HUMAN AFFAIRS 29, 95–107, 2019 DOI: 10.1515/humaff-2019-0009

VISIBLE AS PEOPLE, YET INVISIBLE AS JEWS[1]

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Abstract: Based on their fates, it is possible to categorise the Jewish population of Slovakia from 1938 to 1945 into four groups (which can be further subdivided). The most extensive group were the prisoners in the Nazi concentration camps and labour camps in Slovakia. They were followed by "legal Jews", hidden Jews, "Aryan" Jews, who used false "Aryan" documents in the mainstream society, and last but not least, fighters in partisan units or allied armies. This study analyzes the way of survival of the "Aryan Jews" following the materials gained by oral history and information from professional literature and memoirs. I focused on preparation, way of obtaining false documents, life in the mainstream society, and hidden emotions when confronted with captured Jews. Although physically "nothing had happened" to most of them, the Aryan Jews were exposed to constant stress; psychological impacts of "the life in disguise" accompanied them a long time after liberation.

Key words: Aryan Jews; preparations; false papers; life in disguise; children; identity change; stress impacts

Introduction

Not far from the funeral home in Bratislava's Neological cemetery there stands a small memorial. The Slovak and Hebrew texts inform us that it was built in the "eternal memory of our brothers and sisters who perished in the concentration camps between 1942 and 1945".[2] Numerous pebbles, placed there by cemetery visitors, testify that remembrance of the period and its victims remains relevant despite the passage of decades. Only recently did I realize that this wording identifies the Holocaust with the murder and suffering in the concentration camps, but leaves out the many Jews who faced hell elsewhere.[3]

[1] This article was written with the support of VEGA 2/0022/17 The War-time Slovak State and the Holocaust in Current Social Discourse (An ethnological perspective).

[2] The only difference between them is that the Hebrew gives the years as 5702–5705, based on the Jewish calendar.

[3] Such a view overlooks the thousands of people murdered outwith the concentration camps, particularly in the "bloodlands" (see Snyder, 2013) or in Slovakia in Kremnička, Nemecká and other places.

Based on their fates, it is possible to categorise the Jewish population of Slovakia from 1938 to 1945 into several groups (which can be further subdivided):[4]

a) the most extensive group were the **prisoners** in the Nazi concentration camps and labour camps in Slovakia (Sereď, Nováky, Vyhne) or in ghettos.
b) **"legal Jews"**, were identified by either a large or small yellow star and faced numerous restrictions. They could use their own names and identities in the localities where they lived.
c) **"hidden Jews"**, like "submarines" they tried to stay invisible and keep their existence a secret from both the state and the people around them. As few people as possible were to know about their hiding place. They could wind up in situations where they needed to prove they were not Jews using their "assumed identity".
d) **"Aryan" Jews[5],** chose a strategy that could be characterised as "being visible as people but invisible as Jews." Using false "Aryan" papers, they had to adapt to the "official" environment, at least from the outside. Their mask could not even be taken off when they directly encountered the suffering of other Jews.[6]
e) **Fighters** in partisan units and in the Soviet or Western allied armies.

From the broad range of options on offer in this period, I focus on the category of "Aryan Jews". I was attracted to this subject because the phenomenon of being saved through having a "Christian identity" has never been researched and because of my cousin's story (older than me by one generation). He never talked about the Holocaust, probably due to the age gap between us. He opened up only once and only very briefly recounted what he had experienced and had to face to survive as a shocked 17-year-old boy. Unlike his parents and brother, he had ignored his transport notice. When he saw the guardsmen coming, he jumped out of the window, stopped the first taxi he saw and fled as fast and as far as he could afford. In the end, he managed to get to Banská Bystrica, where his father's sister lived with her family. He acquired false documents and was employed as a lumberjack so he was unlikely to be checked by the police. He tried to adapt to his surroundings. He said, "all of my colleagues cursed the Jews, I cursed the most. And when the Russians arrived, I told them I was not Pavol Slávik but that I was a Jew…" At first, this story shocked and upset me. As I

[4] I consider these terms a temporary solution and expect that they will be further defined over time. It is important to bear in mind that the categorisations were not definitive, but could change over time. Individuals often moved from one group to another (re-categorised) as a consequence of their own decisions or government regulations. Some could even become "perpetrators".

