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Rescue of Jews in the Slovak State (1939 – 1945)

by

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Abstract

This dissertation targets the topic of rescue of Jews in the Holocaust in World War II. It offers a thorough examination of the defiance mechanics of rescue and looks at how precisely rescuers undermine the pillars of totalitarian regimes. The locus for the empirical part is the Slovak State, a puppet state of Nazi Germany. This dissertation scrutinizes the mindset behind efforts to assist Jews, the obstacles on paths to rescue as well as strategies applied in order to overcome legal and societal persecution of Jews. This project builds on the premise that agencies of *any* individual fluctuate, merge and change accordingly with the developments of the war. This study also undermines the widely accepted view of the rescue of Jews as static and one-dimensional and highlights rescue acts' heterogeneous and amorphous nature. Weaving the shades of compliance of Slovaks with the clerico-fascist regime into the story of the assistance/non-assistance to Jews aims to produce a "collage of multiple ambiguities" and "grey zones" of rescue. Rather than celebrating acts of rescuers, this dissertation focuses on the *path to rescue* of which the acts of rescuers were just one piece in a long chain of events in wartime Slovakia. What are the silenced facets of the rescue of Jews that have not been acknowledged, and why have they not been? Why did the topic of rescue emerge as a prominent theme in public forums in recent years? This dissertation not only looks at rescue more broadly, engaging with models of defiance of totalitarian states, but also sheds light on the controversy over the understanding of the Slovak World War II milieu.

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Introduction

On 25 October 1996 I was invited to a tiny one bedroom apartment on Vinohradská Street in Hlohovec, a small town situated in Southwestern Slovakia. As I reached for the doorbell I realized that the apartment doors were open. The calm voice of Rabbi William Glück encouraged me to step inside. Rabbi Glück apologized for his unusual welcome and explained that on Saturdays his actions were restricted by the need to respect the Sabbath and avoid any activity that might be considered “work.” He kept his door opened so that his neighbours could hear him if he called for assistance. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss a taboo theme – the fate of the Jewish community in Hlohovec in World War II. Despite his age, Rabbi Glück’s mind was extremely sharp. We discussed his father’s effort to alert the Slovak president Jozef Tiso about the fate of the deported in an unanswered letter. We also discussed the fate of many Hlohovec Jews and the Rabbi’s own painful experience in Auschwitz in 1944 – 1945. When I asked him how he managed to survive, Rabbi Glück replied that his survival was God’s will. Somewhat puzzled by the Rabbi’s answer I personally believed that it was this very tiny man’s spiritual strength that helped him to endure his suffering. It was this discussion that piqued my curiosity about exactly how some survived the Holocaust when so many others perished. In particular, I began to ask how much outside help survivors received on their path to rescue.

Historical Background

In order to grasp the complex nature of the topic of the rescue of Jews from the Holocaust in Slovakia, it is important to reflect on the historical context against which the destruction of the Slovak Jewry materialized in the first place. The 1938 Munich Agreement which ceded Czechoslovakia to Hitler is generally viewed as a dark stain on the history of Western European diplomacy. Tailored to appease Hitler, this unfortunate diplomatic move is usually either blamed on “pusillanimous, stupid, ill-informed and weak-charactered” politicians or on the declining role of Britain in the international system.¹ Be that as it may, the Munich Agreement unleashed the rapid deterioration and eventually also destruction of the Czechoslovak “island of democracy” in Europe.

The “betrayal of Czechoslovakia” in 1938 was staged simultaneously in foreign *and* domestic arenas. The Hlinka Slovak People’s Party (HSPP) took advantage of the weakening international position of Czechoslovakia and declared the autonomy of Slovakia on 6 October 1938. From that point on, the HSPP initiated the process of *Gleichschaltung*, i.e. the homogenization of the political spectrum. Some parties were banned; others were forcefully fused into the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party – The Party of Slovak National Unity on 8 November 1938.² Riven by internal conflicts, the newly established single political party found ideological support and inspiration in its militias – the Hlinka Guards (HG),

¹ Robert J. Beck, “Munich's Lessons Reconsidered,” *International Security* 14, no. 2 (1989), 161-191.

² Jan Gebhart and Jan Kuklík, *Druhá Republika 1938 - 1939. Svar demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním živote* (Praha: Paseka, 2004), 91.

the organization where the seeds of Slovak separatism established firm roots.³ Ironically though, instead of reaping the fruits of the 6 October political victory over Prague's centralism, the Slovak separatists faced a major diplomatic defeat. Hungary, a long-time rival, had been struggling to revise the 1920 Trianon treaty in order to recover territory in Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine. On 2 November 1938, the first Vienna Arbitration Treaty, the successful outcome of these negotiations, was signed, depriving Slovakia of southern lands and crippling the already pitiful conditions of the Slovak economy.

Known in history as the "Slovak Munich," the Vienna Arbitration Treaty was clearly a result of Hungary's diplomatic mastery rather than the outcome of an economic or political dominance.⁴ Hungary's political flirtation with Nazi Germany came at a costly price to Slovak autonomists. Some 4000 square miles of the most fertile southern lands inhabited by a population of 859,885, of which more than a third was Slovaks, were ceded to Hungary.⁵ The Vienna Arbitration Treaty exposed the weaknesses of the Slovak autonomous government and seriously undermined the autonomists' prestige.⁶ There was only one effective means to ward off Hungarian revisionism and win the confidence of Slovaks.

³ Lubomír Lipták, *Slovensko v 20. storočí* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1998), 140; Ivan Kamenec, *Slovenský štát* (Praha: Anomal, 1992), 11; Gebhart and Kuklík, *Druhá Republika*, 91.

⁴ Jörg Hoensch, *A History of Modern Hungary 1867 - 1986* (London and New York: Longman, 1988), 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 153; Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 273.

⁶ On German and Hungarian attitudes toward the existence of Czechoslovakia see Thomas L. Sakmyster, "Hungary and the Munich Crisis: The Revisionist Dilemma," *Slavic Review* 32, no.1 (1973), 725 - 740. On Hungarian revisionist efforts see Martin Pekár, "Región Šariša v čase medzi Mníchovom a 14. marcom 1939," in *Veľká politika a malé regióny (1918 - 1939)*, ed. Peter Švorc (Prešov-Graz, Vydavateľstvo Universum, 2002), 220-28; Štefan Šutaj, *Slovensko-maďarské vzťahy a problematika hraníc v strednej Európe v 20. storočí* (Brno: SbVA-Brno, řada C společenskovední mimořádné číslo, 1994), 173 - 179; Ladislav Deák, *Hungary's Game for Slovakia: Slovakia in Hungarian Politics in the Years 1933-1939* (Bratislava: Veda, 1996).

From the perspective of the autonomists, winning the Third Reich's sympathies could keep the integrity of the area from "the Danube to the Tatras" intact. Such a goal only further accelerated the shift of politics to the right and gestured towards the end of the Czechoslovakian republic.⁷

Meanwhile, the Nazi leadership in Berlin had decided to liquidate the truncated Czechoslovakia as a part of a strategic move against another Eastern European state – Poland. Nazi control of Czechoslovakia was to create an inevitable pressure on Poland and the states of southeastern Europe. The only thing that needed to be decided was how precisely to finish Czechoslovakia off. In February 1939, Hitler was waiting for "clarification on internal development[s]" which coincided with several visits of Slovak representatives to Germany.⁸ Rightwing radical Vojtech Tuka visited the Führer on 12 February 1939. Tuka, who addressed Hitler as "my Führer," insisted that Slovaks cannot live with Czechs in a single state. He begged Hitler to liberate Slovakia and make her independent, to which Hitler reacted with surprise: "He [Hitler - NP] said that he had not understood the Slovak problem. Had he known the Slovaks wanted to be independent he would have arranged it at Munich. It would be a comfort to him to know that Slovakia was independent... He could guarantee an independent Slovakia any time even today..."⁹ Although Hitler did not effect the declaration of an independent Slovak state on 12 February, as he boasted he could, Nazi

⁷ Mamatey and Luža, 167.

⁸ On 17 October 1938 Ďurčanský, Mach and Karmasin were received by Goering in Munich. On 12 February 1938 Hitler received Tuka in Berlin.

⁹ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany*. (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1992), 539.

Germany created enough pressure on the Slovak leadership to force a declaration of Slovak independence on 14 March 1939, only four weeks later.

Despite displaying attributes of a sovereign state, in 1939 the Slovak republic was a vassal state of Nazi Germany. According to the 1940 census, Slovakia had a population about 2,650,000 of which 85% claimed Slovak nationality. There were also approximately 80,000 Czechs, 130,000 Germans, 79,000 Ukrainians, 67,000 Hungarians, 89,000 Jews and 30,000 Roma.¹⁰ The newly established state used some of the old Czechoslovakian infrastructure, but new institutions such as the Propaganda Office, the Central State Security, the Central Economic Office, the Central Work Office, the concentration camp in Ilava, and the system of work camps following Nazi Germany's model were established with the help of German advisors.¹¹ The paradigm of "one nation, one party, one leader" was quickly adopted in Slovakia. But despite such proclamations of unity and power, the young state suffered from continuous intra-party political tensions as the conservatives (Jozef Tiso) and the radicals (Vojtech Tuka, Alexander Mach) vied for control. Moreover, the political rivalry between the moderates and the radicals had an impact on the relationship between the Slovak state and its Nazi Germany "protector," and hence on public attitudes toward non-Slovak nationals.

¹⁰ Kamenec, *Slovenský štát*, 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

“The Jewish Question”

The radicalization of general attitudes towards Jews had already become a striking feature of the period of Slovak autonomy (1938 – 1939). Public rage over extensive territorial losses created by the Vienna Arbitration was directed against Hungarians, Czechs and especially Jews.¹² Whereas Hungarians in Slovakia were accused of pro-Hungarian revisionism and Czechs of pro-Czech centralism, Jews were accused of both.¹³ The autonomous government strove to shake off the burden of responsibility for an extensive territorial loss and actively directed public anger against the “Magyarophile” Jews. In a telling act of vengeance against “Magyarophile” Jews and Hungary, the autonomous government initiated the hasty deportation of 7500 of Jewish non-Slovak residents and homeless to the southern territories shortly to be ceded to Hungary.¹⁴ It was an unprecedented event when neither the Slovak nor the Hungarian side was willing to accommodate the deportees on their respective territories. Thus, a population of Jews residing in “no man’s land,” on the Slovak-Hungarian border, temporarily emerged. Jewish men, women and children had to stay out in the cold November weather in provisional tents and holes dug out in the fields. Although these Jews were eventually admitted back to Slovakia, it was a warning sign of the deterioration of the situation of Jews in the society.¹⁵

¹² On the history of Jewish community in this period see Eduard Nižňanský, *Židovská komunita na Slovensku medzi československou parlamentnou demokraciou a slovenským štátom v stredoeurópskom kontexte* (Prešov: Universum, 1999).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29 - 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 24 - 101.

¹⁵ Ivan Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy. Holocaust in Slovakia* (Bratislava: Hajko & Hajková, 2007), 41; Nižňanský, *Židovská komunita*, 42- 43, 101.

Fourteenth March 1939 marked the establishment of the Slovak Republic, which materialized in accordance with Hitler's geopolitical calculations. While the collectivist understanding of the nation and clericalism represented continuity with the nineteenth-century Slovak clerico-nationalist tradition, it was the identification of the Slovak wartime nation with this first state that was without precedent: "an attack on the state became an attack on the nation."¹⁶ The principle of a homogenous ethnicity, secured within the boundaries of a single national state cast minorities in a destructive role, threatening the coherence of "organic unity." Slovak President Jozef Tiso,¹⁷ much like many other authoritarian figures of his time, denounced liberal democracy as a threat to the "organic unity" of the Slovak nation: "... liberalism weakened the nation, denationalized it, and placed it at the mercy of various external and internal enemies."¹⁸ "One nation, one party, one leader" was a prominent part of the political, moral, ethical and cultural code of the new state. Yet it would be misleading to suggest that the new state was a static political entity.¹⁹ From a political perspective, there is both the sense of collective agency and empowerment (Slovaks introducing "order" into their own national society) and the sense of collective subjugation to Germany. The predominantly Catholic population was under the strain of Catholic teachings that both called for the

¹⁶ Kamenec, *On the trail of Tragedy*, 229.

¹⁷ See Ivan Kamenec, *Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka. Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887 – 1947* (Bratislava: Archa, 1998).

¹⁸ Teodor Münz, "Catholic Theologians and the National Question (1939-1945)," in *Language, Values and the Slovak Nation*, ed. Tibor Pichler and Jana Gasparikova (Washington, DC: Paideia Press and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 94, cited in Nadya Nedelsky, "The Wartime Slovak State: A Case Study in the Relationship between Ethnic Nationalism and Authoritarian Patterns of Governance," *Nations and Nationalism* 7, no. 2 (2001), 221.

¹⁹ Lubomír Kopeček, "Slovensko v éře první diktatury: politický režim a jeho proměny (1938/39 – 1945)," *Czech Journal of Political Science (Politologický časopis)*, no. 1 (2004), 8- 9.

virtues of charity and mercy and also deemed Jews Christ-killers. Slovaks were still in the process of nation-building during the war period, and thus the dynamism between Catholic Christian values and nationalist particularism was constantly shifting. The continuous intra-party political discord between the conservatives (Jozef Tiso) and the radicals (Vojtech Tuka, Alexander Mach) affected relations between the Slovak state and its Nazi Germany “protector.”

Already in his first public speech, Tiso pointed to the necessity of solving the “Jewish question” and promised that the issue would be approached “without hatred, non-violently in a Christian manner.”²⁰ Antisemitic legislation was not subjected to approval by the *Snem Slovenskej Republiky*; instead, the laws were published in the form of governmental decrees in accordance with article 4 of 1/1939 Slovak law, which entitled the government to pass such decrees if a need to protect Slovak economic, financial or political interests so dictated.²¹ On 18 April 1939, just a few weeks after the establishment of the Slovak state, the government issued a decree which codified the definition of a Jew. Jews were defined as members of Jewish religious communities who were not baptized prior to 30 October 1918, non-religious people with Jewish parents, and the children of such parents.²² Assuming a population of 89,000 Jews in Slovakia, i.e., 4% of the overall population of 2,600,000, the government applied the so-called 4% quota to reduce the high representation of Jews among lawyers, notaries, doctors, and pharmacists. The Jews were excluded from public service (decree no. 74 of 1939) and the male Jews in the army were transferred to “labour units” (decree no. 150

²⁰ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²² Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 68.

of 1939).²³ Small business licenses were reviewed as a “means of the Slovakization and Christianization of Slovak trade,” initiating the process of “aryanization,” i.e. the exclusion of Jews from the economy.²⁴ “Aryanization” materialized in accordance with the interests of regional business associations. These associations proposed the liquidation and aryanization of Jewish businesses and were approved by the district and county offices. “Temporary administrators” and “trustees” were assigned to Jewish businesses in order to prevent undesirable transfers and leaks of business capital abroad and to oversee ongoing business transactions. The implementation of land reform and a controversial “First Aryanization Act,” issued in February 1940, were strongly criticized by the HSPP radicals and German Nazi officials, who expressed their dissatisfaction over “inadequate” anti-Jewish feelings and the slow speed of the antisemitic course in Slovakia.²⁵

In September 1940, the newly established *Ústredný hospodársky úrad* – The Central Economic Office (CEO) – headed by Augustín Morávek took over the “Jewish question” agenda. The Jews could not appeal the decisions made by the CEO, but could turn to the state officials via the newly established office *Ústredňa Židov*, or the Jewish Centre (JC). The JC was completely under the control of the CEO. Membership in the JC was obligatory for all Jews. Thus, the so-called “revolutionary method” of aryanization was initiated by the Second Aryanization Act (decree no. 303 of 1940) partly as a response to pressure from

²³ See for example Dezider Tóth, ed., *Pracovné jednotky a útvary slovenskej armády 1939-1945. VI. Robotný prápor* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 1996).

²⁴ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 78.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

below and as the result of the intervention of HSPP, HG and Deutsche Partei (DP) members. Over 10,000 Jewish businesses were liquidated²⁶ by the end of October 1941, and all domestic property of Jews was transferred into state hands.²⁷ The process of ghettoization of the Jews was then initiated in December 1940 under the auspices of the CEO. Jews were banned from all streets, plazas, and squares bearing the names of Andrej Hlinka²⁸ and Adolf Hitler. Overall, fifty-two Slovak towns issued bans on housing for Jews.²⁹

Forbidding contact between Jews and “Aryans” and marking Jews with the Star of David completed the physical ghettoization of the Jews also from a psychological point of view. But it was the Salzburg talks between Slovak and German representatives in July 1940 that marked the beginning of what some historians refer to as “Slovak national socialism.” Upon the intervention of Nazi Germany, HSPP radicals assumed key posts in the Slovak government. An unpopular Vojtech Tuka now combined the powers of prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. The commander of HG, Alexander Mach, became the minister

²⁶ Ibid., 138.

²⁷ Ibid., 152.

²⁸ Andrej Hlinka (1864-1938) was one of the most influential representatives of the Catholic-nationalist political stream. In an effort to halt forced magayrization and secularization of Slovak society Hlinka mobilized the Slovak masses and became one of the founding fathers of the Slovak People’s Party in 1905 – the party that defended the interests of the church. Hlinka was a fervent follower of the idea of Czechoslovak statehood. However, he denounced the idea of ethnic “czechoslovakism” promoted by the Czech political leadership and became a leading figure of the Slovak autonomous movement. He criticized Czech “Hussitism” and the progressivism promoted by Czechoslovak president Tomáš G. Masaryk. He denounced liberalism, socialism and “Jewish capitalism.” In 1925 the Slovak People’s Party was renamed after its leader as the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party (HSPP). In his search for political allies in the 1930s, Hlinka moved closer to the political representation of the radical right such as the Czech National League, radical National Democracy and fascism. He also supported the radical Vojtech Tuka, a founder of the infamous *Rodobrana*. Hlinka died in August 1938, shortly before the September 1938 Munich Dictate. On Andrej Hlinka see also Ľubomír Lipták, “Andrej Hlinka,” in *Muži deklarácie*, ed. Dušan Kováč et al. (Martin: Vydavateľstvo Osveta, 1991), 58-79; Alena Bartlová, *Andrej Hlinka* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Obzor, 1991).

²⁹ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 154.

of the interior, thus combining the powers exercised by Wilhelm Frick and Heinrich Himmler in Nazi Germany. The post-Salzburg political course adopted the Nazi model and its racial criteria under the supervision of a newly arrived “advisor on Jewish questions,” Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny. The attacks on those who disapproved of antisemitic policies also increased. Even in the post-Salzburg era, the rhetoric of the moderates at times oscillated close to the orbit of the radicals. In his September 1940 public speech in Višňové, near Žilina, Jozef Tiso claimed: “Fears are expressed that what we are doing with the Jews is not Christian. I say: It will be the most Christian, when we are rid of them.”³⁰ Dieter Wisliceny put the future of the Jews in much clearer terms: “Depriving 90,000 inhabitants of Slovakia of income and property will create a Jewish problem, which can be solved only by emigration.”³¹

Two hundred and seventy laws were then incorporated into the infamous Jewish Code (decree no. 198 of 1941), published on 9 September 1941 and surpassing the severity of the Nuremberg Laws. Published at the height of German foreign successes, the Jewish Code retrospectively legalized dozens of antisemitic decrees and confirmed the ongoing exclusion of the Jews from the social, economic and cultural spheres. The introduction of racial laws such as the prohibition of mixed marriages, the outlawing of extra-marital sex with Jews and a new racial definition of Jews signaled the further empowerment of the Slovak national socialists and German governmental representatives in Slovakia.³²

³⁰ Ibid., 119.

³¹ Ibid., 123.

³² Anyone who had three grandparents of Jewish origin was a Jew. A so-called “židovský miešanec” (a partial Jew) was anyone who had one or two Jewish grandparents.

Neither the protests of bishops nor the Vatican's protestations against the Jewish Code in December 1941 helped to prevent the ongoing severe pauperization, ghettoization and segregation of the Jews in Slovakia. Meanwhile, the possibility of deporting the Jews had been discussed within the narrow circle of Slovak and German politicians between the end of October 1941 and the end of February 1942.³³ Vojtech Tuka assumed a leading role in the preparatory phase of the deportations of the Jews and carried out a series of direct or mediated consultations with Adolf Eichmann, Heinrich Himmler, Hanns Ludin and Dieter Wisliceny. In December 1941, Tuka and Ludin discussed the specific steps to take to resettle Slovak Jews from the territories of Slovakia, Austria, Germany and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The Slovak government also gave its consent to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deport Slovak Jews living on the territory of the Third Reich and also agreed to provide a so-called "colonization payment" of 500 Reichsmarks for every deported Jew to cover "resettlement costs."³⁴ Only Croatia paid a similar colonization payment of 30 Reichsmarks per every deported Jew. By the beginning of May, when the Assembly started to discuss the constitutional bill on deportations proposed by the Minister of the Interior, Alexander Mach, 20 transports (approximately 20,000 Jews) had already been deported out of Slovakia.³⁵ Therefore, President Jozef

³³ Kamenec, *On the Trail of tragedy*, 199.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁵ The Constitutional Law was passed on 15 May 1942. It was to "protect" certain groups of Jews: a) persons who became members of some Christian denominations not later than 14 March 1939; b) persons who lived in a legitimate marriage with a non-Jew, into which they entered not later than 10 September 1941; c) persons who were or would be granted presidential dispensation according to article 255 of decree no. 198/1941 SCL; and d) also physicians, chemists, veterinarians, engineers and other persons, if the need and benefits of their staying in public or

Tiso's public promise of a "Christian way" as a mode of solving "the Jewish question" transformed, in practice, into the 1942 and 1944 deportations, which resulted in the death of more than 70,000 Jews.³⁶

Ramifications of the Research

Between 15,000 and 18,000 Jews, i.e. less than a tenth of the prewar number of Czechoslovak Jews managed to survive the war.³⁷ The recent scholarly research on the topic highlights the near impossibility of escaping the trap that the wartime antisemitic state and its society facilitated.³⁸ One is therefore forced to ask how some of the Jewish victims made it through the war while the majority did not. What were the obstacles that Jewish victims faced in the wartime authoritarian regime in Slovakia? What strategies were applied in order to overcome legal and societal persecution? What were the factors that facilitated one's path to rescue? What aspects of the rescue have yet to be acknowledged and why? Why did the topic of rescue emerge as a prominent theme in public discourse in recent years?

economic life were proved. The above mentioned categories of Jews were exempted from deportation until it was decided otherwise.

³⁶ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 19.

³⁷ Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust and Communism: Czech and Slovak Jews since 1945* (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 19.

³⁸ See for example Tuvia Friling, "The New Historians and the Failure of Rescue Operations During the Holocaust," *Israel Studies* 8, no. 3 (2003), 25-6

Some historians claim that rescuers represent a heterogeneous group of no particular nationality, economic class, education level, sex or age; others examine the impact that social status, political affiliation, gender and religious beliefs had on a person's willingness to engage in rescue.³⁹ But apart from a willingness to acknowledge the variety of identity markers attributable to the rescuers, there is a surprising *unwillingness to recognize the variety of rescuers' behavioural patterns* vis-à-vis Jewish victims. In fact, a large number of scholarly or memoir accounts generally recognize altruism as a sole motivator behind rescue acts. My project's aim is to grapple with this simplified narrative and bring the neglected aspects of the rescue of European Jews into focus.

I begin from the premise that “moral motivations do not operate independently of the political environment but are embedded in social and organizational networks that provide meaning, context and political opportunity.”⁴⁰ Although it is uncomfortable, and such an approach can hardly facilitate a happy-ending rescue story of goodness triumphing over evil, this research represents a necessary step towards better understanding the tragedy of the Holocaust and the system behind rescue. This study therefore undermines the widely accepted view of the rescue of Jews as static and one-dimensional and highlights instead the heterogeneous and amorphous nature of rescue acts. Weaving Slovak compliance and the role of the clerico-fascist regime itself into the story of the assistance/non-assistance to Jews produces a “collage of multiple

³⁹ Eva Fogelman, *Conscious & Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995); Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Michael Gross, “Jewish Rescue in Holland and France during the Second World War: Moral Cognition and Collective Action,” *Social Forces* 73, no. 2 (1994), 490.

ambiguities” and “grey zones” of rescue. In other words, rather than celebrating the acts of rescuers, this dissertation targets the *path to rescue* of which the acts of rescuers constituted just one link in a long chain of events in wartime Slovakia.

This dissertation builds on the premise that the agency of *any* individual fluctuated, merged and changed with the developments of the war. Therefore, the analytical category of rescuer in this study does not represent a stable entity. The terms “rescue” and “rescuer” are defined more broadly, in the sense that even collaboration and perpetration can be wrapped up in these terms. Within the frame of this study, rescuer (or helper) represents an individual who in *any* possible way, on *any* occasion and under *any* circumstances eased the persecution of Jews and served as one step on a person’s path to rescue. As this work will show, many rescuers pursued only anomalous, occasional or temporary assistance to Jews and were motivated by complex situational factors. One might object that attaching the label of rescuers to individuals who are hardly altruists, and who did not consistently adhere to principles of Christian love and mercy, is not a legitimate scholarly enterprise. Such concerns naturally spring from a fear of undermining established analytical categories in Holocaust studies and the associated risk of removing condemnation and guilt.

Those concerned with the ill effects of this type of boundary blurring need to keep two things in mind: first, *in no way whatsoever* does this study intend to exempt perpetrators who occasionally helped Jews from their guilt in other contexts; second, ambiguous acts of assistance are not being celebrated, but merely accounted for. The aim of this study is to investigate the grey zone of

rescue from a historical perspective, not to absolve Slovak society from responsibility for the fate of the Jews. At the same time, bringing the grey zone of rescue to public and scholarly attention is not intended to diminish the value of the acts of Righteous rescuers⁴¹ Selfless assistance did occur and when it did, was an important step on a Jew's path to rescue. However, uncritical celebration of rescuers – that is, the politically rather than ethically motivated celebration – is eschewed. Politically motivated celebrations of the “Righteous rescuers” serve as a cover for problematic pasts and, as such, should be condemned. The rescue theme has crystallized as the core of identity politics in Slovakia, being used as a tool for martyrological narratives in which the nation is garbed in the cloak of a victim of Nazi Germany and helper and rescuer of those in need. This situation mandates that the history of rescue, and its uses, be revisited.

Oftentimes the attention of historians is narrowly focused on physical rescue from the grip of the deportation process itself. Administrative forms of rescue on the regional and central levels, border crossing, conversion to Christianity and Aryanization as a means of rescue have not been properly addressed. The present study fills this void and traces the “loopholes” in antisemitic legislation, i.e. the ways in which Slovaks bypassed, ignored or even broke the laws of so called “Jewish Code” and hence assisted Jews. This method has multiple benefits. First, it allows us to grasp the subtleties of help and rescue forms on the regional level. Second, it sheds light on acts of help and rescue that *failed* because they were detected by the authorities. It thus complements the

⁴¹ Yad Vashem bestows the title of Righteous among the Nations on non-Jews who risked their lives in order to rescue Jews during the Holocaust.

postwar Holocaust survivors' testimonies that mostly reflect on their own *successful* rescue experience.⁴² And last but not least, tracing rescue strategies against the dense net of antisemitic laws provides valuable insight into the nature and power mechanics of the wartime authoritarian regime. As a result, readers are offered a “micro-history” which brings rescuers, victims, “ordinary citizens,” bureaucrats and the Church together on a single canvas. This study of the “grey zone of rescue” thus naturally weaves a “bottom-up” perspective (centred on the societal/regional level) with a traditional “top-down” view (ministerial and governmental acts and their impact on the ground).

The story of the rescue of the Jews inevitably becomes a story about the responses of ordinary Slovaks to the plight of Jews – a topic which hits the raw nerve of the Slovak national ego. This study undermines generally accepted scholarly views about “passive Slovaks” and instead portrays “ordinary citizens” as historical agents who carefully evaluated situational factors and responded accordingly. A closer look at the grey zones of rescue thus inevitably offers a unique perspective on the collaboration of Slovaks with the wartime Slovak state's antisemitic policies. John A. Armstrong compared Slovak collaborationism with Nazi Germany to the Western European style “conservative social reaction”⁴³ and argued that it was “...more sudden and more intense...”⁴⁴ in

⁴² The architects of the successful rescue acts are potential candidates for Yad Vashem's title “The Righteous among the Nations.” The recognition of the moral and human dimension of about 450 rescue acts in Slovakia by Yad Vashem implicitly overshadows failed rescue attempts with a tragic end for the Jews and to certain degree to Slovak rescuers. The research of regional and supra- regional judiciary institutions will help to overcome this bias.

⁴³ John A. Armstrong, “Collaborationism in World War II: The Integral Nationalist Variant in Eastern Europe,” *The Journal of Modern History* 40, no. 3 (1968), 405.

comparison to other Eastern European countries. Armstrong did not hide his skepticism about Slovaks: “If permitted [a] little self-deception the Slovak integral nationalists, the avowed defendants of “Christ’s Slovakia”, could be induced to co-operate in the most extreme atrocities.”⁴⁵ Indeed, Slovaks were capable of discriminating against their Jewish neighbours relentlessly and mercilessly. Ordinary Slovaks were empowered to negotiate their place in the society via participation in the antisemitic policies.

Armstrong’s view, however, should not mislead us. One’s ability to encroach on someone’s basic human rights is not solely the result of a psychological interplay between the state and an individual. In addition to ideological motives, ordinary Slovaks trampled on the rights of Jews due to a variety of factors, ranging from individual pragmatism to an effort to safeguard communal interests. It is because of this that the collaboration of Slovaks with the antisemitic program implemented by the regime requires closer scrutiny; it was a complex process that is currently poorly understood. Keeping this in mind, this study construes the behaviour of ordinary Slovaks as “ ... conformist and nonconformist at the same time – nonconformist towards the specific, conformist towards the general nature of Nazi [in our case Slovak clerico-fascist] rule.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid., 399.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ian Kershaw, “The Führer Image and Political Integration: The Popular Conception of Hitler in Bavaria during the Third Reich,” in *Der Führerstaat: Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld and Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 134.

Setting a Time Frame

The targeted period of 1939 – 1943 includes the initial stages of the Jewish persecution and carries the reader through the outbreak of the first wave of the deportation in spring 1942 and into its aftermath. The temporal boundaries thus encompass the period prior to the outbreak of the second wave of deportations from Slovakia in 1944. This boundary is necessary because the rescue of Jews from the 1942 deportations differed qualitatively and quantitatively from the rescues that took place during the 1944 deportations.

In the first years of the existence of the Slovak state, the dangers posed by the fragile alliances and revisionist efforts in the Central European milieu made young Slovakia come closer to the orbit of its Nazi German “Protector.” Nazi Germany also imposed German “advisors” upon Slovakia, and Hitler made his voice heard whenever the political reality in Slovakia was “out of line.” Yet, it must be remembered that Slovakia was hardly a puppet whose strings were pulled solely by Nazi Germany during these critical years. During the initial stage of the war, it was the Slovak state and its representatives who determined the speed and nature of the persecution of Jews in accordance with foreign and domestic developments. Slovaks were not under the pressure of direct occupation by the *Wehrmacht*. And they did not face the death penalty for assisting Jews, as did their contemporaries in Poland. In fact, in many cases the punishment for assistance to Jews was symbolic and insignificant. Yet, two thirds of the Jewish community was put on deportation trains and sent to their death in 1942.

This dissertation occasionally moves beyond the targeted time frame of 1939 – 1943. In particular, the year 1944 is brought into the narrative only when it is necessary to do so. The invasion of the Slovak state by the *Wehrmacht* in fall 1944 introduced a new political reality. Whereas in 1942 the majority of Jews were deported upon the initiative of the Slovak government, the 1944 deportations were unleashed under the direct pressure of Nazi Germany. During the *Wehrmacht's* occupation of Slovakia, more than thirteen thousand Jews were deported to death camps, while another twelve hundred were murdered in Slovak territory. In addition, a number of Slovaks who took part in the Slovak national uprising were repressed and murdered. In order to curb assistance to “enemies of the state,” the death penalty was introduced for those caught assisting partisans, communists, and Jews. Legal exemptions from deportations issued by the ministries and the presidential office were generally ignored. As a result, although the process of rescue continued, the period 1944-45 was marked by the transformation of rescue and survival strategies. The physical presence of the *Wehrmacht* on Slovak territory meant that baptismal certificates or presidential exemptions – documents that had saved Jews from 1942 deportation – were no longer of much help. In the last stages of the war, seeking assistance among Christians or joining the partisans represented the most effective means of survival.

Organization

This narrative is organized into five chapters. Each chapter situates the rescue narrative into scholarly debates and reflects in detail on methodologies applied and methodological challenges. *Chapter I* maps the discursive field of rescue in Slovakia onto public and historical discourses over the course of the last fifty years. *Chapter II* examines the roots and nature of interventionism as a form of assistance and examines Jewish doctors as a case study. This chapter subverts the widely promoted notion that ordinary Slovaks were passive agents vis-à-vis the implementation of antisemitic policies in 1939 - 1942. *Chapter III* brings an unexplored theme of the rescue of Jews to light by exploring the state-conducted aryanization policies in new ways. It maps the maneuvering space of Slovaks and Jews with an aim to determine how, precisely, aryanization persecuted some Jews and shielded others. *Chapter IV* applies a new approach and targets the rescue theme as a cross-national rather than national phenomenon. It analyzes the problem of paid smugglers who assisted Jews in crossing the southern border to relatively safer Hungary. *Chapter V* reflects on the sensitive problem of the responses of church representatives to the effort of Jews to convert to Christianity as a means of rescue from the deportation.

Sources

This study is based on a wide range of the documents of Slovak provenience. The documents of the district archives in Trnava, Banská Bystrica and Zvolen offered valuable insight into the mechanics of the implementation of antisemitic decrees on the ground in the Western Slovakian towns of Hlohovec, Piešťany, and Trnava and the Central Slovakian towns of Banská Štiavnica and Zvolen. The Restitution fond of the Slovak national archive in Bratislava became a valuable source for *Chapter III* which tackles rescue of Jews within the context of aryanization. The Slovak Regional Archive in Bratislava and its documents of the district people's courts in Hlohovec, Piešťany and Banská Štiavnica and the county court in Bratislava represent an invaluable part of this research. The documents of postwar trials with collaborators and perpetrators of the wartime regime offered some insight into the nature of the assistance to Jews. Utilizing these documents was not without problems though. Scholars in general do not hide their skepticism about the value of the postwar trial documents for historical research. We have to keep in mind that postwar trials with perpetrators were ideologically and politically motivated and hence the conduct of the trials and scenario of the examination was carefully orchestrated for the public audiences. In the same vein, assistance to and rescue of Jews is often utilized by the prosecuted individuals as a defense, and so there is a risk that the rescue story has been embellished or exaggerated. Yet, despite this trap, I share the view of Alexander Victor Prusin who, with regards to the postwar trials of Nazi perpetrators in the

Soviet Union, claimed that "...there is no reason why the interrogation and trial records – if combined with other available materials – should not be used as historical sources relating to the sites and instances of genocide."⁴⁷

Not surprisingly, the archives offered more documents on Jewish doctors and businessmen than ordinary factory workers, small farmers or socially unimportant Jews. This notable imbalance in the record has a simple explanation: those with financial means were able to push their cases to the highest levels for a longer period of time, resulting in a larger number of records. As a result, this study is inevitably more focused on the rescue of those with available means: doctors, owners of businesses, and those Jews who could pay for being smuggled to Hungary or to be converted from Judaism to Christianity. The absence of the documents about the efforts of Jews of lower social status is striking and deserves more attention from scholars in the future.

This project also utilized the collected testimonies of the Milan Šimečka Foundation in Bratislava. Eight volumes of the document series "Holocaust in Slovakia" were extremely beneficial for this project. The series is organized thematically and contains valuable documents of domestic, regional, governmental and international provenience.⁴⁸ *Chapter V* and *Chapter VI*

⁴⁷ Alexander V. Prusin, "Fascist Criminals to the Gallows!": The Holocaust and Soviet War Crimes Trials, December 1945-February 1946," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003), 18.

⁴⁸ Eduard Nižňanský, *Židovská komunita na Slovensku: obdobie autonómie porovnanie s vtedajšími udalosťami v Rakúsku* (Bratislava: Inštitút judaistiky Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave, 2000); Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2, Prezident, vláda, snem SR a štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939-1945): Dokumenty* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003); Eduard Nižňanský, *Holokaust Na Slovensku 4, Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie (1939-1945)* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003); Eduard Nižňanský, Igor Baka and Ivan Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku 5, Židovské pracovné tábory a strediská na Slovensku 1938 - 1944* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2004); Eduard Nižňanský, (ed.) *Holokaust na Slovensku 6. Deportácie v roku 1942. Documents.* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana

incorporate the documents of *Vatikán a Slovenská republika* (The Vatican and Slovak Republic) - the first post-communist edition which examined the response of the Vatican to the antisemitic course in the Slovak milieu. The edition consists of documents from *Actes et Documents du Saint Siege relatifs a la seconde guerre mondiale 8* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974) and from the Slovak National Archive (SNA). Last but not least, the sections of this dissertation that deal with the problems of memory benefited from a variety of media such as TV (TA3, CBC), radio (Rádio 7), and periodicals (Plus7, Týždenník, Sme, Pravda, Domino).

Šimečku, 2005); Eduard Nižňanský et al., Eduard Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 7, Vzťah slovenskej majority a židovskej minority: náčrt problému* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Katedra všeobecných dejín FF UK, 2005); Katarína Hradská, *Holokaust na Slovensku 3. Listy Gisely Fleischmannovej (1942-1944)* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003); Katarína Hradská, *Holokaust na Slovensku 8. Ústredňa Židov (1940-1944)* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2008).

Chapter I

From Marginalization to Mythologization: Mapping the Rescue Discourses in Postwar and Postcommunist Slovakia.

In the postwar period the theme of rescue and assistance to Jews by ordinary Europeans was passed over in silence. And as far as institutional rescue efforts are concerned, postwar scholarly views were either skeptical or overly judgmental. Only within the context of the “new unified Europe,” after the fall of communism, has the rescue theme acquired more positive meanings, even reaching the point of outright romanticization and idealization. As a result, rescue has turned out to be not only a new marker of European identity, but also a means for the dissemination of overly optimistic messages about bright European future prospects. The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the reception of the rescue theme in the postwar and postcommunist era in the European context. In particular, my aim is to focus on the fluctuation of rescue discourse in postwar Slovakia within the rhythm of its Holocaust consciousness, which was suppressed in the 1950s and 1970s and revived in the 1960s and at the end of 1980s. I will look at the way the topic of the rescue of persecuted Jews was muted and marginalized within specific historical milieus until the fall of communism and then came to the fore of public attention in the postcommunist era.

In the immediate postwar era when the gruesome facts of the Holocaust came to light and the scale of the victims’ suffering was revealed to the public,

there was understandably hardly any space for the praise of the acts of those who assisted Jews. In the view of a sociologist Nechama Tec, it was the extent of the barbarous crimes committed against the Jews that silenced the discussion about rescuers' acts.⁴⁹ Overwhelmed by the traumatic past in the immediate postwar years, the victims' mindset was not ready to contemplate the acts of "good-doers." When Esther Gitman interviewed Yugoslavian Holocaust survivors, many admitted that discussing their own salvation "felt like a betrayal of those three-quarters of Yugoslavia's Jews who did not survive."⁵⁰ Moreover the postwar milieu, riveted by ethno-nationalism, was reluctant to recognize the rescue acts of other nationalities. And even later, victims of the Holocaust were reluctant to bring this topic to the centre of general attention as a result of victims' "fidelity to suffering."⁵¹ According to this argument, instead of resenting it, victims accepted and embraced the wartime suffering as an indelible part of their newly constructed postwar identity. As a result of this process any attempts which implicitly undermined the totality of victims' wartime suffering, including the altruistic acts of rescuers, were approached with caution. Also the majority of the European population recoiled from celebrating rescuers' deeds since their acts reflected badly on the rest of community. Omer Bartov noted that "good-doers" were ostracized in postwar society "precisely because their actions serve as an implicit condemnation of those who did not do good, were complicit in evil, or profited

⁴⁹Michael Phayer and Eva Fleischner, *Cries in the Night: Women Who Challenged the Holocaust* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1997), viii.

⁵⁰ Esther Gitman, "The Rescue of Jewish Physicians in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 1941-1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009), 79.

⁵¹ Eva Hoffman, *After such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 142.

from the crime...”⁵² In this regard, “moral rescue” potentially condemned its immoral “other,” i.e. the passivity of the majority of the population and the deeds of the perpetrators. Moreover, rescuers themselves were unwilling to discuss their past acts which, in fact, turned out to be a psychological burden. Zasloff reflects on this point as follows: “... the responsibility they [rescuers] took on, of choosing whom they could save and therefore necessarily sacrificing others, was a heavy and permanent burden for the human mind and heart, at least for the type of human being who became a rescuer.”⁵³ Dealing with rescue was also hindered by the pressures generated by different ideological factors in postwar Western and Eastern Europe. In particular, incidents of rescue were overshadowed by an undue focus on the heroic acts of resisters that became the core of the postwar reconstruction of national identities in both Western and Eastern Europe. In other words, the acts of rescuers were shunned by both the process of the reconstruction of postwar national identities mediated mainly via the theme of resistance and the gravity of the trauma of recent wartime events.

In the course of the 1950s, rescue acts were approached with a great deal of skepticism and even outright suspicion. Not rarely the acts of rescue committees were denounced as “black deals” with the Nazis, and even Jewish leaders were accused of what Randolph Braham dubbed a “conspiracy of silence.”⁵⁴ The most poignant example in this regard was the so-called “Kasztner train” of rescued Jews, which was seen as the result of a deal between Zionists

⁵² Omer Bartov, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 88.

⁵³ Tela Zasloff, *A Rescuer's Story Pastor Pierre-Charles Toureille in Vichy France* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 73.

⁵⁴ David Cesarani, ed., *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary 1944* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), 15.

and Nazis in order to save their own skins, or even as a “kind of a down-payment on their complicity in the deportations.”⁵⁵ In the eyes of his enemies, Rudolf Kasztner, one of the leaders of the Budapest Relief and Rescue Committee, negotiated an agreement with the Nazis: a rescue of some Jews from the deportation in exchange for the free hand of the Nazis in the further continuation of the cleansing of the Hungarian Jewry. Such a negative perception of rescue efforts abated only in the course of 1960s with the proceedings of the Eichmann trial. The Eichmann trial shed more light on the process of the destruction of European Jewry which made it clear that the scale of rescue efforts and resistance had been rather limited. The introduction of Hannah Arendt’s concept of the “banality of evil” and totalitarian theorems provided a suitable explanation for the general failure to provide assistance to the persecuted European Jews. But the “banality of evil” turned out to be a self-explanatory paradigm behind the problem of compliance with authoritarian regimes, hardly allowing for the contemplation of the place of non-compliance.

The German social philosopher Theodore Adorno’s statement about no poetry after Auschwitz, together with the concept of the “banality of evil,” dictated the course of Holocaust scholarship for decades. Even theologians attempted to make sense of evil “from retrospective, dualistic, and privative theories to prospective, eschatological, and process theodicies.”⁵⁶ Unable to define evil, many of them have given up, while others at least became aware of its mysterious quality. The preoccupation of scholars with the various faces of

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Karen Howard, "Why Teach the Shoah," *The Living Light. An Interdisciplinary Review of Catholic Religious Education, Catechesis and Pastoral Minister* 38, no. 4 (2002), 19.

complicity with evil authoritarian regimes disseminated the message of a hopeless future for humankind. Only the fall of communism, followed by an effort to build democratic societies under the auspices of the EU provoked the shift to a new direction and a new cultural urge to “move on” from the evil past. The realization is finally dawning that while the Holocaust became an all-pervasive and powerful symbol of antisemitism, genocide and racial and confessional hatred, modern Europe needs to detect a “ray of light and hope” within the past realm of the Holocaust in order to find moral guidance for the future. David Gushee, a Baptist minister and theologian has thus emphasized that there are forces that allow humankind to withstand evil after the Holocaust and argued that “where the God who is characterized as ‘love’ (1 John 4:16) is, there is life and vigorous resistance to the forces that bring death.” In this regard, Gushee insisted that “Christians ought to see themselves as being in the life-preserving, life-cherishing, life-defending, and life-enhancing business, because that is what God does.”⁵⁷

Whereas the topic of resistance to Nazism remained at the core of the postwar reconstruction of European state identities, the postcommunist milieu utilized the theme of rescue as a cornerstone for identity politics. The moral capital of rescuers of European Jews became a means through which the newly rebuilt trust in human potential was widely disseminated. Presented with the growing impatience with dividing Europe eternally into perpetrators, victims and bystanders, Dr Dennis Klein, Director of the ADL’s International Centre for Holocaust Studies pointed to a growing desire to understand how and why some people defied antisemitism: “Even if resisters and rescuers were numerically

⁵⁷ Ibid., 25.

marginal, don't their actions bear a historical and moral significance beyond their numbers?"⁵⁸ Rescuers have been recognized to constitute "the nucleus of another moral universe."⁵⁹ They were situated at the core of the new concept of the "banality of goodness" as a counterpoint to Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil."⁶⁰ Rochat and Modigliani argued that goodness "can be expressed in quite ordinary ways that are mere extensions of common civility or basic decency."⁶¹ But unlike Arendt's concept of evil, which could be banal and perpetrated by anyone, Rochat and Modigliani do not read the conception of ordinary goodness as being commonplace, even if they recognize the nature of the acts of help and rescue as spontaneous and progressively evolving. In no way does these authors' focus on the "ordinariness of goodness" diminish the presence of the "banality of evil" in society.⁶² In fact, these scholars call for the development of a dialectic between the phenomena of "banality of evil" and "ordinariness of goodness," which they believe can offer a more nuanced understanding of authority/subordinate relations. In their view, when rendered banal, evil will be perpetrated. But "the goodness does not disappear in the process of making evil commonplace."⁶³ In a similar fashion, Leonard Grob has pointed to the need for a new language of

⁵⁸ Antony Polonsky, *My Brother's Keeper?: Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (Taylor & Francis, 1990), 30 <<http://lib.myilibrary.com/login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca?ID=32209>> (accessed December 2, 2008).

⁵⁹ Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy After the Holocaust* (London; New York: Verso, 1998), 42.

⁶⁰ Thomas Brudholm, "A Light in the Darkness? Philosophical Reflections on Historians' Assessments of the Rescue of the Jews in Denmark in 1943," in *Philosophy on the Border*, ed. Robin May Schott and Kirsten Klercke (Denmark: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2007), 206.

⁶¹ Francois Rochat and Andre Modigliani, "The Ordinary Quality of Resistance: From Milgram's Laboratory to the Village of Le Chambon," *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 3 (1995), 206.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

morality in order to prevent the further trivialization and falsification of Holocaust events. Grob encourages scholars to “approach such terms as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ with nothing short of ‘fear and trembling.’”⁶⁴ Also Yehuda Bauer reminds us that “we are capable of being rescuers, just as we are capable of being evil-doers.”⁶⁵

The rescue of European Jews has often been poetically described as “light in the darkness of the Holocaust.”⁶⁶ Hans Kirchhoff bridged the past rescuers’ acts with bright future prospects when he claimed that we should light “a light in the darkness of Holocaust” in order to “live on beyond the crime of the century.”⁶⁷ Similarly Brudholm opined that incidents of rescue allow us to “live on, to avoid despair and to inspire hope for the sake of cultural preservation.”⁶⁸ Leonard Grob believes that “rescuers help let us know that we have it within ourselves to repair the world.”⁶⁹ He asserted that it is “the deed of the rescuer [that-NP] tips the scale in favour of the good, and thus contributes to **the redemption of all.** [author’s emphasis]”⁷⁰ Even some Holocaust survivors urge us to turn attention to “light in the darkness of the Holocaust.” During the Hidden Children Conference in Jerusalem in July 1993, Abraham Foxman, a Jew rescued by his babysitter in Vilna claimed: “For the first fifty years after the Holocaust, survivors bore witness to evil, brutality, and bestiality. Now it is the time for us, for our generation, to bear witness to goodness. For each one of us is living proof that even in hell, even

⁶⁴ Leonard Grob, "Rescue during the Holocaust – and Today," *Judaism* 46, no. 1 (1997), 98-107.

⁶⁵ Yehuda Bauer, "Historian of the Holocaust (Part 1)," *Dimensions on Line. A Journal of Holocaust Studies*. 18, no. 1 (2004). http://www.adl.org/education/dimensions_18_1/default.asp. (accessed June 9, 2008)

⁶⁶ Brudholm, 195 – 226.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁶⁹ Grob, “Rescue during the Holocaust.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

in that hell called the Holocaust, there was goodness, there was kindness, and there was love and compassion.”⁷¹

The recent cultural trend promotes the idealization and romanticization of the “goodness” of the rescuers to counter the “evil” of the perpetrators and collaborators. The concepts of “good” and “evil” are approached as simplified and homogenized dichotomous entities situated on opposite poles of the scale of morality. As a result the “grey zone” of assistance to the persecuted Jews, i.e. the zone where it is impossible to untangle good from evil, is hardly addressed by academics. This leads us to the question of the implications of these recent attempts to construct a dichotomous relation between the new concept of the “ordinariness of goodness” and the “old” concept of the “banality of evil.” Overall, there is no consensus about the risks and dangers posited by the recent efforts to romanticize the rescuers’ category. According to Thomas Brudholm, the focus on the light of humankind posits a risk of “a premature reconciliation or a narcissistic search for deliverance at the expense of the unprejudiced recognition of the disaster and of a moral debt as regards remembering victims of history.”⁷² Revived interest in the light of goodness amidst the darkness of evil might gloss over the unspeakable monstrosities of the Holocaust. The focus on rescue might eventually show the path towards reconciliation with “unmasterable pasts.” Brudholm is thus both aware and suspicious of the capacity of the rescue theme

⁷¹ Patrick Henry, *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 144.

⁷² Brudholm, 211.

“to *endure* the horror,” i.e. “to maintain the remembrance of, the eye for or the exploration of ‘the horror.’”⁷³

In his study of rescue stories in Denmark, Andrew Buckser points to the risk that the rescue theme posits vis-à-vis the category of victims. Within the context of rescue stories in Denmark “the Jews figure primarily as a mascot minority, a group one never particularly needs see, but whose historical existence confirms the Danish self-image of tolerance and moral principle.”⁷⁴ In this regard, Jews assume the role of “the outsiders whose presence makes the larger culture’s nature visible.”⁷⁵ But according to Patrick Henry such views are unsubstantiated. In his re-examination of the rescue efforts in Le Chambon Sur-Lignon, Henry argues that it is misleading to claim that the study of rescuers is an attempt to evade the horror of the Holocaust. In his view, “to argue that writing about rescue ‘colours the disaster with a rosy tinge and helps us to manage the unimaginable without having to look at its naked and ugly face’ is particularly false and distasteful when we consider, for example, Daniel Trocmé’s death in the gas chamber at Maidanek and the months that Madeleine Dreyfus, lice-infested and starving, spent in Bergen-Belsen.”⁷⁶ Also, Stephen P. Cohen assures us that “renewed focus on the rescuers of Jews does not in any way diminish the evil that was done. On the contrary, the rescuers’ behaviour sharpens our understanding of that evil.”⁷⁷ A Slovak Holocaust survivor, Eva Gossman, seems to take a middle ground when

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Andrew Buckser, “Modern Identities and the Creation of History: Stories of Rescue among the Jews of Denmark,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (1999), 13.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁶ Henry, *We Only Know Men*, 140.

⁷⁷ Stephen P. Cohen, “A New Frontier,” *Dimensions: A Journal of Holocaust Studies* 3, no. 3 (1988), 17.

she concludes that "...It is impossible to remember the good without the evil, and it is impossible accurately to render the depth of the evil when it is illuminated by the good."⁷⁸ But Gossman also clearly states that "the major theme of the period has to be the evil master plan executed on an unprecedented scale with fanatical zeal, bureaucratic efficiency and industrial might; the minor theme has to include the presence of those who defied evil and who, through their acts, affirmed not only the humanity of those they saved, but the humanity of all of us..."⁷⁹

This lack of consensus on the impact of promoting the rescue as one of the central themes of Holocaust scholarship is partially rooted in the failure to define the category of rescuers. Ironically, despite the recent efforts to romanticize and idealize rescuers as messengers of hope for humankind, this category represents an unexplored and puzzling terrain for many scholars. In the view of Patrick Henry "there is something mysterious about the rescuers that escapes our facts, figures, examples, and percentages. Try as we might they always elude our grasp whenever we attempt to seize them collectively."⁸⁰ Leonard Grob acknowledged the mysterious aspect of the motivation of rescuers who "act as provocateurs."⁸¹ While the mysterious side of goodness is uplifting for Henry, Grob calls for the removal of the "mysteriousness" of rescuers, i.e. "the mere aura of that which puzzles us" and allow for the presence of "true mystery." In his view, "that which can be illuminated by inquiry must be so illuminated..."⁸² Furthermore, the

⁷⁸ Eva Gossman, *Good Beyond Evil: [Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times]* (London [u.a.]: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁰ Henry, *We Only Know Men*, 157.

⁸¹ Grob, "Rescue during the Holocaust."

⁸² *Ibid.*

mysteriousness that surrounds rescuers is also enhanced by the lack of consensus over the definition of “goodness”, as the object of moral evaluation of rescuers. According to Thomas Brudholm in the assessment of goodness, the success or failure of rescuers’ acts is not important at all. Rather, the displayed “...solidarity and readiness to help” represents “the important aspect in relation to the assessment of the goodness and laudability of those who helped as a ‘light in the darkness.’”⁸³ But Nechama Tec does not share Brudholm’s view that mere willingness to help suffices to warrant praise for the acts of rescuers. The continuous aid of rescuers, their autonomous altruism, i.e. “selfless help, which is neither reinforced nor otherwise rewarded by society,” as well as the possibility of the ultimate sacrifice by the giver, lie at the core of Tec’s understanding of goodness.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Norman Geras questions self-sacrifice as the core of rescuers’ goodness. Geras objected that “it is unreasonable to pitch the level of self-sacrifice on behalf of others too high.”⁸⁵ Instead, he agrees with Barrington Moore, who found the demand that “all human beings devote absolutely all of their energies to eliminating evil and injustice” to be somewhat “mean-spirited, twisted and narrow.”⁸⁶ But at the same time, Geras is fully aware of the importance of assisting those who are under grave assault or in acute danger. He has no doubts that failure to bring aid in securing the rights of others places our own rights in jeopardy.⁸⁷

⁸³ Brudholm, 204.

⁸⁴ Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*, 151-152.

⁸⁵ Geras, 32.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

Regardless of the lack of scholarly consensus on who the rescuers are and how the concept of “goodness” should be approached, rescuers have become a suitable building material for recent political discourses that exploit rescuers’ moral capital with an aim to promote political goals. The rescue theme has thus become a tool for embracing the morals of nations hoping to invigorate civic nationalism and curb the expressions of racism and ethnic hatred. Rescuers’ humanity, cross-national, ethnic and religious tolerance has been exploited as a reservoir for soothing the current intra-ethnic and cross-national tensions and as a building block of European and national identities. But at the same time, the acts of rescuers were utilized as a balancing theme in an effort to alleviate European countries’ problematic pasts. The rescue theme thus became a suitable tool in the hands of revisionists and apologists of fascism and Nazism. More specifically, postcommunist countries struggling to add a layer of propriety and legitimacy to their newly established national states appropriated historical pasts to their current political needs. A rhetoric of victimization, rather than a rhetoric of self-examination of conscience vis-à-vis the tragedy of the Holocaust, represented the engine behind the much needed revival of national pride and self-awareness. At the same time, the topic of rescue boosted national pride and, to a certain degree, appeased the “unmasterable pasts” of postcommunist national states. The following section will explore the discursive terrain of the rescue theme in greater detail within the context of postwar and postcommunist Slovakia. While postwar “Western” scholarship was concerned with the issues of compliance with authoritarian regimes, of which the most extreme example was Daniel J.

Goldhagen's view of "ordinary Germans" as "Hitler's willing executioners," postwar Slovak scholarship contemplated the crimes of the wartime era strictly along the "proletariat's innocence" and "petty bourgeoisie's guilt" framework, thus exempting the "working class" from responsibility for the Holocaust. In what follows I will examine how precisely the theme of the rescue of Slovak Jews was appropriated within the ideological context of the neo-Stalinism of the 1950s, the era of "communism with a human face" of the 1960s and the "normalization" of the 1970s and 1980s. I will pay detailed attention to the ways rescue has been utilized since the fall of communism to the present.

As a satellite of Nazi Germany, the wartime Slovak state implemented antisemitic policies which resulted in the deportation of 75,000 Jews. The precise number of those who survived the Holocaust in Slovakia is unknown, although the estimates vary anywhere between 4000 to 30,000 Jews.⁸⁸ It has been acknowledged that the immediate postwar period of retributions and trials was marked by a general animosity towards the returning Jews who demanded the restitution of their property and businesses. The wartime myth that the Jews were

⁸⁸ Alena Heitlinger, *In the Shadows*, 19, informs us that a tenth of the prewar number of Czechoslovak Jews managed to survive the war, i.e., between 15,000 and 18,000. According to Michael Phayer and Eva Fleischner, *Cries in the Night*, 59, less than 4000 Jews survived the war. Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 274 indicates 10,000 Jews, while Peter Salner "'Viditeľní' a 'neviditeľní' židia v slovenskej spoločnosti po roku 1945," 123, gives the number of 25,000 Jewish survivors in Slovakia. Livia Rothkirchen "Státní antisemitizmus během komunistické ery 1948-1989," 113, even claims that there were approximately 30,000 Jews after the war in Slovakia. Martina Fiamová, "Židovská Komunita v Zlatých Moravciach v Rokoch 1938 – 1949," 97 estimates the number of surviving Jews anywhere between 15,000 and 30,000. And Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Zachráň sa, kto môžeš. Židia na Slovensku v rokoch 1944 – 1950: poznámky a úvahy," 93 is the most specific, claiming that approximately 5000 Jews survived in Slovakia, 16,000 returned from concentration camps and about 9000 returned from foreign legions.

on the side of the ruling Magyars who exploited Slovaks was also revived.⁸⁹ And the 1946 campaign of communists against “šmelináři” – which was one of the degrading labels for Jews – resulted in an upsurge of antisemitism especially in the southern parts of Slovakia.⁹⁰ Tensions even escalated to the point that outbursts of antisemitic riots took place in Topolčany, Humenné, Bratislava and other areas. In Hlohovec, the postwar authorities went so far as to establish a labour unit where fascist collaborators, HSPP members and Jews were forced to rebuild the destroyed bridge over the river Váh.⁹¹

The resurgence of early postwar antisemitism thus acted as an obstacle to the debates about the fate of Holocaust victims, not to mention the acts of helpers and rescuers of Jews. Due to the upsurge of Slovak nationalism and antisemitism immediately after the war, rescuers continued to be accused of “unpatriotic” behaviour and were commonly accused of acquiring riches at the expense of the persecuted Jews.⁹² Politically, the silence regarding rescuers had its roots in the postwar silence over the fate of the 75,000 Jewish victims of the Holocaust that was persistently overshadowed by the sacrifices of the Red Army for the sake of Czechoslovakia’s peaceful future. The commemoration sites were dedicated to the victims of fascism and never specified Jewish and Roma victims of the Holocaust.⁹³ The number of Holocaust victims and Jews who died in the

⁸⁹ Livia Rothkirchen, “Státní antisemitizmus během komunistické ery 1948-1989,” in *Antisemitismus v posttotalitní Evropě*, Hana Bílková and Jan Hančil, eds., (Praha: Nakladatelství Franze Kafky, 1993), 112.

⁹⁰ Tomáš Lang and Sándor Štrba, *Holokaust na južnom Slovensku na pozadí Novozámockých Židov* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2006), 373.

⁹¹ Bedřich Róna, *Osudy z temných časů* (Praha: G plus G, 2003), 62.

⁹² Gossman, 6-7.

⁹³ Livia Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” in *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, ed. David S. Wyman and Charles H. Rosenzweig (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 176.

resistance movement was invisible within an anonymous figure of total wartime human losses. The new regime celebrated the courageous acts of the Red Army, communists and partisans and glossed over the acts of those who rescued and assisted Jews. Rescuers, in a sense, undermined the unwavering authority of the resisters in society. According to Deborah Dwork, the resistance movement in many European countries was defined in terms of heroic operations such as armed defiance, tactical maneuvers or sabotage, which were interpreted as patriotic and nationalistic. On the other hand, the acts of rescuers failed to promote the message about one nation's suffering under Nazism, since rescuers' acts de-accentuated the nation's suffering vis-à-vis the all-pervasive presence of the Nazi totalitarian regime. Dwork argued that "less obviously nationalistic and manifestly humanitarian, the business of saving lives during the war was not politically useful in reconstructing a national consciousness and patriotic pride when the hostilities ended."⁹⁴ More important, saving the life of the member of a persecuted non-Slovak minority seemed to transgress the interests of the national state by reaching out towards ethnic and religious tolerance – values that were hardly promoted during the postwar mass expatriation of Germans and Hungarians from Czechoslovakia and the communist regime's intolerance towards religion.

Moreover, from an international viewpoint, it was of paramount importance that the newly established regime successfully situate postwar Czechoslovakia firmly among the ranks of the victorious Allies. The aim was to divert international attention away from the problematic Slovak clerico-fascist past by

⁹⁴ Deborah Dwork and Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, *Voices and Views: A History of the Holocaust* (New York: Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, 2002), 444.

bringing the achievements of the August 1944 Slovak national uprising to the foreground as a key marker of a newly re-constructed Slovak antifascist identity. Rescuers would inevitably turn attention to those Slovaks who failed to assist the persecuted Jews, thus positing the question of the collaborationism of Slovaks with the clerico-fascist regime and jeopardizing an effort to situate Czechoslovakia more firmly among the victors. As a result, the communist regime trumpeted the illustrious deeds of the participants in the 1944 Slovak national uprising as an expression of the democratic will of Slovaks. To further complicate the issue, Czechoslovak-Israeli relations helped determine the approach of the Czechoslovak government to Jews and their rescuers. Relations between both states were sharply deteriorating since May 1949, with both foreign and domestic political affairs reaching the peak of mutual animosity in 1951 and 1952.⁹⁵

Quite apart from the general reluctance to discuss the fate of Holocaust victims or their helpers due to the complicated political terrain, a different atmosphere and rhetoric permeated the rooms of the postwar regional people's courts that interrogated former fascist collaborators. These regional people's courts carefully investigated a number of individual cases of collaborationism with the former regime. And it was in the course of this process that the rescue theme assumed a central role and became a main identifying tool within the political profiles of former "fascist collaborators." The rescue and assistance of Jews, like the provision of help to partisans, communists and Czechs, was one of the key markers that allowed the jurors to evaluate the gravity of each prosecuted

⁹⁵ Martina Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca z odboru história, Židovská komunita v Zlatých Moravciach v rokoch 1938- 1949* (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, Filozofická Fakulta, Katedra História, 2004), 128.

individual's complicity with the former regime. From the point of view of the victors, the rescue of Jews served as an identifying tool of the "sameness" defined as "Slavophilic," Czechoslovak and antifascist, and the "otherness" defined as fascist, German and Magyar. From the viewpoint of the accused perpetrators and collaborators, rescue served as a balancing tool for their problematic pasts and as a much needed "transfer ticket" to a postwar society.

Despite the resistance theme's central place in political discourse, the communist regime did not entirely refrain from appropriating selected events from the Holocaust past for building a myth about the antifascist attitude of Czechoslovak people. Themes such as the suffering of the inmates in the Terezin and Auschwitz concentration camps were to deliver an urgent message about the struggle against fascism.⁹⁶ Interestingly, it was the realm of novels and poems where intellectuals expressed their views on the topic of the Holocaust more freely. The first memoirs, novels and reflections on the Slovak state's misguided policy and the destruction of the Jews had already been published by the late 1940s.⁹⁷ In the atmosphere of the postwar trials of fascist collaborators, the moral values of the wartime Slovak state and its impact on Jewish citizens were questioned by Dominik Tatarka in his novel *Farská Republika* (The Parish Republic) (1948). Hela Volanská's novel *Stretnutia v lesoch* (Meetings in Forests) (1948) and Katarína Lazarová's *Kamaráti* (Friends) (1949) also offer an insight

⁹⁶ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 184 – 193.

⁹⁷ See Ivan Dérer, *Slovenský vývoj a ľudácka zrada, fakta vzpomínky a úvahy* (Praha: Kvasnička a Hampl, 1946); Dominik Tatarka, *Farská Republika* (Turčiansky Svätý Martin: Matica Slovenská, 1948); Hela Volanská, *Stretnutia v lesoch* (Praha: Naše Vojsko, 1949); Katarína Lazarová, *Kamaráti* (Bratislava, 1949).

into the fate of the Jews in the 1944 Slovak National Uprising.⁹⁸ Prior to his emigration, Leopold Lahola published his first novel *Božia ulička* (God's Lane), *Vtáci spev* (Bird Singing) about pogroms in Slovakia.⁹⁹ The theme of the rescue of Jews by Slovaks was partly touched on within the context of these immediate postwar novels by Holocaust victims. Especially noteworthy is the short story "Sedliak" (The Farmer) (1947), by the non-Jewish author, František Švantner, who daringly reflected on the reluctance to help Jews that resulted in the murder of a victim seeking help.¹⁰⁰

But this brief attention to the fate of the Jews came to an end with the 1950s upsurge of anti-Semitism marked by the 1952 Rudolf Slánský show trial, in which eleven out of the fourteen defendants, high party and state officials, were of Jewish origin.¹⁰¹ In 1957 another five Slovak Jews were sentenced in a "Jewish conspiracy" show trial in Žilina.¹⁰² Secret police investigated the activities of Jewish intellectuals and Jewish community leaders such as Dr. Tibor Kováč – a member of the Working Group,¹⁰³ which had been engaged in the rescue of

⁹⁸ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 177.

⁹⁹ Milan Richter and Zuzana Reiselová, eds., *Božia ulička: Antológia Slovenskej literatúry o Holokauste* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov: SNM - Múzeum Židovskej kultúry, 1998), 231.

¹⁰⁰ František Švantner, "Sedliak," in *Božia ulička. Antológia slovenskej literatúry o holokauste*, Milan Richter and Zuzana Reiselová eds., (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo spolku slovenských spisovateľov, SNM - Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 1998), 13 – 36.

¹⁰¹ Heitlinger, *In the Shadows of the Holocaust & Communism*, 21 - 22; Pavol Mešťan and Daniela Baranová, *Zborník referátov z Konferencie Antisemitizmus na konci 20. storočia: Nitra, 15-17.5.2000* (Slovenské národné múzeum. Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2000), 22.

¹⁰² Mešťan and Baranová, *Zborník referátov*, 24.

