In his introduction to *Comparing Jewish Societies*, Todd Endelman wrote:

With few exceptions they [historians of the Jews] have shown little enthusiasm for comparing Jewish communities across time and/or space... or comparing Jews with non-Jews either in the same place or in different national contexts... [M]ost contributions to Jewish historical writing either focus on Jews alone, usually within narrow geographical and chronological limits, or, at the other extreme, survey broad expanses of Jewish history, collapsing differences among communities and subcommunities in order to force their varied experiences into a uniform model or framework.¹

Why are we so reluctant to employ a comparative perspective? As Raymond Grew has noted, “few historians are willing to abandon the benefits of specialization” as it seems that for a historical comparison to work well, a historian needs intimate knowledge of at least two, if not more, societies.² As Endelman stated, “no historian... wants to see his or her work dismissed as superficial or dilettantish.”³ He further argued that to understand this particular reluctance among historians of the Jews, one must also understand the particular political and cultural underpinnings of Jewish historical writing, thinking, and training during the last two centuries or so.

Moreover, as Grew noted, “to call for comparison,... says almost nothing about how to do any of this well” since there is no comprehensive theory of historical comparison or “comparative method.”⁴ The pitfalls are manifold: a comparison may end up being too narrow or too broad; too superficial or uneven; false due to forced or arbitrary analogies; or based on poorly defined criteria. Comparison may lead to

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⁴ Grew, “The Case for Comparing Histories.”
conclusions which neither broaden our knowledge nor open intellectually engaging questions. Is, then, a comparison in Polish-Jewish history worthwhile, especially after the “cultural turn” that has called national master narratives into question?

I believe that comparative study, even if subject to the risk of failure, is a worthy enterprise in Jewish history, in general, and in post-Holocaust Jewish history, in particular, for a number of reasons. In general terms, as Grew argued in his influential 1980 essay “The Case for Comparing Histories”:

To call for comparison is to call for a kind of attitude – open, questioning, searching – and to suggest some practices that may nourish it, to ask historians to think in terms of problems and dare to define those problems independently, and to assert that even the narrowest research should be conceived in terms of the larger quests of many scholars in many fields... For historians to think comparatively, to compare histories, is to do what we already do – a little more consciously and on a somewhat broader plane.5

The edited volume Comparison and History presents a comprehensive list of the benefits of historical comparison. First, according to Peter Baldwin, a comparative approach allows us to “separate the important from the incidental and thus to point the way towards causal explanations.”6 Second, comparison reveals which experiences are common and which are uniquely national or, to use Susan Grayzel’s words, “comparative cultural history sets itself the task of identifying elements of culture that are wider than the nation.”7 Third, a comparative analysis illuminates aspects of specific events and the circumstances surrounding them, which remain obscure or ambiguous when examined in the context of a single nation-state.8 Last but not least, what Susan Pedersen calls “de-normalizing” and Deborah Cohen and Maura O’Connor call the “unsettling of the perceived naturalness” of historical developments is one of the most significant contributions of a comparative approach in history.9

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5 Ibid.
6 Peter Baldwin, “Comparing and Generalizing: Why All History is Comparative, Yet No History is Sociology,” in Deborah Cohen and Maura Connor (eds.), Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective (New York: Routledge, 2004).
7 Susan Grayzel, “Across Battle Fronts: Gender and the Comparative Cultural History of Modern European War,” in Cohen and Connor (eds.), Comparison and History.
A few works in Jewish history effectively use the comparative perspective, including Nancy Green’s work on Jewish immigrants in Paris and New York and Maud Mandel’s study of Armenians and Jews in France after the First and Second World Wars. Endelman’s comparative work on German and English Jews’ paths to integration illuminated the benefits of comparison most profoundly when he concluded that European Jews confronted modernity “. . . in a variety of ways. They did not enter the modern world like a well-disciplined army, tramping faithfully in the footsteps of Mendelssohn and the maskilim.” Endelman’s study unsettled the “naturalness” of the German or Mendelssohn model of acculturation and thus significantly revised our understanding of Jewish modernity.

This book is an attempt to compare the experiences of Jewish survivors upon their return to Poland and Slovakia after the Holocaust. I chose Slovakia as a point of comparison for a number of reasons. First, anti-Jewish violence, so prevalent in postwar Poland, also occurred in postwar Slovakia. Second, Slovakia had a different prewar and wartime history and a different political makeup hence its comparison with Poland could illuminate what mechanisms generated similar phenomena in differing political and social milieus. In short, the distinctiveness of the Polish and Slovak settings and the similarity in the dynamics of ethnic relations, offered an attractive material for comparison.

When I started this project in 2003, in contrast to the current state of affairs, the historiography of postwar Jewish life was either limited (Slovakia) or skewed toward violence (Poland). The postwar Slovak Jewish historiography rested on the shoulders of just a few scholars in Israel and Slovakia, such as Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, Ivan Kamenec, Peter Salner, and Robert Y. Büchler. They covered a broad array of

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12 Slovakia was a part of Czechoslovakia before (until 1939) and after the war (until 1993). In March 1939, the independent Slovak State was created. Although Slovakia was reunited with the Czech lands after the war, it retained a large degree of autonomy until 1949. In this book, I use “Slovakia” when speaking of issues relevant only to this region and “Czechoslovakia” when discussing the entire country after the war.

13 Anti-Jewish violence also occurred in Hungary (Kunmadaras and Miskolc) and Ukraine (Lvov and Kiev).

topics including postwar Jewish property restitution, communal rebuilding, assimilation and emigration, postwar Slovak and Jewish politics within Czechoslovakia, and, last but not least, anti-Jewish violence. The historiography of postwar Polish Jewish life was larger in size but, in contrast to its Slovak counterpart, skewed toward two topics: violence and emigration. To be sure, by the early 2000s, there had been a few important studies surveying Jewish life in postwar Poland as well as a few brilliant monographs with a focus other than violence and emigration. But...
even these works largely agreed with the prevailing narrative – that as Jewish survivors returned to Poland after the war the local population "greeted" them with antisemitism and violence. As a result, rebuilding of Jewish life in Poland was impossible and emigration was inevitable. Titles such as *Le Massacre des Survivants: En Pologne après l’Holocauste, 1945–1947* (The Massacre of Survivors) and *Żydzi w Polsce po II wojnie światowej: akcja kalumni i zabójstw* (Jews in Poland after the Second World War: The Operation of Slanders and Murders) reflected this understanding of postwar Polish-Jewish history.