[5] Hilberg (2004) used the term "Christian Jews" to designate Jews who had been baptised or Jews living in mixed marriages.

[6] Hilberg devoted only one sentence to the people who saved themselves on the "Aryan side" using false documents in a section entitled "Those who Survived": "Almost everywhere, some Jews were able to arrange false documents and a false identity" (Hilberg, 2004, p. 170). Researchers have dealt with this issue mainly on the basis of material from Poland. In particular, I recall a monograph by Malgorzata Melchior (2004). There are also interesting findings in studies conducted by Melrose (2005) and Fleischner (2005). The different situations in occupied Poland and Slovakia were reflected in the different relationships between the majority population and Jews, which explains why this knowledge may provide inspiration in the Slovak context, but cannot be used as comparative material. Within ethnology (and as far as I know in other scientific disciplines) no-one has dealt with this issue in Slovakia.

get older, I am more and more impressed by the presence of mind that helped him survive. My present attempt to process the subject might also be considered a delayed apology for not having understood his story.

I used testimonies originating from the "Oral History" project as the basis for my analysis: destinies of those who survived the Holocaust. This collaborative research was conducted in Slovakia from 1995 to 1997 and resulted in 148 testimonies being gathered (for more details, see Bútora, 2002; Salner, 1997; Vrzgulová, 2002; 2016). The value of the research comes from it having been conducted over a relatively short period of time and focusing primarily on a clearly defined sample and specific period, from 1938 to 1945. The researchers also used the same methodology to conduct the interviews. Another important supplementary source of information is memoirs in which the authors describe their own experiences as well as the physical and emotional problems of those who survived thanks to their false identities, which enabled them to exist within mainstream society.

During the initial stages of the project, it seemed that Jews who had survived thanks to false documents represented a unique case. This was no doubt partly because we used snowball sampling. The majority of survivors from Slovakia stayed in large groups during the Holocaust (in the concentration and work camps, the army, partisan units) and they were united after liberation through their social experiences. When asked if they knew of other witnesses, prisoners from Auschwitz or other camps, people from Nováky or Sereď, soldiers from the 6th Labour Battalion or former soldiers and partisans usually gave the names of people who had shared similar experiences. However, this approach made it difficult to identify those had lived illegally. They had not been part of a group. On the contrary, their survival was based on individual or family help. After liberation, the "real survivors" often looked down on them with a certain kind of disrespect because "nothing had happened" to them. Listening to their stories revealed the fact that living under a "stranger's identity" meant a different, but not a simple or painless, form of salvation. Their suffering might have been less visible but it was no less difficult. Having acquired more testimonies, it became obvious that this type of salvation was not as unusual as it might seem at first glance.[7] The testimonies show that the effort to "stay invisible" often resulted in cabin fever caused by isolation and limited social contact (see Fischer, 2017; Klemperer, 1975).

The strategies of "Aryan" Jews required them to have many different attitudes. In harmony with their new identity, they needed to be seen at work and to spend their free time in public and they had to prove that they were part of mainstream society.[8] False documents provided more than just a new name. The owner acquired a cultural, ethnic or religious identity, one that may have only been known superficially up until then, but

[7] According to Israeli historian Robert Büchler, approximately 11,000 Jews in Slovakia, or a third of all survivors, were rescued from various hiding places, saved by their false documents (Büchler, 1988). They represented more than 10% of the witnesses in our sample. This view was initially adopted by the institutions that reviewed compensation claims for Holocaust victims. Claimants owned documents with false names and had no other legal proof of their history. Moreover, life "in disguise" was apparently idyllic: they had worked, received a salary and lived…. Only later did those around them and the relevant authorities begin to understand their claims and the impact of their past way of life.

