

Post-Holocaust Pogroms in Hungary and Poland

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2009

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work to the memory of my grandfather, Dezső Kun, who was born in Kunmadaras, in 1900. My special thanks go to Michael L. Miller and Eszter Timár who helped my work with friendly and professional advice. I also need to thank for the support of my family and all the help of professors, coordinators and colleagues at CEU.

Thank you

Abstract

This thesis compares violent attacks suffered by Holocaust survivors in post-war Poland and Hungary. I argue that although the backgrounds of the two countries were different, certain factors occasionally resulted in similar pogroms in approximately the same time. During the thesis I analyze these factors in the context of the Kraków and Kielce pogroms in Poland, and the Kunmadaras pogrom and the Miskolc riots in Hungary.

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Introduction

Immediately after the Holocaust the returning Jewish inhabitants were subjects of various violent attacks in Eastern Europe. These anti-Jewish acts occurred in the same period in Hungary, Slovakia and Poland, mostly from the summer of 1945 till the end of 1947. There are further similarities: the brutality, the social strata of the attackers, the radical changing in the political background. However, the most striking similarity is the irrational accusation behind most of the events. On 21 May 1946, in the middle of Hungary, three survivors of the Holocaust were lynched, because the inhabitants of Kunmadaras were told that the Jews were going to kill their children in a cellar in order to make sausage from them. The police investigation led to the cellar of Sándor Kohn, where the witness confessed that the accusations were false.¹ Unfortunately, by that time already dozens of lives had been destroyed because of the pogrom. In Kielce, Poland, only around five-hundred kilometers from Kunmadaras, the investigators did not even find a cellar under the building at 7 Planty Street, where the Jews allegedly held the nine-year-old Henryk Błaszczuk after, as he reported, they had kidnapped him in order to use his blood for making matzo. As a result, on 4 July 1946, only forty-four days after the pogrom in Kunmadaras, forty Jews were lynched in Kielce, and a hundred more wounded by the Christian parents who believed that they had to defend their children from the survivors of the Holocaust. Two of the seriously wounded died two days later in Łódź, where the Jews from Kielce had to be transported by the Red Cross in order to prevent further killings.²

¹ Report on the pogrom of Kunmadaras, Archive of the Jewish Museum Budapest Box no. XXXIII–5–b/4., File no. 38.

² Joanna Michlic, “Polish Jews during and after the Kielce Pogrom: Reports from the Communist Archives 1947”, *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 13 (2000), p 253.

In my thesis I will focus on four post-war anti-Jewish events: the Kielce and Kraków pogrom in Poland, the Kunmadaras pogrom and the Miskolc mob law in Hungary, although I plan to use other 1945-1946 anti-Jewish incidents as examples. According to the Central Committee of Jews in Poland (Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce: CKŻP), the summer of 1945 was the period when the anti-Semitic murders became frequent: approximately 100 Jews were killed in this season. In August, the Kraków pogrom gained international attention. On 8 February 1946 the repatriation of more than 100,000 Polish Jews started from the Soviet territories. Their return further aggravated the already existing social tensions, which resulted everywhere in anti-Jewish sentiments, even in Western Poland. Here, both Polish Jews and ethnic Poles were new residents, since these were former Germans territories.³ However, the Kraków incident had special importance. Although it was not the first pogrom, nor even especially brutal, it symbolically signaled the beginning of anti-Jewish attacks since the mob destroyed and desecrated a synagogue and it gained wider publicity. This happened in an internationally well-known place and the pattern was already the same as later, in Kielce:

- children accused Jews with attempted murder in a community building
- the already existing rumor of ritual murder is further generated by this accusation
- a crowd gathers around the building
- soldiers, policemen and militiamen start rioting
- the mob lynches the Jews.⁴

A year later, in Kielce something very similar happened, but in a much more brutal form and much larger scale. The Kielce pogrom is the most horrifying anti-Jewish act of post-war Europe. The city's name itself reminds most Europeans of the pogrom, and the inhabitants

³ Joanna Michlic, "Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1918-1939 and 1945-1947", *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 13 (2000), pp 38-39.