¹⁰³ The Working Group also known as the *Nebenregierung* ("other government") was an illegal organization of mostly the members of the Slovak *Judenrat*, i.e. Jewish Council in Slovakia. The group bribed Slovak (Anton Vašek, Izidor Koso) and German (Dieter Wisliceny) officials to prevent the deportation of Jews from Slovakia to the death camps. Although the effort to stop the deportation failed, the group was successful in delivering packages to the Slovak Jews concentrated in the Terezin camp in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The Working Group supported illegal activities in concentration labor camps in Slovakia (the camps established to exploit the work of Jews) and thus helped to prepare the ground for the national uprising. The

persecuted Jews, who under the pressure of investigation committed suicide.¹⁰⁴ In the course of 1950s, Jews were frequently denounced under the labels of “bourgeois nationalism,” “cosmopolitanism” and Zionism. They were accused of sabotaging the Slovak economy and conspiring against Czechoslovak interests. In the atmosphere of the antisemitism of the 1950s, scholars only occasionally referred to various aspects of the Holocaust in Slovakia, and then within broader contextual frameworks.¹⁰⁵ This hostile atmosphere represented an obstacle to tackling the issues of the relationship between Slovaks and Jewish victims of the Holocaust, a topic that was either limited or appropriated within the limits of communist ideology. Rudolf Jašík’s novel, *Námestie svätej Alžbety* (1958), applied the Marxist paradigm of class struggle while reflecting on the problematic Holocaust past through the lens of a love story between a young Slovak named Igor and a Jewish girl, Eva. Jašík exempted the Slovak working class from responsibility for the Holocaust and placed this burden instead on the shoulders of the demoralized Slovak petty bourgeoisie embodied in the characters of “Yellow Dodo” and barber Flórik. This simplified pattern of the allocation of Holocaust guilt was also embraced by Ladislav Mňačko in his novel *Smrt’ sa volá Engelchen* (1963). Only with the process of de-Stalinization, which allowed for the partial rehabilitation of the victims of the 1950s purges, did Slovak novelists embrace the

most notable leaders of the Working Group were Gisi Fleishmann and Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandl. At Weissmandl’s initiative the Working Group masterminded the ambitious *Europa Plan* which aimed to rescue European Jews from the hands of the Nazis. The *Europa Plan* failed to meet its goal.

¹⁰⁴ Rothkirchen, “Czechoslovakia,” 186.

¹⁰⁵ Vlastislav Bauch, *Polnohospodárstvo za Slovenského štátu* (Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1958); Imrich Stanek, *Zrada a pád; hlinkovskí separatisté a takzvaný Slovenský štát*. Praha: Státní nakl. politické literatury, 1958).

idea of the solidarity of ordinary Slovaks with the persecuted Jews, a view that was widely disseminated especially over the course of the 1960s.¹⁰⁶

The 1960s were marked by changes in the approach to the topic of the Holocaust. In 1961, some Czechoslovak reporters were even sent to Jerusalem to cover the proceedings of the Eichmann trial. This resulted in the publication of Ladislav Mňačko's *Ja, Adolf Eichmann* (I, Adolf Eichmann) in Bratislava in 1961 and a brief controversy between Fraňo Tiso and Edo Friš about the responsibility of the wartime Slovak state in the Holocaust.¹⁰⁷ But even in the 1960s, in the era of "communism with a human face," the publication of Holocaust scholarship could have materialized only if 1) the scholar employed antifascist rhetoric within a class struggle paradigm and 2) he or she avoided the sensitive theme of Slovak nationalism. In the 1960s, a few scholarly articles addressing the situation of Jews in the Slovak state¹⁰⁸ and within the resistance movement¹⁰⁹ were published. Scholars of this period promoted the view of antisemitism as a "tool of distraction of the working class from their respective class issues."¹¹⁰ As the 1960s scholarly argument went, the antisemitism of the Ludak regime "sharply contrasted with the honest attitude of the majority of Slovak folk to racially persecuted citizens."¹¹¹ Namely, a "decisive majority of the working class, most of the peasants and a significant part of intelligentsia refused to follow the antisemitic campaign...due

¹⁰⁶ Richter, 233.

¹⁰⁷ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 178.

¹⁰⁸ Ivan Kamenec, "Židovská Otázka Na Slovensku a Spôsoby Jej Riešenia v Čase Autonómie Slovenska," *Nové Obzory* 10 (1968), 155 - 180; Jan Dzugas, "Postavenie Židovského Obyvateľstva v Normotvorbe Slovenského Štátu v Rokoch 1939-1945," *Právnické Štúdie* 15, no. 2 (1967), 349 - 391.

¹⁰⁹ Emil Knieža, "Bojová Kapitola Slovenských Židov," *Židovská Ročenka 5725* (1964 - 1965), 134 - 140.

¹¹⁰ Dzugas, "Postavenie Židovského Obyvateľstva," 362.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 389.

to moral reasons.”¹¹² Pogroms and atrocities were carried out by HG and HM members who received special training from Nazi Germany’s instructors.¹¹³ Dzugas, who denounced the antisemitism of the wartime Slovak state as “a priori reactionary and anti-human,” found the death of “30,000 poor Jewish citizens” to be “less logical” from the Ludaks’ viewpoint than the murder of Jewish millionaires and bourgeoisie.¹¹⁴

Despite the continued prominence of the resistance theme in scholarly production, the rescuers and helpers of Jews were given relatively more attention, especially within the context of the post-uprising period, 1944 - 1945. But even in this context, it was the suffering of Slovak helpers and rescuers under the fascist regime that was unduly emphasized, while the victims of the Holocaust served as mere mediators of the Slovaks’ heroism. The 1960s world of fiction and poetry was, notably, more receptive to the Holocaust theme than the realm of censored scholarly production. It was then that the Holocaust survivors Jozef Lánik, Júlia Škodová, and Margita Schwalbová revealed their memories on the *universe concentrationaire* in Auschwitz. In what is thought to be the best novel within camp genre, Jozef Lánik’s, alias Valter Rosenberg’s novel “*Čo Dante nevidel*” (1964) provides an insight into the desperate situation of Auschwitz’s inmates.¹¹⁵ Lánik’s novel introduced “without useless sentimentality, in a manly fashion and with human passion”¹¹⁶ was based on a true story of the courageous escape of two inmates, Karol and Valér, alias Wetzler and Vrba, from Auschwitz to their

¹¹² Ibid., 354.

¹¹³ Ibid., 371.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 360.

¹¹⁵ Jozef Lánik, *Čo Dante nevidel* (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1966).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 269.

homeland in Slovakia. They crossed the Slovak-Polish boundary with the help of a Polish communist resistance fighter, Tadeusz, whom Lánik described as a “good hearted, almighty character from a fairy tale.”¹¹⁷ While idealizing the Polish resister as a rescuer, the author moved away from the undue celebration of the solidarity of “ordinary” Slovaks and captured a more nuanced picture of assistance to the Auschwitz escapees. Margita Schwalbová’s memoir *Žila som životy druhých* (I Lived the Lives of Others), from the milieu of women’s concentration camps, differs from Lánik’s “manly” novel.¹¹⁸ Despite the horrors that women prisoners faced every day, Schwalbová, a prisoner with the function of camp physician, embraced her role helping and rescuing female prisoners as a means of her own mental and spiritual survival.

The 1965 Academy Award-winning movie *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on Main Street), directed by Jan Kadar challenged the dichotomy drawn between the proletarian alibi and petty bourgeois guilt.¹¹⁹ The movie is a “statement on how antisemitism can be bred by oversight, plain laziness or general apathy.”¹²⁰ The main character, carpenter Brtko, cannot remain long in the role of innocent bystander. He slowly becomes aware of his new identity as someone who aryanizes the little button shop of an aging, deaf Jewess: “I’m your Aryan and you’re my Jewess...understand?” When Brtko accidentally causes the death of the Jewess that he was hiding, he hangs himself. In the view of Viliam Marčok, Brtko’s suicide disseminates the message of the morality of the “ordinary man”

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 216.

¹¹⁸ Margita Schwalbová and Katarína Hradská, *Žila som životy druhých: Zo spomienok lekárky na Osvienčim* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku: Židovská náboženská obec Bratislava, 2001).

¹¹⁹ Richter, 233.

¹²⁰ “Obchod na korze, The Shop on Main Street; A Shop on the High Street (Czechoslovakia),” *Variety*, 1 January 1964 <http://www.variety.com/review> (accessed 23 October 2007).

while posing the question of unwilling and accidental participation in the Holocaust.¹²¹ Three years later, in a similar fashion, Ladislav Lahola made the audience undergo its own search for the roots of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance within Slovak society. In his collection of novels titled *Posledná vec* (1968) Lahola addressed the tragedy of Slovak Jews within the context of the antifascist struggle by deliberately avoiding the enormity of the Jews' suffering.¹²²

The period of "normalization" in the 1970s introduced profound stagnation and crisis in Slovak historiography. The most influential historians whose research targeted the 1938-1945 era, such as Jozef Jablonický, Ľubomír Lipták, Martin Vietor, Samuel Falt'an and Ladislav Lipscher, were either silenced by the neo-Stalinist regime or forced into emigration.¹²³ A much simplified and distorted picture of wartime events was re-introduced. In the spirit of the 1950s the effort to exempt the majority of Slovaks via the theory of "the proletariat's alibi" was revived.¹²⁴ For example, Ivan Kamenec's scholarly production in the 1970s¹²⁵ closely followed the Marxist paradigm. Kamenec located the roots of aryanization in class antagonism and looked at the economic exclusion of the Jews as being a venture of the Slovak bourgeoisie.¹²⁶ In this line of interpretation, Slovak capitalists propagated national hatred in order to undermine the strength of the working class. The responsibility for the Holocaust in Slovakia was clearly

¹²¹ Richter, 233.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Elena Mannová and David P. Daniel, eds., *Studia Historica Slovaca: A Guide to Historiography in Slovakia* (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 1995), 115.

¹²⁴ Richter, 233.

¹²⁵ Ivan Kamenec, "Koncentračné a pracovné tábory pre rasove prenasledovaných občanov na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945," *Terezínske listy* 5 (1975), 12-25; Ivan Kamenec, "Koncentračné, pracovné a zajatecké tábory na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945," *Terezínske listy* 6 (1976), 15- 28.

¹²⁶ Ivan Kamenec, "K hospodárskej politike slovenskej buržoázie v rokoch 1939-1945. Arizačný proces a jeho triedny character," *Studia historica Slovaca* 22 (1977), 33- 67.

ascribed to Nazi Germany which “categorically demanded” the “Final Solution” of the Jewish question from the Slovak leadership.¹²⁷ But it was the realm of *belle lettres* that again allowed for more nuanced reflections on the painful wartime Slovak past. Klára Jarunková’s novel *Čierny snovrat* (1979) tackled the story of her grandmother, the widow Berta Malatincová, who was hiding members of the Rosenkraz family. This writer promoted the message that humanity and altruism lie at the core of Christian morals.¹²⁸

In the mid-1980s, under the impact of Soviet *perestroika*, the Marxist paradigm slowly abated, opening a space for a more balanced view on the Holocaust.¹²⁹ Prior to the fall of communism in Europe, Bratislava’s intellectuals, artists and scholars, headed by Dominik Tatarka, were thus able to publish in 1987 a proclamation that condemned the deportations of Jews from Slovakia and crimes committed against the Jewish community.¹³⁰

The fall of communism introduced radical changes in lives of many Slovaks. Although the process of democratization in Slovakia took longer than in other countries of the region, once the democratic forces of Mikuláš Dzurinda’s cabinet replaced Vladimír Mečiar’s gambling with postcommunist nationalism in 2002, Europeanization was carried out at a pace that stunned foreign observers. Slovakia entered the European Union enlargement in May 2004.¹³¹ But the stability of the democratization process was jeopardized by particular streams in

¹²⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹²⁸ Richter, 8.

¹²⁹ Ivan Kamenec, "Príprava a priebeh deportácií rasovo prenasledovaných občanov fašistického Slovenského štátu," in *Zborník Múzea SNP*, vol. 8, (1983), 134 - 162.

¹³⁰ Rothkirchen, "Czechoslovakia," 189.

¹³¹ Ibid., 99.

society that strived to resurrect historical traditions, practices and identities associated with the ethnic nationalism and clericalism of the historically controversial Slovak statehood of 1939-1945. Traditional institutions – the Matica Slovenská and the Slovak Academy of Sciences – as well as the newly established Nation's Memory Institute (NMI) also molded the past into their own respective ideological casts, leaving indelible imprints on the ways the Holocaust in Slovakia has been interpreted and received in the wider public. Various forms of Holocaust memory politics such as the nationalists' forgetting mode, the integrationists' mode of memory as a resistance to an induced state of amnesia and the mode of memory used for diplomatic maneuvering opened the ground for multiple discourses about rescue. Especially the conservative and liberal streams appropriated the rescue theme to their own political requirements, thus creating a battleground for competing memories of past rescue efforts.

The revival of political clericalism and ethno-nationalism after the fall of communism led to the emergence of an aging generation of historians, politicians and émigré returnees as influential social actors. They effectively disseminate their own social memory of the World War II Slovak state. Milan S. Ďurica and František Vnuk are the most prominent émigré revisionist historians. They have been supported by the Matica Slovenská – an institution recognized for its leading role in the nineteenth-century Slovak national awakening -- which possesses strong nationalist leanings and serves as a major domestic cultural force behind the rehabilitation of the wartime clerico-fascist Slovak state. Émigré historians

and Matica Slovenská strived to resurrect historical traditions, practices and identities associated with the ethnic nationalism and clericalism of the historically controversial Slovak statehood of 1939-1945.

Much attention has been paid to one specific category of rescuers – the “Righteous among the Nations,” or those Slovaks who displayed resourcefulness and courage in order to save the persecuted Jews. By January 2008, 478 Slovaks were awarded the title.¹³² But the wave of public Righteous awards since the 1990s has led to different responses within society. For ethno-nationalists the presence of “the Righteous” rescuers in political discourse was rather problematic since they ran counter to the notion of Slovaks as a victim nation of Nazi aggression. Righteous rescuers’ deeds defied the clerico-fascist regime. Their presence undermined the view that under the authoritarian regime and German pressure Slovaks’ maneuvering was rather paralyzed. Thus the category of Righteous stood out as an uncomfortable subject of discussion, a threat to ethnic nationalists’ accumulated political capital. Ethno-nationalists thus needed to appropriate the topic of the rescue of Slovak Jews for their own political agenda, and eventually they managed to finesse the theme into a means of revisionism and apologetics for the Slovak clerico-fascist past by promoting the following myths:

First, émigré historians put forward a myth about Jozef Tiso, the president of the clerico-fascist Slovak state, as a “saviour of the Jews” as a part of a larger effort to promote the beatification of Jozef Tiso in the Vatican. The image of Tiso

¹³² Yad Vashem, “Righteous Among the Nations - per Country & Ethnic Origin,” January 1, 2008, http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/statistics.html (accessed February 19, 2009); See also “The Righteous among the Nations - Yad Vashem” http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/related_sites.asp (accessed April 13, 2011).

as “saviour of the Slovak Jews” also lies at the core of the “founding father” construct which was reinforced in the postcommunist era of so-called “mechiarism” (1992 – 1998).¹³³ This right-wing national myth is backed up by the historically rooted fact that the president possessed the right to exempt the persecuted Jews from deportation. Although such an option did indeed exist, the number of presidential exemptions has been inflated in order to add an aura of innocence and glory to president-priest Jozef Tiso. According to Milan S. Ďurica, Jozef Tiso and many government members were trying to change the impact of the infamous Jewish Code and rescue “as many Jews as possible.” In his view, the lack of consensus within the government as well as a lack of understanding and cooperation of Jews with the Slovak government (!) led to the failure of Slovaks to withstand the pressure of Germans, who were responsible for the Holocaust in Slovakia.¹³⁴ Liberal historian Ivan Kamenec decisively refutes this myth and offers a more balanced view on the issue of presidential exemptions.¹³⁵ According to Kamenec, Tiso’s office had received about 20,000 requests for presidential exemptions from the Jewish Code, but granted only a thousand exemptions, which altogether allowed for the protection of 5000-6000 Jews. Martina Fiamová noted that Tiso issued the exemptions only to “morally and politically reliable” Jewish applicants of Slovak nationality who continuously supported Catholic goals by substantial financial contributions and whose deeds

¹³³ On stereotypes promoted by populist politicians in Slovakia, see for example Eva Krekovičová, “Stereotypes and Folklore in the Language of Populist Politicians in Slovakia after 1989 and 1993,” *Slovak Foreign Policy Affair*, (Spring 2005), 63.

¹³⁴ Milan Stanislav Ďurica, *Slovenská Republika 1939-1945: Vznik a Trvanie prvého slovenského štátu 20. storočia* (Bratislava: Vydavateľské družstvo LÚČ, 1999), 30.

¹³⁵ Ivan Kamenec, *Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka. (Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887 – 1947)* (Bratislava: Archa, 1998), 97 - 99.

in no way undermined the regime.¹³⁶ But presidential exemptions could be declared invalid as soon as its Jewish holder proved to be “unworthy” of holding the written expression of “highest mercy.”¹³⁷

The second myth promoted by ethno-nationalists is grounded in the claim that labour camps in the Slovak state represented a rescue ground from deportations for thousands of Jews.¹³⁸ An émigré historian František Vnuk even claimed that working camps “were to play the role of Schindler ..., because they saved lots of lives from deportations.”¹³⁹ While completely ignoring the overall context behind the establishment of labour camps, Milan Ďurica openly claimed that Jewish labour camps protected the Jews from deportations and that “despite restrictions on their personal freedom they [Jews] enjoyed general living standards... that the majority of Slovaks have never dreamt about.” Therefore – Ďurica continues – “Jews were lucky if they could stay in Slovak labour camps designated for Jews.”¹⁴⁰ Ivan Kamenec decisively refutes such views of labour camps as “idyllic islands” for Jews. He argues that Jews who were transferred to Nováky, Sered’ or Vyhne were already deprived of their possessions and became morally and mentally depressed human beings who lived in constant fear of being deported.¹⁴¹ Similarly, Igor Baka attacked émigré historians’ view of labour camps as safe havens for Slovak Jews and the myth that the camps represented the Ludaks’ humanitarian act of mercy. Baka warns us that such claims are politically

¹³⁶ Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca*, 85 – 86.

¹³⁷ Kamenec, *Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka*, 98.

¹³⁸ Igor Baka, *Židovský tabor v Novákoch 1941 – 1944* (Bratislava: Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, Zing Print, 2001), 6.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

motivated and promote the neo-Ludak apologetic line.¹⁴² Baka also reminds us that the improvement of conditions in labour camps, which émigré historians frequently underline, was an economically motivated act which in the long run aimed to preserve a cheap Jewish work force. This is not to say, however, that within the labour camps, no rescue was possible whatsoever. Even Christopher Browning recognized that work camps *on occasion* [italics mine] did yield greater chances of survival or rescue. In his analysis of the slave labour camp in Starachowice Browning claimed that following the brutal reign of Willi Althoff, prisoners eventually attempted to smuggle their children into the camp: "...they calculated the risk of their children trying to survive in hiding to be greater than trying to live as an 'illegal' child in camp."¹⁴³ Similarly Katarína Psicová in her research on the Holocaust in Piešťany claimed that "some Jews [in Slovakia] voluntarily entered working camps" because they believed that here they would be protected from the deportations.¹⁴⁴ Ladislav Lipscher also claimed that "the position of the Jews in the labor camps was relatively better than that of other Jews in the country. Jews who had been drafted for forced labor were less likely than other Jews to be deported from Slovakia to the death camps."¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Lipscher hints at the temporality of such chances, which was determined mainly by a hostile relationship between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Defense which "on several occasions" refused to

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 55.

¹⁴⁴ Katarína Psicová, *Riešenie židovskej otázky na Slovensku v r. 1938-1945. Modelové mesto Piešťany* (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa, Filozofická Fakulta, Katedra História, 2004), 97.

¹⁴⁵ Ladislav Lipscher, "The Jews of Slovakia: 1939 – 1945," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia. Historical studies and surveys*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, vol. 3 (Philadelphia, New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 187.

discharge Jews from labour service on the Ministry of the Interior's request.¹⁴⁶

Most Slovak historians seem to ignore the complex structure of labour camps which yielded different conditions for Jews in the Slovak milieu. But more important, historians have to evaluate their conclusions within the *overall context* of this tragic period and keep in mind the exploitative and immoral nature of working camps when reflecting on chances of rescue within this specific context.

Rescue has also recently stood out as a means of balancing the problematic past of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. The revival of political clericalism after 1989 in a country with a strong Catholic tradition has come as no surprise.¹⁴⁷ Roman Catholic and Lutheran priests played an important role in the tumultuous process of Slovak nation-building in the nineteenth century. Many priests advocated Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakia throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In this regard, the Catholic Church's current link to ethnic nationalism is not an atypical development. The intimate connection between ethnic nationalism and clericalism survived World War II and was reinforced after the fall of communism in 1989, when the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church supported the efforts of nationalists to commemorate Tiso as "remaining in the people's memories as a luminous exception amidst Stalinism and Hitlerite Nazism."¹⁴⁸ The Catholic Church in this milieu continues to play the roles of shaper of the nation, mediator between classes, gelling factor of national society,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 188.

¹⁴⁷ See for example Gila Fatranová, "Antisemitizmus v politickom vývoji Slovenska. Živnosť antisemitických javov," *Acta Judaica Slovaca, Zborník referátov z konferencie Antisemitizmus na konci 20. storočia*, 6 (2000), 169; Michal Vašečka, "Sociologický výskum antisemitizmu na Slovensku po roku 1989 v kritickej perspektíve," *Slovak Sociological Review* 38, no. 4 (2006), 283 - 313.

¹⁴⁸ "Antisemitism and Racism," <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2000-1/slovakia.htm> (accessed 18 October 2007).

and disseminator of national consciousness.¹⁴⁹ Nostalgia for the lost influence that the Roman Catholic Church once exercised upon the morality, society and politics of the wartime state was also all-pervasive in the transition period. The Roman Catholic Church itself voiced its interests via the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH – *Kresťansko Demokratické Hnutie*),¹⁵⁰ which joined the camp of agitators for the rehabilitation of Jozef Tiso.¹⁵¹ Yet, the voice of the clergy has been rather hesitant as far as the controversial Tiso's legacy is concerned. The Slovak Bishops' Conference in 1998 issued mixed messages: on the one hand there was an effort to revive Tiso's legacy, while on the other the Roman Catholic Church envisioned itself in the role of sympathizer to the Jewish tragedy.¹⁵² Not even a decade later, the voice of the Roman Catholic Church became more decisive on the subject of Tiso's rehabilitation. In December 2006, Archbishop Ján Sokol of Bratislava-Trnava publicly praised Tiso. He insisted that under Tiso's presidency the country had "enjoyed a period of well-being," which, in the Archbishop's opinion, had a positive impact upon his family and his childhood. Pending public outcry and protests from the Jewish community, Prime Minister Robert Fico had to alleviate the impact of Sokol's speech and reassure the public that Tiso was a war criminal.¹⁵³ Four months later, in April 2007, Cardinal Ján Chrisostom Korec, on the television program "V politike," defended Tiso and his policy by claiming

¹⁴⁹ This notion speaks in favour of Adrian Hastings' theory about nationalism. See Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 193.

¹⁵⁰ The KDH was established as a political party in February 1990 under the leadership of Ján Čarnogurský.

¹⁵¹ Fatranová, "Antisemitizmus," 170.

¹⁵² The Stephen Roth Institute, *Antisemitism and Racism*.

¹⁵³ US Department of State, *Slovak Republic: International Religious Freedom Report 2007*, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 14 September 2007 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90199.htm> (accessed October 18, 2007).

that Tiso had “very good relations with Jews,” yet “things happened which should not have happened.”¹⁵⁴ The Jewish community in Slovakia responded by denouncing the highest Roman Church representatives’ apologetic stance on Tiso’s regime as an insult to the victims of the Holocaust. The Jewish community’s representative, Ľudovít Fischer, reminded the public that history cannot be rewritten or whitewashed and pointed to the inability of the Roman Catholic Church to face the truth.¹⁵⁵

Like the émigré historians, the Catholic Church in Slovakia also appropriated the topic of rescue for its own purposes. After its failed attempt to proclaim Tiso a saint, Spišská diocese has been struggling to promote the beatification of another problematic bishop, Jan Vojtaššák, since December 1996. That said, Angelo Sodano, the head of the State Secretariat of the Vatican made it clear that “for now” it is improper to proceed with the beatification of Vojtaššák.¹⁵⁶ Although the martyrdom of Vojtaššák during communism was widely acknowledged, Vojtaššák’s problematic past in the era of the wartime Slovak state has raised serious questions. Despite the protests of the Vatican, Vojtaššák became a Chairman of the State Council, an institution that bore its share of responsibility for the Holocaust in the wartime Slovak state. Spišská diocese nowadays downplays Vojtaššák’s passivity vis-à-vis the persecution of

¹⁵⁴ TA3, “Židovskú komunitu pobúrili výroky kardinála Korca,” 28 April 2007 http://www.ta3.com/sk/reportaze/35867_zidovsku-komunitu-poburili-vyroky-kardinala-korca (accessed October 18, 2007).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. It may be of interest to point that the bandwidth originally assigned to broadcasting the BBC, the station that was at the centre of attention in Slovakia for sixty years, has been reassigned to Radio Lumen, which the US Conference of Catholic Bishops has described as “one of the great Catholic Radio success stories in Eastern Europe.”

¹⁵⁶ Katarína Domanská, “Biskup Ján Vojtaššák – bez svätožiary,” 15 May 2007 http://domanska.blog.sme.sk/clanok_tlac.asp?cl=95583 (accessed February 4, 2009)

Jews and his participation in the aryanization of Baldovské spa by claiming that the Slovak bishops' reaction to the deportation of Jews did not differ from the attitude of other European bishops.¹⁵⁷ The diocese attempts to counter-balance this bishop's problematic past by painting an image of Vojtaššák as a helper and rescuer of Jews. The head of the Spišská Historical Society Ivan Chalupický argued that Vojtaššák assisted many Jews by baptizing and obtaining exemptions from deportations.¹⁵⁸ But according to historians Kamenec, Hubenák and Jelinek, Vojtaššák did not question the antisemitic course of wartime Slovakia and even approved of the deportations in 1942.¹⁵⁹ According to Ivan Kamenec, Vojtaššák had no doubts about the antisemitic policy of the state and was willing to assist only converted Jews. In his view Vojtaššák approved of the deportations in 1942 when he claimed that "the deportation action should be approached not only from the religious but also from the political angle."¹⁶⁰ Ladislav Hubenák points to the minutes of a State Council meeting dated 3 February 1942, at which Vojtaššák aimed to discredit "the myth" about the mistreatment of Jews in Slovakia. At a time when Slovak Jews were deprived of their material possessions and excluded from economic, cultural and social life, Vojtaššák cynically claimed that although Jews believed that they were mistreated, they could still have a good time in camps.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Ivan Chalupický, Peter Olexák, "Biskup Ján Vojtaššák," <http://www.kapitula.sk/www/?value=1205844605> (accessed February 3, 2009)

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ivan Kamenec, "Kauza biskup Vojtaššák," <http://www.delet.sk/showarticle.php?articleID=111> (accessed February 3, 2009); "Delet | Kauza Biskup Vojtaššák " <http://www.delet.sk/spravy-a-politika/slovensko/kauza-biskup-vojtassak> (accessed 9/9/2011, 2011); Ladislav Hubenák, "Oceňovaný antisemita," <http://www.slovakia.humanists.net/vojt.htm> (accessed February 3, 2009)

¹⁶⁰ Kamenec, "Kauza biskup Vojtaššák. "

¹⁶¹ Hubenák, "Oceňovaný antisemita."

Despite this, in their defense of Vojtaššák, Chalupecký and Olexák promote the myth that it was thanks to Bishop Vojtaššák that the 1942 wave of deportations of Jews was halted. This myth is based on the argument that the spring 1942 memorandum of persecuted Jews prompted Vojtaššák to write a letter to Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach who immediately responded by stopping the 1942 wave of deportations. Many historians have doubted the veracity of this argument since Vojtaššák's letter to Mach has never been found. Ivan Kamenec claimed that the myth that Vojtaššák's intervention eventually resulted in the cessation of the 1942 deportations "is absolute nonsense and a purposeful effort behind an illegitimate glorification of Vojtaššák."¹⁶² Kamenec reminds us that the first wave of deportations ended on 20 October 1942, i.e. six months *before* Vojtaššák received the memorandum from desperate Jews in spring 1942. Even the pro-Vojtaššák historians Chalupecký and Olexák eventually admitted that Vojtaššák failed to see the dark side of the regime and that the Roman Catholic bishop only later became aware of this regime's evil face.¹⁶³ Kristína Vlachová's recent documentary about the rescue of Jews in the wartime Eastern Slovakia village of Medzilaborce, called *Road of Hope* (2005), further damaged the myth of Vojtaššák as a rescuer of Jews and thus marred the prospects of the beatification of this controversial bishop in the near future. But the NMI refused Vlachová's documentary permission to be shown on Czech television. The film shows the bishop Ján Vojtaššák, the deputy chairman of the State Council of the wartime Slovak state, giving the Nazi salute to Jozef Tiso,

¹⁶² Kamenec, "Kauza biskup Vojtaššák."

¹⁶³ Hubenák, "Oceňovaný antisemita."

president of the clerico-fascist state. The NMI's negative reaction to the film stemmed from the footage in which the problematic salute is captured. The film was perceived as an obstruction to the Roman Catholic Church's effort to beatify Vojtaššák.

While the Roman Catholic Church utilized the theme of rescue as a means of political "beautification" of some of its priests, for the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia, the rescue theme has served as a means of distancing its institutions from the problematic past of some Roman Catholic priests. When the Greek Catholic bishop Pavel Gojdič was posthumously awarded Yad Vashem's title Righteous among the nations in January 2008 for rescuing and assisting many Jews in need, the Greek Catholic Church welcomed the international recognition as a kind of compensation for the persecution Greek Catholics had endured under the communist regime.¹⁶⁴ Celebrations of Gojdič who, in fact, was the first bishop awarded the title of Righteous by Yad Vashem, were accompanied by a series of events that were to restore moral leadership of the Greek Catholic Church in society.¹⁶⁵ The *Righteous* Bishop Gojdič, who was beatified in November 2001 and posthumously awarded the Pribina Cross of the first class in January 2000, allowed the Greek Catholic Church to be exempted from the negative stigma of problematic Roman Catholic priests such as Tiso or Vojtaššák. The historian Miroslav Sabol even noted that with respect to their attitudes to the persecution of Jews, Roman Catholic Bishop Vojtaššák and Greek Catholic Bishop Gojdič

¹⁶⁴ Ľubomír Petřík, "Prvý biskup ocenený titulom Spravodlivý medzi národmi," 29 January 2008, <http://www.zoe.sk/?spravy&id=863> (accessed 16 June 2008).

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

represented the two opposite poles.¹⁶⁶ The ambassador of the state of Israel in Slovakia, Zeev Boker, highlighted the importance of Gojdič's Righteous award ceremony which, in his view, counters the efforts of those who doubt the existence of the Holocaust and spread tales about the wellbeing of Jews in wartime Slovakia. The Greek Catholic Church celebrates Gojdič as a true hero and as a counter-balance to many "pseudo-heroes and braques" who deform rather than form morals of Slovaks.¹⁶⁷ Righteous rescuers thus stand out as a wall against the views of revisionists and apologists of the wartime Slovak state. Also the representatives of the Protestant Church in Slovakia have distanced themselves from the recent wave of nationalist agitation and the Roman Catholic Church's efforts to promote the myth about Tiso and Vojtaššák as rescuers of Jews.¹⁶⁸ In an open letter addressed to Žilina's town council and to President Rudolf Schuster, Protestant Church representatives warned that the public honours to Tiso relativize and belittle the crimes of the Slovak past: "...On its path to European integration, Slovakia needs repentance and the courage to follow the ideals of Christian justice and love."¹⁶⁹

Whereas ethno-nationalists have recently been mapping the national territory of the Slovak Republic with Slovak crosses, busts of Andrej Hlinka or placards of Jozef Tiso, liberals have been marking the nation's memory by a series of public awards to and praise of the Righteous Slovaks' morals and

¹⁶⁶ Peter Getting, "Spravodlivý," 15 February 2008, <http://plus7dni.pluska.sk/plus7dni/vsimli-sme-si/spravodlivy.html> (accessed 20 February 2008).

¹⁶⁷ Petřík, "Prvý biskup."

¹⁶⁸ TA3, "Židovskú komunitu pobúrili výroky kardinála Korca."

¹⁶⁹ Mešťan and Baranová, *Zborník referátov*, 227; See also Daniela Baranová, Dezider Tóth, *Účasť kresťanov v protifašistickom odboji v strednej Európe v rokoch 1933-1945* (Tranoscius; Múzeum Slovenského národného povstania, 2001).

courage. They have reached out to the Righteous Slovaks with an aim to use their moral capital as a building block of identity politics and democracy and as a means of furthering the process of Europeanization. In the hands of liberals, the category of rescuers has served as a transfer ticket to European Union structures.

According to Andrej Šebej, Slovak Righteous among the Nations rather than dubious national heroes should serve as a moral platform for Slovak identity.¹⁷⁰ During the October 1996 ceremony at Bratislava's castle, fifteen Slovak citizens were awarded the prestigious title of Righteous among the Nations by Israeli Ambassador Yoel Sher. At this occasion the president of the Slovak Republic, Michal Kováč, embraced the idea of civic nationalism by lauding the Slovak Righteous as "the pride of Slovakia" and their heroism as a "testimony of the true soul of Slovakia."¹⁷¹ The Slovak president proudly claimed that for the third time Slovakia sends out the important message "...of respect for life, a message of peace and intra-ethnic, confessional and intra-cultural tolerance, solidarity and cooperation."¹⁷² A few years later during the January 2008 Righteous awards ceremony president Ivan Gašparovič and the head of the president's office, Milan Čič, adopted a similar rhetoric.¹⁷³ They both felt an upsurge of national pride while reading the names of Slovak rescuers engraved on

¹⁷⁰ František Šebej, "Spravodlivý medzi národmi," *Týždeň*, http://video.tyzden.sk/sk/komentare/frantisek_sebej_o_spravodlivych_medzi_narodmi.php (accessed 21 May 2008).

¹⁷¹ TASR, Z odovzdania vyznamenaní Spravodliví medzi národmi, http://mesto.sk/prispevky_velke/modra/zodovzdaniavyzname845308140.phtml (accessed 18 December 2008).

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Prezident Slovenskej Republiky Ivan Gašparovič, "Príhovor prezidenta SR Ivana Gašparoviča na odovzdávaní ocenení Spravodliví medzi národmi, Bratislava," 27 January 2008, <http://www.prezident.sk/?prihovor-prezidenta-sr-ivana-gasparovica-na-odovzdavani-oceneni-spravodlivi-medzi-narodmi-bratislava-27-1-2008> (accessed 25 May 2008).

the plaques on the wall of honour in the Garden of the Righteous in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. At this occasion Slovak representatives resolutely denounced the expressions of antisemitism and racism in Slovakia against which Slovak rescuers were to act as a symbolic wall. Slovak society has also opted to celebrate the high morals of rescuers as the core of the vision of a new Europe distanced from the past of ethnic, racial and religious hatred. Rescuers were celebrated as a paradigm of embodied morality and an “example of humanity and moral heroism” at the February 2007 Raoul Wallenberg remembrance meeting in Bratislava.¹⁷⁴ President Ivan Gašparovič promoted rescuers as a memento in an effort to protect democracy from totalitarianism during the January 2008 Righteous awards ceremony.¹⁷⁵ Even at the sixty-third anniversary of Auschwitz’s liberation, historian Dušan Kováč situated rescuers at the core of the concept of modern Slovakia while Ivan Kamenec highlighted “goodness, humanity and non-pathetic bravery” that the Righteous rescuers promote.¹⁷⁶ At this occasion Dušan Kováč admitted the responsibility of the Slovak state for the deportation of Jews in 1942, but he claimed that Slovak society did not approve of the inhuman treatment of the Jews in Slovakia.¹⁷⁷

Apart from the general praise of the Righteous Slovaks’ altruistic behaviour, there is no scholarly consensus over the question of the larger Slovak

¹⁷⁴ Dušan Čaplovič, “Vystúpenie na spomienkovom stretnutí k úcte Raula Wallenberga dňa 10. Februára 2007 v Bratislave,” 10 February 2007, <http://www.caplovic.vlada.gov.sk/5536/vystupenie-na-spomienkovom-stretnuti-k-ucte-Raula-wallenberga-dna-10-februara-2007-v-bratislave.php> (accessed 25 May 2008).

¹⁷⁵ Prezident Slovenskej Republiky Ivan Gašparovič, “Príhovor prezidenta SR.”

¹⁷⁶ Ivan Kamenec, “Titul Spravodliví medzi národmi má veľký morálny význam,” 27 January 2008, <http://www.sme.sk/c/3698656/ivan-kamenec-titul-spravodlivi-medzi-narodmi-ma-velky-moralny-vyznam.html> (accessed 13 January 2009).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

population's reaction to the persecution of Jews. Liberal historian Eduard Nižňanský believes that antisemitism lay at the core of the overall disinterest of the majority of Slovaks in the fate of Jews, which explains the passivity of the "silent majority" of Slovaks and a striking absence of collective intervention in favour of Jews.¹⁷⁸ In his view, propaganda, the regime's effort to engage the public in antisemitic policies as well as "doses of terror" inflicted by the invasion of the Wehrmacht in 1944 atomized and fractured the society to such a degree that the organizing of collective intervention in favour of Jews was virtually impossible.¹⁷⁹ Ladislav Lipscher also noted the lack of opposition from the population to the government's determination to enforce anti-Jewish measures.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, Sulaček in his research on the persecution of Jewish doctors in Slovakia did not note a significant collective act of help to Jews.¹⁸¹ But according to Ivan Kamenec, one can talk about "mass assistance of Slovak people to persecuted Jewish citizens" after the Slovak National uprising in August 1944. Kamenec argued that not only the political situation in 1944, but also human and religious compassion were to be found behind Slovaks' willingness to assist Jews in this period.¹⁸² But Kamenec confessed that his findings on the views of Slovaks on "Jewish question" were only hypothetical since they "are not based on deeper analysis and arguments."¹⁸³ Given the multi-layered structure and internal dynamism of Slovak society, the special attention of historians, sociologists,

¹⁷⁸ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 13.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸⁰ Lipscher, "The Jews of Slovakia: 1939 – 1945," 166.

¹⁸¹ Sulaček, *Biele plášte. Tragické osudy židovských lekárov na Slovensku v období druhej svetovej vojny*, vol.1 (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2005), 46.

¹⁸² Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 274.

¹⁸³ Ivan Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 107.

philosophers, lawyers, psychologists and others is required to examine this theme.¹⁸⁴ Given the current state of the Holocaust research on assistance to and rescue of Jews, any attempt at quantitative evaluation of the helping behaviour of Slovaks vis-à-vis persecuted Jews is vulnerable to subjectivism. But recent research on the regional level and the publication of seven volumes of documents on the Holocaust in Slovakia already provide a basis for reflection on the contextual circumstances that spurred individual or group interventions on behalf of Jews.

Whereas scholarly views on the nature and extent of assistance to Jews vary, the media plays an important role in the dissemination of the romanticized and idealized image of the rescuer. The media tend to conflate the numbers of the Righteous rescuers with an aim to offering a more human and democratic face of the Slovak past to the public. According to Yad Vashem, 478 Slovaks were awarded the title of Righteous. But the *Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu* (Document Centre of the Holocaust – DCH) informs us that in the 1990s there were about 600 rescuers awarded the title Righteous. In its definition of rescuers DCH notes that as a result of the sacrifice and help of Slovaks about 10,000 Jews were rescued in Slovakia¹⁸⁵ – a view that often crumbles when encountering the narrative testimonies of Holocaust victims. One often comes across the information that Slovakia had the highest number of rescued Jews per citizen,

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, "Kľúčové slová," <http://sk.holokaust.sk/historia/klucove-pojmy/> (accessed 30 January 2009).

while the number of these rescuers is passed over in silence.¹⁸⁶ PR Press of Slovak Television in November 2007, for example, announced an upcoming debate on the Righteous among the Nations and made the claim of Slovakia having the highest number of rescued Jews per citizen.¹⁸⁷ Interestingly, the journal *Delet*, which targets Jewish audiences, even omitted the reference to the ratio of rescued to the overall population and simply asserted that Slovakia ranks among the countries with one of the highest numbers of Righteous.¹⁸⁸ But according to Yad Vashem's statistics Slovakia, with its 478 Righteous, lags behind the number of Righteous rescuers in countries such as Poland (6066), the Netherlands (4863), France (2833) or Ukraine (2213).¹⁸⁹ This misinformation on the part of *Delet* can be either seen as the publisher's error or an effort on the part of a small community of 3000 Jews to secure positive relations with the Slovak majority. Most of the Slovak rescuers were awarded the Righteous title over the course of the 1990s, after diplomatic relations between Slovakia and Israel had been revived. Perhaps the effort of the Jewish leadership to further embrace the discourse about Slovak rescuers might be read as an attempt of the small Jewish community to "move on" from the painful past and foster good Slovak-Israeli relations. At the same time it might be read as an effort by the Jewish community to preserve friendly relations with the ruling government and thus prevent the occasional slippage of some Slovak politicians into antisemitic rhetoric.

¹⁸⁶ Spravodliví medzi národmi v Slovenskej televízii. *PR Press STV*, 13 November 2007, <http://www.tvcentrum.sk/?action=show&art=4996> (accessed 19 December 2008).

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Michael Szatmary, "Ceny Yad Vashem," <http://www.delet.sk/showarticle.php?articleID=70>, 3 June 2008 (accessed 16 June 2008).

¹⁸⁹ Yad Vashem, "Righteous Among the Nations - per Country & Ethnic Origin," January 1, 2008, http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/statistics.html (accessed February 18, 2009).

In addition to the Righteous Slovaks, the liberal stream has also paid tribute to a number of unknown rescuers who defied the wartime clerico-fascist regime. The current discourse celebrates these anonymous rescuers' morals as the "true kernel" of the Slovak nation's qualities and a building block of Slovak national identity. The memorial "Park of Generous Souls" will be built in Zvolen, Central Slovakia in 2009 to pay tribute to the unknown Slovak rescuers who did not transgress against humanity and moral principles. The authors of the project argue that since the only witnesses of these rescuers' deeds – the Jews – found death in the mass graves together with their rescuers, there is nobody who could claim the title of Righteous among the Nations which they deserve. The Park of Generous Souls thus aims to exempt these forgotten rescuers from "eternal omission" and prevent their symbolic death by commemorating their brave acts.¹⁹⁰ It is precisely the unknown quality of anonymous' rescuers deeds that allow for the idealization and romanticization of the unknown rescuer. Miloš Žiak, who is currently in charge of the memorial project in Zvolen, even glorified the Righteous and anonymous rescuers as saints and "angels of life."¹⁹¹ He claims that these Slovak rescuers deserve our respect because "they put their deeply human 'I' above impersonal regime," and because they demonstrated to the world that acts of love and kindness could materialize even within the context of Nazi rule: "All these people [the Righteous and anonymous rescuers] are angels of life. Even if we cannot remember any of them by their names and will probably never know their particular stories, we should exclaim at their remembrance: 'Holy,

¹⁹⁰ Miloš Žiak, *Park ušľachtilých duší, Park of Generous Souls*, vol.1 (Bratislava: Izraelská Obchodná Komora na Slovensku, 2007), 22 - 23.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

holy, holy!”¹⁹² In his effort to glorify their martyrdom Žiak situates the rescuers in the role of victims and blurs the boundaries between the suffering of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and that of “all the decent people:” “...During one winter more than a hundred mass tombs arose on the mentioned small area, in which side by side lie Jewish men, women, children and their unsuccessful saviours. And thus the Holocaust, primarily aimed against the Jews, became fatal for all the decent people who, due to their moral conscience and feelings, just could not countenance violence and atrocities against humanity.”¹⁹³ Žiak even suggested celebrating 9 September, the Commemorative Day of the Victims of the Holocaust and Racism since 2003, as “...the day of commemoration of those who in their effort to help other people put their own lives in danger in the decisive moment.”¹⁹⁴

Recently, rescuers have been put on a par with the victims of the Holocaust with an aim to send a powerful warning against the promotion of racial, cultural or confessional intolerance. During his May 2005 visit to Yad Vashem, Slovak president Ivan Gašparovič emphasized that we must remember victims’ horrifying suffering in the past but, at the same time, we should remember that “...mankind recovered its good sense also thanks to the Righteous among the Nations,” who “have moved the conscience of all of civilization.”¹⁹⁵ Also Deputy Prime Minister Dušan Čaplovič emphasized that the fates of both the victims and the “heroes of the Holocaust” – as he dubbed the rescuers – can never be forgotten and should stand out as a “timeless omnipresent lesson” and a constant reminder

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Žiak, *Park Ušľachtilych Duší*, 156 – 157.

of the need for a “permanent fight for democracy and freedom.”¹⁹⁶ Yet, it is the rescuer that receives the public attention while the victims of the Holocaust represent a mere tool through which the moral values of the rescuers are celebrated. In the words of Andrew Buckser “the Jews figure primarily as a mascot minority, a group one never particularly need see” but whose historical presence seals the Slovaks’ self-image of tolerance, heroism and moral principle.¹⁹⁷ As a result the victims of the Holocaust, as a reminder of the problematic Slovak past, are overshadowed by the Slovak rescuers’ morals which are to mediate the construction of a brighter and democratic future for Slovakia. Needless to say, the above mentioned effort to idealize and conflate the number of Slovak rescuers poses the risk of glossing over the sensitive issue of complicity of Slovaks vis-à-vis Holocaust, the topic that has been to date shrouded in silence.

As has already been indicated above, rescue has been utilized as a tool of diplomatic maneuvering with an aim to bring Slovakia closer to partnership with European structures and to Western Europe more generally. Let us just point to the recent two-day visit of Queen Elizabeth II to Bratislava in 2008, which, in fact, was her first visit to formerly communist Europe. “The Iron Curtain has fallen, and Slovakia has taken its place in the Europe of nations,” she claimed during her address at the banquet during her October 2008 official visit in Bratislava.¹⁹⁸ The British monarch highlighted the cooperation between the people of Britain and Slovakia during the difficult period of World War II while

¹⁹⁶ Dušan Čaplovič, “Vystúpenie na spomienkovom stretnutí.”

¹⁹⁷ Buckser, *Modern Identities*, 13.

¹⁹⁸ Luba Lesná, “Queen wows Slovakia,” <http://www.girodivite.it/Queen-wows-Slovakia.html> (accessed 14 February 2009).

completely ignoring the simple fact that these countries were on opposite sides. In this regard, Queen Elisabeth was especially pleased to find out about individuals such as Sir Nicholas Winton from England, a rescuer of 664 Czechoslovak Jewish children, who, in her view, exemplified this earlier English-Slovak cooperation. But the CBC correspondent Joe Schlesinger, who at the age of 11 was one of Nicholas Winton's rescued Slovak children, did not comment on the Slovak regime and the behaviour of its citizens as kindly as the Queen did in her speech.¹⁹⁹ While reporting on the Queens' visit in Slovakia, he bitterly reminded the audiences that the Slovak fascist regime did not need much prompting to persecute his family and other Slovak Jews.

But Nicholas Winton's rescue acts did not solely serve as a platform to burnish the reputation of Slovakia, which for fifty years had been on the losing side with its fascist and communist regimes. Winton's story has also recently yielded tremendous potential as a tool for educating the young generation of Slovaks in citizenship. The 2002 documentary *Nicholas Winton - Sila ľudskosti* (Nicholas Winton – Power of Humanity) by Michal Mináč was screened at thirty schools with the aim to teach youth to distinguish good from evil. Slovak media celebrated Nicholas Winton, the rescued children and their families as well as “all the people of good will” as “the largest family of the world.”²⁰⁰ By doing so, they disassociated the rescuers, the victims of the Holocaust and “all people of good

¹⁹⁹ “Return to Slovakia,” International/US, CBC News, *The National*, 6 November 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/national/blog/video/internationalus/return_to_slovakia.html (accessed 14 February 2009).

²⁰⁰ “Nickyho rodina pripomenie šírenie dobra Nicholasa Wintona,” Bulvár, 20 October 2008, <http://www.bulvar.fmg.sk/clanky/nickyho-rodina-pripomenie-sirenie-dobra-nicholasa-wintona-1980.html> (accessed 15 November 2008).

will” from the past evil regime. But if Slovaks are to be implicitly identified with “all the people of good will,” then who were those who benefited from the tragedy of the Slovak Jews? This question, unfortunately, remains unanswered.

Conclusion

Whereas Hannah Arendt’s concept of the banality of evil and related postwar debates about complicity with authoritarian regimes consumed the energies of most European scholars, postwar Eastern European scholarship, harnessed by a communist ideology, followed a different path. Its exaggerated celebration of the resistance movement initially did not allow for the reflection on the issues of Slovak compliance with the wartime regime on the scale witnessed in Western European scholarship. And even when scholars took up this topic during the era of de-Stalinization in the 1960s, it was strictly debated within the framework of the class paradigm of the guilty bourgeoisie and the innocent, heroic and philo-Semitic Slovak working class. Not surprisingly, the topic of the rescue of Jews was appropriated within the context of the Marxist paradigm of class struggle. Novelists, however, seemed to display more freedom to express their views on the response of Slovaks to the Holocaust. But the fall of communism represented a complete turnover in scholarly and public attention towards the rescue theme. Postcommunist Slovakia was transformed to fit into an all-European system of values. Former “Western” and “Eastern” European scholars searched for a terrain of common dialogue that would promote the

message of bright prospects for a unified Europe, and the theme of rescuers of European Jews turned out to be a suitable common denominator.

Recent debates over and commemoration of the Holocaust in Slovakia have been marked by the struggle over how to remember rescuers and which rescuers should be permanently imprinted in Holocaust and national memory. As we have seen, the topic of who rescued Slovak Jews became a battleground for contradictory efforts at national self-identification the Christian and the liberal democratic tendencies in Slovak society.²⁰¹ The simplification of complex historical positions into comprehensible homogenized political messages is a means of manipulating current political discourse. I agree with Hans Kirchhoff, a well-known historian of the occupation years in Denmark, that “it is necessary to cleanse history of the sentimentality and romanticization attached to it.”²⁰² In this regard, young generations would benefit more from the study of the “thousand faces of rescue.”²⁰³ Slovak historians should pay more attention to an unexplored terrain of “grey zone” of rescue acts which evade single-minded classification under vague moral paradigms of good and evil. By challenging the ongoing construction of the homogenized image of the virtuous rescuer Slovak historians could initiate the process of a more honest approach to the Slovak past, an approach that, to this point, has failed to materialize.

²⁰¹ Krekovičová, 61.

²⁰² Brudholm, 196.

²⁰³ Henry, *We Only Know Men*, 146.

Chapter II

“The Grey Zone of Assistance to Jews.” On the Path to the Rescue of Jewish Doctors

Historical truths will be plural and they will be political.¹
Charles Meier.

There are some survivors, and their children, who prefer to preserve a “reasonable distance” in order to comprehend the Holocaust. Even some historians tend to boil the Holocaust down into a single all-embracing and uneven struggle between the “good” and “evil” forces of humankind, a procedure which consequently produces powerful moral and ethical messages. In their effort to comprehend the Holocaust past they often times resort to such concepts as martyrdom, the dignity of dying, the triumph of the human spirit, salvation and redemption. As a result of this approach, the rescue of the persecuted Jews has been studied as a homogenous realm of “light in the darkness of the Holocaust,” and rescuers appeared mostly as saints.² It is easy to fall into this type of rhetoric of an almost supernatural realm where human goodness is challenged by the evil of the Holocaust. This chapter moves away from this type of moral polarization of rescue and instead targets the admittedly uncomfortable realm of human actors and their specific contexts.

¹Charles Meier, *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 12.

² See for example Emmy Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency: The Rescue of the Danish Jews During World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002)

Slovak Agency vis-à-vis the Persecution of Jews in Recent Memory

The topic of the compliance and non-compliance within nations with wartime antisemitic policies is always painful to discuss. Slovak scholarship has, thus far, failed to offer an insightful and detailed analysis of this problem. However, the recent effort to bring Slovak rescuers to the centre of public attention allows us to gain some perspective on the agency of Slovaks vis-à-vis persecuted Jews as imprinted in recent public memory.

Besides the traditional rescue narrative constructed on the basis of the good-vs.-evil axis, Slovak scholarship on the Holocaust displays another remarkable divide: while the rescue acts of the Righteous Slovaks pertaining to the post-uprising period of 1944 - 1945 are widely appraised in public and among scholars, scholarly literature and public discussions about the assistance to Jews in earlier stages of the Slovak state are notable by their absence. Twice as many Slovaks were awarded the title Righteous among the Nations for their rescue acts in the course of the post-uprising political atmosphere of 1944 than in the period of 1942 deportations when two thirds of all Slovakian Jews were deported to death camps.³ Certainly, one can trace various historical as well as political reasons behind this uneven ratio. On a political plane, centring public and scholarly attention on the deeds of the Righteous in the post-uprising atmosphere of a crumbling regime in 1944 underscores a distancing of contemporary Slovak society from a problematic chapter of their history. In particular, bringing to

³ This ratio is calculated from information provided in Israel Gutman, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations. Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. Europe. Part I and Other Countries* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007)

public attention Righteous rescuers whose acts date to 1944 conveniently obscures the more problematic period of Slovak national socialism. The Ludak regime was the most severe after the Salzburg dictate in 1940 when radicals took the upper hand in the government. These Righteous rescuers' stories have therefore allowed Slovaks to believe in a historical continuity of anti-authoritarian, anti-racist and democratic views by focusing on the political atmosphere of 1944, which was determined by the Slovak national uprising. As a result, rescuers became an indelible part of the construction of memory surrounding the uprising. The anti-totalitarianism of these rescuers' acts is thus a commonly highlighted trope. The uprising itself is interpreted as an expression of the solidarity of the Slovak nation which, as the commonly disseminated reasoning goes, explains a number of rescue acts in the post-uprising era.

These ideas have been recently promoted during the 2009 commemoration of the 65th anniversary of the uprising. During the event, politicians in their speeches highlighted the Slovak national uprising's anti-totalitarianism while strengthening the national ego at the same time. At this occasion, the president of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, pointed to the uprising as a "test of individual as well as national character."⁴ In his view, Slovaks passed this test; moreover, he claimed that no historical event displayed the solidarity of Slovaks better than the Slovak national uprising.⁵ Also at this occasion, Head of Parliament Pavol Paška warned the public against casting any doubts on the

⁴ "Fico na oslavách SNP: Čakáme, že menšiny budú ovládať štátny jazyk." *Spravy.pravda.sk*, 29 August 2009, http://spravy.pravda.sk/fico-na-oslavach-snp-cakame-ze-mensiny-budu-ovladat-statny-jazyk-p8a-/sk_domace.asp?c=A090829_140830_sk_domace_p23 (accessed 5 September 2009)

⁵ *Ibid.*

nature of this historical event. He even offered the public what he saw to be a correct interpretation of 1944: “The Ludak state was not a good state; we did not want fascism, and Slovaks participated in the uprising not because they were forced to, but rather out of inner conviction.”⁶ Prime Minister Robert Fico highlighted the importance of having the “courage to live in the truth” as the most important marker of the uprising period, thus evoking a comparison with the events of the “Prague spring” of 1968. The recent commemoration of the Slovak national uprising also allowed Fico to articulate current political views. In particular, he underlined the role of the state in protecting the rights of national minorities. But at the same time he made clear his expectations with regards to minorities in Slovakia: the representatives of the minorities should be able to speak and write in Slovak and respect the Slovak nation.⁷

Within the context of recent debates on totalitarianism, i.e. the period of *nesloboda*, the rescue theme was employed as an efficient means to underline the democratic, antifascist and “anti-totalitarian” nature of the Slovak national uprising and the post-uprising era. But from a scholarly point of view, the debate about the totalitarian or anti-totalitarian nature of the wartime Slovak regime is rooted in a paradox that stems from weaknesses in the very theory of totalitarianism. In particular, it overemphasizes the mechanics of the system while being reluctant to explore the essence of the regime, i.e. its specific socio-economic conditions, functions and political aims.⁸ Totalitarian theory’s⁹ narrow

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ On the advantages and disadvantages of the concept of totalitarianism, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (London, 2000), 36 - 38.

focus on oppression, as a power with preventive ability, represents only one form of power relations within the context of the authoritarian regime. More important, the theory of totalitarianism denies non-elite actors the capacity to shape the policy of the state. But if non-elite actors' agency has been paralyzed due to an all-pervasive totalitarian threat – as the common interpretation of totalitarian theory claims – why is the rescuers' agency so readily acknowledged and brought to the fore as a shiny example of resistance to it? The images of the Slovak citizen with no free will, trapped in a power field of oppression and of the rescuer who can defy the totalitarian regime have both been frequently referred to in recent political speeches. And despite the inner contradiction with regard to their perceived agency, both constructs - Slovak as victim and Slovak as hero - have been utilized by Slovak nationalists and liberals for their own respective political purposes.

Recent attention to the events of 1944 in public memory is a continuance of the positive view that most Slovaks evinced about the Slovak national uprising after the fall of communism. Most Slovak scholars working in the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Military Historical Institute of the Slovak Republic's Army in Bratislava and the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica have interpreted the uprising in terms of a “democratic antifascist revolution.” Most professors at Slovak universities also teach this view to their students and highlight the importance of the antifascist

⁹ Only a few scholars, such as Yeshayahu Jelinek, hold the view that totalitarianism never managed to establish complete control in Slovakia. See Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party 1939 -1945* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1976).

turn around 1944 that helped the Slovak nation become firmly established on the side of the World War II victors.¹⁰ Within the context of the postcommunist Slovak republic, the idea of an all-pervasive Slovak resistance to fascism became a cornerstone of the reconstruction of the new state's national identity. Even émigré historians' condemnation of the Slovak national uprising as a main cause behind the destruction of Slovak statehood did not shatter its firm place in national consciousness. Fifty years later, resistance to fascism as represented by the Slovak national uprising stands firm as the backbone of Slovak national identity and remains prominent in the nation's memory. Twenty-ninth August, the day when the uprising broke out in 1944, has been declared a state holiday. Also, presidents of six states were invited to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Slovak national uprising in 1994. The Slovak army that was formed after January 1993 was built on the tradition and values promoted by the Slovak national uprising. And a number of memorials dedicated to the uprising are annually visited by students and the general public.¹¹ Portraying the Slovak national uprising in glowing colours often slips into a mythologization of this event; it has now become a unique milestone in Slovak history. It is, then, logical that the mythologization of the uprising and post-uprising era also depends on the mythologization of the rescuer, who is routinely portrayed as a moral hero untainted by the crooked Ludak regime. But, as Ian Kershaw warns us, there is a danger in exaggerating the extent and gravity of the oppositional tendencies. In

¹⁰ Soňa Šváčková, *Humanistické tradície v literárnom odkaze Slovenského národného povstania. Zborník príspevkov odborného seminára k 60. výročiu Slovenského národného povstania a 100. výročiu narodenia Ladislava Novomestského* (Banská Bystrica, Štátna vedecká knižnica, 2004), 4.

¹¹ Lubomír Lipták, "Pamätníky a pamäť povstania roku 1944 na Slovensku," *Historický časopis* 43, no. 2 (1995), 367.

his view, an individual's behaviour "...can be conformist and non-conformist at the same time – non-conformist towards the specific, conformist towards the general nature of Nazi rule."¹²

As has been indicated in the previous chapter, the heroism of the rescuer plays a tremendous role in contemporary political discourse. Any doubts cast on the heroism of the Slovak rescuer would certainly also cast a shadow on the current process of building the national ego, self-confidence and an overall positive image of Slovaks in the postcommunist era. From the viewpoint of the Slovak nation's identity politics, the survival of Slovaks themselves during the war as well as the dangerous circumstances that Slovak helpers and rescuers faced played an equally important role. The severe conditions that the Slovak public faced following the invasion of the Wehrmacht are more readily brought to public attention than the political atmosphere of earlier stages of Slovak regime. During the presence of the Wehrmacht, more than 13,000 Jews were deported to the death camps in fall 1944, while another 1200 Jews were murdered on Slovak territory. In addition, a number of Slovaks who took part in the Slovak national uprising were persecuted and murdered. The gruesome oppression by the Nazi occupier is highlighted, but themes such as the complicity of Slovaks in this period and the grey zones of rescue are not discussed. Furthermore, the phenomenon that Emmy E. Werner described as a "window of opportunity of rescue" (i.e. the non-action of some German soldiers that made it possible to rescue some Slovak Jews in the

¹² Ian Kershaw, "The Führer Image and Political Integration: The Popular Conception of Hitler in Bavaria during the Third Reich," in *Der "Führerstaat". Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches*, eds. Gerhard Hirschfeld, Lothar Kettenacker (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 134.

final stages of the war) has never been tackled by Slovak scholars, much less figured in public discourse.¹³

The aforementioned preponderance of Righteous rescuers in 1944 (as opposed to 1942) can be approached from another perspective too. In Peter Novick's opinion, "the intention of most commemoration of the 'righteous minority' has been to damn the vast 'unrighteous majority.'"¹⁴ Novick points to the words of the director of Yad Vashem's Department of the Righteous, who explained that "spicing the history of the Holocaust with stories of rescuers was indispensable in showing the delinquency of European Christians 'against the background of the righteous.'"¹⁵ The Righteous are utilized as a means to blame the majority of the European population for the Holocaust: "For every righteous person," said the head of Anti-Defamation League in the United States, Benjamin Meed, "there were thousands upon thousands who collaborated ... or who, at best, stood idly by and did nothing."¹⁶ In a similar fashion Beate Kosmala claimed that "each and every individual story of rescue is an astounding refutation of prophylactic assertions that people knew nothing about what was happening and were in any case unable to do anything."¹⁷

Historical circumstances, such as the fact that Slovaks faced neither the death penalty nor long-term imprisonment or torture if they assisted Jews in the earlier stages of the state's policies, offer a different take on the issue of Slovak

¹³ Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency*, 171.

¹⁴ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 180.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Beate Kosmala, "The Rescue of Jews, 1941 – 1945 – Resistance by Quite Ordinary Germans," in *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003), 107.

rescuers. That two thirds of the Jewish population, or 57,800 Slovak Jews, were deported to the death camps in 1942 of which only 300 survived (0.5%) raises the question of the level of Slovak willingness to safeguard their Jewish neighbours from persecution and forceful deportation.¹⁸ How did ordinary Slovaks respond to everyday harassment, physical assault and other forms of persecution of their Jewish neighbours? What assistance, if any, did Slovaks offer to the persecuted Jews after the radicalization of the antisemitic course in Slovakia? Given a general reluctance of Slovak scholarship to tackle this sensitive theme, the problem of Slovaks' complicity in the murder of Jews in 1942 becomes even more pressing. Scholars also conveniently replaced the negatively imbued notion of complicity with the more neutral notion of the *passivity* of the general public in the implementation of antisemitic policies in 1942. This view is nothing but a continuation of the view promoted by some Marxist scholars. The notion of "disinterestedness" or passivity with regard to the solution to the "Jewish question" is intended to shield the working class, farmers and part of the intelligentsia from accusations of participation in antisemitic policies. As a result, the image of a "disinterested" general public working as a moral agent was created and pitted against the image of an immoral, wolfish Slovak bourgeoisie.¹⁹ Even today, leading Holocaust scholars argue that the passivity of the general public lay at the core of their reluctance to assist the persecuted Jewish minority during the fateful spring and summer of 1942.

¹⁸ Hilda Hrabovecká, *Ruka s vytetovaným čísлом* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Prístrojová technika, 1998), 62.

¹⁹ Dzugas, "Postavenie Židovského Obyvateľstva," 353.

For example, Tatjana Tönsmeier claims that the increasingly antisemitic policies resulting in the 1942 deportations did not have any resonance among the public whatsoever. By contrast, the 1944 deportations as a result of the Wehrmacht's presence spurred a "great willingness to help partisans and Jews" despite the threat of death penalty for assisting "enemies of the regime."²⁰ Eduard Nižňanský also points to the passivity of the majority of Slovaks in 1942. In his introduction to the series of documents of the Holocaust in Slovakia he admits a more nuanced texture of wartime behavioural patterns. Nižňanský concludes that both the participation of Slovaks in the process of the pauperization of the Jewish population and the escalation of antisemitism through propaganda and diffused terror were responsible for the overall passivity of the majority of Slovaks and their lack of interest in rescuing Jews. But he also highlights the emergence of collective acts of rescue within the context of 1944.²¹ Ivan Kamenec believes that "there must have been some resistance, or at least non-agreement, among the Slovak majority of the non-Jewish population already at the start of the persecution."²² But he distinguished the period from fall to spring 1944 as one of "mass assistance to the persecuted Jews by the Slovak population."²³ Kamenec claimed that "...so to speak everybody – even the worst executors of antisemitic policies – had 'his own Jew.'²⁴ Behind the survival of approximately 10,000 -

²⁰ Tatjana Tönsmeier, *Solidarita a pomoc prenasledovaným Židom v Slovenskom štáte* (Bratislava: Inštitút Judaistiky Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave, 2000), 1.

²¹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 27.

²² Ivan Kamenec, "Changes in the Attitude of the Slovak Population to the So-Called 'Solution to the Jewish Question' During the Period 1938 – 1945," in *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003), 329.

²³ *Ibid.*, 336.

²⁴ Anna Jurová, Pavol Šalomon, eds., *Košice a deportácie Židov v roku 1944. Zborník príspevkov z odborného seminára k 50. výročiu deportácií z Košíc* (Košice: RVO VVSL gen. M.R. Štefánika

15,000 Jews in Slovakia, as his argument goes, lies the same number of rescuers: “...each survivor in Slovakia had - particularly after the territory had been occupied by Nazi troops in 1944 – a saviour, someone who risked their life or the lives and safety of their family, in the act of saving his or her life...”²⁵ Kamenec also states that it was not important whether assistance to Jews was undertaken for material or purely humanitarian reasons.²⁶ But elsewhere, Kamenec admits that sources on the attitudes of the Slovak population to the Holocaust are scanty and “interpretations of these attitudes are bipolar, in that they either idealize or demonize the antisemitic policy of the government at the time.”²⁷ Finally, Andrea James, in her study of the Holocaust in Topoľčany, takes a different stand on the passivity of Slovaks, but again only further complements the above mentioned views on the agency of the general population vis-à-vis the regime’s policies. She claims that the general population was “passive” in relation to the crumbling regime in 1944 because of rumors about the fate of the deportees, general skepticism over the regime’s policies and concerns about their former collaboration.²⁸

These conflicting historical interpretations highlight two closely interwoven problems that permeate the scholarship on rescue. First, in the Slovak case, the assessment of the nature of assistance to Jews as “passive” in 1942 and “active” in 1944 is misleading and rather simplified, especially given the absence

pre Spoločenskovedný ústav SAV, Košice a Oddelenie židovskej kultúry Slovenského národného múzea v Bratislave 1994), 17.

²⁵ Monika Vrzgulová, ed., *We Saw the Holocaust* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2005), 24.

²⁶ Kamenec, “Changes in the Attitude of the Slovak Population,” 336.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 327.

²⁸ Andrea James, “Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topoľčany počas obdobia Slovenského štátu,” *Česko-Slovenská historická ročenka* (2001), 130.

of studies examining the nature of assistance and help to Jews in the earlier stages of the antisemitic regime. Second, when trying to reflect on assistance to and rescue of Jews, scholars have been narrowly focused on a single moment: the roundups for deportations which preceded certain death. By ignoring the nature of intervention and assistance to Jews in different stages of the Slovak state's policies, most historians inevitably arrive at black and white judgments.

Scholars in Slovakia are silent about the presence of informal groups willing to assist Jews in the early stages of the Slovak state. For example, Eduard Nižňanský claimed that current research has not revealed any collective action on political, confessional or social issues prior to fall 1944. The collective rescue effort, in the view of this scholar, only began with the 1944 Slovak national uprising, when the idea of a Czechoslovak state and political plurality regained popularity in some parts of Slovakia.²⁹ These views deny the presence of both collective informal networks, and uncoordinated collective forms of help in earlier stages of the Slovak state and support the notion of a passive societal attitude to the persecution of Jews. But the narrow focus on individual acts within the context of rescue debates is not something specific to the Slovak case. Many scholars have acknowledged that a great shortcoming of rescue literature in general is its restriction to rescue as an individual act, while most of the time it was a group act.³⁰ Too narrow a focus on the courageous act of a single rescuer

²⁹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 27.

