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Linda Margittai

**THE “JEWISH QUESTION” IN THE SOUTHLANDS 1941-1944**

**Ph.D. dissertation – theses/description**

**Thesis Supervisor:**

**Dr. Habil. Judit Molnár, Department Chair, Associate Professor**

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## I. The reasoning underlying the research topic, and its background

In January 1942 units of the Hungarian military and gendarmerie massacred more than three thousand – or, according to Serbian historians, nearly four thousand – civilians in what was supposedly a “raid to hunt for partisans” (*razzia*) in the Southern Bácska region. The great majority of victims were Serbs and Jews. The infamous massacres in the region, which have since become known as the “cold days,” can be regarded as unique in the series of events of the Holocaust in Hungary. Prior to the “final solution to the Jewish question” offered by the Nazis, which started in Hungary in the Spring of 1944 – that is the forcing of Jews in Hungary living outside of Budapest into ghettos and collection camps, and the deportation of the overwhelming majority of them to death camps – other than the deportation of Hungarian Jews to Kamanets-Podolski, and the atrocities committed against Jews forced into work brigades, the “cold days” were the only event in which Hungarian Jews were in great numbers victims. This was the only occasion on which Jews were murdered en masse within Hungary’s borders by Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes. The “cold days” became a symbol of the fate of Jews in Southern Hungary, and of Hungarian authorities’ Jewish policies in the region. Literature on the Holocaust in Hungary has long counted it as one of the most tragic stations on the road to the annihilation of the majority of Hungary’s Jews.<sup>1</sup>

The raids in Southern Bácska are the only episode in the persecution of Jews living in the Southern Lands re-appended to Hungary from 1941 to 1944, which is well known among the broader public. The most important research findings about the raids in Hungary are not so much associated with Holocaust history as – because of the markedly anti-Serbian nature of the event – with research on Hungarian authorities’ minority policies in the region, above all towards Southern Slavs, and as part of research on Hungarian-Southern Slav ethnic connections, and the history of Hungarians in the region.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable because the memory of the few years of

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<sup>1</sup> As expressed by, for example, the title of: Randolph L. Braham: *The Kamenets Podolsk and Délvidék Massacres: Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary*. *Yad Vashem Studies*, 9 (1973) 133-156.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous works on the raid are available in Hungarian and Serbian, though a fresh monograph in Hungarian is much needed. See, for example: Zvonimir Golubović: *Racija u Južnoj Bačkoj 1942. godine*. Istorijski muzej Vojvodine, Novi Sad, 1992; Aleksandar Kasaš: *Mađari u Vojvodini 1941-1946*. Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, Odsek za istoriju, Novi Sad, 1996, 80-100.; Buzási János: *Az újvidéki „razzia”*. Kossuth, Budapest, 1963; A. Sajti Enikő: *Délvidék 1941-1944. A magyar kormányok délszláv politikája*. Kossuth, Budapest, 1987, 269-306.; Ead.: *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbség. Magyarok a Délvidéken 1918-1947*. Napvilág, Budapest, 2004, 269-318.; Pihurik Judit: *Magyarok és szerbek a délvidéken 1941-1944*. *Limes*, 22 évf. 2. sz. (2009) 83-102.; Ead.: *Kórkép mint történeti forrás. Bayor Ferenc nyugalmazott tábornok, újvidéki városparancsnok 1942-43-as pere és elítélése. Betekintő*, 2011/4.; Ead.: „Vagy ők, vagy mi”. Harminc évvel a csurogi *razzia* után. In: Hornyák Árpád és Bíró László (eds.): *Magyarok és szerbek a változó határ két oldalán, 1941-1948. Történelem és emlékezet*. MTA

Hungarian rule in the region, and the bitter experience of the “cold days,” casts a long shadow over Hungarian-South Slav (above all, Serbian) relations, and on the situation of Hungarian minorities still living in the region. Hungarian research on the Holocaust in the Southlands has focussed above all on reconstructing the history of ghettoization and deportation after the German occupation of Hungary.<sup>3</sup> What has been missing is research on Hungary’s Jewish policies in the region, and an analysis of how Hungarian authorities dealt with the “Jewish question” from the reoccupation of the region in April 1941 until the Spring of 1944.<sup>4</sup> My dissertation is an attempt to fill this research gap.

The questions that led to my research were brought up by the massacre in Southern Bácska. To answer these questions, however, I had to look beyond the “cold days,” the events of which were in any case relatively well covered by existing literature. I primarily tried to clarify the degree to which the massacre could be considered an event that typified Hungarian authorities’ policies toward Jews in the Southlands, the components of these Jewish policies, and how they fit within the official anti-semitism of Hungary in the period.

To answer these questions I had to broaden the scope of my analysis to include aspects not regularly approached by traditional Holocaust history. The core of my work remained policies against Jews. However, my goal was also to introduce these policies in the broader, multifaceted context of ethnic oppression, which was by no means restricted to oppression of Jews, in the Southlands under Hungarian rule. Through this approach I hoped to join the newer approaches to Holocaust research developed outside Hungary which focus on the ethno-nationalist state-building efforts undertaken by states allied with Nazi Germany, in consonance with the broader context of similar German efforts. These efforts were often most clearly expressed in these countries’ multi-national borderlands, where a complex of discrimination and persecution made up a system that simultaneously – though not always identically – was directed against every ethnic group which

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Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, Budapest, 2016, 109-128. (And the reprint version of all these: Ead.: *Perben és haragban – világháborús önmagunkkal, Tanulmányok*. Kronosz, Pécs, 2015, 13-50, 51-68, 69-96.) Most recently in English: Arpad von Klimó: *Remembering Cold Days: The Novi Sad Massacre in Hungarian Politics and Society*. University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburg, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Molnár Judit: *Zsidósors 1944-ben az V. (szegedi) csendőrkörületben*. Cserépfalvi, Budapest, 1995, 60-72; Randolph L. Braham: *A népiirtás politikája: a holokauszt Magyarországon*. Park Kiadó, Budapest, 2015, 604-605, 716-720; Molnár Judit: *Zsidótlantítás a déli határsávban 1944-ben*. In: Randolph L. Braham (ed.): *Tanulmányok a holokausztról VIII*. Múlt és Jövő, Budapest, 2017, 31-64.