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17 Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz.*
given it such power, detail, and authority that mainstream Polish-Jewish historiography has had to contend with it. Gross attributed anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland to what he saw as the general corruption of the moral economy of Polish society after the war.\textsuperscript{18} He claimed that since Poles as a whole failed to help their Jewish neighbors and even actively collaborated with the Germans, they “could not bear the Jewish presence after the war because it called forth their own feeling of shame and of contempt in which they were held by their victims.”\textsuperscript{19} Further, Gross argued, “Wherever Jews had been plundered, denounced, betrayed, or killed by their neighbors, their reappearance after the war evoked this dual sense of shame and contempt, which could be overcome only by mourning. And as long as Polish society was unable to mourn its Jewish neighbors’ death, it had either to purge them or to live in infamy.”\textsuperscript{20}

Gross’ book attracted criticism, especially from scholars in Poland.\textsuperscript{21} They attacked his historical method, interpretation, and selection of sources.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, his generalized notions of “Polish society” and societal feelings of “shame and contempt” (notoriously impossible to prove in historical terms) remain problematic (more on this in my chapter on violence).\textsuperscript{23} Yet, I believe that Gross’ \textit{Fear} is a brilliant book of engaged and passionate scholarship. Not many historians and not many books open up such deep-reaching intellectual debates as Gross does.\textsuperscript{24} Having said that, I also believe that \textit{Fear} remains within the limits of the earlier

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{20} Gross, \textit{Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz}, 258.
\textsuperscript{22} Gądek (ed.), \textit{Wokół strachu}.
\textsuperscript{23} Maciej Kozłowski, “Fakty i uprzedzenia czyli stracona szansa na dialog,” in Gądek (ed.), \textit{Wokół strachu}.
described historiography. It perpetuates the understanding of postwar Jewish history in Poland as a story of violence and emigration.

This study is a response to such a narrative. Certainly there was violence against Jews and, indeed, a mass emigration followed. But although 120,000 Jews left Poland after the most notorious pogrom in Kielce in July 1946, another 100,000 stayed. These numbers are our first indication that an approach that focuses on violence and emigration restricts our understanding of the period as much as it contributes to it. I believe this approach is problematic in at least three ways. First, it reduces the diversity and multiplicity of Jewish experiences in postwar Poland to one aspect – antisemitism. There is no doubt that analysis of postwar antisemitism and violence is of primary importance – and the research of the last three decades has reflected this. Now, however, when we have a number of excellent studies on the subject, it behooves us to go “beyond violence” in order to fully grasp the complexity of the postwar period.²⁵ Otherwise, we, historians of postwar Polish-Jewish history fall into the trap of simplifying and homogenizing postwar history. We reduce the postwar period to a meta-tragedy – a uniformly gloomy picture which silences all experiences that do not conform.²⁶

A second closely related limitation of the prevailing approach is that it disregards any identity other than that of a victim, an emigrant, or a perpetrator. In other words, it obscures the multiple ways in which Jews and non-Jews encountered each other. Daily experiences between 1944 and 1948 did not consist solely of violence. Pogroms occurred only sporadically in both Poland and Slovakia. Further, the majority of the population was not personally involved in the violent interaction of jails, interrogations, execution chambers, or guerilla warfare. Instead they interacted on multiple non-violent levels and in multiple social roles – as employers and employees, as business partners and co-workers, as members of the same cooperative, as petitioners and clerks in offices, and as spouses and friends. All these roles and the nuances they reveal are lost in the prevailing meta-tragedy. Thus one of the aims of this book is to uncover the heterogeneity of Jewish experiences in the postwar period. In order to do so, I seek to go “beyond violence,” as the title suggests. I seek to show postwar Jewish history in Poland and Slovakia not as the short, harsh prelude to an “inevitable” emigration, but rather as a time of complex encounters wherein an exodus was not presupposed. By

²⁵ More and more scholars are doing exactly this. For example, see recently published edited volume: Tych and Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), Następstwa zagłady Żydów.

“complex encounters” I mean the broad range of experiences generated through the interactions between Jewish survivors, the state, and the majority population. These experiences included traveling back home, fighting to repossess property and retain citizenship, rebuilding “normal” lives by marrying, having children, finding a job, engaging in political, social, and cultural life, and, yes, experiencing violence. I believe that an analysis of these daily interactions not only uncovers the historical heterogeneity but also provides social contextualization of postwar Jewish experiences.

It is not my intention, however, to present a story of private life. Instead, I analyze the borderline between the private and the public, and there, in the middle ground, I pin down the most revealing moments of ethnic relations. I define the “borderline” as the space where public and private lives intersect. The Polish na ulicy, Slovak na ulici, or Yiddish און דער גאס (oyf der gas) – which loosely translate to “on the street” in English – fit this concept particularly well. The word ulica (Polish and Slovak) or gas (Yiddish) denotes an urban space between the intimacy of the home and the formality of the public where people’s political and social lives unfold. In my analysis, I also go beyond this urban space to include ethnic interactions on roads, on village paths, at railway stations, on trains, and others.

I enter public offices, courts, city halls, and the headquarters of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in order to illuminate the complex negotiations between Jewish survivors and the state. State representatives were the primary agents of political change, a change to which returning Jewish survivors had to adjust. For example, after liberation, the Polish and Czechoslovak (and Slovak) governments formulated new requirements for entry into their national communities by redefining the criteria for citizenship. I explore how municipalities in the two countries implemented these changes, what effect this had on Jewish survivors, and how they negotiated the changes. Another example is the involvement of the state in property restitution. Analyzing restitution reveals, on one hand, the ambivalence of the two states toward “the Jewish issue,” and, on the other, the Jewish survivors’ tenacious struggle for agency, their willingness to improve their economic and social standing despite legal and administrative obstacles. In such a narrative, Jewish survivors no longer appear exclusively as objects of someone else’s will but as subjects who negotiated their position in the national and the local community, who addressed social and political circumstances and acted accordingly.

The very category of “Jewish survivors” requires rethinking. Atina Grossman has already pointed out the importance of distinguishing
between survivors from occupied Eastern Europe and those from the Soviet Union. She argued that putting all returning Jews into the simple category of “Jewish survivors” obscures the diversity of their experiences.\(^{27}\) The categories of “Jews” (˙Zydzi in Polish or Židia in Slovak), “Poles” (Polacy), and “Slovaks” (Slováci) are equally problematic. They imply impregnable identities. They imply that “Jews” could not have been “Poles” or “Slovaks” at the same time, thus obliterating the complex experiences of assimilated Jews.\(^{28}\) For this reason, I use the phrase “Jewish – non-Jewish,” instead of “Polish-Jewish” or “Slovak-Jewish,” when describing ethnic relations in postwar Poland and Slovakia.

Who then were the “Jews” in postwar Poland and Slovakia? What did it mean to be Jewish there and then? Until roughly the seventeenth century, Jews were defined as a community of faith. However, in the course of modern transformations, the meanings of Jewishness changed and expanded beyond Judaism. In the twentieth century, Jewishness meant a common biblical ancestry, history and memory, a national sense of belonging, devotion to one of the different strands of Judaism, as well as a secular cultural or communal identity. As Jacqueline Goldberg stated, “Jewish identity [or any national identity, including Polish and Slovak] is not static or fixed in time, but instead can be more usefully regarded as being in a constant state of flux; it is a process rather than a product.”\(^{29}\) Thinking of ethnic or national identities as flexible can be particularly useful when applied to periods following a cataclysmic event.\(^{30}\) After all, the Second World War not only shattered physical buildings and old political structures but also national and ethnic perceptions of self and others. Depending on their personal experiences

\(^{27}\) I will discuss this at length in Chapter 1. Atina Grossmann, Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany (Princeton University Press, 2007). Shimon Redlich, in his recent book on postwar Łódź, uses “survivors” versus “repatriates” to distinguish the two groups. See Redlich, Life in Transit.