³⁰ On rescue as collective rather than individual act, see: David Gushee, "Many Paths to Righteousness: An Assessment of Research on Why Righteous Gentiles Helped Jews," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7, no.3 (1993), 387; Michael Gross, "Jewish Rescue in Holland and France during the Second World War: Moral Cognition and Collective Action," *Social Forces* 73, no. 2 (1994), 483; David H. Jones, *Moral Responsibility in the Holocaust. A Study in the Ethics of Character* (Lanham and New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 200; Mette Bastholm Jensen,

obscures the much more complicated and twisted path that survival often took. Collective assistance to Jews, in its various forms, can be traced vertically along the social spectrum and within a variety of political microcosms. Mass mobilization, according to Mette Bastholm Jensen, is preconditioned by the presence of strong social ties overlapping through multiple diverse social networks, which explains the presence of a collective rescue effort in Denmark and the lack thereof among the Dutch.³¹ Similarly, Michael Gross' study on French and Dutch rescuers concluded that "supporting social networks that define solid micromobilization contexts" were the critical factor in propelling rescue.³² The notion of collective rescue, however, is not built on the premise of the group's sharing common political views and ideological leanings. One has to keep in mind that rescue actions occurred in variable socio-political, national and cultural contexts, which dooms to failure any attempt to construct a category of universal rescuer. As Gushee reminds us, "no rescuer study has been able to avoid lumping together people whose contexts and deeds were vastly different."³³ But with regards to the Slovak case, one can sense even more reluctance to move away from the traditional approach of bi-polar visions and clear-cut class binaries. In fact, many scholars keep on repeating earlier views, such as Ľubomír Lipták's.

Solidarity in Action: A Comparative Analysis of Collective Rescue Efforts in Nazi-occupied Denmark and the Netherlands (Yale University, 2007), retrieved 7 April 2009, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text database. Michael Gross analyzed rescue as a "collective action problem," which he understood as the "sustained action" of individuals who organized rescue consistently during an extended time span. Marion Kaplan, in her study, more specifically noted that only with the assistance of three hundred individuals, was it possible to rescue the lives of sixty-five Jews. Mette Bastholm Jensen, in his PhD thesis, likewise compared the impact of intersecting social networks on facilitating collective rescue in Denmark (as the country with the highest survival rate) and the Netherlands (which displayed one of the lowest survival rates of persecuted Jews).

³¹ Jensen, "Solidarity in action," 24.

³² Gross, "Jewish Rescue in Holland and France," 485.

³³ Gushee, 391.

In the 1960s Lipták underscored the importance of loosely organized informal resistance groups who had no specific program. Lipták had no doubts of these groups' antifascist ideology and their "keeping a distance from the regime."³⁴ The present case study challenges such a simplistic interpretation and instead acknowledges the heterogeneous ideological profile of loosely organized temporary networks that aimed to exempt Jewish doctors from the impact of antisemitic decrees.

The Encyclopedia of the Righteous, which was compiled on the basis of Holocaust survivors' narratives to publicly recognize the rescue acts of Slovaks during the war, situates rescue in the realm of individual acts. This source offers a picture of an ideal moral rescuer whose motivation is described in terms of their humanitarian nature, their religious beliefs, or their morals. Eventually, the reader is offered a picture of a selfless moral humanitarian Slovak rescuer, a picture which excludes the problematic "grey zone" of assistance to Jews. Although there were certainly acts of humanity and solidarity on the part of individuals, these are unduly privileged while other equally important motivating factors in the rescue are left aside. Often times a simplified rescue narrative, which usually targets a single moment in the story, is the result of a survivor's need to turn a memory into a story. Henry Greenspan reminds us that narrators have to take some perspective on past experience and give it a form and significance. Story-telling requires a trajectory of logic and meaning, which can be altered with multiple retellings of a survivor's memory. Greenspan argues that such stories are not only "partial and

³⁴ Ľubomír Lipták, "Slovenský štát a protifašistické hnutie v rokoch 1939 – 1943," *Historický časopis* 2, (1966), 186.

provisional” but they are formed on the edge of their own dissolution.³⁵ This, according to Greenspan, is the result of turning survivors’ testimonies into “celebratory discourse” which “fixes on the idea of bearing witness” and, as such, distorts the realities of survivors’ lives.³⁶

But although this is a serious problem in the Encyclopedia, survivors of the Holocaust in Slovakia offered a more nuanced picture of rescue that helps to fill in our understanding of events. The interviews with Holocaust survivors carried out by the Milan Šimečka foundation as a part of its oral history program do not reinforce the heroic picture of a rescuer. These interviews indicate that rescue resulted from a chain of multiple acts and various forms of assistance, such as hiding in the countryside in exchange for money,³⁷ bribery of guardists and gendarmes,³⁸ crossing the southern border with the assistance of paid smugglers³⁹ or even protection by Slovak farmers in exchange for land.⁴⁰ Similarly, the ownership of ministerial or presidential exemptions and baptismal documents played an important role on the path to rescue. Although both the Encyclopedia and We Saw the Holocaust projects utilize the narratives of Holocaust survivors, they send different messages about Slovak rescuers, which is the result of the way survivors’ attention was navigated. In particular, those interviewed by the We Saw the Holocaust project are prompted to tackle various aspects of the Holocaust in Slovakia. These survivors thus had their attention drawn away from a singular

³⁵ Henry Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting and Life History* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1998), 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁷ Vrzgulová, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27, 77, 86, 104.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

focus on Slovak rescuers, which therefore produced more spontaneous references about rescue and exposed the greater complexity of its terrain.

The image of the rescuer as an antifascist disapproving of the Slovak state policy (as promoted by the Encyclopedia) differs from the picture presented by survivors. The project *We Saw the Holocaust* readily crosses the perpetrator-rescuer boundary. In this regard, the most extreme example is the testimony of one female Holocaust survivor who named Dr. Mengele as her saviour in a narrative that was very upsetting for the interviewer, ethnologist Peter Salner: “During the selection she was trying to get to her parents,” Salner records, “but he [Dr. Mengele – NP] saw it and pointed a stick at her ordering her to go back, and that allegedly saved her life. At that point I lost my professional distance and got into a (useless and helpless) argument.”⁴¹ In a similar fashion, the archival material of the postwar district courts makes us more alert and cautious about of rescue within the context of Holocaust survivors’ memory. For example, Dr. Matej Rada, pharmacist in “Stará lekáreň” – “the Old Pharmacy” – in Hlohovec had no doubts about the moment of his own rescue. In the postwar trial of the HSPP district secretary and the commander of the Special Units of the Hlinka Guard (*Pohotovostné oddiely Hlinkovej gardy* – POHG) in Hlohovec, Ján Jánoško, Dr. Rada testified that it was thanks to a special document issued by Jánoško that he was protected not only from deportation, but also from “*bantovanie*,” i.e. possible harassment and attacks by the local HGs. Rada claimed that “this document with its official content was so useful for my functioning within society, that I was protected from the threat of deportation by his

⁴¹ Vrzgulová, 82.

[Jánoško's] act and therefore I can rightfully claim that his intervention saved my life.”⁴²

Mapping the Discursive Field of the Grey Zone of Rescue

According to the memories of a victim rescued by Oscar Schindler “one cannot fight evil with saintliness. In order to fight the Nazis, one had to outwit them, one had to be inventive, and not fall in with conventional ways of thinking.”⁴³ This statement could be naturally applied to any authoritarian regime that suppressed its own minorities. There are very few studies on the rescue of European Jews that are willing to venture away from the “comfort zone” of interpreting rescuers as “good-doers” and to plunge instead into the politically sensitive realm of rescue as ambiguous terrain. All the more then do I appreciate the work of Beate Kosmala, Limor Yagil, Esther Gitman and Jan Grabowski, which served as a guide and inspiration to my own study. Beate Kosmala, who studied the rescue of Jews by “quite ordinary Germans,” reminds us that helpers and rescuers “did not necessarily correspond to the ideal type of an altruistic personality who always displayed civility or political solidarity, human decency and sympathy or Christian neighbourly love directly and courageously.”⁴⁴ Yagil’s study *Chrétiens et juifs sous Vichy (1940–1944): Sauvetage et désobéissance*

⁴² ŠAB, fond OLS Hlohovec, kartón 5, Třud 135/1947, Trestná vec: Ján Jánoško,

⁴³ Ray Jones, “The Economic Puzzle of Oskar Schindler: Amenity Potential and Rational Choice,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 57, no. 1 (1998), 18 – 19.

⁴⁴ Beate Kosmala, “The Rescue of Jews, 1941 – 1945 – Resistance by Quite Ordinary Germans,” in David Bankier (ed.), *Nazi Europe and the Final Solution*, (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2003), 106.

civile represents a much needed innovation in rescue scholarship.⁴⁵ Yagil offers readers an analysis of the French society in minute detail. By revealing disobedience, resistance and rescue on a regional level, Yagil comes to the quite unexpected conclusion that it was not only humanitarians of various persuasions, but also a variety of administrators (at every level), who were responsible for the safeguarding of 75% of the Jews of France during the Shoah.⁴⁶ Similarly, Esther Gitman, in her Ph.D. thesis on the rescue of 169 physicians by officials of the Independent State of Croatia, challenges the view of the “Ustase’s behaviour [as] ‘one of the most gruesome stories.’”⁴⁷ Gitman revealed “historical nuances that did operate to save Jewish lives,” thus undercutting the notion that the entire Croatian population was complicit in the murder of Jews.⁴⁸ Finally, Jan Grabowski paints a picture of rescue as a profitable occupation and reflects in detail on a “market of rescue” which operated as a thriving enterprise in Poland.⁴⁹ Grabowski even demonstrates that following the deportations of 1942 the rescue market was regulated by the law of supply and demand.⁵⁰ All of this suggests that rescue was not always a response to concerns and interests embedded in Christian morals and that people operated within the context of both regional and central

⁴⁵ Limor Yagil, *Chrétiens et juifs sous Vichy (1940–1944): Sauvetage et désobéissance civile*, (Editions du CERF, 2005).

⁴⁶ Christine E. Van der Zanden, review of *Chrétiens et juifs sous Vichy (1940–1944): Sauvetage et désobéissance civile*, by Limore Yagil (Editions du CERF, 2005) *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 3 (2007), 500-503.

⁴⁷ Esther Gitman, “The Rescue of Jewish Physicians in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 1941–1945,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009), 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁹ Jan Grabowski, *Rescue for Money: Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939 – 1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

forces. Eventually, certain of these forces worked to the benefit of some persecuted Jews.

What actually mattered in the transformations of bystanders into helpers or rescuers was not their inner qualities but their agency, or the capacity to act. Slovak scholarship still denies this capacity and adheres to a simplistic notion of an individual deprived of the ability to act due to the all-pervasive power of totalitarianism which mercilessly imposed itself in a uniform and uncompromising way on society. But if we move beyond this simplistic notion and instead understand the individual as an agent within a system of power that is omnipresent “not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere,”⁵¹ then a new and unexplored terrain of resistance within the context of authoritarian regimes emerges. This Foucauldian notion of how power works puts an equal emphasis on points of resistance, which are readily present everywhere in the power network, as on the system itself. As Foucault reminds us, there is a “plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable, others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial; by definition they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations.”⁵² This chapter targets the invisible and even fragile resistance to the wartime state’s regime that often became visible only with the emergence of the new postwar regime. The gaze of society and the authority of the regime forced resistance to evolve covert forms that need to be carefully teased from the

⁵¹ Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. vol. I (New York: Vintage Book USA, 1990), 93.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 96.

available documents. The gaze of society had a great impact on one's ability to act. Furthermore, a person, according to the principle of "diffusion of responsibility," is much less likely to take responsibility and intervene in a rescue act if he is surrounded by other participants or observers of the situation.⁵³ This is the conclusion from experiments conducted by Latane and Darley in the 1970s which differed from the views that highlighted personal qualities as lying at the core of one's pro-social behaviour.⁵⁴

These considerations explain why it is necessary to rethink rescue as something dynamic and multidimensional, to explore its heterogeneous terrain and amorphous texture. The Holocaust survivors themselves often reflect on how they managed to get away from the grasp of the Hlinka guards and assembling spots in the spring and summer of 1942. Various forms of rescue in 1942 include the help of neighbours and friends, obtaining exemptions from various antisemitic decrees, work permits or even a timely *pro forma* aryanization of Jewish businesses. But while memoir and scholarly literature treats the help of friends and neighbours in detailed and vivid fashion, the other factors of rescue from 1942 deportations, especially *the process* that eventually yielded governmental exemptions from antisemitic decrees, find little reflection in the discourse. What follows will reflect in detail on the initial steps that were essential on the path to

⁵³Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 58.

⁵⁴Such was the view of Elisabeth Midlarsky. Midlarsky de-accentuated the factor of societal gaze in one's acts and believed that willingness to help is determined by competency – feeling that one is capable or has the confidence to alter events. This quality is often referred to as an "internal locus of control." Samuel and Pearl Oliner's findings in the Altruistic Personality Study promote the same line of argument. Yet another group of social psychologists believe that a rewards-cost approach can explain the transformation of bystanders into helpers or rescuers. According to this theory the rewards for helping must outweigh the costs of helping. The reward in the case of most rescuers is not material but rather a personal satisfaction of doing the right thing.

the rescue of some Jews in Slovakia and expose the variety in the responses of some Slovaks to the persecution of Jews. With the help of available archival material one can bring to light those aspects of rescue that have hitherto been neglected.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the roots and nature of intervention to assist persecuted Jews. This chapter will therefore run against the grain of the widely shared notion that the Slovak public was a passive agent vis-à-vis the implementation of antisemitic policies in 1939 - 1942. In more specific terms, I will trace the nature of earlier efforts to mitigate the impact of the antisemitic decrees that aimed to expel Jews from the liberal professions and the labour market in general. Jewish lawyers, notaries, doctors and pharmacists were deprived of their jobs as a result of a *numerus clausus*. Here we will concentrate on Jewish doctors and pharmacists as an interesting case to study. Only the possession of a work permit could secure further employment for members of these groups, and those who held one were shielded from the first wave of deportations in 1942. The process leading to the possession of a work permit helps us to reveal the fine texture of the initial phase of the path to rescue. Behind the acquisition of a work permit and an exemption from the *numerus clausus* was a complex process determined by the antisemitic decrees and the persecuted individual's social, moral and economic standing in society. Tracing the roots of positive intervention within the cross-cutting social networks will reveal a subtle and nuanced terrain of public responses to antisemitic measures. As will be demonstrated, the effort to isolate and remove the Jewish community from “the

organic unity of the Slovak ethnic state” was often hampered at ground level by the needs of society and the quality of social bonds when the antisemitic decrees were put into practice. As a result, state-promoted nationalism and the interests of the regional social milieu occasionally clashed in a way that could not be easily overcome. Once we grasp this tension, the nature and roots of the effort of some Slovaks to exempt some Jews from the impact of these laws will stand out from obscurity.

As the title suggests, this section of the dissertation is concerned with the realm of a “grey zone” of assistance to persecuted Jews in the Slovak state 1939 – 1945. My understanding of the “grey zone” is the realm of assistance to Jews that excludes the unique group of “morally committed rescuers.”⁵⁵ Its features are: a) a range of interventionism initiated at all levels of society ranging from lower to upper social strata and including the problematic HSPP, HG and bureaucratic apparatus; b) a wide spectrum of interventionists’ motivation which could hardly be understood merely within the context of altruism alone; c) a variety of acts that were essential to accomplishing rescue but individually could not guarantee it, and finally d) a phenomenon requiring the blending of such standard analytical categories as perpetrator and bystander used in historical scholarship. None of these features are easily defined or perfectly coherent. As far as the notion of “assistance” or “help” is concerned, this chapter applies the definition of David H. Jones who included in it the idea of “help” as “*not* doing something that would harm a victim”; acts of omission, in Jones’s view, “could be just as valuable as

⁵⁵ Jones, *Moral Responsibility*, 218.

positive help.”⁵⁶ My “grey zone” of rescue therefore necessarily encompasses opportunism and utilitarianism, phenomena that are by large left unexamined within rescue scholarship.

It is not a surprise that current political arguments use long established and rigid categories of victims, perpetrators, bystanders and rescuers as an essential means of legitimating contemporary political goals. If blurred, deconstructed or questioned, these categories would become a less effective tool in political discourse, depriving interest groups of a meaningful instrument of argumentation. Emphasizing the “grey zone” is thus a necessary but antagonistic task, subverting comfortable political categories as well as the views of established historians. For example, it means questioning the views articulated by David H. Jones, who has embraced rescuers as standing “in sharp contrast to the great majority of people in all countries who were either perpetrators or bystanders.”⁵⁷ In Jones’s view, “virtually all people who helped and rescued...were highly praiseworthy and admirable...heroic and even saintly,” as opposed to “the great majority of bystanders ... [who] were blameworthy for not helping and rescuing,”⁵⁸ which is a more reductive approach to a broader typology of rescuers. The grey zone blurs such categorical rifts and complicates a neat typology of moral rescuers ranging from the heroic or religious type who does not accept the morals promulgated by

⁵⁶ Ibid.,209.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 199.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 230.

the regime and the anti-national socialist boycotting state policies to the altruistic man of conscience.⁵⁹

The grey zone of assistance to Jews further transforms categories of rescuer and perpetrator. Within the context of the grey zone, agency becomes more complex, permeable and changeable, a perspective that will remain politically problematic. The political priority of bringing Slovakia closer to European structures dictated the approach to the past via clearly and carefully defined concepts of “totalitarianism” and “democracy.” This approach has of course left its imprint on the interpretation of the past. The ossified understandings of the political terms brought with them equally rigid notions of “perpetrator” and “rescuer,” and any attempt to introduce a less clearly defined line between the two categories would potentially raise doubts about the effort of Slovakia to come to terms with its problematic past, bringing into question its effort to become a respected member of a newly united Europe.

On a different level, liberal scholars are concerned that an émigré group of historians who struggle to legitimize the problematic Slovak wartime state could make use of any disruption in the categories of rescuer and perpetrator as a tool of apologetism for the problematic Slovak past. In particular, there are already attempts to shift the wartime Slovak president Jozef Tiso (who needs to be held

⁵⁹ Gutman, General Introduction to *Encyclopedia*. For typology of rescuers see also Werner, *A Conspiracy of Decency*; Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*; Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*. The grey-zone approach sheds a different perspective on Emmy Werner’s image of the compassionate and decent rescuer. And it also casts a different perspective on Eva Fogelman’s view that the “rescue act was an expression of the values and beliefs of the innermost core of a person” – the core being an integral part of a rescuer’s personality nurtured in childhood. Fogelman’s claim further complements Nechama Tec’s categorization of rescuers into altruistic helpers distinguished by their independent spirit and individualism and paid rescuers motivated by material gains.

accountable for his actions) from the perpetrator to the rescuer category, since he issued about one thousand presidential exemptions from deportations. But despite these sensitive political implications, a proper understanding of the structures of power and resistance should not be avoided. As Dominick LaCapra correctly reminds us, the “deconstruction of binary oppositions does not automatically entail the blurring of all distinction,” demonstrating that a change in our understanding of a structure does not necessarily change the means by which we hold people accountable.⁶⁰ The idea of a grey zone allows us to raise the question of the “more or less dubiously hybridized cases, but it does not imply the rashly generalized blurring or simple collapse of all distinctions including that between the perpetrator and victims.”⁶¹ Moreover, the moral imperative of the Holocaust past is so deeply embedded in our cultural consciousness that the reader is able to decipher the presence of that distinction on his own. But even if one is willing to admit the viability of a perpetrator-helper/rescuer and a bureaucrat-helper/rescuer category, one should always be aware of their unstable nature and ability to morph into qualitatively different entities as a response to the changing socio-political milieu of the studied region.

From the methodological point of view, what remains to be answered is how the targeted case study of grey zone, the rescue of Jewish doctors in Slovakia, alters the recent debates on perpetrators and bureaucrats. In order to properly understand the complexity of the path to rescue of Slovak Jewish medical practitioners, it is essential to trace the intervention of lower-level

⁶⁰ Dominick La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 21.

⁶¹ La Capra, *Writing History*, 79.

administrators. One has to keep in mind that the implementation of antisemitic policies at ground level was moulded by lesser bureaucrats with a great deal of decision-making power in their hands. The view that lower bureaucrats were not necessarily mindless drones furthering regime policies challenges, in part, Raul Hilberg's view of a bureaucrat, a "desk perpetrator" or a "desk murderer" as an essential mover behind the "machinery of destruction" – the view that has stood its ground for several decades. Hilberg's conclusions were supported in the 1990s by Christopher Browning, who offered a picture of the bureaucrat receptive to signals emanating from the centre. Similarly, Susanne Heim and Götz Aly offered a bureaucratic prototype - a young technocrat or "theoretician of genocide" (*Theoretiker des Völkermords*). They described these bureaucrats as the "planning intelligentsia," who approved of the mass murder of the East European Jews as a means of solving the problem of overpopulation. All of these approaches argue that decisions are made at the centre and flow out to the peripheries; however, it is time that the opposite process is also taken into account. Bureaucrats responded both to signals from above (from the central authority) and from below (from the specific communities they oversaw, whose needs had to be met). These men were administrative amphibians: despite being under the influence of the state's ideology, they did not hesitate to protest against the state's implementation of antisemitic policies when their community's interests were threatened. This type of approach is supported by Ulf Schmidt's identification of a non-centralized bureaucracy apparatus that was responsive to regional needs⁶² and challenges

⁶² Batsheva Ben-Amos, "Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor. Medicine and Power in the Third Reich (Review)," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009), 315.

Zygmunt Bauman's thesis that the anonymity of wide-ranging modern organization and the resulting gap between administrators and their victims is a precondition for systematic mass crime.⁶³ Lower rank administrators were usually familiar with the people they oversaw and the relations among local inhabitants. As this chapter demonstrates, the initial phase of removing Jewish doctors from medical practice faced multiple obstacles at the lower administrative level. The establishment of the new ethno-national state in 1939 did not allow for the immediate replacement of the “old” Czechoslovak cadres – supporters of the former democratic regime, and this, in part, explains the initial lenient approach to the implementation of antisemitic decrees by some lower rank bureaucrats. A benevolent attitude, or even just a reluctance to follow the orders from the new central authority, proved to be essential on the path to rescue for some Jews.

Perpetrators, much as bureaucrats, were also responsive to communal needs, which, at times, led them to assist the persecuted Jews. But academics in the postwar era have mostly downplayed the assistance of perpetrators to victims as sheer alibism; and this refusal to rethink perpetrators allowed them to mould neat typologies for the category of perpetrators. The view of perpetrators as evil monsters, a view that emerged immediately after the war, was replaced by the image of the no longer so demonic and rather shortsighted *Massenmenschen* in the 1960s. Although the 1970s were marked by the unwillingness to engage with the reality of perpetrating murder, the 1980s reintroduced perpetrators as a “phalanx of sturdy, rational players actively embracing genocide,” whose

⁶³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989).

antisemitism was actually downplayed as part of this process.⁶⁴ But then historians Ulrich Herbert and Michael Wildt introduced a perpetrator – the *Weltanschauungskrieger* – which embraced the cohort of young right-wing activists who adhered to a pragmatic realism and fought ruthlessly for the interest of the Volk.⁶⁵ More recently still, Eric Steinhart’s study offered a more complex portrayal of a “perpetrator-chameleon” characterized as “an apparent combination of political plasticity, tenacity, and an acute perception of his ability to reinvent himself...”⁶⁶ But apart from Steinhart’s version, the wide range of perpetrator constructs share a common denominator: perpetrators as presented by scholars respond to policies emanating from the centre.

That being said, this chapter will focus instead on the acts of perpetrators and bureaucrats whose assistance to Jews was determined by the needs and interests of the individual within the context of specific regions. Thus, what follows will highlight bureaucrats and perpetrators who, regardless of their inner qualities are *receptive to the needs and interests of their own social milieu* – the aspect that has been mostly neglected within the existing range of the perpetrator and bureaucrat typologies. In their effort to reconcile the state antisemitic policies and communal and private interests, these bureaucrats and perpetrators were more receptive to the needs of the region. As a result, bureaucrats and perpetrators of the grey zone do not blindly follow instructions from the centre. At times, on their

⁶⁴ Mark Roseman, “Beyond Conviction? Perpetrators, Ideas and Action in the Holocaust in Historiographical Perspective,” in *Conflict, Catastrophe and Continuity. Essays on Modern German History*, ed. Frank Biess, Mark Roseman and Hanna Schissler, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 91.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁶ Eric Conrad Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki: Jack Reimer, Soviet Volksdeutsche, and the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 2 (2009), 242.

own initiative, they either accelerated the state's antisemitic policies or, on occasion, curbed this legislation by exempting and safeguarding some Jews from its effects.

The grey zone points to another phenomenon, which I argue should be called the "path to the rescue." The notion of a "path to rescue" allows us a better grasp of the subtleties within rescue and denies a direct linear progression from a "first action" to "relief." Instead, responses range from interventionism and timely help to a more lasting assistance to Jews. Slightly different, and yet overlapping in meaning, these modes of pro-social behaviour were applied with various degrees of vigour, by various people, with the aim to lessen the impact of antisemitic decrees. Such acts at times improved the ever deteriorating socio-economic status of the persecuted Jews or even exempted them from the reach of antisemitic decrees. But it is still important to remember that individual acts of help were often driven by an effort to protect one's own interests. Various groups and individuals were able to grasp the gravity of the situation of the Jews at different stages of the implementation of antisemitic policy.⁶⁷ Individual or collective realization of this danger at different stages might have spurred an incentive to provide help to the persecuted Jews. If this is the situation, the concept of the "path to the rescue" allows for a longer time span that ran in parallel with the evolution of the antisemitic policy of the Slovak state. It cautions us from focusing too narrowly on the immediate danger of the 1942 and 1944

⁶⁷ On the different periods in the existence of the Slovak state, 1939 – 1945, see Ivan Kamenec, "Politický systém a režim Slovenského štátu v rokoch 1939 – 1945," in *Slovensko v rokoch druhej svetovej vojny*, ed. Jana Skladaná (Bratislava: Slovenská národná rada, 1991), 15; Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec, eds., *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 14 – 16.

deportations, around which the rescue narrative has been hitherto almost exclusively centred. As the Holocaust survivor Juraj Špitzer noted, "...the crime did not start at the ramp where people were selected for different ways of murder. It begins ... when the particular group or community of people is deprived of their rights via legal means."⁶⁸ In a similar fashion, Eva Fogelman underscores the "awareness of dehumanization" which, in her view, "...sets the [rescue - NP] process in motion when the condition is seen to warrant intervention."⁶⁹ It is precisely here, at the initiation of persecution, I believe, that the one should begin to study "the path to rescue."

Given the time difference involved between the initial phase of the implementation of antisemitic policies and the realization of the danger that Jews were exposed to, there is inevitably a lack of general consensus on the single moment of danger which signalled that the lives of Slovak Jews were in peril. Slovaks who failed to perceive danger in the state's coordinated antisemitic policies at first became more alert when rumours spread about the fate of the deportees in the East. Three months after the first deportation trains left Slovakia in March 1942, Gizy Fleischmann, in her letter to the leader of a rescue organizer, Relico A. Silberstein, informed him of the first news about the fate of the deported Slovak Jews.⁷⁰ Some Jewish communities, such as the ones in Medzilaborce and Hlohovec, received the news about the mass murder of the Jews from the deported Jews themselves. Rabbi Izak Goldman, who himself was

⁶⁸ Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku medzi tradíciou a asimiláciou* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2000), 101.

⁶⁹ Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*, 314.

⁷⁰ Hradská, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 3, 20 – 30.

deported to Lublin, managed to send a message to Lazar Mendlovic in Medzilaborce that people die daily from hunger and diseases and that hundreds of Jews had been murdered.⁷¹ Similarly, rumours in Hlohovec about the murder of Jews in the East were spread upon the escape of Simon Orloff from Auschwitz, where he was made a clerk. He even addressed testimony to president Tiso, who failed to respond.⁷² Alica Barak-Resslerová, in her memoir *Krič, dievčatko, krič*, claimed that Jews from Prešov received the information about the horrors of the concentration camps from the Polish escapees who managed to cross the Polish-Slovak border prior to 1941.⁷³ Emaciated and on the verge of death, some deported Prešov Jews managed to escape from the concentration camp in Lublin and returned back to Michalovce to confirm what was already known, demonstrating once again that Slovaks were aware of the mass murdering of Jews from 1941 onwards.⁷⁴

Scholars concerned with the rescue of European Jews rarely point to the fact that different means were applied at different stages in order to protect Jews from the immediate impact of the antisemitic decrees. As this chapter demonstrates, the possession of exemptions from the so-called *numerus clausus* and work permits obtained via legal or illegal channels proved to be an important means of evading the first wave of 1942 deportations in Slovakia. There was some noncompliance in the implementation of the *numerus clausus*. Whereas the

⁷¹ Ján Hlavinka, "Vlaky nádeje. Prípad organizovanej záchrany pred deportáciami," *Štúdie. Pamät' národa* 4, (2005), 20.

⁷² Nina Paulovičová and Jozef Urminský, *Židovská komunita v dejinách mesta Hlohovec. (1938 – 1945) Príbeh, ktorý prešiel tmou* (Hlohovec: Občianske združenie Ex Libris Ad Personam, 2009), 177.

⁷³ Alica Barak-Ressler, *Krič, dievčatko, krič* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2003), 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

regime tried to enforce its notion of Jewishness on its Jewish population in the form of antisemitic decrees, in some cases, lower bureaucrats tried to hinder the process and accentuated the “Slovakness” of those same people. By ascribing “Slovakness” to some Jews, these lower bureaucrats trespassed against the ethno-nationalist principles promoted by the state. Similar deviation from the official ethno-national line can be traced as well in the process of aryanization. But two years later, the Wehrmacht’s physical presence in the region caused a shift in rescue strategies. During this last phase of the Slovak state (1944 – 1945), when documents such as work permits or presidential and ministerial exemptions lost their protective value, hiding and passing in the Christian world, but also timely assistance by some of the regime’s proponents, represented the most common means of survival. Here, once again, the timeline indicates we should think in terms of the “path to the rescue.”

Scholarship targeting the motivation and altruism of an individual⁷⁵ as the primary reason for rescuers’ actions fails to reflect on the complex, multifarious and evolving process of rescue. The motivations behind individual and collective rescue efforts cannot be thought of as stable operational entities, since they evolve within the political milieu. Even with regard to moral motivations, Michael Gross correctly reminds us that motivations “...do not operate independently of the political environment but are embedded in social and organizational networks that

⁷⁵ Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York; London: Free Press; Collier Macmillan, 1988); Elisabeth Midlarsky and Eva Kahana, *Altruism in Later Life* (London, New Delhi: Sage publications, 1994); Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness*; Stephanie Fagin-Jones and Elisabeth Midlarsky, “Courageous altruism: Personal and situational correlates of rescue during the Holocaust,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 2, no. 2 (2007), 136 – 147.

provide meaning, context and political opportunity.”⁷⁶ Likewise, Frank Bajohr’s interpretation of the interaction between state and society as “social practice” underlines the concept of rule as an “amorphous force field – a “complex network of relationships in which the actors are embedded.” And it is the “hybrid behaviour” of social agents which, according to Bajohr, dominates behavioural taxonomy such as “enthusiastic support, complicity, and pursuit of self-interest, as well as conformity, acquiescence, detachment, and opposition.” In his view, a “social actor can behave quite differently in similar situations at different times.”⁷⁷ As this chapter demonstrates, the personal attributes of the rescuer can also no longer be seen as a sufficient motivator of rescue activity. Nor can rescue be understood solely as a “political question faced by a vanquished and completely overwhelmed democratic polity.”⁷⁸

On the Path to the Rescue of Jewish Doctors in Slovakia

Many scholars have recognized that the professions of law and medicine, more often than others, are hot spots for antisemitism. Norman Naimark saw lawyers, doctors, professors and engineers as both “the architects and beneficiaries of the modern state” and supporters of political elites.⁷⁹ Michael Marrus and Robert O. Paxton opined that the medical profession represented the

⁷⁶ Gross, “Jewish Rescue in Holland and France,” 490.

⁷⁷ Frank Bajohr, “The ‘Folk Community’ and the Persecution of the Jews: German Society under National Socialist Dictatorship, 1933–1945,” *Holocaust Genocide Studies* 20, no.2 (2006), 183.

⁷⁸ Gross, “Jewish Rescue in Holland and France,” 464.

⁷⁹ Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 10.

most visible platform of foreign competition in the 1930s.⁸⁰ Donna Evleth described the professions of law and medicine in 1930s France as “hotbeds of anti-foreigner and even antisemitic sentiments.”⁸¹ But while in France medical antisemitism and the introduction of the quota for Jewish doctors was the result of “overcrowding” in the medical profession, in Slovakia the *numerus clausus*, or the 4% quota, was introduced in spite of a severe lack of doctors and pharmacists.

At the end of May 1939, almost 44% of the 1414 doctors in Slovakia were Jewish, and 33% were Roman Catholics.⁸² As a result of the acute shortage of qualified health care professionals, the medical profession in general became one of the most desirable on the job market, and Jewish doctors in Slovakia soon represented the most visible social group in the Jewish community.⁸³ According to Jozef Sulaček, of all social groups, Jewish doctors, especially family physicians, X-ray specialists, psychiatrists and pediatricians, undoubtedly received the most respect and trust from the non-Jewish Slovak population.⁸⁴ Most of the Jewish doctors in Slovakia adhered strictly to their religion and were leading figures within the various Jewish religious communities, especially in Eastern Slovak towns, but also in Trenčín and Kremnica.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Donna Evleth, “The Ordre Des Medecins and the Jews in Vichy France, 1940–1944,” *French History* 20, no.2 (2006), 208; See also John Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 235.

⁸¹ Evleth, “The Ordre Des Medecins,” 208.

⁸² Jozef Sulaček, *Biele plášte. Tragické osudy židovských lekárov na Slovensku v období druhej svetovej vojny*, vol.1 (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum – Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2005), 44.

⁸³ Karol Janas, “Židovské obyvateľstvo v Trenčianskej župe a jeho perzekúcia v rokoch 1940-1945,” <http://sk.holokaust.sk/wp-content/janas2.doc>, (accessed May 6, 2009)

⁸⁴ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol.1, 32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

The already looming crisis in health care, which was especially severe in the Eastern region, did not prevent the government from implementing a series of decrees⁸⁶ that further reduced the number of Jewish doctors and pharmacists.⁸⁷ On 18 April 1939, just a few weeks after the establishment of the Slovak state, the government issued decree No. 63 which codified the definition of a Jew. This first attempt to isolate the Jewish community from the general population clearly applied confessional criteria.⁸⁸ Jews were defined as members of Jewish religious communities, converts from Judaism who were not baptized prior to 30 October 1918, non-religious people with Jewish parents, and the children of these non-religious people. Under decree No. 63/1939 almost half of the doctors, i.e., 621 individuals, were defined as Jewish and thus subject to persecution.⁸⁹ The second part of the ordinance introduced a 4% quota among the liberal professions. The first to be affected by the ordinance were Jewish attorneys or candidates for the bar who were not permitted to practice law. Under decree No. 63, Jews could not be appointed as public notaries and editors of non-Jewish newspapers and magazines. A few months later the *numerus clausus* was applied also to Jewish

⁸⁶ The decree 63/1939 represented the springboard for the subsequent persecution of Jewish doctors since it provided the definition for a “Jew” and aimed to apply a 4% quota in liberal professions. The decree 74/1939 issued on 24 April 1939 excluded Jews from public service as soon as the proper professional replacement was found. The decree 184 /1939 issued on 25 July 1939 eventually determined the implementation of the 4% in the Medical Chamber, i.e. it applied the ratio of 96% “Aryan” doctors to 4% Jewish doctors in health care. The decision about which Jewish doctors to include in the 4% quota was made by the Ministry of the Interior upon the recommendation of the Medical Chamber. Five hundred and four Jewish doctors were excluded from their medical practices on the basis of decree 184/1939. But paragraph 1 stated that if the situation and public interest required it, the Ministry was allowed to exceed the number of Jews left in their professions.

⁸⁷ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 69.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 69.

doctors and pharmacists through the July 1939 ordinance No. 184.⁹⁰ This ordinance allowed the government to exclude individual Jewish doctors from medical practice throughout 1940 and 1941. But the case of Jewish doctors proved more difficult on the regional level, where there were numerous exemptions.

Meanwhile, decree No. 74 attacked Jewish doctors employed in state hospitals, medical centres and institutions. Issued on 24 April 1939, the decree excluded Jews from public service in order to establish a “pure and healthy social life.”⁹¹ But given Slovak difficulties with the acute lack of qualified replacements for Jews in state services, many Jews remained in their positions until the proper professional replacement was found, some maintaining their jobs until fall 1944.⁹² Regulation of the number of Jews in the Slovak labor market peaked with the introduction of work permits in October 1940 for all employed Jews, with the exception of those in state sectors. These decrees were continuously supplemented by a series of ordinances which introduced numerous obstacles for those who were temporarily allowed to continue their medical practice. Such a dense net of antisemitic decrees necessitated the assistance of Slovaks if the interests of Jews were to be safeguarded. And the plethora of frantically issued and poorly regulated antisemitic decrees could at times yield unexpected scenarios of assistance to Jews.

Leading political figures routinely boasted of successes and progress with regards to the “Jewish question” and glossed over the difficulties such policies

⁹⁰ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia 1939 – 1945,” 166. See also Sulaček, *Biele Plášte*, vol. 1, 48.

⁹¹ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 69.

⁹² *Ibid.*

introduced on a regional level. In his May 1942 report to the Slovak Assembly, Dr. Augustin Brychta admitted that the government acknowledged “a minor lack of professional medics,” and yet he claimed that medical care was much more efficient after the government dismissed Jewish doctors because of their charlatanry and readiness to perform abortions.⁹³ (a taboo, of course, in a clerico-nationalist state). Also the regional press, for example *Trnavské noviny*, praised the exclusion of Jewish doctors. It took the position that depriving Jewish doctors of their jobs strengthened the Slovak nation, but at the same time it pointed nervously to the absence of Slovak qualified professionals who could readily replace the excluded Jews.⁹⁴ Radicals backed up by the HG and FS offices as well as professional associations of “Aryan” medics were not willing to compromise on the *numerus clausus*, even though the outbreak of World War II further diminished the ranks of doctors by conscripting some of them into the army. Moreover, a reduced nutritional intake among the Slovak population, caused by ever increasing food prices, posed increasing risks to public health.⁹⁵ The looming supply crisis that emerged in winter 1940/1941 had an immediate impact on the population. “National bread,” which was a second-rate bread made of 40% wheat and 60% barley, was ordered to be produced in all of Slovakia. The introduction of meatless days in restaurants and the allotment system, mocked by the public as the “hunger allotment,” allowed a daily ration of 22 dkg of bread per individual

⁹³ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 2, 208.

⁹⁴ Veronika Slnková, “Zásahy proti židovským lekárom v Trnave v rámci tzv. riešenia židovskej otázky v rokoch 1938 – 1942,” *Acta Nitriensiae: Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre* 2 (1999), 341.

⁹⁵ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol.1, 45, 58.

and 36 dkg for labourers in physically demanding occupations.⁹⁶ A series of similar encroachments on public nutrition standards resulted from the war and had a far reaching impact on public health. In the face of this crisis, Jewish doctors and pharmacists were often issued ministerial exemptions from the antisemitic ordinances because of the intervention of the local population and some regional offices. Thus, Jewish medical practitioners received more exemptions than any other group, and out of 125 requests by medical professionals to obtain presidential exemption from the 1942 deportations, 80 were approved.⁹⁷ The Ministry of the Interior even cautioned the district offices that Jewish doctors and pharmacists should not be subjected to concentration and deportation without the permission of the Minister.⁹⁸ In her research on the Holocaust in Piešťany, Katarína Psicová noted that due to the lack of Slovak doctors, Piešťany's Jewish doctors managed to avoid the first wave of the deportation in 1942.⁹⁹ But, as the case studies in this chapter will show, the successful exemptions of Jewish doctors from the 1942 deportations had more complex causes, dependent on a person's social networks and timely interventions by others. As the archival documents reveal, obtaining an exemption was usually the result of multiple factors and did not necessarily lead to favourable results.

There were many factors that played a role on the path to the exemption of some Jewish doctors from the 4% quota. The place of birth, nationality, relations with the Slovak community, membership in Slovak organizations and political

⁹⁶ Samuel Cambel, *Slovenská dedina 1938 – 1944* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 1996), 114 – 115.

⁹⁷ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol.1,53.

⁹⁸ Slnková, "Zásahy proti židovským lekárom v Trnave," 347.

⁹⁹ Psicová, 26.

parties prior to the establishment of the Slovak state, as well as the degree of the assimilation of Jewish doctors represent just a few examples in this regard.¹⁰⁰ The final decision on the exemption of individual Jewish doctors from the *numerus clausus* was determined by a number of bureaucratic institutions, including the Medical Chamber and the Jewish Centre. Interestingly, even the nationalistic cultural institution of Matica Slovenská, and the sport club “ŠK Vranov” were not silent when it came to choosing who was exempt and who was not.¹⁰¹ Prewar sympathies with leftist political parties, one’s identification with Hungarian cultural heritage or permanent residence outside Slovakia exponentially diminished one’s chances in the process of exemption.¹⁰² Equally important was the financial aspect, i.e. the fees for the administrative procedure which usually ranged from 5000 to 30,000 Ks, but on occasion could skyrocket to 100,000 Ks. These administrative fees were usually collected as part of the program for the “economic revival of Slovakia,”¹⁰³ a contribution to the gold reserves of Slovakia or as a donation to the Red Cross and social funds. Understandably, high fees – if not provided by Jewish doctors themselves – might have posed an obstacle to individual efforts to intervene in favour of Jewish doctors.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, since the exemption from antisemitic decrees was only temporary, applicants often had to undergo the same exhausting and lengthy bureaucratic procedure several times.

¹⁰⁰ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol.1, 62.

¹⁰¹ Imrich Michnovič, *Vranov nad Topľov v 20. storočí. (do roku 1948)* (Vranov nad Topľou: Mesto 2002), 205.

¹⁰² Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 1, 63.

¹⁰³ The “loan of economic revival of Slovakia” was a campaign initiated by the 1939 Slovak autonomous government that aimed to 1) sell state bonds to ease the state deficit and 2) mobilize the population under the leadership of the HSPP regime.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*,65.

Despite an effort to extend its influence from the central to the regional administrative structures, the HSPP failed to do so.¹⁰⁵ The party failed to fully penetrate the administrative apparatus in the early stages of Slovak state-building, and as a result Slovak officials sometimes resisted HG and FS radicalism, an attitude which surprised the HG and FS leadership.¹⁰⁶ Radicalization of the regime's policies following the July 1940 Salzburg talks increased the volume of anonymous threats and public attacks on "Jewish traitors," i.e. Slovaks and state administrators who did not approve of the radical approach to the "Jewish question" and advocated different views. In Banská Štiavnica, the moderate priest František Jankovič urged the Guardists "to watch those [Slovaks - NP] who drifted away from them."¹⁰⁷ Štiavnica's district office was accused of ignoring the "Judeo-Bolshevik threat," complaining that one needed "proofs" if such "unbelievable" acts, i.e. acts of assistance to Jews, are to be punished, whereas national socialists in Germany began an investigation upon "mere suspicion."¹⁰⁸ Central offices were also alarmed by the regional administrators' disclosure of confidential information to friends and acquaintances, including Jews, which considerably hindered the effectiveness of antisemitic measures. The Ministry of the Interior was, in fact, so concerned about this situation that it distributed a strictly confidential circular on 20 September 1940 which empowered county offices to investigate how many state employees maintained contacts with Jews. According to the circular "state employees are not allowed to be acquainted with

¹⁰⁵ Lipták, "Slovenský štát," 180 – 181.

¹⁰⁶ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 105.

¹⁰⁷ SNA, ÚN-NS, kartón č. 12, 93/45, František Jankovič.

¹⁰⁸ ŠABB, fond OLS BŠ, kartón č. 6, Tlud 3/46, Štefan Korský.

Jews, they are not allowed to play cards or entertain themselves with Jews in public or private spaces, they are not allowed to court Jewesses, etc.”¹⁰⁹ Also, “clerks who promote unrest by spreading silly criticism, etc., or spend too much time in public places need to be re-educated.... Pay attention to those clerks who spend more than they can earn. Observe from which sources they cover their expenses. ...”¹¹⁰ The resultant investigation prompted a wave of mutual suspicions and anonymous denunciations within the bureaucratic apparatus like that in the district office in Hlohovec. There, the head of Hlohovec district assured the Ministry that clerks and administrators processed “only those matters that had to be processed within the context of the valid regulations...” and that “clerks did not maintain friendly relations with Jews.”¹¹¹ Despite these assurances, the district officer was clearly uncertain about the results of the investigation: “whether my orders were strictly followed in each case is difficult to confirm with absolute certainty.”¹¹²

Given these bureaucratic difficulties, the government tried to enforce a stricter control of its employees, with the aim of curbing administrative assistance to Jews. Paragraph 64 of the September 1939 law on the defense of the Slovak state clearly stated that if a state employee failed to fulfill or purposefully avoided the duties dictated by the state, he could be fired and deprived of the rights that stemmed from state service. Such an individual’s prospects for future service in a

¹⁰⁹ ŠABpT, fond OÚ Piešťany, kartón č. 79, zákł.č. 906/40. Štátni úradníci. Konanie služobných povinností a spravovanie sa v službe i mimo služby.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, č. 1346/40 prez., Štátni úradníci, priateľenie sa zo židmi.

¹¹² Ibid.

public institution of any kind would be permanently damaged.¹¹³ Bureaucrats who intervened on behalf of or otherwise helped Jews, regardless of their motives, were accused of “*bieložidovstvo*,” i.e., “white Jewishness,” and faced public humiliation.¹¹⁴ In general, Slovaks helping Jews were denounced along racial and ethno-national lines as “White Jews,” “Jewish traitors” or “Czechoslovaks.” The acts of these ‘half-Slovaks’¹¹⁵ did not correspond to priest and the member of the Slovak Assembly František Jankovič’s idea of a “true Slovak national socialist who with a clear conscience could claim that he did everything that he was ordered to do.”¹¹⁶ The Propaganda Office (*Úrad propagandy*) accused Slovaks who aided the Jews of being influenced by a “perverse international Jewish culture” and labeled them “snobs” and “narrow-minded wretches.”¹¹⁷ The Propaganda Office even mocked Jewish sympathizers as “coffee-house democrats, bar socialists or salon communists” and condemned them as being an obstacle to the “healthy development of the Slovak state” because of their “destructive criticism” of the regime and “passive approach to Slovak statehood.” Also mocked as “*inteligenti*” soaked with a spirit of ghetto culture,” those who assisted the Jews in one way or another were considered an obstacle to the healthy development of the Slovak state.¹¹⁸ Yet despite the widespread mockery of Jew-

¹¹³ Igor Baka, *Slovenská Republika a nacistická agresia proti Poľsku* (Bratislava: Vojenský Historický Ústav, 2006), 138 - 139.

¹¹⁴ ŠABB, fond OLS BB, kartón č. 15, Tlud 13/47, Štefan Zahoriansky.

¹¹⁵ Ivica Burnová, “Transformácie politického kapitálu v mikroštruktúre mesta - Dolný Kubín v rokoch 1900 – 1950. (Prípadoví štúdiá),” *Slovak Ethnology (Slovenský národopis)* 1 (2004), 17.

¹¹⁶ SNA, ÚN-NS, kartón č. 12, 93/45, František Jankovič.

¹¹⁷ Ivan Kamenec, “Keď strieľajú aj slová. Funkcia, metódy a ciele antisemitskej propagandy na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945,” in *Storočie propagandy. Slovensko v osídlach ideológií*, Valerián Bystrický and Jaroslava Rogul’ová, eds., (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2005), 106.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

helpers, assistance to persecuted Jews can be traced at all levels of the Slovak state. Even the daily *Gardista* bitterly complained that “some of our people just cannot forget their Jewish friends.”¹¹⁹

The surveillance system under which a person operates and the severity of penalty for noncompliance have a demonstrable impact on the willingness of individuals to assist the persecuted minorities. David H. Jones reminds us that, apart from Germany and the countries under direct Nazi occupation (such as Holland and Poland), bystanders usually did not face high levels of punishment.¹²⁰ The Slovak state, as a satellite, conformed to this pattern and did not impose severe punishments against “White Jew” actions. Legally, paragraph 12 of decree 63/1939, which implemented the rule of the *numerus clausus*, sentenced those who continued to employ or assist Jews excluded from the liberal professions directly or indirectly to three months in prison, labour duty and a penalty of between 1000 to 5000 Ks. Only decree 184/1939 increased the penalty to 20,000 crowns, which, if not paid, could result in up to six months imprisonment.¹²¹ Furthermore, in an effort to bolster the support of the general public and preempt public protests, state offices often refrained from severely punishing “Jew lovers.” Yeshayahu Jelinek noted that “Slovakia was a small nation where many people were mutually acquainted,” the result of which was that Slovak “leaders found it hard to be cruel in such a familiar environment.”¹²² Even Jozef Tiso recoiled from

¹¹⁹ Eduard Nižňanský, “Slovaks and Jews - Relation of the Slovak Majority and the Jewish Minority during World War II,” in *Park ušľachtilých duší návrh pamätníka. Park of Generous Souls*, Miloš Žiak, ed., (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2007), 91.

¹²⁰ Jones, *Moral Responsibility*, 216.

¹²¹ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 1, 48.

¹²² Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 67.

being cruel to those who “...are accustomed to sweet strings...”¹²³ If serious assistance to Jews was detected by the authorities, however, one faced imprisonment in Ilava, which was the one and only concentration camp for political prisoners in Slovakia. Referred to as “Machau” (a combination of references to the Dachau concentration camp in Germany, and the Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach, one of the main protagonists of the “Slovak national socialist” movement), from December 1938 till August 1944 Ilava served as a prison for approximately 2500 people who had “obstructed the interests of the Slovak state.”¹²⁴ During the spring 1942 deportations of Slovak Jews to extermination camps in Poland, the Ministry of the Interior issued an ordinance to imprison all “Aryans” who assisted Jews. But the harshness of this order was tempered by 1943 when, in the face of the looming crisis of the Ludak regime and major setbacks on the Eastern front, the conditions in the Ilava concentration camp had already improved. The guards became more benevolent and allowed prisoners more contacts with outsiders, and corporal punishments diminished.¹²⁵ It was only the arrival of the Wehrmacht in 1944 that led to the introduction of the death sentence for aiding Jews.¹²⁶

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ivan Kamenec, “Koncentračné a pracovné zajatecké tábory na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945,” *Terezínske listy* 6 (1976), 17-19. Lubomir Lipták points to the moderate approach of the regime to its Christian, Slovak or German citizens. In the course of the five years of duration of the Slovak wartime republic, the USB (State Security Centre) imprisoned about 1500 individuals due to their underground communist activities and 700 for various anti-state activities. Thousands of individuals were confined in the Ilava camp. About 3595 prisoners (2858 Slovaks, 395 Czechs, 128 Magyars, 84 Germans and 123 “Eastern Slavs”) were confined in the prisons of courts of higher instances (*krajské súdy*). Lipták also claims that the punishment for the prisoners was rather moderate and did not differ from the penalty Code of the prewar Czechoslovak republic. However, one has to keep in mind that some activities that were not subject to punishment during the democratic era were punishable under the law of the Slovak state.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 19.

¹²⁶ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 22.

Oftentimes vaguely formulated governmental decrees could be interpreted in various ways which opened up considerable space for local initiatives to further antisemitic policies, while considering regional needs.¹²⁷ In this regard, regional district officers played an important role. In 1940, the County Office in Bratislava complained that some Jewish doctors continued to carry on their medical practices under the pretext of providing necessary care and that subordinate bureaucrats were sluggish in depriving Jewish doctors of their medical licences.¹²⁸ This is corroborated by archival materials that provide insight into the efforts of some district leaders to lessen the impact of the *numerus clausus* and intervene in favour of the persecuted doctors. Those district leaders willing to do so often highlighted the popularity of the Jewish doctors in a particular community when defending their actions. In particular, they emphasized these Jewish doctors' conscientiousness, reliability and positive relations with the Slovak folk (*ludomilstvo*). The doctors' Slovak nationality, their education of their offspring in the "Slovak spirit," their loyalty to the Slovak nation and, wherever applicable, their membership in a nationalistic *Matica Slovenská* were brought to the fore by their defenders in order to emphasize their "Slovakness." Their utility was further

¹²⁷ See for example Robert Y. Büchler, *Židovská náboženská obec v Topolčanoch (Počiatky, rozvoj a zánik)* (Bratislava: Slovenské Národné múzeum, múzeum židovskej kultúry, 1996), 88; Peter Kónya and Dezider Landa, eds., *Stručné dejiny prešovských Židov* (Prešov: PVT a.s. Bratislava divízia Prešov pre ŽNO Prešov, 1995); Anna Jurová and Pavol Šalamon, eds., *Košice a deportácie Židov v roku 1944* (Košice: Spoločenskovedný ústav SAV, 1994); Rudolf Kuklovský, *Šaliansky Židia* (Šaľa: Oto Németh, 2002); Petra Larišová, *Židovská komunita v Bratislave v roku 1940: Historická Demografia Na základe sčítania ľudu* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku; Ústav etnológie SAV; Židovská náboženská obec Bratislava, 2000); Ján Hlavinka, *Židovská komunita v okrese Medzilaborce v rokoch 1938 - 1945* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2007); Peter Salner, ed., *Židia v Bratislave* (Bratislava: Inštitút judaistiky FFUK; Ústav etnológie Slovenskej akadémie vied; Židovská náboženská obec Bratislava, 1997).

¹²⁸ Slnková, "Zásahy proti židovským lekárom v Trnave," 32.

emphasized by bringing attention to some of these doctors' financial contribution to the revival of the Slovak state through the "Loan to the Revival of Slovak State" (*Pôžička na obrodu Slovenského štátu*). Political disinterest was also emphasized, as was non-involvement in political parties, in order to allay the suspicions of the central authorities about these Jewish doctors' "anti-state activities." Willingness to provide free medical services to the poor and the benefits of well equipped Jewish doctors' offices for patients in the region were often brought forward as well. But most importantly, in their reports to the central authorities, lower bureaucrats frequently emphasized the inability to replace Jewish physicians or dentists with qualified Slovaks.

In a small western Slovakian town of about 9000 inhabitants, Hlohovec, seven out of eight Jewish doctors should have been deprived of their medical practices as a result of the 4% quota.¹²⁹ However, a two hundred year history of epidemics in the region convinced the head of the Hlohovec district, Ondrej Kutlík, to protect local Jewish doctors in order to safeguard community interests. Kutlík argued that the war posed a real threat of epidemic outbreaks, so that he had to maintain the current standards of professional health care and keep professional medics – though Jewish – in this district. As a result of his intervention, only four (instead of seven) Jewish doctors were prohibited from

¹²⁹ ŠABpT, fond OÚH., kartón č. 95, zákl. č. 108/1940 prez., Usmernenie počtu židov vo výkone lekárskej praxe.

ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 95, zákl. č. 1000/40 prez., Zastúpenie mimoriadnych národností a náboženstiev v štátnej službe.

ŠABpT, fond OÚH, č.6532 - 34/40, č. 6536/40, č. 9221/40, č. 9455/40, Zákazy výkonu lekárskej praxe.

carrying on their practices.¹³⁰ The popularity of Jewish doctors within the Hlohovec community and the approval of the regional HSPP executive committee determined which doctors were exempted from the 4% quota.¹³¹

Following the infamous “Jewish Code” - the decree 198/1941 issued on 9 September 1941, so called “miešanci” – “half Jews” and “Aryan” partners of Jews were to be excluded from state service as well. This meant that non-Jewish doctors married to Jewish partners, derogatorically called “White Jews,” also had to apply for the exemptions. Aid also helped protect these practitioners, for example, Ondrej Kutlík’s successful intervention in favour of Dr. Imrich Frič and Dr. Ferdinand Valach (both married to Jewish women).¹³² Resistance to implementing the *numerus clausus* can also be identified in Trenčianska county where some of the county’s administrators and HGs proposed the removal of all Jewish doctors in state service but were met with protests by the county’s notaries. In Myjava, a town in Trenčianska county, the head notary even resolutely demanded the immediate increase in the number of doctors (Jewish or otherwise), citing a looming health crisis. The situation in Lednice in Púchov district, where infant mortality had escalated, was critical. Lednice’s notary insisted that a doctor of Jewish origin, Izabela Schmideková, from the Children’s

¹³⁰ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 212, zákl. č. 3666/41 adm., Žid. lekári, predloženie zoznamu, kt. bolo odňaté právo vykonávať lek. prax.

¹³¹ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 91, zákl. č. 68/1940, Mudr. Neumann Izidor lekár v Hlohovci a spol., žiadosť o povolenie prevádzania lekárskej praxe.

¹³² ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 107, zákl. č. 1939/41 prez., Vylúčenie židov zo štátnej služby

Institute in Horovce, be transferred to the area. The Ministry of the Interior met the request, and Dr. Schmideková was transferred to Lednice in March 1943.¹³³

A similar pragmatism also inspired the successful March 1942 intervention by Zlaté Moravce's district leader, J. Kazár, against the deportation of E. Richter, a dental technician. Richter was considered an indispensable member of his community since he was the one fixing state employees' and guardists' teeth.¹³⁴ In a similar vein, the head of the notary office in Sečovce complained that a number of people with unfinished dental work came to his office every day. Inhabitants of Sečovce thus intervened on behalf of Dr. Maximilián Neumann, whom they expected to meet the needs of 25,000 people who would otherwise be left without any professional dentists. Even the Encyclopedia of the Righteous laconically informs us of five members of the Weiss family from Myjava who were assembled for deportation to Poland, but were rescued at the last minute because the father's occupation was dentistry. As in many Righteous encyclopedia entries that deal with 1942, however, it is not clear who was behind this intervention. We can only assume that an intervention on the regional and administrative levels was required to release the family from the Žilina concentration camp and transfer them back to their home town. Although the "father's occupation as a dentist" saved the family from deportation in 1942, during the second wave of the deportations in 1944, the Weiss family had to rely on the help of a Christian neighbour, who arranged for them to hide in a

¹³³ Karol Janas, Židovské obyvatelstvo v Trenčianskej župe a jeho perzekúcia v rokoch 1940-1945, <http://sk.holokaust.sk/wp-content/janas2.doc> (accessed May 6, 2009)

¹³⁴ Martina Fiamová, "... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli," *Domino*, Wednesday 2 April, 2008, <http://www.euro-domino.sk/pamat-naroda/clanok/840/-a-potom-jedneho-dna-proste-zmizli.html> (accessed February 25, 2009)

farmer's house in the nearby village of Poriadie.¹³⁵ Overall, 25% of the Jewish dentists in Slovakia received an exemption from the *numerus clausus* as a result of various interventions.¹³⁶

But the bleak health care situation was not the only reason for intervention in favour of Jewish doctors. The archival documents also reveal cases when the reluctance to implement the *numerus clausus* was the result of a benevolent attitude, at least in the early stages. Ivica Bumová, in her research on Dolný Kubín, pointed to the benevolence of lower administrators in the face of antisemitic policies during the first years of the Slovak state's existence. These administrators represented the "old," democratically oriented middle stratum of the post-World War I generation, who were soon confronted by a "new" conservative middle stratum of the World War II generation that owed its career to the newly established regime based on ethnic nationalism.¹³⁷ For example, the "old" generation head of the Topoľčany district, Štefan Fabián, was known for implementing antisemitic decrees *pro forma*. Fabián tolerated some Jewish doctors practicing medicine, despite their exclusion from the profession, an attitude that earned him the criticism of local administrative institutions, the Topoľčany HSPP and HG. But in 1941, when the political atmosphere was marked by a shift towards a more radical approach to the "Jewish question," Fabián was terminated and replaced by the radical Július Šimko. Upon being appointed to the leading position in the district, Šimko always cooperated with

¹³⁵ Gutman, *Encyclopedia*, 466 - 467.

¹³⁶ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol.1, 62.

¹³⁷ Burnová, "Transformácie," 18.

local guardist circles.¹³⁸ Acquainted with the Minister of the Interior himself, Šimko followed the implementation of antisemitic policies to the letter, which sealed the fate of the Jewish community in Topolčany.¹³⁹ A lenient approach of the lower bureaucrats to the *numerus clausus* was also detected by Martina Fiamová in the Zlaté Moravce district office. Here, the head of the district recoiled from strictly enforcing the 4% rule, allowing the exemption of Jewish doctors from the *numerus clausus* on the condition that their medical practice was carried out outside of the Zlaté Moravce district.¹⁴⁰

The more lenient approach of some lower administrators to the exclusion of Jewish doctors from their professions might have opened up some space to maneuver, but at times such maneuvering seemed to be considerably restricted by the central bureaucracy. Such was the case of Dr. Viliam Freisinger from Revúca, a member of the Slovak League and Matica Slovenská. Dr. Freisinger was given a positive reference by the local gendarmerie station, which reported his popularity, especially among women, for his expertise in child birth. He was issued a work permit in 1941 a “*žltá legitimácia*,” or “yellow document,” (i.e., ministerial exemption from the deportation) in July 1942, and the Bulgarian tsar Ferdinand even intervened in his favour. Yet, neither of these interventions was ultimately successful. Dr. Freisinger and his family were deported to Auchwitz on the orders of JUDr. Anton Vašek, the man in charge of “Department XIV,” the department responsible for the deportation of Slovak Jews. Dr. Freisinger managed to survive the Holocaust and worked in Prague after the war, but his wife and children died

¹³⁸ James, “Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topolčany,” 128 – 129.

¹³⁹ Büchler, *Židovská náboženská obec v Topolčanoch*, 88. See also Vrzgulová, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca*, 32.

in Auchwitz.¹⁴¹ Likewise, in January 1940, the district office in Prešov tried to exempt Dr. Zoltán Grossman, general practitioner in Lipany, from the *numerus clausus*. The head of the Prešov district portrayed Grossman as a loyal citizen who financially contributed to the revival of Slovakia. Grossman's membership in Matica Slovenská, his Slovak nationality and his decision to educate his child in the "Slovak spirit" were cited. Describing Grossman as a modest and not very rich "ludomil," the district office expressed the view that the "...folk are grateful to him..." and that Grossman "...is much needed and worthy of the exemption, as citizens are satisfied with his services." But despite these positive references, which were further supported by the "starostovia," or elders in the area, the county officer and the bishop Jozef Čársky, the Ministry of the Interior eventually rejected their request. As a result, Dr. Grossman was barred from practicing in July 1940 and was deported to Sobibor in May 1942, where he probably died on 19 July 1942.¹⁴²

On a governmental level, willingness to grant requests from the lower administrative ranks differed from one Ministry to another. As was indicated above, the Ministry of the Interior was less receptive to requests for exemption than, for example, the Ministry of Defense.¹⁴³ Moreover, Department XIV of the Ministry of the Interior usually ordered the deportation of Jewish doctors without consulting the Department of Health.¹⁴⁴ Even within the Ministry of the Interior itself, views on how best to approach the "Jewish question" differed, and these

¹⁴¹ Jozef Sulaček, *Biele plášte. Tragické osudy židovských lekárov na Slovensku v období druhej svetovej vojny*, vol. 2 (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum, Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2006), 30.

¹⁴² Sulaček, *Biele plášte* vol. 2, 40.

¹⁴³ Lipscher, "The Jews of Slovakia," 227.

¹⁴⁴ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 1, 93.

differences of opinion were highlighted during the deportation process in 1942. For example, Ladislav Lipscher informs us that the Department of Health, which operated under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior, “issued 360 ‘letters of protection’ to Jewish physicians and another 256 to Jews who were pharmacists or engaged in related health professions.”¹⁴⁵ But he also cautions that government agencies “were not necessarily motivated by pangs of conscience,” but rather expressed a desire to “keep German experts...from gaining too firm a foothold in the inner structure of the Slovak state.”¹⁴⁶ The acute lack of Slovak professionals qualified to replace excluded Jewish professionals inevitably opened the door to German substitutes. Events in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, where excluded Jews were replaced by the Reich Germans who attempted to establish a compact German settlement, set a dangerous precedent and raised considerable concerns that the Reich would apply similar tactics in Slovakia.¹⁴⁷ There was thus a rather ambiguous approach to the “Jewish question” which had its roots in a tension between the interests of the Slovak government and its Nazi “protector.” But an ambiguous approach to Jews was not a new feature of politics here. According to Miroslav Kárny, the approach to the “Jewish question” was similarly ambiguous during the second Czechoslovak Republic when Slovakia declared itself autonomous. Two contradictory goals – appeasing Nazi Germany by gradually implementing fascism and attempting to secure a British-French loan to safeguard the state’s interests and avoid the disruption of foreign trade –

¹⁴⁵ Ladislav Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia,” 211.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ See for example Drahomír Jančík and Eduard Kubů, “*Arizace*” a arizátoři. *Drobný a střední židovský majetek v úvěrech Kreditanstalt der Deutschen (1939 – 45)* (Praha: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2005).

influenced the Czechoslovak approach to the Jewish minority.¹⁴⁸ Hence, the effort to protect the interests of the Slovak state and hold off the influx of German professionals – even by means of keeping some Jewish practitioners in medical posts – can be seen as a continuation of the previous pragmatic political line of interwar Czechoslovakia. Developments on the tumultuous European political scene left their indelible imprint on the domestic policies of the Slovak state. According to Ľubomír Lipták, within the context of European policies in 1939 – 1941 the Slovak political milieu was permeated by an overall insecurity and weakness. The inexperienced Slovak politicians and the public were exposed to situations to which they could adapt only slowly and with difficulty.¹⁴⁹

The ambiguous attitude of the Ministry of the Interior to the exclusion of Jewish doctors can be demonstrated by tracing the fate of those Jewish doctors who were excluded by the 4% quota and the decision of this Ministry to refuse exemption. The refusal of central officials to exempt a Jewish doctor from the *numerus clausus*, just like the failure to obtain a work permit or a presidential exemption, dangerously escalated chances that he would be sent either to one of the transitory camps assembling the Jews for deportation to the East or to a work centre or labour camp. The published list of Slovakian Jewish doctors and their fates compiled by Jozef Sulaček helps clarify this picture. Of the twenty-four physicians and dentists who were interned in the Nováky camp after they were declined exemption by the Ministry of the Interior in 1940, sixteen were released and relocated to hospitals, doctors' offices or health care centres with a severe

¹⁴⁸ Miroslav Kárny, "Politické a ekonomické aspekty 'židovské otázky' v pomnichovském Československu," *Zborník historický* 36 (1989), 193 – 195.

¹⁴⁹ Lipták, "Slovenský štát," 183.

shortage of medical personnel. This was likely due to continued regional intervention, perhaps resulting from concerns about the expansion of German influence. Dr. Arpad Karol Pollak, Dr. Armin Porjes and Dr. Emil Weiss managed to survive the war due to the possession of exemptions and documents of a protective nature. Dr. Jozef Strelinger and Dr. Rudolf Welwart were relocated back to the labour camps in Ilava and Dubnica nad Váhom. And five doctors (Acs Alexander, Maros Dezider, Neumann David, Sweitzer Arpad, and Welwart Rudolf) were forced into hiding and managed to survive the war.