<sup>4</sup> Several better quality local, micro-histories are worthy of attention, such as: Pejin Attila: *A zentai zsidóság története*. Thurzó Lajos Művelődési Központ, Zenta, 2003. More recently, on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry in 1944, books and studies were published which provided further information about the history of Jews in the Southland during the Holocaust. These generally do not provide a focus on the region, but at a more local level. The richest historical narrative is available on the Jews of Subotica (Szabadka). For instance, see: Dévavári Zoltán: *Ez történt Szabadkán. Emberi sorsok, tragédiák – a szabadkai zsidóság a második világháborúban (1941-1944)*. In: Id. and Olga Kovačev Ninkov: *Subotica – Szabadka 1920-1944. Prilozi istoriji subotičkih jevreja/Adalékok a szabadkai zsidóság történetéhez*. Szabadkai Zsidó Hitközség, Szabadka, 2014; Farkas Zsuzsa, Mirko Grlica, Lovas Ildikó and Ninkov K. Olga (eds.): *Élettől az életig a holokauszton át*. Forum Könyvkiadó – Szabadkai Zsidó Hitközség, Újvidék és Szabadka, 2015; Dévavári Zoltán: *A szabadkai zsidóság eszme- és politikatörténete (1918-1944)*. GlobeEdit, Saarbrücken, 2016

appeared to societies based on a strict ethnic hierarchy, ultimately, as obstacles to the creation of an ethnically homogeneous state.<sup>5</sup>

Although the literature on the stresses between Hungary and its neighboring states is especially rich, and has dealt with the region's multi-ethnic border regions – including the Southlands – the integrated approaches outlined above have rather modest predecessors in Hungarian historiography, particularly in the historiography of the Holocaust as related to Hungary.<sup>6</sup> Very little attention is paid to the fact that the Jewish policies pursued in the various regions taken from Hungary after the First World War and re-appended to the country immediately prior to and during the Second World War (The Uplands, Transcarpathia, Northern Transylvania, and the Southlands) was by no means a mere imposition on those territories of the anti-Semitic regulations earlier introduced in little Hungary, or even of those brought after these territories were re-joined to the country. In this regard, the differences in the ethnic composition of little Hungary, and of the territories appended to the country meant that in these regions Hungary's already developed policies of ethnic discrimination were widened to exclude other nationalities. As a result of the borders set by the Peace Treaty of Trianon of 1920, Hungary's Versailles Treaty, other than Jews and Germans Hungary had no other ethnic minority of any significance in demographic or social-economic terms. The racist, ethnonationalist policies and social programs of the period prior to the return of lost territories were above all directed against Jews.<sup>7</sup> In the multi-ethnic borderlands between Hungary and the surrounding states – regardless of which country they belonged to – the “Jewish Question” primarily was always fit within the context of the ongoing debate on the politics of history and memory about the ownership of these territories.<sup>8</sup> After the re-appending of the lost territories,

<sup>5</sup> On the growing international literature on this topic, and on Romania in particular, see: Vladimir Solonari: *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, DC – Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2010; Paul A. Saphiro: *The Kishinev Ghetto 1941-1942. A Documentary History of the Holocaust in Romania's Contested Borderlands*. University of Alabama Press – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 2015; Diana Dumitru: *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2016. On Croatia, see: Alexander Korb: *Im Schatten des Weltkrieges: Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien, 1941-1945*. Hamburger Edition, Hamburg, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Such efforts are most notable in the case of Transylvania. See: Holly Case: *Between States. The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2009, 175-198; Anders E. B. Blomquist: *Economic Nationalizing in the Ethnic Borderlands of Hungary and Romania. Inclusion, Exclusion and Annihilation in Szatmár/Satu Mare 1867-1944*. Stockholm University, Stockholm, 2014; Horváth Sz. Ferenc: Népcsoportpolitika, szociális kompenzáció és gazdasági jóvátétel. A holokauszt Észak-Erdélyben. *Múltunk*, 51: 3 (2006) 102-143. On the Transcarpathian region, see: Raz Segal: *Genocide in the Carpathians. War, Social Breakdown, and Mass Violence 1914-1945*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Krisztián Ungváry has pointed out the fact that to date literature on the topic has spent relatively little effort on stressing the fact that a significant portion of Hungary's nationalist, racist discourse encouraging a re-distribution of property called for a “struggle on two fronts” against both Jews and Hungary's German minority. See: Ungváry Krisztián: *A Horthy-rendszer és antiszemitizmusának mérlege. Diszkrimináció és társadalompolitika Magyarországon, 1919-1944*. Jelenkor, Budapest, 2016, 292-319.

<sup>8</sup> On how the deportation and murder of the Jews of Northern Transylvania appeared in the social memories and memorial politics of Hungary and Romania, and was taken up as part of the “debate” on Transylvania after the

ethnic oppression in little Hungary remained primarily anti-Jewish. But in the parts of the country returned to Hungary, anti-Semitic efforts made up just a part of broader efforts toward economic and social re-organization on ethnic grounds. So, the “Jewish question was not only not the only issue, but it wasn’t even always the primary focus of Hungarian authorities’ ethnic policies in these regions. Indeed, discrimination and persecution of non-Jewish ethnic minorities here strongly influenced the situation of Jews.

