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Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust in history and memory

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ABSTRACT

In Eastern Europe, where the genocide of the Jews became an almost “ordinary”, integral part of life during the war, as well as in Central Europe, removed from the direct proximity of the mass murder, the culpability of the Germans and their principal role in the Holocaust has not been doubted. After all, the Holocaust was an all-German story to tell. Far more complex has been the recognition of the local majority societies’ – that is non-Germans’ – involvement in the persecution and extermination of the Jewish population, and of the majority societies’ ambiguous responses to the return of the Jewish survivors (or refugees and exiles) after 1945. This essay opens a collection of eleven articles that provide diverse insights into Jewish-Gentile relations in Central and Eastern Europe from the outbreak of the Second World War until the reestablishment of civic societies after the fall of Communism in the late 1980s. The interdisciplinary and comparative perspective of this issue enables us to scrutinize the interaction between the individual majority societies and the Jewish minorities in a longer time frame and hence we are able to revisit complex and manifold encounters between Jews and Gentiles, including but not limited to propaganda, robbery, violence but also help and rescue.

KEYWORDS

Antisemitism; Jewish-Gentile relations; memory; Central and Eastern Europe

The Holocaust left an indelible mark on Central and Eastern Europe. Across the whole region, the German troops, including the special units of the SS and order police, and their local collaborators, left millions of Jews – as well as other racially, ethnically, and ideologically defined groups – dead. The places of suffering – the Babi Yar ravine, the pits of Ponary, the Treblinka extermination camp, or the former sites of the Warsaw or Lublin ghettos – have since the end of the war been an uncomfortable reminder of the mass murder committed more than 70 years ago. The culpability of the German occupiers and their principal role in the Holocaust has never been doubted. From the very moment of the liberation in 1943–45, even if the retribution for the specific crimes against the Jews (and their commemoration) remained partial to say the least, the Germans – as a nation – were burdened with the guilt for the Holocaust. Far more complex has been the

recognition of the local majority societies' – that is non-Germans' – involvement in the persecution and extermination of the Jewish population, and of the majority societies' ambiguous responses to the return of the Jewish survivors (or refugees and exiles) after 1945.

The legacies of the Second World War, including the problematic behavior of their former neighbors during the war, impacted on the survivors' efforts to start new lives following the war's end. They had to cope with the unwillingness of both the national authorities and the majority societies to correct the past wrongs, and allow the Jews to regain their properties and return to the socio-economic positions they had been forced to leave during (but sometimes even before) the war. The Europe as they knew it, writes Pieter Lagrou, vanished, becoming a grim place, "disrupted by demographic, social and political turmoil, stricken by physical destruction, haunted by recollections of violence and killing."¹ The joy of liberation, the expectations of the war coming to an end, anticipations of reuniting with loved ones, feelings of elation and excitement went hand in hand with anxiety and concerns.² Yet the bitter return of refugees, exiles, and survivors has still not been properly addressed in many countries across the region.³ The same applies to the question of local involvement and the degree of profiteering from the Nazi persecution and murder of the Jews, examined in this volume. Although there have been debates about the complicity of the local non-German population, especially in Poland as we shall see below, often they only touched upon the role of the political elites (as has been the case with Hungary or Slovakia, countries governed by their own administrations until the German invasion in 1944, in March and August respectively, or with Croatia, Romania, and Bulgaria).⁴ Furthermore, most of these investigations have remained confined to scholarly debates that did not reach a broader public. This is also the case with the relatively recent Hungarian *Historikerstreit*, which addressed some of the most problematic questions about the Horthy regime, including the indigenous antisemitism and the Hungarians' participation in the Holocaust.⁵

Only in Poland has the academic research on the degree of local participation in the crimes against the Jews led to several intense general debates after the fall of the Communist rule (though they were initiated already in the 1980s by academic research in Israel, Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah*, and by the first articles in the Polish press, for example by Jan Błonski that questioned the established war memory⁶). Further debates were stimulated by the opening of the local archives after 1989 and by the deeper involvement of scholars in free research of all topics pertaining to the Holocaust, including its precedents and the aftermath. Interestingly, many of these debates, be it the more general ones in Poland or the academic disputes across the region, were triggered by research studies published either by émigré scholars, as was the case with Randolph L. Braham, István Deák, or Jan T. Gross, or foreign authors, including Benjamin Frommer or James Mace Ward, who have no direct family ties to the countries whose histories they have challenged.⁷

