THE MEMORY

OF THE EXPULSION AND DISAPPEARANCE OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN PREKMURJE

OTO LUTHAR
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THE LAND OF SHADOWS

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What brought about one of the saddest chapters in human history?

Prologue

1944 marked the end of an era in Prekmurje, the northeastern province of Slovenia, which from 1941 to 1944 was occupied by Hungarians and then by Nazi Germany until 1945. A land that used to be home to a community of three or four languages, three religions and a multitude of different customs was, almost overnight, robbed of people who had, over the previous two centuries, crucially contributed to its economic and cultural development.

It began on an April morning and ended with a November announcement of winter, when the province between the rivers Mura and Raba lost all trace of the members of the Jewish families Sonnenfeld, Hiršl, Weiss, Ebenšpanger, Berger, Arvay and Schwartz... The Nazis, assisted by Hungarian armed police forces, drove away Jewish children, women, men, young and old, sick and, well... everyone.

This is their story or, more precisely, a humble attempt at narrating the reasons why they had to leave and why nothing has remained of their rich culture but tombstones, obscure family stories and half-forgotten names – making a person who has delved into the history of the province sometimes feel as if being drowned in the Land of Shadows.

The more we struggle to understand why and how this could have happened, the more questions are raised, questions to which we will probably never know the definitive answers.

Yet most confusing of all is the question why so little has been known about this tragedy until recently, why the memory of it has been so obscured and, finally, why some of the houses, workshops, prayer rooms etc. have been so utterly demolished as to not even cast a shadow...

WHY, then...

… Why is the plan for the destruction of the Jews one of the saddest episodes in human history?

Why do we call it the Holocaust rather than the Shoah as the Jews do?

Holocaust (Gr. *holókaustos*: *hólos*, "whole" and *kaustós*, "burnt") • in Greek, this term denotes burnt sacrificial offering, presently it stands for the systematic murder of Jews, as well as Slavs, Roma and the mentally and physically disabled by Nazi Germany during World War II.

Shoah (Hebrew *HaShoah*, "catastrophe") • the Biblical word shoah became the standard Hebrew term for the Holocaust in the 1940s, especially in Europe and Israel. Most Jews prefer to use the term shoah, mainly for theological reasons, as they associate the term "Holocaust" with ancient Greek pagan rituals.

And finally:

Why did the plan for the destruction of the Jews find so many supporters throughout Europe and the world, who bear the responsibility for the fact that during the course of five years almost six million Jews of all ages and standings perished in concentration and labour camps and secret killing locations. Women and children, young and old, sick and healthy alike were killed indiscriminately.

The Nazis and their collaborators even used specialised vans to kill the Jews. A van like the one in the photograph (photo from Chelmno extermination camp) was also used in Belgrade between April and May 1942 to murder 5,200 Jewish women, children and elderly people.
www.starosajmiste.info/sr2012/#/mapa/gasni_kamion.

Why is it that, seven decades after the first reports on the systematic killing of the Jews appeared, we still cannot understand:

How was it possible?

We wonder:

Who was to blame?

And:

Why at that particular point in time?

In addition, we would also like to know:

Who were the people who elicited so much hatred and contempt? Was it really just hatred? What about jealousy, fear, insecurity...?

And finally:

Did Slovenian Jews share the same fate? What happened to them?

Hmm, questions keep on coming, so we'd better start finding answers. To do that, we should first try to answer the most fundamental questions:

Who are the Jews and why did they suffer such a devastating fate in the middle of the 20th century?

And:

Did the massacre have anything to do with the Jews themselves... or did the blame lie squarely on those who decided that the Jews were to be exterminated? What about those who knew about it and did nothing to stop it?

Given that, despite irrefutable evidence, there are still some individuals who try to minimise the blame of the perpetrators, let us be clear on one thing at the very outset:

The sole responsibility for the genocide of the Jews rested on its perpetrators, that is, those who devised it and those who executed it.

Genocide (Gr. *genos* – "race" and lat. *occidere* – "kill")
• is any form of systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of a national, ethnic, racial or religious community.

Adolf Eichman was one of the key organisers and responsible for the machinery of **deportation** to the extermination camps. Directly subordinated to Adolf Hitler, the most responsible for the execution of the **"Final solution to the Jewish question"**, Eichmann organised the deportations and killing of Hungarian Jews, including those from the Slovenian province of Prekmurje. After the war, Eichmann escaped to Argentina, where he was tracked down by the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad fifteen years later. Mossad agents secretly transported him to Israel, where he was found guilty at a public trial and sentenced to death.
Botsch 2008, 104.

Deportation/deportees • a process in which a person was stripped of their freedom and property and "transported" to a concentration camp.

"Final solution to the Jewish question" (nem. *Endlösung der Judenfrage*) • was the National Socialist term for the envisioned killing of all Jews in Germany and all territories occupied by the German army and placed under the control of the German Reich. Adolf Hitler already made his intention to annihilate the Jews publicly known on 30 January 1939; the expression "final solution to the Jewish question" was first used on 12 March 1941, by Adolf Eichmann, Head of the Department for Jewish Affairs of the Reich Main Security Office. By that date, thousands of Jews in Poland had been killed in mass executions by special SS squads; the first deportations of Polish Jews to ghettos and concentration camps had also taken place. From 22 June 1941 onwards, German military units entering the Soviet Union were followed by special squads with the task to achieve "the full-scale extermination of Jews."
The plan for a large-scale organisation of the "final solution to the Jewish question" was further elaborated on 20 January 1942 at a conference held in Berlin's suburbs on the shores of Wannsee Lake. In September 1941 – four months before the "Wannsee Conference" – the first gassing experiments were performed in Auschwitz. In October 1941, the first order was issued for the deportation of Jews from the German Reich. On 23 October, Jews were prohibited from emigrating. In December 1941, the first mass murder took place in the Polish Chelmno extermination camp, with the use of mobile gas chambers that were fed engine exhaust fumes. Between 1942 and 1945, mass transportations shipped Jews from all territories under National Socialist power to concentration and extermination camps. According to the results of studies based almost exclusively on SS documents, European countries estimated that approximately six million Jews were victims of the Final Solution.

Why do we stress guilt and responsibility at the very beginning?

Partly because after World War II many attempted to throw the blame on their superiors, saying, "It was our duty to follow orders," while those who gave orders tried to avoid punishment by claiming that their hands were, in fact, not stained with blood...

Despite the overwhelming body of evidence, many still continue to maintain that the Holocaust never happened, that there were no concentration or extermination camps built to kill people; that prisoners died only of war-related disease and scarcity. The fact is that extermination camps did exist and were used to "industrialise" murder.

But let's go back to the beginning and take a look at where the hatred towards the Jews stems and when it started. In this case, too, we'd better start with the latter question.

Therefore: Since when...?

Although answers may differ in details, they all agree in principle that Jews have often evoked hatred, fear, feelings of superiority and inferiority, envy, malice and so forth. Or to put it more accurately: these feelings could be perceived whenever Jews came into contact with their neighbours and especially upon their first encounter with European peoples. Since this was a more common and intense occurrence during the Middle Ages, persecution of the Jews was more severe during the so-called High Middle Ages, when the first cities began to emerge also as a result of the activities of the Jews.

A depiction of the looting of Jewish shops and workshops in 17th-century Frankfurt. Botsch 2008, 19.

The latter simply needs to be emphasised, because too many still hold the opinion that Jews only immigrated after the conditions became favourable for them to engage in activity for which they later became the most famous and hated. This was, of course, trade and everything related to it: purchases, sales, bargaining, loans, debt claims and collection of property from those who were unable to pay off their debt.

All of the above aroused repugnance, but also respect and awe. The second reason for repugnance and distrust was the Jews' religion and the ways it affected their daily life, making it significantly different from the life of Christians.

Differences were also apparent in the clothes they wore and the food they ate, and, on top of everything, toward the end of the 19th century Jews were often ascribed certain psychological attributes that engendered many stereotypes of large noses, black glaring eyes, black hair and beards... It is also often forgotten that a particular way of life was imposed upon the Jews already in the Middle Ages. Thus they were decidedly "marked," thus prevented from integration.

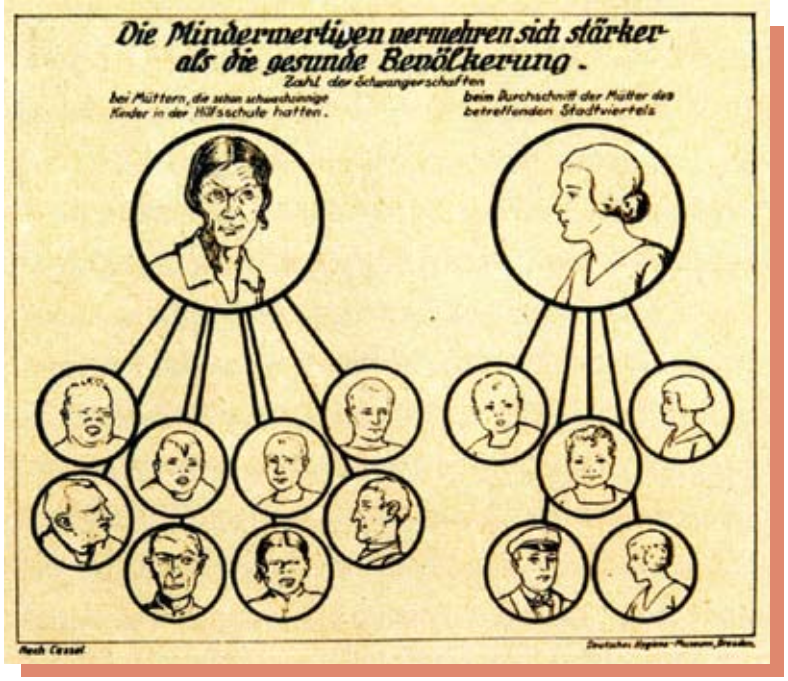
This meant that Jews

- were not allowed to become artisans
- were not allowed to own land
- were forced to dress differently
- were forced to live in designated areas.