Dr. Eugen Lengyel and Dr. Emil Liebermann were less fortunate. They were imprisoned by SIPO, SD and POHG and eventually murdered. Similarly Dr. David Neumann and Eugen Loffler were imprisoned and, as “politically unreliable” men, deported to the East. The remaining six Jewish doctors (Diamant Oskar, Herzog Armin Anton, Maros Dezider, Neumann David, Sweitzer Arpad, and Tomaschoff Marek) either cooperated with partisans or took an active part in the Slovak national uprising in August 1944. Except Armin Anton Herzog, those who participated in the uprising survived the war. Half of the doctors who remained in confinement at the Nováky camp (Braun Arpad Ondrej, Friedmannova Helena, Mandler Juraj, Spira Jakub) participated in illegal camp activities, and after the camp’s liberation in 1944 they also joined the partisans in the uprising. Dr. David Altmann became seriously ill and died in Nováky. Dr. Alexander Deutsch and Dr. Emil Shépházy were deported to the East and died in the first wave of the deportations in 1942. In sum, out of the twenty-four

physicians and dentists interned at Nováky, seventeen survived the war¹⁵⁰ and seven died mostly in the custody of the SIPO, SD and POHG or in the first wave of the deportations.¹⁵¹ As this small sample indicates, mostly those Jewish doctors who joined partisans in 1944 and those who went into hiding had greater chances to survive the war. This conclusion supports the view of Jan Rychlík who asserted that Jews in Slovakia in 1944 did not have any choice but to join the partisans if they wanted to be rescued.¹⁵²

Archival documents also reveal cases of institutional corruption which offered considerable room for Jews and their helpers to manoeuvre. There are even several cases in which the CEO, which issued work permits, was implicated in forging documents and accepting bribes, both from intervening Slovaks and from Jews.¹⁵³ The CEO turned out to be one of the most corrupt and disorganized central offices in the state, despite the strict internal measures that were used to protect the office from external interventions and the strict discipline of Augustín Morávek, head of the CEO.¹⁵⁴ The archives recount the case of a CEO employee, Ľudovít Križan, who was in charge of the section for bonded accounts and deposits of Jewish property and the related division of Jewish budgets, accounts and transfers. He extensively accepted bribes from Slovaks, Jews and the head of

¹⁵⁰ Acs Alexander, Braun Arpad Ondrej, Diamant Oskar, Feldmann Jozef, Friedmannova Helena, Holly Julius, Mandler Juraj, Maros Dezider, Neumann David, Pollak Arpad Karol, Porjes Armin, Spira Jakub, Strelinger Jozef, Sweitzer Arpad, Tomaschoff Marek, Weiss Emil, Welwart Rudolf.

¹⁵¹ Deutsch Alexander, Herzog Armin Anton, Lengyel Eugen, Liebermann Emil, Loffler Eugen, Shépházy Emil.

¹⁵² Jan Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Československé vztahy 1914 – 1945* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, Ústav T.G. Masaryka Praha, 1997), 228.

¹⁵³ ŠAB, Krajský Súd Bratislava, KSB-TK spis 502-1943.

Jan Poftaj (príslušný do okr. Nové Mesto n. Váhom) a Juraj Genčík (príslušný do okr. Zvolen)

¹⁵⁴ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 126.

the Jewish Centre, Henrich Schwartz. In return, he was willing to offer various services, ranging from the manipulation of the revision process for aryanized Jewish business, to controlling the processing of business agreements, to ensuring work permits, to providing vital information from within the internal offices of the CEO.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the CEO's accounting secretary, Vojtech Hrdina, whose monthly salary was 1750 Ks, increased his income to 5500 Ks with the profits from his trustee function in four Jewish businesses; he also accepted bribes in order to sustain his bohemian lifestyle.¹⁵⁶

When Jan Potfaj, administrative assistant at the CEO since May 1942, was transferred to the VI Division of the CEO, overseeing Jewish movable and immovable property, he managed to get hold of two old CEO stamps. When Juraj Genčík, also an ex-employee of the CEO, asked him to issue work permits for Alexander Braun and Alexander Berman, he used these stamps to do so in return for 1000 Ks. In fact, however, Berman and Braun had a legitimate claim which they simply wanted to expedite, and when they suspected that the work permits were forged, they personally requested the verification of these documents by the CEO in order to avoid trouble. The case was investigated by the police, and Potfaj eventually admitted his "nerozvážnosť," i.e. carelessness, claiming it was the result of his meagre monthly pay of 1200 Ks, which was not enough to make ends meet. Meanwhile, although Alexander Berman's application was still being processed, Alexander Braun, who was employed as the international representative at the firm Lanificio Di Lodi, had his application declined by the

¹⁵⁵ ŠAB, fond KSB TK, č. 680/41, Ľudovít Križan a spol.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

CEO, forcing him into hiding. Both Genčík and Potfaj were charged with bribery and the forgery of official documents.¹⁵⁷

Although incomparable to the national collective rescue of Jews in Denmark or to the largely organized rescue activities in France and Holland, the following small-scale regional collective interventions of Slovaks had their roots in well established and intersecting social networks, of which Jewish doctors were a part. These networks also included patients, who facilitated the mobilization of representatives of all social spheres on behalf of specific Jews, as well as bureaucrats and representatives of the ruling HSPP and members of the paramilitary HG. The honour and respect that the medical profession traditionally received in Slovak society provided an incentive for small-scale collective interventions on the regional level.

When Dr. Evžen Schemowitz, from Piešťany, was deprived of his medical license in 1940, realtor Madunický collected signatures from his patients. Several hundred signatures were collected, including that of HG and HSPP member Jozef Čimo, and the document was sent to the presidential office with an aim to exempt Dr. Schemowitz from the infamous 4% quota. During his postwar trial, Jozef Čimo claimed as part of his defence that he signed the document despite the recommendation of the central authorities that strongly discouraged HG members from providing such help.¹⁵⁸ In similar fashion, a road construction worker named

¹⁵⁷ ŠAB, Krajský súd Bratislava, KSB-TK spis 502-1943
Jan Poftaj (prislusny do okr. Nove Mesto n. Vahom) a Juraj Gencik (prislusny do okr. Zvolen)

¹⁵⁸ ŠOBA, Okresný ľudový súd Piešťany, krabica č.1, Tľud 16/45, Trestná vec: Jozef Čimo.

Pristaš collected signatures from his coworkers in 1939 to keep general practitioner and dentist Dr. Eugen Schnitzer in the local hospital. Despite this effort, he was not exempted from the *numerus clausus* in September 1940, but two years later, in July 1942, the Ministry of the Interior permitted Dr. Schnitzer to work as a dentist in the office of Dr. Ján Kapralčík in Sabinov. In September 1944, Schnitzer successfully evaded the mass round up of Jews and managed to obtain a false birth certificate, I.D., and a permanent resident card. He survived the war by passing as a Christian with the help of these documents.¹⁵⁹

Ladislav Lipscher noted that miners and farmers of Nováky region “had no sympathy for the Slovak regime” as a result of the failure of the government to improve conditions for the lower classes.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, the mining areas of lower Spiš and several villages of the Upper Ponitrie exhibited democratic and antifascist views.¹⁶¹ Miners and farmers seemed to be more prone to boycott the Slovak state’s antisemitic policies, especially when such policies further encroached on their own interests in the region. The collective protest of 170 workers, the Union of Christian mine and steam mill workers from Krupina, to the Ministry of the Interior further supports this view. In order to protect Dr. Ondrej Kuhn from the impact of antisemitic ordinances, these miners and workers planned a strike on 17 November 1940 with the objective of obtaining a presidential exemption for Dr. Kuhn. But the strike was eventually sabotaged by

¹⁵⁹ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 2, 84.

¹⁶⁰ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia,” 226. Within the Slovak context, deteriorating social conditions meant that the period between 1938 and 1940 was marked by an increase of strikes, of which the miners’ strike for a wage increase in Handlová in October 1940 was the most severe.

¹⁶¹ Lubomír Lipták, *Slovensko v 20. storočí* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1998), 219.

the authorities, and seven of the strike's organizers were prosecuted. Dr. Kuhn was eventually deported to a concentration camp in 1942 where he died.¹⁶²

In some regions, signing petitions that protested against the exclusion of Jewish doctors seemed to be a more popular means of expressing the views of the public than more active forms of resistance to antisemitic decrees. Supported by signatures collected by local women, the mayor of Spišská Belá, Michal Bugala, intervened at the district office in favour of Dr. Herman Singer, an excellent obstetrician in the region. But Bugala's effort was blocked by a negative response at the district administrative level after the district officer informed the Ministry about Bugala's efforts and advised it to decline his intervention. Bugala was then publicly reprimanded and threatened with exclusion from the ranks of the HSPP as well as deprivation of his post if he ever intervened again.¹⁶³ Not one, but several mayors and governmental commissars in the region signed a petition for Bátovce's physician Ladislav Kertézs. Similarly remarkable was a collective intervention of Bishop Samuel Štefan Osuský, thirteen priests of the Augsburg confession, two Roman Catholic parishes and a number of patients in favour of Dr. Július Schwarz from Ratková. In this case, the collective intervention paid off, and Dr. Schwarz managed to survive the war.¹⁶⁴

Although a similar collective effort was developed to protect Dr. Alexander Küchel in the Spišská Stará Ves district, his path to rescue ended tragically. Küchel, a well respected public figure and the only physician in this region for twenty years, received significant support from the district office,

¹⁶² Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 1, 60 – 61.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 59. See also Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 2, 85.

district gendarmerie office and leading figures from nineteen villages in Spišská Stará Ves. According to these sources, Küchel “merged with the folk,” i.e. he supported the Slovak national and religious movement and never put his own interest above the interests of others.¹⁶⁵ But neither a 1940 work permit nor a 1942 presidential exemption yielded sufficient protective power to safeguard Küchel from the German secret police in September 1944. Dr. Küchel was deported to Gross Rosen, Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald, and died shortly prior to liberation.¹⁶⁶ Even if the collective intervention on a regional level eventually secured exemptions from the *numerus clausus* and the 1942 deportations, the 1944 Nazi roundups were harder to avoid, because a new political situation, dictated by the presence of the Wehrmacht, required the application of mostly non-administrative rescue stratagems, significantly reducing the effectiveness of established tactics.

The exemption of Dr. Alexius Fáy from the 4% quota started as a chain of successful interventions ranging from the lower to the central administrative levels. The district office in Prešov recommended Fáy’s application for the exemption, which was further supported by all “starostovia” – elders in the district – and even the Minister of Justice, JUDr. Gejza Fritz. On 28 April he obtained a presidential exemption which allowed him to continue his medical practice, but in October 1944 he and his mother were seized by the German police and deported to a death camp. The series of interventions on an administrative level were thus ultimately unsuccessful. Dr. Fáy was murdered during the death march near

¹⁶⁵ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 1, 60.

¹⁶⁶ Sulaček, *Biele plášte*, vol. 2, 58.

Fürstengrube.¹⁶⁷ Dr. Eugen Nágel, general practitioner and dentist in Modra, as well as revolutionary poet and generally leftist thinker, met a similar fate. Strangely enough, Slovak administrative institutions at all levels were willing to overlook his leftist political views, which would usually have been a serious cause for concern, since he was the only doctor for 17 villages. The county office in Prešov also ignored Nágel's ideology and supported his application by claiming that he was a hardworking, successful and conscientious doctor. As a result, Dr. Nágel was issued a work permit in September 1939, yellow legitimization in July 1942 and even a partial presidential exemption from the deportation in September 1942. However, in 1944, Dr. Nágel left for Galicia, where he was murdered.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Returning to the modern political agenda, the effort to embrace a national ego after the fall of communism has made reinterpreting rescue fraught terrain. Furthermore, the Liberal effort to highlight the “active” response of Slovaks to the plight of Jews in 1944, aimed to establish the continuity of the post-1989 Slovak Republic with an antifascist heritage, has further complicated the situation. Promoting the anti-fascism of the general public by highlighting active assistance to Jews, the Liberals were merely interested in creating a springboard for gaining access to a newly united Europe. They therefore carefully avoided the sensitive issue of complicity and instead embraced the neutral notion of the “passivity” of

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 68.

Slovaks in the implementation of antisemitic policy. But the idea of a “path to rescue” allows for a more nuanced reading of the public response to the plight of Jews, and archival sources support the notion that there was a great deal of pragmatism behind societal efforts to exempt some Jews from the impact of pernicious antisemitic decrees. If altruism indeed was a motivation behind these examples of interventionism in favour of Jews, it has remained carefully hidden behind the semiotics of official documents. But apart from the problem of motives, these documents allow us to understand *the mechanics* of resistance to the Ludak’s regime as communicated through bureaucratic channels.

The preceding discussion highlights a very important and often overlooked aspect of the Holocaust by investigating the mechanics of resistance. On the one hand, bureaucratic offices require certain information from lower administrative levels in order to oversee and control the situation on the ground. At the same time, central offices utilize the same channel of inquiry for further inspiration and incentive in the formation of antisemitic policies. And last, but not least, the inquiry practice, in the form of monthly reports, served as a means of maintaining approval and support for the regime’s policies. But these practices, utilized by the HSPP, also represent a place where resistance to state policies could flourish, a process that left its own characteristic traces. As has been demonstrated, resistance to the *numerus clausus* was articulated through pre-existing communication channels of the bureaucratic apparatus. Efforts to exempt Jewish doctors from persecution had to be communicated in the language of the regime; and since an essential component of the Slovak state’s policies centred on the

progress of its economy and the wellbeing of the nation, it was the language of pragmatism that dominated.

This research confirms Michael Gross' view that the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust poses a challenge to both empirical and theoretical social research.¹⁶⁹ Given the unstable and permeable nature of the analytical categories currently in place, historians face a challenge to re-interpret rescue. The notion of the "grey zone" of interventionism can help with this, as it reveals a more subtle terrain behind the nature of assistance to Jews. By approaching rescue as a "path" rather than the single act of a mythologized "moral rescuer," the collective act of many individuals spread over various political and social backgrounds is reasserted. The widely disseminated view of the early "passivity" of Slovaks in the face of the plight of Jews must therefore be rejected. Clearly, antisemitism was negotiated on a regional level and reconciled with the needs of a specific community. Various historical agents, ranging from ordinary people to bureaucrats and even perpetrators, were responsive to contextual problems. In this regard, clearly defined victim-perpetrator-bystander-rescuer models must be re-evaluated because they ignore the presence of the *chiaroscuro* of the human psyche, personal biases, dilemmas or extreme behavioural reversals on the one hand and socio-political context on the other.

¹⁶⁹ Gross, "Jewish Rescue in Holland and France," 463.

Chapter III

“Undisciplined Aryanizers”

Mapping the Terrain of Assistance to Jews within the Context of Aryanization Policies

“... human nature is more verb than noun, more process than fixed product, a nature-that-makes-itself continually – choosing, unchoosing, rechoosing its moral path. How we act is for us an issue, a task rather than a given. Unlike the plant that bends with every wind, the human creature is a being the shape of whose existence is always in question for itself.”¹⁷⁰ (Leonard Grob)

Recently the topic of the aryanization of Jewish businesses during World War II has become a lens through which the morality of the contemporary political scene and even the Church has been explored.¹⁷¹ The media especially has brought to light cases of aryanization to question the legitimacy of a few prominent Slovak politicians.¹⁷² But besides an effort to play the ‘aryanization card’ to weaken an institutional or individual opponent in the eyes of the public, the recent focus on aryanizers-rescuers also mediates a message of rapprochement

¹⁷⁰ Grob, “Rescue during the Holocaust.”

¹⁷¹ In particular, the effort of conservatives to beatify the problematic bishop Vojtaššák led to an uproar on the part of liberals. The liberals responded by bringing the issue of the aryanization of Baldovske spa, in which Vojtaššák was clearly implicated, to public attention. The “aryanization card” in the hands of liberals was utilized as a means of undermining the position of the Church. Another incident revolved around the problem of aryanization of Jewish businesses by the relatives of some prominent Slovak politicians after the Nation’s Memory Institute published a list of aryanizers.

¹⁷² Let us mention the case published in the daily *Pravda* which questioned the morality of the ruling party *Smer*. *Pravda* revealed that the grandfather of Martin Glváč, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Reconstruction and the leader of Bratislava’s faction of *Smer*, aryanized the lucrative Jewish business of Max Kohn in Pezinok. Max Kohn managed to avoid the first wave of deportations in 1942, but in 1944, when exemptions from antisemitic laws lost their validity due to the Wehrmacht’s presence in Slovakia, Kohn committed suicide. Today, the house of Max Kohn is in the ownership of the family of one of *Smer*’s founding members, Richard Demovič. This case spurred a counterattack of *Smer*’s leadership on the media. *Smer* questioned the moral currency of *Pravda* by reminding the public that the daily *Pravda* approved of the humiliating Munich agreement signed by the leading powers in 1939.

between Slovaks and Jews. In this regard, the Jewish Business Chamber in Slovakia financed the Park of Generous Souls project, which communicates the message of a positive relationship between the Slovak and Jewish communities, with the aim to move on from a problematic past. The studies published in *Park ušľachtilých duší 2* foregrounded cases of aryanizers who were rescuers in order to turn attention to the rescue efforts of Slovaks. The collected studies were organized along a strictly premediated template which highlighted altruism and assistance of Slovaks to Jews during the war.¹⁷³ This chapter applies more caution in studying the assistance to Jews by evaluating it within the context of aryanization policies. In particular, I do not aim to force the label of altruism on somewhat problematic acts of assistance. Quite on the contrary, my aim is to offer a narrative that would preserve the ambiguity of these cases in their, so to speak, “raw nature.” In other words, my effort is to resist some historians’ temptation to embellish or forcefully reshape the behaviour of targeted historical agents so that it fits into easily comprehensible typologies.

The rescue of the persecuted Jews within the context of the aryanization of Jewish businesses, i.e. the state-condoned transfer of Jewish businesses into Slovak hands, represents a neglected aspect of the history of the Holocaust. This chapter reflects on how the aryanization of Jewish businesses translated itself into the lives of some persecuted Jews and how Slovaks, namely the candidates for aryanization and aryanizers, responded to antisemitic policies. Scrutinizing

¹⁷³ Miloš Žiak, Ladislav Snopko, Eduard Nižňanský, eds., *Park ušľachtilých duší: Pamätník Slovákom, ktorí pri záchrane Židov počas holokaustu prišli o život. 2, Základný kameň. Park of Generous Souls: Memorial for Slovaks Who Lost their Lives while Saving Jews during the Holocaust. 2, the Foundation Stone* (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2008).

aryanization “on the ground” allows a closer look into complex and otherwise hardly detectable ideological, political, economic and social relations during World War II. In particular, what this chapter brings to light is a hidden face of aryanization, i.e. aryanization that served as a means of shielding the Jews from persecution during the so called “evolutionary phase” (1938 – summer 1940) and “revolutionary phase” (fall 1940 – 1941) of the aryanization process in Slovakia. The evolutionary phase was characterized by a so-called “voluntary form” of aryanization of Jewish businesses which provided the persecuted Jewish owners some sort of protection and maneuvering space. But the voluntary form of aryanization was often criticized by proponents of a more radical approach to aryanization *on all levels* of the bureaucratic ladder. The shift to radicalism was heralded by the November 1940 Second Aryanization Law, which replaced the voluntary form of aryanization with a mass liquidation and 100% aryanization of Jewish business. It is in this historical context that the rescue mechanisms to be described below aimed to shield some Jewish businessmen.

This chapter looks at rescue strategies applied by large and small Jewish entrepreneurs *in cooperation with* aryanizers. More specifically, it offers a template of factors that contribute to our understanding of the complexity of the rescue of European Jews once we realize the large number of obstacles that the persecuted Jews and their helpers faced. Some aryanizers influenced the rescue of Jews by such indirect means as ostentatiously demonstrating their loyalty to the regime or persuading the regime that their own interests were identical with those of the Slovak state. Fear of spoiling their reputation in the community, however,

made some aryanizers reluctant to help Jewish businessmen. In addition, what could be classified as “technical” factors, such as the timing of the aryanization, the size of the aryanized Jewish enterprise and its strategic importance for Slovak economy, further determined the form of protection that was possible for the persecuted Jews. The interrelationship of these factors produced qualitatively different situations and prompted different conditions for shielding Jews from antisemitism. The collected case studies demonstrate that protective means available for large Jewish firms differed from those for small Jewish enterprises. Jewish owners of big businesses in the available case studies searched for protection among leading politicians, former business partners or friends. The purposeful fractioning of a big business into smaller holdings was an example of a way to protect a Jewish businessman from further persecution. Demonstrating loyalty to the regime seemed to be the most efficient means used by “undisciplined aryanizers,” i.e. the helpers of smaller businesses.

The ability to remain employed directly affected the chances that Jews could be rescued from the 1942 deportations. In this regard the period between October 1940 (when decree No. 256 introduced the work permit as a precondition of the employment of Jews) and 1942 (the first wave of deportation of Slovak Jews) is key. From the perspective of the persecuted, a work permit allowed access to tangible resources such as money and shelter. Equally important were intangible resources, such as connections with representatives of the regime, that

in some cases added another layer of protection for Jews.¹⁷⁴ More important still, a work permit protected its owner from having to wear the Star of David, which marked Jews as easy targets for public humiliation and physical attacks. But the initiative to obtain a much needed work permit was in the hands of Slovak employers of Jews and owners of newly aryanized businesses. It is therefore one of the goals of this chapter to scrutinize the terrain that aryanizers faced in an effort to obtain the needed work permit for “their” Jews.

On the surface the “undisciplined” Slovak aryanizers followed the law of the Jewish Code and participated in the “slovakization” of Jewish businesses. But what seemed to the regime to be willing participation in its antisemitic policies was - on the part of some aryanizers - a pro-forma gesture. Fictitious aryanization was counter-productive to the goals of the HSPP since it shielded some Jews from the impact of antisemitic decrees. Available documents also reveal cases when Christian aryanizers realized that protecting the Jewish businessmen was beneficial for the undisturbed running of their newly acquired businesses; Slovak aryanizers often lacked knowledge, skills and much needed experience in the field. The vicissitudes of the wartime economy made aryanizers apply more caution and pragmatism in their decisions. Obtaining work permits for former Jewish businessmen who were utilized as handy and cheap business advisors in critical times for many seemed to be the prudent decision. In her memoir Alica Barak-Resslerová recalled:

¹⁷⁴ Ray Jones, “The Economic Puzzle of Oskar Schindler: Amenity Potential and Rational Choice,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 57, no. 1 (1998), 15.

My father and the aryanizer who was to take over the business negotiated the aryanizer's salary. It was obvious that he [the aryanizer - NP] would never be able to learn this job's skills. My father was happy that his apprentice did not make a big effort: he knew that as long as the aryanizer did not acquire needed skills, the safety of his family was secured. The days were passing and the authorities, again and again, kept extending my father's permit to stay in town.¹⁷⁵

Methodologically, this chapter was guided by some of the more well-known Foucauldian questions regarding power and resistance. Foucault encourages us to "imagine a power that unites in itself a what, a why and a how."¹⁷⁶ Foucault also reminds us that "...in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations."¹⁷⁷ Janaki Nair articulated Foucault's theorem in a more straightforward fashion: "If power is everywhere, then resistance may similarly be constructed as a web, 'always already present.'"¹⁷⁸ If we agree that power and resistance are "always already present," then we can assume that *grounds* for rescue and helping behaviour are always present too. But, even if the grounds for rescue are omnipresent within the examined system of power, it does not necessarily mean that a rescue or helping act will automatically

¹⁷⁵ Alica Barak-Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko krič* (Bratislava: SNM-Muzeum židovskej kultury, 2003), 24.

¹⁷⁶ James D. Faubian, ed., *Michel Foucault: Power* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 336.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

materialize. Human agency, situational factors, the overall sense of security or danger that permeated the society during the war, but also the nature of the penal system and specific characteristics of the targeted region could tip the scale of assistance to Jews in one way or another. Rescue mechanisms that developed against the net of both resistance and conformism to antisemitic decrees were determined by various factors ranging from the international situation, the nature of antisemitic laws, the public mood, intercommunal social relations and, last but not least, regional socio-economic needs.

This chapter asks the following questions: “What happens when individuals exert (as we say) power over others?”¹⁷⁹ What was the capacity of Slovaks to resist aryanization decrees? What prompted the willingness of aryanizers to proceed with fictitious form of aryanization as a means of protection of the former Jewish owner? The text below will target what has been neglected in the narratives of Slovak scholars. It aims to reflect on *how* the assistance to Jews materialized within the context of aryanization process, i.e. how was a particular form of resistance exercised. This chapter explores what was the nature and scale of maneuvering space that various forms of resistance to aryanization decrees yielded for Jews, thus shaping their path to rescue from the 1942 deportations. As far as the quality of resistance to aryanization is concerned, this author is aware of its *unstable nature*. In this regard, this chapter supports the view of Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer that more subtle perception of resistance suggests reconsidering the possibility of resistance not as a means of

¹⁷⁹ Faubian, *Michel Foucault*, 337.

challenging or even overthrowing the order, but rather "... as a strategy for viewing order as imperfect and fallible...."¹⁸⁰

The process of aryanization has recently received more scholarly attention. The scholarly literature offered various interpretations of this socio-economic phenomenon. Not surprisingly, academics have offered contradictory views about the nature of the aryanization process. In particular, the conclusions of leading scholars on the topic, Helmut Genschel and Avraham Barkai, did not agree on the mode of the implementation of the transfer of Jewish businesses into Christian hands. Helmut Genschel, who was among the first to suggest a periodization of the aryanization process in 1966, demonstrated that aryanization lacked linear development and was riddled with contradictions. This line of argument was also supported by Hans Mommsen who recognized the unstable nature of the process and considered the aryanization of Jewish businesses, land and property to be a "grey zone of functioning of the Nazi regime."¹⁸¹ Similar views were put forward by Frank Bajohr, who focused on the workings of "centre-periphery" relations within the context of aryanization and concluded that aryanization "was far from a process carried out 'from above' by means of the simple execution of ...orders."¹⁸² Bajohr defined the process of aryanization as "...an all-encompassing displacement process whose political and social underpinnings and historical context have to be analyzed...."¹⁸³ Avraham Barkai's conclusions, however, dissented from understanding aryanization as an unstable and variable process.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer, "Introduction: Resistance Against the Third Reich as Intercultural Knowledge," *The Journal of Modern History* 64 (1992), 1-7.

¹⁸¹ Jančík and Kubů, "Arizace" a arizátoři, 22.

¹⁸² Frank Bajohr, *Aryanization in Hamburg. The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of their property in Nazi Germany* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 5.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.

Barkai emphasized continuity and intentionality behind economic exclusion of the Jews.¹⁸⁴ The “dean of Holocaust studies” Raul Hilberg noted that “aryanization was perhaps the only phase of the destruction process in which the Jews had some maneuverability, some opportunity for playing German against German, and some occasion for delaying tactics.”¹⁸⁵ But he also cautioned that aryanization “...was a dangerous game. Time was against the Jews.”¹⁸⁶

Whereas *the process* of aryanization has been widely tackled in scholarly literature, aryanizers as historical agents have received only meagre attention. In his 2002 monograph on aryanization in Hamburg, Frank Bajohr pointed to the scant attention paid by scholars to the topic of aryanizers’ motivations and behaviour during the transfer of Jewish property. Bajohr portrayed several types of aryanizers: unscrupulous profiteers, silent beneficiaries, and “new owners” who broke Nazi law with an aim to compensate the loss of the former Jewish owners. Wolfram Selig basically followed Bajohr’s classification of aryanizers and added one more: the *alte Kämpfer* type.¹⁸⁷ Avraham Barkai called aryanizers the “sleeping partners” of the Nazi regime who profited from the antisemitic policies and the militarization of German society.¹⁸⁸ The Czech scholars Drahomír Jančík and Eduard Kubů disagreed with the “sleeping partners” paradigm and emphasized an “antisemitic consensus” and ignorance by aryanizers as to the Jews’ fate.¹⁸⁹ Jančík and Kubů’s typology included a “grey zone” of aryanizers who were not fervent followers of National Socialism but displayed a great deal

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 60.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Jančík and Kubů, “*Arizace*” a *arizátoři*, 117.

¹⁸⁸ Bajohr, *Aryanization*, 3.

¹⁸⁹ Jančík and Kubů, “*Arizace*” a *arizátoři*, 114.

of silent tolerance for the Nazi regime. Peter Hayes, who examined the stunning growth of the German firm Degussa during the war, pointed to its managers' rapid "accommodation to the ideology of the self-proclaimed Third Reich."¹⁹⁰ Hayes described big industries' aryanizers in terms of both distance from and rejection of antisemitic policies, on the one hand, and adoption of these policies, on the other.¹⁹¹

Actually scrutinizing the effect of aryanization policies on the ground does not allow for overly neat classifications of aryanizers as historical agents. Scholarly literature offers typologies based on the aryanizers' responses to the regime's antisemitic policies implemented from the centre. In addition, the categories are often treated as static and unchangeable and tend to stigmatize rather than explain "choosing, unchoosing, rechoosing its [human nature's -NP] moral path."¹⁹² Moreover, one cannot classify aryanizers without considering the existing relations within their social milieu. It is also surprising that a considerable number of studies offer rich typologies of aryanizers *without* ever considering the aryanizers' agency in terms of the pressures a particular Jewish victim was being exposed to, thus leaving out any consideration of how the victim's situation influenced the agency of the aryanizer. Aryanizer-victim relations are often treated as if they were nonexistent. Scholars routinely assume a general ignorance regarding the fate of Jews or implicitly regard the Jews as showing passivity to their plight. But this glossing over of the issue does not make for an insightful

¹⁹⁰ Peter Hayes, *From Cooperation to Complicity: Degussa in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹² Grob, "Rescue during the Holocaust."

interpretation of the historical record on the ground level. This brings us to the following questions: Who are, then, the aryanizers? And what are the contours of the aryanizer-victim interaction that influenced aryanizers' response to antisemitic policies and made possible the rescue of some Jews?

This chapter introduces aryanizers as historical agents whose relationship to the antisemitic regime in the wartime Slovak state was rather fluid and ambiguous. Aryanizers' ambiguous responses to the transfer of Jewish businesses had roots in the mutual operations of power/resistance as wielded by a variety of historical agents such as the candidates for aryanization, aryanizers themselves, Jewish businessmen and bureaucratic institutions' representatives on all levels. In particular, there are three major contexts against which the aryanizers' response to the state's antisemitic policies *and* their willingness to assist Jews will be addressed: 1) competition and rivalry between the candidates for aryanization – a process where Jewish businessmen often initiate an effort to mediate an ad hoc sort of protection, 2) the relationship between an aryanizer and a former Jewish owner, and 3) pragmatism and utilitarianism applied to business conducted in a wartime economy.

It is important to emphasize that it is not my aim to divert attention from the overall immoral nature of the aryanization process. One has to keep in mind the immoral essence of aryanization which deprived Jewish inhabitants of their property and means of living. Besides occasional cases when aryanization served as a protective means, aryanization had far reaching tragic consequences for the Jewish population in Slovakia and eventually also catastrophic consequences for

the Slovak economy. Often embraced in terms of the “nationalization” of Jewish property, aryanization deprived Jews of their businesses, capital assets, movable and immovable assets, art collections, etc. Moreover, the wartime Slovak government utilized the profits from the aryanization and liquidation of Jewish businesses as a “resettlement payment” to Nazi Germany, i.e. 500 RM for each deported Jew.¹⁹³ It is generally recognized that the aryanization and liquidation of Jewish businesses in Slovakia did not meet the expectations of the regime. The profits of the aryanization process in Slovakia amounted to 1.1 billion Ks, which was a meagre sum if one considers that the costs of the associated administrative procedure amounted to 900 million Ks. In addition, the aryanization process introduced an enormous devaluation of Jewish movable and immovable property. In the end, the confiscation of bank accounts’ securities and the public sale of Jewish furniture in 1944 turned out to be the only financial profit realized from the Slovak state’s aryanization policies.¹⁹⁴

In no way is our focus on a few cases when aryanizers shielded persecuted Jewish businessmen aimed at neglecting individual and collective efforts of those Slovak aryanizers who developed initiatives to exclude Jews from their businesses. It is important to emphasize that the Slovak public had a considerable impact on the fate of Jews in aryanized businesses. Let us just point to the case in Trnava where 49 Slovak businessmen called for the exclusion of all Jews from

¹⁹³ Information on the policy of the Government of the Slovak Republic regarding combating Anti-Semitism, and Holocaust Remembrance in the SR, 28 September 2009, http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/09/39765_en.pdf, (accessed 1 October 2009).

¹⁹⁴ Eduard Nižňanský, Jean-Marc Dreyfus, “Jews and Non-Jews in the Aryanization Process: Comparison of France and the Slovak State, 1939-1945” (unpublished article); see also Eduard Nižňanský, “Arizácie a problémy rmajetku Židov na Slovensku v hláseniach predstaviteľov nacistického Nemecka (1939 – 1943),” in *Arizácie*, Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, eds., (Bratislava: Katedra všeobecných dejín, Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2010), 142 – 192.

aryanized businesses.¹⁹⁵ Similarly, lower ranked administrators turned out to be essential movers behind the persecution of Jewish businessmen. As the previous chapter demonstrated, one could trace a more benevolent approach of lower ranked bureaucrats to the implementation of the *numerus clausus* on Jewish doctors and pharmacists. But a different picture emerges as far as administrators' responses to Jewish businessmen were concerned. Regional research¹⁹⁶ revealed that lower-rank bureaucrats, lower ranked HSPP and HG had a far reaching impact on the evolution of antisemitic policies on the ground. In their monthly reports, these bureaucrats often provided their subjective views as part of their overall monthly assessments on societal and economic "needs" within their area of supervision. As a part of these reports they provided incentives for further antisemitic measures. Central offices, in turn, responded to the impulses of lower administrators and coordinated their policies accordingly. This mechanism of mutual responsiveness between periphery and centre functioning along formal and informal channels of communication eventually produced a form of control of the regime's own functionality and viability within the newly established state. Such a system allowed not only the HSPP, HG and police but also ordinary

¹⁹⁵ Nižňanský, "Slovaks and Jews," 91.

¹⁹⁶ Petra Larišová, *Židovská komunita v Bratislave v roku 1940* (Bratislava: Zing print, 2000); Peter Salner, *Židia v Bratislave* (Bratislava: Inštitút judaistiky FFUK - Ústav etnológie SAV - Židovská náboženská obec Bratislava, 1997); Paulovičová and Urmínský, *Židovská komunita v dejinách mesta Hlohovec*; Jurová and Šalamon, eds., *Košice a deportácie Židov*; Hlavinka, *Židovská komunita v okrese Medzilaborce*; Kónya and Landa, *Stručné dejiny prešovských Židov*; Andrea Jamrichová, "Židovská otázka v Topoľčanoch v období autonómie Slovenska," in: Eduard Nižňanský (ed.), *Židovská komunita na Slovensku. Obdobie autonómie. Porovnanie s vtedajšími udalosťami v Rakúsku* (Bratislava: Inštitút judaistiky Univerzity Komenského, 2000), 9-38; James, "Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topoľčany," 123 – 132; Rudolf Kuklovský, *Šalianski židia* (Šafa: Oto Németh, 2002).

Slovaks to participate in the regulation of the state's antisemitic policies.¹⁹⁷ In the initial stages of the Slovak state this system of power and control proved to be effective in the effort to exclude Jews from the economy.

Anatomy of the Aryanization Process - Aryanization of Jewish Businesses as a Grey Zone of Rescue

Aryanization has been traditionally interpreted as a part of an ethno-national project, i.e. as a means of nationalization of a multiethnic milieu which aimed to concentrate capital and investments in the hands of a single ethnicity.¹⁹⁸ The transfer of Jewish businesses into Christian hands aimed to compensate the grievances of majority populations in Central Europe and offered nationalists a handy tool to buttress the spirit of the ethnic nation. From the viewpoint of Nazi Germany, aryanization helped to accomplish political-strategic goals such as resettlement policies in the East. In Austria, aryanization was seized upon as a means of rationalization and modernization of the sluggish Austrian economy, which lagged behind the economy in Germany.¹⁹⁹ Aryanization was also embraced as a social "elevator," i.e. a trajectory of vertical social mobility providing a means of social promotion and prestige.²⁰⁰ Whereas in Nazi-occupied areas aryanization was to strengthen German ethnic identity, solve its social

¹⁹⁷ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 71 – 72.

¹⁹⁸ Jančík and Kubů, "Arizace" a arizátoři. 112.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 7- 8.

problems and expand its influence, within the context of Nazi Germany's satellite Slovakia, it was local Slovak aryanizers that mostly benefited from the process.²⁰¹

What are the scholarly views on aryanization policies in Slovakia? Apart from the apologetic voice of the Slovak nationalist historians who ascribed the responsibility for aryanization solely to the account of ethnic Germans, liberals condemned aryanization policies in Slovakia on moral grounds. One of the strongest liberal scholarly voices on the issue, Eduard Nižňanský, claimed that “the aryanization and liquidation of Jewish property in Slovakia did not mean its transfer into ‘Aryan’ hands but its actual theft.” This scholar condemned aryanization as “act of stealing of ‘untouchable’ personal property in compliance with the legal system of the wartime Slovak state.”²⁰² The view of aryanization as an “engine of the Holocaust” in Slovakia represents nowadays a leading theory among liberal academics.²⁰³ But although Slovak scholars tackled the problem of institutional responsibility for aryanization, the participation of ordinary Slovaks in aryanization policies has received only marginal attention. Interestingly, the notion of the passivity and ignorance of ordinary Slovaks with regard to the implementation of antisemitic decrees is routinely promoted by some scholars despite the absence of studies on the problem. Ľubomír Lipták's view, although expressed back in 1966, that Slovak businessmen responded to the first measures depriving Jews of their businesses and possessions with a great deal of ignorance

²⁰¹ Ibid., 20.

²⁰² Eduard Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 33.

²⁰³ Ľudovít Halon, Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský, “Pozícia Ústredného hospodárskeho úradu v politickom, hospodárskom a spoločenskom živote Slovenska v rokoch 1940 – 1942,” in *Arizácie*, Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, eds., (Bratislava: Katedra všeobecných dejín, Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2010), 12.

hasn't changed even thirty years later.²⁰⁴ For example, Tatjana Tönsmeier indicated that Slovaks took a passive approach to the exclusion of Jews from the economy. She opined that the Slovak public refrained from protesting against aryanization in 1941 because many Slovaks and Germans benefited from its implementation.²⁰⁵ Tönsmeier's claim is thus saddled with a contradiction. If many Slovaks benefited from aryanization policies, then they simply cannot be classed as passive agents. Similarly, Ladislav Lipscher agreed that the government's determination to enforce anti-Jewish measures in the economic sphere did not encounter any protests on the part of the public. He reminds us that none of the political figures in responsible positions at the time disagreed with these measures. And yet, the economic difficulties of the newly established state and fear of German influence led many politicians and professionals in responsible positions to proceed with caution in what was seen to be a very sensitive field.²⁰⁶ Despite occasional general claims that "many Slovaks" benefited from aryanization policies, the notion of passive public response still represents a leading paradigm of recent scholarly interpretations. The notion of "passive Slovaks" vis-à-vis antisemitic policies aims to exculpate Slovaks from accusations of collaboration with these policies. The "passive Slovak" construct disseminates the message that Slovaks were rather innocent bystanders than active collaborators. But David Gushee, who has approached the issues of agency in the

²⁰⁴ Lipták, "Slovenský štát a protifašistické hnutie," 185.

²⁰⁵ Tönsmeier, *Solidarita a pomoc*, 17.

²⁰⁶ Ladislav Lipscher, "The Jews of Slovakia 1939 – 1945," in Avigdor Dagan, (ed.), *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 3, (Philadelphia, New York: The Jewish Publication Society in America, Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, 1984), 166.

Holocaust from a moral standpoint, reminds us that "...there may be no such thing as a bystander. If one is present, one is taking part."²⁰⁷

Most Slovak scholars agree that aryanization in Slovakia was often embraced as a "recipe" for the solution of economic and social concerns or as a means of fixing social injustices caused by the regime in the former Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁸ The low economic status of applicants for aryanization and the loss of southern Slovak territory to Hungary as a result of the Vienna Accords in November 1938 were often utilized as a rationale behind the transfer of Jewish businesses to Slovak hands. Slovaks who were deprived of their property, businesses and land as a result of November 1938 were especially responsive to disseminated accusations of Jews as supporters of Magyar revisionism and thus an extended hand of Magyar oppression in Slovakia. As a result, many Slovaks approved of the state's policies that encroached on Jewish property and businesses. In addition, aryanization of Jewish property and businesses was interpreted as a way of strengthening the Slovak bourgeoisie or as a means of bringing what was considered to be a nation of farmers into the stage of progressive capitalism. In this regard, one can trace an obvious paradox in the contemporary discourse about aryanization: whereas the ownership rights of Slovaks were protected, the same right was denied to the Jewish population. The denial of ownership rights to Jews clearly undermined the very principle of

²⁰⁷ Victoria Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 11.

²⁰⁸ See for example Martina Fiamová, "Arizácia židovského majetku na úrovni obce Zlaté Moravce," in: *Arizácie v regiónoch Slovenska*, eds. Eduard Nižňanský, Ján Hlavinka (Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, Filozofická fakulta, Katedra všeobecných dejín, Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2010), 11; James, "Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topoľčany," 127

capitalism. On the one hand Ludaks strived to bring to a life a new dynamic Slovak bourgeoisie. On the other, the HSPP did not hesitate to apply a former feudal law to hamper economic activities of Slovak Jews. The feudal principle of *restitutio iuris* – in the words of contemporary propaganda “to return what was earlier stolen” – was utilized as a justification of ongoing economic persecution of Jews on the basis that the Jewish race was a race of criminals and that Jews were not decent people.²⁰⁹ Such an argument lulled the public into the belief that breaching the ownership rights of Jews did not posit a conflict of interests, conscience or religion.²¹⁰ The *restitutio iuris* brought “past and future in an instantaneous present,” thus bringing the construct of “eternal enemy” to the centre of public attention.²¹¹ More importantly still, the *restitutio iuris* symbolically embraced the historicity and rootedness of the Slovak nation: it was the *historical* Slovak nation that was to finally “deal with” its long-term historical enemy.

Aryanization was not only to alleviate the social problems and economic hardships of a newly established state. Slovak political echelons embraced aryanization as a means of “Slovakization” that was to strengthen the newly established ethnic state on the European scene.²¹² In February 1939 the Hlinka Guard proclaimed in a Slovak newspaper: “We, the Hlinka guard, do not

²⁰⁹ Dzugas, “Postavenie Židovského Obyvatel'stva,” 360.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York, London: Verso, 1991), 24.

²¹² Kamenec, “Changes in the Attitude of the Slovak Population,” 330.

recognize Jewish assets, only Slovak national capital.”²¹³ Not surprisingly, an attempt to “slovakize” Jewish property, i.e. to transfer Jewish property into Slovak hands, led to protests from Nazi Germany’s bureaucrats assigned to posts in Slovakia. From the very beginning, the process of aryanization provoked fears on both sides. The general population feared that Germans rather than Slovaks would replace Jews in the economy. German bureaucrats shared similar fears, i.e. that Slovak aryanization was nothing but an attempt to “...exclude Germans from the current living space of the Jews.”²¹⁴ Overall, Nazi Germany was skeptical about the aryanization process as carried out by the Slovak political leadership. Reports to the Reich of German “advisors” in Slovakia carried the message that Slovaks were economically incapable and ideologically immature. The advisor for the Jewish question in Slovakia, Dietrich Wisliceny, reported that “most Slovaks do not understand the necessity of antisemitic measures.”²¹⁵ The German charge d’affaires in Bratislava, Hans Bernard, felt that “Slovaks are not mature enough to initiate steps in the struggle against the spiritual and economic threat of Jewry”²¹⁶ and called for a more efficient approach in aryanization policies in Slovakia.²¹⁷ The Nazi “Protector” had no illusions regarding the “disciplined attitude” of Slovaks to the running of their economy. In the view of German advisors, the economy in Slovakia continued to be run by Jews.²¹⁸ In the eyes of German bureaucrats in Slovakia the “missing willingness to cleanse Slovakia of Jews” was

²¹³ Ivan Kamenec, “Hlavné rysy arizačného procesu na Slovensku,” in *Terezínske štúdie a dokumenty*, Jaroslava Milotová and Eva Lorencová, eds., (Praha: Institut Terezínske iniciativy, 2003), 290.

²¹⁴ Eduard Nižňanský, ed., *Holokaust na Slovensku 4*, 49.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

indicative of a “double game” that the Slovak government applied vis-à-vis the “Jewish question.”²¹⁹ The SD representative Wilhelm Urbantke pointedly described the approach of the Slovak state to the “Jewish question” as “eine Politik der ‘Gummiwände’” (the politics of “rubber walls”), i.e. whenever the demands of the German minority population in Slovakia in terms of the “Jewish question” were promised to be met, they never, in fact, were.²²⁰

Fear of the Germanization of Slovak society determined the nature of aryanization in Slovakia. As a result, aryanization was not only carefully implemented at the ground level, but from the the earliest stages of the transfer of Jewish businesses it met both approval and resistance that could be traced over the entire spectrum of society. Aryanization as a phenomenon based strictly on ethnic and racial principles was also hampered by economic ties inherited from the former Czechoslovakia. Nothing reflects the scale of obstacles faced by Slovak aryanization policies better than a bizarre measure of the Ministry of the Economy and the Governor of the National Bank who both claimed a right to allot titles of “honourable Aryans” to economically important Jews. Only Jews crucially important in the Slovak economy were to bear the title of “honourable Aryan,” which shielded its bearer from the impact of antisemitic legislation.²²¹ Although the measure was to be applied only in a few cases, the attempt to mediate the symbolic “Slovakization” of prominent Jewish businessmen indicates the nature of the obstacles that the aryanization process encountered in implementation. The need to proceed cautiously when transferring Jewish property and businesses to

²¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 71.

Christian hands was further dictated by two additional factors. First, the value of Jewish property and enterprises amounted to 38% of the value of all property in Slovakia. Such a significant percentage demanded that politicians be careful at every step along implementing aryization policies.²²² Second, the political leadership was aware of a general lack of capital in Slovak hands which disadvantaged Slovak potential aryizers vis-à-vis German applicants. The state took care to prevent an influx of German applicants for the aryization of Jewish businesses in Slovakia. From the viewpoint of the government, voluntary aryization that temporarily forced collaboration between Jews and Christians, even at the risk of continuing assistance to Jews, was a more acceptable option than the takeover of Jewish businesses by Germans. While the government could handle “its own Jews” in one way or another, it did not have the same leeway with regard to the German minority in Slovakia. Slovakia did not want to irritate the Nazi “Protector” by inappropriate policies against ethnic Germans. At a meeting held in a major bank, Tatrabanka, it was clearly articulated what was at stake. The participants of the meeting had no doubts about the need to “...exclude our capital enemy [Jews-NP] from our economic life.” Yet, this goal was to be achieved in a non-revolutionary fashion: “If we were to follow a revolutionary path, we would throw our economy into the hands of Greater Germany. It would be better to solve the problem within 10 – 15 years rather than to expose the nation to

²²² Eduard Nižňanský and Jean-Marc Dreyfus, “Jews and Non-Jews in the Aryization Process: Comparison of France and the Slovak State, 1939-1945” (unpublished article). The net value of Jewish property was 3,150,000,000.00 Ks (three billion Slovak crowns). The net value of Jewish housing property was 950,000,000.00 Ks. The value of Jewish enterprises was 530,000,000.00 Ks. They owned deposits of a total value of 350,000,000.00 Ks.

catastrophe.”²²³ The transformation of a mainly agricultural society to capitalism and the building of an ethno-national Slovak state were long-term mutually interwoven goals that simply did not allow for hasty decisions in dealing with great risks in the context of wartime geopolitics.

A cautious approach was apparent by the earliest stages of aryanization. Following the preparatory stage, which placed temporary administrators and governmental trustees into Jewish businesses, the government proceeded to the actual process of the transfer of Jewish businesses into Slovak hands by an April 1940 decree No. 113. Known as the “First Aryanization Law,” it prohibited Jews from taking over new businesses and obtaining business licenses unless the Ministry of the Economy issued an exemption.²²⁴ If Jews were deprived of a business license, the county office was entitled to set the conditions of the liquidation or aryanization of that business.

Slovak scholarship has recently been struggling to answer the question about the possibility of rescue within the context of aryanization and the liquidation of Jewish businesses. The general assumption has it that aryanization rather than the liquidation of Jewish businesses ultimately proved to be more beneficial in terms of eventual rescue. Andrea Jamrichová in her research on Topoľčany conjectured that almost all Jews that were excluded from the economy were deported in 1942 and only those who managed to keep employment survived the wave of 1942 deportations. Most of the survivors of the first wave of deportations in Topoľčany were Jewish businessmen kept as employees in their

²²³ Kamenec, “Hlavné rysy arizačného procesu,” 291.

²²⁴ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 95, zákl. č. 810/940 prez., Zákon o žid. podmienkach a židoch prevádzajúcich smernice.

aryanized businesses, the owners and renters of farms, doctors and pharmacists and their family members.²²⁵ Another young scholar, Martin Macko, came to a similar conclusion. Macko argued that the chances of rescue for those Jews in Štiavnica who were retained in aryanized businesses were higher than for those whose businesses were liquidated. According to his research, out of 68 owners of liquidated businesses in Banská Štiavnica, 59 (86.76%) were deported. On the other hand, 65% of Jews whose businesses were aryanized (i.e. 13 out of 20 Jewish owners whose businesses were aryanized) were deported to the concentration camps.²²⁶ Although these figures indicate the desperate situation of the Jewish owners of businesses, it is still reasonable to claim that in some regions the Jews whose businesses were aryanized had more chances to survive than those whose businesses were liquidated. Certainly, given the regional differences and specifics, there were towns that did not follow the same template. For example, the fate of Jews excluded from the economy in the eastern Slovakian district of Vranov nad Topľov, which counted 1821 Jews in December 1941, offers a different picture. Here, the Jews excluded from the regional economy were interned in a labour camp which, *on occasion*, might have yielded some chances of rescue. In particular, following the liquidation of 164 Jewish businesses by April 1941, their former Jewish owners were conscripted for forced labour to build the railroad in Prešov – Strážske. It seems that regional offices received a

²²⁵ James, “Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topoľčany,” 131. In particular, only 50 former rich Topoľčany entrepreneurs, 69 manor owners, 10 doctors and 4 pharmacists with families were rescued from the March-October deportations in 1942. Almost half of the deported Jews (49%) were younger individuals up to 45 years old.

²²⁶ Martin Macko, “Arizácia židovského majetku v okrese Banská Štiavnica,” in *Arizácie v regiónoch Slovenska*, eds. Eduard Nižňanský, Ján Hlavinka (Bratislava: Judaica et Holocaustica 2, 2010), 99.

considerable number of interventions to release some of these Vranov Jews. In November 1942 the district officer advised his superiors to ignore these interventions and proposed to get rid of them by means of deportation. According to Vranov's district officer "...many became useless from an economic point of view..."²²⁷ Whereas in Topoľčany and Banská Štiavnica the process of aryanization of Jewish businesses yielded somewhat greater chances of rescue, this was not the case in the district of Zlaté Moravce. Martina Fiamová's research led to a conclusion that only one third of Jews who were employed in aryanized businesses on the basis of work permit and various exemptions, ultimately survived the war.²²⁸

Why did the liquidation of Jewish businesses appeal to the government as a more viable solution to the "Jewish problem" than the actual transfer of Jewish businesses to Slovak hands? According to the head of the CEO, Augustin Morávek, it was the fiscal policy of the Slovak state that provided an incentive for large scale liquidation of Jewish businesses rather than aryanization.²²⁹ Within Slovakia as a whole out of 12,500 Jewish businesses 85% were liquidated and only 15%, i.e. 1888, were aryanized.²³⁰

²²⁷ Imrich Michnovič, *Vranov nad Topľov v 20. storočí*, vol. 1 (Do roku 1948), (Vranov nad Topľov: Mesto Vranov nad Topľov, 2002), 206.

²²⁸ Fiamová, "Arizácia židovského majetku," 50.

²²⁹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 157.

²³⁰ Nižňanský, "Slovaks and Jews," 85. A similar ratio between liquidation and aryanization can be traced on a regional level. For example in Trnava 75.7% of the Jewish businesses were liquidated as opposed to 16.6% of the aryanized businesses. In Topoľčany the ratio was 83% liquidated to 17% aryanized businesses. And 69% of Jewish enterprises were liquidated in Banská Štiavnica. Similar trends were noted elsewhere in Europe. Within the context of Nazi Germany only 25% businesses were aryanized and the rest were liquidated.²³⁰ Moravia under the Nazi occupation recorded 80.1% liquidated Jewish businesses and 19.9% aryanized by March 1939.

Liquidation of Jewish businesses, in essence, secured one of the goals of the Slovak state – to get rid of Jewish influence in the Slovak economy. The wartime antisemitic rhetoric promoted liquidation of Jewish businesses as a means to revitalize Slovak business and as a way to strengthen the Christian Slovak middle class. Due to a general lack of capital in Slovak hands, the liquidation of Jewish businesses served as a handy tool to curb Jewish influence in the economy. More important still, once Jewish businesses ceased to exist, German businessmen could not step in and take over the former Jewish enterprises. In this way, the government expected to strengthen the position of Slovaks in their newly established state against the undesirable penetration of the German element.²³¹ But apart from these benefits that liquidation offered to the newly established authoritarian regime, the liquidation of Jewish businesses also helped to curb another undesirable phenomenon – assistance to Jews by Slovaks. In other words, liquidation of Jewish businesses prevented cases where Slovaks willingly resorted to aryanization as a means of shielding Jews from further persecution. Liquidation of Jewish businesses basically secured peace of mind for those who viewed Slovak-Jewish interaction in the economic field as being harmful to the state's interests.

Returning to the First Aryanization Law, it introduced both forced and voluntary aryanization. It was specifically voluntary aryanization that received much criticism from German bureaucrats since it could be used to help and even rescue some Jewish businessmen. Voluntary aryanization, in which a Jewish business owner reached an agreement with another party of his own choice,

²³¹ Tönsmeier, *Solidarita a pomoc*, 17.

preceded the forced phase of aryanization, in which the aryanizer was selected by the authorities. Voluntary aryanization was based on a mutual written or oral agreement between Jewish and non-Jewish partners who agreed to run the business in tandem. This allowed the aryanizer to learn needed skills and get acquainted with the running of the business *with the help* of the former Jewish owner. According to German ambassador Hans Bernard in Bratislava this practice indicated how disoriented the Slovaks were regarding the “Jewish question.”²³² As Bernard’s argument went, the law which allowed “Aryans” to learn the skills and practices of Jewish businessmen was destructive to the “Aryan element” since it was precisely Jewish practices that the law intended to eliminate from the Slovak economy in the first place.

The participation of non-Jewish partners in voluntary aryanization required at least 51% of the capital. The non-Jewish partner was obliged to buy his participation in the Jewish business by paying it off in the form of periodical instalments – half of his annual profit of the aryanized business.²³³ German ambassador Bernard was concerned that aryanization that transferred merely 51% of the former Jewish business to Slovak Christians would encourage Jews to carry on their business practices “under cover” in an unrestricted manner. The Aryan businessman, Bernard worried, would be turned into a mere pawn without any influence on Jewish business whatsoever.²³⁴ But regardless of German and Slovak political leadership worries about the impact of voluntary aryanization on the economy, eventually only 35 Jewish businesses were aryanized in this fashion in

²³² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 4, 48.

²³³ Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 57.

²³⁴ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 4, 49.

1939, the first year of the existence of the Slovak state.²³⁵ It was only over the course of 1940 that more applications for voluntary aryanization were submitted to the central authorities.

As was already mentioned above, voluntary aryanization was expressive of the cautious approach of the Slovak government to the transfer of Jewish businesses due to insufficient financial capital in Slovak hands and a general effort to ward off the increasing influence of Germans in the Slovak economy. But the mechanism of a cautious transfer of Jewish businesses to Slovak hands also opened the possibility for resistance to the aryanization process. Voluntary aryanization in general was thus marked with an inner contradiction: it seemingly straightforwardly presented a new opportunity for nationalization of the Slovak economy but also provided a means by which covert resistance to “slovakization” of Jewish businesses could be effectively mounted.

Some Jewish businessmen sought to utilize the regime’s own weapon, i.e. the First Aryanization Law, as their own protective shield and approached “voluntary” aryanization as a “lesser evil.” A timely approach to a suitable aryanizer was seen by many as a protective shield against further encroachments of the government on lives of Jews. From the perspective of the victims, voluntary aryanization offered a chance to negotiate the conditions of the transfer with a certain degree of mutual trust. This was an important element since voluntary aryanization was often built on existing social relations and therefore could serve

²³⁵ Eudovít Hallon, *Majetkové pomery židovskej komunity na Slovensku po roku 1938 – Historický ústav SAV*, an unpublished report submitted to the governmental office in 2002. The report eventually led to the decision of the government to pay 850 million Sk to the Central union of Jewish religious communities in Slovakia as a compensation for Jewish property confiscated by the state during the war. The sum represented 10% of the estimated value of the wartime Jewish property.

as a means of protection of Jewish businessmen even in the long run. Many Jewish entrepreneurs grasped what was at stake and made important decisions to protect their interests. For example, in Trnava, where almost 40% of businesses belonged to Jews, twenty nine Jewish businessmen initiated their own search for a “suitable” Aryan business partner willing to purchase at least 51% of the business’ share, thus transforming the former Jewish business into a Christian-Jewish enterprise.²³⁶ Within the context of Banská Štiavnica, out of 18 applications for voluntary aryanization 11 were marked as suspicious cases of shielding Jews in the assessments of the district small business association.²³⁷ In sum, The First Aryanzation Law introduced an unintended result: both Slovaks and the persecuted Jews were in search of a “suitable candidate,” each for reasons of their own. Slovaks were searching for a Jew who would be willing to proceed with the process of voluntary aryanization as a means of easy profit, whereas some Jews were in search for an aryanizer, ideally a guardist or Ludak who would shield them from further persecution. But the situation of Jews was often complicated due to competition and rivalry among Slovak candidates for aryanization.

Often a struggle between two potential aryanizers over the same Jewish business significantly undermined certain protective means offered to Jewish businessmen by a voluntary form of aryanization. For example, Aron Kastner in the postwar trial of Ľudovít Križan described how he struggled to find a “good

²³⁶ Veronika Slnková, “Arizácie židovských podnikov v Trnave ako súčasť tzv. riešenia židovskej otázky v rokoch 1938 – 1945,” *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 9 (2001), 187. According to the 1938 census, there were 2, 481 inhabitants in Trnava. Jews represented 10.5% of the town’s population. Jewish businesses represented 39.5% of all businesses in Trnava.

²³⁷ Macko, “Arizácia židovského majetku v okrese Banská Štiavnica,” 86.

guardist” willing to aryanize his business. Kastner testified that after a long search he finally succeeded. Following the mutual agreement between Kastner and guardist Jan Floch in August 1940, Floch applied for 60% aryanization of Kastner’s business at the CEO, which had been responsible for the transfer of Jewish businesses to Slovaks since September 1940. But the deal to protect Kastner via voluntary aryanization was soon challenged by another potential candidate for aryanization Rudolf Moravčík. Moravčík tried to win Kastner over for voluntary aryanization by assuring him that he, Moravčík, was a “poriadny človek” - a “decent man.” But as soon as Kastner, who was already protected by “his own” aryanizer-guardist, declined Moravčík’s offer, Rudolf Moravčík transformed from a “decent man” into a very persistent man. Refusing to give up, Moravčík applied to the CEO for 100% aryanization of Kastner’s business, hoping to remove the guardist Floch from the game. Kastner, threatened by Moravčík’s radical move, immediately countered the pressure by asking Floch to proceed with 100% aryanization of his business.²³⁸ In order to win the case both Moravčík and Kastner resorted to bribing the CEO’s representative. Eventually it was Rudolf Moravčík who was given Kastner’s prosperous wholesale business in Bratislava as a governmental trustee, a function that was a step towards the later aryanization of Kastner’s business. Inexperienced in business, Moravčík seriously hampered the running of Kastner’s firm. More important, Kastner’s position in his former business became dependent on Moravčík’s will. Overall this Jewish businessman’s effort to safeguard his business through voluntary aryanization by

²³⁸ŠOBA, fond KSB TK, č. 680/41, Ludovit Križan a spol.

the guardist Floch was unsuccessful as were his hopes for being shielded from further antisemitic policies.

Mutual denunciations were an inevitable part of the fierce competition between aryanizers. Informing on the competition in the aryanization process represented an essential component of the power mechanics that had a far reaching impact on Jewish victims' rescue. Denunciations of co-applicants for aryanization strived to taint rivals' credibility in the eyes of the regime by bringing attention to rival applicants' "Magyarophilism," "Czechness" or membership in former non-Ludak political parties and Czechoslovak organizations. At the same time informers strived to bring to attention their own qualities and accomplishments that supposedly benefited the Slovak national cause. For example, in order to further boost his chances of aryanizing a Jewish firm, Štefan Macko drew attention to his status as an elderly, poor and loyal Slovak citizen, i.e. as a representative of the marginal social strata that propaganda promised to reward by the means of aryanization of Jewish property and businesses. Being a father of four,²³⁹ Macko was unable to accumulate sufficient capital for a full aryanization. He underscored this fact in his letter and pledged the Ministry to "help one Christian family to be independent" and hence support "Slovak" business.²⁴⁰ In an effort to present themselves as promising aryanizers, the candidates often highlighted their "Slovakness" and poor social status as a result of Magyar, Czech or Jewish "oppression." Traditionalism, love of family and respectability were often emphasized as proof of one's adherence to

²³⁹ Other document refers to Macko as father of three children.

²⁴⁰ SNA, ÚHÚ, kartón č. 330, zákl.č. 3430 –II/B.

state policies. It was crucial to impress lower bureaucrats, since key decisions about these candidates' potential were already formed on a regional level. Regional bureaucrats' assessment of the candidates for the aryanization was directly provided to business associations, the party or central offices. The decisions of the bureaucrats in higher offices about the suitability of the candidates for the aryanization were heavily influenced by the recommendations of the lower regional bureaucrats. Therefore, if the reference of regional administrators raised any doubts of higher bureaucrats about the applicant's attitude to Slovak ethno-national policies the applicant's chances for aryanization were shattered. Such was the case of J. Ivanička from Zlaté Moravce whose application for voluntary aryanization was repeatedly declined by the district business association due to suspicions that the aryanization would serve as a cover for the former Jewish owner. The regional secretariat of the HSPP also refused to recommend Ivanička's application since he failed to contribute to the Slovak national cause and help Slovaks in Hungary.²⁴¹

Archival documents also revealed cases when Jewish businessmen tried voluntary aryanization only after they faced a threat of full aryanization of their business. Ružena Vogelová owned a fashion business in Piešťany which attracted the attention of several Slovaks from the earliest stages of the aryanization process. When she found out that Anna Klimešová applied for 100% of Vogelová's business on 3 September 1940 Vogelová sought Klimešová out and tried to win her over for a voluntary mode of aryanization which would allow Vogelová to have a say in the running of her own business and hence a certain

²⁴¹ Fiamová, "Arizácia židovského majetku," 47.

protection from further antisemitic measures. But Klimešová categorically refused such an offer and even informed the central authorities about Vogelová's effort to settle the matter without their involvement. In order to prevent 100% aryanization of her business, Vogelová managed to find a more willing Slovak candidate for voluntary aryanization, Štefan Gogol, whom the district HG officer described as a "completely reliable" individual from a family of long time supporters of the HSPP. Štefan Gogol agreed to a formal transfer of 60% of Vogelová's business. Klimešová responded by applying for a concession on Vogelová's business despite the fact that the final verdict of the CEO in the matter of its aryanization had not been yet made. Both parties also immediately intervened with the central authorities to win the case: Vogelová wrote a letter to the Ministry of the Economy, while Klimešová intervened at the CEO. In her letter to the CEO, Klimešová insisted that the CEO step in and prevent the Vogelová-Gogol voluntary transfer. On the other, hand, Vogelová and Gogol tried to persuade the Ministry of the Economy about their "serious intent" to proceed with the 60:40 transfer of Vogelová's business. But besides an effort to persuade the Ministry about the seriousness of the transfer, Gogol did not offer any persuasive arguments. From the CV he submitted it was clear that he lacked any experience whatsoever in the conduct of business. Although Gogol spoke Slovak, German, Hungarian and also some English he was currently unemployed. In the past he had worked as a doorman in the Thermia hotel for nine years, as an upholsterer for two years and as a painter for another two years.²⁴² Such a profile perhaps did

²⁴² SNA, Fond PPO VII Reštitučný, kartón č. 326, zákl. č.: 9746, Heslo: Vogelová Ružena, Piešťany, obchod s módnym tovarom.

not appeal to the Ministry that was mostly in the hands of moderates calling for a cautious approach in matters of aryanization. Anna Klimešová eventually won the case and aryanized Vogelová's business. This was result of several key factors: first, in September 1940 the regime clearly preferred 100% aryanization, which represented a shift of the regime to a radical approach to aryanization policies under the auspices of the CEO. Second, in 1940 the Ministry of the Economy, mostly represented by the moderates, basically turned into an obedient executor of the CEO's directives.²⁴³ The CEO in the hands of Augustín Morávek, in fact, represented the supreme arbiter in the matters of aryanization. Historians Ľudovít Halon, Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský came to the conclusion that the interventions of the central institutions, including the Ministry of the Economy, in matters of aryanization rarely met a positive response from Augustín Morávek's CEO.²⁴⁴ That the Ministry of the Economy did not manage to win the case for Vogelová and Gogol is therefore not surprising. Third, Klimešová seemed to utilize informal channels since she applied for a concession on Vogelová's business prior to the CEO making a final decision. Klimešová probably played a game which made her confident about her ultimate success. The nature of available documents does not offer information on how Vogelová managed to survive the deportation of 1942 and 1944. But we know for sure that she survived the war and applied for the restitution of her fashion business after the war.²⁴⁵

When the authorities realized that the voluntary form of transfer served to shield Jews, a new administrative practice was applied. As a number of archival

²⁴³ Halon et al., "Pozícia Ústredného hospodárskeho úradu," 56.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ ŠABpT, OŽS Piešťany, kartón č. 15, zákl.č. 754/46 prez., Predmet: Zoznamy živností okresu.

documents reveal, responsible offices gave preference to those applicants who suggested 100% aryanyzation of Jewish businesses on their own initiative. Full aryanyzation of Jewish business met the governmental goal to remove the “Jewish force from ... national-economic life.”²⁴⁶ For example, in Zlaté Moravce many applications for voluntary aryanyzation were initiated by Jewish businessmen in the course of the summer and fall of 1940, i.e. following the radicalization of antisemitic policy after the fateful Salzburg events. The takeover of crucial governmental posts by the radicals persuaded even the last holdouts among Jewish businessmen that voluntary aryanyzation was still a better solution to their predicament than a forced form of aryanyzation imposed by the regime. But central offices declined many of these applications, suspecting that they worked in favor of Jews. In this regard Fiamová brings to light the case of J. Valach, who applied for voluntary aryanyzation of A. Vogel’s butchery in Zlaté Moravce. Suspecting that it might serve as a cover for Vogel, the authorities rejected Valach’s application. But soon they suggested to Valach to proceed with a full aryanyzation of Vogel’s butcher shop. It seems that Valach failed to clear suspicions about the nature of the transfer because in May 1940 the authorities suggested Vogel’s butcher shop for liquidation. It was a solution that disallowed any forms of economic resistance to antisemitic policies and hence assistance to Jews.²⁴⁷ From the viewpoint of the regime, either 100% aryanyzation or liquidation of Jewish business represented effective means of both excluding Jews from the Slovak economy and preventing Slovaks from protecting them.