\(^{28}\) The Polish language reflects and reproduces these static identities. For example, the common term Polski Żyd (Polish Jew) does not imply that a person is at the same time a Pole (Polak) and a Jew (Żyd). The terms that make such implication – Polak-Żyd or Polak żydowskiego pochodzenia (Pole of Jewish origin) – are rarely used and “sound artificial,” thus reflecting culturally embedded discomfort with flexible Polish Jewish identities.


\(^{30}\) See Jeremy King’s definition of ethnicity as “a web of vague and multivalent relationships, as a seemingly permanent but actually plastic set of social attributes, and as a populist and thus modern mode of political cognition,” in Jeremy King, Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948 (Princeton University Press, 2002).
before, during, and after the war, people revised their ideas of what it meant to be Jewish, Polish, or Slovak (I will return to this subject in the chapters on “Return to normality”).

These personal experiences were most often shaped by local or regional conditions explored in this study. Focus on the local plays a similar role to a comparative analysis, namely it illuminates phenomena which not only remain obscure in broad national narratives but also have the power if not to undermine, then at least to complicate the narratives themselves. For example, the existence of Jewish farming in the newly annexed western territories of postwar Poland was contingent upon a unique local setting and was not possible anywhere else in the country (for more detail, see Chapter 6). Yet, its very existence undermines the notion that Jewish life in postwar Poland was impossible. Although limited and contingent, Jewish farming made up an integral part of the history of postwar Jewish returns, in general, and the history of Poland in the late 1940s, in particular.

Since the past shapes political and social conditions on both local and national levels, postwar Jewish experiences in Poland and Slovakia are incomprehensible without their prewar and wartime context. In the interwar period, the Jewish population in Poland was the second largest (after the Soviet Union) in Europe. In the census of 1921, there were 2,855,318 and, in the census of 1931, 3,113,933 Jews in Poland, or 10.5 and 9.8 percent of the total population respectively.\(^{31}\) In the cities of Warsaw, Łódź, Lwów (now L’viv), Kraków, Wilno (now Vilnius), and Lublin, Jews constituted between 20 and 30 percent of the total population. In eastern towns such as Grodno, Brześć on Bug, Równe, Łuck, or Pińsk, the percentages were even higher, reaching 50 to 60 percent of the total population. In prewar Slovakia, according to the census of 1921, there were 130,843 “Czecho-Slovak citizens of the Jewish religion (Israelite confession)” or 4.3 percent of the total population.\(^{32}\) In the

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\(^{32}\) Rebekah Klein-Pejšová, “Among the Nationalities: Jewish Refugees, Jewish Nationality, and Czechoslovak Statebuilding” (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2007), 195–207, 60. Until 1919, there was no category of “Jewish nationality” and Jewishness was marked as a religious or linguistic affiliation. Also see Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918–1938: Education and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Boulder and Columbia
census of 1930, this number increased to 136,737. The largest centers of Jewish life in prewar Slovakia included Bratislava, Košice, Nitra, Zvolen, and Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš.\(^{33}\) After the Vienna Arbitration of 1938 and the subsequent Hungarian annexation of southern Slovakia with Košice, more than 44,000 Jews found themselves outside their country of origin.\(^{34}\) In 1939, the number of Jews in Slovakia oscillated between 89,000 and 91,000.

Jews in Poland, in particular, remained the most vibrant Jewish community in interwar Europe. Diversity was the hallmark of this population, situated in what was at the time, multiethnic and multireligious Poland. The largest segment of this Jewish community was religiously minded and embedded in tradition. In shtetlekh and villages, Orthodoxy thrived side by side with Hasidism and other religious groups. Assimilation and acculturation to the dominant Polish culture also made significant inroads, and so did growing secular political movements such as Zionism and socialism. However, to recall Ezra Mendelsohn’s words, the best of times happened in the worst of times.\(^{35}\) The Great Depression and the rise of the political right defined the 1930s. After the death of Józef Piłsudski in 1935, the extreme right-wing, such as Roman Dmowski’s \textit{Endecja}, took over politics in the capital and on the street.\(^{36}\) Antisemitism grew explosively. In just two years, between 1935 and 1937, anti-Jewish violence occurred in over 150 towns and villages, including Przytyk, Mińsk Mazowiecki, and Brześć nad Bugiem.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{33}\) Klein-Pejšová, “Among the Nationalities,” 197.

\(^{34}\) On November 2, 1938, in the Vienna Arbitration, Hungary – with Germany and Italy as the arbiters – coerced Czechoslovakia to surrender territories in southern Slovakia and southern Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Czechoslovakia retained the western Slovak towns of Bratislava and Nitra, while Hungary gained the most disputed Slovak towns (where more than 50 percent of the population was Hungarian): Košice, Uzhgorod, and Mukachevo. In the Arbitration, Slovakia lost 21 percent of its territory, 20 percent of its industry, and over 30 percent of its arable land. During the war years, the Vienna Arbitration became a central bone of contention between Slovakia and Hungary.

\(^{35}\) Ezra Mendelsohn, “Interwar Poland, Good for the Jews or Bad for the Jews?,” in Polonsky (ed.), \textit{The Jews in Poland}.

\(^{36}\) \textit{Endecja} or Narodowa Demokracja (National Democracy), under the leadership of Roman Dmowski, had its roots in the 1880s.

The Jewish population in interwar Slovakia, part of the First Czechoslovak Republic, was also characterized by linguistic and religious diversity. Slovak Jews spoke Yiddish, Hebrew, Magyar, German, Slovak, and Czech. As in Poland, the majority belonged to Orthodoxy but Hasidism, Status Quo, and Neolog communities thrived as well. As Rebekah Klein-Pejšová wrote:

Material evidence indicates that the Jewish population in Slovakia was thriving. By 1928, the Orthodox Jewish community in Bratislava, the largest community in Slovakia, had constructed an additional synagogue, rabbinical offices, a matzah bakery, a ritual poultry slaughterhouse, water tanks at the ritual bath (mikveh), installed central heating in the school...; it had purchased a plot of land for a new school and hospital. Similar projects were in the works across Slovakia. The Neolog Jewish community in Košice built a new domed synagogue, and the Hasidic community there, greatly augmented by the influx of Hasidic Jewish refugees from the east, put up a new prayer hall. The Hasidic community in Michalovce built a new prayer hall for the same reason...

As in Poland, the Jews of Slovakia had to cope with the rise of antisemitism and of the political right, most notably led by the nationalist Hlinka Slovak People’s Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSĽS, also known as L’udáči). As in Poland, antisemitic violence became more common in the mid-1930s. Unlike in Poland, however, the Jews of Slovakia could count on the central government in Prague to guarantee their minority rights. This protection weakened after October 1938 when the First Czechoslovak Republic came to an end and the Second Czechoslovak Republic, with broad Slovak autonomy, was established.