Ever since the mid-Middle Ages, however, depictions of Jews and their customs have also portrayed their rituals that, according to Christian conceptions, reveal Jewish hatred or at least malice towards non-Jews. Jews were depicted as sacrificing the blood of Christian children or poisoning wells, which was the basis for Christian anti-Semitism. Both charges are historically unfounded.

Physical characteristics became subject to systematic studies only at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, stirring particular interest among medical doctors and other scientists investigating human races. While most studies exhibited genuine scientific interest, a small part regrettably amounted to nothing more than completely unscientific assessments of individual traits.

The latter were, first and foremost, performed by enemies of the Jews, or anti-Semites, who based their prejudice against various races and peoples on supposedly scientific findings. In so doing, they diligently employed the principles of so-called Social Darwinism, principles arising from a comparison between the origin and evolution of animal species on the one hand and of human races and nations on the other.



Racist propaganda poster: "Weak persons are reproducing faster than healthy people." Botsch 2008, 18.

In this case, Darwin's findings on the survival of the fittest and the most adaptable no longer applied only to individuals but began to determine the destiny of whole societies and groups. This occurred in a century marked by the establishment of nation states; by then, societies were no longer just groups of people settled in a common territory, but were bound together by common origin or, in anti-Semitic and **racist** terms, by the same blood.

Modern **anti-Semitism** is therefore a fusion of racial theory and traditional hatred of Jews. At the beginning of the 20th century, traditional anti-Semitism stereotyping Jews as hook-nosed schemers and murderers of children definitively transformed into modern racist anti-Semitism. In addition to traditional Christian anti-Judaism, which mainly rested on a different interpretation of the Holy Bible, the new development was largely based on the findings of **"racial science."**

Anti-Semitism • until the 19th century, anti-Semitism was most often religious and based on Christian or Muslim interpretations of Judaism (for example, holding Jews responsible for the death of Jesus Christ). For this reason, the Jews were often the main targets of religious violence and persecution. This form of anti-Semitism was directed predominantly against religion, hence religious anti-Semitism, and not against people of Jewish descent who converted to some other religion. Another kind of anti-Semitism is economic anti-Semitism, which is based on stereotypes about the economic status and occupation of the Jews as wealthy, greedy, heartless businessmen. From the 19th century onwards, racial anti-Semitism became the prevalent form of anti-Semitism. It was based on anthropological ideas from the Enlightenment period. Here, the hatred or prejudice against the Jews as believers is supplanted by the idea that the Jews are a racial group and that, irrespective of their religious belief and customs, they are inferior or unworthy.

Racial science (scientific racism) • is the use of scientific techniques and hypotheses to sanction the belief in racial superiority or racism; it draws on the works of 18th-century scientists.

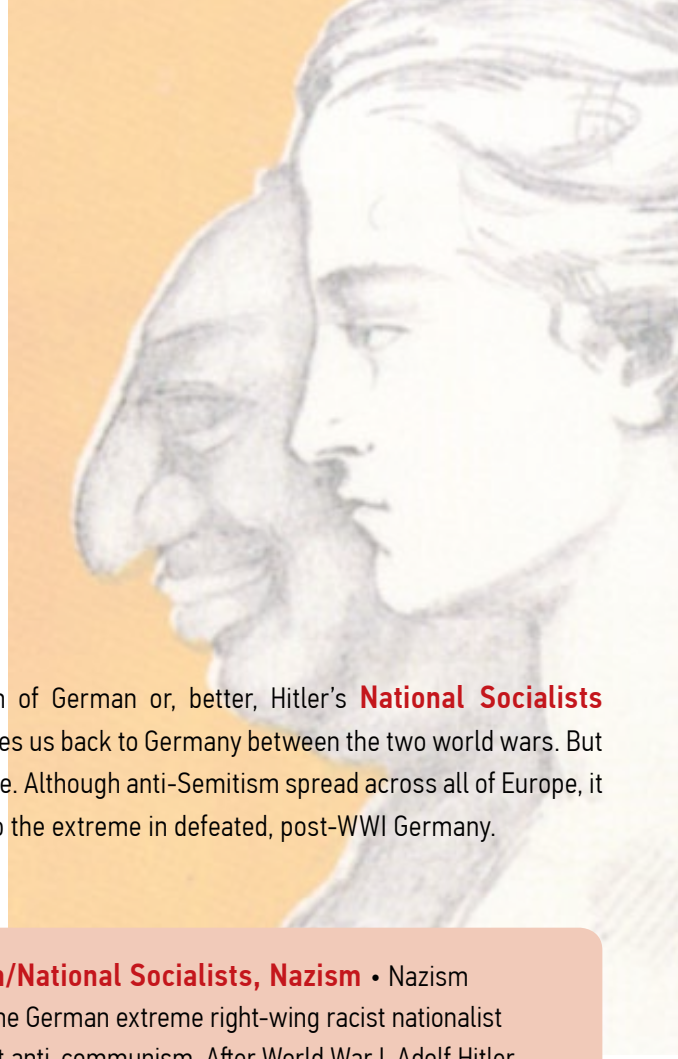
Such and similar "findings" helped establish anti-Semitic value scales, at the top of which were Aryan peoples from northern Europe; Slavs were classified as considerably inferior, whereas Jews, Roma and Sinti (who were seen as "racially distinctive" and "asocials") were ranked at the very bottom of the racial scale. According to racial scientists, this lowest category also included blacks.

Racism • is the belief that there are biologically grounded and verifiable differences among the humans, which often serves as the basis for abuse and discrimination.

"Typical" features of Jews brought to the extreme, in comparison with the Aryan "norm."
Botsch 2008, 21.

An important time in this process was the period of World War I, which, according to German racial scientists, the Germans lost also because of the Jews. Namely, after 1919 many interpretations in the popular German press portrayed Jews as war profiteers who let the German army down or even acted to its detriment in pursuit of their own selfish ends.

And here is where our story about the last chapter of this differentiation begins. Our aim in narrating it is to learn about the conditions that led to the so-called "Final solution to the Jewish question," as the Nazis called the process of destroying European Jewry.



The mention of German or, better, Hitler's **National Socialists** instantly takes us back to Germany between the two world wars. But not only there. Although anti-Semitism spread across all of Europe, it was taken to the extreme in defeated, post-WWI Germany.

National Socialism/National Socialists, Nazism • Nazism built on elements of the German extreme right-wing racist nationalist movement and violent anti-communism. After World War I, Adolf Hitler used this ideology in an attempt to encourage workers to turn away from communism and embrace popular nationalism. At first the Nazis advocated anti-capitalism and anti-bourgeois viewpoints, which they later replaced with anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism. Nazism promulgated the superiority of the Aryan race, which they claimed could only evolve by preserving its purity and instinct for self-preservation. In this respect, the greatest threat was identified in the Jews, as well as homosexuals, Slavs, Roma, blacks, political opponents and the physically and mentally disabled.

"Germans, do not forget!" A malicious caricature depicting the alleged betrayal by wealthy Jewish families during World War I. "Typical" features of Jews brought to the extreme, in comparison with the Aryan "norm."

Botsch 2008, 21.

During the last sixty-five years, this subject has inspired a prolific production of scholarly and literary works, as well as many documentary and fictional films. One of the particularly intriguing ways of presenting the Holocaust is graphic novels, which over the past twenty-five years became an acknowledged approach to historical representation. From this point on, we are going to rely on excerpts from two graphic novels, Jason Lutes' *Berlin* and Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. These authors found a particularly felicitous way to describe the events that led to the Holocaust and the genocide itself.

Let's take a look...

... at how Jason Lutes depicted the life of Jewish children in 1930s Berlin, after Nazi propaganda influenced public opinion.

Grown-ups often preferred to hide the truth from their children, which is also evident from the narratives of the rare Slovenian Jews who survived the horrors of a German concentration camp. They remember that during the war some people would help Jewish refugees from Austria, which Hitler had annexed already in 1938. But they knew nothing about the reasons for their plight – just as they did not know that the Germans were sending the Jews to concentration and extermination camps and began systematically killing them a little more than two years into the war.