Despite the undeniable progress that has been made in historical research and public awareness about the Holocaust in its local context, in recent years and months we have been witnessing renewed efforts in the countries across Eastern and Central Europe to relativize, deny, and even criminalize particular avenues of Holocaust research and commemoration. Discussions of the majority societies' involvement in the Holocaust have increasingly become associated with a direct or indirect attack on the national master

narratives and accounts of the experiences of the war. Such discussions are often perceived as contradicting and endangering the sense of national identity, and myths of national heroism and victimhood during and after the war, that continue to exist throughout Europe, East and West alike.⁸ Any reckoning with the past deeds is then understood as besmirching the good name and honor of the nation. Hence, not surprisingly, new scholarship, problematizing the role different parts of society had in the Holocaust, has not necessarily led to a “transformation of the mythological narrative.”⁹

In Hungary, the recent state-sponsored commemorations of the war, especially the controversial Memorial of the Victims of the German Invasion, dedicated to “all victims” of the German occupation, present the Hungarian majority society as a victim of Nazi Germany.¹⁰ Also the House of Fates, a new Holocaust museum in Budapest that opened just last year, remains largely silent about the involvement of the Horthy regime in the Holocaust, including the deportations of 1941 (which led to the mass massacre of foreign Jews, expelled from Greater Hungary to Kamenets Podolsk in today’s Ukraine, committed by the German troops and their Ukrainian and Hungarian helpers), crimes committed in Vojvodina (the part of Yugoslavia occupied by Hungary), and then the large-scale collaboration of all levels of the Hungarian administration in the 1944 deportations to Auschwitz and elsewhere.¹¹ In the Baltic states, annual marches of former local SS soldiers – although criticized by the international community – have become a part of the “folklore.” In Lithuania, there have even been attempts to prosecute former Jewish partisans – including the erstwhile Yad Vashem director and chief historian Yitzhak Arad – for the alleged crimes they committed against the locals during the war.¹²

In Slovakia, Marián Kotleba’s ultranationalist People’s Party – Our Slovakia entered the parliament in the spring of 2016. The country’s intellectuals spoke of democracy suffering a blow, while only about 1000 people gathered in the center of Bratislava to protest against fascism. Kotleba, since 2013 the governor of the Banská Bystrica region in the center of the country, has not been shy in expressing his deeply troubling views. In the more than 10 years during which he rose from the leader of a fringe party banned by the constitutional court to a parliamentary member, Kotleba openly spoke of “Gypsy parasites” or “an alleged Holocaust,” claiming that the Slovaks had no reason to “deal with any feelings of collective guilt or to endlessly apologize to those who have despised, exploited, oppressed the Slovak nation for centuries.”¹³ Last year, Kotleba’s party sued a Slovak non-governmental organization for “promoting racism” because they, as part of their exhibition commemorating the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, displayed a photograph of Štefánia. Born in Slovakia, Lorándová helped Slovak Jews in Hungary to obtain false papers and flee to safety during the war, thus actually saving many from imminent death. As also stated on the photograph, Lorándová was a member of the Zionist Hashomer Hatzair youth movement. Basing their argumentation on the 1975 UN General Assembly resolution that equaled Zionism with racism (revoked in 1991), Kotleba’s neo-Nazi party claimed Lorándová’s story promoted the suppression of human rights. Although Kotleba’s public appearances were quickly condemned in the liberal press, ongoing public and academic debates seem not to touch upon the key questions concerning the role of the lower echelons of the Slovak wartime regime and the majority society as such.¹⁴ However, it is impossible to deny the role the Slovak state played in the Holocaust. The involvement of the president-priest Jozef

Tiso in the initiation of the state-sponsored persecution of the Jews has indeed been scrutinized ever since he was captured as a fugitive in Austria and handed over to the Czechoslovak authorities in October 1945. Yet the discussions on the “ordinary” Slovaks’ participation in the Holocaust have been far from sincere. As James Ward showed, the Tiso trial, lasting from December 1946 until March 1947, was not only about finding the historical truth but also about constructing political truth.¹⁵ Tiso has remained a villain *and* a saint,¹⁶ and the predominant focus on him has also diverted the Slovak discourse on the Holocaust to a debate about the *few* in power. The questions about the implication of the large parts of the Slovak population in the persecution of the Jews and the ways in which they benefited from the cleansing of the Jews from the society are yet to be adequately and satisfactorily addressed.