[8] The "techniques" used in Bratislava are described in memoirs by, for example, Cohn and Ciaccio (2001) or Stern (2005).

that had definitely not been part of their life before. Contact with others risked betrayal, causing permanent fear and stress. In public, they were continually at risk of police checks. There was a danger of being betrayed by accidental encounters with Jewish or non-Jewish acquaintances. They lived in fear of losing their composure, or that their lack of familiarity with "standard" models of behaviour would reveal their identity. The mosaic of information acquired illustrates the complex situations they faced, be they one-off occurrences or repeated events.

The preparatory stage

Exiting into illegality was sometimes a spontaneous reaction, as in the previously mentioned case of my cousin, but more often, it was a planned solution. Not everybody found the courage to do it. Some people underestimated the existing dangers, others were afraid of being punished for breaking the law, or were unable to find a suitable hiding place or the necessary documents. Others rejected the solution for moral reasons,

> *Basically there were a few possibilities, such as perhaps baptism certificates that could be acquired in Eastern Slovakia, a lot could be arranged. But my father refused to do it. And as for the children…it was never an option. How would they behave when we didn't know how to relate to our baptism certificates or Aryan papers? It was not...it could not be an option for me, for my brother or other family members, not on my mother's side, nor my father's side, not at all (*Aw 1924).[9]

Preparing for life with a new identity (real or fictional) meant getting used to the facts associated with that identity. Children also had to cope with different situations:

> *When the danger [of deportation] came, the family started to make preparations for a potential escape and thanks to our good friends, neighbours, for example Mr. G. from a neighbouring house, we acquired false documents that are just like today's identity cards. In fact, we were preparing to use them in hiding. Then my name changed and I became Miklóš Vološťuk. I, as a five year old boy, had to learn the names of all my relatives, the Vološťuks, I did not know them but, just in case, I had to be able to talk about them. Basically, I had to acquire a new identity as a child and my mother prepared me for that…I knew….everything was explained to me…I could not say I was H, I could not say I was a Jew, I had to say I am Vološťuk Miklóš and I had to cross myself and I had to learn the Lord's prayer by heart etc. I was trained to do it. As a six-year-old boy I could play, have fun and make friends, even kneel and cross myself when I heard the church bells ringing. And, hopefully, it is not inappropriate, but I even learnt how to pee in public and not reveal my true identity* (Hm 1937).

Eva Fleischner (2005) explored the identity of Jewish children who hid in Polish Catholic families. A Slovak parallel to what she learned is provided in the memoirs of well-known Slovak scientist Ján Vilček. He mentions, among other things, how he spent several months in a Catholic orphanage: "At eight I became a devoted Catholic, I prayed daily the way I had

[9] I identify the witnesses randomly with a capital letter, giving their gender (m-man, w-woman) and year of birth. The published extracts of the testimonies are authentic transcriptions of parts of the testimonies with minimal linguistic and grammatical editing.

been taught, and what is more, I assisted at Holy Mass in the orphanage chapel" (Vilček, 2016, p. 81).

He described the circumstances of his stay at the orphanage in an interview about the book:

> I was basically a Catholic at eight, I prayed daily – we had religious education every day. It caused no chaos in my soul, I was a child and I did not analyse my beliefs. And later…our family was not religious, we were secular Jews (Plavcová, 2018, p. 24).

False documents

A condition of being saved was having false documents, and these were sometimes checked. Our testimonies, just like any other memoir-related literature, include the many ways those who were endangered sought to obtain the necessary documents.[10]

Just like in the case of Mr. H, whose friends and acquaintances helped him by providing them real documents.

> *I lived in Bratislava and had Aryan papers which my very good friend Ľ.K. lent to me. I lived with them in Bratislava and stayed at many friends' and acquaintances' illegally. For some time we slept there together with a friend in a shop room, yes, we paid one hundred crowns a month to the owner to allow us to stay there, so I was not registered anywhere and in case there were checks I had documents stating I was Ľ.K., an Aryan. So I spoke fluent German and I had no trouble then* (Gm 1924).