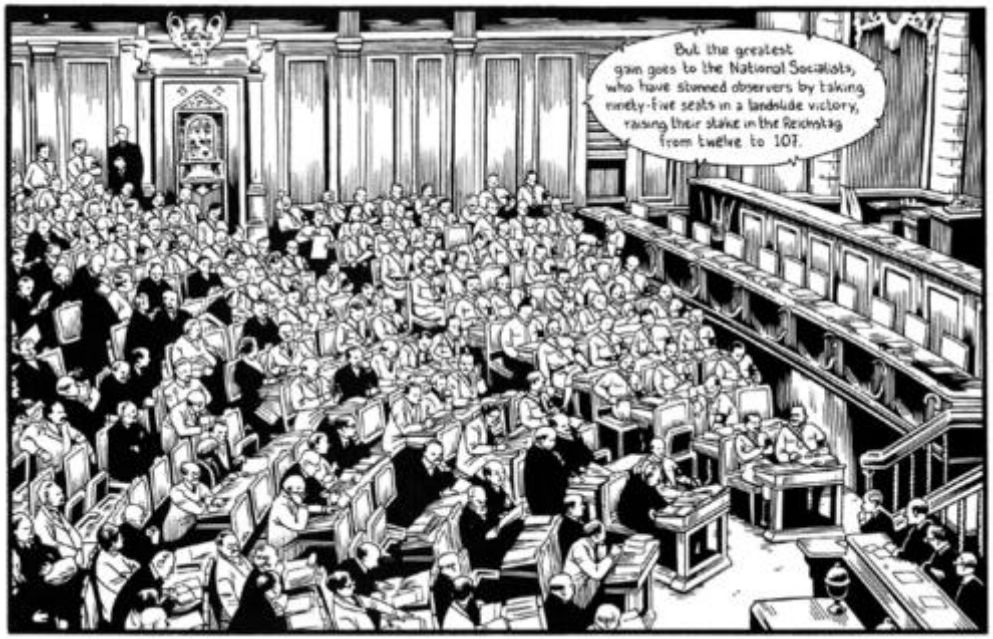
On the other hand, grown-ups tried to prepare themselves, if only for the worst. In this respect, too, one of our informants offers a very illustrative account by recalling that a few weeks before being sent away to a concentration camp her parents took her and her sister to the woodshed and showed them where they hid the family jewellery and papers pertaining to her father's education.

> But that was only later on. **Before the war, the hatred towards the Jews and people of different opinions was fuelled also by a severe economic crisis. In combination with stringent demands for war reparation payments, the crisis was especially severe in Germany, where political extremists, including Hitler, emerged in force in the early 1930s.**

However, the Nazis also targeted their political opponents, primarily communists and socialists, whom they denounced as Bolsheviks. The ideological leaders of Nazism (Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Adolf Hitler etc.) even tried to convince people that the greatest responsibility for the spread of Bolshevism lay with the Jews.

Let's take a look at how the atmosphere was envisioned
by the author of the graphic narrative about interwar Berlin.

Neither the Germans nor the Jews could have ever anticipated that this kind of hatred and intolerance would lead to such an unparalleled disaster. The extraordinary imprudence of the coalition parties was clearly visible after Germany's last free election before WWII, in 1933, when they gave Hitler enough support to form a strong coalition.



What the election would mean soon became evident, since Hitler did not hide his ambitions. Most of what he wrote as his political plan in the book *My Struggle* (*Mein Kampf*) was put into effect immediately after the election victory. The adoption of racial legislation or, more accurately, the Blood Protection Act, part of the so-called Nuremberg Laws, classified the Jews as second-class citizens. In every sphere of activity, Hitler paid particular attention to the economic and cultural destruction of the Jews.

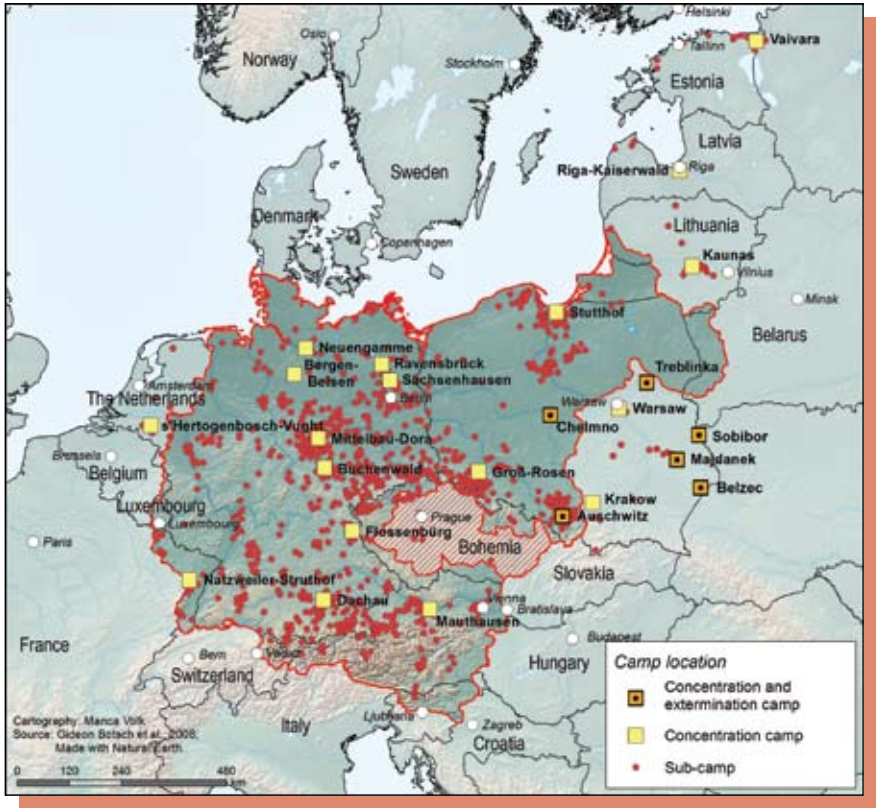
Members of Jewish communities were prohibited from nearly all forms of dealings: from pursuing lucrative and prestigious professions to marrying non-Jews. Those who failed to comply with the legislation were subject to ridicule, vicious attacks and punishment by the law.

What is more, the Jews also became unwelcome wherever their presence did not happen to be directly forbidden. Signs stating *"Juden sind hier unerwünscht,"* or in English *"Jews are not welcome here,"* or simply *"Juden unerwünscht"/"Jews not welcome"* appeared across public spaces.

1938 was marked by a campaign of arson and plunder against Jewish property, which followed a policy of ostracising the Jewish population from society; for instance, state officials could only be Aryan, Jews were prohibited from certain jobs, Jewish shops were boycotted. In addition, new concentration camps were established.

The first camps opened soon after the 1933 election and were initially intended mostly for non-Jews, i.e. political opponents and criminals. Later on the camps were increasingly used to detain numerous other groups and individuals who failed to meet the Nazi political and moral norms; particularly after the beginning of WWII, the Jews, Roma, Slavs and POWs were deported and interned in the concentration and extermination camps.

Germans and their collaborators introduced similar measures in the occupied territories, where they built veritable "death factories."



Map of Nazi concentration and extermination camps.
Adapted from Botsch 2008.

By this we are referring to a system of concentration and extermination camps, the most infamous being Auschwitz or Auschwitz-Birkenau, to which Jewish prisoners were deported beginning in 1942 and where they were systematically killed starting one year later.

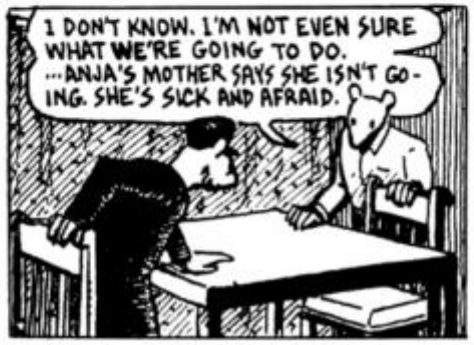
Concentration and extermination camps • a camp in which regime opponents, "public enemies," members of ethnic minorities etc. are detained for the purposes of re-education or extermination. The first concentration camps in Nazi Germany were founded in 1933 (Dachau already in March 1933); their number quadrupled between 1938 and 1942. In this period, many became part of the machinery of the systematic murder of Jews and other "unworthy" groups.
Concentration camps forced prisoners to do hard labour until they died of exhaustion; prisoners also died as a result of torture and medical experiments, malnutrition, epidemics and poor hygiene.
In *extermination camps* they were killed in gas chambers and mass executions, and their bodies were then burnt in crematoria or buried in mass graves.

The way Jews were collected and transported to camps from local and regional centres across most of Central and Eastern Europe is most graphically illustrated by the American comic-book artist, Art Spiegelman. In his graphic novel *Maus*, he describes how his father, Vladek Spiegelman, experienced the extermination camp.

AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GRANDPARENTS, IT WAS A FEW MONTHS QUIET. THEN IT CAME POSTERS EVERYWHERE AND SPEECHES FROM THE GEMEINDE...

MY FATHER - HE HAD 62 YEARS - CAME BY STREETCAR TO ME FROM DABROWA, THE VILLAGE NEXT DOOR FROM SOSNOWIEC.

AFTER MY MOTHER DIED WITH CANCER, HE LIVED THERE IN THE HOUSE OF MY SISTER FELA, AND HER FOUR SMALL CHILDREN.