⁴ Anna Cichopek, "The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945, A Narrative Reconstruction" in *Contested Memories, Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and its Aftermath* ed. by Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) p 235.

visibly fight against their heritage. Not by accident, they recently erected a statue of Jan Karski, the courier for the London-based Polish government during World War II, who tried to alert the world to the Holocaust. It stands at the junction of the main pedestrian street and Planty Street. On the building of 7 Planty Street already four plaques commemorate the pogrom.

Kunmadaras is the place in Hungary, where the cruelest post-Holocaust pogrom occurred. I put special emphasis on this event, because one of the most exciting questions is *why* the anti-Jewish aggression appeared in this, otherwise insignificant village. Women accused local Jews of criminal market behavior, an accusation which mingled with ritual murder and blood libel accusations. I present also the tensions and contradictions occurred over the memory of the victims and the remembrance of this pogrom.

Miskolc is a unique case, since here the aggression was clearly induced by certain political forces. On the one hand, it was the least spontaneous out of the four anti-Jewish riots. On the other hand, this case shows the most the alleged approval of the authorities, and the spontaneous rage against the police when the alleged approval was revoked.

At least three out of four pogroms show the signs of food riots. As Péter Apor shows in the case of Kunmadaras, the Jews were first attacked at the market because of the price they sold or bought eggs.⁵ It is well known that the drought of 1946 made the already terrible famine even worst. The Holocaust survivors could seem to be in a privileged position: thanks to the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, most Jews got financial or material aid. In Kraków and in Miskolc too, the marketplace was absolutely essential in the

⁵ Péter Apor, “The Lost Deportations: Kunmadaras 1946” (Budapest: MA Thesis, CEU, 1996), p 18.

pogrom. In the latter the rioters wanted to kill their victims in Búza Square, where the Jews traded. I believe that the choice of place here had a special message, especially, since here again the basic accusation was the criminal behavior in selling food.⁶

Although similar pogroms occurred in post-war Poland and in Hungary, one has to bare in mind at least two very important differences. Firstly, the political background of the events radically differed. In Hungary, once the Nazi occupation was ended by the Red Army, a democratic political system was installed. The survivors of the Holocaust found themselves in a radically new position. The wartime anti-Jewish legislation was revoked, Jews could earn higher position in the army, in political life, could become civil servants, etc.⁷ In Poland, the communist monopolization of power started immediately after the war, while the units of Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) fought against the new system. It was a period of civil war, when anti-Jewish sentiment was often accompanied with anti-communist feelings.⁸ In these circumstances at least 500-600 Polish Jews were killed after the withdrawal of the Nazis till the end of 1946,⁹ but Jan T. Gross estimates 1,500 victims.¹⁰ Secondly, in Hungary, anti-Jewish aggression – with some exception of the white terror – did not characterize the public life since Tiszaeszlár. On the contrary, the Polish Jewry experienced three waves of violence in the inter-war period. The first wave, in between 1918-1920 included a pogrom in Lviv, where seventy Jews were murdered, and another one in Pinsk, where thirty Jewish inhabitants were killed.¹¹ The second wave in 1930-1933 meant mostly anti-Jewish student riots.¹² The last wave occurred when, in two separate incidents, first in March 1936, in Przytyk, later, in June 1936, in Mińsk Mazowiecki, two Poles died by the arms of Polish

⁶ See János Varga, “A miskolci népitélet” [The Mob Law of Miskolc] *Medvetánc* Vol. 5, No. 2-3 (1986): 293-314.

⁷ Viktor Karády, *Túlélők és újrakezdők* [Survivors and Restarters] (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002), pp 14-15.

⁸ Jan T. Gross, *Fear: anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007), pp 22-34.

⁹ David Engel, “Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944-1946” *Yad Vashem Studies* 26, (1998).

¹⁰ Gross, 2007 p 35.

¹¹ Michlic, 2000 A p 35, p 44.