It is also worth stressing more strongly than hitherto what appears to be the systematic phenomenon that the most glaring extremism of Hungarian anti-Semitism prior to 1944 could be expressed in the re-annexed parts of the country. In this period the officially expressed general goal of Hungary’s anti-Semitic policies was the social, and “racial” isolation of Jews, and the more-or-less gradual re-rolling back of what was deemed their “over influence” in social, economic and cultural affairs. Until the German occupation, the focus of Hungary’s anti-Semitic program was not a Nazi-style “solution” to the “Jewish question.” Systematic, state-supported physical violence – especially mass physical violence – against Jews was not characteristic in rump Hungary.

The situation, however, differed in the parts of the country re-annexed to Hungary. In these regions extreme acts against Jews – often in parallel with rude attacks carried out in parallel against other ethnic minorities – were regular. These included legal restrictions and confiscation of property that went beyond even the bounds set by existing anti-Semitic legislation, a broad denial of citizenship, mass internment and expulsion from the state’s territory, and extended to atrocities and the early realization of plans to carry out deportations. The most extreme examples of the ethnic repression that became characteristic in these re-annexed territories have received a fair amount of attention in historical narrative. In addition to the ethnic cleansing of the re-occupied Southlands and the bloodletting in South Bácska, the prime attention has been on the deportations to Kamenets-Podolski.<sup>9</sup> The evaluation of these events and their place in Hungary’s official anti-Semitism prior to and during the Second World War, is unavoidable for historical discourses on the mechanism of Holocaust in Hungary.<sup>10</sup>

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Second World War, see: Holly Case: A holokauszt és az erdélyi kérdés a II. világháború után. In: Molnár Judit (ed.): *A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában*. Balassi, Budapest, 2005, 340-353.

<sup>9</sup> On the deportations from Transcarpathia, see: Majsai Tamás: Iratok a körösmezei zsidódeportálás történetéhez – 1941. In: *A Ráday Gyűjtemény Évkönyve IV-V*. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1986; Ságvári Ágnes: Holokauszt Kárpátalján 1941-ben. *Múltunk*, 44: 2 (1999) 116-144; Karsai László: *Holokauszt*. Pannonica, Budapest, 2001, 228-232; Frojimovics, Kinga: *I Have Been a Stranger in a Strange Land: The Hungarian State and Jewish Refugees in Hungary, 1933-1945*. The International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2007; Gellért Ádám: Az 1941. évi körösmezei deportálások. A kitoloncolásokat jóváhagyó minisztertanácsi döntés háttere. *Betekintő*, 2012/2.; Id.: Menekülés a népiirtás elől. Az 1941-es deportáltak hazatérési kísérletei és a magyar állam ellenintézkedései. *Betekintő*, 2013/3; Id.: Mi történt Kamenec-Podolszkijban? Deportálások Magyarországról 1941-ben. *Múlt-kor*, 2014/Spring, 46-51; Frojimovics Kinga: Holokauszt Kárpátalján 1938–1944. *Múlt-kor*, 2014/Spring, 69-71.; Gellért Ádám és Gellért János: Egy tömeggyilkosság anatómiája – Kamenec-Podolszkij, 1941. augusztus. *Betekintő*, 2015/4; Ungváry: *A Horthy-rendszer*, 544-551.

<sup>10</sup> The reasoning and developments in the debate between Hungarian historians representing the structuralist and

In my dissertation I attempted to draw a few general conclusions on these issues through the case study of the Southlands. For example, I found it important to reflect on the newer attempts at interpretation – partially related to the so-called intentionalist-structuralist debate – of the place of these atrocities to Hungary’s Jewish policies, which suggest that the extreme policies against Jews, (and other minorities) in the border regions came about precisely because of the very nature of Hungary’s Jewish policies (and in a broader sense, ethnic policies).<sup>11</sup> I am convinced that these interpretations are as misguided as those which attempt to pose these extreme acts as anomalies which in no way fit within the context of Hungary’s racist, anti-Semitic policies.

### **III. The topic of the dissertation, its logic and structure**

In the dissertation I attempted to introduce the topic of the “Jewish question” in the Southlands in a more nuanced manner. The general structure of my work more-or-less follows the now classic categories established by Raul Hilberg in discussing the experiences, roles, and situations of perpetrators, bystanders, and victims.<sup>12</sup> However, I did not use this categorization as a strict guide to structuring the thesis. From the outset, I considered the primary goal of my research the analysis of the Jewish policies of Hungarian governments, and of the various levels of Hungarian administration operating in the Southlands. This prime focus remained to the end, and is evident in the structure of the thesis. The majority of the work discusses the work of policy makers and local bureaucrats. To express what I meant, I found it best to attempt to meld chronological and thematic approaches. Above all I attempted to interpret the anti-Semitic policies of the Southlands, or rather to place them in their broader ethno-political context, especially in the early stage of the return to Hungary, under military administration, and in the extremism that was expressed during the raids (Chapter 3). Following this I detailed the administration’s attempts to ethnically re-arrange various spheres of social and economic life, and to expose the ethnic discrimination that this entailed. Here each chapter covers a specific topic – such as the limitations that led to a “changing of the guard” in secondary and higher education, the ethnic transformation of the industrial-trade sector, the re-arrangement of agricultural property ownership, work service, etc., etc. – and in doing so I strove to transmit the procedural dynamic of the events over time (Chapters 4-8).