The worst was yet to come. The Shoah, or the mass killings of European Jews during the Second World War, was the ultimate man-made catastrophe and became the defining event for both Polish and Slovak Jews. The two communities, however, had distinct war experiences due...
to radically different political conditions in their countries. On March 14, 1939, under pressures from the Third Reich, the Slovak Parliament proclaimed Slovakia’s independence. In October 1939, the Slovak parliament unanimously elected Father Jozef Tiso, head of the HSĽS, as the president of the republic.\footnote{James Ward, “No Saint: Jozef Tiso, 1887–1947” (PhD Dissertation, Stanford, 2008). Recently published as James Mace Ward, Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013).} The new Slovak State was allied with the Third Reich and had significant autonomy in its domestic affairs, including “the Jewish question.”\footnote{Yehuda Bauer, Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Bauer, Rethinking the Holocaust.} A few months later, on September 1, 1939, the Third Reich (and Slovak troops) attacked Poland and, within a couple of months, brought it under total Nazi occupation.\footnote{See, for example, Jan Tomasz Gross, Polish Society Under German Occupation: The General-Gouvernement, 1939–1944 (Princeton University Press, 1979).} The sources of Polish sovereign authority were either in exile (the government in London) or underground (the Home Army or Armia Krajowa, AK). As a result, in occupied Poland, the Nazis had absolute control over the lives and deaths of the local population while the Slovak State could protect its citizens until the German occupation in September 1944.\footnote{Ward, “No Saint: Jozef Tiso, 1887–1947.” In September/October 1944, the German army, with the help of the Tiso government, crushed the Slovak National Uprising and occupied the country.} In contrast to his or her counterpart in Poland, the physical survival of the average non-Jewish Slovak was not under constant threat. The Tiso regime also privileged the economic well-being of “ethnic” Slovaks at the expense of everyone else, including Germans. Obviously in occupied Poland, “ethnic” Poles had no such protection.\footnote{Ladislav Lipscher, Židia v Slovenskom Štáte, 1939–1945 (Bratislava: Print-Servis, 1992); Tatjana Tönsmeyer, “The Robbery of Jewish Property in Eastern European States Allied with Nazi Germany,” in Martin Dean, Constantin Goschler, and Philipp Ther (eds.), Robbery and Restitution: The Conflict Over Jewish Property in Europe (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).}

Unfortunately, Slovak Jews did not enjoy the benefits of Slovak independence.\footnote{Yeshayahu Jelinek, Ivan Kameneck, Eduard Nižňanský, and Livia Rothkirchen are the few scholars who remain profoundly engaged in the historiography of the Slovak State and of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139568111.001} In 1940, the Slovak government implemented the first
Introduction

anti-Jewish laws. In September 1941, the regime issued the “Jewish code” (Židovský kódex), modeled on the Nuremberg Laws, which stripped Jews of all civil and political rights, including the right to private property.\(^\text{47}\) In early 1942, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior had operational labor camps in Sereľ, Nováky, and Vyhne, among others.\(^\text{48}\) On March 25, 1942, the deportations to Auschwitz began. By October that year, the Slovak government had deported 57,000 Slovak Jews or more than 60 percent of the entire prewar Jewish population.\(^\text{49}\) Slovak historian Ivan Kamenec summarized the deportations as follows:

It is necessary to point at one important and surprisingly little known fact: the Slovak state was the only country in Europe, not directly occupied by Nazi Germany, which had deportations of Jewish citizens through their own power and administrative means and forces. Nothing can be changed by the fact of the satellite position of the Slovak state in relation to Germany and Nazi pressures on the “solution of the Jewish issue.”\(^\text{50}\)

It must be noted, however, that the Tiso regime discontinued deportations in October 1942 and did not reactivate them until the German occupation of Slovakia in the fall of 1944.\(^\text{51}\) Hence Slovak Jews found themselves temporarily protected by the very state that had launched a vicious campaign against them.


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\(^\text{51}\) Twelve thousand more Slovak Jews were deported in 1944.
The direct involvement of non-Jewish Slovaks, both in the government which ordered the expropriation and deportations and the policing forces – the Hlinka Guard, regular police and gendarmerie or žandárstvo – which carried them out, was a tragic disappointment for Slovak Jews. The following is a testimony of Slovak Peter Skreptáč, quoted by Ján Hlavinka in his book on the Jewish community in the Medzilaborce district (northeastern Slovakia) during the war. Skreptáč witnessed deportation of Jews in his village Čertižňane on May 19, 1942:

When they were taking the Jews here, I did not see any Germans. Every Čertižňan [resident of Čertižňane] will say that. And when they began putting the Jews on the wagons and there was also Simko, Majur [nicknames of local Jews], I went away because, you know, they were crying and I could not look at it . . . And that Mellinger, who had land in Pereluki, sat there with his wife, next to gendarmes on the wagon, and said, “So you will be better off when they will take us away.” And I told him, “Listen . . . Mellinger,” he was a young Jew, “. . . how will we be better off? Do I want to see them take you away? Neither did I do anything wrong to you nor you did to me. How many years have you lived here? There was no difference between a Ruthenian or a Jew. I’m going now because I cannot look at it and maybe I can save Mordko [Skreptáč’ 95-year-old neighbor, Markus Schwindler] . . .,” and that happened in front of the gendarmerie barracks. A gendarme came and asked me if I wanted to go with him [Mellinger] that I talked to him. And I told him [the gendarme] that we’ve lived here together and I did not know a reason why I should not talk to him. But he chased me away . . . And Mordko . . . they took him on the wagon and it was raining too. I could not look at it . . . at least cover his face. He lay like a corpse. He almost could not see, could not hear. As soon as he heard me talk, he recognized my voice, “Hey, Petrik, this will be my end.” And I, “How can I help you?” But I said [out loud], “Why are you taking him? After all, he is half dead. Let him stay.” But the gendarme said, “Do you want to go with him? You can, we’ll take you at once!” What to do? You will not help either way. So they took him. Fico shouted that he was still alive when they threw him out of the wagon. Gardisti [Hlinka Guard] . . . It was a miserable day then.

In this village, rounding up Jews for deportations became an intimate communal experience shared by neighbors. The Hlinka Guard storm-troopers – often resented or even hated by ordinary Slovaks for their violent fascist extremism – carried out the deportations. But regular

52 The police (in the urban areas) and gendarmes (in the province) were the regular security forces in wartime Slovakia. The Hlinka Guard, or Gardisti was a paramilitary unit, the storm-troopers of the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party. See Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, “Storm Troopers in Slovakia: The Rodobrana and the Hlinka Guard,” Journal of Contemporary History 6, no. 3 (1971).


Slovak gendarmerie also participated in the process. Both forces carried out the orders of the Slovak government without the physical presence of Germans, although not without their political pressure. The power of the state, compassionate men like Skreptáč could do little to save their Jewish neighbors.