²⁴⁶ Fiamová, “Arizácia židovského majetku,” 43.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Most scholars agree that the Salzburg talks in July 1940 represented “a major event in the evolution of the Slovak state” since it further cemented the dependence of the Slovak state on the Third Reich.²⁴⁸ Yeshayahu Jelinek described the Salzburg Diktat as a political necessity of a temporary nature,²⁴⁹ the essence of which was to replace unreliable Slovak extreme radical “Nástupists,” who kept the interests of Slovakia before those of the Reich, with more loyal Hlinka Guardists.²⁵⁰ An unpopular Vojtech Tuka now combined the powers of prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. The commander of the HG, Alexander Mach, became the minister of the interior, thus combining the powers exercised by Wilhelm Frick and Heinrich Himmler in Nazi Germany. The post-Salzburg political course adopted the Nazi model and its racial criteria under the supervision of a newly arrived “advisor on Jewish questions,” Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny.

Due to the radicalization of antisemitic policies, voluntary aryanization was soon to be viewed as a doubtful process, a business that was out of control of regional and central authorities. Alexander Mach criticized the swindling and cheating of aryanizers and condemned the transfer of Jewish businesses under the First Aryanization Law as mere “hebrejčenie, požidovčenie” - “hebrewization,” “Jewification.” Slovaks assisting Jews were publicly denounced as enemies of the state. According to *Trnavské noviny* Christians and Aryans who intervened in

²⁴⁸ Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Slovakia’s Internal Policy and the Third Reich, August 1940 – February 1941,” *Central European History* 4, no. 3 (1971), 242.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

favour of Jews at central offices in cases of ongoing aryanization were “the dirtiest betrayers of Slovak ideology.”²⁵¹ In the same context, Augustín Morávek the head of the CEO that was in charge of aryanization complained about “hidden or public protectors of Jews” and described them as an “invisible hidden power of Jewry.”²⁵² In a 1941 published collection of aryanization laws Morávek pointed to “... many ‘white Jews’ among us who are more dangerous than Jews themselves. There is a special group of about 600 hebrew-ized individuals ... [i.e. –NP] applicants who asked for the approval of voluntary aryanization agreements.”²⁵³ The cases of assistance to Jews raised concerns among supporters of antisemitic policies on all levels. The nature of voluntary aryanization and the overall liquidation of 229 businesses mostly in the Bratislava region did not satisfy HSPP and HG radicals who called for a new “revolutionary” phase of aryanization in Slovakia.²⁵⁴ The wave of such criticism was soon to be curbed.

Slovak “protectors of Jews” - as propaganda marked them - shielded the Jews from aryanization on various pretexts that were not necessarily rooted in altruism. Many aryanizers, often due to the lack of education, skills and experience, simply refused to assume responsibility for running the newly acquired Jewish businesses. Instead, they preferred convenient regular income from an aryanized enterprise while leaving the management in the hands of the former Jewish owner. Whereas Slovak employers and aryanizers benefited from the implementation of antisemitic policies, their loyalty to the regime’s policies

²⁵¹ Slnková, “Arizácie židovských podnikov v Trnave,” 193.

²⁵² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 155.

²⁵³ Halon et al., “Pozícia Ústredného hospodárskeho úradu,” 18.

²⁵⁴ Macko, “Arizácia židovského majetku v okrese Banská Štiavnica,” 95.

was limited by efforts to protect their very own interests. Once the prosperity of Slovak aryanizers' "new" enterprises was at stake, even the most fervent antisemitic aryanizers resorted to pragmatism and utilitarianism.²⁵⁵ As the available documents reveal, once the newly appointed aryanizers were exposed to the challenge of running the business in the wartime economy, they often resisted the pressure of antisemitic policies, arguing that by keeping Jewish employees they protected the very interests of the state.

But the government soon issued a decree which complicated such practices by aryanizers and put employed Jews in a precarious situation. Decree No. 256/1940 issued on 11 October 1940 introduced work permits for Jewish employees that could be issued only by the CEO. A work permit basically allowed Slovak aryanizers to keep cheap experienced Jewish employees *only with permission* of the state. It served as a means for the central authorities to retain the final word in deciding which Jews were indispensable for running the Slovak economy and which were not, in other words, which Jews would keep their employment in Christian and aryanized businesses and for how long. From the perspective of the persecuted Jews, obtaining a work permit allowed for exemption from deportation in 1942.

But another radical measure that changed the nature of aryanization and encroached on the lives of Jews was yet to come. Four months after the Salzburg events, on 30 November 1940, the government issued decree No. 303 concerning

²⁵⁵ Andrea Jamrichová, "Zmeny v postavení židovskej komunity v okrese Topoľčany počas obdobia Slovenského štátu," *Česko-Slovenská historická ročenka* (2001), 132; Lipscher, "The Jews of Slovakia," 211.

Jewish businesses. Known as the Second Aryanization Law, it did not allow a voluntary form of aryanization, although a partial involvement of Jews as a “temporary specialized workforce” in the conduct of the aryanized business was possible.²⁵⁶ Compared to the First Aryanization Law, decree No. 303 truly got aryanization going. In essence, the Second Aryanization Law unleashed a mass transfer of “all forms of Jewish property ranging from factories to items of personal use.”²⁵⁷ The radicalism of the Law was reflected not only in the scale of control over the very existence of Jewish economic subjects but also in the speed of the transfer. More important, the CEO became the sole institution in charge of the ultimate “question of being or not being of Jewish economic subjects of all sorts.”²⁵⁸

The pinnacle of the effort to regulate the number of employed Jews in the Slovak economy was decree No. 256/1940 issued on 11 October 1940. With the exception of Jews employed in the state sector, decree No. 256/1940 allowed Jews to retain their jobs only if they became holders of so called work permits issued by the CEO. Although the employment of Jews was already curbed by the First Aryanization Law, economic subjects maintained the right to regulate the number of Jews in their businesses. Decree No. 256/1940 deprived Slovak employers of this right in favour of the CEO. This measure basically situated all economic subjects employing Jews into the “submissive role of applicants”

²⁵⁶ Hana Klamková, “Slovakizácia židovského majetku: process zainteresovania slovenskej spoločnosti na tzv. židovskej otázke,” in *Arizácie*, eds. Eduard Nižňanský, Ján Hlavinka (Bratislava: Katedra všeobecných dejín, Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2010), 123.

²⁵⁷ Halon et al., “Pozícia Ústredného hospodárskeho úradu,” 13.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

seeking permission from the powerful CEO.²⁵⁹ The head of the CEO, Augustín Morávek, publicly threatened employers of Jews that “the personal reliability of the owner of a business with a relatively large number of Jewish employees, or where Jews hold the great majority of important jobs, is extremely doubtful, and hence there is a strong interest in proceeding against such employers.”²⁶⁰ Despite these threats, by 15 November 1940, i.e. within a single month after the decree was released, the CEO received about 13,000 requests for work permits especially for Jewish business representatives in industry, agricultural specialists, qualified workers and artisans.²⁶¹ The hunt of many aryanizers for work permits for their Jewish employees in essence challenged the principal goal of antisemitic policies – the exclusion of Jews from the economy. For example, after careful comparison of available documents, Katarína Psicová concluded that within the context of Piešťany, Jews remained a part of running the economy “until February 1944 or even longer.”²⁶² That the situation in Piešťany raised concerns amongst the authorities is evident from the May 1943 report of the Ministry of the Interior. According to the report many Jews were protected by “Aryan” firms who “found these Jews indispensable for the running of the business.”²⁶³

Those Slovaks who aimed to obtain work permits for Jews regardless of Morávek’s threats faced a lengthy, exhausting and complicated process which could be easily disrupted at any stage on the bureaucratic ladder. Regional notaries received the applications for work permits which, after being supplied by

²⁵⁹ Halon et al., “Pozícia Ústredného hospodárskeho úradu,” 101.

²⁶⁰ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 132.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Katarína Psicová, *Židia v Piešťanoch, diplomová práca* (Nitra, Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa), 77.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

the comments and views of the regional HG commander and HSPP leader, were further submitted to district offices. District offices had to collect information about the Jewish person's job and its importance in developing the Slovak economy. In particular, district offices investigated "*nenahraditeľnosť*" and "*nepostrádateľnosť Žida,*" i.e. to what degree a particular Jew is irreplaceable and indispensable in the labour market and to what degree his profession posed a threat to "Aryan" businesses. This information had to be complemented by an evaluation from the state police office, after which the application was sent to the Ministry of the Interior for a final decision.²⁶⁴ In cases when the Ministry issued a work permit or extended the expiry date of the existing one, Slovak employers had to pay a fee anywhere between 50 to 5000 Ks. If the Ministry declined the request for a work permit, the employer was obliged to fire his Jewish employee within 2-6 weeks depending on the position of the Jewish applicant.²⁶⁵ Losing the job within the context of what was seen as a "Slovak national market" dangerously increased the chances for Jews to be either transferred to labour camps or deported during the first wave of 1942 deportations. A work permit, however, did not guarantee its holder's employment in the future. Point number 3 of the permit stated the expiry date as well as contained a note that the permit "...can be withheld at any time."²⁶⁶ Work permits allowed Jews to temporarily maintain their jobs and receive at least part of their original salaries, allowing them to provide their families with the basics, although with many restrictions and obstacles.

²⁶⁴ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 217, zákl. č.15458/41prez., Pracovné povolenia pre židov.

²⁶⁵ Slovák, č. 247, 17. Októbra 1940.

²⁶⁶ SNA, fond ÚHÚ, č. 55600/2957, pracovné povolenie.

Slovak employers had to provide sound and reasonable arguments on all rungs of the bureaucratic ladder. Naturally, historians cannot expect to find expressions of altruistic rhetoric within the context of these written interventions. Even if altruistic motives lay behind such interventions, they were carefully hidden and sealed within the semiotics of the contemporary political language and remained invisible to the sharpest eye of these documents' readers. As the available documents show, Slovak interveners usually underlined the gravity of their businesses' economic situation and reminded the state about the strategic importance of their enterprise during times of war. Slovak employers further warned the state not to undermine the productivity of their businesses by excluding its experienced workers and specialists who happened to be Jews. Similarly as in the case of Independent Croatia "the sudden dismissal [of Jewish employers] led to chaos, business failures and unemployment."²⁶⁷ These were precisely the arguments that many aryanizers in Slovakia adduced in their effort to safeguard the cheap Jewish labour and entrepreneurship in "their" businesses.

Playing the "Slovak national card" proved to be an efficient means to reach a favourable reply from the central authorities. A collective intervention of aryanizers in Kežmarok in favour of their Jewish employees at the Ministry of the Interior represents a remarkable example. In April 1942 thirteen aryanizers complained that none of the Jews in their aryanized businesses were issued work permits.²⁶⁸ Similarly as in many cases of aryanization none of these aryanizers had the skills and knowledge needed to manage aryanized Jewish businesses. In

²⁶⁷ Esther Gitman, "The Rescue of Jewish Physicians in the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), 1941–1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 23, no. 1, (2009), 78.

²⁶⁸ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 250 – 251.

their letter they candidly admitted the lack of desired skills and complained that within the last year they were not able to run their aryanized firms without the help of the previous Jewish owners. “If the most important Jews-specialists – who cannot be replaced due to the lack of a Christian work force – are not left with us, the existence of our businesses will be in jeopardy and many of us will be ruined financially.”²⁶⁹ As a result “Slovak business and Slovak industry will disappear from Kežmarok” and “another nationality” [read the Magyar nationality- NP] will take over business in the town. “We rightfully defend ourselves in the interest of the Slovak cause.”²⁷⁰ Ironically, in order to protect the “Slovak cause” from the “Magyar threat” these Slovaks fought to safeguard “their Jews,” which propaganda and government routinely branded as “Magyarophiles.” These aryanizers also reprimanded the government that foreign [read German – NP], rather than Slovak interests dictate the issuing of work permits for Jews. Aryanizers from Kežmarok made it clear that they did not stand on the side of the erstwhile Jewish owners. However, the need for skills and knowledge that they themselves had yet to learn required these aryanizers to intervene in favour of “their” Jews.²⁷¹ It is not clear if the Ministry of the Interior proceeded with the case and issued work permits for the Jews in Kežmarok’s businesses. The brief note at the end of the document dated from 10 October 1942 informs us: “Further proceedings of the authorities [in this case] are not required.”²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

Highlighting the strategic importance of an aryanized business in order to obtain a work permit was also utilized by aryanizer Václav Rýpal. Rýpal applied for a work permit for a former Jewish owner of the Vrtižery brick factory Pavol Grün from Považská Bystrica. Rýpal insisted that issuing a work permit for a “true specialist in this area” is “in the public interest.”²⁷³ As the sole producer of bricks in the town, Rýpal faced the pressure of increased demand for “his” products. Rýpal further warned the authorities that hampering production in his aryanized business would jeopardize the construction of strategic objects under the auspices of the local “Zbrojovka” (arms factory) as well as the construction of 58 family houses and schools in the region. Rýpal admitted that he lacked knowledge and skills in this area and promised to acquire the needed skills within six months.²⁷⁴ Although Rýpal’s request was backed up by the district association of businessmen in Považská Bystrica, it is not clear if the Ministry issued the work permit for Grün or not.

A petition of 104 workers to keep a reliable and conscientious professional Jewish watchmaker Vojtech Stromf in his business further undermines the notion of the “passive” approach of Slovaks to the persecuted Jews in 1942. This group of mostly railway workers refused to comply with the decision of the authorities simply because they refused to walk the long distance to neighbouring villages to ask some “stranger” to fix their watches. This case attests not only to an effort to

²⁷³ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 48.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

protect one's own interests from the government's encroachments, but possibly also a collective attempt to rescue a persecuted Jew from deportation.²⁷⁵

Given the difficulty of obtaining a work permit, many Slovak aryanizers simply continued to employ Jews without the permit or did not bother to renew expired ones. Such practices, if known among the public, might have served as a means of settling unresolved issues within the community, which frequently resulted in a wave of anonymous denunciations. Hlohovec, famous for the endless incoming stream of anonymous letters to the presidential office, provides an example.²⁷⁶ An anonymous letter denounced "White Jews" Jozef Švikruha, Eugen Burián, Albert Mutkovič and Michal Cibul'a from Hlohovec because they allegedly employed Jews without permits. But the investigations proved negative, and it was concluded that the anonymous letter was written by a hostile individual who aimed to settle accounts with his enemies.²⁷⁷

A continuing wave of anonymous letters from all corners of Slovakia motivated the Ministry of the Interior to initiate a "strict revision" of the issued work permits within eight days beginning 20 June 1942.²⁷⁸ The revision often revealed cases in which Slovaks continued to employ Jews without work permits.²⁷⁹ On the other hand, a report about the revision of work permits from Vrbové dated 1 July 1942 informs us that all employers of Jews in this village did have the required permits. "Moreover, each of them has not one, but two

²⁷⁵ Miloš Žiak, Ladislav Snopko, Eduard Nižňanský, eds., *Park ušľachtilých duší*, vol.2, (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2008), 90.

²⁷⁶ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 193.

²⁷⁷ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 113, zákl.č. 1760/42, prez. Židia – biely v Hlohovci, anonymné udanie.

²⁷⁸ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 98, zákl. číslo 781/1942 prez. Heslo: Židia – ponechanie vo verejnom kultovom živote podľa zák č. 68/42 Sl.z. – o vyst'ahovaní Židov.

²⁷⁹ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 217, zákl. č. 15458/41 adm. , Pracovné povolenie pre Židov - úprava.

‘legitimácie’ [various official documents that allowed Jews to obtain a work permit - NP].”²⁸⁰ This brings us to the conclusion that both “Aryans” and Jews, for various reasons, worked together and used all available means to protect Jews. In the report of the revision we also read that all employers reapplied for 1942 work permits for the Jews, but as of the revision none of them had received any reply from the central offices. A similar reluctance to give up Jewish employees can be traced for the conscription of Jews to labour camps in 1941 and 1942. The Ministry of the Interior was informed that 22 Slovak employers from Michalovce, 38 from Prešov, 19 from Poprad, 10 from Stropkov, 11 from Žilina etc. refused to release their Jewish employees to labour camps.²⁸¹

The situation in former Jewish businesses deteriorated fast. Even the Ministry of Finances was alarmed by the catastrophic impact of aryanization and warned central offices that the expected benefits of the aryanization “will not cover expenses for the deportation of Jewish inhabitants.”²⁸² Aryanizers soon became the most unpopular group in society. The fact that some aryanizers sought to retain previous Jewish owners and protect them from the 1942 deportation often elicited criticism from the public. After Viktória Zelenayová aryanized the business of the Grünfelds in Vrbové, she pragmatically kept the former owners. Soon, Zelenayová’s reluctance to give up her Jews sparked a wave of protests in the Vrbové community. The protests even accelerated to physical threats as a result of which Zelenayová asked for official protection of the house by gendarmes. But local HG and gendarmes were reluctant to help her. Instead they

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Dzugas, "Postavenie Židovského Obyvateľstva," 376.

²⁸² Ibid., 296 – 297.

put pressure on Vrbové officials to get rid of the Grünfelds from the aryanized business. In their letter to the Vrbové office, HG and gendarme representatives made a sarcastic comment about Viktória Zelenayová. In their eyes, Zelenayová represented the kind of aryanizer who “will not be able to lead the business independently even in five years.”²⁸³

The aryanization process had encountered too many obstacles to satisfy governmental goals. District offices constantly complained about aryanizers who were “...morally and financially incapable, they do not know what they want and they obstruct aryanization.”²⁸⁴ Even the leaders of the HSPP county organizations described 1941 aryanization in bleak terms. They complained that “only unworthy individuals who every first day of the month come to collect the money. ... Enemies of the party, criminals and ‘individuals completely unsuitable for aryanization either because of their character or incompetence’ took over Jewish businesses.”²⁸⁵ Neither changes in the leadership of the aryanization process nor the institutional subordination of the CEO to the Ministry of the Economy helped to thwart the chaos and catastrophe that aryanization of Jewish businesses had unleashed. The second leader of the CEO, Ľudovít Paškovič,²⁸⁶ complained that “aryanizers neglected their duties and approached aryanized businesses as a convenient source of income.”²⁸⁷ Msgr. Ján Pöstényi, a member of the State Council, complained that national idealism had long disappeared from Slovak towns. Instead, it seemed that aryanizers were controlling the Ludak party and

²⁸³ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 49.

²⁸⁴ Kamenec, “Hlavné rysy arizačného procesu,” 293.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 296.

²⁸⁶ Ľudovít Paškovič took part in the initial phase of the implementation of the voluntary form of aryanization in 1940.

²⁸⁷ Kamenec, “Hlavné rysy arizačného procesu,” 296.

movement. More importantly, Pöstényi criticized those aryanizers who intervened in favour of former Jewish owners and complained that instead of the “healthy economic conditions” that aryanization aimed to create, the state created a class of “Žid-nostníkov” instead of “živnostníkov,” i.e. Jewish entrepreneurs instead of Slovak Christian entrepreneurs.²⁸⁸ Such criticism could be traced also later on, after the first deportation train with Jewish victims left Slovakia for Auchwitz in March 1942. In May 1942 *Trnava* newspapers denounced Slovak aryanizers as “weaklings who failed in both running the aryanized business and thinking on their own once the Jews departed. They cannot imagine running their business without a Jew... The incubate period of partnership between Jews and our businessmen is over, you aryanizers, take responsibility for the business on your own shoulders....”²⁸⁹

Such criticism of aryanizers’ behaviour apart, the general public was disappointed that the government failed to keep its promises. Instead of transferring Jewish property and businesses to the socially weak, war invalids and the families of dead soldiers, only a few prominent individuals profited from the transfer. As a result, the public ignored the government’s calls for a revitalization of the aryanization process aiming to fix past mistakes. According to a June 1943 report of the Centre for State Security the public was disappointed with the way aryanization was implemented and thus had lost its faith in the regime.²⁹⁰ During one of the sessions of the State Council it was stated that national idealism over the approach to the “Jewish question” has disappeared and that “...the Jewish

²⁸⁸ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 177

²⁸⁹ Slnková, “Arizácie židovských podnikov v Trnave,” 197.

²⁹⁰ Kamenec, “Hlavné rysy arizačného procesu,” 297 – 298.

question is only a matter of aryanizers and their interests.”²⁹¹ After observing the situation in the CEO for a period of ten months, the German advisor for the Jewish question in Slovakia, Dieter Wisliceny, came to the conclusion that despite some progress in aryanization “...one could hardly speak about a real exclusion of Jews from economic and political life.” In his view, most of cases of aryanization were mere compromises: “...none of the men I’ve met so far sincerely believe in the Slovak state and correctness of its policy.”²⁹²

Aryanization of Jewish Businesses as a Grey Zone of Rescue – Case Studies

The size and the importance of Jewish enterprise for the Slovak economy represented an important factor in the protection of its Jewish owners. In this regard, Karl Schleunes noted that “the larger and more complex the Jewish firm, the greater were its powers of resistance.”²⁹³ Schleunes noted that due to the complex nature of some Jewish firms in Germany, its systematic aryanization was pursued only in 1938.²⁹⁴ But according to Raul Hilberg “the tendency [of Jewish businesses – NP] to hold out or to give in was not a measure of size.”²⁹⁵ Hilberg marked big Jewish businesses as “tempting morsels” that, quite contrary to Genschel’s view, arrayed greater German forces against them.²⁹⁶ As far as the

²⁹¹ Kameneč, “Changes in the Attitude of the Slovak Population,” 332.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 332.

²⁹³ Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy Toward German Jews, 1933-1939*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 145.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁹⁵ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 60.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Slovak context is concerned, the following case studies indicate that bigger firms might yield a more complex terrain of resistance to aryanization. Connections with leading politicians and influential individuals or purposeful fragmentation of a big enterprise by means of multiple voluntary aryanizations represented ways to protect Jewish businessmen.

The following case study of the aryanization of the “Trikota” firm in Banská Štiavnica presents an example in which Christian shareholders safeguarded their Jewish business partners in order to protect their economic interests. The aryanization of their Jewish partners’ share aimed to shield Trikota from being managed by someone from outside lacking any relevant professional experience whatsoever. Trikota’s Christian co-owners were concerned that inexperienced aryanizers would have jeopardized the firm’s productivity. Christian owners held off the pressure of unwelcome candidates for 100% aryanization. It was only later that tension between the Christian and Jewish partners emerged, thus shifting the nature of protection of Jewish enterprise to a different level.

In March 1940 Ján Löwy, Vojtech Schultz and Jozef Slugeň established a firm that produced knitted garments. Whereas Schultz and Slugeň’s share in the business was 30% each, Jewish businessman Ján Löwy, the founder of Trikota, owned 40% of the firm. But soon this enterprise was exposed to outside pressure when a stranger applied for the aryanization of Löwy’s share in 1941. In order to protect the newly established enterprise from the encroachment of an inexperienced stranger, Dr. Jozef Slugeň and Vojtech Schultz made a decision to

aryanize Ján Löwy's share. Beginning January 1942 Löwy's participation in the firm was officially nullified and his share was split between Dr. Slugeň (55%) and Schultz (45%). But Slugeň and Schultz's takeover of Trikota served as a cover. According to an unofficial mutual agreement between Slugeň, Schultz and Löwy, it was Löwy who continued to be the sole primary owner of the firm.²⁹⁷ Whereas Löwy possessed the knowledge and skills to run Trikota, neither of Löwy's partners was qualified to lead the business on this scale. Despite existing antisemitic policies Slugeň and Schultz decided to intervene at the CEO with an aim to acknowledge Löwy as an official partner of Trikota. Such a step would shield Löwy from the impact of several antisemitic decrees. In their letter to the CEO dated January 1942, Dr. Slugeň and Schultz described Löwy as the "soul of all [Trikota-NP] enterprises and absolutely indispensable."²⁹⁸ They described Löwy as one of the best specialists in the production of knitted garments Slovakia had ever had. They warned the CEO that the existence of Trikota depended on Löwy. Slugeň and Schultz argued that the dependence of this mountainous region on industrial production made Trikota vital for the running of the regional economy. Trikota represented the sole source of employment for local women. Dr. Slugeň and Schultz buttressed their cause by mobilizing wide support from public figures, party members, offices and the Craft Union. Slugeň and Schultz emphasized that Löwy had founded the firm with his own resources at a time when other Jews withdrew from investments in the Slovak economy. Therefore, their argument went, it was ethical to recognize Löwy as a member of the Trikota

²⁹⁷ SNA, fond PPO VII, kartón č. 218 – 4991.

²⁹⁸ ŠABB, fond OŽS BŠ, kartón č. 48, 1356. 1941.

enterprise. The indispensability of Löwy's knowledge, experience and skills was connected with the public interest and the socio-economic wellbeing of the region. Slugeň and Schultz's arguments were effective. The CEO eventually issued permission for Löwy to be employed in the firm as an "advisor in business and production related matters."²⁹⁹ Löwy was also exempted from the impact of several antisemitic laws by the decision of President Jozef Tiso in December 1942. The presidential exemption and his status of advisor secured him an official monthly salary of 1500 Ks, which was higher than the average monthly payment of workers in the firm, i.e. 1030 Ks. The intervention of his business partners thus proved to be crucial to Löwy's rescue from the 1942 deportations.

The owners of another business of knitted garments tried to protect themselves by making a deal with two aryanizers of German origin with whom they had previously established a positive relationship. Alexander Löwy (possibly a relative of Ján Löwy from the previous case study) was a co-owner of the firm Müller at al. which he established with Jozef Müller in 1937. On 30 August 1940, a new partner of German origin, Juraj Shäck, whose wife was Jewish, joined the firm.³⁰⁰ But in August 1941 Alexander Löwy also asked his very good old friend Jozef Krippner, a painter and a member of the DP who once sympathized with the social democrats, to rescue his business from being aryanized by Weisgärber, another candidate for the aryanization of his business. Weisgärber, who had already aryanized the firm Schindler et al., aimed to merge two prosperous businesses. In an effort to prevent Weisgärber's plans Alexander Löwy offered his

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Martin Macko, "Arizácia židovského majetku v okrese Banská Štiavnica," 99.

friend Krippner a permanent business partnership during and after the war if he agreed to protect Löwy via the fictitious aryanization of his business' share.³⁰¹ In addition, Löwy also mediated the support of a prominent figure in the region, Jankovič, a priest and the head of the local HSPP in Banská Štiavnica. It seems that Krippner had mixed feelings about his involvement in shielding Löwy. As a DP member, Krippner was concerned that the matter would be brought to light. At the same time, he might have been flattered by a new sense of competence – feeling that one has the capacity or confidence to alter events.³⁰² Although there is a great deal of silence over dental technician Juraj Schäck's role in the process, it is clear that the former Jewish owners eventually made two agreements with aryanizers Krippner and Schäck: one official and another private. According to the official agreement, the firm Müller et al., the factory that produced knitted sweaters in Banská Štiavnica, was aryanized by Jozef Krippner and Juraj Schäck. The transfer, dated 19 August 1941, was reflected in the new name of the firm: SVETRO, J. Krippner et al. A 59% share in the firm was aryanized by Krippner and 17% by Schäck; the former Jewish owners Alexander Löwy and Eugen Müller each retained a 12% share in the firm. Eight months later, i.e. in April 1942 both Jewish former owners were officially excluded from running the firm by the decision of the CEO. Krippner and Schäck thus became exclusive partners of the firm "SVETRO."³⁰³ Though officially excluded from management of the firm, Löwy and Müller continued to run the business under cover until 1944 when rebellious Banská Štiavnica succumbed after the defeat of the Slovak National

³⁰¹ SNA, fond PPO (VII. odb.), kartón č. 1573, zákl. č. 85

³⁰² Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*, 60.

³⁰³ SNA, fond PPO (VII. odb.), kartón č. 57, zákl. č. 797.

Uprising. Following their unofficial mutual agreement dated 19 December 1941 Krippner and Schäck's decision over the firm's matters were not to interfere with agreements made by Müller and Löwy. Müller and Löwy even managed to maintain exclusive access to the account in Sedliacka Bank where all the profits from black market transactions of the firm until 1944 were installed in several accounts under various aliases. Müller and Löwy thus maintained access to their bank account at a time when all monetary transactions of Jews were severely limited and closely monitored by the Ministry of Finances and the CEO. Available documents also reveal that Krippner and Schäck registered another enterprise called Terra under their names. It seems that the firm only served as a cover for Müller and Löwy's black market transactions since it existed only on paper. Müller and Löwy's clever conduct of business and participation in the black market considerably increased the profit of the firm from 1.3 million Ks in 1940 to 22.3 million Ks in 1944. Another sign of the steady growth of their business was an increase from 61 employed workers in 1941 to 190 in 1943.³⁰⁴

But according to the documents, the authorities suspected that Krippner and Schäck's aryанизation of Müller at al. might have been a cover for the former Jewish owners. In order to silence investigators, the firm paid 35,000 Ks as an "aryанизation fee." The report of the postwar court confirms that "aryанизers worked hand in hand with former owners Löwy and Müller..."³⁰⁵ The aryанизers, the document claims, were "...more or less pawns." In the words of Krippner at the postwar people's court: "aryанизation was just a cover and hideout for my

³⁰⁴ SNA, fond PPO (VII. odb), kartón č. 57, zákl. č. 797.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

companions, i.e. Löwy and Müller ... several non-Aryans were hiding under my wings.”³⁰⁶

Müller and Löwy did not waste any opportunity to increase their own safety within the context of the antisemitic regime. They both sought baptism in order to obtain a presidential exemption from the 1942 deportation. At this occasion, aryanizers Krippner and Schäck became Müller and Löwy’s godparents, thus establishing even closer ties with the persecuted former owners. But following the baptism of Müller and Löwy in 1943, the relationship between the former Jewish owners and aryanizers rapidly deteriorated. Profits from the black market caused problems between the former owners and fictitious aryanizers. The breaking point was Krippner’s complaints about his meagre monthly salary of 4000 crowns. Although Müller and Löwy eventually raised Krippner’s salary to 6000 crowns, this incident strained their friendship. Krippner complained that the former Jewish owners even called him an embezzler, a fascist and a collaborator. But Eugen Müller and a widow, Valeria Löwy, in a letter supporting their restitution claims after the war provided a different explanation behind the rapid deterioration of their mutual relations. Krippner and Schäck allegedly sold the firm’s products on the black market, thus earning hundreds of thousands of crowns without the consent of Alexander Löwy and Müller.³⁰⁷ Being aware of their aryanizers’ extra business activities Löwy and Müller felt betrayed when Krippner and Schäck asked for an additional raise.

³⁰⁶ SNA, PPO (VII. odb.), kartón č. 1573, zákl. č. 85.

³⁰⁷ SNA, PPO (VII. odb.), kartón č. 57, zákl. č. 797.

Despite the deterioration of mutual relations between the aryanizers and former Jewish owners, the fictitious aryanization helped to safeguard Löwy and Müller from the 1942 deportations. Only following the defeat of the Slovak national uprising were Müller and Löwy forced to leave the firm, in October 1944. Business was still conducted by both aryanizers but it was Furgyik, the former employee and eager adherent of germanization, who was in charge.³⁰⁸ Eugen Müller managed to survive the war, but the events of 1944 were fateful for Alexander Löwy who was murdered by Germans in November 1944. Thus it was only until 1944 that the Jewish owners could utilize financial means and the help of their aryanizers to mitigate the impact of the persecution and avoid the first wave of deportations. With the arrival of the Wehrmacht in Slovakia they were forced into hiding for six months and faced life-threatening situations which proved to be fateful for Löwy.³⁰⁹

It is not surprising that the owners of big Jewish firms attempted to safeguard their enterprises by seeking assistance at the governmental level. Jewish owners of key Slovak businesses often sought protection among prominent political figures. As elsewhere in Europe, Jews in Slovakia complied in advance with the anticipated pressure, a form of response which Hilberg called “anticipatory compliance.”³¹⁰ One should though not forget that what Hilberg refers to as “compliance” was first of all an “anticipatory defence.” Peter Hayes offers some thought on the response of the “other side,” i.e. gentiles whom Jews often approached in their search for protection. Hayes makes us aware that

³⁰⁸ SNA, PPO (VII. odb.), kartón č. 1573, zákl. č. 85.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 62.

“...most people when presented with opportunities or imperatives that they have every imminent or material reason to accept or accede to and only potential or moral grounds to reject, will choose the course of least resistance, internalize the arguments that legitimate it, and balk at admitting that one could or should have done otherwise.”³¹¹ That material interests gave way to corruption on governmental or institutional levels is not surprising. German bureaucrats employed in Slovakia often criticized corruption at the top of the bureaucratic and party ladders in Slovakia since it could be used to protect influential Jewish businessmen. For example, the Jewish businessman Fürst, owner of one of the biggest lumber businesses in Slovakia, sought the protection of the Ministry of the Economy. Fürst approached the Minister of the Economy Gejza Medrický hoping to secure protection for his crucial enterprise. Being aware of the key role of the Fürst business in the Slovak economy, Medrický advised Fürst to proceed with 51% voluntary aryanization. But Fürst objected that such a critical decision should be based on mutual trust between him and a potential aryanizer. Fürst carefully asked Medrický to suggest a trustworthy person for the aryanization of this scale. Medrický did not hesitate and suggested his own sister as the most suitable candidate for 51% aryanization of Fürst’s flourishing business. For Fürst, the participation of Minister Medrický’s family in the voluntary aryanization of his business represented a sufficient guarantee of the protection of his interests which offered peace of mind. Upon mutual agreement, Medrický’s sister was indeed listed in the business registry.³¹² But Medrický’s postwar memoir

³¹¹ Hayes, 19.

³¹² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 4*, 37.

obviously failed to mention the aryanization of Fürst's enterprise. Ironically, Medrický himself was a politician who insisted that government should look after the "personal problem of aryanization" and obstruct efforts of those aryanizers who approached Jewish business as solely a source of income without interfering in the direction of the aryanized enterprise. In the end, it was Medrický who labelled the kind of aryanization in which he personally was involved as the economically and morally undesirable "hebreizácia," i.e. "Hebrew-ization," of the Slovak aryanizer.³¹³

Ludwig Spät, prominent in lumber and a spokesperson for Slovak Jewish entrepreneurs in this industry, tried to protect his interests through multiple voluntary aryanizations by influential political figures. Spät transferred 20% of his business to governmental commissar and MP Teodor Turček, president Jozef Tiso's brother in law. Another 20% was transferred to the hands of Dr. Balko, a prominent figure in business chamber circles and the Ministry of the Economy. Transferring shares to influential Slovaks allowed the firm to be exempted from definition as a "Jewish business." Spät's firm "Industria" was transformed into a Christian business which eventually even supplied the German army.³¹⁴ Available documents do not reveal precisely how Ludwig Spät functioned within the net of newly established relations in his firm.

Pro-forma aryanizers of small Jewish firms had to apply different tactics in order to thwart suspicions of fictitious aryanization. Usually, the only option of pro-forma aryanizers to gain the trust of the regime was to prove their reliability

³¹³ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 2, 37.

³¹⁴ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 4, 37.

and loyalty. There were two efficient strategies: timely aryanization and public demonstration of antisemitic and anti-Magyar sentiments. Timely, i.e. early, aryanization was based on a prompt consensus between two parties to aryanize, sometimes even *prior to* the implementation of the First Aryanization Law. Such anticipatory compliance indicates the extent to which the Slovak policies unleashed fear and anxiety among Jews. Early aryanization as a response to the persecution of Jews is not surprising given the extensive sell-outs of Jewish enterprises in Czechoslovakia prior to the entry of Germans into the area.³¹⁵

The case of the Jewish businessman Pavel Vig represents an example of early aryanization as a means of protection. Concerned about the future, Vig approached Andrej Filadelfi with an offer of 55% aryanization of his business in August 1939, i.e. during the early stages of the aryanization process and eight months before the First Aryanization Law (Law No. 113) was issued in April 1940. Vig hoped that Filadelfi's early aryanization would be interpreted as a sign of his loyalty to the regime and would help divert suspicion about its protective nature. But Vig and Filadelfi's mutual plan was in jeopardy after Filadelfi's 55% aryanization was brought to the attention of the authorities by the daily *Gardista* in March 1941. The author of the article noted that two years after the initiation of the aryanization process, the wholesale store "Vogelhut" was still in Jewish hands and that one could hardly find a trace of the presence of aryanizer Filadelfi in the store. Filadelfi was accused of being "willing" to help "others" for free while neglecting to help his own spouse who slaved in the notary office for the meagre

³¹⁵ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 61.

salary of 1600 Ks.³¹⁶ By playing the gender card, the authorities effectively appealed to public sensibilities. The wellbeing of one's family was seen as a moral reflection of the viability of the ethno-national Slovak state and could be effectively utilized as a counterpoint to assistance and help to Jews. Filadelfi's prestige as a businessman, citizen and, more importantly, as a father and husband was jeopardized in the Zvolen community, where traditional values were paramount. In order to safeguard respect within his own social milieu he had to respond effectively to the accusations published in *Gardista*. Filadelfi therefore wrote a letter to the CEO in which he decisively refuted all accusations of covering for a Jew. He ascribed these "fabrications" to personal grievances of a baptized Jew, the pharmacist Friedrich Haas, about whom Filadelfi once wrote a critical article in the magazine *Štúrov hlas* (Štúr's voice). Haas's intrigues, Filadelfi explained, lay behind the charges of fictitious aryanization. In his defence Filadelfi went even further and called Haas's pharmacy a "breeding nest of evil in Pliešovce and its surrounding area..." and even pointed to the pro-Magyar orientation of the locals. He warned the authorities that "...All Pliešovce's Jews and those who look up to Budapest gather here [in Haas's pharmacy – NP]..."³¹⁷ By employing an anti-Magyar and anti-Jewish perspective in his defence, Filadelfi effectively managed to deflect accusations of shielding a Jew. He even demanded that the name of the article's author be revealed, since he wanted to initiate a prosecution of this person. Filadelfi's claims were eventually backed by the Craft Union in Zvolen which confirmed the "seriousness and

³¹⁶ SNA, fond PPO VII - 735, kartón č. 45.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

veracity” of this particular aryanization: “The targeted aryanization contract is true in every respect ... It is absolutely out of the question here to talk about cover [for a Jew] and another [case of] illegal participation on the part of the former Jewish owners.” In the end, the authorities were persuaded about Filadelfi’s innocence. What followed was 100% aryanization of Vig’s enterprise and the exclusion of Vig from his former business in March 1942. Only the postwar documents of the PPO restitution fund reveal that despite Filadelfi’s defence and his demonstrated hatred of Jews in the above-mentioned document, he, in fact, protected Pavel Vig from the harsh impact of antisemitism by fictitious aryanization.³¹⁸ After the war Filadelfi returned the business to its former owner, thus settling the restitution issue without the authorities’ encroachment. Ľudovít and Pavel Víg confirmed that Andrej Filadelfi’s aryanization was purely fictitious and served as a means of protection of its former owner: “Andrej Filadelfi, as far as our personal relation to him is concerned, was fair to us; he did not cause any harm to us, quite the contrary, he assisted us when we faced difficulties.”³¹⁹ Filadelfi’s case points to what Tela Zasloff described in a simple fashion: rescue of one human equals sacrificing another. Filadelfi opted to protect the Vigs even at the cost of his public attack on Haas. In Zasloff’s view, opting to choose one and neglect to help another was a “heavy and permanent burden for the human mind and heart...at least for the type of human being who became a rescuer.”³²⁰ The available documents, however, do not allow us to judge Filadelfi’s moral take on this dilemma. Within the context of the “grey zone of rescue,” where the

³¹⁸ Ibid., 97.

³¹⁹ SNA, fond PPO VII reštitučný, kartón č. 45, zákl.č. 735, Andrej Filadelfi – Zvolen.

³²⁰ Zasloff, *Rescuer's Story*, 73.

boundaries between collaboration and resistance were hardly detectable, moral choices were usually tainted with shades of grey and black.

As has already been pointed out, persecuted Jewish businessmen often searched for a willing, approachable or even corrupt guardist or Ludak who would act as a shield from the impact of the regime's antisemitic course. Since the aryanizers' attitude to the party and the HG was related to successful aryanization, the behaviour of new members of the party and the HG was closely monitored. Those with a lukewarm attitude to the party's politics risked exclusion from the HSPP's ranks, which, in turn, jeopardized the aryanization process. Such was the case of František Švikruha, who agreed to aryanize the business of Alexander Weinstein from Hlohovec upon Weinstein's initiative. Weinstein believed that Švikruha would be a more consenting and compliant aryanizer than anybody else. Švikruha applied for the membership in the HG to increase his chances for the aryanization of Weinstein's business. But due to his lukewarm ideological worldview the HSPP district office declined to give Švikruha a recommendation for the aryanization of Weinstein's business. Weinstein's hopes that Švikruha would shield him from the further blows of the regime were thus shattered. Although unable to aryanize Weinstein's business, Švikruha was at least appointed as a temporary administrator.³²¹ Given the restricted powers of

³²¹ The newly established Slovak state's economic difficulties prompted calls for strict control over Christian and especially Jewish businesses via the implementation of temporary administrators and governmental trustees, which is generally marked as the initial phase of aryanization in Slovakia. Decree No. 137/1939 which implemented temporary administrators in Jewish businesses initiated the aryanization process. The introduction of temporary administrators represented a higher form of control over Jewish businesses. Apart from a trustee who merely controlled the business and could not encroach into the everyday procedures and transactions, a temporary administrator was entitled to intervene in the running of the business and ensure that its conduct ran in parallel with the interests of the regime. Temporary administrators were to

temporary administrators, he could not provide the desired protection for Weinstein even if Švikruha consented to protect him. At one point Švikruha was prosecuted under the pretext that he had embezzled half million crowns. Although he was eventually cleared of all accusations, Švikruha himself became bitter and after the war he regretted that he ever joined the HSPP and HG.³²² What was the fate of Weinstein following the unsuccessful attempt to find an aryanizer who would shield him? Weinstein became a member of the Jewish Council board in Hlohovec.³²³ His business was liquidated – a fact that placed more obstacles on his own path to rescue.³²⁴ Since Weinstein's name is missing from the list of Jews exempted from deportation in 1944, we can assume that he was deported during either the first or second wave of deportations.³²⁵

Not only the suspicions of the authorities and competition among aryanizers, but also a lukewarm ideological worldview and fear of being publicly mocked, could undermine the protective nature of fictitious aryanization. As a result of such fears, voluntary aryanization of K. Eisenberg's business in dynamite, agricultural machinery and seeds in Zlaté Moravce took a different course. Driven by the belief that cooperation with an aryanizer would be beneficial to his protection, Július Eisenberg tried to recruit Karol Pažitný for a

represent Jewish firms in dealings with authorities and were paid by the Jewish owners. Trustees did not have the right to manipulate the finances or property of Jewish businesses. Their task was to point to any activities and deficiencies that would potentially impair the flourishing of the business and thus endanger the state's economic interests. It was generally assumed that both trustees and temporary administrators would eventually take over Jewish businesses after gaining more experience.

³²² ŠAB, fond OLS Hlohovec, kartón č. 4, zákl.č. TĽud 106/1945, Jozef Švikruha.

³²³ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 133.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

³²⁵ *Ibid.* His name could be found on list B – the list of Jewish men from Hlohovec between 16- 60 years of age.

60% fictitious aryanization of his business. Although Pažitný eventually became a pro-forma aryanizer, Eisenberg's hopes became to crumble some time later when a long-time chairman of the regional HSPP and HG member Karol Valach applied for 100% aryanization of the same business. Pažitný became increasingly concerned that the authorities would find out that the 60% aryanization was to protect Eisenberg. In order to thwart any accusations of assisting Jews, Pažitný immediately refrained from shielding his Jewish partner and even fired Eisenberg from the business. Pažitný's move was applauded by the regional secretary of the HSPP M. Gerdelán who claimed that "finally there is someone who fired a Jew from his business without [100% -NP] aryanization."³²⁶

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to provide an insight into the maneuvering space of Slovaks and Jews within the context of aryanization policies. More specifically, it looked at the capacity of Slovaks to resist aryanization decrees with an aim to challenge the notion of "passive Slovaks." As has been demonstrated, resistance to aryanization decrees displayed various forms and motivations. In the earlier stages of the Slovak state, fictitious aryanization and obtaining work permits for persecuted Jews could substantially contribute to protection from the first wave of deportations in spring 1942. But the path to fictitious aryanization and obtaining a

³²⁶ Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca*, 46.

work permit was not straightforward. If situated in the larger context of power/resistance relations of the Slovak wartime milieu, one can easily grasp the complex terrain behind both of these protective tactics. Aryanizers exerted power over the persecuted Jews in various fashions and modes. The precarious position of those who consented to shield Jews dictated to blend compliance with antisemitic policies with subtle avoidance and masked resistance to it. The mechanics of resistance to the state's policies displayed similar features: it proved to be successful if it efficiently managed to turn the very language of the regime into a tool of one's defense by blurring the distinction between the interests of an individual and those of the state. In particular, playing the ethno-national card, i.e. employing anti-Magyar and even anti-Jewish rhetoric as well as expressions of concern about the German takeover of former Jewish businesses in Slovakia, was at times effectively utilized as means to obtain permission for voluntary aryanization or a work permit for former Jewish owners and employees.

Slovak ethno-nationalism celebrated the wellbeing of Slovaks as a core justification of its policies against the Jews. The transfer of Jewish property and businesses into Christian hands represented a means of attaining this goal. But, as we have seen, the implementation of this idea on the ground often took a different turn. Individual cases of aryanization often reveal an effort to save the former Jewish owners due to pragmatic reasons. These former Jewish business owners' fallen status as societal outsiders deprived of basic rights and as cheap experienced labour turned them into an attractive rescue market commodity. Although there were certainly cases when assistance to former Jewish

businessmen was motivated by altruistic reasons, pragmatism more often represented the motivation behind an effort to exempt former Jewish owners from the further impact of antisemitic decrees. Ironically, once Slovaks placed their very own wellbeing above the state's interests, the aryанизation process as a core project of the ethno-national state started to come apart. Eventually, the inability of the state to bridge the contradictions between the ideological goal of getting rid of Jews and the pragmatic self-interest of the individual actors not only hampered the viability of the aryанизation process, but, more important, it seriously shattered a general confidence in the antisemitic regime and its ethno-national project.

Chapter IV

The Silenced Phenomenon of Cross-National Rescue:

“Leaking Border” and Paid Smugglers

Why is the topic of transnational rescue not discussed in Slovakia? And more important, what do available documents tell us about transnational rescue? Who were the individuals who helped Jews cross the border? How did the wartime Slovak state approach the problem of illegal⁵³⁰ border crossing by Jews? What were the challenges that the smugglers of fleeing Jews faced while crossing the Slovak-Hungarian border? These are the key questions underlying the narrative of this chapter. The present chapter examines an aspect of rescue absent from the scholarly discourse concerning the Holocaust in Slovakia, namely, the several thousand Jews who evaded deportation in 1942 by fleeing with or without the help of smugglers to neighbouring Hungary. Close examination of cross-national rescue offers an additional narrative to existing theories on the origins of the Holocaust in Slovakia. So far, scholars have offered the following theories. First, the Final Solution was a litmus test for German-Slovak relations and hence

⁵³⁰ This chapter contributes to the debates about legal/illegal migration. Recent research on the topic underlines the importance of different contexts within which illegality and legality are negotiated. In this regard scholars on the issues of migration agree that “there is no such thing as a legal-illegal dichotomy.” The boundary between illegal and legal migration is blurred as a result of the different standards for both of these concepts within different historical and geographical milieus. The term “illegal Jewish refugees” as used in this chapter reflects these Jews’ effort to cross the border while breaching the rules and the laws pertaining to border policies of the wartime Slovak state.

the origins of the Final Solution should be traced to the mutual workings of Nazi German pressure and Slovak domestic politics.⁵³¹ Frequent confrontations between radicals and moderates in the domestic political scene and Hungarian-Slovak rivalry on the international scene pushed quarrelling sides further into the orbit of a powerful “Protector.” In this interpretative frame the solution of the “Jewish problem” was not the primary goal of the government but rather an instrument to manipulate public opinion and a test of its loyalty to Germany. The short-sightedness of the government and its inability to foresee the consequences of this antisemitic course, rather than an active attempt to liquidate the Jews, dominate this line of argument.⁵³² Second, the origins of the Holocaust in Slovakia are firmly embedded in the socio-economic dynamics of wartime Slovakia as exemplified in the work of Götz Aly, who highlighted the economic aspect of the Final Solution, stating that “the Jews, robbed of all means of subsistence and forced into ghettos ...became a more lasting burden from the murderers’ point of view.”⁵³³ Eduard Nižňanský adds that the pauperization of the Jews was one of the key internal factors leading to their deportation. The Final Solution thus represents a domestic and pragmatic response to the inability of the administration to handle the state-directed pauperization of the Jews. The third theory interprets the origins of the Final Solution in Slovakia through the lens of Slovak nationalist priorities. As Nadya Nedelsky argues, the regime’s

⁵³¹ Wacław Długoborski and Jarek Mensfelt, *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia: 1938-1945: Slovakia and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question"* (Oświęcim; Banská Bystrica: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum ; Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, 2002), 112.

⁵³² Ibid.

⁵³³ Götz Aly, Belinda Cooper and Allison Brown, *"Final Solution": Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London and New York; New York: Arnold ; Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

participation in the Holocaust represents a “dramatic illustration of the party leader’s belief in the sanctity of the national state over the sanctity of not only individual rights but also of human life.”⁵³⁴

It will be argued that several thousand fleeing Jews hampered the smooth organization of the deportation process. Missing Jews complicated the work of the police and lower bureaucrats who were exposed to a considerably increased work load. In order to alleviate the chaos caused by fleeing Jews and diminish administrative work, some lower bureaucrats called for a more radical approach to the “Jewish question.” The government was aware of the problems that fleeing Jews caused. Yet, despite the complaints of lower-ranked bureaucrats and the call of radicals to prevent the mass escape of Jews to Hungary, the regime introduced only minor measures to prevent mass desertions across the border. This chapter calls attention to several factors that lead us to conclude that the Slovak government deliberately condoned the illegal border crossing of Jews to Hungary as a complementary solution to the “Jewish question.” From the perspective of the government, Slovak Jews who migrated to Hungary immediately helped to solve several “problems.” The complaints of overworked lower-ranked bureaucrats apart, the long-term absence of Jews helped to facilitate one major goal of the government – “odžidovčené Slovensko” or “Slovakia without Jews.” Needless to say, Jewish refugees from Slovakia represented a burden to Hungary – a weapon

⁵³⁴ Nadya Nedelsky, “The Wartime Slovak State: A Case Study in the Relationship between Ethnic Nationalism and Authoritarian Patterns of Governance,” *Nations and Nationalism* 7, no. 2 (2001), 229; See also Nina Paulovičová, “The ‘Unmasterable Past’? Slovaks and the Holocaust: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Slovakia,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light: The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Michlic (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming).

that was readily utilized by the Slovak government against its long-time southern rival.

The argument that the Slovak government deliberately condoned the illegal border crossing of Jews to Hungary does *not* imply that by the nature of its border policies the Slovak government was, in fact, a “willing rescuer” of its own persecuted Jews. One has to keep in mind that it was the Slovak government’s antisemitic policies that drove the Jews to flee Slovakia in the first place. Any attempts to manipulate this chapter’s narrative so as to exonerate the wartime Slovak government from responsibility for the Holocaust by portraying it solely as a rescuer of several thousand Jews who made it to Hungary should be condemned on both moral and historical grounds. One should recognize the ambiguous nature of the Slovak-Hungarian border-crossing phenomenon while staying alert to the dubious argument-twisting practices of many Slovak ethno-nationalists and apologists of the Slovak wartime clerico-fascist regime.

This chapter aims to establish a constant awareness of the above-mentioned ambiguity without offering a place for apologetic narratives by situating the phenomenon of cross-national rescue within the framework of a “grey zone” from two perspectives: from “above” or from a governmental level, and from “below” or from a regional level. From above, this narrative targets the ways in which an ethno-nationalist principle was challenged by the approach of the Slovak state to the illegal crossing of Jewish refugees in both directions. The fluctuation on the Slovak-Hungarian border displayed a pendulum motion as a result of several factors: 1) institutional unwillingness on the part of Slovakia and

Hungary to accommodate Jewish refugees, 2) the historical circumstances of the 1942 deportations of Jews from Slovakia, and 3) the 1944 deportations of Jews from Hungary via Slovakia to the concentration camps in the East.

This chapter highlights historical agents that have been long excluded from the narrative of rescue – paid helpers or organized networks of smugglers of Jews. Scrutinizing the agency of these historical actors is problematic. In particular, it is the anonymity of the smugglers in available documents that is disconcerting. As a result, one is not able to offer a detailed profile of this historically neglected group. At the same time, these agents' very *acts* of smuggling Jews via the border for money could be negotiated along the notion of ambivalence or indifference to Slovak and Hungarian national projects. The notion of ambivalence and indifference to national projects transforms the rigid category of ethno-nationalism that has been recently and continually imposed on rescuers and helpers of Jews in the realm of public memory. This chapter suggests that the indifference of smugglers to national projects was one of the multiple factors behind cross-national rescue.⁵³⁵ Bringing to attention smugglers' national indifference is fully legitimate, especially in the face of recent scholarly awareness of the flaws of too narrow a focus on the nation-building process. Even one of the leading thinkers on issues of nationalism, Miroslav Hroch, highlighted the need to explore “nationally unconcerned” groups – in this case, intelligentsias – who “by reason of their education and ethnicity, could have participated in the

⁵³⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 13.

national movement, but did not do so.”⁵³⁶ In general, more and more scholarly voices insist on introducing the category of national indifference as a viable category of historical analysis.⁵³⁷ This innovative and recent approach has not found scholarly support within the context of our theme of rescue.

In a larger frame, cross-national rescue turns our attention to one of the most debated issues – the problem of the border and border areas. “There is no business like border business,” claims David Newman.⁵³⁸ According to Newman, “territory and borders have their own internal dynamics, causing change in their own right as much as they are simply the physical outcome of decision-making. They are as much perceived in our mental maps and images as they are visible manifestations of concrete walls and barbed-wire fences. But the latter have not disappeared altogether and, in many cases of existing ethnoterritorial and political conflict, borders are being constructed or moved – as a means of consolidating

⁵³⁶ James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 6.

⁵³⁷ Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* (2010), 93 – 119; James E. Young, *At Memory’s Edge. After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000), 15.

⁵³⁸ David Newman, “The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in our ‘Borderless’ World,” *Progress in Human Geography* 30, no. 2 (2006), 143. On the problem of borders see also: Caitlin E. Murdock, *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands, 1870-1946. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany Series* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Mathias Albert, David Jacobson and Yosef Lapid, *Identities, Borders, Orders: Rethinking International Relations Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).; Symposium U.G.I. et al., *Political Boundaries and Coexistence: Proceedings of the IGU-Symposium, Basle/Switzerland, 24-27 May 1994* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1994); Vladimir Kolossov, “Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches,” *Geopolitics* 10 (2005); Joel S. Migdal, *Boundaries and Belonging: States and Societies in the Struggle to Shape Identities and Local Practices* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Brendan O’Leary, Ian Lustick and Thomas M. Callaghy, *Rightsizing the State: The Politics of Moving Borders* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Janet Allison Brown, Martin Pratt and International Conference of the International Boundaries Research Unit, *Borderlands Under Stress* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000).

physical separation and barriers.”⁵³⁹ Whereas from the 1950s to the 1970s borders were embraced as static entities, the transformation of Cold War-divided Europe into a “New Europe” immediately spurred interest in the dynamics of bordering *processes* rather than the border *per se*. The integration of the former eastern bloc into “Western” European structures initiated the wave of scholarship focused on border-opening processes and permeability of the borders (i.e. circumstances and factors that had a direct impact on the functioning of the border). But this trend was soon to be challenged. The catastrophe of 9/11 in the USA immediately replaced “border-opening discourse” with “securitization discourse” as a result of the need to create more secure borders and more efficient protection from outside threats.⁵⁴⁰ These debates necessarily introduced discussions about the distribution of power between the state and border authorities.⁵⁴¹ This chapter contributes to these debates about border permeability and securitization within the central European context through examining the wartime southern Slovak-Hungarian border.

Silence and the Cross-national Rescue of Jews in Slovakia

Rescuers’ acts of humanity during World War II turned out to be an effective means of healing the wounds left by the Holocaust on the conscience of nation states. More importantly, the morality of the rescuers of the persecuted

⁵³⁹ Newman, “Lines,” 146.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁵⁴¹ George Gavrillis, *The Dynamics of Interstate Boundaries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

Jews was an efficient means of improving the confidence of the nation during times of problematic transformation, i.e. during the transformation of the European continent into a “New” or more unified Europe. As such, the firm place of rescuers in the national memory established over the last two decades is not surprising. As Patrick Gerard Henry reminds us, “the verb ‘re-member’ too, has its surgical sense of putting things back together again.” This process also includes European rescuers who, in Henry’s view, are an integral part of the history of occupied Europe.⁵⁴² The topic of the rescue of European Jews has recently taken on a mediating role in the process of imagining the nation as a community of good-doers, i.e. ethically and morally upright citizens. An effort to “re-member,” to re-unite the nation along the premise of “being good to others,” substantially revives a shattered sense of national confidence. What remains to be explained is a recent general impatience surrounding the commemoration of rescuers within a national context. Stanlee Joyce Stahl, director of the Anti-Defamation League’s Jewish Foundation for Christian Rescuers, touched the core of the problem as early as 1994: “Time is running out, these people [rescuers-NP] are getting old.”⁵⁴³

European countries yield many examples of the utilization of rescue as a means of strengthening the national ego. According to Andrew Buckser, the rescue of Jews in Denmark has a “powerful significance in the larger Danish culture, as a heroic moment that defined the role of Denmark in the postwar

⁵⁴² Patrick Henry, “Banishing the Coercion of Despair: Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon and the Holocaust Today,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 20, no. 2 (2001), 81.

⁵⁴³ Andriy Vynnyckyj, “Olga Medynska recognized as ‘Righteous Among Nations,’” *The Ukrainian Weekly*, 14 August 1994, http://www.scribd.com/full/16268942?access_key=key-ssiws1sll6h22k3g7nt (accessed 14 January 2010).

world.”⁵⁴⁴ Because of wide-scale rescue operations in Denmark, rescuers serve as “an object of national pride” while Jews are relegated to a “sort of mascot minority, a group whose continued existence attested to the worth of the larger population.”⁵⁴⁵ For Italian Foreign Minister and vice-president of the Council of Ministers Gianfranco Fini the 400 Italian “Righteous” rescuers serve as “proof of an ampler and more widespread phenomenon,” the “piece of a mosaic of exemplary and admirable humanity, which makes an important contribution to Italy’s history.”⁵⁴⁶ In reference to persecuted Jews, Nathan Ben Horin, a member of Yad Vashem’s Commission for the Righteous, concluded that “the Italian population showed itself as one of the most humane in Europe.”⁵⁴⁷ In this regard, it is not only human qualities that the Righteous rescuers offer to their respective nations as priceless political capital, but also their very numbers. Professor Felix Tych believes that “the good image of Poland in the world suffered due to the half a century of silence about people like Irena Sendlerowa, a nurse, who together with her coworkers saved hundreds of Jewish children (there are reports claiming 2,500), from the Warsaw Ghetto.”⁵⁴⁸ Although Poland prides itself on having the highest number of acknowledged Righteous rescuers, representing 28% of the Righteous of the world,⁵⁴⁹ Professor Tych believes that the number of identified

⁵⁴⁴ Andrew Buckser, *After the Rescue: Jewish Identity and Community in Contemporary Denmark* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 191.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁴⁶ “Book Confirms Church’s Saving Role with Jews. Stories of 387 ‘Righteous’ Italians,” *Zenit. The World Seen from Rome*, <http://www.zenit.org/article-15175?l=english> (accessed 6 October 2009).

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ “Polish Righteous,” *Museum of the History of Polish Jews*, <http://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/index.php?cid=3&lang=en> (accessed 12 January 2010).

ethnic Polish rescuers is merely “the tip of the iceberg.”⁵⁵⁰ “We cannot refer to Yad Vashem as a reasonable basis for estimating the number of Polish rescuers,” Hans G. Furth claimed, “just as we would not use the list of canonized saints as a reasonable basis for estimating the number of Catholics.”⁵⁵¹ Furth believed that the number of rescuers in Poland is heavily underestimated and in his own calculation offered an estimate of 1,200,000 Polish rescuers.⁵⁵² In France, World War II rescuers’ morals were readily identified with the eighteenth-century French revolutionary slogan *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. In his address at a national ceremony in honour of the Righteous in France on 18 January 2007, President Jacques Chirac praised the Righteous for embodying universal French values such as fraternity, solidarity, and free will: “To those who ask what it means to be French, to those who ask what France’s universal values are, you, the Righteous, brought the most magnificent response at the darkest moment of our history.”⁵⁵³ In addition, the mythologization of rescuers in France and “Chambonisation” of the rescue theme, i.e. centring attention on the unique story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon’s communal rescue, further helped to employ the rescue theme as a means of building the national French ego.⁵⁵⁴ Is there anything wrong with efforts to harness the rescue theme within a national framework?

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Hans G. Furth, “One Million Polish Rescuers of Hunted Jews?” *Journal of Genocide Research* 1, no. 2 (1999), 229.

⁵⁵² Ibid. In his numerical estimate Hans G. Furth does not take into consideration the situation when Jews were rescued by the members of Jewish organizations or by themselves, i.e. without the help of Poles.

⁵⁵³ Speech by M. Jacques Chirac, President of the Republic, at the national ceremony in honour of the Righteous of France, Paris, 18 January 2007, <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Chirac-addresses.8745.html> (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁵⁵⁴ Henry, “Banishing the Coercion of Despair,” 71.

Such hyperbolic rhetoric as well as the effort to inflate numbers of the Righteous constitute a double-edged sword. While these strategies certainly inspire the self-confidence of European nations, they also deliberately ignore the place of minorities in the history of nation states, thus leaving out their contribution to the rescue of European Jews. Romania, for example, which claimed only sixty Righteous by January 2010, puts a heavy emphasis on ethnic Romanian rescuers who assisted Jews in Hungarian-occupied northern Transylvania. The unilateral focus on ethnic Romanian rescuers' acts was intended as a contrast to the collaboration of Hungarians with the Nazis in this region. Hungarians were thus implicitly presented as merciless perpetrators, whereas Romanians were praised as well-intentioned altruists.⁵⁵⁵ Such manipulation of the Righteous rescuers' political capital within a national context signals the continuing tension between Romanians and the Hungarian minority in the region and also points to a general effort to downplay Romania's own responsibility in the Holocaust.

Slovakia also manipulates rescue discourse. Intentions similar to the Romanians' account for a general silence about cross-national rescue. Out of 89,000 Jewish citizens in Slovakia, 57,628 were deported to the Nazi extermination camps during the first wave of deportations between 25 March and 20 October 1942.⁵⁵⁶ Only a fraction of the first wave deportees survived the war; according to Ivan Kamenec, this was between 280 and 800 persons. Anywhere

⁵⁵⁵ "Solidarity and Rescue. Romanian Righteous Among the Nations," http://www1.yadvashem.org/about_yad/what_new/data_whats_new/pdf/english/1.11_solidarity_and_rescue.pdf (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁵⁵⁶ Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 195.

between 5000 and 15,000 Jews out of 32,372 Jews left in Slovakia in 1942 escaped to Hungary. Historians Ivan Kamenec, Martin Hetényi, and Martina Fiamová claim that one-third of the Jews who made it to Hungary survived the war.⁵⁵⁷ In 1942, Hungary was a safer place for Slovak Jews. Keeping all of the difficulties of cross-national rescue in mind one could still conclude that an escape abroad represented one of the most effective means of rescue. The importance of cross-national rescue is apparent; yet this topic remains on the margins of scholarly and public attention.

The smuggling of Jews across the border was a lucrative source of income for many who were familiar with the geographical terrain of the southern border areas in wartime Slovakia. Yet, these paid acts of assistance to persecuted Jews are rarely tackled in scholarly literature. What are the reasons for the silence over the participation of non-Jews in the cross-national rescue of Jews? According to Ilse van Liempt smugglers have been for some time dressed up in a romantic cloak of heroism, as those who rescued the persecuted from “bad” regimes.⁵⁵⁸ But within the context of the communist regime in Eastern Europe the representation of smugglers is indicative of a double standard. On the one hand, communist writers depicted smugglers of the Slovak wartime regime as heroes who defied the fascist state and protected proletarian interests against greedy fascist capitalists. On the other, the historical figure of a smuggler who trespassed against

⁵⁵⁷ Martin Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie v rokoch 1938 – 1945* (Nitra, 2008), 119, http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/e_kniznica/hetenyi.pdf (accessed 15 May 2010); Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca*, 87; Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 87 – 132.

⁵⁵⁸ Ilse van Liempt, “Gendered Borders: The Case of “Illegal Migration from Iraq, the Horn of Africa and the former Soviet Union to Netherlands,” in *Illegal Migration and Gender in Global and Historical Perspective*, ed. Marlou Shrover et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 84.

the interests of the postwar Czechoslovak republic, was singlehandedly condemned as a conspirator, spy, or bourgeois element. The fall of communism in the 1990s introduced yet another construct of the smuggler. The spread of right-wing nationalism heightened sensitivities over the influx of illegal refugees into national states in the “New Europe.” Once romantic heroes, smugglers acquired a negative connotation, that of criminals who mediated the influx of undesirable and illegal cheap labour and “bogus asylum seekers.”⁵⁵⁹ This post-1990s construct of the “smuggler – criminal” in part explains the reluctance to discuss smugglers as helpers.

More importantly, smuggling indicates the existence of “leaky borders” and hence the image of a “weak state” – a view that is unacceptable to those who support a unified state based on an ethno-national principle. Whereas the Righteous rescuers’ political capital helps to promote respect towards a nation, smugglers as historical agents send a message of ambivalence or indifference to national projects. From the perspective of ethno-nationalists, smuggling is the exception rather than the norm. The fact that several thousand Jews managed to survive by fleeing from Slovakia to Hungary with the assistance of those who were familiar with conditions on the southern border is rarely brought to the public’s attention. The fact that Jews were assisted by anonymous individuals of uncertain national background and that Hungary became a safe haven for persecuted Jews from Slovakia until 1944 come as unsettling facts for Slovak ethno-nationalists. The Slovak National Party and its representative Ján Slota have made relations tense with Hungary and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., 85.

Recent political events exacerbating tensions include an effort to deprive the Hungarian minority of dual citizenship and to force a single citizenship option on this minority group. This context makes it difficult to discuss cross-national rescue. The rescue theme as harnessed by the national ideological framework is favored over any cross-national or supranational framework. More important still, the topic of the cross-national help of non-Jews to Jews fleeing to Hungary works against the narrative of the Slovaks' victimization at the hands of the Hungarians – a widely disseminated trope of the current ethno-nationalist perspective in Slovakia. The fact that the regime in Hungary in 1942–44 displayed more tolerance to the Jews than the wartime Slovak state makes the discussion about the nature of that Slovak state even more painful.