REALLY, I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO ADVISE HIM.

WHEN WE WERE EVERYBODY INSIDE, GESTAPO WITH MACHINE GUNS SURROUNDED THE STADIUM.

THEN WAS A SELECTION, WITH PEOPLE SENT EITHER TO THE LEFT, EITHER TO THE RIGHT.

ME AND ANJA CAME TO THE TABLE WHERE MY COUSIN WAS SITTING...

WE WERE SO HAPPY WE CAME THROUGH. BUT WE WORRIED NOW - WERE OUR FAMILIES SAFE?

BUT LATER SOMEONE WHO SAW HIM TOLD ME... HE CAME THROUGH THIS SAME COUSIN OVER TO THE GOOD SIDE.

HER, THEY SENT TO THE LEFT. FOUR CHILDREN WAS TOO MANY.

AND, WHAT DO YOU THINK? HE SNEAKED ON TO THE BAD SIDE!

THOSE WITH A STAMP WERE LET TO GO HOME. BUT THERE WERE VERY FEW JEWS NOW LEFT IN SOSNOWIEC...

And what happened to **the Jews** in Slovenia?

Before we answer this question, we must first learn at least some basics about the Jewish community in the territory of present-day Slovenia.

The first Jews arrived in the territory that today is Slovenia during the period of emerging hamlets, settlements and towns. Only rare places were granted town or market town rights in the absence of Jewish settlers. Most Jewish families came to the territory of present-day Slovenia from Carinthia and the Rhineland and settled in Trieste, Gorizia, Ljubljana, Maribor and Ptuj. The first verifiable mention of their settlement refers to Ljubljana or, rather, its **synagogue** in the early 13th century. References to Jews in Maribor, Ptuj, Celje and Slovenj Gradec can be found somewhat later, in the first half of the 14th century. At a still later date, sources mention Jews in Slovenska Bistrica.

The constantly strained relations between the native population and the Jews underwent a considerable change in the second half of the 15th century, when the Inner Austrian provincial estates demanded from Emperor Frederick III (in return for monetary compensation) that he banish the Jews from Carinthia and Styria. His son and heir to the throne, Maximilian I, finally yielded to the pressure and issued the edict of 18 March 1496, which not only held the Jews accountable for the eruption, spread and consequences of contagious diseases, but also accused them of so-called host desecration, the killing of Christian children and the poisoning of wells.

Synagogue (gr. *synagogē*) • a Jewish place of gathering, a community centre where people pray, study and meet. In modern communities, a synagogue also includes a room for religious school and a library.

Jewish settlers in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy earned their livelihood as merchants trading in wine, wood, horses etc., with their partners scattered around the greater part of the Balkans, the central Austrian provinces, Hungary and northern Italy. In the 15th century, Jews from Maribor and Ljubljana established an especially lucrative trade with Venice, from whence they imported various kinds of commodities, silk, spices, precious stones and gold. Apart from merchants, sources also mention seal makers, goldsmiths, medical practitioners and landowners.

The biggest and most influential medieval Jewish community in the Slovenian territory was in Maribor, which is also confirmed by a fair number of documents kept in the Regional Archives Maribor. These documents contain the first mention of the synagogue in Maribor, which dates back to 1429.

We cannot provide any original images of the synagogue in present-day Židovska ulica in Maribor, but the recently renovated building gives a sense of what its ancient predecessor looked like.

Photo: Bojan Nedok, (c) Sinagoga Maribor.

Even though the Jewish community in Maribor was younger than the community in Ptuj, the memory of it is much stronger, mostly thanks to a long line of generations of the Marpurgo family, whose many members even had contacts with Florentine bankers. Yet, despite their bustling trade activities and extensive connections, medieval Jewish quarters have left only a faint mark on Slovenian towns. The reason for this was the relatively small number of Jewish families and their dispersed settlement pattern. In other words, Jews in Slovenian towns were not limited to individual quarters from which **ghettos** would later emerge, but to individual houses and streets that later obtained the name "Jewish" street, alley or road. In any event, every such designation required special consent.

Ghetto • The term "ghetto" can be traced back to the establishment of a Jewish quarter in Venice in 1516. This was the first case of officially sanctioned segregation of the Jews in Europe (although Jewish quarters existed already before). In the 16th and 17th centuries, the practice spread across Europe, as local and state authorities ordered the creation of ghettos for Jews in some of what were then the biggest European cities, for instance in Frankfurt, Rome and Prague. The idea was to put the Jewish population under strict regulation.

Through time, the concept of the ghetto and its characteristics changed considerably. From a "Jewish quarter," the area of a city traditionally inhabited by Jews, to an ethnically homogenous and, as a rule, unruly and poor segregated area that can be found in many cities of the world today. Throughout history, ghettos were places of poverty and exclusion. A wall, exacerbating the exclusion, usually surrounded ghettos. By the end of the 19th century, Jewish ghettos were being abolished and the walls torn down. The regime of ghettoisation, the segregation of the Jewish from the non-Jewish population, was revived by Nazi Germany. During WWII, Nazi Germany established its own system of Jewish ghettos in Eastern Europe, aiming to control, segregate, terrorise and exploit the Jews. In German-occupied Poland alone, the Nazis established at least 1,000 ghettos. During World War II, the Germans concentrated the municipal and sometimes regional Jewish population in the ghettos, thus separating Jewish communities from the non-Jewish population and from other Jewish communities. The first such ghetto was established in Piotrków Trybunalski, Poland in 1939. The biggest was the Warsaw ghetto, with more than 400,000 inhabitants. Some ghettos existed for only a few days, others for months or years. Living conditions were terrible also due to malnutrition, unbearable hygienic standards, violence and disease. With the implementation of the "Final solution" in 1942, the ghettos were eliminated. The residents were either shot or deported to extermination camps.

A fresco from St Martin's Church in Martjanci, dated to the end of the 14th century, shows a Jew spitting at Jesus Christ. The image demonstrated the established myth about Jews, the murderers of Christ.
Photo: Boris Hajdinjak.

This crucial event pushed the Jews to the margins of the Slovenian provinces, where they remained until the end of the 18th century. The restoration of the Jewish community in Slovenian territory was made possible only with the modernisation of the economy, which slowly but eventually also reached Prekmurje. Thus, in 1778, Lendava, too, recorded its first fourteen Jewish settlers. Then, in the middle and the second half of the 19th century, a fair number of Jewish families settled in Beltinci and Murska Sobota.

Most of them engaged in trade, and there were also many innkeepers and butchers. As well-connected dealers, they first purchased honey, hides, cattle, feathers and linen cloth from villagers and later sold them to wholesalers in bigger towns. From the end of the 18th century onwards, they could also rent and work the land, and many even became landowners. They also controlled a major share of the cattle trade.

Given the above, it is little wonder that some contemporaries labelled Murska Sobota the "Jewish nest" or the beginning of "Jewish dominion." The latter supposedly reached as far as Budapest, which in the most fervent anti-Semitic discourse was dubbed "Judapest."

In the early 1930s, the situation turned from bad to worse. This was primarily due to developments in Germany, from whence the news spread about the expropriation and persecution of the Jews. However, the major cause for alarm was the changing political climate in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Here, we are referring both to the change that followed the death of King Alexander in 1934, who was regarded as a patron of the Jews in Yugoslavia, and to specific legislation that in many ways imitated the Nuremberg Laws in Germany, compelling some Jews to convert to Christianity. The latter process was especially characteristic of the last years before the war, when even Slovenian newspapers would feature articles portraying Jews as swindlers, traitors to Jesus and, indeed, a misfortune for the "Slovenian nation."

Just about that time, during the 1930s, **Erika Fürst**, our main informant, was born as the second child to a Jewish family in Murska Sobota. Her mother was the daughter of a successful merchant who ran a store with his wife in a village some ten kilometres from Murska Sobota. Before she married Erika's father, who was a transporter, she worked as a cashier at her father's shop. Erika had one sister, and the family of four led an ordinary life in Murska Sobota.