The “disappointment” with neighbors was even stronger in occupied Poland; where the Nazis opened the KL Auschwitz-Birkenau; where they established the assembly lines of death in Operation Reinhard; and where they annihilated millions of European, including Polish and Slovak, Jews. Poland became the site of Nazi “experiments in brutality” as early as September 1939. The first targets were Polish intelligentsia and clergy, rounded up and transported to concentration camps or executed on the spot. The Jews soon followed. The Nazi administration unleashed a vicious anti-Jewish campaign, gradually depriving Polish Jews of all their rights. Starting in 1940, the Nazi regime established hundreds of ghettos of various sizes all over occupied Poland. In the summer of 1941, following the Wehrmacht offensive against the Soviet Union, the Einsatzgruppen together with auxiliary police battalions engaged in mass killings of Jews in the eastern territories of prewar Poland. In December 1941, the first death camp was initiated in the forests near Chelmno (central Poland) and, in March 1942, the first “transports” of Jews were sent to the second death camp Belżec (eastern Poland). Soon, the program of mass killings was operating at full capacity.

This physical proximity of the Shoah turned Poland’s population into witnesses and participants. The extent of witnessing and participation,

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55 The evaluation of Slovak policies toward Jews during the war must obviously take into account the political wishes of Berlin. Hitler interfered in the domestic affairs of the Slovak State and German “advisors” were attached to the Slovak ministries. Elites of the Hlinka Guard were trained in an SS officer school in the Reich. See ibid.

56 Arad, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. “The Holocaust by bullet,” or mass executions of Jews by Einsatzgruppen and their auxiliary forces, happened not just in Poland but also in the large territories which stretched from the Baltic (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) to the Black Sea (Ukraine). Patrick Desbois, The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest’s Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 million Jews (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

57 Bergen, War & Genocide.

however, varied across the country. Peasants near the Sobibór death camp, who smelt burning bodies, witnessed the Holocaust differently than the peasants from small towns and villages far from death camps or large ghettos. Residents of Warsaw, who lived near the walls of the largest ghetto in occupied Poland and who heard the shots and smelt the ghetto burning during the Uprising in 1943, witnessed the Holocaust differently than the residents from the small town of Szczecbrzeszyn (Zamość province). In the summer of 1942, the famous memoirist of Szczecbrzeszyn, physician Zygmunt Klukowski, recorded the following in his diary:


August 8, 11 A.M. In town the atmosphere is very tense. Last night it was clear that Jewish lives are in jeopardy. There is bad news from Bilgoraj and Zwierzyniec [nearby towns] also . . . In the morning I left the hospital to try and find out what had happened. All Jews must report at 8 A.M. across from the Judenrat. They are allowed to take 15 lbs. of baggage, food for five days, and 1,500 złoty per person. The mayor informed me the 2,000 Jews will be deported east to the Ukraine. Railroad workers said that a large train with fifty-five cars is ready at the station. So far there are no volunteers, so the Germans began mass arrests. I asked a gendarme what would happen if the Jews did not show up. His answer was, “We will kill them here.” It is 7 P.M. Without interruption, throughout the entire day, patrols of gestapo, gendarmes, Sonderdienst, “blue police,” along with members of the Judenrat and the so-called Jewish Militia, patrolled the city. They searched
houses, including basements and attics. Any Jews that were found were moved to the marketplace. Most Jewish houses are empty now, so city personnel began removing the belongings, loaded everything onto horse-drawn wagons, and took them for storage in warehouses around city hall. Most of the Jews are still hiding. Some Poles are helping the Germans search for Jews. In town the tension is growing.

August 8, 9 P.M. Around 8 P.M. the Germans began moving the Jews from the marketplace. Some Jews attempted to escape, but the German police stopped them by shooting them. The shooting started a panic among the people standing near the streets, so everyone began running. Several hundred Jews were taken to the railroad station. Some older men and women who were unable to walk quickly were beaten by the gendarmes. I was able to observe this by standing on top of the hospital wall. It was so terrifying that I do not have the strength to describe it. From Bilgoraj and a few surrounding villages around 1,000 Jews were taken to the railroad station. So far in Szczeczeszyn thirteen Jews were killed. No one believes that the Jews will be moved to the Ukraine. They will all be killed. After today’s events it is difficult to gain control of myself, but I feel that this is not yet the end.\(^59\)

This first-hand account in a small occupied town in eastern Poland shows the “witnessing” of the genocide on a micro level. A representative of Polish intelligentsia, Klukowski, recorded the events of the day; he was upset, disturbed; he could not “gain control” of himself. Other people were just “standing near the streets,” perhaps out of curiosity, perhaps out of compassion, or perhaps out of satisfaction that Jews were being taken away. Still others, caught in the crossfire on the streets, were running for their lives in fear and panic. Railroad workers reported “a large train with fifty-five cars.” The city mayor and city personnel, none of them Germans but under German orders, managed the “situation.” “Polish ‘blue police’ (policja granatowa)” hand in hand with German gendarmes and Jewish militia “patrolled the city.” And, finally, “… some Poles were helping the Germans search for Jews.” These were multiple modes in which non-Jewish Poles witnessed the killing of their Jewish neighbors: from compassion to passivity to active collaboration.

The net result of the war, in general, and the Shoah, in particular, was, to use Tony Judt’s word, staggering.\(^60\) Apart from the dead, the casualties of war included orphans, raped women, wounded soldiers, POWs, camp and prison inmates, victims of Nazi medical experimentations, Jewish and Gypsy survivors, the sick, the hungry, the homeless, and the displaced. Europe’s death toll reached an estimated thirty-six and a half

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mong million people from war-related causes. Nineteen million or half of all the deaths were civilians. Among them were between 5,700,000 and 5,900,000 European Jews who perished in the Shoah. The Einsatzgruppen executed 1.2 million East European Jews in, what Timothy Snyder called, the “bloodlands” of Europe (or today Poland, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia). Between spring 1942 and fall 1943, in Operation Reinhard (the death camps Belżec, Sobibór, and Treblinka), the Germans gassed and burnt 1.7 million East European Jews. In Auschwitz alone, almost a million Jews were killed. According to the most recent estimates, 2,710,000 or 81 percent of Jews from pre-war Poland lost their lives in the Holocaust. Slovakia lost 69,000 or 77 percent of its 1938 Jewish population.

Apart from human losses, the war, especially in the eastern parts of the European continent, brought tremendous material devastation. Poland suffered material damage as early as the September campaign of 1939. The Soviet advance at the turn of 1944 and 1945 and the German retreat destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure. Each region suffered damage proportional to the intensity of local military operations. In eastern and southern Poland, bridges, roads, and railroads were destroyed; cities were robbed of precious artifacts; and the Jewish quarters were significantly ruined. At the same time, urban centers like Kraków, Rzeszów, Kielce, and Lublin suffered less damage than cities in central Poland.