Similarly, an effort to utilize the rescue theme to promote a positive image of Slovaks pushes the rescue efforts of non-Slovak nationals on Slovak territory to the margins. The case of a plaque to commemorate the rescue acts of Swedish diplomat Raul Wallenberg revealed in Nové Zámky 6 July 1997 is indicative. As a response to the attempt to commemorate a “foreign” rescuer on Slovak soil Marián Tkáč reminded the public that Slovaks do have their own “Slovak Wahlberg”[sic]. Tkáč pointed to the rescue acts of the Slovak ambassador in Budapest Ján Spišiak who, according to Tkáč, helped to rescue about 80,000 [sic] Jews on the southern territory occupied by Hungary. But according to another source, Spišiak issued protective passes and false passports for 8000 Jews who could cross the Slovak-Hungarian border back to Slovakia at times when it was

relatively safe for Jews.⁵⁶⁰ Spišiak even smuggled Jews to Slovakia in his car. For his altruistic acts Spišiak was awarded the title of the Righteous among Nations in 2006.⁵⁶¹ Tkáč bitterly concluded that there should have been a plaque dedicated to Spišiak right next to Wallenberg's.⁵⁶²

Paid helpers belong to a “grey zone of rescue.” Smugglers, truck drivers and anonymous men and women who profited from smuggling Jewish refugees across the southern border do not offer currently usable political capital, as a result of which this group is either marginalized or ignored both by the public and by scholars. At the same time, the identity of some of these grey zone helpers seems to be one of the major obstacles preventing politicians on either side of the border from “claiming” the group. In particular, the acts of multinational, multicultural or bilingual individuals who helped Jews cross the southern border do not easily fit into notions of “Slovakness” or “Hungarianess.” In fact, smugglers of Jewish refugees resist categorization of any kind – a factor that discourages scholars from addressing the topic. Not only is “national belonging” a barrier, but this group also resists identification by way of a common denominator as far as gender, age or political and religious profiles are concerned. The available documents point to smuggling as a phenomenon widespread up and down the social ladder. Owners of driver's licenses, hospital workers and employees in forestry, both Jews and Aryans, even including HG and DP

⁵⁶⁰ “Spravodliví medzi národmi sú ďalší desiat Slováci. Rádio 7,”

http://www.radio7.sk/buxus/generate_page.php?page_id=2152 (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁵⁶¹ “Righteous among the Nations Honored by Yad Vashem by January 1, 2009.”

http://www1.yadvashem.org/heb_site/righteous/pdf/virtual_wall_of_honor/SLOVAKIA.pdf (accessed 10 February 2010).

⁵⁶² Marián Tkáč, “Aj Ján Spišiak,” 7 July 1997.

http://www.tkac.sk/texty/aj_jan_spisiak_1997.doc (accessed 11 June 2008).

members, could be found among the smugglers of Jews. The most surprising participant involved in the smuggling of Jews into Hungary were the very representatives of the bureaucratic apparatus or the government such as the administrators of district offices or even the head of State security in Slovakia.

Despite the absence of hard data about personal profiles of paid smugglers, some hypotheses can be offered. The very *acts* of taking Jews close to the border and smuggling Jewish refugees to Hungary indicate the smugglers' familiarity with the geography of the southern territory, which allows us to assume that these individuals were mostly local inhabitants of southern border areas. In the post-Vienna Accords period of 1938 there were 67,502 Hungarians (2.5%), of whom 17,510 were citizens of Hungary. Most of them were concentrated in southern Slovakia, especially in the border districts of Nitra and Zlaté Moravce.⁵⁶³ Given the overwhelming concentration of the Hungarian minority in the southern areas, it can be assumed that a significant number of the paid helpers operating in the southern border areas were multilingual or of diverse cultural backgrounds. This supposition is occasionally supported by memoir literature. For example, Alica Barak-Resslerová recalled that in 1942 many Jews opted to rescue their children by smuggling them to Hungary with the help of the farmers living in the vicinity of the border. Following the first failed attempt to cross the border when a female smuggler deprived Alica and her sister of new clothes, her parents did not give up. They contacted a bilingual smuggler familiar

⁵⁶³ Martin Hetényi, "Postavenie Maďarskej menšiny na Slovensku v rokoch 1939 – 1940," *Slovensko medzi 14. marcom 1939 a Salzburskými rokovaniami* (Prešov: Prešovská Univerzita v Prešove, Filozofická Fakulta, Universum, 2007), 93.
http://www.pulib.sk/elpub2/FF/Pekar2/pdf_doc/hetenyi.pdf (accessed March 2010).

with the geography of the area who successfully guided the girls to Hungarian territory.⁵⁶⁴

How precisely does the multicultural status of smugglers feed into the topic of assistance to the Jews? The category of amphibians, i.e. multicultural individuals of border areas, represents a slippery phenomenon within the context of national states since they resist categorization by conventional nationalist language. Despite their visible presence throughout the history of nation states amphibians were ignored, pushed to the margins or mocked. In Slovakia, many scholars labelled multicultural and multilingual individuals as “nationally unaware” or even as “disoriented” – a trope that has not disappeared from recent political discourse.⁵⁶⁵ Within the context of non-Slovak scholarship, Chad Bryant, Jeremy King and Eric Steinhart reflect on amphibians as individuals who could conveniently apply one national status over another out of sheer pragmatism.⁵⁶⁶ According to Steinhart, “...amphibians exercised significant agency and could, upon occasion, evolve into political and national chameleons whose capacity to adapt permitted them not only to survive, but even to thrive in a dangerous environment.”⁵⁶⁷ There is also a stream of scholarship that highlights the link

⁵⁶⁴ Barak-Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko krič*, 24.

⁵⁶⁵ Ján Bobák, “Poznámky k vývinu a stavu národnostného zloženia obyvateľstva južného Slovenska,” *Historický zborník* 7 (1997), 94.

⁵⁶⁶ Chad Bryant, “Either German or Czech: Fixing Nationality in Bohemia and Moravia, 1939 - 1946,” *Slavic Review* 61, no. 4 (2002), 684; Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki,” 240. Amphibians were labeled differently all around Eastern Europe. Bryant, “Either German or Czech,” 685, claims: “Upper Silesians labelled them Water Poles (*Wasserpölen*); Serbian nationalists called them ‘hermaphrodites’ (*melez*); Hungarians called them Janissaries; in Czechoslovakia they were called Germanized Czechs or Czechified Germans.” Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities,” 96, continues the list further: “...Masures in Silesia, the schwenbendes Volkstum of Carinthia, the Lemkos of the Carpathians, the Hultschiners of Moravian Silesia, Transylvania’s Szeklers, Bohemia’s Budweissers...”

⁵⁶⁷ Steinhart, “The Chameleon of Trawniki,” 252.

between identity perception and the moral content of people's acts.⁵⁶⁸ Kristen Renwick Monroe believes that "people's categorization influences their treatment of others" – a view supported by the body of scholarship on self-categorization and social identity.⁵⁶⁹ Such views aside, my aim is not to imply that one's multicultural background is a natural precondition for moral action. Rather, it can be assumed that the pragmatism and opportunism of nationally lukewarm individuals in border areas facilitated the cross-border rescue of Jews.

As mentioned above, the *act* of paid assistance to Jews allows us to highlight one of the often overlooked common denominators particular to the group of paid helpers – an ambiguity or even indifference to the Slovak ethno-national project. According to Rogers Brubaker, historians should refrain from attaching a concept of individual belonging-ness to a targeted national group since national groups do not represent stable and homogenous entities.⁵⁷⁰ Instead of a fixed idea of national belongingness Brubaker suggests that the notion of "groupness" or "a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable" is embraced as an event.⁵⁷¹ This concept offers a new insight into the problem of individual agency vis-à-vis nationalism: it is not only tradition, value, and ideology that indicate individual responsiveness to national projects, but also individual acts. In their everyday actions smugglers could display both indifference and responsiveness to national projects. Everyday life in war-torn Europe exposed individuals to various situations that dictated more pragmatic responses to the pressures of

⁵⁶⁸ Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Morality and a Sense of Self; The Importance of Identity and Categorization for Moral Action," *American Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 3 (2001), 504.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities," 97. Zahra here cites Brubaker.

⁵⁷¹ Brubaker, *Etnicity without Groups*, 11.

nationalization. In this light, the case of paid helpers assisting Jews across the border would not be exceptional.

Data and “facts” extracted from archival documents have for a long time represented the core value of an “objective approach” to the study of history as regards Slovakia. Archival documents, in the minds of Slovak scholars, represent the “truth” about the past. Where the past is used as a doubtful justification of political projects, “facts” as presented in documents serve as the supreme arbiter and do not require further questioning. From a scholarly and also a cultural viewpoint, “naked” facts as presented in documents represent the most effective means of challenging problematic interpretations of the past. But as far as our theme is concerned, the absence of reliable data posits a challenge for historians. An effort to estimate the number of Jewish refugees who crossed from Slovakia to Hungary can be described in terms of “guesstimation.”⁵⁷² No available Hungarian sources provide the number of refugees fleeing to Hungary during the years of persecution in Europe. Following the occupation of Hungary by Germany the Ministry of the Interior shipped refugee files to the International Red Cross. These documents were kept in the Erney Palace’s “Polish room” and were destroyed during the bombardment of Budapest.⁵⁷³ The methodological impossibility of coming to a consensus on the number of illegal refugees on both sides of the border represents another obstacle in the way of studying cross-national rescue. Below I will try to come to grips with this problem and offer some interpretation of such data as is available.

⁵⁷² Furth, “One Million,” 227.

⁵⁷³ Livia Rothkirchen, “Hungary, The Asylum for Refugees,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 7 (1968), 128.

What information is provided by historians on the number of Jews from Slovakia seeking refuge in Hungary between 1942 and 1944? About 15,000 refugees from Poland and Slovakia entered Hungary in 1941-43 with or without the assistance of non-Jews and brought first-hand reports of mass killings.⁵⁷⁴ Raul Hilberg noted that following the initiation of the deportation process, the flow of Slovak Jewish refugees to Hungary was steadily growing, reaching the number of 7000 (one-tenth of Slovak Jewry at the end of 1942).⁵⁷⁵ According to Eduard Nižňanský, in 1942 about 8000 Slovak Jews managed to avoid deportation to Poland. Out of this number, 5000-6000 Jews escaped to Hungary. He claims that the help concerned was “quite extensive.”⁵⁷⁶ Sulaček turns our attention to the Budapest Jewish Rescue Committee, according to which 6000-8000 Jewish refugees from Slovakia and 500-1000 from Bohemia and Moravia made it to Hungary by the end of November 1943.⁵⁷⁷ Gila Fatran points to the same report of the rescue committee in Budapest dated 22 November 1943. According to Fatran by November 1943 1900-2500 refugees and 114 children crossed from Slovakia to Hungary.⁵⁷⁸ Fatran also notes that small groups of refugees entered Hungary at the end of 1943 and at the beginning of 1944.⁵⁷⁹ According to Ladislav Lipscher “. . . about 12,500 Jews” managed to “. . . escape deportation by fleeing to

⁵⁷⁴ Cesarani, *Genocide and Rescue*, 16. In the report of Anton Vašek to Alexander Mach we read that until 26 June 1942 about 53,000 Jews out of 89,000 had been transported. About 10,000 Jews escaped to Hungary or were hiding in unknown locations.

⁵⁷⁵ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 465.

⁵⁷⁶ Eduard Nižňanský, “Slovaks and Jews: Relation of the Slovak Majority and the Jewish Minority during World War II,” *Park of Generous Souls* (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2007), 102.

⁵⁷⁷ Sulaček, *Biele Plášte*, vol.1, 53.

⁵⁷⁸ Gila Fatran, *Boj o prežitie* (Bratislava: Slovenské národné múzeum - Múzeum Židovskej kultúry Múzeum židovskej kultúry, 2007), 259.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Hungary or going underground.”⁵⁸⁰ Jozef Dzugas points to 11,042 Jews who left Slovakia due to persecution via legal and illegal channels by December 1940.⁵⁸¹ The highest number of Slovak Jewish refugees is offered by Carmilly-Weinberger who estimates that 10-15,000 Jews crossed into Hungary. Out of this number about 4000 refugees from Slovakia were placed in refugee camps in Ricske and Garany.⁵⁸² Lang and Štrba note that about 5000 Jews from Slovakia who escaped from the first wave of 1942 deportations managed to survive the Holocaust in Budapest. According to this source, 24% of Jews in Hungary managed to survive in the Budapest ghetto; in the houses⁵⁸³ under the auspices of neutral states such as Sweden, Switzerland, Portugal, and the Vatican; or as a result of their hiding.⁵⁸⁴ Slovak Jews who found refuge in Budapest were either caught by gendarmerie and returned to the Slovak authorities or held in Hungarian detention camps.⁵⁸⁵

Although available numbers provide some insight into the movement of Jewish refugees across the Slovak-Hungarian border following the first wave of 1942 deportations, these statistics hardly allow for an estimate of the number of non-Jews who assisted persecuted Jews. Assuming that each Jew crossed the border to Hungary with the assistance of a Slovak would ignore the complex nature of border-crossing. Needless to say, such an assumption would further

⁵⁸⁰ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia,” 201.

⁵⁸¹ Dzugas, “Postavenie Židovského Obyvateľstva,” 359.

⁵⁸² Moshe Carmilly-Weinberger, *The Road to Life: The Rescue Operation of Jewish Refugees on the Hungarian-Romanian Border in Transylvania, 1936-1944* (New York: Shengold, 1996), 36.

⁵⁸³ Raoul Wallenberg (a Swedish diplomat and rescuer who is credited with saving about 100,000 Jews) in cooperation with the Swiss consul Charles Lutz, as well as Portuguese and Spanish legations created more than thirty “protected houses” and “protected ghettos” in Budapest to house Jews with international identity papers from a neutral country.

⁵⁸⁴ Tomáš Lang, Šándor Štrba, *Holokaust na južnom Slovensku na pozadí Novozámockých Židov* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2006), 331 – 332.

⁵⁸⁵ Martin Vietor, *Dejiny okupácie južného Slovenska 1938 - 1945* (Bratislava, 1968), 227.

contribute to the nationalization of the rescue theme and the Slovak nation's ego-building project. None of the information available on the Righteous who assisted Jews to cross the border indicates the number of smugglers. The Encyclopedia of the Righteous hardly addresses this problem. Yad Vashem, the institution that initiated the Righteous among Nations's awards, offers only a fragmented picture of rescue in general, let alone the cross-national rescue of Jews. In fact, Yad Vashem candidly cautions us about the attempts to interpret collected data on the Righteous rescuers as follows:

It needs to be noted that the numbers of Righteous recognized do not reflect the full extent of help given by non-Jews to Jews during the Holocaust; they are rather based on the material and documentation that was made available to Yad Vashem. Most Righteous were recognized following requests made by the rescued Jews. Sometimes survivors could not overcome the difficulty of grappling with the painful past and didn't come forward; others weren't aware of the program or couldn't apply, especially people who lived behind the Iron Curtain during the years of Communist regime in Eastern Europe; other survivors died before they could make the request. An additional factor is that most cases that are recognized represent successful attempts; the Jews survived and came forward to tell Yad Vashem about them.⁵⁸⁶

Keeping Yad Vashem's caution in mind, what can we make of the number of Righteous rescuers who assisted Jews crossing from Slovakia to Hungary? The

⁵⁸⁶ "The Righteous Among the Nations," Yad Vashem, <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/statistics.asp> (accessed 13 December 2011).

Encyclopedia of the Righteous in Slovakia lists 26 cases in which border crossing was a part of the overall rescue story. One has to be aware, however, of the methodology that the editors applied when faced with the problem of cross-national rescue:

The name of the rescuer appears under the country to which he or she belongs by citizenship or nationality, but since after the war borders changed and in some cases the rescuers acted outside their countries, we generally saw fit to attribute the rescue story to the rescuer based on his citizenship or nationality according to his own definition and choice, or that of his offspring. In certain cases, where the rescuer was a citizen or national of one country but his rescue activities were carried out in another country, with the assistance of locals, we chose, with agreement of the editor of each country's volume, to publish the rescue account in the country of occurrence as well as in the country to which the rescuer belonged.⁵⁸⁷

As this approach indicates, an effort to estimate the number of the Righteous smugglers of Jews to Hungary within the context of a national state is complicated by the determination of the identity of these helpers. In some cases, the identity of the rescuers after the war could differ from his/her wartime national status. Nationality during the war could be imposed on an individual either as a result of geopolitical changes or simply as a result of an individual's pragmatism. The above-mentioned 26 entries on Slovak Righteous remain silent

⁵⁸⁷ Gutman, *Encyclopedia*, xvii.

on these issues. None of these Righteous rescue stories help shed light on the challenges that Jewish refugees and their helpers faced while trying to cross the border. Some of the Encyclopedia's entries note how the Jews managed to reach Hungarian territory: in six cases the Righteous helped to arrange for the escape of Jews from Slovakia or provided false travel papers for the victims. Four Slovaks were recognized as Righteous because they helped to smuggle the Jews across the southern border. In eight cases Jews successfully crossed the border on their own. But in another three cases a failed attempt had tragic consequences for the Jews involved. The Encyclopedia also informs us about four cases where the acts of Slovak rescuers took place on Hungarian territory.

When one reconsiders the number of Jews that crossed the Slovak-Hungarian border, which according to the available estimates was somewhere between 5000 and 15,000, the number of the Encyclopedia's Slovak Righteous rescuers awarded for cross-national assistance to Jews is fairly small. Such a difference is striking even if we keep Yad Vashem's caution about the interpretation of the statistical data on the Righteous rescuers in mind. There are several possible explanations for this discrepancy. First, Jews often opted to cross the border on their own. Second, many Jews from Slovakia crossed the border with the help of a so-called Working Group (*Pracovná skupina*) and Jewish organizations such as *Halutzim* or *Hashomer*. Under the auspices of Zionist youth groups in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, Jewish organizations rescued thousands of Jewish refugees from Poland and Slovakia.⁵⁸⁸ Such cases would not attract the attention of Yad Vashem, since this institution does not incorporate Jews as

⁵⁸⁸ Cesarani, *Genocide and Rescue*, 17, 128.

rescuers into the category of the Righteous. Third, some Jews managed to obtain passports to secure safe passage to Hungary. According to Eugene Levai, the author of *The Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (1948), the Slovak Public Security Office “issued hundreds of passports to Jews who were willing to pay considerable sums for an opportunity to escape to Hungary and, by doing so, discredited even their own antisemitic measures.”⁵⁸⁹ There were also cases when non-Jews willingly gave their own passports to Jews, thus enabling them to make their way to Hungary in relative safety. Such practices provided an impetus for tighter control of identities and the verification of passport data by the lower district authorities.⁵⁹⁰ Often the passports were forged or obtained by other illegal means with or without the help of non-Jews. Given the lack of information in official documents and memoirs, this aspect of rescue across the Slovak-Hungarian border is difficult to investigate in detail. Another explanation for the discrepancy between the number of Jewish refugees who successfully reached Hungary and the small number of recognized Righteous is that many Jews crossed the border with the help of paid rescuers and anonymous smugglers. Paradoxically, if bribed, the *crème de la crème* of the Slovak political scene often willingly mediated a safe passage for some Jews. The paid form of help *eo ipso* excludes this group from Righteousness. In addition to these scenarios one has to recall that border crossing usually represented one step on the path to rescue, and hence it did not necessarily stand out as a key part of rescue narratives. For some

⁵⁸⁹ Eugene Levai, *Black Book on the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry*, ed. by Lawrence P. Davis (Zurich: Central European Times Pub. Co., 1948), 57.

⁵⁹⁰ ŠABpT, Fond OÚT, kartón čís. 151, Zákl. číslo: D1-260. Heslo: Židia – zákaz vycestovania za hranice.

survivors more immediate threats, such as rescue from the imminent danger of deportation or surviving the hell of the concentration camps, would naturally stand out. Finally, one could also conclude that the small number of the Righteous awarded for their cross-national acts attests to the continuing nationalization of the rescue theme.

Approaching the Border from the Perspective of Slovak and Hungarian State Policies

From a supranational perspective, the smuggling of Jews across the border defies both Slovak and Hungarian national projects. From the perspective of the Slovak state, smugglers' acts are of an ambiguous nature. On the one hand, they helped to fulfill the goal of the radicals – to remove Jews by any means. On the other hand, by smuggling Jews *en masse* to Hungary smugglers encroached on one of the initial governmental goals – to introduce Jews to physical and manual labour which, on the part of the moderates, was interpreted as part of an ethnocentric nation-building effort in Slovakia. Whereas Slovaks were promoted as a victimized nation of hard workers, Jews were portrayed as work-shy Magyarophile usurpers and exploiters. The efforts of the moderates to retrain “work-shy Jews” and introduce this minority to less attractive positions and menial labour represented one of the central political goals of the young ethno-national state.⁵⁹¹ Although smuggling operations defied such policies, Slovakia's

⁵⁹¹ Several decrees aimed to exclude the Jewish minority from the economy, culture and politics and transform Jews into societal outsiders and a cheap workforce. For example decree no. 63

response to the problem was rather lukewarm. What constituted government indifference to the smugglers? Was it a vacillation over the course of government policies, the weakness and inability of the state to tackle the problem, or a strategy to solve one of the state's other burning concerns? The available documents imply that despite official antisemitic policies the illegal emigration of Jews abroad was *condoned* by the state as an *acceptable way* of getting rid of Jews. However, the Slovak state's indifference to the fate of Jewish refugees who made it to Hungary should also be seen within a larger context. First of all, the Slovak government was challenged by the problem of a constant stream of non-Slovak refugees on its own territory – a problem that consumed the energy of the state. Second, the deportation of Jews from Slovakia was a logistically challenging task that put local administrators under great pressure. Once Jews crossed the border and made it to Hungary they ceased to present a “problem” for lower and central administrators. The deportation of Jews to the East and illegal border crossing had basically the same effect, since both were means to decrease the number of Jewish citizens in Slovakia. Illegal emigration was obviously a cheaper solution to the “Jewish problem.” Since the Slovak government paid 500 RM to Nazi Germany to cover the “expenses” for each deported Slovak Jew, the illegal emigration of Slovak Jews helped curb the considerable costs of the deportation process. In addition, the property of those who left Slovakia for Hungary, as with the property of the deported Jews, was confiscated by the state. But despite the financial

issued on 18 April 1939 regulated the number of Jews in liberal professions; decree No. 184 issued on 25 July 1939 regulated the number of Jewish doctors in job market; decree No. 256 issued on 11 October 1940 stated the rules about the employment of Jews; decree no.153 issued on 4 July 1941 concerned labour duty of Jews.

benefits, this approach could not serve as a long-term means of solving the “Jewish problem.” Further escalation of the tension between Slovakia and Hungary caused by the ever-increasing influx of Jewish refugees from Slovakia would necessarily attract the unwanted attention of the Third Reich.

In order to better understand the state’s response to the illegal border crossing by Jewish refugees we should first look at the historical context that contributed to the permeability of the Slovak-Hungarian border. From 1938 the pressure on the border continually increased as a result of geopolitical changes. Already in March 1938, shortly before the *Anschluss* of Austria, Czechoslovakia was exposed to a stream of refugees, including social democrats, prominent journalists and Jews from occupied Austria.⁵⁹² About 2650 Austrian Jews found refuge in Slovakia in the course of 1938-45.⁵⁹³ But the Vienna Accords in November 1938, which established a new southern border, not only complicated the situation, but more importantly, resulted in a qualitatively different approach taken by the Slovak state leadership. Due to the changed geopolitical situation and overall pressures of the war, the southern border represented a “leaking border” – a fact that proved to be decisive on the path to the rescue of several thousand Jews.

⁵⁹² The Jews were forced from border areas such as Burgenland, Kittsee, and Pama. Kittsee and Pama’s Jews were even expatriated to one of the Danube islands in spring 1938. Most of the refugees from Austria in this period headed towards Bratislava. The refugees followed especially the route Vienna-Wolfstahl-Bratislava. Bratislava was a well-known transfer point for illegal Jewish refugees heading to Palestine in the course of 1939 and 1940. Slovak transit visas were issued to those refugees who were holders of Bolivian or Paraguayan visas since the British obstructed the issue of visas to Jews heading to Palestine.

⁵⁹³ Eduard Nižňanský, (ed.), *Židovská komunita na Slovensku. Obdobie autonómie. Porovnanie s vtedajšími udalosťami v Rakúsku* (Bratislava: Inštitút Judaistiky Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave, 2000), 88. As a result of the Vienna arbitration about 600 Jews found themselves under the new rule of Hungary, 400 made it to Palestine, 1350 became the victims of the Holocaust and 210 survived in Slovakia.

The First Vienna Arbitration Treaty signed 2 November 1938, often dubbed the “Slovak Munich,” represented a key moment in the history of the southern border. The Vienna Arbitration was interpreted as a *faux pas* by the Slovak political leadership and a success for Hungarian revisionists.⁵⁹⁴ Slovakia was deprived of some 4000 square miles of its most fertile lands in the south of the country and a population of 859,885, of which more than a third were Slovaks.⁵⁹⁵ Many Slovaks, Jews, Rusyns and Czechs were forced to leave the annexed territory. At the same time, 60,000 Magyars were held captive by the Slovak government.⁵⁹⁶ The Slovak leadership was humiliated by the 1938 decision in Vienna and refused to recognize the newly-established border. In fact, the Slovaks hoped for the revision of the Vienna decision. As a result, the border was not seen as a fixed political-geographical entity, but rather as a necessary and temporary evil.

The new Slovak-Hungarian border caused tension between both states. Hungarian pressure to move the border further north did not relax following the decision of 1938 and continued unabated well into the initial stages of the existence of the Slovak state in 1939-40. The Slovak government, too, responded

⁵⁹⁴ On Hungarian revisionist efforts, see Martin Pekár, “Región Šariša v čase medzi Mníchovom a 14. marcom 1939,” in *Veľká politika a malé regióny (1918 – 1939)* (Prešov-Graz, Vydavateľstvo Universum, 2002), 220-28; Štefan Šutaj, *Slovensko-maďarské vzťahy a problematika hraníc v strednej Európe v 20. storočí* (Brno: SbVA-Brno, řada C společenskovední mimořádné číslo, 1994), 173-79; Ladislav Deák, *Hungary's Game for Slovakia: Slovakia in Hungarian Politics in the Years 1933-1939* (Bratislava: Veda, 1996)

⁵⁹⁵ Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža, *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 273. Martin Hetényi offered a slightly different number: due to the Arbitration decision, Slovakia lost a population of 854,218 (503,980 Hungarians and 272,145 Slovaks and Czechs). Hetényi cautions us that historians offer slightly different numbers of Hungarians who lived on the annexed territory. Martin Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomezie v rokoch 1938 – 1845* (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa Nitra, 2008), 15 – 16. http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/e_kniznica/hetenyi.pdf (accessed 10 July 2010).

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

to the pressure with loud calls for revision of the existing border – a political aim that was often used as an excuse for closer relations with Slovakia’s Nazi “protector.” Both the Slovak state and Hungary strived to win the Reich’s sympathies and solve the problematic border issue.⁵⁹⁷ But the hopes and efforts of both states met a cold response from the Reich. In the course of 1940-41, Berlin sent several clear messages to Bratislava and Budapest outlining an unwavering interest in preserving the *status quo*: “For the time being it is not possible to move the border and its modification would be possible only after the war’s end. The revision of the Vienna Accords decision would have an impact on all borders in southeastern Europe and nobody would see an end to it...”⁵⁹⁸ Neither side was satisfied with the establishment of the new Slovak-Hungarian border. The lack of respect for the newly established border essentially formed the terrain for Jew-smuggling operations.

Scholarly works on the problem of illegal immigration agree that individuals who evade state control by acts such as illegal border crossing raise the question of the state’s ability to protect and control its territory. Illegal border crossing thus necessarily speaks to the legitimacy of the state.⁵⁹⁹ From a different perspective, the state that is unable to control its own territory and border poses a threat to its neighbours.⁶⁰⁰ But the “leaking border” complicates the terrain of the ethno-national state with yet another paradox. The general adoption of an ethno-national paradigm in wartime Europe created a mass of undesirable citizens who,

⁵⁹⁷ For more details, see Martin Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie v rokoch 1938 – 1945*, 18 – 23.

⁵⁹⁸ Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie*, 24.

⁵⁹⁹ Marlou Schrover et al., *Illegal Migration and Gender in a Global and Historical Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 11.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

for various reasons, defied national categorization. The Slovak government faced a constant flow of non-Slovak refugees from across Central and Eastern Europe after ethnic nationalism took the upper hand in the region. A considerable influx of individuals who became *personae non gratae* due to ethno-national projects applied elsewhere in Europe jeopardized the Slovak state's principal goal – the construction of a homogenous national polity of Slovaks. The young Slovak state that still had to come to terms with the socio-economic consequences of the transformation from multicultural Czechoslovakia to an ethno-national Slovak monolith could not easily cope with the influx of refugees from other states. It is within this larger context that the approach to the illegal border crossing of Jews to Hungary has to be understood.

The fluctuation of migrants across the newly established border with Hungary rapidly increased in the course of 1938. The border was crossed daily by refugees, organized groups of smugglers, businessmen eager to buy cheaper goods on the other side of the border, Hungarian border guards, gendarmes and Hungarian and German soldiers.⁶⁰¹ But due to overall coldness, mutual ignorance and the lack of communication between Slovak and Hungarian political leadership, the refugee problem remained mostly unsolved at the diplomatic level. On the part of Hungary, the influx of Slovak and Polish Jewish illegal refugees to Hungary via its northern border reopened Hungary's old wounds. Hungary had been previously exposed to the influx of thousands of Jewish refugees from

⁶⁰¹ Martin Hetényi, "Náčrt problematiky utečencov z Maďarska v okrese Nitra 1938 – 1945," in Martin Šmigel' and Peter Mičko, eds., *Slovenská Republika 1938 – 1945 očami mladých historikov IV, Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Banská Bystrica 14.- 15. apríl 2005* (Banská Bystrica, 2005), 440.

Galicia in the course of World War I.⁶⁰² Another wave of Jewish refugees via its northern border with Slovakia created the impression that the problem of illegal Jewish immigrants coming to Hungary had not abated. The problem of illegal immigration to the country came to the fore especially during the rule of pro-German radical prime ministers such as Béla Imrédy, László Bárdossy, Döme Sztójay and Ferenc Szálasi. Quite to the contrary, a benevolent stance towards the illegal immigration of Jews was present during the reign of “reluctant collaborators” such as Pál Teleki, Miklós Kállay and Géza Lakatos. According to Raul Hilberg, as far as the implementation of antisemitic measures in Hungary was concerned, “the moderate prime ministers slowed down and arrested the catastrophe; the extremists hurried it along.”⁶⁰³

The absence of efficient communication between the Slovak state and Hungary had an impact on the management of the refugee problem.⁶⁰⁴ The fluctuation of population across the border was influenced by the nature of social relations within border communities. According to Martin Hetényi, Jews became victims of a “non-standard” quality of relations on the Slovak-Hungarian border.⁶⁰⁵ Indeed, the inhabitants of the border areas were exposed to the direct negative impact of extensive territorial losses as a result of the Vienna Accords. Personal tragedies caused by the loss of property led to nationalist outbursts

⁶⁰² Paul Hanebrink, “Transnational Culture War: Christianity, Nation, and the Judeo-Bolshevik Myth in Hungary, 1890–1920,” *The Journal of Modern History* 80, no.1 (2008), 68 – 69.

⁶⁰³ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 511.

⁶⁰⁴ Hetényi, “Náčrt problematiky,” 431.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

against Hungarians, Czechs and Jews.⁶⁰⁶ Anti-Semitic, anti-Magyar, and anti-Czech sentiments in the region were further exacerbated by press accusations that Jews favored Czech centralism and Hungarian revisionism.⁶⁰⁷ In addition, the press encouraged discussion of the resettlement of Jews from Slovak territory via legal means. On 8 November 1938, just a few days after the Vienna Arbitration, the daily *Slovak* published an article titled, “Would One Thousand Bratislava Jews Really Move to Bolivia?” With a great deal of sarcasm, the article stated that even more than a thousand Jews could move not only to Bolivia but to other states as well. A day later the same paper supported the idea of the emigration of Jews, deprived of their assets, to Palestine.⁶⁰⁸ Similar articles in the press were to prepare the ground for actual policies that challenged the presence of a Jewish minority in Slovakia: first, by what scholars dubbed as “voluntary” emigration, and second, by the forceful deportation of Jews from Slovakia orchestrated by the

⁶⁰⁶ On the history of Jewish community in this period, see Eduard Nižňanský, *Židovská komunita na Slovensku medzi československou parlamentnou demokraciou a slovenským štátom v stredoeurópskom kontexte*, (Prešov: Universum, 1999).

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 29-32.

⁶⁰⁸ Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku medzi tradíciou a asimiláciou* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2000), 112 – 113.

state in 1938,⁶⁰⁹ with the cooperation of Nazi Germany in 1942, and under the pressure of the Nazi “protector” in 1944.⁶¹⁰

It was mainly politics that formed the border. However, the border acquired its own specific nature from its management on the ground. There are several perspectives that underscore the heterogeneous nature of the Slovak-Hungarian wartime border. First, theoreticians of the border and border areas remind us that each border is surrounded by a “zone of pressure” which increases in strength closer to the border.⁶¹¹ Border crossing points are defined as points of “...impulse, change, changeability [and] a local centre of diffusion.”⁶¹² These views indicate that the border should not be studied as a single entity. Second, one should also keep in mind that relations between the border officers and administrators on both sides of the border left signatures on the border-crossing

⁶⁰⁹ The first radical step challenging the physical presence of Jews on Slovak territory was taken already in 1938. Prior to the occupation of southern Slovakia by Hungarian troops on 5 November, all districts received a telegram with governmental orders to transport all stateless Jews – i.e. non-Slovak residents and the homeless – to the southern territories soon to be ceded to Hungary. A hasty deportation of 7500 “stateless” Jews from Slovakia as well as Jews who were born in the areas of the southern territory that were to be succeeded to Hungary was the Slovak government’s direct response to the losses caused by the Vienna Accords. But the Hungarian authorities refused to accept the 7500 Jews from Slovakia. As a result, the deportees were forced to stay in the cold November weather in provisional tents and dugouts in a no-man’s land on the Slovak-Hungarian border. Only upon the intervention of Jewish communities were most of the deported Jews eventually admitted back to Slovakia.

⁶¹⁰ It is no secret that Slovakia played with the bizarre idea of resettling its Jews abroad prior to the establishment of the Slovak state, in the period of Slovak autonomy (October 1938 – March 1939). Slovak politician Karol Sidor proposed resettling the Jews to Birobidzhan in the Soviet Union, arguing that most Slovak Jews were communists anyway. On Nazi resettlement policies, see Christopher Browning, “Nazi Resettlement Policy and the Search for a Solution to the Jewish Question, 1939-1941,” *German Studies Review* 9, no. 3 (1986), 497-519; Ulrich Herbert, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik, National Socialist Extermination Policies. Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000); On emigration policies, see Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 555 – 580; Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration* (New York: Picador, A Metropolitan Book, Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 31; Philippe Burrin, *Hitler and the Jews: The Genesis of the Holocaust* (London and New York: Edward Arnold; New York: Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, 1994), 72.

⁶¹¹ Milan Jeřábek et al., *České pohraničí*, 47.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 51

phenomenon all along the Slovak-Hungarian frontier.⁶¹³ The so-called “*finančná stráž*” (financial guard) watched the border during the period of Slovak autonomy and throughout the existence of the Slovak state. Hlinka guards and the military participated in supervising the cross-border movement due to the small number of members of the financial guard.⁶¹⁴ The variety in the representation of border guards contributed to the specific nature of the southern border’s various sections.

In 1939 Slovak authorities suspected that Hungary was trying to get rid of Jews by dubious means. The Presidium of the County Office issued a warning stating that the Hungarian authorities were developing subtle means to remove their own Jews: various handwritten comments on the national status of the passports’ holder in the field marked as “*állampolgárság*” (i.e. nationality, citizenship). The comments aimed to raise the suspicions of Slovak border administrators as regards the Hungarian national status of Jewish passport owners. If the doubts about the Hungarian nationality of Jews returning from Slovakia back to Hungary emerged, the Slovak border guards might have prevented their return to Hungary. Hungarian authorities thus generated problems and difficulties for Jews returning to Hungary. It was suspected that the Hungarian authorities aimed to prevent the return of its Jews to Hungary. As a response to such

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie*, 36. Following the occupation of southern Slovakia by Hungarian troops, the command of southwest Slovakia issued directives which consolidated the movement across the newly established demarcation line as follows. The border could be crossed only at the selected cross-points on the basis of written permission issued by local gendarme stations. Since many Slovaks’ fields happened to be situated in the annexed territory, the newly established border could be crossed exclusively for agricultural purposes. Border crossing was prohibited from dusk to dawn with the exception of those seeking medical help or in cases of efforts to extinguish spreading fire. Those individuals who evaded the directives faced up to fourteen days in prison or a fine of up to 5000 Ks.

practices the Slovak government subjected the passports of all Hungarians crossing the newly-established border to close inspection. The Slovak customs officers were instructed to collect “suspicious passports” with any handwritten comments and refrain from issuing visas to such individuals. In order to prevent the influx of unwanted Jews from Hungary, Slovakia insisted that the Hungarian authorities clarify citizenship status in the passport of those crossing the border.⁶¹⁵ But given the increasing wave of antisemitism in Central Europe such measures could hardly curb the influx of Jewish migrants and refugees.

The radicalization of antisemitic discourse in Slovakia after the Salzburg talks in July 1940 further intensified movement on the border in both directions. In October 1940 the Ministry of the Interior warned all districts in Slovakia about Jews and non-Slovak citizens who “ran away from justice or went into hiding” and called for vigilance on the part of regional administrators to prevent the influx of these Jews on Slovak territory by all means.⁶¹⁶ Meanwhile, many Slovak Jews were trying to evade antisemitism by legal emigration. But with Europe deeply engaged in the war and antisemitism escalating, legal emigration was slowly turning into an unattainable goal for most Jews. “Voluntary” emigration of the persecuted Jews from Slovakia was inhibited by many problems dating back to the outbreak of World War II. The emigration procedure was sluggish and extremely problematic due to obstructive immigration policies and the decreased

⁶¹⁵ ŠABpT, fond OÚP, kartón 65, zákl. číslo: 248 prez. Heslo: Vyhostenie židov z Maďarska. Dok. č. 1063/1939 prez. Predmet: židia z Maďarska, poškodzovanie hosp. záujmov slovenských príslušníkov.

⁶¹⁶ ŠOBA, fond OÚP, zákl. číslo: 3009/1941 prez. Heslo: Zákaz prístupu židom-cudzím štátnym príslušníkom na územie Slovenského štátu.

number of emigration destinations in war-ridden Europe.⁶¹⁷ In his memoir Holocaust survivor Bedřich Róna offers some insight into the dilemmas Slovak Jews were exposed to in terms of emigration:

Emigration? Where to? The borders were almost impenetrable. In the west there was a Protectorate, i.e. Germany. In the north there was defeated Poland, i.e. Germans. Southeast, there was Hungary which imposed restrictions on travel even for Slovaks due to tension between both states. Moreover, as a rule, Jews could not obtain Slovak passports which made them resort to illegal border crossing. But this [option – NP] could help some individuals, but absolutely not as a mass solution⁶¹⁸

For Jews the outbreak of the war posed too many challenges, making a relatively safe destination difficult. On 13 September 1940 the Ministry of the Interior in Slovakia ordered the withdrawal of passports from “politickí zbohatlíci” (political parvenus) and Jews within eight days.⁶¹⁹ Those who failed to do so faced imprisonment for up to one month or a penalty up to 100,000 Ks. This measure clearly signalled that the government had abandoned voluntary emigration as a means of solving the “Jewish problem.”⁶²⁰ From this point on, illegal emigration became the only means of reaching relatively safe countries.

⁶¹⁷ Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 54.

⁶¹⁸ Bedřich Róna, *Osudy z temných časů* (Prague: vydavatel'stvo G plus G, 2003), 16 – 17.

⁶¹⁹ ŠABpT, fond OÚH, kartón č. 214, zákl. č. 7449/41 adm., Žid. Cestovné pasy – odobratie.

⁶²⁰ Ibid. The same decree entitled the regional offices to control overseas phone calls made by Jews and “politically unreliable individuals.” These phone calls were to be transcribed and within one hour submitted to USB (State Security Centre) regardless of their contents.

Whereas in fall 1940 the government basically turned the Jewish minority into prisoners in their own state, fall 1941 represented a significant change in the implementation of antisemitic policies. By fall 1941 the Slovak state managed to dispose of Jews from the Slovak economy. At this time the deportation of Slovak Jews materialized. The first steps leading to the deportation of Jews from Slovakia were most likely discussed at a meeting at Hitler's headquarters on 23-24 October 1941. Whereas Kamenec and Rothkirchen agree on the willingness of the Slovak government to resolve the "Jewish problem" as well as its responsiveness to the German offer,⁶²¹ Katarína Hradská emphasizes that the Nazi Germans initiated interest in the deportations of the Jews and followed their own "German scenario." In her view, "the nature of the German intervention was substantial, but still inconspicuous."⁶²² These different views on the origins of the decision to deport the majority of Slovak Jews apart, the deportation process accelerated border movement since many Jews evaded deportation by fleeing to Hungary.

Based on the February 1942 agreement between Vojtech Tuka and the German ambassador in Bratislava Hans Ludin, the first transport was composed of young men and women between the ages of 16 and 35. After solving the logistical transportation challenges, such as establishing five assembly points

⁶²¹ Jarek Mensfelt, *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia, 1938 -1945: Slovakia and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question,"* 2nd ed. (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, and Banská Bystrica: Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, 2002), 116.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, 89. The scholarly literature offers various interpretations of the crucial events that formed the origins of the Final Solution in Slovakia. The interpretations range from the Final Solution as an instrument to manipulate public opinion and a litmus test of Slovak loyalty to Germany to the Final Solution as the result of the rapid pauperization of the Jews and the inability of the administration to handle the social problems the state had itself created. Another school of thought, especially prevalent among Israeli scholars, underlines ideology as the prime mover behind the Holocaust in Slovakia and condemns Slovak leaders who offered the Jews to Germany together with a payment for each deported Jew. The debate around the issue of the Slovak offer of Jews to Germany and the nature of Slovak-German relations remains heated and is still an unresolved issue.

(Poprad, Patrónka, Sered', Žilina, Nováky) and the organization and supervision of the transports by Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior, the first deportation train with 999 young women left Poprad, Slovakia for Auschwitz on 26 March 1942. But Slovak authorities objected that the "spirit of Christianity" was abandoned when Jewish families were torn apart.⁶²³ As a result of this plea, the first family transport left Trnava on 11 April 1942. But the deportation of entire Jewish families was supported by more pragmatic reasoning. Subjecting entire families to deportation was used as a means of lowering the number of escapees and easing the administrative load. Jewish escapees complicated the situation on the border and continued to challenge local district offices in the border region. For example, the newspaper *Gardista* described the hectic work of the Nitra police, challenged daily by the violation of antisemitic laws by both Jews and Aryans. The author of the article complained, "Jews are crossing the border in order to avoid labour duty" and threatened that "Aryans who assist Jews will be punished, too."⁶²⁴ In order to ease the administrative paper work the district officer in Medzilaborce in his April 1942 monthly report called for a radical approach to the Jewish question in his region: "It would be desirable that the evacuation of Jews was carried out in a radical fashion to reduce the administrative work since currently Jewish affairs represent the most important occupation in the offices."⁶²⁵ He further complained that administrators do not have time to respond to all the appeals, including those of influential individuals:

⁶²³ Livia Rothkirchen, "The Situation of Jews in Slovakia between 1939 and 1945," *Jahrbuch fuer antisemitismusforschung* (Frankfurt a. Mein, 1998), 52.

⁶²⁴ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 7, 44.

⁶²⁵ Eduard Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 330.

“it is often a game of nerves, which will not cease until the evacuation of the Jews is accomplished.”⁶²⁶ More important, it was also believed that assembling Jewish families for transport would diminish the chaotic and horrific scenes, the wild chasing of Jews through the streets for example, and thus prevent public protests. For instance, in April 1942 during the round up of young Jewish women in Medzilaborce only 68 were assembled and transferred to Poprad, while 80 deserted.⁶²⁷ According to the report of Medzilaborce’s district officer Kornel Reinhardt to the Centre of State Security, “the round up of Jews went smoothly, but only to the point when Jews who deserted were replaced by Jews whom the authorities caught on the street...”⁶²⁸ As a result of these unruly roundups more Jews than originally required by the Ministry of the Interior were placed in a single transport. It was within this context that Reinhardt suggested solving the chaotic situation by the deportation of entire families: “[Our –NP] work would be easier if entire families would be deported; in that case, perhaps, there would be no desertions. It is difficult for family members to say goodbye.”⁶²⁹

As these documents indicate, bureaucrats in lower administrative positions could not carry on with their daily agenda as a result of the challenges of deportation. According to the report of CEO head Augustin Morávek about 5000 Jews had evaded deportation by mid-May.⁶³⁰ The situation was so critical that the Ministry of the Interior could not ignore it any longer. In order to alleviate the work load of lower administrators the Ministry of the Interior shifted the burden

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ján Hlavinka, “Vlaky nádeje,” *Pamät’ Národa* 4(2005),19.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 465.

of responsibility for the search for escaped Jews to the Police Centre in Bratislava (Kriminálna Ústredňa v Bratislave – KRIUS) by the directive issued 14 March 1942. Instead of notifying multiple offices about Jewish escapees, lower administrators were to provide a brief single report about such events to Department 14 of the Ministry of the Interior.⁶³¹

The period between the political radicalization following the Salzburg talks in 1940 and the initiation of the deportation of the Jews yielded a variety of responses from the Jewish population, ranging from obedience to resistance. From the onset of the deportations rumours circulating about the fate of Jews provided an impetus for increased border traffic. In Nitra, for example, many believed that Jews would be transported to Russia and shot. According to a Nitra district officer's March 1942 report the "impression was a result of returned soldiers' fairy tales about the treatment of Jews in Russia."⁶³² In the eastern Slovak town of Prešov Jews were alarmed by rumours of deportation to the Galicia district of the General Government. Following the deportation of young girls many Jews in the region crossed to Hungary.⁶³³ According to Eugene Levai, "the Slovak Jews made no secret of the fact that 'they preferred to spend the remainder of their lives in some Hungarian prison or internment camp, rather than be exposed to deportation; for this reason they were determined to cross the Hungarian frontier at all costs.'"⁶³⁴ This claim is corroborated by archival documents. From April 1942 reports of the head of the State Security Headquarters on the ongoing

⁶³¹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 270.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶³⁴ Levai, *Black Book*, 57.

deportation of Jews stated that Jews from various districts such as Bratislava, Malacky, Zvolen, Revúca, Poprad, Zlaté Moravce, Trnava,⁶³⁵ Prešov and Vráble were trying to reach Hungary.⁶³⁶ Similarly, Jews with Hungarian citizenship living in Slovakia were also trying to cross the border into Hungary.⁶³⁷ In some cases the fleeing Jews managed to maintain communication with their relatives in Slovakia. For many Jews in Slovakia such contacts served as an incentive to leave the state. For example, the district officer in Trstená reported that those who managed to escape to Hungary sent letters to their relatives describing the hospitality of Hungarians and the lack of obstacles while crossing to the Hungarian side. According to the report, these letters pointed to the help of the American government, which provided financial support to refugees in Hungary via Switzerland. The district officer concluded by remarking that, “This, naturally, attracts the rest of the local Jews and now they all would like to go to Hungary.”⁶³⁸ Bedřich Róna, a Holocaust survivor from Hlohovec, described the situation of Jews who made it to Hungary in bright colours: “[the Jews – NP] spent time in coffee houses and conducted business merrily under the protective wings of Admiral Horthy.”⁶³⁹ Alica Barak Resslerová recalled that her family sent a coded message to her relatives in Hungary to inform them about their plan to cross the border. Such coded messages used secret signs and Hebrew words incorporated in the text without any specific meaning.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁵ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 256.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁶³⁸ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 329.

⁶³⁹ Bedřich Róna, *Holokaust po Slovensky*, (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2000), 24.

⁶⁴⁰ Barak-Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko krič*, 47.

The circulating rumours about the fate of the deportees and encouraging letters from Jews who made it to the “other side” encouraged more Slovak Jews to cross the border to Hungary. Mass escapes of Jews continued all around Slovakia. In Piešťany district the police estimated that 100 Jews escaped deportation in such a manner.⁶⁴¹ In the course of assembling Jews in Trnava on 7-8 April 1942 a “larger number of Jews” evaded deportation by crossing the border to Hungary.⁶⁴² At least one hundred Jews from Zlaté Moravce tried to cross the border to Hungary, often with the paid assistance of local truck drivers. Martina Fiamová came to the conclusion that approximately one-third of the Jews from Zlaté Moravce who crossed the border in 1942 survived the war.⁶⁴³ There was a mass escape of Jewish women from the 1942 deportation roundup in Michalovce, which resulted in the removal of district HG leader Dr. Kabina and Michalovce’s district officer Velgos⁶⁴⁴ from their posts. They failed to facilitate HG and police supervision of the women who received an order to assemble for deportation within two hours. Left without HG and police supervision, these women were given sufficient time to escape. Only 126 of 629 Jewish women were assembled in Michalovce district. According to available documents, in Michalovce 17 Jewish women showed up at the assembly station voluntarily, several hundred of the remaining women went into hiding or crossed the border to Hungary.⁶⁴⁵ The district officer in Michalovce tried to find an efficient means of bringing the

⁶⁴¹ ŠABpT, fond OÚP, zákl. číslo 749/1942 prez. , Heslo: Piešťany – židia, útek z Piešťan.

⁶⁴² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 256.

⁶⁴³ Martina Fiamová, “... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli ... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli,” *Domino*, Wednesday 2 April, 2008, <http://www.euro-domino.sk/pamat-naroda/clanok/840/-a-potom-jedneho-dna-proste-zmizli.html> (accessed 25 February 2009).

⁶⁴⁴ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 228.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 360 – 361.

escapees back to the town – one being a roundup of the parents of Jewish girls who evaded the March 1942 deportation. In order to halt the catastrophe, the Jewish Council in Michalovce promised to find these young women within 48 hours on condition that they would not be deported.⁶⁴⁶ The document does not provide information about the outcome.

Illegal border crossing to Hungary continued unabated in 1942-43. In his letter to the Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach⁶⁴⁷ Anton Vašek⁶⁴⁸ reported that by the end of June 1942 out of 89,000 Jews approximately 53,000 were deported to the East and about 10,000 either escaped to Hungary and other foreign countries or went into hiding.⁶⁴⁹ On 22 June 1942, three months after the outbreak of the first wave of deportations, the Hungarian Ambassador in Slovakia Dr. Kuhl voiced the concerns of the Hungarian government concerning Jewish refugees moving from Slovakia to Hungary. This was the second time that the Hungarian ambassador insisted that the Slovak government prevent the further influx of Jewish refugees to Hungarian territory.⁶⁵⁰ Despite the increased number of border guards, the flow of refugees did not stop. Quite the opposite, the movement of illegal Jewish refugees from Slovakia increased. There were cases when Slovak Jews attempted to cross the Slovak-Hungarian border repeatedly, some of them three or four times. The district commander of the gendarmerie in Bratislava

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid, 188.

⁶⁴⁷ Alexander Mach (1902 – 1980), member of the HSPP, representative of the Snem. In 1938 he was the head of the Propaganda Office (Úrad propagandy); 1940-1945 the Minister of the Interior; 1940 – 1944 – the government deputy; 1939 – 1944 – the main commander of the Hlinka Guard.

⁶⁴⁸ Anton Vašek (1905 – 1946), 1939 – 1942 the head of department 14 also called “Jewish department”. Department XIV was responsible for the organization of the deportations of Jews from Slovakia. After the war Vašek was sentenced to death and executed.

⁶⁴⁹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 420

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 419.

cautioned subordinate gendarmerie stations about one hundred Jews from Slovakia who were caught by Hungarian authorities and transferred to Senec with the aim of returning these Jews to Slovak territory. Gendarmes in border regions were ordered to obstruct such efforts.⁶⁵¹

The Slovak government remained oblivious to the unidirectional movement on the border and condoned the illegal crossing of Slovak Jews to Hungary well into 1942 when the first transports left Slovakia taking Jews to the East. A letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed to the Slovak Embassy in Hungary supports this claim.⁶⁵² According to the letter, the Prime Minister distanced himself from the problem of illegal Slovak Jewish refugees on Hungarian territory and expressed disinterest in their fate. According to the third paragraph of Law No. 68/42 issued 15 May 1942, the Jews who left Slovakia were automatically deprived of Slovak citizenship, as a result of which their property was confiscated by the state. Illegal refugees thus became *personae non gratae* on Slovak soil, and the burden of Slovak Jewish illegal emigration was left solely to Hungary. The Slovak side even advised Hungary to offer the unwanted Slovak Jews to the German authorities.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵¹ Jan Sulaček, *Biele Plášte*, vol. 1, 53.

⁶⁵² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 432 – 433.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 433.

Problematic Historical Agents: The Paid Smugglers of Jews

Scholarly views on the problem of paid help can be classified along two lines of thought. On the one hand, historians who take a sceptical view do not incorporate paid helpers into the category of rescuers. For example, sociologist Nechama Tec draws a clear line between rescuers and paid helpers. She further distinguishes paid helpers from those who received money for reasons other than protecting Jews.⁶⁵⁴ Accordingly, the paid helpers' "commitment to the protection of the Jews was weak and could easily be terminated by external threats."⁶⁵⁵ The other line of argument expresses more confidence in the effect of paid assistance to Jews. Jan Grabowski offers a somewhat untraditional perspective on the problem. According to Grabowski, paid helpers, even if they asked for a significant amount of money, should not be condemned as "immoral individuals deprived of a sense of decency..."⁶⁵⁶ Grabowski believes that assistance provided to Jews for money was in fact "an attempt to act normally in an abnormal situation," i.e. "to respect and honor . . . contractual commitment."⁶⁵⁷ Contrary to Tec, Grabowski has more faith in the motives and acts of paid helpers. In his view, "a trustworthy paid helper was . . . a useful ally in the Jewish fight for survival."⁶⁵⁸ As long as money was available paid helpers were reliable allies. But one has to keep in mind that the relationship between the paid helper and the

⁶⁵⁴ Nechama Tec, "Reflections on Rescuers," in *The Holocaust and History: The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed and the Reexamined*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Abraham J. Peck (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 656.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Jan Grabowski, *Rescue for Money: Paid Helpers in Poland, 1939 – 1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008), 9.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid.

victims was more complicated when financial sources ran out. For example, in 1943 there were several hundred Jewish refugees from Poland on Slovak territory waiting to be smuggled to Hungary. The lack of money needed for smuggling these Jews to Hungary prolonged the stay of these refugees on Slovak territory, thus exposing them to the Slovak authorities and antisemitic laws.⁶⁵⁹

One of the most challenging aspects of researching paid helpers is the difficulty tracing these historical agents with the resources available. Sociologist Nechama Tec cautions scholars about resorting to Jewish accounts and memoirs when studying the profiles of paid helpers since they tend to hide this aspect of the past.⁶⁶⁰ Nor does interviewing paid helpers seem to offer a sufficient base for examining this neglected theme. As Tec's extensive sociological research proves, paid helpers "refuse to identify themselves as Jewish protectors" and do not draw attention to the act of help when discussing the past.⁶⁶¹ Available archival documents offer only scattered information on paid help, and once we narrow our interest to the paid smugglers of Jews, the search becomes even more frustrating. The paid smugglers of Jews within the designated context are mostly anonymous historical agents.

Paid smugglers facilitated one of the key conditions for a successful rescue of persecuted Jews – mobility. The state banned the free movement of Jews through ghettoization, public place access restrictions and the imposition of the Star of David. The effort to remove Jews from the Slovak Christian milieu to designated and supervised areas represented a pretext for the efficient

⁶⁵⁹ Fatran, 257.

⁶⁶⁰ Tec, "Reflections on Rescuers," 656.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

organization of deportation. Smugglers' acts, in essence, went against antisemitic decrees that attempted to concentrate the Jews in chosen areas; they hampered the facilitation of deportation. As already demonstrated, missing individuals targeted for deportation introduced difficulties for the lower administrative level and increased the work of gendarmes in border regions. More important still, from a nationalist point of view, smugglers' acts disregarded national boundaries and hence the integrity and security of the young Slovak state. According to available data, the acts of those involved in Jewish smuggling operations exhibit various forms of assistance to Jews and various modes of hampering the implementation of antisemitic laws. There were smugglers who facilitated the mobility of Jews on both the territory of Slovakia *and* across the border to Hungary. Others operated in organized groups where all members facilitated the mobility of the Jews on the agreed route sections. Often the Jews themselves managed to buy the personal documents of Aryans. False IDs allowed Jews to pass among Christians, increasing their mobility outside of physically and symbolically ghettoized space. With the help of the passports of Aryans some Jews managed to reach the border and slip through passport control without facing major difficulties. Others combined means of rescue, i.e. they obtained IDs of Christians to reach the border in combination with smugglers' assistance across the border.

Those holding a driver's license (drivers by profession) stand out as the group most frequently involved in the organized smuggling of Jewish refugees to Hungary. As the available documents suggest, many non-Jews with available means of transportation such as cars and trucks grasped the opportunity from the

very onset of deportation. Only a few weeks after the first wave of deportations in March 1942, the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior issued a directive for all district offices and police stations to watch for “Aryan” drivers assisting Jews. The Ministry found this issue pressing and entitled the district officers to send Aryan helpers of Jews to Ilava prison without prior consent of State Security Headquarters.⁶⁶² But as the available case studies indicate, district offices rarely resorted to this form of punishment. And even if they did so, most of the time smugglers of Jews faced short-term rather than long-term imprisonment. Since financial benefits from Jew-smuggling surpassed the risks involved, smugglers were usually encouraged by the successes of the first smuggling operation. The story of smugglers of the Putera group supports this view. The Putera case represents an example of turning one occasion of paid assistance to Jews into a more extensively organized long-term source of income.

The group of Leonard Putera from Nitra smuggled Jews to Hungary in 1942-43, until Putera’s assistance to Jews was discovered by the local authorities. Putera organized his first smuggling operation with Jan Kollár, a driver from Nitra, and Rudolf Daniš, a poor labourer from Šalgov, Nitra district. They successfully smuggled the Jewish woman Zola Piková from Nitra to Hungary for a payment of 5000 Ks. Encouraged by their initial success and the ongoing demand, the Putera group asked for a payment three times higher when organizing their second smuggling operation. Such a step could be interpreted in two different ways: either in terms of the greed of paid helpers eager to earn easy money or as a result of the workings of the “rescue market” in Slovakia which

⁶⁶² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 285.

simply “responded to the laws of supply and demand.”⁶⁶³ In Jan Grabowski’s view it could be claimed that the demand for rescue grew rapidly, and so did prices.⁶⁶⁴

From that time on Putera seemed to have faith in his enterprise since he turned smuggling into a family business. His wife Margita joined the group and Putera’s godmother Valéria Baranová, who lived in the border village Mladý Háj, occasionally sheltered Jews prior to their crossing. Putera and Kollár were the masterminds behind several two-step smuggling operations. First, the Jews were safely transferred to the border in cars. Then, one or two smugglers usually guided the Jews to Hungarian territory. The payments received for smuggling Jewish refugees allow some insight into the hierarchy within the Putera-Kollár group. Putera and Kollár, who drove refugees to the border, faced lesser risks than those involved in the actual smuggling of Jews across the border. Whereas Kollár and Putera received from 1000 to 4000 Ks each per smuggling operation, the smugglers operating on the border usually received anywhere between 3000 and 6000 Ks. Even though smugglers were often familiar with the area on both sides of the border (the newly established border with Hungary in 1938 was shifted deeper into Slovak territory), the border crossing was always dangerous.

The Putera group consisted of individuals of various national backgrounds: at least eleven individuals, including Jews and Hungarians, were implicated in smuggling Jews across the border. Most of the time, the contact between the Jews seeking help and the smugglers was mediated by Jews. In

⁶⁶³ Grabowski, *Rescue for Money*, 29.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

particular, Eduard Menzer from Nitra mediated contact in at least three cases, which earned him no less than 5000 Ks. Three Hungarians are mentioned as assisting Jews on the Hungarian side: Jozef Forró from Veča, Sitkay and Kóňa from Tardošked. The multiethnic nature of the Putera-Kollár group is noteworthy given the all-pervasive propaganda disseminating hatred of Jews and Magyars.

Similarly organized groups of smugglers could be detected all around the newly established southern border.⁶⁶⁵ Jozef Sulaček states that the employees of the hospital in Podbrezová were organized into a wide-scale smuggling operation via Čerenčany and secret cross points around Šamorín, Bernolákovo, Sereď, Levice, Dudince, Tomášovce, Gemerská Poloma, Medzeva, Košická Belá, Budimír, Trebišov and Snina.⁶⁶⁶ In southwest Slovakia the borders between Galanta and Sereď as well as between Čeklis and Urmin were among the most frequented. In Urmin, Nitra district the border crossings were organized by a Jew named Sušický who represented the top of the organized network of smugglers. Although all members of Sušický's group charged about 150 Ks for assistance to illegal refugees, this sum, according to historian Martin Hentényi, might be inaccurate or underestimated.⁶⁶⁷ The vicinity of Veľká Poľana, situated on the Hungarian side of the southeast border area, was a zone of operation for Jewish smuggler Henrich Rotmann. Rotmann was paid 600 Ks for smuggling three Polish Jews through Senné across the border to Hungary in November 1940.⁶⁶⁸ But Rotmann was caught by the police in Michalovce. Interestingly, Rotmann was

⁶⁶⁵ Fiamová, " ... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli.; Fiamová, *Rigorózna práca*, 86 – 87.

⁶⁶⁶ Sulaček, *Biele Plášte*, vol. 1, 53.

⁶⁶⁷ Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie*, 117 – 118.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 119 – 120.

not transferred to one of the Slovak labour camps – a standard procedure for those Jews trying to evade the regime by fleeing to Hungary. After serving five days in prison he was returned to Hungary. The area between Trnovec and Klučiarka was also frequented by smugglers, as in the case of Jewish pub owner Steiner and his mother from Šóku, situated in the territory annexed to Hungary. Steiner and his mother were suspected of smuggling both Jews and confidential information across the border. In the border village of Močenok farmer Jan Velebný and his daughter assisted Jews and Czechs.⁶⁶⁹ In Lapášske Ďarmôty a member of the border guards smuggled Jews for a payment of 200 Ks.⁶⁷⁰ There were also some comical situations as recalled by Holocaust survivors. Mrs. M.W. from Zvolen, central Slovakia, recalled a group of organized smugglers from Detva:

There was a group of people in Detva who dealt with taking Jews over the border into Hungary. ... So just before the border we got off the train and as agreed a cow shepherd, well, a cowherd, who knew the area well, was to take us across the border and we were supposed to arrive in Lučenec. A certain Mr. B. – a friend of ours – escorted us. Meanwhile we saw some really comical goings-on, because that cowherd wanted slivovica as well as money... I remember it, we crossed the fence, dogs were barking at us and it was very adventurous, but only from today's perspective. Everything really echoed and so he said that always, when he lies down, that means that

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid, 120.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

he can see something, and that we should lie down as well. Only that he'd been drinking that slivovica and he fell, so we fell down with him. Well, so that was the funniest part of our crossing.⁶⁷¹

According to testimony, the fleeing Jews were often robbed of their possessions. Mrs. M.W. ironically pointed to “people in Lučenec who, for a fee, did this so-called ‘rescue’ work.” These helpers “turned out not to be the most decent of people” as they deprived the family of all of their possessions except the clothes with camouflaged golden buttons that M.W. had on that night.⁶⁷² These buttons helped the family to survive in Budapest: “We didn’t starve. We always just sold a button.”⁶⁷³

The supporters and benefactors of the ethno-national regime in Slovakia, such as aryanizers and DP and HG members, were also involved in Jew-smuggling to Hungary and thus benefitted financially from the persecution of Jews. Such was the case of Emil Fiedler from Piešťany, a driver of German origin and a DP member from 1939-43.⁶⁷⁴ Fiedler’s membership in DP was pragmatic: when HG confiscated Fiedler’s car he decided to join the DP in order to get it back. His membership in the party was marked with problems due to both his antifascist views and distance from antisemitic policies.⁶⁷⁵ Following the 1942 deportations Fiedler, now in possession of his car, assisted some Jews to avoid deportation by driving them out of Piešťany and across the border. On 7 April

⁶⁷¹ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁷² Ibid., 104.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ ŠOBA, fond OLS Piešťany, kartón č. 3, Tľud 47/1946, Trestná vec: Emil Fiedler.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid. Fiedler received a meagre punishment – public reprimand and loss of the right to vote for a period of three years.

1942 Fiedler gave a ride to two Jews from Piešťany to Nitra for “only” 500 Ks.⁶⁷⁶ For a period of six months this DP member sheltered Amália Mantelová, who escaped from the assembling camp in Žilina. Fiedler even provided timely warnings to local Jews whenever so-called “chytačky” or “Jew hunts” were organized. Fiedler’s status as a bilingual individual familiar with Slovak and German cultures clearly worked to his benefit in wartime Slovakia.

Interestingly, some lower-ranked administrators in Slovakia, in cooperation with the clandestine Working Group, assisted Polish Jews to cross the Polish-Slovak border with an aim of reaching Hungary via Slovakia. Following the outbreak of WWII in September 1939 Slovakia became a transit country for Jews who escaped from Poland to Hungary. The Slovak state represented part of an illegal refugee corridor crossing Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Known to some Polish and Slovak Jews as the “Road to Life” this passageway represented a relatively safe way for refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. It was secretly maintained by smugglers of various nationalities operating at several key illegal border crossings: the first crossing, situated near Košice, was operated by Polish smugglers. Felek-Felac, situated 20 km from Cluj-Kolozsvar on the newly-established Hungarian-Romanian border was poorly controlled by state authorities on both sides. From here, Jewish refugees could follow the rescue corridor to northern Transylvania or cross the Hungary-Romanian border at Soesul-Rece (Hideg Szamos).⁶⁷⁷ In 1943, when the rumours about the fate of the deported Jews became more imminent, about 2500 Jews from occupied Poland crossed the

⁶⁷⁶ ŠOBA, fond OLS Piešťany, kartón č. 3, Tľud 47/1946, Trestná vec: Emil Fiedler.

⁶⁷⁷ Carmilly-Weinberger, 60 – 63.

Slovak-Polish border to find refuge in Hungary. Once the Jewish refugees reached secret reception centres along the Polish-Slovak border various methods were applied to smuggle them to Hungary. In fact, due to the participation of low-ranking Slovak administrators this transfer of Polish Jewish refugees to Hungary posed smaller risks than crossing the border on their own. Historian Ladislav Lipscher describes the ingenious means of smuggling these Jews via the Slovak-Hungarian border as follows:

The district board of the area would report to Ústredňa štátnej bezpečnosti (State Security Headquarters), the Slovak counterpart of the Gestapo, that a number of individuals, presumably of Hungarian nationality, had been apprehended in Slovakia on various charges of financial misdemeanour, State Security Headquarters would thereupon issue an order to the effect that, after due investigation, the offenders should be “expelled” from Slovakia and “deported” to Hungary. The “offenders” would then be taken under police escort to Prešov and from there south to the Hungarian border, where they crossed illegally into Hungary.⁶⁷⁸

Not only lower-ranked bureaucrats, but even the very institution that was in charge of controlling border traffic was implicated in Jew-smuggling. Gila Fatran, an Israeli-based historian on the Holocaust in Slovakia, points to the lenience of State Security headquarters with regard to the problem of illegal Jewish refugees on Slovak territory. In the period of July-September 1943 State

⁶⁷⁸ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia,” 222.

Security Headquarters reported only 55 cases of illegal border crossing, although there were, in fact, hundreds of refugees crossing the Slovak-Hungarian border. Peter Komendak, the head of State Security was challenged by Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach to explain State Security's lenient approach to the matter. Komendak sought to deflect Mach's strident criticism by claiming that Jewish refugees from Poland were citizens of Hungary. Komendak was candid when pressured by Mach: if transferred back to the General Government the refugees from Poland would be sent directly to a "Vernichtungslager." According to Fatran such a lukewarm attitude to Jewish refugee smuggling on the part of some local and even central authorities was a result of the lobbying of Working Group members and Jews from Liptovský Mikuláš.⁶⁷⁹

Deserters from the army represent another interesting group of smugglers. In 1943 there was a mass conscription of men into the Hungarian army which resulted in more cases of military desertion by way of flight from Hungary to Slovakia. Concerned about the infiltration of deserters by Hungarian spies, the Slovak government applied more caution in handling such cases. Since many of the deserters were Slovak-speaking individuals from annexed territories the government was rather reluctant to return deserters to the Hungarian army and expose them to the ordeal of military tribunals. Due to unemployment they often resorted to crime, such as stealing and the smuggling of goods or Jews.⁶⁸⁰ Since these former military deserters were familiar with the geography of the border area, smuggling seemed to be the most convenient source of income.