¹² *Ibid.*, p 35, pp 51-52.

Jews. These two Poles, Stanisław Wieśniak and Jan Bujak became national heroes, and became symbols of the “Jewish threat” which allegedly entitled Poles to act violently against their Jewish neighbors.¹³

In Kunmadaras, a much higher percentage of the local Jewry arrived back in 1945, since most of them were deported to labor camps in Austria instead of Auschwitz. In Poland, the leaders of the Jewish Community gave the order: the Jews should leave small towns that are dangerous for them either for big cities or for the West.¹⁴ Therefore the concentration of the Jews in Kielce was much higher than anywhere else around. Furthermore, in Kunmadaras once again one can find the rumor of ritual murder. However, this accusation departed from the historically so often used accusation and – thanks to the Nazi propaganda and persecution – it became more irrational and bizarre. The only constant element is the threat: the returning Jew allegedly threatens the Christians, which *justifies* the attack. According to Joanna Michlic, the concept of the threatening Jew not only shifts the guilt and the responsibility for the violence onto the victim, but also minimizes the criminal nature of the anti-Jewish act itself.¹⁵ János Pelle evokes the memories of Pál Drukker, who as a policeman arrived to Kunmadaras right after the pogrom. He found the rioters gathered around the local police headquarters, where they tried to explain to the regional police captain of Szolnok what the Jews did with the Christian children. The inhabitants stood there with blood on their clothes and tried to justify their cruel act. They expected sympathy from the authorities. Pelle’s source, Drukker Pál adds: “it seemed that these people wanted the police to defend their children from the Jews. They did not even think that they could be arrested.”¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., pp 55-56.

¹⁴ Minutes of the Meeting of Jewish Committees of the Kielce Voivodeship, held on 14 May 1945 in Adam Penkalla, “Poles and Jews in Kielce and Radom”, *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, Vol. 13 (2000), p 243

¹⁵ Michlic, 2000 A p 44

¹⁶ János Pelle, *Az Utolsó Vértáradak* [The Last Blood Libel Accusations] (Budapest: Pelikán Kiadó, 1995), pp 161-162.

In Hungary, the socialist regime preferred to keep silent about the anti-Jewish events. In Miskolc, since the communists induced the violence and from 1948 they ruled the whole country, it is not surprising that for forty years nobody wrote extensively about the anti-Jewish events. It was still a brave act when János Varga raised the question of responsibility in his study published in 1986.¹⁷ Interestingly, till this day this is the best historical work on the topic. Péter Apor¹⁸ sees a “boom” in the fact that after the change of regime three or more studies were published about the post-Holocaust pogroms. In 1994, Éva Vörös wrote a very precise, detailed description of the Kunmadaras events, however, she does not step forward from the mainstream anti-Semitic view of the pogrom.¹⁹ In 1995 János Pelle published a book with the telling title: “Az utolsó vérvádak”²⁰ (The Last Blood Libel Accusations) in which he analyzes the background of the riots. A year later, in 1996, a young scholar, Péter Apor devoted his thesis to the topic of Kunmadaras.²¹

Joanna Michlic explains the even more disturbing silence and misinterpretations of post-war Polish pogroms. According to her, the Polish national mythology portrayed wartime Poland “as a community of heroes and martyrs only.”²² This self-image does not accept any critical inquiry into the wartime and post-war Polish history. Since the major threats to this self-image were the anti-Semitic actions during and right after the war, it is understandable that the majority of Poles rejected a discussion of the topic.²³ Others tried to depict, for example, the

¹⁷ Varga, 1986 pp 310-311.

¹⁸ Apor, 1996 p 2.

¹⁹ Éva Vörös, “Kunmadaras, Újabb Adatok a Pogrom Történetéhez”, *Múlt és Jövő*, Vol. 7, No.4 (1994).

²⁰ János Pelle, *Az Utolsó Vérvádak* [The Last Blood Libel Accusations] (Budapest: Pelikán Kiadó, 1995).