61 Ibid., 17–18.
62 Judt wrote that “The numbers of civilian dead exceeded military losses in the USSR, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Norway. Only in the UK and Germany did military losses significantly outnumber civilian ones [in Europe].” Ibid.
64 Weiser, “Demograficzne skutki Holokaustu.”
65 This number of casualties did not include 44,000 Slovak Jews who ended up in Hungary after 1938 and who perished in large numbers during the final phase of the Holocaust in 1944.
66 Half the transportation and communication infrastructure was destroyed, including cars, locomotives, railway bridges, tracks, and roads. In total, 162,000 buildings in cities and towns and nearly 354,000 farms were destroyed. Twenty-two million acres, or half the arable land of the country, lay fallow; 43 percent of cultural and art objects were destroyed or stolen; 60 percent of educational and scientific institutions were destroyed or closed; and 64 percent of the postal, telegraph, and telephone system damaged. The takeover of Polish industry for the Nazi military effort added to the losses. Sprawozdanie w przedmiocie strat i szkód wojennych Polski w latach 1939–1945 (Warsaw: Biuro Odszkodowań Wojennych przy Prezydium Rady Ministrów, 1947); Joseph Vincent Yakowicz, Poland’s Postwar Recovery: Economic Reconstruction, Nationalization, and Agrarian Reform in Poland After World War II (Hicksville: Exposition Press, 1979), 13. Also see Eugenio Reale, Raporty: Polska 1945–1946, trans. Pawel Zdziechowski, vol. 164, Biblioteka Kultury (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1968), 42.
Introduction

and western Poland. Kraków – the capital of the Nazi administration – survived almost intact. Its damage was limited to Jewish cemeteries, historic monuments, and the bridges across the Vistula River.

Western Poland suffered the most destruction; major cities (like Wrocław/Breslau), bridges, and roads were all demolished. But it was Warsaw, the Polish capital, which became the symbol of the war devastation. During military operations and the two uprisings, Warsaw lost more than 70 percent of its residential buildings and 80 percent of its total structures. Suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the spring of 1943 had left thousands dead and whole quarters of the city burnt to the ground. German retaliation after the Warsaw Uprising (an armed insurrection of the Polish underground against the Nazi regime in the late summer of 1944) left more than 200,000 dead and the city in ruins. When Klukowski visited Warsaw in June 1946, he wrote, “. . . I could see the terror of all that Warsaw had endured. I wandered alone in these ruins and very seldom saw even the silhouette of another person. Terrifying dullness and deadness, overwhelming with its size and magnitude. I will never forget the sight of annihilated Warsaw.”

67 Hanna Jędruszczak, “Miasta i przemysł w okresie odbudowy,” in Franciszek Ryszka (ed.), Polska Ludowa, 1944–1950: przemiany społeczne (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974). While the most damaged areas of Warsaw and Wrocław/Breslau each lost approximately a hundred million cubic meters of residential space, Kraków and Lublin lost “only” approximately six to fifteen million cubic meters each.

68 Eighty-five percent of all historic buildings in the city of Warsaw, 80 percent of theaters, and 50 percent of hospitals, residential houses, and churches were ruined. Ibid., 280–1.

69 The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (Powstanie w getcie warszawskim) started on April 19, 1943, and lasted almost a month until May 16, 1943. It was an armed insurrection in the Warsaw ghetto by the Jewish resistance movement, most notably the Jewish Fighting Organization (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa, ZOB). About a thousand fighters, with the help of the civilian ghetto population, engaged more than 2,000 German forces daily. To defeat the insurgents, who were hiding in bunkers and sewers, the Nazis burnt down building after building. All the remaining ghetto population was deported to concentration and death camps (Treblinka) near Warsaw. For more information, see Israel Gutman, The Jews of Warsaw, 1939–1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt (Indiana University Press, 1982); Barbara Engelking and Jacek Leociak, The Warsaw Ghetto: A Guide to the Perished City (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

70 The Warsaw Uprising (Powstanie Warszawskie) started on August 1, 1944, and lasted until October 2, 1944. It was an armed insurrection of the Polish underground resistance Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) against Nazi Germany. The Home Army aimed to liberate Warsaw from the Nazis and to take over the city before the Soviet Army. The Germans defeated the Uprising after two months of heavy fighting and staggering Polish, mainly civilian, losses. The Warsaw Uprising has been extensively studied, especially in the Polish language. For most recent texts, see Norman Davies, Rising ’44: The Battle for Warsaw (New York: Viking, 2004); Andrzej Kunert (ed.), Kronika Powstania Warszawskiego (Warsaw: Zysk i S-ka, 2004).

As a Nazi ally, Slovakia escaped material damage until the German occupation in the fall of 1944. Most of the devastation occurred during and after the Slovak National Uprising – an armed insurrection of the Slovak underground resistance movement against the Tiso regime in August–October 1944. Heavy, often brotherly, fighting of German and Slovak forces (the army and the Hlinka Guard) against Slovak partisans was concentrated mainly in central Slovakia, near Banská Bystrica where it started, and then spread toward the east of the country. The military operations, especially the German counteroffensive, left much of Slovakia devastated. After the uprising, the Einsatzgruppen burnt almost a hundred entire villages in retaliation and on suspicion of collaboration with partisans. Villages like Kremnička and Nemecká were wiped out, losing 747 and 900 residents respectively.

In his *The Slovak Dilemma*, Eugen Steiner wrote that when the war ended in April 1945 “most of the towns in Slovakia were badly damaged; . . . transport and industry completely disrupted,” widening the gap in economic potential between Slovakia and the Czech lands where “most of the towns, including Prague, and most of the industrial plants remained intact.” The communication and transportation systems suffered in both the Czech lands and Slovakia. The railroad system was in better shape in the Czech lands than in Slovakia. Chemical works, oil refineries (most notably the oil refinery and storage facilities in

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Bratislava), the textile industry, and heavy industry suffered severe damage from bombing and shortages of materials. Overall, Slovakia suffered considerably more material damage than the Czech lands but relatively less than Poland.

Human and material losses only begin to describe the postwar European and East European landscapes. Both in Poland and Slovakia, domestic migration, interwoven with movement across (fluid) state borders, became the daily reality. In 1945 alone, approximately 1,117,000 prewar Polish citizens returned home from camps in Germany and another 360,000 came from elsewhere in Europe. Krystyna Kersten’s description of Poland in 1944–8 as a country of people in motion is equally applicable to postwar Slovakia. In both countries, hundreds of thousands of Poles, Slovaks, Jews, Czechs, Hungarians, Germans, and Ukrainians crossed the borders from the east, west, north, and south on a daily basis. Small and large columns of returnees from concentration and labor camps in Germany and Poland, from the Soviet gulag, or military service, repatriates, exiles, expellees, and so-called displaced populations, marched through, making up the postwar East European landscape.