> *I had no document at all but I travelled. It was quite risky because if they had caught me, I would have been headed for the nearest transport straight away. So this is another risk I took. I went to Zálužie to my uncle's but I told myself that I had to do something, because everybody there knew me and I could not hide there. It was impossible. So I made a deal with my wife, now she is my wife, but then she was still my fiancée, although she could not be my fiancée. No contact between Jews and Aryans was allowed, it was a crime. So we agreed that we had to acquire false documents. We agreed she would go to one of my friends who was also a member of the youth organisation I belonged to and she would ask him to lend or give us his documents. He had no problem giving us everything he had, his state citizenship, his birth certificate and his apprenticeship certificate. He lived in Malacky then and he worked there too. His name was Augustín Vinarsch. Written in German. Unfortunately, he was a bookbinder and I had never bound a book in my life but I became a bookbinder. Yes, and his labour book. Everybody had to have one since all employers were registered there? So I had those documents and went to Žilina with them. I went to the police station to register myself. I filled out an application and without any problems I got a stamp and I was registered in Žilina* (Em 1919).

Various forms of "home production" of the necessary documents became popular.

[10] Religious figures of many denominations played important roles because they baptised endangered Jews. Others issued false or blank baptism certificates which could be used to acquire other documents or in potential cases of police lustration. These have been described by witnesses and several priests. For more details, see Šimek, 2010; Očenášová-Štrbová et al., 2003.

So they taught me how to forge documents because they lived using false documents. And since I could draw quite well, I quickly mastered forgery techniques. There are, I don't know what it's called today, it was a kind of material, something like gum, gum material, foil. You had to draw on the foil, draw a stamp according to the original, copy the signature of the relevant clerk or make a negative and then print it, we had a colour substance, they had the colour substance, to print on the paper but it was important to have a form. They also had forms (Bm 1916).

Sometimes, forging documents went as far as "mass production" (an example from Nitra).

Vlado's apartment became a temporary hiding place for our many friends on their journey to an "Aryan" metamorphosis. The one-room flat also had a workshop for producing false identity cards and documents that were masterfully made by my brother Puco. And so many with Stars of David stitched on their coats left Vlado's "magic" room as 100% "Aryan," for example Michal Gajdoš or Štefan Šumichrast (Gonda, 2007, p. 151).

Not everybody had an opportunity to acquire quality documents. They had to cope with temporary "false documents," just like in the case of a young man from Bratislava:

*My original name Braun was very well known. In Bratislava the whole town knew my father, and what is more, the identity card was very amateurish. There were prints made in a print shop that had some mistakes and the government didn't accept blank identity cards. They were given back to the printer and some of them wound up illegally in the hands of people who needed false documents. There was a mistake in the spelling of the word "person". The word "person" was misspelled as "pervon." Any police warden knew, of course, that an identity card with the word "person" misspelled was fake. It might work in routine checks but in the checks made by the Germans after they had conquered the town I had no chance at all (*Dm 1929).

When the transports from Slovakia started, many people sought safety by escaping to Hungary where there were no deportations at the time. They did not have to keep their Jewish origins secret until the German occupation of the country. The problem was that they were not Hungarian citizens, but illegal immigrants from Slovakia.[11] They were at risk of arrests or of being sent back to their home country. Their situations were also made worse by the attitudes of the local Jews who considered immigrants a threat.

The Hungarian Jews were so scared and we could hardly get by because we had almost no financial means, we lived only on what families gave us and I used to knit at night. Sometimes they admitted us for two-three nights but we often had to spend the night in parks, particularly in the beginning. But, it was April, May then, we could do it. It was summertime but it was very dangerous because there could be a police check and we could get caught.
So in the meantime, we acquired false documents because you could only find a rented room if you presented documents showing who you were, what you were and what is more, you had to hand over one copy of the registration form to the doorkeeper. But Slovaks were very smart and they were able to make forgeries and so we had false stamps, and if nobody took a closer look at the documents, we were fine. We lived in Budapest from April 1942 to May 1945 this way. It was an unbelievably hard time because in fact we did not exist, we were there illegally (Ow 1922).

[11] For more details on the issue, see Cohn and Ciaccio, 2001.