When Prekmurje came under Hungarian rule in 1941, the then ten-year-old Erika attended primary school. At the end of 1943 she felt like an ordinary girl, no different from her friends at school. After 1943, however, her life and the life of her family began to change. They were forced to wear yellow Jewish stars, just like their coreligionists in Germany and elsewhere in Europe:

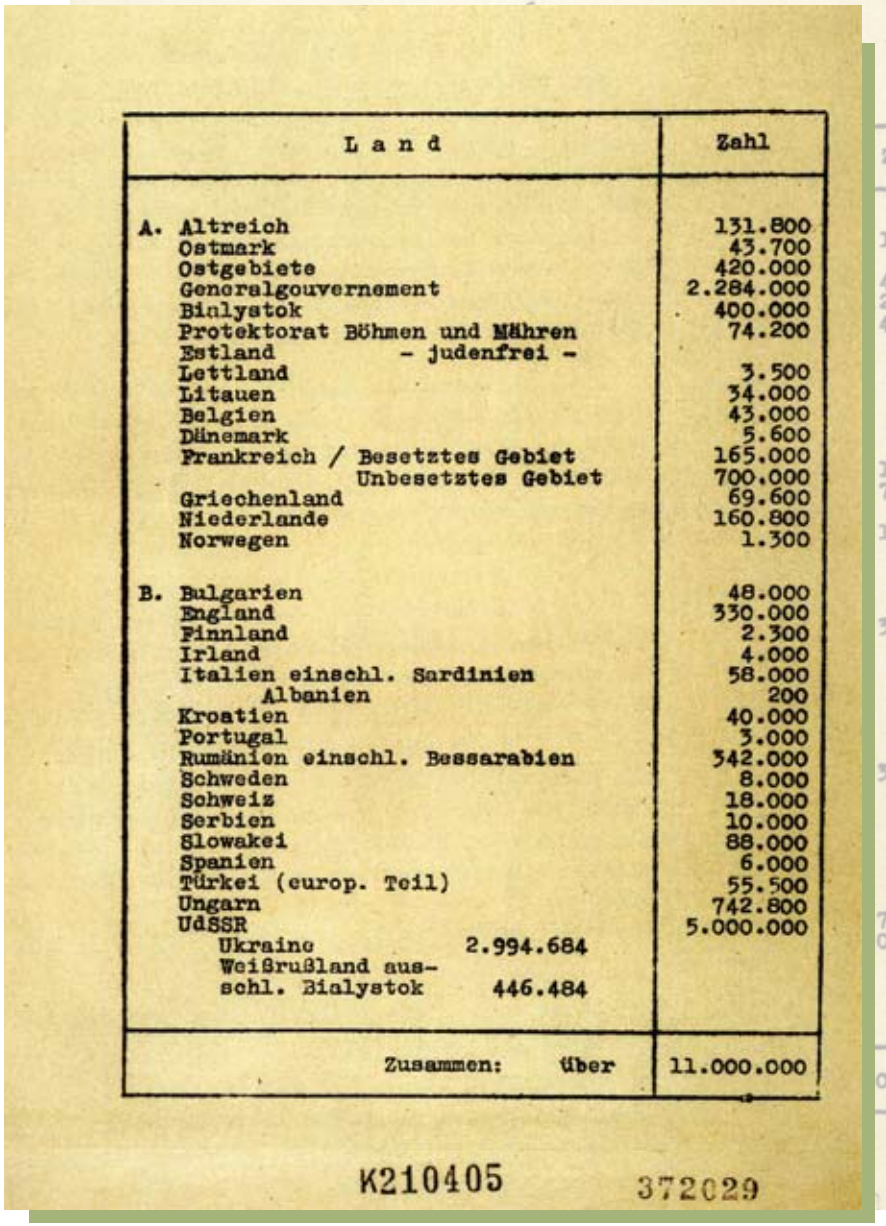
Children continued to go to school until autumn 1943, I think, when they ordered us to put on the Star of David. This identified us as Jews. Quite a few girls from school, friends, avoided me in the street because of the star I was forced to wear on my coat. I can say that Slovenian children weren't ashamed to walk down the street with me...

[Erika Fürst's account is not entirely accurate; in the Hungarian zone, the Jews were not forced to wear the Star of David until spring 1944; all quotations hereafter are from an interview with Erika Fürst recorded in August 2011]

Prekmurje's Jewish community, the largest in Slovenian territory, found itself in an increasingly precarious situation. Having been placed in the Hungarian occupation zone, the Jews in Prekmurje were initially spared the fate of their acquaintances and relatives from countries and provinces occupied by the Germans and the Germans' local allies. Namely, during much of the war Hungary refused to comply with the German demands to deport its Jews to concentration and extermination camps. For this very reason Jewish families in the Hungarian territory and areas occupied by the Hungarian army were initially not directly affected by decisions on the "Final solution."

Erika Fürst with her sister and aunt. Courtesy of Erika Fürst.

Erika Fürst's aunts. Courtesy of Erika Fürst.



Land		Zahl
A. Altreich		131.800
Ostmark		43.700
Ostgebiete		420.000
Generalgouvernement		2.284.000
Bialystok		400.000
Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren		74.200
Estland	- judenfrei -	
Lettland		3.500
Litauen		34.000
Belgien		43.000
Dänemark		5.600
Frankreich / Besetztes Gebiet		165.000
Unbesetztes Gebiet		700.000
Griechenland		69.600
Niederlande		160.800
Norwegen		1.300
B. Bulgarien		48.000
England		330.000
Finnland		2.300
Irland		4.000
Italien einschl. Sardinien		58.000
Albanien		200
Kroatien		40.000
Portugal		3.000
Rumänien einschl. Bessarabien		342.000
Schweden		8.000
Schweiz		18.000
Serbien		10.000
Slowakei		88.000
Spanien		6.000
Türkei (europ. Teil)		55.500
Ungarn		742.800
UdSSR		5.000.000
Ukraine	2.994.684	
Weißrußland aus-schl. Bialystok	446.484	
Zusammen: über		11.000.000

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A copy of a part of the original minutes of the Wannsee Conference containing the data on the Jewish population in Europe at the beginning of the 1940s.
Botsch 2008, 76.

As the hour of deportation drew near also in Prekmurje, Erika's family quickly tried to adapt to the new circumstances. Erika's father showed her and her sister a makeshift hiding place for small valuables in the family woodshed:

> *The woodshed was filled with wood, [and] there was a big hive in one corner. Underneath it father dug a hole... and told us there were some very important things [in it], and should anything happen to him and any of us might return, it would do at least for a start. Back then I didn't know what it was and what was in it. After the war mother told us it was a large storage jar. In this jar was a box and in this box were father's business licence and some jewellery... They ordered us not to tell this to anyone and for the first time that strange feeling came over me that something bad could happen to us.*

Indeed, barely a few weeks later, it was on a Monday in April, two members of the Hungarian armed police force and two state officials knocked on the door of Erika's house at five o'clock in the morning. The family was woken up and ordered to pack in thirty minutes and turn over all their possessions. Erika and her sister knew that it was going to be a long journey, so they wanted to say goodbye to their best friend living right next door:

> *My sister and I wanted to say goodbye to our best friend, and the gendarmes gave us permission. They were our next-door neighbours. We went there and took memory books with us, so she would put them away, and we said our goodbyes. Her father had already been imprisoned at a base in Hungary, and he took it the hardest. He put his arms around us, tears running down his face, and said: "Poor children, I'm afraid I know what waits for you there." Anyway, a few moments later we were back home.*

Erika's mother, scared out of her wits, was completely unable to pack, so Erika and her sister helped her. One of the officers said they should take as much food as possible. When they arrived at the synagogue in Murska Sobota, where they were being assembled, and they saw the German soldiers, members of the SS, Erika realised that the situation was very serious.

> *The very moment we saw the Germans, [...] with their shepherd dogs [...] we knew they were [...] far more bloodthirsty than the Hungarians* [Hungarian police]*.*
> *The Hungarians were somewhat more considerate, however you look at it.*

Šarika Horvat, Erika's acquaintance three years her senior told the Shoah Foundation that it was not only the dogs and the ruthlessness of the Germans that frightened her, it was the entire process. After being herded in front of the synagogue, they were forced to wait there for others to be driven from the nearby villages. In the meantime, the German soldiers repeatedly checked their presence, until *"300 or perhaps 400 people"* were gathered by the evening, *"packed like herrings in a barrel"* in the synagogue.

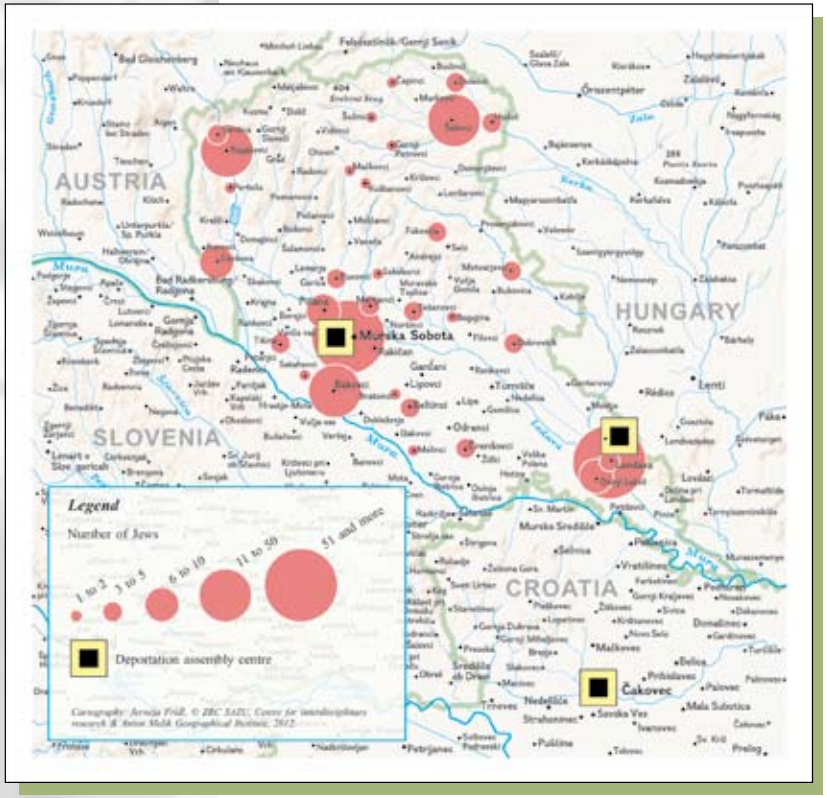
> *Then we were taken to Čakovec, some of us in wagons and the rest in a train. In Čakovec they locked us in a school building. We slept on the floor. We were held there for two days until they examined each and every one of us.*
> *There was a small room in which two officers were sitting. They called each one of us by name, examined us and asked whether we had any money or jewellery left. I was shaking with fear then, I was only 13 and alone with the aggressive officers, [who looked] threatening. They had a dog; they searched me from head to toe, thinking I was still hiding something. [...]*
> *They searched all of us. They happened to find a broken filling on Mr Hiršl Karman from Murska Sobota and they beat him up so badly that his face was all swollen up and covered with blood. Two days later they loaded us on cattle trains and took us to Nagykanizsa* [a/n where a deportation centre was].