As Kersten established, between 1945 and 1948, about 1.5 million prewar Polish citizens (including POWs and prisoners of labor and concentration camps) were repatriated from the territory of the Third Reich to Poland. Another staggering 1.2 million pre-1939 Polish citizens (including Jews) were repatriated to Poland from the eastern territories, now annexed by the Soviet Union. Jerzy Kochanowski raised this number to 1.5 million after including repatriates from the prewar Polish eastern territories, Siberia, and Central Asia in the years 1944–8. Overall, almost three million people returned to Poland from the Soviet Union and Germany as a result of repatriation and unorganized homebound movement. Thousands of Czechoslovak citizens had also returned (mainly from Germany) or had been transferred from the Soviet Union.
by the end of 1947. In June 1945, Czechoslovakia signed a treaty with the Soviet Union that authorized the cession of its eastern province of the Subcarpathian Ukraine to the Soviets and agreed upon provisions for subsequent population transfers. Of the projected population exchange of 50,000, approximately 27,000 Czechoslovak citizens were repatriated to Czechoslovakia by the end of 1947. Overall, between 141,000 and 161,000 pre-1938 citizens (including Jews) returned to Czechoslovakia after the war. The Polish and Czechoslovak states also engineered much of the postwar movement with their grand projects of “ethnic homogenization” and retribution forcing millions of Germans and tens of thousands of Hungarians to leave their homes (for more analysis, see Chapter 5).

After the war, the Polish and Slovak populations found themselves yet again in markedly different political circumstances. While, during the war, it was the relationship with the Third Reich that differentiated the two states, now it was the Soviet Union. Soviet political pressure, so pronounced in postwar Poland, was mainly absent from postwar Czechoslovakia until mid-1947. From the conference in Teheran, through the Warsaw Uprising, and the subsequent imposition of governments, the Kremlin openly pushed to gain full control over Polish domestic and foreign affairs. As Stalin’s top priority, the Polish state remained under constant surveillance from Moscow. The Red Army’s presence and the NKVD’s system of invigilation and detention served to subjugate and intimidate Polish society from as early as the summer of 1944. In Czechoslovakia, weaker Soviet influence and the early exit of the Red Army in December 1945 created an environment in which domestic centers of authority enjoyed actual autonomy, at least for the first two years after the war.

Judt suggested that Poland’s critical geographic location (“on the route from Berlin to Moscow”), as well as its political history of anti-Sovietism (“longstanding impediments to Russian imperial ambitions in the west”) with the resulting minimal “prospects of a Soviet-friendly government emerging spontaneously by popular choice,” may explain Stalin’s differing strategies in the two countries. In contrast to Poland, as James Felak argued, “Czechoslovakia has positioned itself as a solid ally of the Soviet

82 Ibid., 122–6. Also see Bächler, “Znovuoživenie Židovskej Komunity na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne.”
Union, and in some respects leaned more to the East than to the West.” President Edvard Beneš believed that Czechoslovakia needed a protector and the Soviet Union seemed a better alternative than the “West,” which had betrayed his country in 1938. As a result, in Judt’s words “Czechoslovakia was... the Soviet Union’s closest ally in the region after 1945, in spite of losing its easternmost district of sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to Soviet territorial ‘adjustments.’ That is why Beneš, alone of the east- and south-east European wartime prime ministers-in-exile, was able to bring his government home...” And, indeed, the Czechs did not disappoint. In May 1946, in the last genuinely democratic elections in Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party won more than 40 percent of the vote in Bohemia and Moravia.

In the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia, the political standing of the Slovak Communist Party (Komunistická strana Slovenska, KSS) was not as advantageous. First, as Michal Barnovský argued, the activity of the NKVD in Slovakia in the final months of the war sullied the Soviet ally in Slovak eyes: “While Prague welcomed the Red Army with open arms and celebrated the victory, in Slovakia the relation toward the liberators was tarnished by accusations against NKVD members who had illegally sent thousands of people to the Soviet gulag.” Second, the re-creation of Czechoslovakia reminded Slovaks of prewar Prague centralism and added to the general apprehension of the Prague government, now dominated by Communists under the leadership of Klement Gottwald.

Finally, as self-identified Christians – 82 percent Catholic and 16 percent

88 The Košice Program of April 1945 regulated Czech and Slovak coexistence in the republic. Although there was no mention of a federation in the program, the National Front agreed that Czechs and Slovaks were two separate nations sharing one state and enjoying the right to separate autonomous governmental structures. The Košice Program obliged the Prague central government to recognize the legal position of the Slovak national administration, the Slovak National Council (Slovenská národná rada, SNR) and the Board of Commissioners (Zbor povereníků, ZP). The SNR became the primary legislative and executive institution of Slovakia after the war. Among its responsibilities was the appointment of the Board of Commissioners, which functioned as the SNR’s executive organ. “[The government] will end all old conflicts and, while recognizing Slovaks as an independent nation, the government will, from its first steps, make everything so that in Czechoslovak conditions the principle of ‘equal with equal’ would be realized and the brotherhood between both nations effectively applied.” In “Programme československé vlády Národní fronty Cechů a Slováků přijatý 5. dubna 1945 v Košicích, tzv. Košický vládní programme,” at www.svedomi.cz/dokdoby/1945. kosvlpr.htm (accessed December 2011). The Slovak autonomy was gradually limited in the Second and Third Prague Agreements in April and June 1946.
Protestant – the majority of Slovaks preferred the Christian-based platform of the Democratic Party (Demokratická strana, DS) over the atheist Communists.\(^8^9\) In the elections of May 1946, the DS beat the Communists by a landslide of 62 percent to 31. Still, the Slovak Communists secured one third of the vote in genuinely free elections. They drew their legitimacy and thus their electoral success from their participation in the Slovak resistance movement and the Slovak National Uprising, hand in hand with the members of the DS party.

The Polish Communists or the Polish Worker Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR), under the leadership of Władysław Gomułka, could hardly claim any such legitimacy, neither could they count on victory in a popular vote. NKVD arrests of Polish underground fighters (mainly the Home Army) and activists associated with the Polish government-in-exile started immediately after the Soviet “liberation.” Psychological intimidation, physical abuse, and constant harassment of opposition members were part of every political campaign after the war. The rigged referendum of June 30, 1946, made it clear that a great majority of the population opposed the current administration and that only repression could keep the Communists in power.\(^9^0\) The parliamentary elections of January 1947 were accompanied by scenes of brutal intimidation and violence, aiming to instill fear in society.\(^9^1\) The main target was the opposition party, the Polish Peasant Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL), under the leadership of Stanisław Mikołajczyk. According to the official results, which were rigged and nowhere near the actual results, the Communists won 80 percent of the total vote while the PSL won 10 percent.\(^9^2\)

\(^8^9\) Despite the Communist efforts to win Catholic votes. Felak, *After Hitler, Before Stalin.*

\(^9^0\) To delay the elections, the Communists proposed the idea of a referendum. To get people to vote, the Communists asked questions on the least controversial or ambiguous issues, “Do you favor the abolition of the Senate? Do you want the adoption in the future Constitution of an economic system carried out by means of land reform and nationalization of basic national industries with the preservation of statutory rights for private initiative? Do you want the adoption of the western border of the Polish state on the Baltic Sea, the Oder and Neisse River?” According to official results, 70 percent voted “yes” and 30 percent voted “no” to the “Senate question.” However, no one doubted that the Communists falsified the results. In Kraków, where the opposition safeguarded the voting, 84 percent voted “no” to the first question, 59 percent voted “no” to the second question, and 30 percent voted “no” to the third question. See Andrzej Paczkowski, *Referendum z 30 czerwca 1946 r: przebieg i wyniki* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1993).