I got a false document that I was, I am…/…/ I wanted to have a document showing I was not a Jew. So my prospective sister-in-law got me one, I asked her to get one with the same first name as mine because I was afraid if they called me I would not turn round and I would become a suspect if they called me by my name and it was not me. So she managed it, I was Juhos Ilona. It was the first time that I thought how good it was not to be a Jew. No non-Jew can imagine it, how good it is when they can live and laugh and have no problems and they can live and they can eat and they can go to the cinema and they can be with their parents and have siblings and have a home. I went to bed every single night thinking how good it was not to be a Jew (Jw 1918).

Orthodox believers faced a particular situation when looking for safety in a non-Jewish environment. They had to change their usual behaviour, their appearance, because they needed to get rid of the exterior identifying marks of their affiliation with Orthodox Judaism. This process was complicated by personal obstacles and the active disagreement of co-believers:[12]

As these changes were occurring, a man I did not know visited me at the Papa Yeshiva with a message. He related that my father was instructing me to leave Papa immediately and return to Budapest. The messenger handed me a new set of false papers with a new identity.
My name was to be Jan Kovic. I was to became a non-Jew. However, I resembled a young Jewish boy from the yeshiva. If I were to pass as a non-Jew, I would have to change my appearance drastically. I needed to remove my peyos, a clear sign of my ancestry. I went directly to a barber who was patronized by most of yeshiva students. I asked him to style my hair to make me look like the non-Jewish boys in the neighbourhood. He understood instantly that I was planning to leave the city; that I had no intention of being relocated. He went into a rage, yelling at me that I had no right to flee.
"I know what you are trying to do. You are trying to escape! You will be breaking the law. I will have no part of it." He screamed at me. "Dina d'malchusa dina", he railed. "The law of the land is the law."
I returned to the yeshiva and convinced one of the students who knew how to cut hair to do me a favour. Even with my haircut, my clothing still branded me a yeshiva student. My long coat was very different from the short standard waist-length coat worn by local boys. I asked the Jewish tailor to alter my coat. He reacted exactly as the barber, railing on and on about the law and how he would not help me break it.
"I know, what you are trying to do," he said accusingly, "You are trying to escape the ghetto, and I will not help you!"
I found another tailor to alter the coat. I purchased a cap similar to the military hat that was worn by the non-Jewish boys. Cloaked in my new disguise, I purchased a train ticket and set off for Budapest, looking like a young Christian citizen with the papers to prove it (Cohn & Ciaccio 2001, pp. 102-103).

The opinion of an orthodox rabbi from the Nitra yeshiva stands out because of his negative attitude toward Hungarian orthodox believers who desperately wanted to respect the law in all situations. According to Cohn, when he was noticed by Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandl,

[12] In 1942, Bratislava-native Romi Cohn illegally escaped to Hungary as a 13 year-old boy. He was able to live as an Orthodox Jew until spring 1944 but he had to keep secret the fact that he was an illegal immigrant from Slovakia.

he leaped from his chair, took three or four quick strides and stopped directly in front of me with an accusing look. I was perplexed as to what I had done wrong. He reached out and grabbed the tallis katan that was visible under my gentile shirt. With one dramatic sweep of his arm he pulled the garment form under my shirt and held the tallis katan in his outstretched hand. The great rabbi rebuked me for being careless with the mitzwah of protecting one's life. I can still hear the clear tone of authority in his angry voice: "Don't you know that the priority of saving your own life pushes aside all the mitzvos of the Torah? You can do nothing that might identify you as a Jew!" He spoke directly to me, but every person in the room understood this message. The passion in his voice made it clear to everyone that saving Jews had first priority (Cohn & Ciaccio, 2001, p. 131).

His different attitude probably resulted from the fact that Jews in Slovakia had already experienced the first wave of deportations, whereas in Hungary, they were only about to begin.

A young girl from an orthodox family escaped from a raid in autumn 1944 that took place right on the most important Jewish holiday. On Yom Kippur, she found herself among people who could not have known about her Jewish origins. Not only could she not fast, she also ate food that she had never touched before.