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intentionalist viewpoints is summarized by: Kovács András: A magyar intencionalizmus. Új irányok a magyar holokauszt-történetírásban. In: Randolph L. Braham and Kovács András (eds.): *A holokauszt Magyarországon hetven év múltán*. Múlt és Jövő, Budapest, 2015, 13-35.

<sup>11</sup> Itt elsősorban Raz Segal érvelését, következtetéseit lehet említeni: Segal: *Genocide in the Carpathians* (passim).

<sup>12</sup> Raul Hilberg: *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*. Aaron Asher, New York, 1992.

In addition to covering official policies, my work focuses on the social function of anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution (especially Chapter 9). I mainly attempted to expose the factors in the Southlands' collective history and past experiences which help explain Hungarians' behavior towards Jews, and in addition to describing the great variety of their relationships and deeds, I revealed clearly identifiable general characteristics. I felt there was an especial need to do this, because the topic, primarily the topic of the negative role of the Hungarian civilian population, has long been surrounded by silence, at least in part because of the perception that through the atrocities committed against Hungarians by Yugoslav communist partisans, Hungarians too "got theirs."<sup>13</sup> Baseless claims have even appeared that the Hungarians in the region "condemned the imposition of the Jewish Laws."<sup>14</sup> Besides Hungarians, I examined the patterns of behavior other ethnic groups in the region expressed toward Jews. I tried to describe these in the context of their own complex social and ethnic relations, and to throw light on how the place certain ethnic groups were assigned in the hierarchy of Hungarian society at the time affected their attitudes towards one another, just as much as did the supposed or real attitudes of Jews towards other ethnic groups and their assumed or truly experienced loyalty and solidarity.

I dedicated a separate chapter (10) to the experiences and reactions of persecuted Jews. My express goal here was not to depict Jews as merely passive sufferers. Instead I tried to stress their agency – no matter how limited it was – through which they could attempt to express some sort of resistance, and occasionally were even able to affect policies. The sections that discuss this issue are primarily about the various strategies Jews in the Southlands used to persist and resist. I discussed a broad spectrum of activities in this chapter, from fleeing persecution, through the tools through which anti-Semitic limitations could be withstood through tricks, or attempted sabotage, up to and including participation in organized paramilitary resistance. Since the same limitations were placed on Jews in the Southlands as on those in Hungary as a whole, often their reactions were similar to those of other Jews elsewhere in the country. There were, however, certain forms of anti-Semitic oppression which struck the Jews of the Southlands in a unique way, and which evoked responses that were specific to the region. I attempted to describe both generalities of resistance in the country as a whole, and factors that made resistance in the Southlands unique.

I also tried to show how anti-Semitic oppression affected Jewish religious communities and institutions, and what collective responses this evoked. Here I follow how congregations attempted

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<sup>13</sup> Szerbhorváth György: A jugoszláviai holokauszt emlékezete Szerbiában – irodalmi és tudományos igényű könyvek tükrében. *Regio*, 23: 1 (2015) 152-166, esp. 158. A few newer works raise the issue of the responsibility of Hungarians in the Southland: Pejin: *A zentai zsidóság*, 243-244.; Dévavári Zoltán: Két tűz között: a szabadkai zsidóság megsemmisülése. Feljelentők, besúgók, életmentők és áldozatok. In: Babits Antal (ed.): *Magyar holokauszt 70. Veszteségek és felelőségek*. Logos, Budapest, 2014, 149-184.

<sup>14</sup> Arday Lajos: *Magyarok a Délvidéken, Jugoszláviában*. Gondolat, Budapest, 2002, 29.

to ensure the furthering of community life and to provide support for members of the congregation in a period of ever decreasing material and human resources, and simultaneously a time in which members of the community had greater need than ever for help. I also felt it important to discuss how the experience of Hungarian state discrimination and persecution shaped the national and cultural identities and loyalties of Jews in the Southlands. I close the chapter, and the dissertation, with a demographic summary of the great loss in numbers of Jews there was due to Hungarian authorities' anti-Semitic repression from the return of the Southlands to German occupation in the Spring of 1944.

Although individual chapters treat the policies of administrators and government, the role of civil society, and the situation of Jewish victims, I did not attempt to make a strict separation between these topics which would, in any case, have appeared to be somewhat artificial and which I did not even see as possible. Disregarding the fact that the categories of "perpetrators, bystanders, and victims" are rather fluid, and by no means impossible to bridge, the political and social actions associated with them formed an interconnected system in which each affected the other, and all affected the dynamic of anti-Semitic discrimination and persecution.<sup>15</sup> It was my goal to make palpable their collective effects.

### **III. Research sources and methods**

My work is based on primary sources. Above all I examined the documents of the Hungarian administration in the period in Serbian and Hungarian archives which hold documents from the various administrative, judicial and bureaucratic authorities. I also examined the documents of local and regional economic interest-groups, trade and business chambers, and various associations. In addition to local and regional administrative bodies, I examined materials from central government organs, and ministerial documents. To supplement these materials, I used contemporary press and periodicals, diaries, correspondence, and various written and video records of memories of the time. I only carried out systematic and original research on the subject of the region of the Southlands in the period of Hungarian rule. I based those parts of the thesis which discuss the situation of Jews in the Southlands in the interwar period, or in other parts of Hungary on already published research, although I was able to incorporate some primary sources which appeared by chance in research on my primary subject.

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<sup>15</sup> See: Robert M. Ehrenreich and Tim Cole: The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships. *Human Organization*, 64: 3 (2005) 213-224.