²¹ Péter Apor, “The Lost Deportations: Kunmadaras 1946” (Budapest: MA Thesis, CEU, 1996).

²² Joanna Michlic, “The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945-1947” in *The Jews Are Coming Back*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem-Berghahn Books 2005), p 211.

²³ Michlic, 2005 pp 210-214.

Kielce pogrom as an event organized by the NKVD.²⁴ According to Andrzej Paczkowski, Polish historians could not get rid off the theory of external conspiracy, because then they would have to admit that in the post-war Polish society extremely intense anti-Semitism existed.²⁵ Gross argues that reclaim of the confiscated property was of importance.²⁶ Anna Cichopek uses Gross' theory when she compares a Polish and a Slovakian case: "Property and Pogroms in Kraków and Topol'čany in 1945."²⁷ This is basically the only comparative study of post-war Eastern European anti-Jewish events.

Therefore, until now there is no detailed analysis about the similarities or differences in Polish and Hungarian Post-Holocaust Pogroms. The goal of this thesis is to fill this gap by analyzing especially the motives, the circumstances, the reactions and the commemorations of these pogroms. I believe that this comparative approach will allow a closer view of the rioters' motives. I especially plan to show that the attackers did not let themselves be driven by the most irrational blood libel and ritual murder accusations until the authorities seemed to approve the attack or to share these accusations. It is also important to deal with the local social elements of the riots, such as: the intense role of the female inhabitants, the social stratification of the rioters, the aftermath and the memory of the events. I also argue that the individuals had to have a virtual map of the Jewish houses and organizations, and in general places, where Jews used to be present. In order to find answers, I analyze the existing Hungarian and English literature on the topic, the related newspaper articles and commentaries of the pogroms, Jewish community minutes, and personal memoirs. I add

²⁴ See for example: Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *Rape of Poland: Pattern of Soviet Aggression*, (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948).

²⁵ Andrzej Paczkowski, "Raporty o Pogromie" [Reports about the pogrom], *Puls* Vol. 50 No.3 (1991): p 103.

²⁶ See especially: Jan T. Gross, *Fear: anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2007).

²⁷ Anna Cichopek, A Case for Comparative Perspective in Polish-Jewish History: Property and Pogroms in Kraków and Topol'čany in 1945, <http://icj.huji.ac.il/conference/papers/Anna%20Cichopek.pdf> (accessed 21 April 2009).

photos of memory plaques, tombs and important places, because without these photos my work would be unfinished.

My thesis has the following order: In *Chapter 1* I give a review of the already existing literature, I will define the ritual murder accusation and outline the blood libel as a growing phenomenon in Eastern Europe. In *Chapter 2* I give a description of the Kunmadaras events. In *Chapter 3* I focus on the first and second wave of turbulences in Miskolc, and the aftermath of the riots. In *Chapter 4* I summarize the two Polish pogroms – Kraków and Kielce – and investigate the motives behind the murders. As a result of the research work I close the thesis with the *Conclusion* which is devoted to the comparison, including not only the motives and preconditions, but also the trials and contemporary commemoration of the victims.

1. Literature review

In this part I review the historical studies about the Hungarian pogroms and I give some basic description about the blood libel and ritual murder accusations. After this I list the most important works on the post-war Polish pogroms and their findings. First and foremost I focus on the pogrom appeared in Kunmadaras. When I started to work with this pogrom, some fellow-scholars warned me that this subject is explored already, it is enough to see how many studies were published in the recent years. As I counted, no more than four scholars were engaged with the topic. Overall they did not write even two hundred pages about the subject. Since the results of their works often contradict each other, I have found it worth having a closer view of the cruelest Hungarian post-Holocaust pogrom.