The Czech Republic is also still waiting for a complex debate about the locals’ collaboration in the Holocaust (including the state bureaucracy, police forces, as well as “ordinary” Czechs), but the political authorities, including the former president Václav Klaus, have already rejected any direct complicity of the locals in the deaths in the Czech-run transit camps for the Roma population. The prisoners in the camps died, according to Klaus, because of the typhus epidemics, implying the prisoners’ inherent lack of hygiene.¹⁷ While the German guilt for the crimes against the Jews, Roma, and Czechs is being continuously emphasized (also as a way to justify the postwar transfer – that is, expulsion – of the German minority from Czechoslovakia), the silence about the ethnic Czechs’ guilt in the crimes is staggering, though probably not surprising. The Czechs have built their image of an island of democracy in East-Central Europe and reject any debate about their possible involvement in the crimes of the Third Reich. The end of the Second World War, then and now, has been largely framed as the victory of the Czech people in the “centuries-long” struggle with the Germans.¹⁸

The popular attitude in postwar Czechoslovakia was in agreement with regards to the punishment of perpetrators. Czechoslovak political deliberations on how to cleanse the nation began sometime around June 1943 and by the spring of 1945 a complex system of the retribution was outlined.¹⁹ In the introduction to the Czech translation of Benjamin Frommer’s rightfully lauded book on postwar retribution in Czechoslovakia, the author reveals what surprised him as he began to delve into the research on how the Czechs reckoned with their Protectorate past. He was surprised, first, that the Czechs and Slovaks were far from forgiving after 1945 and second that more people were imprisoned in 1945–48 than during the subsequent 40 years of Communist rule (1948–89).²⁰ Despite the severity of retribution and the harsh popular attitudes toward all those now termed fascists, questions about which of the three catchall categories of Holocaust actors – “victims,” “bystanders,” or “perpetrators” – Czechs and Slovaks themselves belonged to have been only rarely raised. The situation in the Czech Republic has not significantly changed since. As Michal Frankl observed with respect to the post-1989 Czech discourse on the Holocaust, “Nothing comparable to the Polish discussions about the Jedwabne pogrom in Poland or the role of the Tiso administration in Slovakia ever occurred, making the public’s coming to terms with the Holocaust a noncontroversial issue.”²¹ In other words, according to the Czechs, there is nothing to challenge, because they did not participate in the Holocaust and the so-called solution of the Jewish question was in fact only a prelude to the future extermination of the Czech people.²² The Hilsner Affair, the well-documented anti-Jewish violence in the last years of the First World War and in the

first years of Czechoslovakia, the rise of antisemitism after Munich, the still fully unexplored question of Czech collaboration with the Nazis, or the now increasingly discussed problematic position of Holocaust survivors in immediate postwar Czechoslovakia are seen as exceptions in the otherwise idealistic relationship between Czechs and the Jews. One can only ask how many exceptions we need before we begin to question the whole master narrative of the Czech–Jewish coexistence in history.

Coming back to recent events, the situation turned out to be even more problematic in Ukraine. One year after the 2014 revolution that removed pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian parliament – the Verkhovna Rada – adopted a series of highly contested laws, including law no. 2538 on “the legal status and honoring the memory of participants in the struggle for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century.” This law also commemorates members of organizations that collaborated with Nazi Germany, including the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and their armed wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) of Stepan Bandera. The law strictly states that those who “publicly exhibit a disrespectful attitude” toward the organizations or their members could be prosecuted.²³ However, as John-Paul Himka summarizes, the OUN “was deeply implicated in the Holocaust in Galicia and Volhynia.” Members of the group later joined the German-formed auxiliary police forces in the region, murdering hundreds of thousands of Jews:

Even outside German service, they continued to kill Jews, at first in the course of ethnic cleansing actions against the Polish population of these regions – any Jews found were routinely killed; later, in the winter of 1943–44 as the Red Army approached, UPA’s Army North systematically lured Jews out of their bunkers in the forests of Volhynia, placed them in makeshift labor camps, and then executed them.²⁴

By the law, the Ukrainian parliament made any systematic research and criticism of the Ukrainian nationalists, their leader, and their contribution to the Holocaust illegal. These sentiments are mirrored by the situation in parts of the Ukrainian population, when, for example, in 2012 the organizers had to cancel most of the public lectures by the Polish-German scholar Grzegorz Rossolinski-Liebe, who has written a comprehensive – though contentious – biography of Bandera. The organizers were allegedly unable to guarantee the speaker’s safety and even the remaining talks could be delivered only under the surveillance of police forces.²⁵