The next morning all young men and girls were assembled in the courtyard. Unfortunately, this group also included Erika's father, who was sent back to collect his luggage, along with others. They were lined up and taken to the railway station. This was the last time she saw her father:

> *Everyone was crying. We were all locked in classrooms, watching out the window, waving to each other. I will never forget that look, that sad look on my father's face. They were taken to the railway station and to Auschwitz. That was the first transport to Auschwitz.*

Although some data differ, we can safely claim that in April 1944 about 330 Jews were driven from Lendava, Beltinci, Murska Sobota and nearby villages. That was the first wave of deportations that spared only Jews who had earned special merits for Hungary.

The first group of deportees was followed by a second one at the beginning of May, a third one on 20 October 1944, and in November the last and the smallest group was arrested after having escaped previous deportations based on the aforementioned "merits for the Hungarian nation." The course of the expulsions was more or less identical: early morning arrests were followed by rounding up, identity verification and transport to Croatia and Hungary, from whence the deportees were taken to Auschwitz.



The map shows Prekmurje Jews localities and deportation centres. Map design: Jerneja Fridl.

The concentration camp was a "true ordeal" for Erika:

> *They opened the wagons, German soldiers were shouting at us "alle raus," everybody out. We were not allowed to take anything – women not even a toiletries case, nothing. There was word going around that we would only be left with what we were wearing. So we put on some underwear, a blouse dress, a skirt to cover that, then a winter coat, and a trench coat over the winter coat. My sister and I looked older, stronger, and so we jumped off the wagons. There we were lined up by soldiers who were constantly shouting, "'faster, faster," and then we walked along the railway line until we reached an intersection [...].*

Similar developments were documented by a German soldier. The photograph was first published in a book written by two concentration camp survivors, Ota Kraus and Erich Kulka, a little more than ten years after the war. They were among the first to refer to Auschwitz as the "Death Factory."

Mothers and children from a Hungarian transport. Auschwitz Album, (c) Yad Vashem.

Soon after her arrival during the selection process Erika found herself face to face with the infamous doctor Mengele, who performed experiments on people, preferably twins.

[He sent] elderly people, children and young mothers to the right [...], and the few of us who were fit to work went to the left. When we came up to Mengele, my sister and I were wearing the same clothes and we were of approximately the same height, though my sister was two years older than me; he asked my mother whether we were twins. Mother said no, we weren't. "How old are they?" She said 17 and 15, and added in German: "We want to work." Then he smiled like a weasel and said, "Left." That's how we stayed alive and were not driven straight to the **crematorium.** *Only 34 women survived from the entire transport. I know that because we were lined up by fives in six rows, and because there were only four in the last one, instead of five.*

Crematorium • a facility intended for burning human remains; in German extermination camps cremating technology was used for burning corpses after gassing.

The horror upon the reception at the concentration camp was further exacerbated by dehumanisation, which Erika faced when she was stripped of all her personal belongings, including her clothes, and sent with others to the showers:

We were taken to a building where we were forced to strip naked, then they cut our hair, and we left our shoes and all our clothes on a pile. My mother kept a family photo and an SS woman pulled it out of her hands, saying: "What's this, you won't be needing this," and tore it up before our eyes. We went to the showers. The water was lukewarm and we were cold, because our heads were shaved bald. We came out on the other side and, of course, we had no towels, nothing to dry ourselves off with. We were given grey dresses; no socks, no underwear, only dresses and shoes. My sister and I had rather small feet, so the SS woman allowed us to take our own shoes. My mother was given a different pair; some were given wooden shoes.

It is quite possible that photographers continued to follow the new arrivals, recording their transformation from terrified and tired newcomers into increasingly expressionless concentration camp prisoners.

The just-shaved Hungarian women were forced to wait for hours to be distributed clothes and sent to the barracks. Auschwitz Album, (c) Yad Vashem.

Shivering with cold, dressed in rags and shaved *"to zero,"* Erika as well as other children and women from Murska Sobota realised after a few days that it would be difficult to survive in the new environment. The peak of the initial systematic dehumanisation was when the prisoner was tattooed with a camp number.

The latter is also recounted in the story of Art Spiegelman's father, who arrived in Auschwitz in the dead of winter.

Erika and the rest of the survivors were sent to women's Camp A and settled in the barracks. There they had their first premonition of what was waiting for them. Erika was hungry, thirsty, terrified and shivering with cold. She suffered terribly. She was given scraps of food, a piece of bread and a small tin plate of soup. The bunks in the barracks looked like *"shelves."*

Then began the long roll calls or "appells," beatings and hard labour. Šarika took a few beatings as well, although children were less likely targets of physical punishment than older prisoners. Erika had a great problem getting used to the poor toilets and the fact that she could not go to the toilet when she needed to, but only when she was allowed to: *"There was one SS man making his rounds if you happened to be squatting for five minutes more."* On top of it all, she was extremely cold in the beginning, especially at night. Bedbugs were a terrible pest and kept her from sleeping at night: *"In the morning we all had our faces covered with blood. [...] After they moved us to Camp B [...], there were no bedbugs, but there were lice; only bedbugs are far worse than lice."* Sleepless nights alternated with days of slave labour:

> *We did hard work. We were loaded with bricks and forced to carry them in our hands several kilometres away. The road built with bricks from Auschwitz still stands today.*

For Erika, a girl of barely thirteen years at the time, life in the concentration camp was an even harder ordeal; on the other hand, it was precisely her youth that saved her life at a certain moment. After she was separated from her mother and sister, Erika had no one to talk to; however, in the barracks where she was transferred she was at least spared long roll calls. But there was plenty of work; it was, indeed, not as physically demanding, but still:

> *Bigger children were sent to a special room every day where we were to sort out wool. People brought all sorts of things to the camp, including heaps of wool. Not in skeins, but wool of various colours, to hide gold, and maybe some money. Our job was to spin these bales of wool into yarn of various colours. I worked with two Hungarian girls... and one day we found a gold ring and a pair of earrings in a yarn. The older girl put them away. Unfortunately, I never saw these girls again. They probably found that gold on them and took them to the crematorium*

This is roughly how more than one million Jewish and Romani children, women and men, as well as a considerable number of Russian prisoners, disappeared from Auschwitz and nearby extermination camps. A million... It is impossible to imagine such a number, just as it is impossible to think how many had died just before the liberation or during the evacuation of the concentration camp. The latter is one of the saddest and cruellest episodes of this story.

Although the German army was in great disarray by January 1945, that did not deter it from undertaking preparations for the so-called "Todesmarsch," the death march. Erika made a split-second decision that she would not go, she did not want to leave her sister and mother behind. She jumped into the snow and remained hidden until the rest of the prisoners were gone. On either side they were escorted by armed soldiers with dogs:

> *I waited [...] there, [and then] headed for the barracks where my mother was, and hid under her bunk. The Germans were still coming back, literally tearing the female prisoners from the bunks and shooting them...*

And how does Vladek Spiegelman remember that moment?

Meanwhile Erika took care of her mother and sister. They were weak and sickly and, between the Germans' departure and the arrival of the Russian liberators, she kept them alive by searching for food and clothes in the abandoned camp:

> *[My] sister and mother were unable to stand on their feet. [...]. I walked around the storage facilities with other prisoners [to see if] the Germans left any food. [...] We collected water from the pool [...] in which the Germans used to bathe during summer [... and] I found flour in one storage [...]. I put it in my scarf and later made žganci [a dish made of buckwheat flour cooked in water] with it. [...] In another storage [...] I also found [a tin of] cabbage. The tin was [too] big to lift, so I rolled [it] [...] to our barracks.*

Survivors of the Buchenwald concentration camp;
the camp was liberated on 16 April 1945.
www.history.com/photos/holocaust-concentration-camps/photo10.

That tin kept all three alive until the arrival of the Russians, who, as Erika recounts, came to the camp ten days after the Germans evacuated it. They were wearing

> *white sheets [...], as camouflage, and some female prisoners were kissing their feet, throwing their arms around them, and some of us were terrified. We couldn't tell whether they were really Russians [...], [until] they began to speak in Russian. They were shocked by the sight of us, the state we were in, nothing but skin and bone [...]*

Survivors from Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, after liberation in 1945. (c) Yad Vashem. www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/index.asp.