#### **IV. Research results**

The massacres of Serbs and Jews in January 1942 are rightly considered a milestone in the way to the Holocaust in Hungary. The Jewish men pressed into forced labor, and the deportations to Kamenets-Podolsky made it clear that there was a side to Hungary's official anti-Semitic policies that was much more brutal than that of the anti-Semitic laws and regulations which stripped Jews of their rights and property. Despite the uncountable limitations which embittered practically every aspect of life for Hungary's Jews, what happened appeared to be incomprehensible: On the territory of Hungary, Hungarian troops and gendarmes massacred masses of Hungary's Jewish citizens. The phrase "cold days" has ever since become an inseparable part of the history of Jews in the Southlands during Shoa, and of Hungarian authorities' anti-Semitic policies in the region.

Nonetheless, Hungarian authorities' Jewish policies in the Southlands were too complex to enable us to claim that they were equal to the slaughter committed in Southern Bácska. There is no doubt that certain unique factors of these policies were given by its most extreme elements. The mass murders committed in the raids of January 1942 represented a low point in crude, repressive anti-Semitic practices the elements of which – in the form of the mass arrest and internment of Jewish citizens, their expulsion from the country, the uninhibited stealing from them, and the elimination of their rights which went well beyond the Jewish laws and regulations then in effect – had been carried out since the return of the territory to Hungary. These atrocities clearly went beyond the boundaries generally set by the official anti-Semitic policies and practices carried out in rump Hungary. They however evoked, but in many cases exceeded, the anti-Semitic excesses which had been carried out in other territories re-annexed to Hungary earlier.

Jews in the Southland under Hungarian rule became victims of atrocities that counted as exceptions in the context of official Hungarian anti-Semitism in the period even though the focus of Hungarian authorities' ethnic policies was not primarily directed against the relatively small Jewish community of the region, but against the mass of South Slavs, particularly Serbs here. This is supported by the fact that the source of the extreme anti-Semitic act was the unusually harsh ethnic policy which developed following on the occupation of the region with respect primarily to the issue of South Slavs, above all Serbs. Hungarian authorities attempted to achieve a quick and drastic change in the ethnic composition of the region, to effect a stabilization and "legitimization" of the return of the territory to Hungary. Hungarian authorities had tried elsewhere, in previously returned lands, to create an ethnically homogeneous territory, or at least one with a strong

Hungarian majority. That this effort took on a more drastic form than it had previously in the Southlands arose from the military situation during the re-occupation of the territory, and its unusually tense ethnic relations. In comparison, the return of territories in the Uplands and Northern Transylvania happened relatively peacefully, and the country received territories here with a clear Hungarian majority. At the time the Southlands were returned, the foreign and domestic political situation was unusually tense, and the occupation of the region took place on the eve of Hungary's entry into the war. Additionally, Hungarians were a numerical minority in this territory, compared with the mass who were of ethnic affiliation considered dangerous and an enemy of Hungarians. The almost hysterical fear of the development of organized armed resistance to the occupation of the region led to a general brutalization of ethnic policies in the Southlands. In this emotional atmosphere the idea that ethnic vengeance and the methods used to demonstrate Hungarian strength – carried out against the Serbs who were considered the major ethno-political “problem” – might evoke revenge across the border against Hungarians living there did not occur, because unlike the case of Slovakia and Romania, practically no Hungarians lived in the small puppet state left to the Serbs.

This atmosphere enabled the extreme treatment of Jews as well, who were considered to be “unreliable,” “anti-Hungarian,” and “friends of the Serbs.” We cannot exclude the possibility that the Hungarian state's efforts to quickly and radically change the ethnic structure of the Southlands would have continued, with an even greater attempt to expel Jews (as had been done in Transcarpathia), had these efforts not been stopped by protests from Germany and Croatia against the mass deportation of South Slavs from the region.

Various local factors, thus, played a central role in the transformation of the Southlands into a scene of extreme anti-Semitic atrocities. Yet I must stress that these local factors only made possible the realization of an anti-Semitic act that had long been present at the level of imagination in Hungarian public life. The “solution” of the “Jewish problem” and – with of the “problem” of other non-Jewish minorities who came with the expansion of Hungary's territory – had been risen along the lines of the Nazi model, and were largely inspired by it (mass expulsion of minorities, their complete exclusion from social and economic life, etc.), and such radical suggestions were widespread in public discourse of the time in Hungary. These however did not become ruling concepts, in part due to official government policies towards various foreign and domestic policy issues, because of fears of economic and social unrest, and in part because of conservative ideological concerns. Yet Hungarian military circles, especially the officer corps, could be counted among the most committed to, and most eager to propagateradical ethnic policies. The chance to pursue these policies came when, during the re-occupation of the Southlands (as had been the case

in other regions) the army was given a free hand (above all during the initial military administration, and at the time of the raids of January 1942).

We must stress that between the command corps of the military, the local military administration, and individual civilian authorities an open, or tacit agreement was reached on the implementation of radical ethnic policies right until they did not conflict with other more important foreign or domestic policy considerations, or with the more general interest in the region's political, social and economic stabilization. It is also clear that in addition to their racist, anti-Semitic zeal, the lack of understanding of their task by members of the military administration, who were often too quickly recruited, contributed to the atrocities committed. One of the most typical, but far from unique example of this was provided by the military commander of Újvidék (Novi Sad), Ferenc Bayer. Certain individuals were encouraged to commit extreme anti-Semitic acts by the fact that an overzealous application of Jewish laws and regulations was pursued regularly in rump Hungary – though in total to a lesser degree than in the Southlands – and thus it was unclear what the boundaries were, or “how far one could go” in discriminating against and persecuting Jews. The military authorities, who were unacquainted with local conditions in the Southlands when they arrived, only later got clear and concrete instructions on how to treat the various ethnic groups living in the region.