The tides are beginning to change also in Poland, the country that had the largest number of Holocaust victims during the war. The last two decades have witnessed an immense growth in research initiatives across the whole spectrum of possible topics related to the Holocaust in Nazi-occupied Poland. At the same time, the recent landslide victories of the right-wing nationalist and deeply Catholic Law and Justice Party in the parliamentary and presidential elections have already led to several attempts to create an official narrative of the Holocaust in the country, and reject or even criminalize alternative avenues of historical research. The Polish parliament – the Sejm – currently debates a law that could lead to imprisonment of people who use the term “Polish Death Camps” in reference to the extermination and concentration camps established during the war in occupied Poland by the Nazi administration.²⁶ Alongside this debate, the Presidential Office investigates whether to strip the Holocaust historian Jan T. Gross of the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland – praise awarded to those who

have rendered great service to the Polish nation abroad. Gross received the order in 1996 for his active role in opposition and research on the modern history of Poland.²⁷ The reason behind the current investigation is Gross's more recent research, often conducted together with his wife Irena Grudzińska-Gross, revealing the involvement of ordinary Poles in the Holocaust, and his recent controversial comments suggesting that Poles killed more Jews during the war than the Germans.²⁸

The developments in recent years – and here we need to acknowledge that these changes have been occurring across the whole region – testify to the continued need for research on Gentile–Jewish relations across Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust and its aftermath, as well as its commemoration and memorialization in the 70 years since the end of the war. The aim of this volume is to offer multifaceted insights into the period of the Holocaust, as well as its aftermath, in parts of Central and Eastern Europe. It is a needed contribution to the complex debates that have developed since the 1940s and that continue to stir controversies and public outbursts. The ambition here is to problematize the understanding of Gentile–Jewish relations during and after the Holocaust in the eastern parts of Europe (with the exception of Kateřina Králová's article, which deals with the situation in Greece, and Michael Fleming's contribution, which sheds light on British–Polish contacts during the war). The volume originated from two academic events that we organized in 2012 and 2014. In July 2012, we convened a two-week workshop on “Confronting the Holocaust in Postwar Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary” at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. The network we have established served as a basis for the following series of two major scholarly events – a workshop and conference, both held in May and June 2014 at the Charles University in Prague under the title “Jews and Gentiles in East-Central Europe in the Twentieth Century.” The articles offered in this volume are refined versions of selected papers delivered and debated at these events.

“Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust in History and Memory” traces the complex, dense, and far from static relations between majority societies and Jews in the region. It does so by taking an interdisciplinary approach, shedding light on the various shades of collaboration, profiteering, indifference, passivity, but also help and rescue. Any categorization of social behavior, or so it seems, is necessarily doomed to failure. How can we classify human actions, if the categories of Holocaust actors and their behavior themselves do not reflect how various stances and positions evolved, and how individual attitudes were formed? If genocidal violence, as Thomas Kühne tells us, constituted Germans' shared identity, establishing a “national brotherhood of mass murder,” how can we disentangle the level of individuals' involvement in the crime and their responsibilities for the committed deeds?²⁹ Omer Bartov's much-needed reminder that “what we call the Holocaust and associate largely with mass murder facilities and gas chambers was played out more intimately in the form of communal massacres,” especially in Eastern Europe where not only most Jews lived but where a decisive majority of all European Jews were also murdered, further muddles the picture of Jewish–Gentile relations individual authors address in this volume.³⁰

The study of the Second World War and of the Holocaust, including its aftermath, can actually gain from a cross-country perspective on the topic, accentuating rather than obscuring the different experiences of violence and murder – and the memories of the

vicious acts in postwar, democratic, or non-democratic settings – in Central and Eastern Europe. Articles in this volume include diverse evaluations of the interethnic coexistence, factors, circumstances, and the level of knowing that shaped Jewish–Gentile relations, and a discussion of varying recollections of the “integral, routine, almost ‘normal’”³¹ slaughter of the Jews in the East. They also again point to the almost “normal” widespread socio-economic exclusion and persecution of the Jews that implicated majority societies of countries allied to Nazi Germany, or occupied by the Wehrmacht, in the subsequent deportations and killings.³² Challenging newly available but often tainted sources, including postwar trial, restitution and compensation documents, propaganda materials, official documents, but also situational reports, using different lenses (macro- and micro-history) and methods, such as ethnographic interviews and cultural studies approaches, the essays in this volume contribute to a more rounded understanding of the dynamics of the Holocaust and its legacies more than 70 years after the end of the war.