The Russians took them to Auschwitz and settled them in the barracks of former guards and soldiers, where they could recover some of their strength and begin to make preparations for their return home. Since the war was still going on, the journey to Murska Sobota was not possible until the beginning of May. And even then they could only go as far as Krakow and from there through Prague to Budapest.

Auschwitz, children after liberation in 1945. (c) Yad Vashem. www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/resource_center/index.asp.

> *Then [...] my mother decided that we would go home with a Romanian transport [...], there appeared to be many Romanians, and they were coming to collect their relatives in Krakow [...] The first transport [...] was Romanian. [...] The journey was long, hard, we rode in open wagons until we reached the Czech border, I think, [...] then through Prague [...] to Budapest. At the Budapest railway station we were awaited by people from the Jewish municipality; they took us to some school again and gave us food [...]*

In Budapest an international Jewish organisation (it is impossible to say with certainty which one it was) offered to organise their emigration to the United States:

> *For people like us, the Jewish community would arrange a journey to America. But my sister and I wouldn't hear of it, because our father's last words were: "See you back home." We were convinced that he was waiting for us.*

Therefore, instead of going to America, they went back to the Budapest railway station:

> *We boarded an open wagon [...] stacked with potatoes, and on that train [...] we then continued to Szombathely, where [...] the Jewish municipality [...] arranged [...] for us to sleep at some gentleman's house. There we could take a bath, wash and then [...] continue [...] towards Körmend on foot.*

From there to Prosenjakovci in Prekmurje they were frequently stopped by Russian soldiers who took them for refugees. In Prosenjakovci they were awaited by their father's acquaintance, who took them to Murska Sobota, where they found everything in a shambles:

> *One barn and one cellar were destroyed, only the woodshed was still standing. The house was occupied by the partisan army. The flooring was torn out, the electric wiring likewise. The partisans slept on the floor, on hay. Upon our arrival, they emptied the house immediately. But the house was a complete mess, [so] we stayed a few days [...] with a family in Murska Sobota.*
> *My mother was granted a loan, I can't imagine on what basis; she had the house painted and new electrical installations fixed in the kitchen and one room. We slept on the floor dressed in [...] what we were wearing upon our return from the concentration camp. [...] With nothing. [A former] farmhand brought a small pot of lard, neighbours pitched in a bit of flour, and so little by little we were returning back to life.*

At that time and until summer, twenty-five other inhabitants of Sobota and twenty-three Jews from Lendava returned home, like Erika, her sister and mother. Together with the survivors from other towns and villages, sixty-five or a little less than twenty per cent of those who had been deported a year before returned to their homes. According to the data presently available, 387 persons, including Erika's father, died in concentration camps or as a result of forced labour and the death march. Auschwitz claimed the highest number of deaths. Therefore, after waiting for a while, Erika, her mother and sister assumed that he might have died there as well, even though the circumstances of his death remained unclear. Not least because her mother's sisters had had such a premonition; they had met him at least once on their return to Birkenau from work at Auschwitz and said that his feet were very swollen and covered with blisters, which was why he was most likely sent to the gas chamber.

After the war Erika nevertheless wrote to the Red Cross in Buchenwald, having heard some rumours that her father had died in that camp. The highest survival rate was, in fact, among those who had been chosen to work in other camps, while only six returned from Auschwitz camps, one man and six women.

Holocaust survivors from Prekmurje soon after their return home.
Courtesy of Erika Fürst.

As later became clear, very few men returned home. A little more than one-fifth, statistics suggest. The survival rate for the Jewish community in Prekmurje was higher for women, most of whom left Prekmurje soon after the war. They mainly migrated to Palestine and the US, and some moved to other parts of Slovenia. Erika's sister moved with her husband to Maribor, where she died not long afterwards from a bizarre accident in which a dress she was ironing caught fire and the flames spread to the ironing board...

After 1945, Erika, her mother and her sister tried to lead a life as normal as they possibly could. Already at the end of May, the girls returned to school to complete the validation process: first they had courses and then exams. It was the first winter that she would *"go to school without stockings"* and in a knee-long coat.

> *Then my uncle gave me a pair of men's knee socks and some boots [...] probably my aunt's. I had two aunts in Martjanci, and people in the village would take a lot of things and then give them back. Unfortunately, this was not possible in Sobota.*

She clearly recalls that she had terrible problems concentrating, that she could not remember anything. What she learned in the evening, she had forgotten by morning. Evidently, the subconscious need to forget the past year's horrors also began to eat away at her newly acquired knowledge. Erika's problems with memorising school lessons were shared by the majority of survivors who sought "comfort" in conscious oblivion.

There are several reasons for this phenomenon, but the survivors have most often mentioned fear that something similar might happen again and the desire to forget the horrors they had faced as soon as possible. The number of those who resorted to hatred was, according to survivors' testimonies, somewhat lower. Regardless of how survivors dealt with the consequences of their experience, most of them left Slovenia and Europe. Apart from the US, Australia and Great Britain, their most frequently mentioned destination was Palestine or Israel from 1948 onwards. As data suggest, nearly two-thirds of all Jews who left Prekmurje forever after 1945 migrated to the newly established Jewish state. In the light of this, the destruction of the Jewish community in northeastern Slovenia was almost complete. More than 85 per cent were killed during the war and an additional ten per cent left soon afterwards. Indeed, there were not even enough Jews in Murska Sobota and Lendava to restore the religious community.

Physical extermination by the Nazis was followed by the **nationalisation** of Jewish property by the new Socialist state. This had nothing to do with religious or racial background – only with property. Those Jews who did not have Yugoslav citizenship upon the outbreak of war were expropriated as German nationals, which was particularly painful for them. Even though they had gone to great lengths to obtain citizenship that was never granted to them due to strong local anti-Semitism, the Jews were expropriated after the war because they had not been citizens of the pre-war Kingdom of Yugoslavia. But the worst of it all was that they were officially equated with the nationality of their persecutors.

Nationalisation • was the process of socialising private property that took place after World War II in socialist countries and in the territory of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In this way, most industry, much landed property and the food processing and transport industries were brought under state ownership.

This is another reason why there is absolutely no justification for post-war courts to have "overlooked" the fact that the majority of Jews were, indeed, "Yugoslav citizens of Slovenian nationality and Jewish religion" and whose documents, like Erika's, stated that they were Slovenes.

No less striking is the modest scale on which the memory of Jewish victims was honoured in the first decade after the war. One of the first reports to appear in the *Obmurski tednik,* for instance, was a short announcement that the "the Jews from Sobota, too" were driven to concentration camps. And, while the author of the announcement also gave an incorrect estimate of 117 Holocaust victims, he did devote more attention to Ali Kardoš, one of the main instigators of the resistance movement in the province. It seems that there was little room for individual Jews and their stories during socialism unless they appeared in the role of revolutionaries.

The post-war attitude towards Jews was also manifested by the demolition of the synagogue in Murska Sobota. The City People's Committee of Murska Sobota purchased the building for a modest sum of money in mid-1949 and five years later decided to demolish it. The future was brighter for the synagogue in Lendava, which was renovated in the 1990s and presently serves as a performance venue.

The synagogue in Murska Sobota. Photo: J. Kodrič.

The synagogue in Lendava in 2010. Photo: Aleš Topolinjak, (c) Sinagoga Maribor.

The synagogue in Beltinci was subject to the most persistent process of erasing historical memory. A simple family house converted into a synagogue in 1859 apparently met with the same destiny as the local Jewish cemetery. After the last burial took place there in 1943, that of the Jew Jan Ebenšpanger, "the Jewish cemetery in Beltinci was plundered to the core. Not a single monument has been preserved," as Bojan Zadravec states.

Until 2009, no other memorial had been built in the memory of the Holocaust in Prekmurje. Quite the contrary: by setting up a monument to the victims of Fascism among the tombstones in the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas in 1947, the municipality had, deliberately or not, caused the memory of the deportation and killing of the majority of Prekmurje Jews to fade even faster. In a similar way, the worst consequences of the war on Prekmurje soil were obscured in the teaching curriculum, due to which new generations of the inhabitants of Prekmurje, as well as other Slovenians, have until recently lived in the belief that the Holocaust took place only somewhere far away.

"In memoriam: victims of Fascism 1941–1945." Inscription on a monument set up in the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas near Lendava. Photo: Marko Zaplatil, (c) Arzenal.

At least two generations have lived in the belief that gas chambers and forced labour were part of German but not also Slovenian history. In recent years, this memory is slowly being revived: most often through the agency of teachers and professors who help their pupils explore the Jewish cemetery in Dolga vas or encourage them to explore the remnants of the Jewish culture on their own. Slovenian history is, moreover, still oblivious to the destiny of the Roma in Lower Carniola and Prekmurje. Some from the former location were shot by the partisans and the majority from the latter were driven to labour camps by the Hungarians.

Nothing has, likewise, been heard about people who aided Jews and were thus recognised as the **Righteous among the nations**, as the few brave individuals who were willing to risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones by hiding Jewish children, forging their documents and trying in various ways to save them. Among the tens of thousands whose names are inscribed in the park of the famous Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem there are also seven Slovenes.