1.1. Kunmadaras

First in 1990, László Ötvös, the Calvinist priest of Kunmadaras published an important, however, scholarly sometimes questionable analysis of the pogrom. Four years later, Éva Vörös wrote her descriptive study in which she uses uncritically Ötvös' report as a source, although completes it with the People's Tribunal's sentence. Ötvös and Vörös present only the mainstream anti-Semitic view of the pogrom without finding the motives behind. In contrast, in Pelle's book²⁸ a whole chapter analyzes the background of the Kunmadaras riot, while he switches the emphasis on the blood libel accusation. Péter Apor, beside his thesis, in 2008 yet again published an article about Kunmadaras, in which he summarizes his argument that the pogrom was more a cruel episode of the dissolution of a traditional village than the expression of anti-Jewish sentiments.

László Ötvös' study was published in 1990, right after the fall of Communism.²⁹ The time of publishing and the unidentified oral sources indicates that Ötvös – who after his ecclesiastic appointment lived decades in Kunmadaras – perhaps wrote the story of the pogrom over many years. In his interpretation – unlike Vörös – the pogrom and the turbulence around János Nagy's trial the previous day are separate events. The only connection between the two days' events is the role of Zsigmond Tóth. In general, Ötvös, as a good priest, obviously loves the inhabitants of Kunmadaras and tries to pass the responsibility to outsiders: Zsigmond Tóth and Ferenc Takács. Already on the first page Ötvös informs the reader that Tóth came from Czechoslovakia in December 1945.³⁰ Ötvös also depicts Ferenc Takács, the secretary of the

²⁸ Pelle, 1995.

²⁹ László Ötvös, "A madarasi antiszemita megmozdulás" [The anti-Semitic movement of Madaras], *Jáskunság* Vol. 36, No. 2 (1990): pp 81-93.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p 81.

communist party, as careerist, who more aggressively attacked János Nagy than the *local* communists.³¹

Ötvös overestimates the role of these two men. Although he never declares that Zsigmond Tóth is a foreign agent who came to corrupt the innocent Hungarians, he refers to his suspicious role: “Not by accident Tóth is in the crowd.”³² Similarly, before quoting Tóth’s statement about the Jews in Slovakia, who were hanged because of kidnapping children, Ötvös explains to his reader Tóth’s timing: “Zsigmond Tóth felt that the time had come to swing into action.”³³ Later, in the evening in the building of the Trade Corporation, according to Ötvös, “Zsigmond Tóth in the nick of time, when the situation is tensed between János Nagy and his accusers, stated: ‘As I know, the Jews want to kidnap János Nagy from his flat, so we have to guard him.’ There upon, he immediately organized the guard...He also added, that everybody should be at the market on the next day, because something is going to happen there, maybe the Jews are going to be beaten up.”³⁴ The most unlikely is Zsigmond Tóth’s last scene: Ötvös refers to one of his informers, who saw the Slovakian at the market in the next morning, where he allegedly shouted a short and dramatic “Let`s dance!”, after which he disappeared from the story till the first day of the future trial.³⁵ Ötvös does not name his “informer”, just as he does not call Zsigmond Tóth an agent. However, five years later, in his work about the changes of population in Kunmadaras, published in 1995, he already states that “there was a counter-Hungarian provocation” behind the pogrom.³⁶

³¹ Ibid., p 89.

³² Ibid., p 82.

³³ Ibid., p 82.

³⁴ Ibid., p 83.

³⁵ Ibid., p 84.

³⁶ László Ötvös, *Redemptios Emlékek és Lakossági Változások Kunmadarason* [Redemptical Memories and Inhabitant Changes in Kunmadaras] (Szolnok: Kunmadaras Polgármesteri Hivatal, 1995), p 20.

The highlight of Ötvös's study is the part when he systematically lists all violent acts of the pogrom, based on the report of the People's Supreme Court and on the interviews with the former inhabitants.³⁷ After this main part of his text, Ötvös engages in outlining the motives without any real success. He writes a short paragraph about the blood libel accusation, however, he completely disregards the existing literature on the topic. He does not limit himself to the Kunmadaras case; instead he tries to deny the reliability of the accusations in general.³⁸ Writing about the role of the police, he does not mention the cooperation between the rioters and the policemen which led to the lynching of Ferenc Kuti.³⁹ Unfortunately, Ötvös feels it worthy to mention István Vas' views about the offending cultural superiority of the Jewry as a possible motive behind the mob's aggression. When he adds that "the moral fiber of the majority of the Jews (approximately sixty persons) kept away the aggression",⁴⁰ he basically divides the Kunmadaras Jewry into good Jews and bad Jews.