The documentation from postwar trials, as articles by **Natalia Aleksiu** or **Agnieszka Wiercholska** in this volume establish, offers a rich and still not fully explored sea of information on relations between Jews and Gentiles across Nazi-dominated Europe. Wiercholska’s captivating article on the “dense reality of relations between Jews and Gentiles” in Tarnów, a city east of Kraków, shows how the catchall categories of social action overlap when we focus on the entangled histories of the Holocaust in the local context. Wiercholska’s micro-historical study puts help and rescue – categories that should be treated separately – in the General Government to test, showing the indeed “manifold and intertwined social processes during the Holocaust.” When the uneasy questions of help and rescue were raised during the war – effectively questions of life and death for both parties – was it the prewar contacts, age, gender, character, or money that influenced the answer? As the author shows, the Holocaust has to be understood as a “multifaceted dynamic process,” with all answers to these questions having a role in the dynamic. Alongside the studies by prominent American and Polish historians and sociologists, Wiercholska’s article shatters the Polish victimhood narrative but does so without simplifying either the dynamics of the war or the individual stories in its context.³³

The victimhood competition, exemplified in the 70th anniversary of the “Hungarian Holocaust” that took place in 2014, as well as in the 2010 publication of Eugenia Kanellopoulou’s book that could be translated as *Greek Holocausts*, is at the forefront of two articles in this volume. Besides **Kateřina Králová**’s important contribution on the postwar battle over compensation for crimes committed during the German occupation of Greece, discussed further, **Maté Zombory**’s chapter offers a comparative study of early postwar discourses of the past in Hungary. Zombory applies a prospective perspective on some of the key questions of the aftermath, namely the ways in which the tragedy of both the war in general (treated as the “catastrophe”) and the Holocaust in particular (understood as a “tragedy”) were retold and remembered in immediate postwar Hungary. Zombory offers three perspectives on institutional discourse on what we now call the Holocaust. At the state level, Zombory revisits the formation of the criminal categorization in the postwar retribution, pointing to the causal relation between “war crimes” and “crimes against the people” in the Hungarian legislation. At the theological level, Zombory investigates early postwar statements on the recent past made by the representatives of the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches, the Orthodox Israelites, and the Neolog Movement. The author complements his analysis by offering insights into

how leading public intellectuals in postwar Hungary addressed the notion of “catastrophe.” Zombory persuasively concludes that they placed the emphasis on historical continuity, consequences of one’s actions, and the lessons learnt or to be learnt. By complementing scholarship that challenged the myth of silence in the Hungarian context, Zombory’s text is also a tribute to recently deceased David Cesarani and his reassessment of Jewish life in the postwar era.³⁴

Researchers often hope that their studies will initiate a deeper societal reckoning with the legacies of the “dark past.”³⁵ It was in particular Gross’s book *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka*, translated into English as *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, that in the early 2000s provoked a major discussion on Polish–Jewish relations during the war.³⁶ Besides shaping the study of Gentile–Jewish relations, *Neighbors* also initiated new trends in Holocaust historiography, including the use of survivor testimonies. Gross dedicated *Neighbors* to the memory of Szmul Wasersztajn (Shmuel Wasserstein), one of the few survivors of the July 1941 Jedwabne massacre. Gross came across Wasersztajn’s testimony four years earlier, but at that time he failed to fully grasp its message. In *Neighbors* Gross hence urged scholars to

modify our approach to sources for this period. When considering survivors’ testimonies, we would be well advised to change the starting premise in appraisal of their evidentiary contribution from a priori critical to in principal affirmative. By accepting what we read in a particular account as fact *until we find persuasive arguments to the contrary*, we would avoid more mistakes than we are likely to commit by adopting the opposite approach, which calls for cautious skepticism toward any testimony *until an independent confirmation of its content has been found*.³⁷

In this volume, **Aleksiu**’s vital article shows that Gross’s plea has been heard. Aleksiu takes us to Eastern Galicia, a region where some five million Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians lived on the eve of the war. While examining the postwar trials, Aleksiu turns our attention to the statements of Jewish witnesses and survivors’ own conceptualization of “intimate violence,” that is, the “hostile close encounters between former neighbors in which Jews were threatened, humiliated, robbed, betrayed, and murdered.” By following the paper trail of four postwar trials and taking the intimacy as a point of departure, Aleksiu shows how Jewish survivors positioned themselves as direct witnesses of the hostilities, seeking not only justice but also answers to the question of why some of their former neighbors turned into perpetrators. It is precisely this type of micro-historical study that brings us closer to the understanding of the everyday dynamics of interethnic coexistence and conflict in occupied Europe.