Righteous among the nations • In 1963 Yad Vashem, World Center for Holocaust Research, Education, Documentation and Commemoration, initiated a worldwide project to pay tribute to the Righteous among the nations, that is, non-Jews who in the time of Nazi rule, under threat of death and terror, risked their lives to save Jewish children, men and women.

During the Holocaust the plight of the Jews met mostly either indifference or hostility. Most often, people stood by watching as their former neighbours were rounded up, taken away and eventually killed. Some collaborated with the perpetrators and many benefited from the expropriation of the Jews property.

There were, however, a small number of people who were so disturbed by the horrors of these events and by the elimination of all human feeling, that the decided to stand up against it. Some acted out of political, ideological or religious convictions; others were not idealists, but merely human beings who cared about the people around them. In many cases they never planned to become rescuers and were totally unprepared for the moment in which they had to make such a far-reaching decision. In their accounts there was usually a “turning point” that set them in action: witnessing either deportation, murder or confiscation. In many cases it was the Jews who turned to the non-Jews for help. It has to be emphasised that the rescued Jews should not be viewed as passive in this process, but rather as taking active part in negotiating the hardships of the total annihilation of their rights and in resisting the Nazi regime. The price that rescuers had to pay for their action differed from one country to another. In Eastern Europe, the Germans executed not only the people who sheltered Jews, but their entire families as well; some of the Righteous Among the Nations were incarcerated in camps and killed.

Forms of help by the Righteous can be categorised in four different types:
Hiding Jews in the rescuers' home or on their property. The rescuers would provide a secluded part of their home or arrange for a dugout under houses or barns. Living conditions in dark places were harsh. The rescuers, whose lives were under threat, would provide what little food they could and tend to their needs as best they could. Sometimes the hiding Jews were presented as non-Jews, as relatives or adopted children. Jews were also hidden in apartments in cities, and children were placed in convents with the nuns concealing their true identity.
False papers and false identities. Assuming the identity of non-Jews required false papers and assistance in establishing an existence under an assumed name. In this case, rescuers were forgers or officials who facilitated false documents, for example fake baptism certificates.
Smuggling and assisting Jews to escape. This entailed smuggling Jews out of ghettos and prisons or helping them cross borders into unoccupied countries or into areas where persecution was less intense, (Switzerland, Italian-controlled areas or Hungary before the German occupation in March 1944).
Rescuing children. Parents faced agonising dilemmas of separating from their children and giving them away to increase their chances of survival. In many cases individuals decided to take in a child; in other cases and in some countries, especially Poland, Belgium, Holland and France, underground organisations tried to find homes for children and to provide food and medication.
(Adapted from: http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/about.asp)
So far Yad Vashem has recognised Righteous from 44 countries and nationalities, among them also seven Slovenes: Uroš Žun, a solicitor from Radovljica, who saved the lives of sixteen girls; Andrej Tumpej, a parish priest who saved the Belgrade Jewish family Kalef; Zora Pičulin, who saved a baby whose parents were deported; Ivan Breskvar, who helped save Jewish children in Croatia; Ljubica and Ivan Župančič; Olga Rajšek Neuman and Martina Levec Marković.
Very little has been known so far about these people. However, let us mention the story of Father Tumpej, which has also been told in the film *Three Promises* (Centropa 2011). Although he dedicated his life to helping others, to this day his most-remembered deeds remain saving five Jewish women in WWII Serbia. For them he arranged false papers and identities. Two of these girls were discovered seeking work in Germany and all traces led to father Tumpej. He was arrested and interrogated by the Gestapo and released only after months in prison. This was a time of great fear for the other three Jewish women, Antonija Kalef and her daughters Matilda and Rahela.
Father Tumpej knew he was breaking the law that prohibited and sanctioned any kind of help to Jews. In spite of the danger, he arranged for false papers, using Antonija's maiden name, Ograjenšek.
"From now on, your surname is Ograjenšek. You, Mrs. Kalef, now go by your original Slovenian name Antonija Ograjenšek. Matilda, you are now Lidija, Rahela, you are Breda." Thus father Tumpej became their saviour and lifelong friend. Rahela Kalef decided after the war to keep her new name, as a sign of gratitude.
After the war, father Tumpej continued his philanthropic journey, asking to be relocated to Skopje after the earthquake in 1963. He stayed there until retirement in 1971. He was a nationally conscious Slovene and a dedicated Yugoslav, deeply attached to the Balkans. He is buried in the Belgrade military cemetery Topčider.
(Adapted from Jure Aleksič, Mladina 21, 28 May 2001, http://www.mladina.si/95997/se-en-slovenski-schindler/; Marjan Toš, "Slovenski Schindler iz Beograda," 7 March 2012, http://www.7dni.com/v1/default.asp?kaj=2&id=5756235)

The deeds of other Slovenian Righteous are waiting to be rediscovered.

Much unlike anti-Semitism ... as hatred and distrust of the Jews has been preserved almost intact. This is, not least, evidenced by events that have taken place over the last two decades in Slovenia... including Prekmurje.

Traces of black swastikas on tombstones in the Jewish part of the Ljubljana Žale cemetery and red paint on monuments in Dolga vas may have disappeared, but not the realisation that in Slovenia, as elsewhere in Europe, hatred has outlived mercy.

Photo above: Fotodokumentacija Dela; photo below: Marko Zaplatil, (c) Arzenal.

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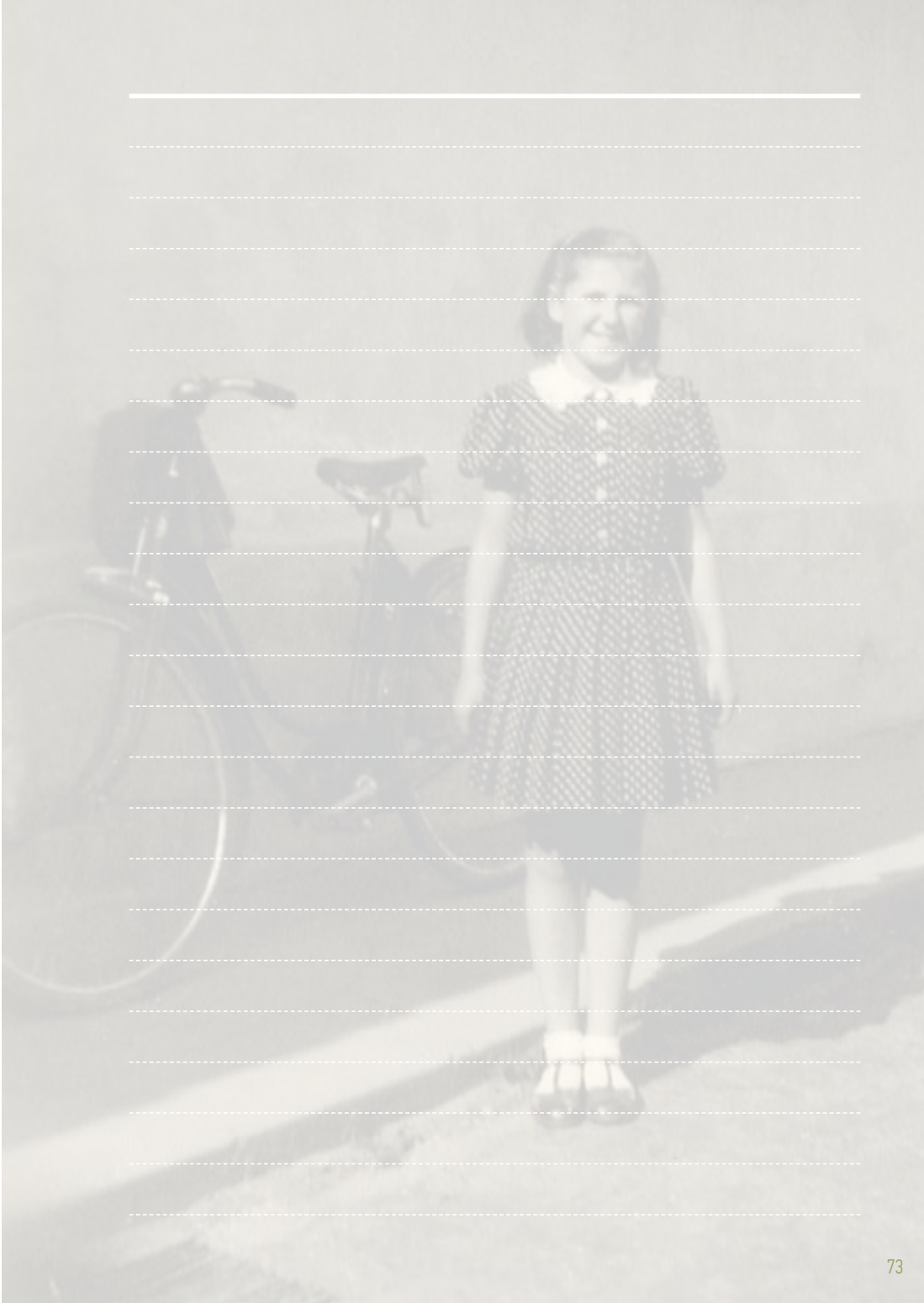

THE LAND OF SHADOWS

The memory of the expulsion and disappearance of the Jewish community in Prekmurje

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