With the end to the military administration, which was so dangerous for ethnic minorities – but was judged poorly by local Hungarians as well because of its lack of professionalism and corruption – the goal of developing the civil administration and improving living standards came to be more and more stressed by government. It finally became clear that ethnic minorities judged to be undesirable could not be quickly, and especially not entirely removed from the region. There was a recognition of a need, therefore, to try to develop conditions that would enable long-term coexistence with them. As a result, a more nuanced approach to ethnic-policies – initially in the form of careful steps – began to take the place of the initial extreme ethnic oppression imposed on the region. Part of this meant that a more moderate, and predictable – though not better-intentioned or more fair – practice of discrimination began to be applied against Jews. This softening process was hardened by the ham-handed punishments that had been meted out in 1941 in an attempt to eliminate communist resistance which operated with the participation of a significant number of Jews, and was finally broken by the mass-murders of the raids in the Winter of 1942. However, the softening was again perceptible from the Spring of 1942 under the new Kállay government which because of realistic political considerations, but also out of principles, tried to pursue a more peaceful nationalities' policy, and more staid Jewish policies.

In other words, while it did not happen in an unbroken or even manner, there was as a whole

a softening tendency in the policies that various Hungarian governments and local authorities carried out against Jews in the Southlands following the initial period of military occupation, then again from the Spring of 1942 until the Spring of 1944 and the German occupation of Hungary then. But it must be stressed that this was a softening only in comparison with the immediate period after the military occupation, or in comparison with the extreme anti-Semitic repression expressed during the “cold days,” and not in comparison with the general trends of Hungarian Jewish policies of the time. We also must note that even in its wilder periods, Jewish policies in the Southlands had some more moderate elements, just as during the more reserved periods there were some expressions of more extreme discrimination, which depended on how these policies were shaped by the interaction of central, national regulations of treatment of Jews, and the local administration’s goals and abilities.

To sum up, we can say that the raids in Southern Bácska, and other cases of physical violence against Jews in the Southlands, the overzealous abuse committed against Jews in eliminating their rights and confiscating their property were not anomalies of Hungary’s Jewish policies. Neither were similar phenomena in other territories recovered earlier, including the most flagrant, the deportations to Kamenets-Podolsky. But one also cannot say that these occurrences were the “true face” of Hungary’s Jewish policies. In common with the other borderlands returned to Hungary, the Southlands served as a sort of trial ground for radical anti-Semitic efforts which Hungary’s political leadership – for the time being, if at all – did not want or did not dare to raise to the level of official anti-Semitic policy, or to carry out everywhere in the country, most especially not in rump Hungary. With the return of multi-ethnic regions from neighboring countries, among changing accompanying conditions, and utilizing the temporary lack of civil state structures and civic law and in the case of the Southlands in the fog of war, a chance arose to experiment with ethno-nationalist state-building efforts towards ethnic homogenization. If and when the limitations and failures of these experimental efforts became evident, radical anti-Semitic efforts were abandoned, and there was a return to the more reserved practices pursued in rump Hungary.

We get a more detailed image of these phenomena and processes when we examine more closely how the ethnically-based restructuring of the Southlands’ political, economic, social and cultural affairs was pursued. Hungarian authorities first of all attempted to re-connect the territory to the motherland, to restore its Hungarian character, and to rehabilitate local Hungarians who had lost their positions under Yugoslav rule. The anti-Semitic changing of the guard in the Southlands that was directed by Hungarian Jewish laws and regulations occurred within a framework of general re-Hungarianization, and in nexus with it. Thus the policies applied in the Southlands differed in a basic way from what they meant in rump Hungary. The changing of the guard in both little Hungary

and in the returned territories was expressly aimed at strengthening the “Christian and national” – that is non-Jewish – Hungarian nature of the economy and society. In rump Hungary, with its Hungarian majority, and with a lack of other targets, the changing of the guard primarily took on an anti-Jewish edge. By contrast, in the multi-ethnic Southlands, in a similar manner to other territories returned to Hungary earlier, Jews were not the sole targets, and in some cases not even the primary targets. Here we should recall that in the Southlands as in other returned territories ethnic discrimination and persecution was carried out in a complex and multi-layered system in which the situation of Jews was largely affected by how the state and its officials treated other minorities deemed to be undesirable.

Some anti-Semitic restrictions were imposed significantly more severely in the Southlands, and thus the lives of Jews here was more seriously affected than that of their co-religionists in Hungary proper. This was primarily the case in economic and social spheres which the authorities considered to be of greater importance and/or where there were not many Jews and thus their expulsion from these fields did not cause serious difficulties (for example, in public administration, education, and the press). This also happened in the case of careers in which, even though the percentage of Jews was high, their exclusion did not seriously threaten the public interest due to the characteristics of the job or to unique local conditions (for example, lawyers and pharmacists).

Still, the attempts made by authorities in the Southlands to aryanize the region, just as was the case everywhere else in the country, had certain limits. Despite their small numbers, the Jews of the Southlands played key roles in, above all, the industrial-trade sector, and in certain free intellectual professions. Authorities had to consider that the elimination of Jews from these functions would cause problems that could threaten the region’s otherwise unstable economic and social order. The relatively small proportion of non-Jewish Hungarians, which remained under 50% even after the expulsion of minorities and the settlement of other Hungarians in the region, and which was even lower in certain professions and in the economic sector, largely prevented the authorities from carrying out large-scale aryanization in these territories. A typical problem was the lack of trained professionals who were Christian Hungarians, and who might have replaced Jews in certain vital (to the public) professions (such as physicians). In trade and in industry, Christian Hungarians’ general lack of capital was the factor retarding aryanization, as was the fact that jobs in the bureaucracy, which had been closed to them under Yugoslav rule, were again available, and these were more attractive than careers in industry or trade. The setting aside of Jews was in cases also blocked by the fact that the authorities did not intend to give Jews’ positions – in the lack of Christian Hungarians – to non-Hungarian nationalities, and thereby to increase their economic and social influence. This was even the case with most, theoretically friendly, allied nationalities,

including the members of the German minority. Germans in particular expressed widespread disappointment and often even loud dissatisfaction with the fact that the Southlands had not fallen under German administration, and so Hungarian authorities had strong reservations about their loyalty to the Hungarian state.