One of the ever-present questions behind any scholarly endeavor into relations between Jews and Gentiles during the Holocaust and in the aftermath is the degree of *knowledge* about the unfolding events that “victims,” “perpetrators,” and “bystanders” possessed. What did people know and how did their knowledge of the Jews’ fate shape their responses to the Holocaust? Knowledge, and responses to what was known then and now, is at the forefront of three articles in this volume. Two of them offer insights into the state administration and focus on political agency. **Michael Fleming**’s study gives evidence of the key role that intelligence from Poland, including on what is now known as the Holocaust, played in the Polish war effort. Fleming creates a bridge between the topics of Gentile–Jewish relations in Eastern and Western Europe. He centers on the relations between

the minor and major Allied powers during the war and asks the question of how the relation shaped the responses of both sides to the Nazi persecution of the Jews. He builds his argument on the extensive historiography on the Allied responses to the Holocaust – which has emerged since the publication of the pioneer studies in the 1960s³⁸ – but offers new conclusions based on a careful reading of the developments at various levels of the British and Polish state bureaucracies. Information on the fate of the Jews was largely available, but it was frequently marginalized, partly out of concern over antisemitism in Britain – but also in occupied Poland. The British Foreign Office, Fleming shows, shared the vision that only “winning the war could help Europe’s Jews,” and other issues, emerging at that time, were perceived through this ultimate aim. In contrast, **Michala Lónčíková** looks into how official propaganda of the Slovak state molded popular responses to the Jews. Lónčíková questions whether situational reports written for the State Security Headquarters can provide reliable insights into the moods and attitudes in the society. She scrutinizes the ways in which the propaganda twisted the looting of Jewish properties as an opportunity for the Gentile Slovaks but presented the 1942 deportations, resulting in about 57,000 evicted Jews, as a nothing-out-of-the-ordinary event. Lónčíková’s contribution makes critical observations about the long-term developments and influences on the Slovak propaganda, going all the way back to the November 1938 attempts to deport “Hungarian” Jews from Slovakia across the new Slovak-Hungarian border. Moreover, Lónčíková delves into the question of Aryanization (appropriation) of Jewish property in Slovakia and the preparation for the deportations. **Monika Vrzgulová** offers a different methodological approach and analyzes sources that complement Lónčíková’s observations. This article is a result of Vrzgulová’s extensive oral history research into the Slovak “bystander” of the Holocaust. In her sensibly guided interviews, Vrzgulová questions the alleged ignorance – the omnipresent “we knew nothing about this”³⁹ – of the Slovak “bystander.” As she suggests, witness accounts “dispel the stereotype of the ‘unknown perpetrators’ [...] Eyewitnesses often describe situations they have seen in great detail. It is precisely at this stage of research when unknown perpetrators are transformed into local guardsmen, neighbors and acquaintances – playing the parts of accomplices. During the interview, the anonymous ‘them’ become members of the ‘us’ group.” Vrzgulová’s article, along with those by Aleksion and Wierzcholska, offers a valuable contribution to the ongoing and much-needed discussion on the limits of the “bystander” category in the Holocaust in the territories with a traditional Jewish settlement, where the Aryanization and deportation created a deep rupture in local societies.⁴⁰

The state-level mobilization of anti-Jewish sentiments and images is further explored by **Kateřina Šimová**. Her article is the only one in the volume that focuses exclusively on the postwar period and the Communist treatment of the Jews in the late 1940s and 1950s. Šimová’s comparative analysis of the Soviet propaganda – and its resonance in the Czechoslovak campaign during the Slánský trial – offers novel insights into the totalitarian practice and attempts to construct an “objective enemy” within and without, which served as a justification for the renewed persecution of the Jewish population in the Socialist bloc. Šimová reaches her conclusions based on an examination of three interconnected propaganda campaigns during late Stalinism: the fight against “cosmopolitanism,” the Slánský trial, and the Doctor’s Plot. As her article shows, the image of the “Jews” constructed during late Stalinism was far from static, and the Jews could in turn be associated with alleged intellectualism, anti-patriotism, but also the West (the capitalist world) in

general or Israel in particular. Lónčíková and Šimová's articles thus offer comparative vantage points from which we can analyze the *modus operandi* of two East European societies in their propaganda fights against real or imagined enemies.

If the postwar trials and propaganda campaigns often established who was (or would be) the “perpetrator” and “victim,” a study of the (often failed) restitution process, as Dan Diner reminds us, enables us to scrutinize the “organic interconnection between restituted private property rights and the evocation of past memories, or vice versa: Restitution of property as a result of recovered memory.”⁴¹ **Borbála Klacsmann**'s article shows precisely what role the confiscated and restituted property played in Jewish–Gentile relations in Hungary after 1945.⁴² She contributes to the growing historiography on the property rights and restitution policies in post-Holocaust Central and Eastern Europe. Similarly to Aleksiu and Wierzycholska, Klacsmann turns to micro-history, comparing case studies of Monor and Újpest, two towns in central Hungary. Her analysis of the Jewish survivors' efforts to reconstitute their property, including real estate, is based on letters the claimants submitted to the local as well as central authorities. Klacsmann shows how careful work with restitution claims can offer a novel perspective on the Gentile–Jewish relations at the local level during the war, but especially during its immediate aftermath. In particular, the analysis returns agency to the Jewish survivors, and the Jewish communal institutions that played a crucial role in the survivors' efforts to start new lives shortly after the catastrophe. Klacsmann thus continues the historiographical approach of going beyond the urban space, recently successfully employed by Anna Cichopek-Gajraj in her study on the situation in postwar Poland and Slovakia.⁴³