⁶⁷⁹ Fatran, *Boj o prežitie*, 258.

⁶⁸⁰ Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie*, 131.

Compared to the consequences facing Polish smugglers if caught by German authorities, smugglers operating along the Slovak-Hungarian border faced rather symbolic punishments. The Encyclopedia of the Righteous tells of groups of foresters from both sides of the Polish-Slovak border who smuggled hundreds of Jews from occupied Poland in 1943 via Slovak territory to Hungary and describes a bleak fate for those caught by the authorities: “Those foresters who were captured along the way were executed along with the Jews who were trying to steal across the border.”⁶⁸¹ The situation on the Slovak-Hungarian border was different. Meagre punishments for Jew-smuggling created ideal conditions for illegal border crossing and thriving smuggling operations. The calls of the radicals for more stringent sentences for smugglers did not alter the situation. For example, the head of the Chief Command of the Hlinka Guard František Málek denounced the assistance of “Aryans” to Jews as “vlastizrada” (betrayal of the motherland) and called for the severe punishment of those assisting Jews to avoid deportation.⁶⁸² But such calls remained mostly unanswered and the smuggling of Jews continued unabated.

Margita Puterová, a member of the Putera-Kollár group, attempted to smuggle 14-year-old Erika Weiss and 12-year-old Emília Weiss from Bratislava to Hungary for a payment of 3000 Ks. After she was caught by Hungarian customs officials Puterová was imprisoned for seven days in Nové Zámky, then sent back to Slovakia. Anton Tirol, a poor worker from Cabaj implicated in Jew smuggling, received the most severe punishment within the Putera-Kollár group –

⁶⁸¹ Gutman, *Encyclopedia*, 455.

⁶⁸² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 391.

imprisonment in Ilava for four-and-half months.⁶⁸³ Another member of the group, Rudolf Daniš, was imprisoned for 17 days at the district office in Nitra.⁶⁸⁴ As far as other smuggling groups were concerned, the punishments allotted to their members were similarly symbolic. Ladislav Lomjanský from Hurše attempted to smuggle two escapees from Vyhne labour camp, Ladislav and Jozef Vogel, to Hungary in September 1943. Lomjanský was paid 500 Ks by the Vogels. But his attempt failed, and after he was caught by the authorities Lomjanský was forced to pay a fine of 200 Ks.⁶⁸⁵ Such insignificant fines hardly presented an obstacle when the assistance to Jews enabled considerable profits. When the attempt of truck driver E. Pichňa to smuggle the Hollender family to Hungary in May 1942 failed, all were arrested. The Hollender family was sent to Nováky labour camp, whereas E. Pichňa had to pay 200 Ks. Pichňa was placed under police supervision and banned from transporting Jews. But this punishment did not stop Pichňa from further assisting Jews; a few days later on 6 June 1942 Pichňa transferred H. Zipser from Zlaté Moravce to the border for a payment of 200 Ks. He was caught again and this time Pichňa was sent to Ilava prison. Five days later he was released from prison by the order of State Security Headquarters, which responded to pressure from the district HG command. The HG in Zlaté Moravce

⁶⁸³ Ibid., 552.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Martin Macko, "Attitudes of the Majority Population toward Jewish Community during World War II on Example of Banská Štiavnica District," *Park of Generous Souls 2*. (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2008), 124.

aimed to use Pichňa as a “dôverník,” an informer, to reveal other truck drivers involved in smuggling. It is not clear if Pichňa accepted the offer or not.⁶⁸⁶

Even if smugglers were caught and sent to Ilava prison the length of the sentence was relatively short. If not, this was because other circumstances, such as an indication of “antifascist orientation,” usually extended one’s stay in prison. Martin Hetényi cites several cases of Jew smugglers detained in Ilava prison. Michal Hlavačka from Degeš, whose attempt to smuggle a Jewish woman and her two children to Hungary failed, was detained in Ilava for an unknown period of time. Jozef Spišiak, František Mirek, Michal Bavolar and Vincent Kmec from Rozhanovce in Prešov district smuggled Jews for 500-5000 Ks and were sentenced to five weeks in Ilava prison in winter 1944.⁶⁸⁷ Jozef Spišiak was not discouraged by the sentence and continued to smuggle Jews in April-May 1944 from Hungary to Slovakia.⁶⁸⁸ Jozef Baráth, Ján Velčický, Mária Nosianová and Mária Sekerešová from Nitra border area were sentenced to 14 days in prison and fined 5000 Ks. The fine was eventually replaced by an additional 14 day imprisonment.⁶⁸⁹ Martin Hetényi also describes the case of a smuggler of Czechs – Juraj Ondejka from Závadka, Michalovce district. His sentence for smuggling Czechs was much harsher than the above-mentioned punishments for smugglers of Jews: he was sentenced to one year in Ilava prison.⁶⁹⁰ To offer yet another

⁶⁸⁶ Martina Fiamová, “ ... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli ... a potom jedného dňa proste zmizli,” *Domino*, Wednesday 2 April, 2008, <http://www.euro-domino.sk/pamat-naroda/clanok/840/-a-potom-jedneho-dna-proste-zmizli.html> (accessed 25 February 2009).

⁶⁸⁷ Hetényi, *Slovensko maďarské pomedzie*, 122.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 122 – 123.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

comparison, for smuggling goods across the southern border one faced a punishment of 20 days in prison and a fine of 3000 Ks.⁶⁹¹

Archival documents also offer some information on the punishment meted out to those “Aryans” who provided their personal documents to facilitate the mobility of Jews. The punishment was so meagre as not to posit a major obstacle. For example, forty-three-year old Verona Hurtíková from Ardanovce, a village in Hlohovec district, and Uršula Komačaj from Malé Výčapy, Nitra district, provided their own personal documents to Jews in summer 1942. Both Hurtikova and Komačaj had to pay a fine of 50 Ks. According to the criminal code even if Hurtikova and Komačaj refused to pay 50 Ks the punishment was only one day in prison.⁶⁹² In both cases, the documents do not indicate if Hurtikova and Komačaj accepted money from the Jewish victims in return for their passports.

Not only was the penalty for smuggling Jews miniscule, there were other factors that allowed smugglers to evade detection, including the timing of the transfer of Jews to the borders and the place where smugglers were caught while assisting Jews. In April 1942, in the initial stages of the first wave of deportations, truck driver Štefan Farkaš from Horné Žembovice transported Ladislav Galamboš and his wife to the Hungarian border. His actions were brought to the attention of the authorities in Banská Štiavnica. However, Farkaš was not punished for helping Jews since the Centre of State Security (CSS) had not yet issued directives empowering district officers to punish Aryans assisting Jews.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, 125.

⁶⁹² ŠABpT, fond OÚP, Inv. číslo 295, kartón č. 103, Zákł. č.221/1943 prez. Predmet: Horizka Orsula vyd. Komačaj a Manasová Verona vyd. Hurtíková z Piešťan, napomáhanie Židom.

The directive was issued a few weeks later, on 24 April 1942, with instructions to send those who obstructed the deportation of Jews to Ilava prison.⁶⁹³ In another case, a smuggler could not be punished since it was impossible to prove that he smuggled a Jew across the border. According to documentation the fact that the smuggler was caught on Slovak territory “could be classified, at best, as an attempt to commit an offense” and in that case the act itself was not punishable under the current law.⁶⁹⁴ Given these circumstances, some smugglers’ assistance to Jews continued since, as the lower administrators complained, the existing law had flaws which tied the hands of the authorities. In this regard it is appropriate to refer to Juraj Špitzer’s memoir *Nechcel som byť Žid*, which recalls the story of one of the organized illegal border crossings in Malý Báb. Bárány, who lived close to the customs office, smuggled Jewish refugees across the river Váh by boat. “He carried on until he was imprisoned. Not for smuggling Jews though, but because of . . . smuggling alcohol and other contraband goods.”⁶⁹⁵

Whereas the punishments for Jew smuggling handed out to Aryan smugglers was insignificant, the punishment of Jewish victims was not. From the perspective of Jewish refugees the escape to Hungary was a risky enterprise.⁶⁹⁶ In his memoir Rudolf Vrba, an escapee from Auchwitz, describes his failed attempt to cross the border and the danger of being shot by Hungarian border guards. When he was handed to the Slovak authorities, he was transferred to one of the assembly camps for deportation to the East. The only human gesture he

⁶⁹³ Macko, “Arizácia židovského majetku v okrese Banská Štiavnica,” 124.

⁶⁹⁴ ŠABpT, fond OÚT, kartón č. 416, zákl. č. 1120/1942, Predmet: Zápisnica o ústnom pojednaní, proti Jánovi Trginovi.

⁶⁹⁵ Juraj Špitzer, *Nechcel som byť Žid* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1994), 33.

⁶⁹⁶ Tönsmeier, *Solidarita a pomoc*, 28.

experienced on the border was the act of an elderly woman who provided him with food and cigarettes while he was in prison.⁶⁹⁷ The Jews who did not make it to the other side were exposed to the danger of being incarcerated in Slovak labour camps where they faced the threat of being deported to the East. According to the March 1942 instructions distributed to district offices by Minister of the Interior Dr. Konka, Jewish males handed to Slovak custom authorities by Hungarian border guards were to be escorted to the labour camp in Nováky, whereas Jewish women were to be transferred to the labour camp at the Bratislava-Patrónka railway station Červený Most.⁶⁹⁸

The gender of the human “commodity” smugglers conducted across the border had a similarly far-reaching impact on the nature and success of smuggling operations. The gender factor, in a sense, predetermined the strategy of the smuggling operation. The most prominent examples come from 1943, when no deportation train left Slovakia. Despite the break in the deportation process in 1943, the fear of renewed deportation was all-pervasive. In fact, circulating rumours about upcoming *razzias* and the transfer of Jews to the East provided sufficient reason for many Jews to evade the danger by fleeing to Hungary. As a result of such rumours many Jewish parents made arrangements to smuggle their children to Hungary. It was generally known that the Hungarian authorities did not send children back to the Slovak authorities, but placed them in local orphanages.⁶⁹⁹ Some desperate Jewish parents in Slovakia, trying to rescue their children, made use of this option. In her memoir Alica Barak Resslerová recalled

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 188 – 189.

⁶⁹⁹ Vietor, *Dejiny okupácie južného Slovenska*, 293 – 294.

that she and her sister Rachel spent some time in Szabolcs orphanage which collected child refugees from Slovakia, Poland and Serbia. Hungarian law allowed families to adopt children from this orphanage.⁷⁰⁰ Once Resslerová and her sister were smuggled to Hungary, their uncle who lived there made the decision to place Alica and Rachel in Szabolcs temporarily and to apply for the adoption of both girls.⁷⁰¹ Historians Tomas Lang and Sándor Štrba mentioned the Jews from Nové Zámky who found refuge in the Budapest orphanage and the Institute for the Deaf.⁷⁰² Archival documents offer only fragments on the smuggling of Jewish children across the border. Most of the time, the helper/smuggler remains a mysterious anonymous figure, as shown in the case of four children. Seven-year-old Karol Jokkel from Nová Ves nad Žitavou was accompanied to Vráble by an unknown woman from Nová Ves. Twelve-year-old Ivan Engel from Nitra supposedly crossed the border on his own, 6-year-old Tomas Lederer from Dobšiná was smuggled to Hungary by an unknown woman and 12-year-old Zuzana Schlesingerová from Nitra was accompanied by an unknown farmer to the border and reached the village of Kalász on her own. All of these children were sent back to Nitra district after they were apprehended by border guards.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ Barak-Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko krič*, 50.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid*, 51.

⁷⁰² Tomáš Lang and Šándor Štrba, *Holokaust na južnom Slovensku” na pozadí histórie novozámockých židov* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2006), 207 – 208.

⁷⁰³ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 283.

The Fateful Year of 1944

The Jews who made a timely decision and reached Hungary with or without the help of paid smugglers were saved from the radical approach to the Jewish question in Slovakia between 1940 and 1942. But fleeing across the border to Hungary represented a temporary solution. Due to the annexation of new territories and the persecution of Jews in Europe the number of Jews in Hungary increased from about 500,000 before the war to approximately 800,000 in 1944, when Eichmann was relocated to initiate his antisemitic policy.⁷⁰⁴ As Raul Hilberg reminds us, "... the Hungarian Jews were living on an island. But the island was not surrounded by water; it was a land island enclosed and protected only by a political boundary. The Jews depended on that boundary for their survival, and the Germans had to break the barrier down."⁷⁰⁵

March 1944 represented a turning point in illegal Slovak-Hungarian border crossing. As a result of the 1944 deportation of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz the flow of Jewish refugees across the border changed direction. A number of Hungarian Jews, especially Jews from the annexed territory, were trying to save their lives by making their way to Slovakia in spring and summer 1944. According to correspondence between Veessenmeyer and Ritter dated 2 May 1944 a number of Jews from zones I (Carpathians), II (Transylvania) and III (North of Budapest from Košice to the Reich frontier) tried to cross the border to

⁷⁰⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Books, 2006), 139. Raul Hilberg noted the number of 750,000 Jews in Hungary by 1944. (Hilberg, *Destruction*, 509).

⁷⁰⁵ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 509.

Slovakia and Romania.⁷⁰⁶ Some Jews from the Hungarian countryside eluded deportation by paying off the Hungarian and German soldiers to be able to reach Slovakia and Romania.⁷⁰⁷ In order to placate the concerns of Nazi Germany over the refugee problem the deputy prime minister in Slovakia Alexander Mach assured Ludin that there was a heavily guarded border and that the number of Hungarian Jews who managed to escape to Slovakia was small.⁷⁰⁸ The Nazi leadership must have been sceptical about such assurances since according to the German *chargé d'affaires* in Hungary Edmund Veessenmayer about 4000 Jews from Hungary made it to Slovakia.⁷⁰⁹ From the viewpoint of the radicals in Hungary and the Nazi occupiers, further escapes could be prevented only with the quick deportation of the Jews trapped in occupied Hungary. Certainly, there were additional factors that hastened the deportation of Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz: the military successes of the approaching Red Army tremendously accelerated the speed of the deportation of Jews from Hungary. Therefore the Nazi leadership did not have to apply additional measures in the border zone to prevent illegal border crossing to Slovakia and Romania. In this connection, Holocaust survivors' memories of the situation on the border in the critical year 1944 are instructive. In her memoir Alica Barak-Resslerová says that it was easier to cross the border in 1944 than in 1942. Slovak and German units operating on

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid, 541. In 1944 the concentration and deportation of Hungarian Jews was organized from the outer zones (I – Carpathians, II – Transylvania) to the old Hungarian lands (III- North of Budapest from Kosice to Reich frontier, IV – East of Danube without Budapest, V – Budapest).

⁷⁰⁷ Raphael Patai, *The Jews of Hungary: History, Culture, Psychology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 574.

⁷⁰⁸ Randolph Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: the Holocaust in Hungary* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 246.

⁷⁰⁹ Robert Letz, "Pomoc prenasledovaným Židom na Slovensku v rokoch 1939 1945," *Viera a život* 9, no. 3 (1999), 213 – 216.

the border were transferred to the front to halt the approaching Red Army. As a result, the border was relatively unguarded. With the help of a smuggler, whom Resslerová described as a “Hungarian-speaking Gypsy from Slovakia . . . whose appearance did not evoke trust,” Resslerová, her sister, and her cousin safely crossed the border to Slovakia in daylight.⁷¹⁰ But in *Dangerous Diplomacy*, Theo Tschuy describes the border crossing experience of eighteen-year-old Slovak Jew Rafi Friedl, alias Janos Sampias, in January 1944 as a very frightful experience: “The border police and the secret services were aided by a treasonable anti-Semite populace on both sides of the frontier.”⁷¹¹

Such contradictory memories related to illegal border crossing in 1944 aside, there are several factors that support a view of the Slovak-Hungarian border in the final stages of the war as poorly watched. First, fear of the approaching Red Army tied up a considerable amount of the Reich’s manpower. Second, hasty organization of the 1944 deportation of Jews from Hungary required extensive human resources. Finally, there were hopes that the upcoming end of the war would introduce yet another revision of the existing borders. This might explain the lack of effort to guard the problematic Slovak-Hungarian border, a border that caused discord between Slovakia and Hungary for nearly six years.

The hectic movement across the border in the final stages of World War II put tremendous pressure on the Slovak state. In addition to Jewish refugees from Hungary the Slovak state was exposed to refugees from the East fleeing the approaching Red Army. By the end of August 1944 there were 19,000-19,500

⁷¹⁰ Barak-Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko krič*, 57.

⁷¹¹ Theo Tschuy, *Dangerous Diplomacy. The Story of Carl Lutz, Rescuer of 62,000 Hungarian Jews* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 5.

Ukrainian, Polish and Russian refugees (65% of whom were women and children), mostly situated in south-central (Krupina, Modrý Kameň, Lovinobaňa, Hnúšť'a, Revúca) and central Slovakia (Brezno, Banská Bystrica, Zvolen, Kremnica).⁷¹² The presence of the eastern European refugees caused difficulties among the locals and increased expenses for the Slovak government trying to cope with the refugee problem.⁷¹³ Slovaks responded to the influx of refugees in various ways, ranging from help and hospitality to outright suspicion, hostility and even liquidation.⁷¹⁴ Many of those fleeing eastern Europeans tried to make their way to Hungary, thus adding to the pressure the border region had already been exposed to.⁷¹⁵ In addition, there were many complaints about Hungarian evacuees wandering in the streets asking for food or buying up supplies in the stores. Given the number of evacuees, State Security carried out regular raids in order to round up illegal immigrants.⁷¹⁶ The situation was further complicated by the Czech and Slovak representatives of clandestine antifascist organizations, representatives of the former Czechoslovak regime, the officers of the Czechoslovak army as well as leftist party functionaries who utilized escape routes across the Slovak-Hungarian border for illegal departures to the West. In the final stages of the war legal and illegal crossings of the border occurred

⁷¹² Michal Šmigel', "Príchod ukrajinských utečencov v roku 1944, ich štruktúra a rozmiestnenie v republike," in *Slovenská Republika 1938 – 1945 očami mladých historikov IV, Zborník príspevkov z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie Banská Bystrica 14.- 15. apríl 2005*, eds. Michal Šmigel', Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica, 2005), 420 – 423.

⁷¹³ ŠABpT, ONÚ Rišňovce, kartón č. 2, zákl. č 1-175/1944, predmet: opatrenia týkajúce sa utečencov.

⁷¹⁴ After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising in 1944 the situation was no longer safe for Ukrainian refugees due to the danger posed by the "red Slovaks" and the approaching Red Army. Moreover in September 1944, the Reich announced the transfer of Ukrainian refugees to its own territory. Only those who remained in the care of their relatives in Slovakia could be exempted from the transfer by the decision of the district offices.

⁷¹⁵ Šmigel', 426.

⁷¹⁶ Hetényi, "Náčrt problematiky," 442.

daily.⁷¹⁷ Due to this immense pressure the border guard and central office handling of border traffic was inefficient and chaotic. If we accept the view that “borders are local manifestations of the claims of a state’s authority” then the attitude of the Slovak state vis-à-vis the situation on the Slovak-Hungarian border reflects the crisis that the Slovak state faced in the final stages of its existence.

The outbreak of the August 1944 Slovak national uprising encouraged many fleeing Jews to join the uprising as a means of rescue. But soon the uprising was suppressed and the invasion of the *Wehrmacht* led to a second wave of deportations in 1944. The new geopolitical situation in the last stages of the Slovak state made Jews dependent on the help of Christians more than ever before. Hiding or passing in a Christian world became the only viable rescue options.

Conclusion

A longstanding feature of historical scholarship is the interpretation of historical events within national frameworks. This approach has selectively chosen historical agents and events deemed relevant to the nation-building process and employed simplified national histories for the consumption of wide audiences. As a result, the treatment of the rescue of European Jews remains undervalued in contemporary scholarship. This chapter steps away from the typical elements and traditional framework of nationally-oriented studies to

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

examine the border as an ambiguous entity vis-à-vis the ethno-national context of World War II.

The Slovak-Hungarian border as established by the Vienna Accords in 1938 was heterogeneous, and thus allowed for various conditions amenable to illegal border crossing. This was mainly the result of the generally lukewarm approach of the state to the problem of fleeing Jews. Smugglers came from various social strata, including farmers and the administration. Despite their different backgrounds, each group embraced the smuggling of Jews as a relatively easy and safe source of additional income. The Slovak state did little to hamper the initiative of smugglers operating in southern border areas. The punishment for assisting in smuggling Jews, especially given the potential profits, was not discouraging. As such, the Slovak state was silently complicit in such activities, which turned out to be a conveniently complementary solution to the “Jewish problem” on Slovak territory.

The Jews who made it to Hungary had a better chance of surviving World War II than those who decided to stay in Slovakia. Certainly, Jews living in war-torn Europe could not have accurately assessed which move represented the best solution to their extremely difficult situation: stay in Slovakia and face increasing persecution or cross the border and face the insecurity of a relatively unknown cultural milieu. But the research presented here suggests quite clearly that the latter proved the more successful strategy.

Chapter V

“On the Path to the Cross”:

Baptism as a Means of Rescuing Jews from Deportations in 1942

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ...

The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians 3:28

Introduction

For several decades the Catholic Church has been commonly presented as a classic example of the “bystander” category – as a “silent agent” or silent bystander.¹ The categorization of the Church as a “silent bystander” implies the higher and lower clergy’s noninvolvement in problematic events and hence suggests the presence of a *homogenous* and stable institution free of internal dissent. A “bystander,” in legal terms, is “one who stands near; a chance looker-on; hence one who has no concern with the business being transacted...,” and thus the categorization helped to ward off potentially sharper views about the role of

¹ Henry, *We Only Know Men*, 11. About the role of the Pope and the Vatican, see, for example, Michael Phayer, “Helping the Jews is Not an Easy Thing to Do: Vatican Holocaust Policy: Continuity Or Change?” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 21, no. 3 (2008), 421- 453; Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust* (New York: Leicester University Press, 2001); David I. Kertzer, *The Popes against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

the clergy *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust.² Following this line of thought, a bystander is “neither victim nor perpetrator; his or her legally relevant role is that of witness – someone who happened to be present and could shed light on what actually occurred.”³ Yet, there is a natural tension, an unsettling element that bothers the curious eye. As Victoria Barnett and Helen Fein remind us, the Judaic and Christian traditions ascribed a more active role to a “witness” who exists and acts within what Fein has called the “universe of obligation.”⁴ Only recently, the concept of neutrality of the Church has been re-interpreted by Frank J. Coppa, currently one of the leading experts on papal history. Coppa argued that a *program* of papal “impartiality” was a diplomatic *tactic* and that objective neutrality could never really be obtained.⁵ Similarly, Barnett found the concept of “neutral bystander” unproductive and introduced the notion of a “culpable bystander.” Bystander, in her view, is a historical agent who is present but does not take a role in a specific event. From this perspective, the decision not to get involved is a decision nevertheless and therefore indicates a degree of culpability.⁶ The International Catholic-Jewish Historical Commission (ICJHC), in its report on the role of the Church *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust entitled “The Vatican and the Holocaust,” further undermined the categorization of the Church as a bystander. The October 2000 report of the ICJHC, consisting of three Jewish and three Catholic scholars, undermined the widely accepted notion of the Vatican’s neutrality and concluded that the Pope was fully aware of the

² Barnett, *Bystanders*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Phayer, “Helping the Jews,” 421-453.

⁶ Barnett, *Bystanders*, 9-10.

seriousness of the situation facing Jews, that he refused to facilitate the emigration of Jews to certain destinations such as Palestine or South America and that the Vatican did not pursue neutral policies during the Nazi-Soviet conflict.⁷ As of today, one can see only a handful of studies that focus on Christians and clergy as perpetrators of wartime crimes against Jews, and scholars are only slowly beginning to reflect on the Church and its clergy as active contributors to the persecution of Jews.⁸

The aim of this chapter is to complicate the supposedly pristine account of the Church commonly offered by contemporary scholarship. Using Slovakia as a case study, I will demonstrate that the Church was firmly established and responsive to its own socio-political milieu. The priests, as *homines politici* determined the speed of the antisemitic course, contributed to the deterioration of social conditions and to the persecution of Jews and hence bear responsibility for their ultimate fate. Certainly, there were also priests who defied state-conducted antisemitic policies; their acts should not be underestimated. But these were mostly isolated efforts that eventually saved only a fragment of the Jewish population in Slovakia. On a narrower scale, this chapter explores particularly the conversion of Jews to Christianity as yet another “grey zone of rescue.” The persecuted Jews faced many obstacles on the path to rescue via baptism. Tensions

⁷ “Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/pius.html> (accessed 5 April 2011).

⁸ See, for example, a brief summary of these works by: Doris Bergen, “Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, the Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919-1945,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007), 32; Klaus-Peter Friedrich, “Collaboration in a ‘Land without a Quisling’: Patterns of Cooperation with the Nazi German Occupation Regime in Poland during World War II,” *Slavic Review* 64, no. 4 (2005), 733-739.

between the Church and the radicals as well the relations between the more dominant Roman Catholic Church and representatives of other Christian Churches had a far reaching impact on the rescue of Jews. The public outcry against the effort of many Jews to join the Christian community and bureaucratic measures to curb mass conversion to Christianity represented further obstacles for Jewish victims trying to avoid the deportation.

It will be argued that conversion to Christianity represented an uncertain means of rescue. First, not every baptized Jew in Slovakia survived the war and witnessed liberation from the clerico-fascist regime in 1945. From the perspective of the victims, baptism could not guarantee the safety of Jews in the young ethno-national state and had to be combined with other protective means such as possession of ministerial or presidential exemptions from deportation or even hiding or crossing the border to safer Hungary. Second, mass Jewish baptisms became a platform against which Slovak and Christian identities became negotiated. The conversion of Jews to Christianity thus turned out to be an extremely sensitive public issue that unleashed a wave of antisemitism on the ground and hence problematized the rescue of Jews from the 1942 deportation. Since the baptism of Jews aroused such strong public feelings, the problem of an increasing number of conversions became an effective manoeuvring instrument in the hands of political rivals. The effort of HSPP and HG radicals to deport as many Jews as possible, including those baptized, challenged the clergy to respond to the pressure. The deportation of the baptized Jews was seen as an attack on the clergy's domain, a daring step of the radicals which triggered some opposition of

the clergy to the state's antisemitic measures. Yet, the resistance of priests to the radical antisemitic course in Slovakia can hardly be considered a "continuing permanent state"; it was, rather, "a daily changing and probably fragile behavioural pattern that again and again moved back to conformity as many...tried to negotiate their paths through this complex era."⁹ It is precisely this unstable pattern of responsiveness of the clergy to the plight of the Jews that allows us to reflect on the agency of the clergy within the framework of the "grey zone of rescue."

The uncritical celebration of the Roman Catholic Church's role in wartime Slovakia and efforts to imprint controversial priests onto the national memory in the transition period following the 1993 establishment of the Slovak Republic has become a permanent feature of memory politics in contemporary Slovakia. Continuing nostalgia for the lost influence that the Roman Catholic Church once exercised upon morality, society and politics has informed one of the most heated public discussions about the wartime Slovak state: the role of the president-priest Jozef Tiso and the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰ After the fall of communism, the voices of the Catholic Church's representatives regarding Tiso's role were rather hesitant.¹¹ Although the Roman Catholic Church sympathized with the Jewish tragedy, there was also an effort to revive Tiso's legacy. A decade later the

⁹ Dietrich, *Christian Responses*, xvii.

¹⁰ From a socio-political perspective the recent nostalgia for the lost influence of the Catholic Church in addition to the impossibility of accessing the archival documents of its bishoprics in Slovakia represent major barriers to scholarly efforts to establish a more nuanced narrative. Both of these problems are interrelated, since the unavailability of documents helps to fuel polarized discussions on the topic. Despite lobbying in 2010, the prospect of public access to archival materials remains extremely bleak. This author was thus compelled to resort to the incomplete and patchy sources on the topic in district archives and in the Slovak National Archive in Bratislava.

¹¹ Paulovičová, "The 'Unmasterable Past'?"

Roman Catholic Church's representatives took decisive steps leading to Tiso's rehabilitation. In December 2006, Archbishop of Bratislava-Trnava Ján Sokol publicly praised Tiso. Four months later, in April 2007, Cardinal Ján Chrisostom Korec defended Tiso on the television program "V politike."¹² And on 18 April 2007, at the sixtieth anniversary of Tiso's execution, a memorial to Tiso was unveiled.

Not fully recovered from this controversy, Slovakia shortly thereafter witnessed a new effort to imprint another problematic priest onto national memory. The law, *Lex Hlinka*, passed on 26 October 2007, recognized Andrej Hlinka's contribution to the idea of Slovak nationhood and downplayed Hlinka's admiration of Mussolini's regime, anti-pluralism and antisemitism, as well as his lack of respect for democracy.¹³ Moreover, a new public discussion about the Roman Catholic bishop Vojtaššák stirred conflicting emotions among Slovaks over their historical self-consciousness and national pride even further. "Kauza Vojtaššák" (The Case of Vojtaššák) emerged in 1996 as a result of an effort to beatify this controversial bishop.¹⁴ A victim of communist persecution, Vojtaššák was a member of wartime Slovakia's State Council, which gave a green light to

¹² "TA3 - Realita v Súvislostiach - Správy, Relácie, Živé Vysielanie, Diskusie" http://www.ta3.com/sk/reportaze/35867_zidovsku-komunitu-poburili-vyroky-kardinala-korca (accessed 28 April 2007).

¹³ Paulovičová, "The 'Unmasterable Past'?"

¹⁴ See for example Robert Letz, "Biskup Vojtaššák ako problém slovenskej historiografie," *Studia Historica Tyrnaviensia* (2002); Ivan Kamenec, "Verejná a Politická Činnosť Jána Vojtaššáka v Rokoch 1939-1945.," in *Spišský Biskup Ján Vojtaššák*, ed. Ivan Chalupecký (Spišská Kapitula - Spišské Podhradie: Kňazský seminár biskupa Jána Vojtaššáka, 2003), 53-68; Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Na okraj beatifikačného procesu biskupa Jána Vojtaššáka. (Osobné poznámky.," in *Účasť kresťanov v protifašistickom odboji v strednej Európe v rokoch 1933-1945. Zborník*, ed. Dezider Tóth and Daniela Baranová, vol. 2 (Liptovský Mikuláš: Transcius Múzeum SNP v Banskej Bystrici, 2004); Ján Hlavinka and Ivan Kamenec, *Spory o Biskupa Vojtaššáka: Politické a spoločenské aktivity Jána Vojtaššáka v rokoch 1938-1945* (Bratislava: Dokumentačné stredisko Holokaustu, 2008).

the deportation of the Jews. There were several disputes that raised a storm of controversy over this problematic priest. The argument over Vojtaššák's response to the deportation of Jews, Vojtaššák's aryanization of Baldovské spa and the appearance of a film showing Vojtaššák giving a Nazi salute to Tiso all resulted in heated debate about Vojtaššák's place in national memory.¹⁵

In 2011, liberal politicians quietly observed yet another commemoration of a Roman Catholic priest, Ján Ferenčík, the head of the Ružomberok HSPD and the Podtatranský region HSPD's office. Ferenčík, who succeeded Andrej Hlinka in Ružomberok parish in the Spišská diocese, was an admirer of Hitler. He celebrated Hitler's strength and courage on the dictator's fifty-second birthday in an article in the weekly *Tatranský Slovák*.¹⁶ Ferenčík even went so far as to describe Hitler's birthday as the most beautiful national holiday in Germany and Slovakia and begged God to give Hitler "iron health and strength...and lots of blessings..."¹⁷ Concerned about the impact of the article, the Vatican divested Ferenčík of his office. Despite this, Ružomberok citizens erected a plaque to the memory of Ferenčík at the municipal hall.¹⁸ The silence of the proponents of Europeanization with regards to these problematic commemorative acts is disquieting.¹⁹ In the view of some, the reluctance of Slovaks to critically approach the role of the Catholic Church in the past has deeper psychological roots.

¹⁵ Paulovičová, "The 'Unmasterable Past'?"

¹⁶ Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 2, 281 – 284.

¹⁷ Ivan Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika, 1939-1945: Dokumenty* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 1992), 55.

¹⁸ "Jozef Karika: Ružomberok má čestný flek pre fanúšika Hitlera | Aktuality | Kultúra.Sme.Sk" <http://kultura.sme.sk/c/5806377/jozef-karika-ruzomberok-ma-cestny-flek-pre-fanusika-hitlera.html> (accessed 13 April 2011).

¹⁹ Paulovičová, "The 'Unmasterable Past'?"

Theologian Miroslav Kocúr²⁰ suggested that the inability to discuss these sensitive issues is the result of the intimate link between argumentation and the “emotionality of Slovaks.” Slovaks embrace Catholicism as their own family: “a priest is perceived as a father, the bishop as someone who is responsible for the functioning of this family and the pope as a representative of the Christ.”²¹ It is precisely this identification of Catholicism with family that, in the view of Kocúr, has a crippling effect on the willingness of Slovaks to criticize the Church: the problems of the family stay within the family and they will not be discussed or criticized.²²

Scholarship on the role of the Church in wartime Slovakia currently portrays the Church as a homogenous stronghold of Christian morals. Scholars uncritically glorify the highly positive attitude of the Church toward the Jews in Slovakia and ignore much of the evidence about the unheroic and ambiguous roles of clergymen in the actual implementation of antisemitism. That the representatives of the Catholic Church adapted Christian morals to fascist and national-socialist ideology and even participated in the persecution of Jews or that most clerical interventions were related to converted Jews only are facts conveniently omitted. German historian and medievalist Walter Brandmüller’s controversial monograph on the Church and the Holocaust in Slovakia paints a

²⁰ Miroslav Kocúr, ThDr., PhD., studied theology at the University of Comenius in Bratislava. He engaged in postdoctoral study at the Biblical Institute in Rome, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the Gregorian University in Rome. He was an instructor at the Catholic University in Ružomberok .

²¹ “A-Omega | Interview SME 15. 3. 2008.

http://www.aomega.sk/sk/spolocnost/interview_sme.php (accessed 10 January 2010).

²² Ibid.

picture of Slovakia as a realm of religious and cultural tolerance.²³ Peter Mulík, one of the most outspoken defenders of the wartime Catholic Church, claims that Slovakia was an “island of the blessed,” the only place where Catholic teachings remained “undeformed.”²⁴ An émigré historian Milan Ďurica’s production not only displays a strong bias but also a lack of confidence in the reader’s ability to judge independently.²⁵ In his translation of German documents Ďurica feeds readers specific sections of original documents, overwrought with the author’s obsessive highlighting of words and phrases designed to indicate the positive role of the Church in the wartime Slovakia. One study though, by Gabriel and Ladislav Hoffmann, occupies a unique place in the history of apologetic celebrations of the Catholic Church. Gabriel Hoffmann, a Jew rescued from transportation to Auschwitz by Dr. Jozef Štefánik, dedicated his life’s work to Jozef Tiso, whom he described as “a great son of the Slovak nation.”²⁶ According to the Hoffmanns, “Dr. Jozef Tiso, all bishops of Slovakia without exception, [and] the entire Roman Catholic Church with the support of the Vatican hierarchy represented by Pope Pius XII did the maximum of what was possible *vis-à-vis* both political relations and the oppression of neighbouring Germany...”²⁷

²³ Walter Brandmüller, *Holocaust in der Slowakei und Katholische Kirche* (Neustadt an der Aisch: Ph.C.W. Schmidt, 2003). See Eduard Nižňanský’s critical review of Brandmüller’s work in *Z dejín Holokaustu a jeho popieraní* (Bratislava: FF UK Bratislava, Katedra všeobecných dejín, 2007), 228 – 234.

²⁴ Peter Mulík, “Katolícka cirkev a politika Slovenskej republiky, 1939 – 1945,” in *Slovenský politický exil v zápase za samostatné Slovensko: materiály z vedeckej konferencie konanej v Bratislave 5.-6. júna 1995* (Bratislava: Dom zahraničných Slovákov, 1996), 102.

²⁵ Milan Stanislav Ďurica, *Katolícka cirkev na Slovensku 1938 - 1945: V hodnotení nemeckých diplomatov a tajných agentov* (Trnava: Spolok Svätého Vojtecha, 2001).

²⁶ Gabriel Hoffmann and Ladislav Hoffmann, *Katolícka cirkev a Tragédia Slovenských Židov v Dokumentoch* (Partizánske: Tlačiareň Garmond, 1994), book cover.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

Domestic liberal historians have not produced a single monograph to counteract the uncritical proliferation of historically biased accounts. A small group of historians challenge the work of academics celebrating the role of the Church on a limited scale: occasionally, in a few paragraphs of their own work, in book reviews, in private discussions or in the form of limited public protests. Peter Salner believed that it was *especially* [italics mine-NP] the Catholic Church in Slovakia that played an important role in the persecution of the Jews.²⁸ Eduard Nižňanský also makes the Roman Catholic Church accountable for the Holocaust in Slovakia. Nižňanský is a more outspoken critic of the Church and became *persona non grata* among pro-Church historians and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁹ Ivan Kamenec expressed himself cautiously, describing the Roman Catholic Church as “one of the ideological supports of the Ľudák regime [which-NP] did not intervene directly in the problem of the solution of the Jewish question, although it strove to moderate the expressions of radical antisemitism and their results in Slovakia and in Czech lands.”³⁰

The Impact of Religious-Secular Tensions on the Responses of the Clergy to the Persecution of the Jews

The Catholic Church in Slovakia welcomed the establishment of the Slovak state in March 1939. “Za Boha život, za národ slobodu!” – “Life for God,

²⁸ Peter Salner, *Židia ta Slovensku: Medzi tradíciou a asimiláciou* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2000), 104.

²⁹ Information obtained from Prof. Nižňanský in a private conversation in 2010.

³⁰ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 62 - 63.

freedom for the nation!” – represented the leading socio-political moral paradigm within the newly established state that included almost two million Roman Catholics, 400,000 Protestants and 90,000 Jews.³¹ The Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia had a far-reaching impact on education, culture and society. “Katolícka akcia” (Catholic Action)³² reached wide segments of the population via a number of Catholic organizations, including the Catholic Academy of Science and the Catholic Press Agency and clerics holding prominent secular positions of authority.³³ Three Catholic priests, Ján Vojtaššák, Ján Pöstényi and Andrej Marsina, were members of the State Council, and in the initial stages of the existence of the Slovak state one-fifth of all MPs in the *Snem* were priests (11 Roman Catholic, 1 Greek Catholic and 1 Protestant).³⁴ Yeshayahu Jelinek noted that “twenty-seven of fifty-eight county branches and two of six district organizations were led by clerics.”³⁵ It was not unusual to see Roman Catholic priests appointed as HSPP and HG leaders or as active functionaries within the HSPP ranks.

Unfortunately, the current inaccessibility of the archival material of the Roman Catholic Church means it is impossible to reconstruct exactly how many priests were members of the district and regional HSPP and HG. The head of the district HSPP and HG together with the district officer, and sometimes also the

³¹ Kamenec, *Spoločnosť, politika, historiografia*, 45.

³² Religious, spiritual, social and cultural activities of a non-political nature organized by priests. Ivan Petranský, “Katolícka cirkev v období prvej Slovenskej republiky,” in *Slovenská republika 1939 - 1945 očami mladých slovenských historikov, Zborník príspevkov z prvého sympózia Katedry histórie Filozofickej fakulty UCM Trnava v Modrovej 19. 20. Apríla 2002, Vol.1*, (Trnava: Univerzita Sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2002), 32.

³⁴ Ivan Petranský, “Katolícka cirkev,” 32. According to Yeshayahu Jelinek in 1940 out of 61 members of parliament 12 were priests. Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 52.

³⁵ Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 52.

representative of the DP and FS, formed the so-called “trojky” (committees of three) or “päťky” (committees of five). These committees made decisions about who would be deported in 1942 and who would not. The clerical influence within these institutions cannot be ignored, even if specific numbers are still unavailable. Scholars must therefore continue to work to determine the number of Roman Catholic priests appointed as the heads of HSPP and HG district branches in order more fully to understand the extent of Roman Catholic clerical influence during the course of the 1942 deportation. Furthermore, Roman Catholic priests were also active in educational programs for the HG, Hlinka Youth or the army and thus served as natural mediators between the HSPP, HG and the public. In many cases, the HG made sure that public announcements were read from pulpits in the local churches.³⁶

The all-pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic clergy soon became a thorn in the side of the secular authorities. Tensions between the Catholic clergy and secular politicians started to escalate as early as 1940 due to the government’s subtle techniques that aimed to undermine the power of the Church.³⁷ On several occasions memorandums of the Church addressed to key ministries were left unanswered, and even when Church representatives received a response, it was often negative or evasive. Being ignored by the authorities led Slovak bishops to voice their complaints in a letter dated 5 March 1940: “We are sorry to see that

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ The Church was traditionally involved in a power struggle with secular authority: the battle over the nature of schools, the morality of youths and the family, the matter of divorce, bureaucratic procedures concerning death or the availability of contraceptives represent a few examples of contentious points between the Church and secular politicians.

we do not find sufficient understanding from governing circles.”³⁸ But rather than feeling discouraged by the government’s attitude, the Roman Catholic priests in key governmental institutions took opportunities to clarify the position of the Church with reference to the political challenges of the time. On 29 October 1940, one of the Roman Catholic priests in the Slovak Assembly, František Jankovič, claimed that Catholic priests would protect Slovaks against “communist utopias” and that “Slovak priests... will build a people’s Slovakia in the national-socialist way.”³⁹ Moreover, the spiritual leader of the HG, Roman Catholic priest Karol Körper, regularly published his antisemitic religious pieces in *Gardista* and openly claimed that Jews do not have a place in a Christian society. In his article, “*Naše stanovisko*” (Our Attitude) Körper assured readers that Slovak priests “...are ready for the most extreme sacrifices... in the name of the nation, we are willing to become a rag in the hands of individuals to wipe the dirt off their faces...”⁴⁰

Despite the clergy’s firm support of the Slovak state’s ethno-national political course, the relationship between the Church and secular power deteriorated when radicals gained the upper hand in Slovak politics in the summer of 1940. One of the goals of the radicals was to restrain the influence of the Church, following Nazi Germany’s example. Alexander Mach, the newly established Minister of the Interior and the Head of the HG, announced the implementation of mercilessly antisemitic policies and made it clear that the

³⁸ Juraj Dolinský, *Cirkev a štát na Slovensku v r. 1918 – 1945* (Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 1999), 91.

³⁹ See for example the speech of František Jankovič in SNA, ÚN-NS, kartón č. 12, 93/45, František Jankovič.

⁴⁰ Karol Körper, “Naše stanovisko,” *Katolícke noviny*, November 7, 1940, 1.

Church's input into the matter of the inclusion/exclusion of Jews in Slovak society would no longer be respected. From this point on, the tensions between secular and religious authorities escalated.

Secular leaders downplayed the role of the Church in the process of the establishment of the Slovak ethno-national state, as a result of which the Roman Catholic bishops developed a degree of opposition to the regime. The bishops protested *some* forms of the persecution of Jewish citizens, thus registering a certain ambiguity in their attitudes. The Church, in fact, was unable to develop a clear response to the plight of Jews or strategies that could counterbalance radical secular political pressures. The Catholic Church wondered if it should distance itself from the regime's policies and enter the path of outright resistance, or should it be more pragmatic and adapt to the demands of the radicals while trying as much as possible to champion its own concerns within the given circumstances? This was a difficult choice for the Catholic Church, and it proved almost impossible to choose a single path.

It could be claimed that the Catholic Church favoured the latter option and occasionally detoured to the path of resistance if the excesses of antisemitism had harmful public repercussions. The legitimacy of the Catholic Church as a moral-religious-cultural force behind the nation was dependent upon the curbing of radical policies with regard to the Jews. But at the same time, the Catholic Church realized that it had to consent to some extent to the persecution of Jews in order to justify its role as a protector and defender of the "weak" Christian Slovak nation against non-Slovak and non-Christian elements such as the allegedly predatory

Jews. Both of these goals needed to be met to preserve the power and influence of the Catholic Church in the young ethno-national state. As a result, the Catholic Church continued to follow conflicting paths – a compromise that was eventually responsible for the Catholic Church’s failure to offer effective assistance to Jews in need. At some point, the compromise between resistance to the antisemitic course and pragmatic policy-making became untenable. In particular, the realization that these goals were no longer compatible emerged more persistently after the introduction of the Jewish Code on 9 September 1941.

The introduction of the Jewish Code, the infamous decree No. 198/1941, signalled secular power’s control over the solution of the “Jewish problem.” Although the Jewish Code legitimized all previous antisemitic steps of the government, it became a clear marker in the history of the persecution of the Jews due to its new definition based on racial principles. In cases of doubt, it was the Ministry of the Interior that decided if an individual was or was not deemed a Jew or a “mixed Jew.”⁴¹ The introduction of the racial principle into the antisemitic policies of a regime headed by a Roman Catholic priest increased the concerns of the Vatican about the role played by President Tiso, who was involved in the formulation of the Code.⁴² Cardinal Tardini at the Vatican claimed “that the Holy

⁴¹ *Slovenský zákonník*, 1941, nariadenie 198/1941 Sl.z.

⁴² Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 2, 128 – 132; Eduard Nižňanský’s review of Brandmüller, 228. Some apologists of Jozef Tiso highlight the fact that Tiso himself did *not* sign the Jewish Code, which, in their view, is proof of Tiso’s distancing himself from such policies. But liberal scholars remind the public that there was no need for Tiso to sign the Code since decree No. 210/1941 (the so called “Enabling Law”) transferred the power of the *Snem* and president to the government. As a result, governmental decrees did not have to be approved by the *Snem* and signed by the president.

See cannot stop Hitler, that is understandable, but why is it impossible to stop one priest [Tiso-NP]; who can understand that?”⁴³

From the birth of the Slovak Republic the Catholic Church reconciled its traditional antisemitism with its new political role through the concept of “punishing a sinner.” “Sin” was not defined within the context of criminal legislation but rather historically and culturally. Jews were accused of historical “sinning” against the Slovak nation in multiple ways such as stealing, plotting, oppressing the weak, crucifying Jesus, *et cetera*. The concept of “punishing a sinner” therefore allowed the Catholic Church to justify its own spiritual, moral and *political* leadership in society. On political grounds, the portrayal of Jews as sinners who deserve to be punished fitted easily into the ethno-nationalist paradigm since it helped to further unify Slovaks – “non-sinners” – under a *Christian* national flag. The concept of “punishing a sinner” thus allowed the Church to reconcile its ideology with the implementation of antisemitism on the ground. But the concept was soon to be replaced by a more radical one: the introduction of the racial principle. With this change, race became an essential marker of inclusion/exclusion in the ethno-national state, eventually undermining the Catholic Church’s fragile balance of principle and pragmatism.

The introduction of the racial principle into politics was unacceptable for the Catholic clergy because it drastically altered the concept of punishing ethnic Jews as sinners: it was no longer *agency* (i.e. stealing, plotting, oppressing the weak, crucifying Jesus etc.), but rather one’s birth, given by God, that was to be measured, evaluated, compared and eventually condemned to non-existence due

⁴³ Dolinský, *Cirkev a štát*, 78.

to the failure to meet man-made racial standards. The racial approach not only undermined the authority of God, but more important, it threatened Slovaks themselves. Given the racial standards of the time, dictated by Nazi Germany, the Slavic origin of Slovaks was not ideal. In this regard, the effort of radicals to introduce racist principles into politics was a risky enterprise. And from the viewpoint of the Church, racism threatened both its own authority within society, as well as the existence of the young Slovak nation. The publication of the Jewish Code in 1941 therefore marked the beginning of some opposition by Catholic priests to radical antisemitic measures.⁴⁴ In a letter to president Tiso, Karol Kmeťko, the bishop of Nitra, rejected racism as “modern nonsense” and a “dogmatic mistake.”⁴⁵ According to the document, “[s]inful deeds cannot be justified by national pride,” and this was underwritten by the implicit fear that after Jews, Slovaks would face racial persecution from a “bigger nation” [Nazi Germany-NP]. As a result, Kmeťko suggested a return to the Golden Rule outlined in the Bible: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” He also denounced the process of solving the Jewish problem as “revolutionary,” “unreasonable,” “cruel” and “unfair.” Kmeťko, however, was not defending the Jews – he maintained the need to punish sinners. Many Jews, in the view of the bishop, were dangerous delinquents and as such should be punishable under the criminal penal code rather than racist laws.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia,” 183.

⁴⁵ SNA, S – 424-3, The letter of Karol Kmeťko, president of the bishops’ conferences to Jozef Tiso.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The introduction of the Jewish Code and its racial principle also prompted a collective response on the part of Catholic bishops. In a memorandum to leading governmental officials dated 7 October 1941, the bishops expressed their concerns about the racist nature of the Code and their wish to protect several thousand new Catholics who were to be persecuted under its rubric. But as Ladislav Lipscher notes, “a careful perusal of similar documents of protest makes it clear that the Church was not opposed to the basic intent of the Jewish Code to exclude Jews from society. The Church was concerned only about the legal status of those Jews who had converted to Roman Catholicism.”⁴⁷ The representatives of the Roman Catholic Church were not concerned about the impact of the Code on non-baptized Jews, and they failed to object to the “separation of Jews from Christians” as a principle of racial ideology. In other words, although the Code prompted Church representatives to protest against the introduction of racist ideology, the persecution of Jews in general was not condemned.

Responses of Church leaders to the 1942 Deportations of the Jews

The deportation of Jews to the East was articulated in constitutional law No. 68/1942, passed by the *Snem* on 15 May 1942. How to interpret the deportation law has been a source of contention among historians. The law was a death sentence for thousands of Slovak Jews, although it protected the holders of so-called presidential exemptions along with doctors, pharmacists, veterinaries, engineers and Jews to whom specific ministries issued ministerial exemptions. In

⁴⁷ Lipscher, “The Jews of Slovakia 1939 – 1945,” 183.

the view of Tatjana Töns Mayer, ministerial and presidential exemptions represented a “crack” in the system of the Slovak clerical-authoritarian state.⁴⁸ Töns Mayer argued that “in comparison to Poland and the occupied Soviet territories, the exemptions from the deportation qualitatively changed the persecution [of Jews]” and even “opened a space for slowing down the deportations.”⁴⁹ The state exemptions, in her view, prevented total implementation of plans to solve the “Jewish question” in the way that it unfolded in other countries. The exemptions provided an incentive to the public to behave better towards Jews: “at first, the rise of expressions of disagreement, later, especially after the suppression of SNU [Slovak National Uprising] by German troops, ‘individual’ exemptions in the form of acts of solidarity, various forms of help and rescue.”⁵⁰ Indeed, in comparison to the previous decree, No. 63/39, which did not distinguish between Jews and Jews converted after 30 October 1918, and to the radical laws of the 1941 Jewish Code, the deportation law was milder in its impact on Jews. This is because the deportation law exempted those who converted from Judaism to Christianity *prior to* the establishment of the Slovak state on 14 March 1939 as well as Jews legally married to Christians prior to 10 September 1941.⁵¹

Yet, we must not ignore the fact that the deportation law sealed the tragic fate of the majority of Jews who converted to Christianity after 14 March 1939 on the basis that these conversions were inspired by pragmatic rather than spiritual

⁴⁸ Töns Mayer, *Solidarita a pomoc*, 18 – 21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Lucia Konösziová, “Možnosti záchrany Židov začiatkom deportácií v roku 1942 – modelové mesto Nitra,” *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 9 (2001), 95.

reasons, even though those baptized after 14 March 1939 could still avoid deportation if they managed to obtain one of the ministerial or presidential exemptions.⁵² To obtain these documents was not easy. For example, in the case of presidential exemptions, participation in the brief 1939 war against Hungary, financial contributions to the state to “revive [the] Slovak nation” as well as contributions to the Roman Catholic Church, charitable donations more generally and the religious and economic status of the relatives of the applicants were investigated, among other factors.⁵³ The speed of the deportation process also meant that some Jews were deported and others crossed the border to Hungary *before* the ministerial and presidential exemption could reach them.⁵⁴ Needless to say, ministerial or presidential exemptions could be withdrawn from the holder at any stage upon the inclination of the regional bureaucratic authorities and institutions such as the HG, HSPP or police.⁵⁵

We also learn about cases, such as Henrik Schreiber from Hlohovec, the Poprad Jews or the Jews from Trebišovce and Sečovce who were deported despite the fact that they possessed ministerial exemptions.⁵⁶ Furthermore, public anger that “the rich Jews” managed to obtain the exemptions and the poor did not encouraged local authorities to deport the holders of the exemptions; it was assumed that the Jews who had obtained the exemptions were either rich or were

⁵² Tönsmyer, *Solidarita a Pomoc*, 19.

⁵³ Konöszyová, “Možnosti záchrany,” 99.

⁵⁴ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 187 – 188. See also the document No. 241 in: Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 316 – 318.

⁵⁵ See for example Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 338 – 341.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 188; Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 379 – 382; Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku 6*, 320 – 321.

scheming against the authorities and hence deserved to be deported.⁵⁷ The Ministry of the Interior was sluggish in its response to this situation and it was not until three months after the beginning of the deportation process that the Ministry cautioned district offices not to deport those who had exemptions without its permission.⁵⁸ Jews possessing or awaiting an official exemption, including the converts, were thus exposed to the threat of vicious attacks from locals.

In Hlohovec the baptized Jews were mocked and denounced as “Uhráriers.”⁵⁹ Similarly in Prievidza, baptizing of Jews *en masse* led to protests, despite the fact that the transportation of Jews provoked the compassion of some local “Aryans.”⁶⁰ In March 1942, the district officer in Trstená wrote in his monthly report that baptisms of Jews should be prohibited since they are motivated by pragmatism.⁶¹ In the community at large, a March 1942 mass baptism of 42 Jews in Zemianske Kostol’any and Pribovce by the priest Albert Predmerský prompted anxiety about “scheming Jews.” This mass baptism was also denounced as sheer speculation, and the County Office (*Župný úrad*) in Nitra immediately instructed the district offices to halt applications for withdrawal from the Jewish religious community.⁶² An article entitled “Well Done Christians,” published in October 1942, made note of 120 Michalovce Jews who felt the need to own multiple protective documents: documents attesting to one’s irreplaceability in the Slovak economy, professional teaching licences, presidential exemptions as

⁵⁷ Ibid., 381 – 382.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 385.

⁵⁹ Uhrárier is an old-fashioned term not longer in usage in Slovak language. This word describes a person who stole something. The word might also suggest false Aryan origin of the baptized Jews.

⁶⁰ Fiamová, *Rigorózna práca*, 81.

⁶¹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 262.

⁶² SNA, fond ŽNM, kartón 60, 212/II-4/ŠB 1942.

well as baptismal documents.⁶³ Negative public responses to the Jewish owners of exemptions and baptismal documents, then, resulted in hasty solutions on the part of local administrators and HG, FS and HSPP members who, in an effort to curb public anger, went against the central directives and initiated the deportation of the “inconvenient” Jews.

Although it is rarely acknowledged, the protests of some members of government, priests and public figures against the deportation of Jews from Slovak territory were generally ineffective. Certainly, one should not ignore individual efforts of the Vicar of Bratislava, Augustin Pozdech, the Bishop of Prešov, Jozef Čársky or the Greek Catholic Bishop of Prešov, Pavol Gojdič, who spoke out against antisemitic policies in Slovakia in strong terms.⁶⁴ There was even an initiative by Bishop Pavel Jantusch to launch a centre to protect Catholics whom the law defined as Jews.⁶⁵ These individual calls, however, could not counteract the impression, widely disseminated by propaganda and supported by the Catholic priests in the government, that what was being done to Jews was fair punishment for their “crimes against the Slovak nation.”

The deportation of Jews was discussed during the 17 March 1942 meeting of the HSPP’s presidium and during the session of the State Council on 26 March 1942, i.e. one day after the initiation of the deportation of Jews from Slovakia.⁶⁶ It was during this “long, sharp and longwinded” debate of the State Council that the

⁶³ Peter Salner, *Židia na Slovensku: Medzi tradíciou a asimiláciou* (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2000), 116.

⁶⁴ Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Kauza Vojtaššák, Kritický pohľad na jedno blahorečenie,” *Slovo* 47 http://www.noveslovo.sk/archiv/2000_47/ominulosti.html (accessed 9 February 2009).

⁶⁵ SNA, fond Úrad Predsedníctva vlády, kartón 35, zákl.č. 2920/41, Založenie samostatnej ústredne pre katolíkov, ktorí podľa zákona sú i naďalej považovaní za Židov.

⁶⁶ Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 164 – 166.

official representatives of the Christian churches in Slovakia, Ján Vojtaššák and Bohuslav Klimo, were asked to make public proclamations about the deportation of the Jews.⁶⁷ Kamenec noted that Klimo, the representative of the Protestant Church,⁶⁸ did not really clarify the Church's position. Instead, Klimo stressed that the problem had to be approached from a political rather than a religious viewpoint and recommended that the president-priest Tiso issue numerous presidential exemptions from the deportation. Vojtaššák, the Roman Catholic bishop, issued an unclear statement as well. On the one hand, he stressed that no distinctions should be made among the baptized Jews with regard to the date of baptism, but at the same time, he claimed that the laws of the Jewish Code (Law No. 198/1941) should be followed. As Kamenec reminds us, Vojtaššák's insistence on following the Jewish Code was in sharp contrast to a 7 October 1941 memorandum, wherein Slovak bishops protested against the Jewish Code.⁶⁹

Equally important, it was one matter to stop the wave of mass conversions and a completely different problem to look after those Jews who successfully made it into the ranks of the Christian community. Catholic priests in government saw the protection of these baptized Jews as a precarious yet unavoidable political requirement, since this task was essential for preserving the clergy's power and prestige *vis-à-vis* the radicals. And so, when pressured by the radicals about the Jewish converts, the priests in government fashioned themselves as defenders of

⁶⁷ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁸ In this study "Protestant Church" refers to the Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession. This is important to clarify since there was also a very small number of members of the Protestant Methodist Church. Also the terms "Protestant" and "Lutheran" are interchangeable. The Protestant Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (in Slovak *Evanjelická cirkev augsburského vyznania na Slovensku*, ECAV) is a Lutheran church body in Slovakia.

⁶⁹ Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 166.

their “flock” and the Church’s sphere of influence. But an effort to protect the baptized Jews could easily be scuttled if the constellation of circumstances made this unfavourable to the interests of the Church. Such political pragmatism can be seen in priest Ján Pöstényi’s speech in the State Council on 29 October 1941. During his speech, Pöstényi criticized rich Jews for a lukewarm national attitude and their underestimation of the Slovak nation’s capabilities. But he also admitted that some Jews rejected “Jewish materialistic theory” and that there were many converts who rejected communist ideology.⁷⁰ Eventually, Pöstényi decried encroachments upon the rights of baptized Jews, not out of moral or Christian concerns, but out of fear that their suffering might raise the sympathies of Slovaks.⁷¹ Why was Pöstényi concerned about the public response to the situation of converts? Any feelings of compassion of Slovaks with the plight of Jewish converts struck right into the heart of the Roman Catholic Church’s political role as a *defender* of the Slovak nation against non-Slovak enemies. While the Church utilized the baptized to claim its own sphere of influence against the radicals, the baptized Jews were not fully embraced as equal members of the Christian community due to the need for the church to claim the role of defender of everything purely Slovak and Christian. This is why the baptized Jews continued to be an irritant to the Church throughout the existence of the Slovak state.

The deportation of the Jews who had converted after 14 March 1939 was clearly a sensitive matter. Uneasy about deporting the baptized Jews, the Catholic

⁷⁰ Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku 2*, 133 – 135.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Church leaders issued a resolution asking the government for a “separate resettlement [of these new Christians –NP] with the possibility of unrestricted religious life and religious-moral education.”⁷² The motivation behind this resolution is currently unclear, but it raises a number of fascinating questions. Did it aim to protect the converts from their ultimate fate in the East? Was it meant to silence opposition to the deportation of the converts among the faithful? Or did the Church simply develop this plan as another response to radical pressure? Whatever the answer, the proposal was ultimately not accompanied by any significant initiative on the part of the clergy in Slovakia to prevent the deportation of the converted or non-converted Jews to the East. When assured that the converts would be segregated from the rest of the deported Jews and that they would be provided access to their own facilities, two official representatives of the Christian Churches in the State Council, Roman Catholic bishop Ján Vojtaššák and the chief supervisor of the Protestant Church, Bohuslav Klimo, did not raise further objections in this matter.⁷³ Moreover, neither of the Roman Catholic priests in the State Council – Msgr. Andrej Marsina and Msgr. Ján Pöstényi – raised his voice to protect the converts from deportation.

Such a lukewarm attitude among the clergy in leading state positions is especially disturbing given the fact that in October 1941 the Vatican *chargé d'affaires* in Bratislava, Giuseppe Burzio, was made aware of the mass executions of the Jews who had been sent to the East.⁷⁴ Burzio was informed about the mass shooting of Jews of all ages and both sexes via bishop Michal Buzalka, who had

⁷² Nižňanský and Kamenec, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 2, 202 – 205.

⁷³ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 212; Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 295.

⁷⁴ Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika*, 71.

obtained the information from his chaplains serving in the East.⁷⁵ Also, Slovak army members who had witnessed the mass killings of Jews in the East informed their friends, relatives and high official representatives about the extermination of Jewish civilians in 1941.⁷⁶ Finally, wild rumours were circulated about the stateless Jews who had been deported from southern Slovak territory (then annexed to Hungary) whom the SS massacred in Kamenets Podolsk.⁷⁷ In light of these facts, it is hard to believe that Slovak bishops and priests in the government were unaware of the risks that the deported Jews, whether baptized or not, were exposed to.

Whereas the fate of some converts deported from Slovakia did not raise major protests from the clergy, this was not the case when the radicals encroached on the safety of the remaining baptized Jews in Slovakia in fall 1942. Based on the decree of the Ministry of the Interior, dated 5 November 1942, the Jews who converted to Christianity after 14 March 1939 were forced to wear the Jewish star. Nitra bishop Karol Kmeťko turned to President Tiso to exempt the converts from this obligation. In his letter, Kmeťko admitted that not all Jews converted to Christianity for spiritual reasons, but he believed that the “power of sacramental forgiveness and new religious education would change their mores.”⁷⁸ Kmeťko’s protest was followed by the protest of Roman Catholic bishop Pavol Jantausch, who insisted that Tiso change the formulation of the problematic decree as

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁷⁷ Livia Rothkirchen, “The Churches and the Deportation and Persecution of Jews in Slovakia,” in *The Holocaust and the Christian World: Reflections on the Past Challenges for the Future*, ed. Carol Rittner, Stephen D. Smith and Irena Steinfeldt (New York: Continuum, 2000), 105.

⁷⁸ Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika*, 164.

follows: “no Catholic, regardless when he was baptized, shall be marked as a Jew.”⁷⁹

Interestingly, the problem of identifying the converted Jews with the Star of David turned out to be a tricky issue that none of the central authorities were willing to address. Kmeťko’s request was sent from the presidential office to the presidium of the government. The members of the presidium shuffled it into the jurisdiction of the CEO. The CEO, too, refused to bear the responsibility for the fate of converts and thus presented the case as a “police problem” in the competence of the Ministry of the Interior. Although the fate of the converts eventually became the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, it was the CEO that was to make a final decision as far as wearing the Jewish star was concerned. In the end, the CEO leader, Augustin Morávek, exempted converts from the obligation of wearing the Jewish star, providing they were baptized before March 1939.⁸⁰

How can one explain the reluctance of ministries and central offices to make converted Jews wear the Star of David? Part of the answer is that deporting converted Jews from Slovakia to the East, where their suffering was out of sight of the Slovak Christian community, seemed in some ways more palatable than marking the remaining converts with the Jewish star – a policy that would invite physical attacks from radical factions within the population. Exposing the converts to the physical attacks of radical nationalists would introduce the risk of

⁷⁹ Document in the possession of prof. Nižňanský. Apoštolská administratúra v Trnave. C. 9790/1942. Predmet: Katolíci pokrstení zo Židovstva – označenie.

⁸⁰ Nižňanský and Hlavinka, eds., *Arizácie*, 49; Eduard Nižňanský, *Arizácie v Regiónoch Slovenska* (Bratislava: Stimul [u.a.], 2010).

a “wild solution” of the Jewish question – a risk that the government was trying to avoid. The last thing that the government wanted was to incur public criticism for the inability to keep control over the implementation of antisemitic policies. None of the ministries and central offices wanted to risk the certain political death that would result from this kind of public criticism. Furthermore, similar fears were present among the leading clergy, whose lukewarm response to the fate of deported converts and making the remaining converts wear the star supports this theory.

Tiso’s public speeches were crucial to the formation of public and clerical responses as well as to the persecution of the Jews. In his eyes, the deportation of Jews was an “action of the radicals,” and so all interventions in favour of Jews were conveniently redirected from the presidential office to the offices of the radicals Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach. According to Kamenec, Tiso did so because he was reluctant to engage in the deportation process.⁸¹ Tiso had also never protested or boycotted the deportation of Jews from Slovakia.⁸² Quite the contrary, on 16 August 1942, when 55,000 Jews had already been deported, he justified the deportation process in his infamous Holíč speech, where he said:⁸³

People ask whether what is being done with the Jews is Christian. Is it human? Is it not robbery?... I ask is it Christian when the nation wants to free itself from its eternal enemy? ...The Jewish element was a mortal threat to the Slovak. It is not necessary to persuade anybody of that. It would look

⁸¹ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 206.

⁸² Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 161.

⁸³ Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika*, 118.

even worse if we had not cleansed ourselves from them. And we did it according to the commandment of God: Slovak, free yourself from those who harm you.⁸⁴

Kamenec is correct in asserting that this speech is difficult to interpret. Was the president's speech: "empty political demagogy, a search for an excuse, an explanation of a clear crime, an amazing piece of political amateurism or political schizophrenia from the head of the state...?"⁸⁵ Such statements therefore problematized the position of the clergy in Slovakia and the Vatican by forcing them to respond to a difficult situation. From a report written by the Italian embassy in Slovakia to the Vatican we learn that the clergy in Slovakia "did not applaud Tiso's statements [in Holíč – NP]. " The clergy, according to the report, criticized Tiso's political opportunism and was disturbed by his interpretation of self-love as God's commandment.⁸⁶ Moreover, as far as the Vatican was concerned, despite its fervent diplomatic activity, the plans of the Slovak government to deport its Jews to the East could not be met head-on and had to be addressed through several intermediaries. The first of these, the Slovak ambassador in the Vatican, Karol Sidor, who regularly communicated the Vatican's concerns to the Slovak government, was pressured to call for moderation in the government's approach. However, Vatican protests against the racial principle of the Jewish Code that began in November 1941 as well as its protests of 14 March 1942 against the deportations of Jews from Slovakia

⁸⁴ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 206.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁸⁶ Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika*, 119.

remained unanswered by the Slovak government. Two months later, on 8 May 1942, the Slovak government remained firmly on its antisemitic political course: it justified both the deportations and the September 1941 Jewish Code.⁸⁷ The Vatican also voiced protests via its *charge d'affaires*, Burzio, in Bratislava. Nevertheless, Burzio, who was very concerned about the reputation of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia, was unsuccessful in his appeals to Slovak representatives.⁸⁸ The Vatican even used the Church in Hungary to put pressure on the Slovak government, but none of this was enough to make Tiso avert the tragic course of events.