In efforts to re-organize the Southlands' economic life decision-makers increasingly came to consider rational viewpoints, and to take the lessons they had learned both in rump Hungary, but more thoroughly in the radical aryanization attempts, which had at times violated the interests even of Christian Hungarians, in the newly acquired territories. A typical example of this was the so-called industrial revision applied in the Uplands and Transcarpathia, which caused serious economic problems, after Jews and members of other ethnic groups considered to be undesirable had their industrial permits revoked en masse. The government of Northern Transylvania called for an identical measure there, but because of the earlier experience, this was never carried out. In the Southlands the idea of imposing a similar measure was never really seriously considered despite the fact that those who expected to benefit the most from it regularly demanded that the government apply it to that region.

There were areas in which anti-Semitic measures simply played no part in the main thrust of the authorities' ethnically-based economic redistribution policies. For example, toward the realization of the long-awaited land reform in little Hungary – because the decision-makers were loth to touch aristocratic or church estates – Jewish property formed the primary source. In the Southlands, by contrast, the confiscation of Jewish estates was accompanied by far less interest because the populace focused on the Yugoslav land reform of the interwar period.

At the beginning there was hardly a difference between the treatment of Jews in the Southlands and of Serbs who had been settled there between the two world wars. The policies applied against them however followed differing dynamics. In a few exceptional cases the authorities were willing to allow the “re-Hungarianization” of Jews who had shown undeniable commitment to the Hungarian nation. But as was the case here, as generally, discrimination against the Jews weakened if it deemed to be in the “common interest.” By contrast, the treatment of Serbs was formed by other nationality policy factors. For them, the rise of the Kállay government opened a period of gestures. Institutional discrimination against Jews, by contrast, remained – if in a less frenzied and more rational framework. Thus from this point on, for the authorities anti-Semitic discrimination represented the primary direction for the racist-nationalist re-organization of the economy and society, as a result of which the situation of the Jews in the Southlands became unambiguously worse than that of the Serbs.

The most characteristic feature of anti-Semitic discrimination and persecution in the

populace of the Southlands was the strong tendency among the region's Christian Hungarians to take part in official anti-Jewish events, and to attempt to profit from them. Of all the factors lying behind this, in the first place lies the disturbance in relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Hungarians in the interwar period, when the myth took root among the Christian Hungarians that Jews had abandoned them to orientate themselves towards the Serbs, the desire for compensation and revention for the insults and abuses suffered by Hungarians during the Yugoslav period, and the disappointments and frustrations which real nature of the long-hoped-for changes evoked in them. To a smaller degree the opposite is occured: certain Hungarians from the Southlands unambiguously stood out for Jews because of the solidarity they themselves had experienced from Jews during the Yugoslav period. For their part, Serbs who felt sorry for the Jews were often motivated in this emotion by the commonality of treatment they had experienced from the Hungarian state. Other, better positioned minorities, such as the Bunjevci, as a demonstration of their fidelity to the Hungarian state, to strengthen their position, or in the hope for profit and reward, joined Hungarians in the anti-Jewish campaign. Among the Germnas of the Southlands, groups of Germans friendly towards the Nazis often took part in violent, provocative anti-Semitic demonstrations, although they also generally exhibited a general rejection of Hungarian rule and Hungarian settlement in the area.

As to Jewish responses and resistance to anti-Semitic discrimination, Zionism was far more popular among Jews in the Southland than in rump Hungary in the interwar period, and when outlawed under Hungarian rule it went underground and as a result, members of the movement were among the most active in organized resistance to Hungarian rule. Another characteristic that should be mentioned is that the Southlands became a sort of transit zone, where local Jews fleeing to rump Hungary and eventually even abroad to get away from atrocities might meet Jews escaping to the Southlands to escape from atrocities in neighboring countries. More than one Holocaust survivor from the Southlands mentioned that he or she came to the conclusion that s/he would have to leave the country to survive, after the mass murders of the raids in Southern Bácska had made it amply clear what could happen. These people attribute their early understanding that anti-Semitism in Hungary could lead to the mass murder of Jews, an understanding not shared by Jews from rump Hungary, and thus their ability to survive to their experiences during the "cold days."

Yet it is also clear that the mass of Jews from the Southlands did not flee, and did not turn against Hungarian rule, especially not in the form of armed rebellion. In similarity to the majority of Jews in Hungary, the better part of Jews in the Southlands did not know, or did not want to believe that the atrocities they had seen first hand and lived through were not just exceptions, foreign to official Hungarian state Jewish policies, and extreme acts which would not be repeated. This is why

the majority of Jews from the Southlands generally also used the strategies commonly used to ease their lives throughout the country, and to combat the anti-Semitic discrimination and persecution that struck them. Those who used appeals, petitions, and other legal instruments in their struggle based their hopes on the working of Hungarian law. Those who recognized the limitations of this and who – with reason – did not trust in justice, attempted to squirm out of anti-Jewish regulations through bribes to the authorities and the populace in general, or through good-willed help offered to them by civilians. The friendship of a “trustworthy” Hungarian and personal connections in a region in which the majority of authorities were not locals and were but poorly acquainted with local conditions, could be of great significance – though it must also be admitted that not a few used their connections to take revenge on Jews.