When I arrived at the Germans we had Lent. Great Lent. And I could not keep it then. And the first day I ate with them. It was just a coincidence that I ate only kosher meals. And the first day I did not eat kosher. I felt very bad because we were used to orthodox kosher up to the end. But everything can be coped with (Mw 1924).

Sudden changes in situation required an appropriate response. Sometimes, vulnerable Jews had to enter the "forbidden zone" without having the necessary documents and permits. They tried to avoid having to show loyalty to the regime without attracting the attention of the police or passers-by. A man who was travelling without a permit (or star) to Žilina to visit his parents who were being sent on a transport described his "evasive manoeuvres" thus:

I had no travel permit and I bought only a daily newspaper "Gardista" [translator's note: the daily newspaper of the Hlinka Guard – the militia of the Slovak People's Party from 1938 to 1945] *and I read it, to protect myself from potentially having my identity checked because if they had asked me to prove my identity and had found out I was a Jew without a star I would have been taken to a transit camp and ended up in Auschwitz.*

On another occasion, the same man substituted the missing documents with a combination of arrogance and courage when he was at a Hungarian train station:

I briskly stepped over to the Germans who were carrying out a raid, Germans and Hungarians. I asked a German because I did not speak Hungarian. "Excuse me, what's the time?" – Entschuldigen Sie bitte, wieviel Uhr ist? He looked at his watch and said "halb zwölf" 11:30. "Danke schön." Just imagine the moment, at that moment I was saved, at least for that while. I disappeared and he kept going, he kept going (Bm 1916).

In another case, a young woman used a simple guise: *"So I got there by train, dressed in black, completely in mourning, with a teary face and a prayer book, Catholic of course, to Bardejov"* (Jw 1918).

In a stranger's identity

In most cases, Jews needed to prove they were Slovak and Christian. People who legally crossed the Slovak–Hungarian border could present themselves as Jews until the occupation of the country by the German army, but they had to hide their non-Hungarian affiliation. Their situations were made worse by their lack of language skills. A 9-year-old girl living with her parents illegally in Hungary had to hide the fact that she did not speak Hungarian:

> *We faced a situation where we had to hide the fact I did not speak Hungarian. So at home I was strictly ordered not to speak anywhere? And because when adults talk in families, children have to be quiet, so my parents believed that the people we were visiting would not consider it strange. But they used to sit there, my mom especially spent hours with me there and I had to pass the time sitting and cutting up pieces of paper and not saying anything. And our friend, Frank was his name, and his wife got closer to my mother and he thoughtfully suggested to my mom that it would probably be good to have me examined to see if I was ok, because I just sat there, so grown up and not saying anything, just cutting. Of course, later on, when my parents and our friends trusted each other, everything came out, he apologised to me and said I was the cleverest child in the world* (Lw 1933).

While Orthodox believers changed the way they behaved and the way they looked in public, it was easier for Jews who had spent more time in mainstream society. A man who acted like a German citizen adapted his appearance and manners without any difficulty.

> *I looked like a German, I used to dress like a German although I said I was a Slovak. I used to wear a hat, Tyrol style, and I used to have a moustache then. I wore white stockings since knee breeches were in fashion then…" As a "German citizen" I looked for a suitable job: "I knew two or three Moravian companies from my previous occupation so I wrote to them, I even signed it and sent it to them. In about a week I received a reply that I should come and introduce myself. So I introduced myself and they gave me a job straightaway. So I started a job in a yeast factory as a sales department head. At the same time they knew I had a German name. So a director, a technical director, called me up, he also had a position as personnel director and he was a Reich German from Austria but in those days he was a Reich German.*
> *I was responsible for all of his technical correspondence and later also for his political party correspondence since he was a Nazi Party chief (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbetertei Partei) for East Slovakia, of all things. I dealt with all of his party correspondence and also all those kinds of things where he would write that so and so from the Volkgenossen (a member of the German nation) some fellow-German was not behaving with enough dignity as a citizen of the German Empire should and that he recommended she be sent back to the Reich. Yes, there were also those kinds of things"* (Nm 1919).