The questions of postwar restitution and compensation for Holocaust survivors are further analyzed by **Kateřina Králová** in her study on Greece. The article brings new avenues for a better understanding of the postwar indemnification and compensation by the postwar German state to the victims of the Nazi policies. Králová identifies the domestic as well as international influences that shaped the German decision-making on monetary compensation to the Greek victims and their heirs. Concurrently, Králová complements Zombory's article and offers further insights into the study of the victimhood competition between Jews and non-Jews. She also shows the efforts to frame the wartime experience in terms of national suffering, which often served as an excuse for overlooking the reconstruction of the communities shattered by either the Holocaust or the German retaliatory measures during their anti-guerrilla operations.

Financial and personal restitution formed a key part in the survivors' efforts to start new lives after the war. Alongside these efforts, an increasing number of those who had gone through the hell of the war attempted to convey their experiences to a wider audience in postwar Europe. New studies have already decidedly moved beyond the previous oversimplifications about the alleged survivors' silence in the first decades after the war.⁴⁴ This recent trend in historiography and other related disciplines is supported by two studies in this volume. **Paweł Wolski**'s article focuses on one of the most acclaimed early authors (and a Gentile Pole), Tadeusz Borowski, who is well known for his series of short stories from Auschwitz, usually published in English under the title *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*. Wolski analyzes and compares the early postwar texts published by Borowski with his later work (before his suicide in 1951) that was in early Communist Poland influenced by the newly prescribed artistic forms of Socialist Realism. Wolski insists on “saving” the often-dismissed Socialist Realist texts of Borowski, showing that Borowski's wartime

experience is present in all of his work. Although Wolski demonstrates that Borowski was able to keep his artistic license and agency even under the Stalinist regime in Poland, the article also brings a vital contribution to the study of the Communists' efforts to shape the memory of the Holocaust and the war. In this manner, Wolski's article brings new perspective to the previously introduced contribution by Šimová.

The question of artistic representation of the Holocaust in the first decades after the war is further analyzed in the last contribution in the volume. Jiří Holý deals with three case studies from the Czech and Slovak production, and provides an analysis of the role humor and satire play in Holocaust novels and films in the late 1940s and early 1960s. From the very end of the war, regardless of Thomas Adorno's dictum that writing "poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric," survivors and other authors have been eager to present fictional representations of the Holocaust. They even employed the genre of "Holocaust comedy," which in fact had already become part of the Holocaust representation during the war.⁴⁵ Similar types of films and novels still stir controversies, a conclusion confirmed by the public responses to Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997). Yet, as Holý suggests, there has been a long tradition of satirical representation of the Holocaust even in the countries that lay behind the Iron Curtain. Jiří Weil's *Life with a Star*, Josef Škvorecký's *Menorah*, and Ladislav Grosman's *Shop on Main Street* (made into a film in 1965 by Ján Kádár and Elmar Klos) each employs humor and satire as a way to represent the otherwise incomprehensible situation during the war.

The 11 essays testify to the need to continue asking the uneasy questions about Jewish–Gentile relations in Eastern Europe and challenge the narratives of the Holocaust as an all-German responsibility (and as an all-German story to tell). Be it micro-history, witness accounts of both Jews and Gentiles, early postwar representations of the war in literature or movies, propaganda, or restitution and retribution documentation, all provide unique insights into the study of various degrees and shades of local participation in what was both a Jewish *and* a Gentile tragedy. The primary aim of the two workshops we convened in 2012 and 2014 was to facilitate the development of new methodological approaches to the theme. This anthology seeks to further the quest for new cross-disciplinary approaches in the joint field of Jewish and Eastern European Studies, and problematize our understanding of a past that indeed continues to haunt us. We invite all to come along on this journey of historical exploration.

Notes

1. Lagrou, "Return to a Vanished World," 1.
2. For the newest research on the theme that stresses the ambiguous responses of survivors to the liberation, see Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps*.
3. For a comparative overview, see e.g. Bankier, *The Jews Are Coming Back*; Deák et al., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe*.
4. For a good yet far from definite summary of the debate in Poland, see e.g. Aleksius, "Polish Historiography of the Holocaust"; Shore, "Conversing with Ghosts"; Polonsky and Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*; for an introduction to the debate on collaboration in Hungary, see Deák, "A Fatal Compromise?"; Vago, "Hungary"; for Slovakia, see Fatran, "Holocaust and Collaboration in Slovakia."
5. Rigó, "A Hungarian Version of the Historikerstreit?"
6. Gutman and Krakowski, *Unequal Victims*; Błonski, "Biedni Polacy patrzy na getto."