\(^9^2\) According to actual results, the PSL secured about 50 percent of votes. See Andrzej Paczkowski, *Od sfałszowanego zwycięstwa do prawdziwej klęski: szkice do portretu PRL* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999).
Most tragically for the population of postwar Poland, this intense political struggle turned into a violent civil war – a conflict unparalleled in postwar Czechoslovakia. Yes, the nationalist, anti-communist, and antisemitic underground (Ludáčke podzemie) did exist in Slovakia as a loose network promoting the re-establishment of an independent Slovak state. It was most active in “the regions around Orava, Nitra, Topoľčany, Piešťany, and Bánovce, less so in Protestant and in industrialized areas.” But it had no real influence and only occasionally printed leaflets and stirred minor unrest, for example during the Tiso trial in 1947. In September 1947, during the so-called “unveiling of the anti-state conspiracy” (odhalenie tzv. protištátneho sprisahania), the government arrested more than 300 underground Slovak activists vilified as a major security threat.

This campaign, however, could hardly compare to the full-scale war which broke out between the communist forces and the anti-communist underground in postwar Poland. Although shattered by the Warsaw Uprising and the repression that followed, the anti-Nazi Home Army (AK) became the dominant resistance movement in postwar Poland. It officially disbanded in January 1945, but some of its units moved into the forests and continued guerilla warfare against the Soviet presence. In May 1945, in the face of increased tensions and the expected withdrawal of the NKVD from Poland, the government started to destroy the forest units. In June and July 1945, in the Lublin province alone, the Third Infantry Division carried out operations in 300 localities. The most intense battles took place in the east but the fighting was not limited to this region; all over the country, partisans clashed with communist security forces. Repressions increased in the winter of 1945/46 and spring of 1946, when entire villages were burnt. The fighting lasted with varying intensity until 1948 and ended with thousands killed, wounded, arrested, or transported to the Soviet Union.

The world war bred the civil war. Violence bred violence. Polish historian Marcin Zaremba called the years 1944 and 1947 in Poland: “Great Fear” (Wielka Trwoga). By detailing and documenting the postwar lawlessness and chaos, displacement and migrations, political terror and simple banditry, poverty, hunger, diseases, and, finally, all-pervading political, social, and ethnic violence, Zaremba painted a disturbing picture of Polish society after the cataclysm of the war. A society which spent
the wartime years in fear and uncertainty and continued to live that way for years after the war – more so than its Czech and Slovak neighbors.

But the postwar years were not only times of violence and fear. They were also times of transition and times of hope. Although both societies ended up under complete Soviet domination, this outcome was by no means predetermined in 1944 or 1945 in Poland and, even at the beginning of 1947, in Czechoslovakia. On August 30, 1944, Klukowski wrote, “We hope that our situation will improve and that we will be able to resume normal lives soon.”\(^{99}\) Czech Heda Margolius Kovály recalled in her memoir, “We tried to bury it [the war] quickly, the earth settled over it, and we turned our backs on it impatiently. After all, our real life was now beginning and what to make of it was up to us.”\(^{100}\) The future was an open book. Some East Europeans hoped for a “national road to socialism,” others prayed for a Third World War, yet others dreamt of Americans landing in their town.\(^{101}\) Like everybody else in Europe, people in postwar Poland and Czechoslovakia hoped that they could return to “normality”; that they could “reconstruct” their lives and forget about the nightmares of the war. Jewish survivors were no different. In this sense, this book is a story of the European reconstruction from the ashes of the war: a story of the efforts to return to “normality” in deeply “abnormal” times.

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The book is based on an extensive collection of primary sources from archives in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, the United States, and Israel. These include records of central and local administrations in Poland and Slovakia, files of central and local Jewish communities and organizations, press reports, reports from American Jewish relief organizations, and published and unpublished testimonies, memoirs, and diaries. Personal testimonies – the playground of memory – are particularly problematic as representative voices in a historical analysis. While I use published and unpublished testimonies, I am fully aware of the challenges they present. The authors of published memoirs, for example, constitute a sample of the most articulate, best educated, and ultimately most successful Holocaust survivors. On the other hand,


\(^{101}\) On November 25, 1944, Klukowski reported, “From Zamość we received news about an American aircraft landing at the Mokre airfield. Nine Americans are supposed to be in town. This has caused a big sensation. Everyone asks what this means. Now there are new dreams, new hopes.” In Klukowski and Klukowski, *Red Shadow*, 37.
recorded oral testimonies represent a broader demographic range of survivors interviewed regardless of their postwar life choices and social standing. Notwithstanding these differences, all testimonies of the war and its aftermath are necessarily shaped by the specific life experiences which followed the events described.

That said, personal testimonies reveal more than they obscure. First, they highlight the most common threads of daily experience. Having read numerous personal accounts collected in the archives in Poland and the United States, I was able to identify recurrent images and representations of the immediate postwar experience. Second, placing personal accounts at the core of a narrative gives voice to ordinary people. Highlighting these voices restores their historical agency and creates a historical narrative which recognizes the potency of individual experience. Finally, individual representations can provide insight into larger historical processes. In the period after liberation, survivors’ accounts reveal features of interethnic dynamics – its contingencies and changeability – otherwise lost in historical data. Experiences such as the first encounters with neighbors and the initial negotiations of one’s place in the community are lost without personal testimonies.

This book begins in the summer of 1944 during the Soviet entry into eastern Poland and ends in 1948 when the political transition culminates in the establishment of communist regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The book does not aspire, however, to cover all aspects of Jewish lives in this period. This is simply impossible especially in a comparative work which necessitates some level of synthesis. For example, the book does not discuss the politics of Jewish central committees, Zionist activism, or emigration. Also, memorialization of the war and retribution for war crimes are left outside the scope of this book, as are the Catholic Church’s relations with Jewish communities in postwar Poland and Slovakia – all important and fascinating subjects which require separate monographs. What follows is a selection of themes which, in my opinion, when presented comparatively, contribute in substantive

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

103 David Engel, Natalia Aleksiun, and Avinoam J. Patt have already done so in Engel, Ben shihur li-veriḥak; Aleksiun, Dokąd Dalej?; Avinoam J. Patt, Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009).

and new ways to our knowledge of postwar Jewish history in Eastern Europe.

Chapter 1 describes the Soviet “liberation” of the two countries, the survivors’ first days of freedom, their journey, and return to “no home.” Chapters 2 and 3 describe Jewish property restitution and its critical role in shaping Jewish and non-Jewish relations after the war. Chapter 4 offers a comparative narrative of anti-Jewish violence in Poland and Slovakia, placed in a broader cultural context. Chapter 5 discusses the postwar struggle to obtain citizenship (especially in Slovakia) and the criteria for inclusion into the newly homogeneous states. Chapters 6 and 7 analyze “the return to normality” including building families, finding jobs, and belonging to communities with or without non-Jewish neighbors.