When asked about whether he had changed his behaviour in keeping with his false papers, one witness said:

> *No, I do not think so, not really ...well, my assimilation helped me a lot, didn't it? As a Jew, I hadn't lived a Jewish life before, so there was nothing to get rid of, there was nothing for me to undo or change. I didn't feel like I was play acting? That, that, that I was different? Somehow it made things easier. My friends who had been religious Jews before were in a much more difficult situation, they kept Lent at Yom Kippur and were now Ivan Balážik [translator's note: typical Slovak name], they suddenly had to behave like Ivan Balážik, those people had problems* (Cm 1919).

The new identity was not only supported by the false documents, but by the new owners adapting their behaviour. In cases of danger, their immediate reactions and knowledge of basic Christian beliefs could result in them being saved:

Once I was going out to Ľupča and a member of the Vlasov Army caught me and told me: "Hey Miss, you are a Jew." I said: "I am not a Jew." He dragged me to the gate where they were killing people, he took me to the gate and immediately took my thin necklace and my watch, he took them away from me immediately. He said: "Miss, well, if you are not a Jew, then say the Lord's prayer." I knew the Lord's prayer from school, so I mumbled it quickly and he was still in doubt so he told me: "Now tell me what we do on Christmas Eve." I didn›t know anything except midnight mass, so I told him we went to midnight mass, and he let me go (Fw 1926).

Precisely because he did not know how things worked, one young man used to leave his place of temporary residence during Christian holidays.

I had to be careful not to be visible…for example, I used to travel, let's say, home and I actually travelled to Bratislava and spent Christmas there with my girlfriend and I lived and stayed at my relatives – comrades who knew I was a deserter, you know…Well, I had to be careful not to become a suspect, for example, through my behaviour at Easter and Christmas. So that was how I resolved it. I did not go to church since I really did not know how to behave there and I would have betrayed myself, because I had no idea how to cross myself, you know (Cm1919).

Confrontation between the stranger's identity and Jewish suffering

Direct confrontations with the realities faced by the majority of Jews from 1942 to 1945 were particularly difficult psychologically. A young woman who, thanks to her false documents, had found a job right in the centre of Bratislava mentioned having such an experience. Her boss once drew her attention to an "attraction" taking place by the window of the tailor's workshop where she worked:

Once on Vysoká street she called to me come quick and see how they were taking them away. They were leading them from Edlová street on foot to the train station. She showed me. Can you imagine what that did to me? My hands were shaking (Kw 1913).

A fifteen-year old boy took a similar experience as a warning:

Unfortunately, I had an opportunity, not an opportunity, I was forced to watch as transports left the platform, the platform at Bratislava-Nové Mesto. It weighed on my soul; it was awful to watch. Of course, it affected me, so I became more careful about the possibility of my papers being checked or of my getting arrested, so I limited myself to only going to work and back from my rented flat, or twice a week I used to go to my mom's and back but when the seizures of people peaked in September of 1944, I agreed with my employers that I would not to go to work at all (Om 1929).

A young woman found a hiding place in Berehov where she worked in a local luxury hotel. Her illusionary safety ended when German officers came to stay:

Well, and then a colonel arrived, I was at the cash-desk. Unfortunately there was nobody in the café and he sat by the table at the door, we had opened the glass door since it was May, so the door was open and he called me over. I asked him what he would like and he said: "Look at the town, how beautiful it is." I asked him: "What is so beautiful? Spring has just started, of course, the town is beautiful. Just like all the other times." And he said: "No, today, the town is even more beautiful, because today, when I see a well-dressed lady in the street I know she is not a Jew. The last transport has left, we can raise a white flag, we have no more Jews here." I was petrified and started shaking, I probably turned pale and if he had looked at me, he would have noticed, but he did not and I barely mumbled that I had to go because my boss might come, but he stopped me again: "Come here, look, Miss, you can still see a Gypsy. But we will remove him too and you will have a totally beautiful and clean town. They will not be here any longer either." So I left, and my boss, luckily, was there, so I asked him to send somebody to the cash-desk and I burst into hysterical crying and I kept crying until the next morning, I was not able to calm down, I also asked my sister-in law, not my sister-in-law, my boss's sister, for a pill because I felt really sick (Jw 1918).