That Jewry in the Southlands related to Hungary, and thought of themselves as Hungarian nationals is reflected in the attitudes of Jews from rump Hungary as well, though there were unique local characteristics here too. Jews in the Southland who, in the period between the two world wars, had kept their Hungarian identity along with all of the handicaps and difficulties that went with that identity, and who had sincerely hoped for revision, but who then experienced discrimination even greater and more drastic than their fellow Jews in little Hungary, felt an extra slap in the face. And yet in the reactions to their expulsion from the Hungarian nation, a stubborn clinging to Hungarian identity is to be found as commonly as a final break with it and disappointment. Still, we might venture to suppose that the few years of official Hungarian anti-Semitism proved to be more effective in turning them against Hungarian identity than the two decades of Yugoslav minority policies had during the interwar period, which could just show very limited results in shaking Jews’ from their Hungarian loyalties. And it is also true, still, that in its national affiliations the Jews of the Southland were more heterogeneous than those in rump Hungary. A significant number of them had turned away from Hungarian identity between the two world wars, and the younger generations of Jews in this period had a far more strongly held Jewish national identity, and for some even Yugoslavism was not foreign. In their case a nostalgia for the “lost paradise of Yugoslavia” was rather strong, and they could be embittered with Hungarian rule without trouble, while their anger strengthened within them a feeling of separation from Hungarians, and a sense of solidarity with the South Slavs who were suffering a similar fate. In some cases, their sense of being Yugoslav was strengthened as well.

## **V. Possibilities for further research**



I concentrated on the Southlands re-appended to Hungary, and within them primarily focused my research on Bácska, the largest of the southern regions appended to Hungary and the area where the majority of Jews in the region lived.<sup>16</sup> I took regular glances at the other regions appended to Hungary – thus at the Baranya triangle, the Mura and Međimurje regions – but research could be broadened in these areas. It would be worthwhile to more thoroughly expound upon certain specific topics analyzed in the thesis through the introduction of different primary sources. In the introduction to Jewish – non-Jewish relations, for example, research on how the Christian churches related to the Jews could offer important insights. Staying with the same topic: Deeper analysis could be done on the behavior Bunjevci, Croats, Šokci, and other national minorities expressed in their dealings with Jews. A more thorough examination could be done on the relations between Jews and non-Jews among intellectuals. And the topic of Jewish experiences and reactions could be nuanced through an exploration of the unique perspectives of various particularistic Jewish groups (those who were baptised, for example, or are from mixed marriages, or are orthodox, etc.).

## **VI. Published works by Linda Margittai related to the topic**

Margittai Linda: A Baross Szövetség szerepe a zsidótörvények és -rendeletek végrehajtásában. In: Strausz Péter and Zachar Péter Krisztián (eds.): *Sorsfordulók és mindennapok – Tanulmányok a 19-20. századi magyar és egyetemes történelemről*. Modern Minerva Könyvek, Heraldika, Budapest, 2011, 212-231.

Margittai Linda: A Baross Szövetség a Délvidéken 1941-1944. In: Antos Balázs and Tamás Ágnes (eds.): *Szemelvények ötszáz év magyar történelméből. A III. modern kori magyar PhD-konferencia tanulmányai*. Szegedi Tudományegyetem Történettudományi Doktori Iskola, 2011, 181-196.

Margittai Linda: „Árjásítás” vagy „nacionalizálás”? „Őrségváltás” a Délvidéken 1941-1944'. Strausz Péter and Zachar Péter Krisztián (eds.): *Történelem és politika – régen és ma. Tanulmányok*. Modern Minerva Könyvek, Heraldika, Budapest, 2013, 58-79.

Margittai Linda: Antiszemitizmus, nacionalizmus, racionalizmus: „Őrségváltás” és orvosság a visszacsatolt Délvidéken. *Bácsország*, 2014/2, 26-34.

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<sup>16</sup> According to the 1941 Hungarian census of the 15,629 Jews in all lands returned to Hungary from Yugoslavia, 14,067 Israelites and converts considered Jews by the discriminatory laws lived in the region. Kepecs József (ed.): *A zsidó népesség száma településenként 1840-1941*. KSH, Budapest, 1993, 62-84, 138, 318-333.

Margittai Linda: „Őrségváltó” szervezetek a Délvidéken. Társadalmi szerepvállalás, együttműködés és érdek-konfliktusok a zsidótörvények végrehajtásában 1941-1944', *Szeged*, 26: 7 (July 2014) 6-7.

Margittai, Linda: “*Changing of the Guard*” *Within and Beyond the Trianon Border: Two Case Studies: Hódmezővásárhely and Szabadka, 1938-1944*. Series: The Holocaust in Hungary, 1. – Selected Papers of the Tauber Fund for Research on the Holocaust in Hungary and Hungarian Jewish History. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem – The International Institute for Holocaust Research, 2014.

Margittai, Linda: Economic Aryanization in Northern Transylvania 1940-1944: Intentions, Considerations, and Realities. *Holocaust. Studii și cercetări (Holocaust. Study and Research)*, 7:1 (2015), 111-136.

Margittai Linda: „Őrségváltó” szervezetek a Délvidéken. Társadalmi szerepvállalás, együttműködés és érdek-konfliktusok a zsidótörvények végrehajtásában 1941-1944. In: Molnár, Judit (ed.): *A nagypolitikától a hétköznapokig: a magyar holokauszt 70 év távlatából*. Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2016, 59-73.

Margittai Linda: Antiszemita numerus clausus a bácskai középiskolákban, 1941-1944. *Bácsország*, 85 (2018) 79-87.