7. For at least some of their important contributions, see Gross, *Sąsiedzi*; Gross, *Neighbors*; Braham, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry*; Deák et al., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe*; Frommer, *National Cleansing*; Frommer, *Národní očista*; Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*.
8. For a general reading on victimhood, see Jensen and Rønsbo, *Histories of Victimhood*; Bessel and Schumann, *Life after Death*.
9. Gerbel and Latcheva, “Cultures of Remembrance of World War II,” 123.
10. Deák, “A Monument of Self-Pity and Self-Justification.”
11. Gruber, “New Holocaust Museum in Budapest Faces Opposition”; “Hungary’s New Holocaust Museum Omits National Culpability.”
12. Melman, “Nazi Hunter.”
13. Mária Hunková, “Rómovia sú paraziti a SNP puč. Na stráž!” *Hospodárske noviny*, 28 November 2013, <http://dennik.hnonline.sk/slovensko/566188-romovia-su-paraziti-a-snp-puc-na-straz>; “My sme národnosti slovenskej, nie židovskej. Čo všetko už Kotleba povedal o slovenskom štáte,” *Denník N*, 13 March 2016, <https://dennikn.sk/404134/zidovska-otazka-nas-zaujimat-nemusi-co-vsetko-uz-kotleba-povedal-snp-zidoch-slovenskom-state/>.
14. Blaščák et al., *Slovenský vojnový štát a holokaust v kolektívnej pamäti slovenskej spoločnosti*.
15. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 262.
16. Abrams, “The Politics of Retribution,” 279.
17. Sniegon, *Vanished History*, 158f.
18. For a recent contribution to this topic, see e.g. Hallama, *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer*.
19. Frommer, *National Cleansing*, 63–94.
20. Frommer, *Národní očista*, 17.
21. Frankl, “The Sheep of Lidice,” 185.
22. Hallama, *Nationale Helden und jüdische Opfer*.
23. Himka, “Legislating Historical Truth.”
24. *Ibid.*
25. Rossolinski, *Stepan Bandera*.
26. “Foreign Ministry Proposes Less Jail Time.”
27. “Prof. Gross zaslužyl na ten order.”
28. “PiS kole order prof. Jana Tomasza Grossa”; Gross, “Die Osteuropäer Haben Kein Schamgefühl.”
29. Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*, 171.
30. Bartov, “Wartime Lies and Other Testimonies,” 491.
31. *Ibid.*, 492.
32. Dean, *Robbing the Jews*, 378–96.
33. Some of the most important publications include Engelking, *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień*; Machcewicz and Persak, *Wokół Jedwabnego*; Engelking-Boni et al., *Prowincja noc*; Markiel and Skibinska, *The Holocaust in the Polish Countryside*.
34. Cesarani and Sundquist, *After the Holocaust*; Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord*; Fritz and Hansen, “Zwischen nationalem Opfermythos und europäischen Standards.”
35. Himka and Michlic, *Bringing the Dark Past to Light*.
36. Solonari, “Patterns of Violence,” 51; Shore, “Conversing with Ghosts.”
37. Gross, *Neighbors*, 139 (emphasis in the original).
38. See for example: Kushner, “Pissing in the Wind?”; Stone, “Britain, the United States and the Holocaust”; Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue*; Rosen, *Saving the Jews*; Morse, *While Six Million Died*; Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue*; Wyman, *Paper Walls*; Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews*; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*; Fleming, *Auschwitz, the Allies and Censorship of the Holocaust*.
39. Longerich, *Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!*
40. Ehrenreich and Cole, “The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation”; Barnett, “Reflections on the Concept of ‘Bystander’”; Cesarani and Levine, *Bystanders to the Holocaust*; Barnett, *Bystanders*; Edgren, *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders*; Levine, “On-Lookers.”
41. Diner, “Restitution and Memory,” 39.

42. Dean, *Robbing the Jews*; Dean et al., *Robbery and Restitution*; Láníček, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews*; Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence*; Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!*
43. Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence*.
44. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*; Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*; Fritz and Kocács, *Als der Holocaust noch keinen Namen hatte*.
45. For example, in the USA, in Charlie Chaplin's feature film *The Great Dictator* (1940).

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