The psychological trauma of people who had to watch the transports became even worse when their acquaintances or even family relatives were among those being deported:

Since I had Aryan papers, I could move around freely. I did not have Jewish facial features, I had thick blond hair, a typical Aryan boy, I spoke German so many people considered me to be a German. So I travelled to Žilina, I visited them there, I was with them for two months and then, of course, my father and mother wore a yellow Jewish star. Then I came back and it was really tragic when my father ….. I said good-bye to my parents and I went with my father to the train station and because he had a Jewish star, he could not walk on the same side as me, so I was walking on one side and my father was walking on the other side and that was how we went to the station. We also waved to each other and I got on the train and my father went back home crying (Gm 1924).

Conclusion

Hilberg (2004) divided society during the Holocaust period into three groups (perpetrators, victims and bystanders, each witnessing the situation from their own, distinct perspective and each assuming a different range of attitudes and reactions. Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, pointed out that the variety of perceptions during the period is also evident within the Jewish community:

There is no such thing as one Jewish memory. The memories of a Jewish policeman who took a woman to the train differ from the memory of a Jewish policeman who saved a child's life. The memories of a child who survived hidden in a monastery differ from the memories of a woman who quietly survived on the so-called Aryan side. And those who were extorted from and denounced every day have different memories, and those who fought and someone else who escaped somewhere and was hidden in the countryside had different memories. So different, then, is also their relationship to the past (Sawická, 2010, p. 96).

Jews who acquired a stranger's identity thanks to false papers also confirm the legitimacy of the idea there are different perceptions of the Holocaust. They could move around relatively freely, they did not suffer from hunger and humiliation or from the torturous

conditions in the concentration camps. Psychological suffering did not leave visible marks and that is why they were perceived as "people to whom nothing had happened." It was forgotten that those people lived under permanent threat and survived only due to their own resourcefulness, courage and the solidarity of others. Living a stranger's identity left psychological marks on their minds (or their descendants') that made their presence felt as the years passed:

> *It is hard to explain, you know. It came to my mind at night that, oh God, what had I experienced. I could not sleep that night. I took a sleeping pill but I could not fall asleep. I cannot think about it. But it lasted, you know, ten years for me (*Jw 1918).

Stern (2005, p. 41) acknowledges the same is in his account of his experience:

> *After long years, I talked to people who had also been in hiding. We all agreed on the same thing, that it was often much worse than being in a concentration camp. Our nerves were badly attacked – we were scared by the slightest noise and lived in permanent fear that they could get us. It is a strange thing – when they finally get you, you don't care. It was often a great relief.*

Survivors try to "hold in" the stress, in self-defence, in their relationship to the Jewish community and religion or mainstream society, and at the same time, they pass it on (often unwillingly) to future generations (see Salner, 2017) or to the general public. Just like in the case of people who survived the concentration or work camps. For "Aryan" (and hidden) Jews, the Holocaust had a great impact on their identity and relationship with the government and mainstream society, as well with the Jewish community. "Life with a mask" and other related long-lasting mental stresses resulted in them paying a price after liberation. Every person reacted differently, and sometimes his or her relationship to the Jewish community suffered. Some decided to mingle with mainstream society and had no interest in "reviving" their former identity. The loss of belief[13] was an accompanying phenomenon. The consequences were also reflected in the choice of life partner, communication within families or bringing up children.

Paradoxically, the experience of living "with two faces" made their lives easier under the Communist totalitarian regime where they could apply the same formula.

The theme of a "stranger's identity" should become the subject of psychology research. What is more, ethnology and other social sciences should also take into account the existence, forms and impacts of such phenomena. The sciences that analysed various (not only Jewish) forms of daily life during the Holocaust, but also under socialism or after November 1989. Without it, it is impossible to fully understand totalitarian regimes and their impacts on people's lives.

[13] Negative reactions to the death of loved ones or one's own suffering could be one of the reasons. In some other cases, baptism (formal or informal) led many people to feel they "cannot believe in a Jewish God". They found themselves in a "no man's land" because they did not feel like Christians either.

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