At the end of the second month of ongoing deportations, the Roman Catholic Church finally publicly clarified its position vis-à-vis the treatment of Jews in the 26 April 1942 issue of *Katolícke noviny* (Catholic News).⁸⁹ The Protestant Church, too, was forced to clarify its position in an open letter of 20 May 1942. This was a response to a radical article published in the April 1942 issue of *Gardista* which claimed that Roman Catholic and Protestant pastors approved of the deportation of the Jews.⁹⁰ Although the radical *Gardista* article aimed to portray the Christian Churches in Slovakia as uniformly anti-Semitic, there were inconsistencies within and between the opinions of Catholics and Protestants. These similarities and differences, particularly between the attitudes of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches in Slovakia are illuminating.

⁸⁷ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 207 – 208.

⁸⁸ Kamenec et al., *Vatikán a Slovenská Republika*, 95.

⁸⁹ Roman Catholic bishops aimed to articulate their position on 12 March 1942 in an open letter entitled “Let’s Make the Jewish Question Clear.” But the Ministry of the Interior prevented Church leaders from having the letter read from the pulpits unless a few sections were modified. The Roman Catholic clergy refused to do so and decided to publish the letter anyway in the 26 April 1942 issue of *Katolícke noviny*.

⁹⁰ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 295.

Therefore, a comparison of these two oft-cited Roman Catholic and Protestant letters is helpful in understanding how clerics behaved with respect to the Jews.

In their letters addressed to the public, both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches publicly confirmed their traditional antisemitic sentiments. They agreed that Jews needed to be punished for the sins which they had committed against Slovaks, although they stipulated that the punishment itself should not transgress the limits of Christian principles. Roman Catholic bishops further confirmed the collective responsibility of Jews for Christ's crucifixion, the "destructive influence of Jews" on Slovaks and the plans of Jews to rule the world with the help of the Freemasonry. The bishops explained that these "facts" were adduced not to evoke vengeance, but rather to "bring to the fore [the] psychological...causes and reasons behind occasional, and often cruel, encroachments of nations against the Jews as a means of a national self-defense." As the document stated, on the part of nations "vengeance is forbidden, but self-defense is allowed." Yet self-defense had to be tempered by humanity: "Jews are humans... and hence they are also entitled to own property and have their own families."⁹¹ Similarly, Protestant Church representatives acknowledged the "heavy sins of Jews against Slovaks" and characterized Jews as "eager opponents of Slovak national efforts" and "cunning dealers of all kinds." The letter stated that a "better, nicer and happier future of [the] Slovak folk and nation depends also on a wise solution of the Jewish question..." i.e. approaching the problem "thoughtfully, fairly, in a Christian manner and according to Christian

⁹¹ Hoffmann and Hoffmann, *Katolícka cirkev*, 27.

principles....”⁹² The letter specified that Jews enjoyed the right to life and property, and their marriages, families and human dignity had to be respected.

Although both letters agreed on the matter of “punishing a sinner,” they responded to the issue of the mass baptism of Jews in a different fashion. First of all, the Roman Catholic Church decisively rejected accusations that it was involved in such mass baptisms and reminded the public that there was a catechetical preparation period lasting from three to ten months that guaranteed that Jews converted for the right reasons, rather than out of sheer pragmatism. The Protestant Church also established a preparation period of up to six months, but also stated that “in exceptional circumstances and justifiable cases it can be shortened accordingly.”⁹³ It was precisely this formulation that allowed Protestant pastors to reduce the length of the preparation period to a few weeks and hence baptize more Jews than Roman Catholic priests did.

In principle, both of these statements were ambiguous since they sanctioned ongoing antisemitic policies, and yet both letters also distanced the churches from any form of “un-Christian” approach to the issue. The letters, however, were silent about what exactly *did* qualify as a “Christian” approach to the exclusion of Jews from the economic, social and cultural spheres of Slovak society. How could one vouchsafe their right to life and property and respect for their marriages, families and human dignity while simultaneously punishing them as “rich, powerful and influential” at the same time? Not surprisingly, this question was not answered. Nonetheless, historical interpretations of both

⁹² Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 355.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

documents are overly optimistic about their impact. According to Robert Letz, “both documents fulfilled their goals and influenced an essential part of the Slovak public.”⁹⁴ Such a conclusion is at best tenuous, given the lack of detailed analysis of ordinary Slovaks’ responses to the persecution of Jews.

The April and May 1942 open letters did not necessarily prompt philo-Semitic behaviour, as Robert Letz suggests. This can be seen in the monthly reports of district officers. For example, in Námestovo, the district officer reported that the letters of Roman Catholic and Protestant Church leaders did not interest the public in the least.⁹⁵ Furthermore, from an April 1942 report of a district officer in Modra, we learn that these letters led to the criticism of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Church’s attitudes and that the public generally disapproved of the clergy’s “excessive political activity.”⁹⁶

Tensions within the Church: Catholics versus Protestants and Their Responses to the Persecuted Jews

According to Holocaust survivor Juraj Špitzer, neither Catholic nor Protestant pastors did enough to rescue Jews.⁹⁷ But scholars still see the clergy’s role as vital, and there have been several attempts to compare the assistance provided to Jews by the Protestants and the Roman Catholics. Some quantitative research on the clergy’s assistance has already been conducted at the regional

⁹⁴ Letz, “Pomoc prenasledovaným Židom,” 191.

⁹⁵ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 328

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

⁹⁷ Špitzer, *Nechcel som byť Žid*, 239.

level. Martin Macko investigated the region of Banská Štiavnica and concluded that the Protestant pastors were more willing to baptize Jews than the numerically larger community of Roman Catholic clergy. In this region, most Jews converted to Roman Catholicism prior to 14 March 1939, but after 10 September 1941, roughly 66% of Jews converted to the Lutheran creed.⁹⁸ The villages in the south of the Banská Štiavnica district displayed a higher occurrence of Lutheran baptisms, whereas most conversions to Roman Catholicism took place in the towns.⁹⁹

Another young historian, Martina Fiamová came to a similar conclusion in her research on the Holocaust in Zlaté Moravce. In 1942, 71% of conversions¹⁰⁰ were to the Lutheran faith. As in Banská Štiavnica, most of the Jews (67%) opted for the Lutheran denomination, while the rest were baptized as Roman Catholics. In Nitra only 11 Jews converted to Roman Catholicism in the period 1940 - 1941 and not a single one converted to Roman Catholicism in the course of the critical year 1942. On the other hand, 160 Jews were baptized by the Calvinist priest Ladislav Šedivý in Nitra between 1939 and 1942, and 6 Jews were baptized by the Lutheran priest Michal Cibulka in 1942.¹⁰¹ A similar pattern of conversion could probably be found in most cities of Central and Western Slovakia. In Eastern

⁹⁸ More specifically, 52 Jews out of 79.

⁹⁹ Martin Macko, "Postoje majoritného obyvateľstva k židovskej komunite počas II. svetovej vojny na príklade okresu Banská Štiavnica," in *Park usťachtilých duší: Pamätník Slovákom, ktorí pri záchrane Židov počas Holokaustu prisľi o život. 2, Základný Kameň. Park of Generous Souls: Memorial for Slovaks Who Lost their Lives while Saving Jews during the Holocaust. 2, the Foundation Stone*, Miloš Žiak et al., (Bratislava: Izraelská obchodná komora na Slovensku, 2008), 120 – 121.

¹⁰⁰ More specifically 60 out of 84 Jews converted to the Lutheran faith.

¹⁰¹ Fiamová, *Rigorózná práca*, 84; ŠA Nitra, fond Župný úrad Nitra, kartón 60, 202/II-4/ŠB-1942, Predmet: Prestupovanie Židov na kresťanské náboženstvá.

Slovakia the situation would be different due to the influence here of the Greek Catholic Church.

Available statistics suggest that in a Slovakia-wide context, there were 88,970 resident Jews before the first deportation train left the Slovak Republic in 1942.¹⁰² The deportations of 1942 reduced that number by over 75%. More specifically, on 1 March 1943, when the deportations came to a halt, there were 21,519 Jews left in Slovakia (see Table 1); 8002 of these Jews were baptized.¹⁰³ (See Figure 1 and Figure 2.) Among the group of 8002 baptized Jews, 2568 received baptism *prior* to 14 March 1939 (see Figure 3), which means that they were to be saved from deportation solely on the basis of having received a “timely” baptism. The remaining 5434 Jews, who received baptism after the establishment of the Slovak state, were not immediately safe but could utilize their baptism as a means of securing a ministerial or presidential exemption. (See Figure 4). Furthermore, out of the 8002 Jews baptized by the spring of 1943, the number of baptisms carried out by the Protestants¹⁰⁴ surpassed the number of baptisms of Jews by Roman Catholics (2812). The number of those baptized in the Greek Catholic rite was also relatively high (886).¹⁰⁵ (See Figure 1.)

¹⁰² The Jews in Slovakia were counted on 12 December 1940.

¹⁰³ 10,570 were Jews; 373 were atheists.

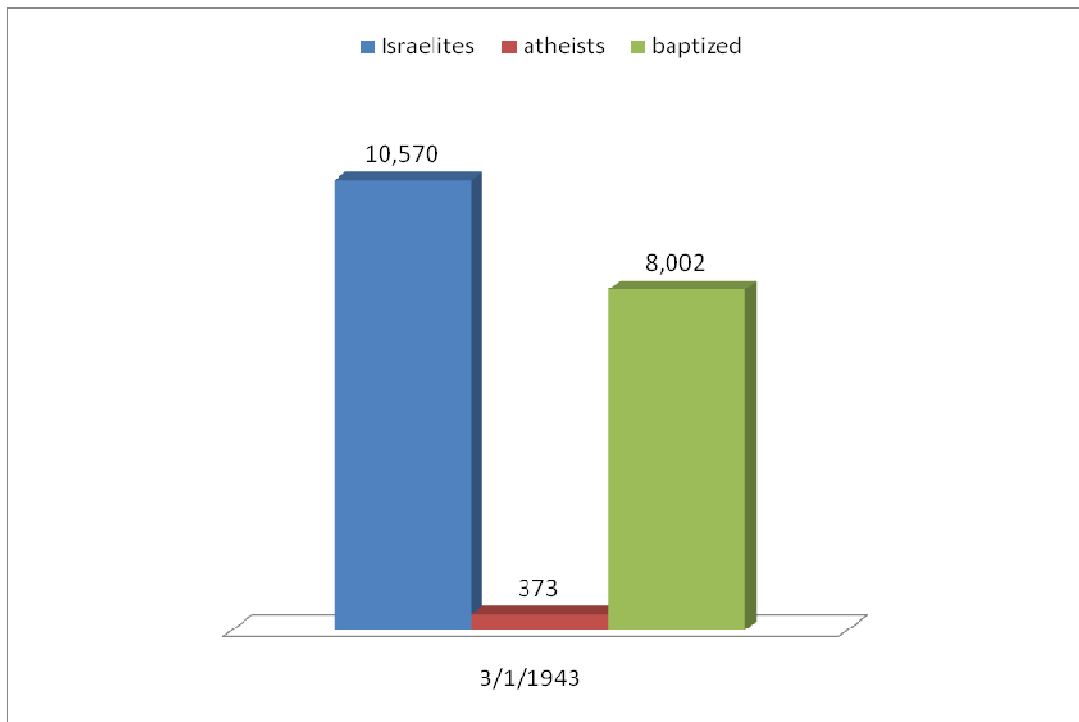
¹⁰⁴ 2926 baptized as Protestants of the Augsburg Confession, 1098 baptized as Reformed Protestants, i.e. Calvinists.

¹⁰⁵ SNA, fond Národný súd, Mimoriadny spis, Anton Vašek, 17/46. I did not manage to obtain the percentages or absolute numbers for Catholic and Protestant clergy for this period.

Table 1: Number of Jews in Slovakia on 1 March 1943 (after the 1942 deportation)

Number of Jews in Slovakia on 1 March 1943	Concentrated in Slovak labour camps	Not concentrated in Slovak labour camps	Total number of Jews in Slovakia on 1 March 1943
Men	1404	9632	11,036
Women	1170	9313	10,483
Total	2574	18,945	21,519

Figure 1: 1 March 1943 - Religion of 18,945 ethnic Jews¹⁰⁶ (This number excludes 2,574 Jews concentrated in labour camps. The available document does not provide an insight into the number of the baptized in labour camps.)



¹⁰⁶ The table in Figure 1 has kept the original translation of the document. The term “Israelites” refers to Jews of the Mosaic religion.

Figure 2: An insight into the denominations of the 8002 baptized Jews not concentrated in labour camps, 1 March 1943.

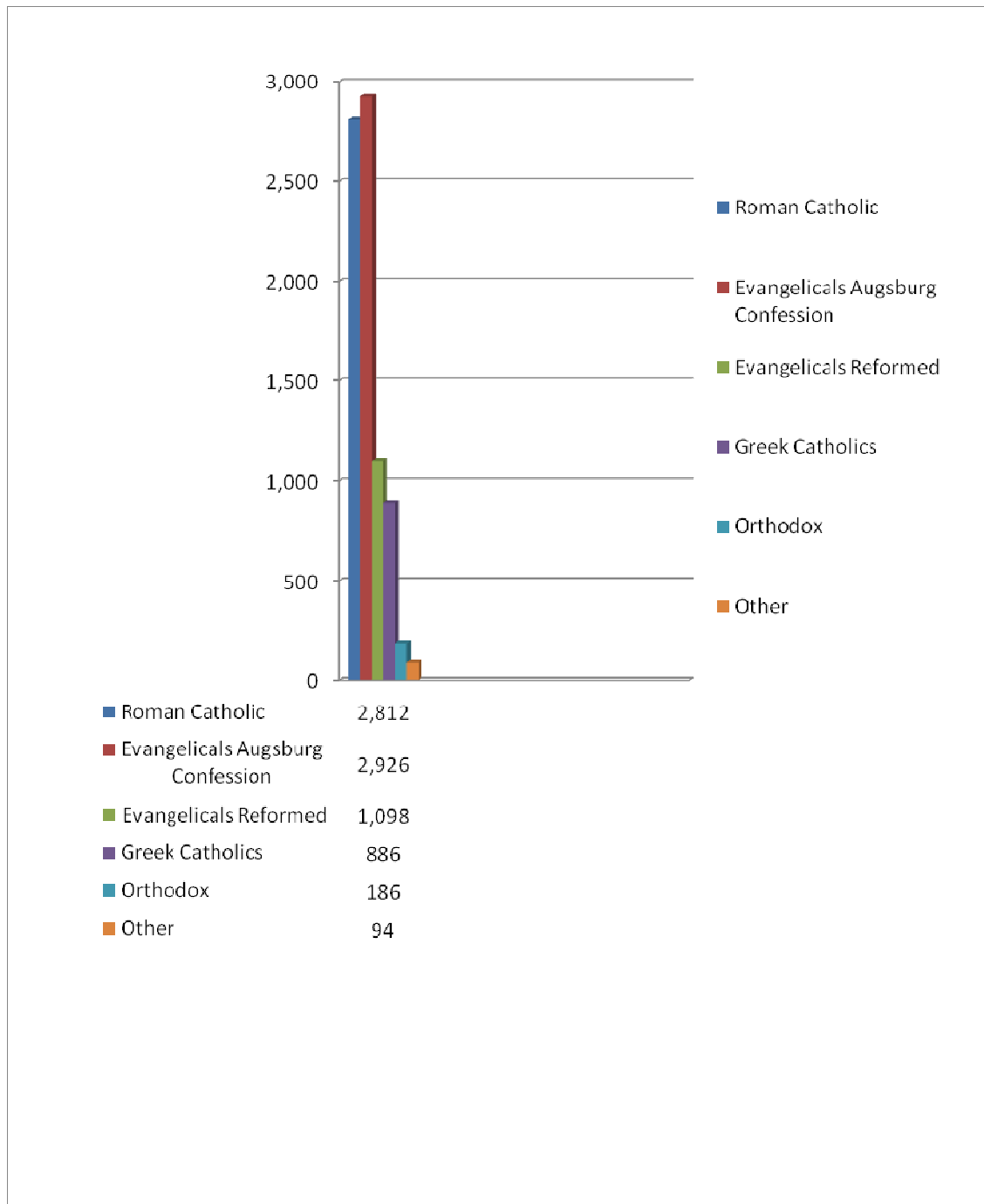


Figure 3: More detailed look at Figure 2. An insight into the denominations of 2568 Jews baptized prior to 14 March 1939.

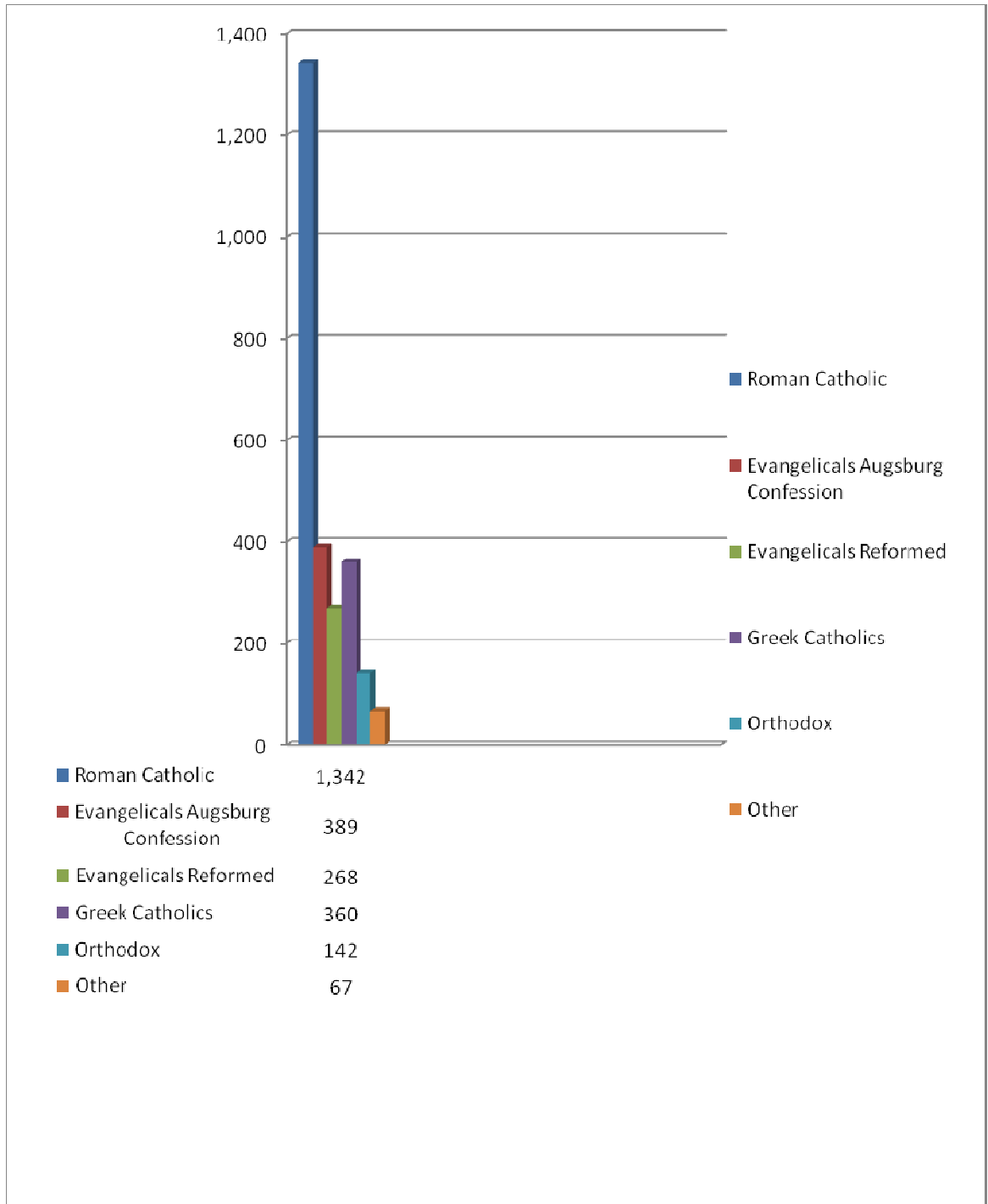
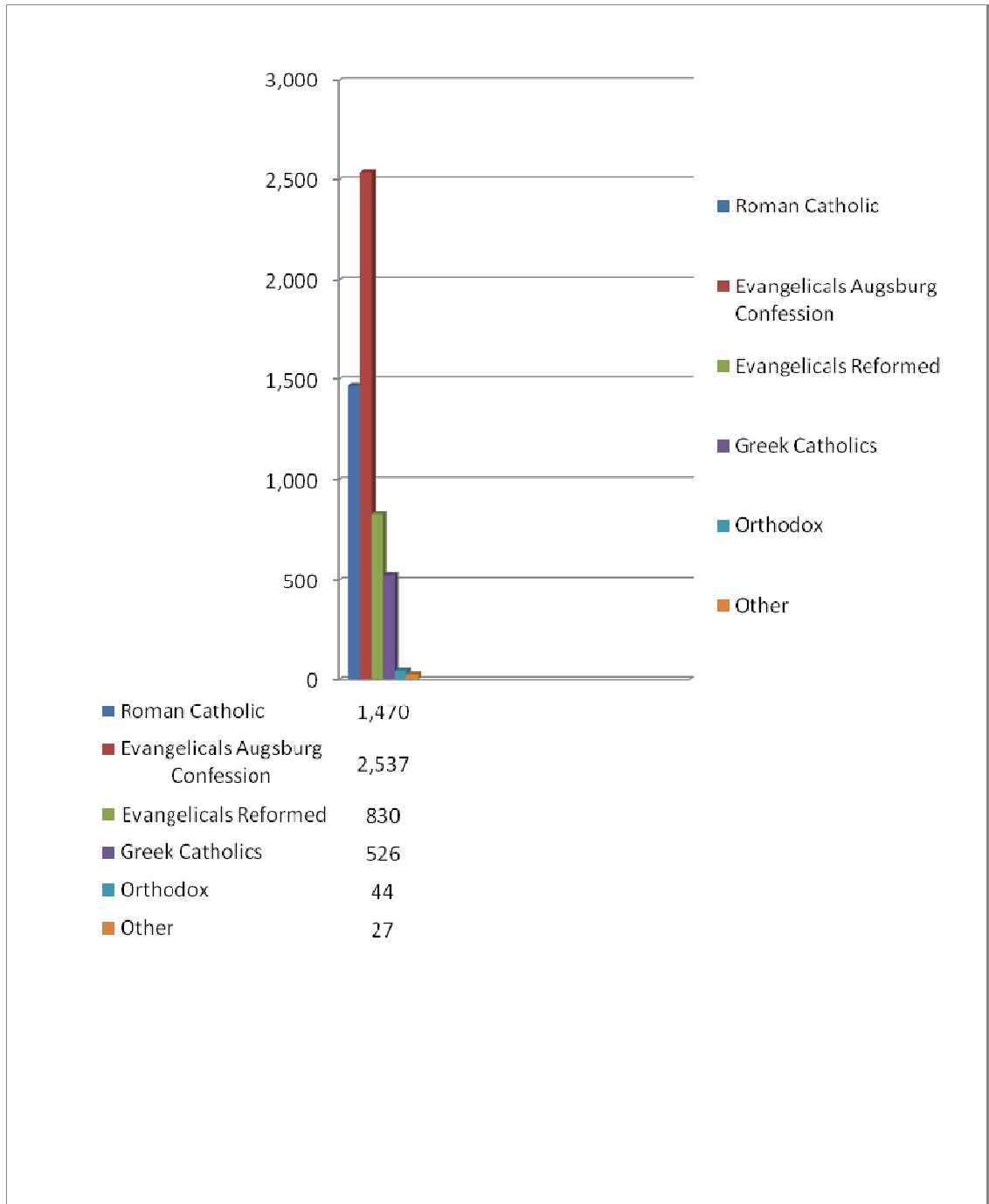


Figure 4: An insight into the denominations of 5434 Jews baptized between 14 March 1939 and 1 March 1943.



As the available statistics indicate, out of 18,945 Jews in Slovakia not concentrated in labour camps, 8002 were baptized either before or after 14 March 1939. By March 1943 there were 42% baptized Jews among those who were not deported in the first wave of 1942 or concentrated in labour camps. This number indicates how useful a tool baptism could be on one's path to rescue. But patterns of baptism changed over time. Almost four times as many Jews converted to Roman Catholicism prior to the establishment of the Slovak state rather than to the Protestant denomination of the Augsburg Confession. The situation, however, changed after the establishment of the Slovak state on 14 March 1939, when the number of Jews who converted to the Augsburg confession was almost twice as high as the number of conversions to Roman Catholicism. Similarly, the number of the converts to the Reformed Protestant Church tripled after 14 March 1939.

There is one urgent question to be answered in relation to these statistics. Scholars have not yet explained *why* the Protestant clergy in Slovakia were more willing – and, for that matter, why the Roman Catholic priests were unwilling – to baptize the persecuted Jews. Interestingly, the answer to this question can be easily found among the available quantitative data. A closer look at the data reveals that the number of baptisms into Roman Catholicism prior to the war and in the period between 1939 and 1943 remained relatively stable, with only a slight increase: 1342 Jewish conversions before 14 March in comparison to 1470 conversions after 14 March 1939. This offers some insight into the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church towards the baptism of Jews because it indicates that after the establishment of the Slovak state the Roman Catholic Church strove to

maintain its prewar baptismal policies towards Jews. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church chose to ignore changing circumstances and demonstrated sluggishness in the face of the persecution of Jews. This slow response was based on a continuance of its prewar policies, which focused on rescuing “souls” of Jews rather than Jews themselves in circumstances where corporeal concerns were increasingly important. Thus, in *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Raoul Hilberg claimed that the Catholic Church’s policy was to save the souls rather than the lives of Jews. Hilberg explained:

Of course the Church protected its converts. The priesthood was angry when the state presumed to nullify the sacred baptism and turn Christians into Jews. But for exactly that reason the Catholic Church did not bestow baptism lightly. The applicant had to be “sincere.” If it took a catastrophe to make him “see the light,” well then, all right, he could be admitted. However, if he was suspected of merely wanting to save his life, perhaps to revert to Judaism after the end of the war, he was turned away...¹⁰⁷

If the Roman Catholic priests were reluctant to change their baptismal policies to assist Jews more effectively, what were the reasons that made the Protestant Church increase their baptismal rate? On one level, the pressure of the Roman Catholic Slovak state, to which non-Roman Catholic religions were exposed, might have generated more compassion on the part of Protestant pastors

¹⁰⁷ Hilberg, *Destruction*, 466.

for the plight of the Jews.¹⁰⁸ The Protestants in Slovakia traditionally stressed the importance of cooperation with the Czechs and hence raised the suspicions of the ethno-national Ľudák regime, which denounced the Protestants as an “unreliable element.”¹⁰⁹ The “unreliable” Protestants clearly meant difficulties for the Slovak state and its cult of the Roman Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, who during his lifetime did not hide his strong anti-Lutheran attitude.¹¹⁰ The denial of Protestants’ contribution to the Slovak national awakening coupled with HG excesses against Protestant pastors further problematized relations between Catholics and Protestants.¹¹¹ From “*Pamätný spis Evanjelikov*” (The Memorandum of the Protestants), dated 21 November 1939, we learn about the HG’s physical attacks on Protestant pastors in “...Sučany, Beckov, Modra and elsewhere...”¹¹² Such attacks were quietly condoned by the HG’s spiritual leader, Roman Catholic priest Karl Körper, who considered the HSPP and HG to be essentially Roman Catholic. According to Körper, “only [a] morally mature individual could become a public worker in the HG; and only a [Roman] Catholic

¹⁰⁸ The tensions between the Roman Catholic and Protestant clergy’s views on how to “awaken” “construct” or “imagine” the Slovak nation in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been widely acknowledged. See, for example, Peter Brock, *The Slovak National Awakening: An Essay in the Intellectual History of East Central Europe* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press), 197; Emília Hrabovcová, “Národnoemancipačné úsilie a požiadavka zriadenia samostatnej slovenskej cirkevnej provincie v období neoabsolutizmu 1849-1859,” in *Katolícka cirkev a Slováci*, Peter Mulík, ed., (Bratislava: Bernolákova spoločnosť - Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi na Slovensku, 1998), 31- 42; Eva Kowalská, “Uhorskí protestanti a viedenský dvor: Formovanie cirkevnej politiky Habsburského štátu pred rokom 1781,” *Historický časopis* 50, no. 3 (2002), 407- 421; Emilia Hrabovec, “Zwischen Nation und Religion, Thron und Altar: Der slowakische Katholizismus in der “Ära Bach,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie und die Slowaken 1849-1867*, Dušan Kováč et al. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press 2001), 79-109.

¹⁰⁹ Ján Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1914 – 1945* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1997), 182.

¹¹⁰ Ladislav Suško, “Evanjelická cirkev augsburského vyznania na Slovensku 1938 – 1939 v zrkadle cirkevnej tlače,” *Historický časopis* 49, no.1 (2001), 64.

¹¹¹ Ivan Kamenec, *Slovenský štát*, 35; Lipták, “Slovenský štát a protifašistické hnutie,” 184.

¹¹² SNA, SNEM, k. 281, zákl.č. 483/39 prez., Pamätný spis evanjelických kňazov na Slovensku.

could be morally mature...”¹¹³ Protestant pastors were not represented in the HG organization and its printed media. Although some Protestant pastors joined the HG ranks, in most cases they soon became disillusioned and left as a result of HG pressure to take part in Roman Catholic religious ceremonies.

Since the 1938 Vienna Accord, which deprived Slovakia of its southern territories, the government had watched pro-Magyar priests closely, mostly the Lutherans, the Calvinists and the Greek-Orthodox clergy. The regime vociferously condemned these priests’ “Hungarian-ness,” commonly associated with a pro-Jewish attitude. From the perspective of the regime, baptisms mediated by these “problematic” priests posed a threat for the young ethno-national state. In particular, the increase in the conversions of Jews into “non-Slovak” (i.e. Protestant and Greek Catholic) denominations was interpreted as a national problem and thus represented an especially sensitive issue. For example, there was the case of the mass baptism of 717 Jews by the Calvinist priest Šedivý,¹¹⁴ after which the baptized Jews were registered as Hungarian nationals. Šedivý was instantly accused of the “magyarization of Nitra,” and his action was met with widespread protests from the public and the regional authorities, as well as from compliant priests. As the general uproar against Šedivý’s actions attracted wider attention, the radicals became concerned that the Hungarian minority in Slovakia might celebrate Šedivý as a “Hungarian martyr.”¹¹⁵ Šedivý was subsequently imprisoned in Ilava on 27 August 1942. During the interrogation he confessed to

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Šedivý supervised several districts: Nitra, Topoľčany, Prievidza, Bánovce nad Bebravou, Trenčín, Ilava, Púchov, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, Myjava, Piešťany, Senica, Trnava and Hlohovec.

¹¹⁵ Lucia Galibert, “Tzv. Riešenie Židovskej otázky na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945. Modelové mesto Nitra.” (PhD, Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa), 191.

accepting “voluntary [financial –NP] contributions for the renovation and furnishing of the church” in addition to a baptismal fee that the converted Jews had to pay.¹¹⁶ Šedivý, who claimed to be unaware of negative public response to his deeds, defended himself by bringing attention to a similar case where an unspecified Roman Catholic had overseen a mass baptism in Žilina. This did not succeed in distracting people, and instead, Šedivý’s actions fuelled an antisemitic mood and strengthened the general perception of the Calvinist Church as essentially Hungarian.¹¹⁷ But for the purposes of this inquiry, what mattered to the converts, now registered as Hungarian nationals, was whether they could make it to Hungary, which was a safe haven for European Jews until 1944.

Nationalism could not only spoil relations between Christian denominations, it could cause friction within the ranks of a single Church as well.¹¹⁸ The notion of a “willing Protestant” did not always correspond with the reality of how the rescue of Jews worked on the ground. Scholars often ignore the fact that the baptism of Jews represented a point of friction between German and non-German Protestants in Slovakia. On 11 August 1942, during a general presbytery session in Bratislava, Scherer, the representative of the German Protestant Church in Slovakia, cautioned bishop Štefan Osuský that the baptism

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Such a perception reflected the reality in Eastern Slovakia, where the majority of Calvinists were Hungarian nationals. In central and south Slovakia most Hungarians belonged to either the Roman Catholic or the Protestant Church of the Augsburg confession. Martin Hetényi, “Promaďarské duchovenstvo a náboženské pomery na pozadí vzťahu štátneho aparátu a maďarskej menšiny na Slovensku 1938 – 1945,” *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 12 (2005), 110.

¹¹⁸ A case in point is the Protestant Church, the only denomination on Slovak territory organized along national principles. German Protestants separated from Slovak Protestants and established their own organization, but Hungarian Protestants refrained from doing the same, owing to Slovak concerns over Magyarization. Instead, Hungarian Protestants were brought under the organization of the German Protestant Church, which complicated the relationship between German and Hungarian Protestant pastors and minorities in Slovakia.

of Jews should be carried out in silence, without raising the protests of German Protestants.¹¹⁹ The Lutheran German minority in Spiš, for example, decisively refused to allow the mass baptisms of the Jews there and remained indifferent to the situation of Jewish citizens. In a letter addressed to German and Slovak authorities in Poprad on 8 July 1942, the Protestant office in Poprad prohibited the baptism of the Jews in “their” Church: “... we will not allow the desecration of God’s temple ... with [the] Jewish nation, whether baptized or not, we do not want to and cannot have anything in common...”¹²⁰ According to Roman Poruban, similar resistance to the baptism of Jews can be traced in Slovak-German Protestant communities all over Slovakia. In Poprad, German Protestants intervened to suspend a local priest, a one-time representative of the National Assembly in Prague named Imrich Varga because he had been baptizing Jews. The documents point to a radical distrust of Varga, who was suspended until the case was resolved.¹²¹

More important still, the available statistics do not show the percentage or portion of the number of forged or fictitious baptisms. And the available central data does not show the number of priests involved in the baptism of Jews. Hence a single priest could have systematically baptized a larger number of Jews, which was often the case, or more priests could have *occasionally* diverged from the antisemitic norm of the regime and assisted Jews through baptism. In the future, scholars need to correlate the number of baptized Jews with the number of priests willing to baptize them, better revealing the dynamics of victim-priest interaction.

¹¹⁹ Poruban, 51.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 329.

In addition, the agency of lesser bureaucrats and central governmental officials who, through administrative obstruction, prevented larger numbers of Jews from seeking baptism needs to be explored further. And finally, what has hitherto been completely left out of the scholarship on the “comparative willingness” of the Churches to assist the Jews is the agency of the Jews themselves. Scholars do not provide any insight into the *strategies* and *attitudes* with which Jews approached conversion. This is important, since the higher number of Jews baptized as Protestants might also indicate a general reluctance on the part of Jews to seek help from Roman Catholic clergymen, either due to the stricter rules of the conversion to Roman Catholicism or simply out of principle (since Catholic priests collaborated with the antisemitic regime). It may not have been simply the case that help was less forthcoming from the Roman Catholic clergy. Although satisfactory statistical information may never become available, what can be accomplished nonetheless is a qualitative analysis, drawing on local records preserved in the district archives. The following section suggests some possible avenues for research of this kind.

Baptism as a Means of Rescue

For many religious Jews, christening was understood as a betrayal of the Jewish faith, culture and community as well as of one’s family, and hence it represented an unacceptable solution to their problems. But for others, the situation required a more pragmatic attitude. When Chava Schelah was baptized

for an unspecified “large sum of money” by a Greek Catholic priest near Racisdorf, her father “was standing by the window and smiling as if he wanted to say: this is not serious.”¹²² Some Jews aimed to seek protection by obtaining forged baptismal certificates despite the risks of public denunciation by Slovaks and more Orthodox Jews. Alica Barak-Resslerová recalled:

My mother started – without the knowledge of my father – to eagerly search for protective documents, which they also called *šmád-cetl*. Together with other Jews she was trying to obtain the contacts of priests willing to provide [these] precious documents. She realized that Jewish tradition interprets such a step as a betrayal. It is prohibited to use such a document: one should rather die than get baptized. Most of the Jews in our town were reluctant to get baptized, although during the years of persecution they kept saying that they were baptized. For the sake of the protection of our lives and also in accordance with religious commandment *pikuah nefesh* our mother ignored this prohibition.¹²³

But many Jews were afraid to get a hold of the forged baptismal documents which introduced the risk of prosecution and eventually even deportation. Moreover, as an anonymous Holocaust survivor recalled: “it [forged baptismal documents- NP] was out of the question. How would we behave? We would not know how to behave after obtaining baptismal certificates or Aryan

¹²² Chava Schelah, copy of the interview in Nadácia Milana Šimečku in Bratislava.

¹²³ Barak- Resslerová, *Krič dievčatko, krič*, 46.

papers.”¹²⁴ On the other hand there were Jews who found the ownership of baptismal documents, either forged or obtained from non-Jews, as liberating. According to Steinitz, the possession of a birth certificate and a “domovský list”¹²⁵ under the name of Aryan citizen Ľudovít Galbavý allowed him more existential security and free movement in Bratislava.¹²⁶ Surprisingly, we also learn about cases when the conversion of Jews was guided by purely spiritual reasons. Historian Robert Letz cites the case of the Jewish doctor and writer Pavol Strauss who confessed: “I met people who looked down on my conversion and who did not believe that it was not an effort to avoid persecution... Nothing could change the suspicious gazes of Jews, Protestant sceptics and Catholics.”¹²⁷ But cases when conversions were inspired by spiritual considerations were probably very rare. With the increased threat of deportation, pragmatism was a major cause behind mass conversions to Christianity. The following case study -- that of Dr. Ladislav Rudolfer from Hlohovec – therefore demonstrates how precarious the situation might become for Jews once the option of conversion seemed to be the only viable means of rescue from deportation.

Dr. Rudolfer’s decision to baptize his family was met with resistance by his religious father-in-law, Dr. Julius Reisz, an accountant at a state farmstead. Determined to sabotage the family’s conversion to Christianity, Reisz obtained a

¹²⁴ Salner, *Židia na Slovensku*, 116.

¹²⁵ “Domovský list” was an official document issued by the authorities of the town/village. It confirmed the residence of the document’s bearer.

¹²⁶ Nadácia Milana Šimečku in Bratislava, fond: Oral history project, Transcript of the interview with PhDr Erich Steinitz.

¹²⁷ Letz, “Pomoc Prenasledovaným Židom,” 16.

false birth certificate¹²⁸ for his five year old grandson Ján and insisted that Rudolfer and his wife Anna not get baptized either. Dr. Reisz also obtained forged baptismal certificates for his second daughter Helena and her four year old daughter Juliana. The problem was that neither Reisz's son-in-law, Dr. Rudolfer, nor his daughter Helena, who was already protected by the Ministry of the Economy's exemption from deportation, found comfort in the possession of the forged baptismal documents. In fact, they both believed that the ownership of the forged documents threatened the safety of their families.

The conflict between Reisz and Rudolfer about genuine and forged baptismal certificates was indicative of the wider conflict between traditionalism and pragmatism, a conflict that touched the very core of Jewish identity. For Dr. Rudolfer the only viable means of rescue for his family was within the framework of existing laws; since he believed that the forged baptismal document had no protective power whatsoever, Rudolfer tore it apart and flushed it down the toilet in his office. Meanwhile, on 25 July 1942, he and his wife officially abandoned their Jewish faith. A few days later, on 4 August 1942 both of them were baptized in the Lutheran Church in Nitra. It seems that both believed that the conversion to Roman Catholicism would yield more protection, since they sent their only son Ján to a Roman Catholic foster home in Bratislava to be able to attend a Roman Catholic school there. This decision was made at the beginning of August 1942 when Anna visited the Franciscan cloister in Bratislava. Here, she was told that

¹²⁸ As far as the origins of baptismal documents is concerned, Julius Reisz obtained the forged baptismal certificates from the private clerk Štefan Marciš, a 39 year old Roman Catholic for the payment of 7500 Ks. Štefan Marciš, who was accused of 15 counts of the forgery of official documents, was sentenced to a relatively mild punishment - 8 months in prison and 3 years loss of his office and the right to vote.

children can be baptized without formalities or a waiting period. Meanwhile, Rudolfer obtained the Ministry of the Economy's exemption from deportation on the basis that his presence in Slovakia was of economic importance for the state. Rudolfer's exemption automatically covered his wife and son. However, the story had a tragic end for Rudolfer's wife Anna and her non-baptized sister Helena Jelinková (also accused by the authorities for participation in the forgery of the official documents). Both of them were transported to Bratislava-Patrónka and on 19 August 1942 they were sent to Žilina – the transfer camp that deported Slovak Jews to Auschwitz. Another piece of undated handwritten documentation, however, informs us that Anna Rudolferová had not crossed the gate of Žilina camp.¹²⁹ There is no further information available about the fate of these women and their families. It seems, however, that Anna and Helena's father's effort to prevent his family from real conversion by providing them with forged documents played a crucial role in their fate.

Not only priests, but also the baptized Jews themselves mediated the rescue of other Jews, since other members of their families could also be saved. The converted Jews might also become vital mediators for the rescue of other Jews via marriage. When the frightening news about the fate of Jews in the East reached Jewish communities in Slovakia, Jewish leaders encouraged the singles who owned any kind of "protective documents" including baptism certificates to marry and rescue another member of the community. Such purposeful marriages were not unusual in the period of ongoing deportations. On 12 March 1942, the Rabbi Armin Fried marked in his diary: "Between morning and evening services I

¹²⁹ ŠOBA, Krajský súd Bratislava, KSB-TK, zákl.č. 3617/42.

addressed hundreds of the assembled feasting crowd. I recommended to the singles to get married because single women will be expatriated first. The Public notary allowed me to issue official permits for marriages, and between Friday and Sunday I served at 45 weddings of young couples. Many of them were rescued from death.”¹³⁰

Within Nazi and fascist regimes, birth certificates and baptismal documents pre-determined one’s “racial membership.”¹³¹ Potentially, each citizen of Slovakia could face a bureaucratic challenge to prove their “Aryan” ancestry, (i.e. to provide the authorities an official document stating that the holder of the document is not a Jew or “half Jew or Jewess”). Such documents could be obtained only on the basis of original birth and marriage records in parish registers.¹³² As a result, priests, who were responsible for the administration of birth certificates and baptisms, became directly involved in the process of constructing the ethno-national racial state, since they influenced the inclusion or exclusion of certain Jews from the Christian community.

The timing of the baptism was essential in order to obtain an exemption from the deportation. Equally important, however, was the interpretation of the steps in the process of conversion. The documentation indicates a tension between the Church representatives and the secular authorities regarding exactly *when* one transformed into a Christian. The question was when did Jews start to be

¹³⁰ Salner, *Židia na Slovensku*, 113.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no.2 (2002), 44.

¹³² Salner, *Židia na Slovensku*, 117.

Christian: when they initiated their catechumenate or only when they were actually baptized? Since the deportation law clearly stated that those *baptized* [italics mine – NP] after 14 March 1939 would be deported, some clergy, hoping to rescue Jews, were willing to reinterpret the steps of the conversion. For example, war veteran and baker of Jewish origin Imrich Ellinger, his wife Gizela, and their five children from Plavecký Sv. Mikuláš abandoned their Jewish faith in January 1939. They submitted an application for baptism and announced their membership in the Catholic Church in February 1939. Meanwhile, on 26 January, Ellinger wrote a letter to President Tiso asking him to exempt his family from being defined as Jews so that they could obtain work permits to be able to keep their small family house. Since no answer from the presidential office was received, Ellinger wrote another letter begging as a disabled veteran for an exemption from the Jewish Code, decree No. 198/1941. This time, in his desperate letter Ellinger claimed that his family had been baptized already on 15 February 1939. But according to other documents Ellinger's family received, the actual baptism took place in June 1939, whereas in February 1939 they had only joined the Roman Catholic Church and initiated their catechumenate. This was enough, however, for the vicar general of Roman Catholic Church in Tnava to confirm that the Ellingers had been Christians since February 1939.¹³³ Notably, this interpretation seems to have been accepted, since the Ellingers were eventually exempted from the 1942 deportation, as indicated by the appearance of their names in a list of Jews from 1944.¹³⁴

¹³³ ŠOKA Modra, fond ŽIDIA, OÚ Malacky, 508 – 515 prez./1942.

¹³⁴ ŠOKA Modra, fond ŽIDIA OÚ Malacky, D1 – 65/1944.

Likewise, willingness on the part of the clergy to shorten the preparation period or antedate the act of baptism to before 14 March 1939 did save some lives; but many more could have been saved. The forging of baptismal documents by priests, Christians and Jews themselves became a means of rescue for some, an act of mercy for others and simply a profit-making opportunity for some others still.⁷ In any case, forged baptismal documents were produced along with the bureaucratic manipulation of parish registries: non-baptized Jews were listed in birth registries with earlier dates or their names were replaced with those of dead citizens. The following case study is an example of an actual christening that was falsely listed under a much earlier date.

Dr. Tibor Szönyi and his parents, Artur Jozef and Helena Szönyi, were baptized in the Cathedral of St. Martin by the chaplain Hladík on 31 May 1939. But due to fear of being deported, the desperate Artur and Helena went to see the vicar of Bratislava, Augustín Pozdech, who knew the Szönyis, since they regularly attended mass in his Blumentál parish in Bratislava. Artur Jozef was so distraught that he threatened to take his life, stirring the conscience of Pozdech, who eventually offered a helping hand. Pozdech therefore issued the Szönyi family antedated baptismal certificates, reading 31 January 1939.¹³⁵ These documents allowed the Szönyi family to obtain exemptions from deportation. They were also exempted from the obligation to wear the Jewish star.

Pozdech claimed that his act was motivated by “Christian love of neighbour” since the Szönyis were an exceptional case of devoted Christians; many other Jews had offered Pozdech money for false baptismal documents, but

¹³⁵ ŠOBA, Krajský Súd Bratislava, KSB – TK, spis č. 229/1944.

he had refused to accept it. Unfortunately, we do not know much about the fate of the Szönyis. Tibor Szönyi was rounded up for the deportation, but in July 1943 he was released to work for the County Office that was understaffed during the vacation season. Tibor was then caught by a German military unit in Čachtice on the night of 3 to 4 October 1944. The unit, with the assistance of the HG, transferred him from Nové Mesto to an unknown place. In the spring of 1945, authorities knew nothing about the whereabouts of Tibor's parents or Augustín Pozdech.¹³⁶ The vicar's acts are generally praised in the literature, as Pozdech also sent a moving plea in the name of Slovak Jewry to the Council of the Jewish Community in Budapest on 20 April 1942; this text also eventually reached the Vatican.¹³⁷

But cases of mass baptisms provoked countermeasures that aimed to obstruct this rescue strategy at both the regional and centralized level. First, priests whose bureaucratic manipulation of baptismal certificates raised the suspicions of central authorities were automatically subjected to investigation by State Security. This is what happened to the priest Vincent Šimkovič, who supplied Gejza Tannenbaum from Hlohovec with a forged Calvinist baptismal certificate.¹³⁸ In some cases the priests who participated in mass baptisms were imprisoned in the Slovak "Machau" in Ilava, like the Greek-Catholic priest from Moškovce, Michal Knap, who was sent to Ilava prison for handing out thirteen

¹³⁶ ŠOBA, Krajský Súd Bratislava, KSB-TK spis č.229/1944, Augustín Pozdecha a spol. Falšovanie verejných listín.

¹³⁷ Livia Rothkirchen, "The Situation of Jews in Slovakia between 1939 - 1945," *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* (1998), 54.

¹³⁸ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 185.

antedated baptismal certificates to Jews in Humenné.¹³⁹ Equally important, lower bureaucrats introduced their own solutions to curb the mass conversions of Jews to Christianity. For example when forty two Jews in Prievidza submitted their applications for the withdrawal from the Jewish religion on 15 March 1942, the district officer simply decided to decline the applications – a decision that was subsequently condoned by the Ministry of the Interior. Fifteen of these Jews eventually managed to be baptized by the Protestant pastor Albert Predmerský on 14 and 15 March 1942 in Zemianske Kostol'any without any payment; however, the mass baptism of these Jews led to protests within the community.¹⁴⁰

The local authorities in Hlohovec also curbed mass baptisms on their own, in more indirect ways. The “*obvodný úrad*” (i.e. the office subordinated to the district office) was responsible for issuing permits for baptism and breaking with the local rabbinate. The local administrators complicated the procedures in order to profit from bribes. According to survivors’ testimonies, the “permit” could be obtained for 1000 – 1500 Ks, a sum of money that socially weaker Jews could not afford to pay.¹⁴¹ In addition to the obstructions of lower administrators, the government initiated a process of verification of baptismal certificates in order to reduce the number of false converts to Christianity. Such verification was a relatively easy procedure since at the end of each year, the respective bishoprics collected the lists of the converts from all Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and Protestant parishes. Therefore, it was a simple task to compare the available lists of the converts in parishes with the lists in diocesan offices. The comparison of

¹³⁹ Nižňanský, *Holokaust na Slovensku* 6, 330.

¹⁴⁰ SNA, fond ŽNM, kartón 60, 212/II-4/5B-1942.

¹⁴¹ Paulovičová and Urminský, *Židovská komunita*, 185.

these documents revealed signs of the manipulation of these documents in parishes.¹⁴² Interestingly though, the idea of detecting faked conversions through the bishoprics did not originate in government circles but was proposed by the lower clergy. In particular, archival documents reveal that the priest Alojz Šimičák from Ružomberok-Ludrová utilized his personal friendship with radical Minister of Interior Alexander Mach in order to halt the avalanche of conversions.

On 28 April 1942 Šimičák advised Mach to collect the baptismal certificates issued to Jews and compare the information found on birth certificates with the copies available in diocesan offices rather than those available in parishes. Šimičák wanted to see the gendarmerie carry out the action since, according to him, “political offices ... lie!” Šimičák also suggested that the Slovak embassy check baptismal certificates issued in Hungary. In addition, with regards to those Jews who obtained exemptions from deportation due to their economic importance, Šimičák advised: “Get rid of these irreplaceable Jews!” He concluded his letter bitterly, remarking that “In the Jewish matter do as I write so that all the dirt of baptismal certificates gets cleaned and the owners of these as well as the middlemen [who provided them] are sent to Jewish camps.”¹⁴³ Alexander Mach indeed followed Šimičák’s advice and issued detailed instructions to gendarmerie and lower bureaucrats about revising procedure.

It took considerable time and a new constellation of the European powers to change public reactions to the persecution of Jews, and communities were slow

¹⁴² ŠAB, fond MV, kartón 262, zákl. č.12199/42, Predmet:Preskúšanie pravosti krstných listov.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

to react to mass-scale persecution. Suffice it to say that it was not until 1944 that there was a case of communal rescue of Jews in Slovakia similar to the one that occurred in the Protestant village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in southern France (1940 – 1944) or in the Dutch village of Nieuwlande (1942 – 1943). Although smaller in scale, the collective rescue of 50 fugitives, of whom 35 were Jews, in the village of Olšavice, in Eastern Slovakia was prompted by the sermons of the Orthodox priest, Michal Mašlej. In this remarkable case, nobody informed on the fugitives and nobody was captured by the authorities.¹⁴⁴

In 1943, when the situation on the Eastern front posed a challenge for the *Wehrmacht*, contemporaries were forced to carefully evaluate the political situation and to think about the future. The Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia became more cautious as far as the ongoing implementation of antisemitism was concerned. Church representatives curbed their traditional antisemitic views and eventually became more willing to help suffering Jews.¹⁴⁵ In political terms, the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to hold back antisemitism in 1943 were strategic. Restraining antisemitic speeches represented the Roman Catholic Church's distancing itself from the radical antisemitic policies of Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach. Limiting antisemitism was also necessary in order to preserve good relations with the Holy See, which the Slovakian Catholic Church saw as its potential rescuer in a postwar scenario where politics would be dictated by the Allies rather than by Nazi Germany. And last but not least, perhaps more priests became aware of their failures to adhere to the Christian principles of

¹⁴⁴ Gutman, *Encyclopedia*, 465.

¹⁴⁵ Kamenec, *On the Trail of Tragedy*, 104.

charity and mercy when disturbing news about the fate of the deported became more persistent. Although the last point is difficult to support with much certainty, the 1943 protests of Catholic Church representatives against the deportation of Jews on several occasions indicate that there was a change in the attitude of the Catholic Church leadership. The radicals found the spurt of the Church protests in 1943 annoying, and Vojtech Tuka in his 3 March 1943 letter to the Chair of the bishops' conference, Karol Kmeťko, wrote:

The government does not understand why the clergy, and especially the Catholic clergy, objects to the deportation of Jews, who are responsible for all the misery of the Slovak nation. The Slovak clergy – honor to the exceptions – only rarely demonstrated such care about the interests of the Slovak nation as it demonstrates vis-à-vis Jews, and in many cases, vis-à-vis nonbaptized ones.¹⁴⁶

Catholic Church representatives, then, became more outspoken against the attacks of the radicals as the war came to a close. When, in 1943, Interior Minister and leader of the HSPP Alexander Mach threatened in Ružomberok that all the remaining Jews in Slovakia would be deported, even if they were baptized by thousands of bishops, the bishops in Slovakia raised their voice and published a new protest on 8 March 1943.¹⁴⁷ This protest was read in all churches on 21

¹⁴⁶ Gabriel Hoffmann and Ladislav Hoffmann, *Katolícka cirkev*, 45.

¹⁴⁷ Letz, "Pomoc prenasledovaným Židom," 215 – 216; Hoffmann and Hoffmann, *Katolícka cirkev*, 45 – 48. The document was signed by Bishops Karol Kmeťko, Ján Vojtaššák, Pavel Gojdič, Pavel Jantusch, Jozef Čársky, Andrej Škrábik, Michal Buzalka.

March 1943. The document retreated from the antisemitic rhetoric of their 1942 protest. From the beginning the bishops claimed: “The natural right of the individual, nation and state is to protect itself from those who threaten its life and prevent its flourishing. However, at the same time, the natural right of each individual regardless of nationality is that nobody can be prosecuted and punished without a sufficient reason... our attitude to people cannot be influenced by their language, state, national or racial identities.” The bishops further referred to paragraph 81 of the Constitution, which guaranteed the protection of life, liberty and property to “all citizens regardless of their origin, nationality, religion and occupation.” More importantly still, the bishops criticized all Christians who refused to admit the converted Jews among their ranks.¹⁴⁸ The 1943 protest of bishops against the persecution of Jews was finally clear enough to avoid any misinterpretation among the faithful, but the message came too late. Most of the Jews had been deported from Slovakia in 1942.

Conclusion

The dynamic between Catholic Christian values and nationalist particularism in wartime Slovakia was constantly shifting. The Roman Catholic Church enjoyed the height of its influence in the early stages of the Slovak state,

¹⁴⁸ Hoffmann and Hoffmann, *Katolícka cirkev*, 45- 47.

in 1939-1940. The radicalization of the antisemitic course in 1940, resulting from the events in Salzburg, introduced tensions between Church representatives and radical secular politicians, although a cautious tolerance of each other's influence was maintained on the surface. However, the introduction of racist principles in the 1941 Jewish Code provoked the opposition of Catholic priests. The Church representatives denounced racial principles and excesses against baptized Jews, but otherwise persecution (i.e. the exclusion of Jews from the Slovak economic, social and cultural spaces) was still mostly condoned by the clergy. The Roman Catholic clergy's compromising of Christian principles with right-wing ideology followed two interrelated goals: 1) unifying the nation through an ideological-political platform and 2) protecting and prioritizing the vital interests of the Church in the new state. The dangerous flirtation of the Roman Catholic Church with right-wing ethno-nationalism might have temporarily ensured the firm position of the Church in high politics, but in the long term, the incompatibility between the Church's own teachings and what was defined as "Slovak national socialism" proved to have far-reaching consequences for the Jews and the position of the Church in society.¹⁴⁹

The Roman Catholic Church was exposed to a dual pressure from radicals and from inter-denominational tensions – such as those between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Church – that guided its Jewish policies. The radical pressure had a twofold effect on the Roman Catholic clergy. On the one hand, it forced the Roman Catholic hierarchy to demonstrate dedication to the ideals of the ethno-national state and hence maintain its leading role in society. On the

¹⁴⁹ Kamenec, *Slovenský štát*, 34.

other hand, the pressure created by radicals encouraged some clergy to resist the implementation of radical antisemitic policies. The Roman Catholic clergy was thus trapped in a net of conflicting pressures and hence ever changing patterns of responses to the plight of Jews.

Comparisons between the willingness of Roman Catholic priests and Protestant pastors to baptize the Jews confirms the view that the Roman Catholic Church refused to give up its prewar baptismal policies. By doing so, it implicitly promoted state policies because of its commitment to saving the souls rather than lives of Jews. As a result of such policies, Jews encountered many obstacles on the path to rescue via conversion to Christianity. Baptized Jews were stuck between two worlds: they became outcasts in their Jewish communities and unwelcome intruders among Christians. Baptism was interpreted as a national problem, and baptized Jews, including the holders of official exemptions from deportation, were often seen as a dangerous and “cunning” element trying to infiltrate the nation with the aim to harm Slovaks. Such popular views prompted local initiatives to deport even the Jews protected by ministerial or presidential exemptions. The fact that the ideals of Christian love, mercy and forgiveness were oftentimes silenced by wartime pragmatism and opportunism has to be acknowledged by contemporary society. Postcommunist idolization of the role of the Church in the problematic past is politically motivated and only adds to an unhealthy ego-building of the contemporary Slovak nation.

Conclusion

The discussion of rescuers has been marginalized and silenced for more than half a century for political reasons. Postwar communist Eastern Europe targeted Nazi resisters as a means to consolidate anti-fascism as its core identity marker. Even if the topic of rescue was given marginal attention in the 1960s during the era of de-Stalinization, the narrative was strictly confined to a class paradigm which preconceived historical agency within the frame of the “guilty bourgeoisie” and an “innocent and philo-Semitic working class.” The fall of communism was followed by the building of a new unified Europe, representing a new starting point in the discussion of the rescue of Jews. From an ideological perspective, the violent, racist and intolerant Europe of the wartime era was to be left behind in favour of a better “New Europe.” To carry out this ambitious goal, the “New Europe” was soon identified with the values that represented an antidote to fascism, Nazism and communism. More particularly, the permanent identifiers of the New Europe included: cultural and religious tolerance rather than racism and xenophobia, civic nationalism as opposed to blind ethno-nationalism, and philo-Semitism in place of antisemitism. For some, this unprecedented European mega project provided a source of optimism despite the fact that a new wave of right wing nationalism swept over postcommunist states. The turbulent era of transformation to liberal and democratic Europe in the 1990s inevitably resonated in Holocaust scholarship. Half a century of scholarly focus on the perpetrators of the Holocaust yielded individual profiles ranging from blind automatons of the

Eichmann type, unaware of their crimes, to ideologically motivated “men with a cause” fully aware of what they were doing and why they were doing it. With the opening of the Eastern European archives scholars will certainly see more “gap-filling” on the topic of perpetrators. But a new ground-breaking view on the perpetrators is rather unlikely. Almost fifty years after World War II scholars are slowly turning their attention to provide “light in the darkness of the Holocaust” with a hope that, perhaps, there might be some “poetry after the Holocaust.” This shift in scholarly focus to the topic of the rescue of European Jews is backed up by the political reality of the European Union struggling to cement a European consciousness in the face of gargantuan economic problems. Whereas resisters represented the backbone of communist historical consciousness and identity, rescuers of Jews turned out to be particularly relevant for the European Union historical project. The rescuers’ altruism, love of neighbour and sacrifice have become widely celebrated values in Europe. Each European nation has invested considerable energy in the search for its “own” rescuers of Jews. Rescuers of Jews yield an immense political potential these days. Not only do they represent a foundation for European identity with the promise of a bright future, they serve as a useful tool in the hands of nationalists looking to embellish the problematic past of their respective countries. The undue focus on the goodness of rescuers more often than not tends to set the problematic historical chapters of the Holocaust aside. Slovakia is no exception in this regard. Slovak scholars and politicians utilize the moral capital of rescuers for political purposes. They used the legacy of the rescuers when negotiating Slovakia’s admission to the European Union and

thereby further manipulated wartime Slovakia's problematic history. More specifically, the deeds of the rescuers of Jews in 1944 have been loudly celebrated, while the fact that the majority of Jews died in the 1942 deportation has been conveniently bypassed.

International and domestic factors played a role in the path to rescue for Jews during the war. First, the relationship between Nazi Germany and its Slovak vassal state, as well as that between Slovakia and Hungary, had a far reaching impact on the development of antisemitic policies. Efforts by the Slovak political leadership to preserve positive relations with Nazi Germany as a counterweight to Hungarian revisionism on the one hand and protection from "Germanization" of on the other complicated the persecution of Jews. The majority of Jews were sentenced to death while only a fraction managed to find a path to freedom. The role of the Slovak state in this process was that of a perpetrator. The Slovak state, mostly on its own initiative and often without pressure from Nazi Germany, created an extremely dense net of antisemitic decrees and laws systematically eliminating Jews from all spheres of socio-economic, cultural and political life.

The destruction of the Jews in Slovakia followed a different scenario from that of the Jews in the East, where entire Jewish communities were brought to the pits and shot at short range. Slovakia represents an example of a "bureaucratic Holocaust" which deprived Jews of their basic civil and human rights over an extended period of time through the execution of carefully premeditated steps. Slovakia's bureaucratic Holocaust left tens of thousands of Jews in fear and agony before exposing them to violent physical death in the death and concentration

camps of the General Government. The bureaucratic Holocaust extended lines of power from the centre to all corners of society. Bureaucrats themselves were not mere “cogs in the machine of the destruction process.” As the mediators between the centre and outlying regions, bureaucrats executed orders and responded to the initiatives and pressures from ordinary Slovaks. Through reports bureaucrats could encourage the centre to proceed with more radical policies against the Jews. They could also curb the impact of some antisemitic decrees if this was in the interest of the community. Thus bureaucrats were double agents: they facilitated the will of the centre while voicing the complaints and enabling the intervention of ordinary men. Through such mediation, bureaucrats served as a link that drew the general public into the process of antisemitic policy making.

To slip through a dense net of antisemitic decrees and laws via legal or illegal means was for many Jews an impossible task. A plethora of factors predetermined one’s chance of rescue, including: nationality, religion, place of birth, class, gender, occupation, the nature and size of a business, relations with the Slovak community, the degree of assimilation with the Slovak community, membership in Slovak organizations and political parties prior to the establishment of the Slovak state and even the financial contribution to the “revival of the Slovak nation.” Any of these factors could prove decisive for obtaining an exemption from any antisemitic law. The division of competencies within the bureaucratic apparatus, corruption within administrative ranks and the workload that bureaucrats were exposed to often hampered the efforts of Jews attempting to avoid persecution. Other external factors such as the nature of the

punishment for assisting Jews further complicated their rescue. The economic interests of the state, of the Church and of ordinary Slovaks played essential roles in the path to rescue. Situational factors such as the ability to assess the degree of potential danger shaped individual agency and the response of Slovaks to the persecution of Jews in multiple ways. The time necessary to intervene on behalf of Jews was of paramount importance; accordingly, the falsification of documents became a widespread practice.

As this study demonstrates, the agency of persecuted Jews themselves cannot be left out of this narrative. From the inception of the Slovak state Jews defied antisemitism by legal means, believing that protection from pernicious encroachments on their freedom could only be sought within the very system that generated antisemitic decrees. Such a strategy was also inspired by a powerful psychological motive. By behaving as law-abiding citizens, Jews hoped to belie the widely disseminated propaganda about the “callousness of the Jewish race.”¹⁵⁰ Seeking protection within the legal administrative framework of the regime often resulted in unexpected acts by Jews, such as voluntarily joining a work camp or refusing to accept forged letters of baptism as a means of protection from deportation. Needless to say, because of such acts Jews were condemned by some postwar historians as cowards who either complied with the regime or gave up without resorting to armed resistance. This study shows instead that Jews used bureaucratic channels and administrative loopholes to resist persecution, and this

¹⁵⁰ A similar conclusion was reached by Frank Bajohr, *Aryanization in Hamburg: The Economic Exclusion of Jews and the Confiscation of their Property in Nazi Germany* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 125.

finding should be taken into account when discussing Jewish rescue and survival. Only when the web of antisemitic decrees severely reduced legal options were illegal means of rescue such as fictitious aryanization, antedated baptism, forgery of official protective documents and illegal border crossing pursued. Jews who obtained exemption from deportation had the capacity to protect family members from deportation. As a result, Jewish owners with exemption status entered into pragmatic relationships with those who failed to obtain the necessary documents. But the rescue of one individual could also result in a tragic fate for another. Jews who failed to show up at assembly points and crossed the border to Hungary were readily replaced by those who were not on the deportation lists.

This study of the rescue of Jews offers a new perspective on wartime society in Europe from 1939 to 1942. The wartime Slovak regime was hardly a simple, unidirectional totalitarian state generating power from the centre and oppressing those at the bottom of the societal ladder. In a “top-down” totalitarian model of power only a few leading representatives of the regime are held accountable for past crimes; the rest of society is described as a victim or a puppet. Any theory which relieves ordinary citizens of historical agency is a dead-end theory, since it obscures the functional mechanics of power on the ground. In contrast, this study provides an alternative perspective, revealing a mechanism of communication and control between centre and periphery that runs along formal and informal channels “from within the social body.” Society participated in the inclusion/exclusion of Jews in a variety of ways. Such empowerment was negotiated concurrently in several directions: 1) top-down, i.e. centre to regions;

2) bottom-up, i.e. regions to centre; and 3) vertically, i.e. between regions; as well as between multiple central offices, institutions or ministries or between ordinary Slovaks within communities.

The lines of power within society allowed ordinary Slovaks to participate in the inclusion/exclusion of Jews in a variety of ways. In light of the existing mechanics of power it is not possible to support a view of the “passive Slovak” vis-à-vis the Holocaust. In fact, this study of rescue reveals a variety of motives which moved Slovaks, including party and HG members, to intervene in favour of “their” Jew and/or intervene in the persecution process. In most of these cases, a single underlying motive persistently stands out: preservation of one’s own interests. The preservation of individual, group and state interests required or was pursued through pragmatic solutions, such as depriving Jews of their rights or taking their property and businesses. Such solutions were often carried out with indifference. In contrast, Slovaks, regardless of their political and ideological leanings, did not hesitate to ignore antisemitic decrees if the ethno-national project posed more risks than benefits to their social and economic status. Often, uneducated and inexperienced Slovaks approached Jews as an attractive and cheap market commodity worth the associated risk. As a result, some Slovaks joined loosely organized temporary networks composed of people with various ideological profiles aiming to help at least a few Jews escape the impact of antisemitic decrees. Those Slovaks who decided to shield Jews were in a precarious position that demanded both compliance and resistance to antisemitic policies. Such an uncertain balance, however, could not be maintained for long.

Rivalry and denunciation among Slovaks hunting for Jewish property rapidly diminished the chances of rescuing Jews. In a different form, many Slovaks, including farmers and bureaucrats, resorted to the smuggling of Jews as a relatively easy and safe source of additional income. The Slovak state did not hamper smugglers operating in southern border areas. Instead, the Slovak state turned a blind eye to the smuggling of Jews, which turned out to be a convenient complementary solution to the “Jewish problem” on Slovak territory.

The Roman Catholic Church in the wartime era failed to act decisively to help the Jews targeted for destruction. Although priests rejected racism as a primary social force, there was a general consensus among the clergy that some degree of the persecution of Jews had to be accommodated by the young Slovak state. Locked in a power struggle with radicals, the Roman Catholic Church offered its own version of antisemitism, showing little charity and mercy toward the Jews. Only public pressure and foreign political developments forced the Roman Catholic Church to abandon cautious maneuvering and publicly articulate a more critical position vis-à-vis antisemitic policy. In the initial stages of the war, the twisted ethno-national Christian logic of the Roman Catholic Church encouraged Slovaks to punish Jewish “sinners” rather than “love their neighbours.” This attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, along with other factors, proved to be fateful for tens of thousands of Slovak Jews.

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