Éva Vörös gives the most detailed description of the events.⁴¹ In her study from the planned trial of the teacher, János Nagy, till the end of the next days' pogrom, everything has its place and importance. She devotes a longer description to the case of Nagy. The villagers, who wanted to accompany their teacher to his hearing, were stopped by the police, which obstructed the crowd's path. Here, once again appears the outsider's responsibility. At least according to Éva Vörös, at this point, "some people from Karcag"⁴² joined the crowd. They spread the news: two children mysteriously disappeared from the town, perhaps the Jews kidnapped them. Apart from this, Vörös five times mentions the blood libel accusation: twice as a rumor spread by Zsigmond Tóth, once at the beginning of the market day, and twice

³⁷ Ötvös, 1990 pp 84-88.

³⁸ Ibid., p 88.

³⁹ Ibid., p 90.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p 92.

⁴¹ Vörös, 1994 pp 69-80.

⁴² Ibid., p 71.

during the pogrom. The rioters also looked for missing children at Gyula Rosinger`s home and once at the home of the Neulanders. However, Vörös still describes the pogrom as a result of the growing political and economic tension in the village, although she only considers general Hungarian economic problems, such as the shortage of food or the Jewish claims for their confiscated wealth. She fails to specify these problems in the economic reality of Kunmadaras, and she does not even mention the anti-Jewish side of an influential political campaign against the black-marketeers. She rather unfolds the events following the line of the political tensions over the trial of János Nagy. In her descriptive and linear study she constantly emphasizes two characteristics: the manifestations of the anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish sentiments and the pandering and negligence of the policemen.⁴³

János Pelle lists the reasons of the pogrom, such as first of all that the cooperation of the police with the rioters in certain situations had the message of approval.⁴⁴ He also sees special importance of the Jewish claims for the confiscated valuables. Pelle notes the cutting remark during the beating of the Rosenbergs, when one of the rioters stated that “these hits you have to suffer because of the reclaimed duvet.”⁴⁵ Out of the four authors Pelle emphasizes the most the Jewish character of the People`s Tribunal.⁴⁶ Unfortunately he does not indicate any reference when he declares that these tribunals represented the will of the communists, who were happy to choose judges from the Jewish survivors. Pelle sees their verdicts as often too strict and fueled by vengeance. According to him, János Nagy did not deserve the verdict of the People`s Tribunal. He sets up a theory that this trial was the idea of Ferenc Takács, who simply wanted to remove the popular teacher from his position.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Pelle seriously considers the theory of Mária Schmidt, according to which Zsigmond Tóth was a secret agent

⁴³ Ibid., p 71.

⁴⁴ Pelle, 1995 p 159.

⁴⁵ Pelle, 1995 p 153, p 161.

⁴⁶ Pelle, 1995 p 154.

⁴⁷ Pelle, 1995 pp 154-155.

of the Soviet NKVD, who already gained experience in organizing pogroms in the empire of the Tsar. Unfortunately, here, once again, Pelle's text lacks reference.⁴⁸

Péter Apor denies all the previous studies by stating that there was virtually no anti-Semitism in Kunmadaras. "The pogrom was launched without anti-Semitism in regards that permanent and long-lasting hatred of the Jews did not exist."⁴⁹ However, Apor only supports this theory by excerpts from confessions and statements made during the trial which followed the riot. These excerpts are undoubtedly biased. The defendants' only goal could be to clear themselves of the charges. The Jewish witnesses, who testified "that they had not experienced anti-Semitism in Kunmadaras before"⁵⁰ could be also affected by the shock of the tragic events. Moreover, the presence of the blood libel accusation in the village and in the region itself proves anti-Jewish sentiment. One can add to this that in early 1946, for example in Karcag, only twelve kilometers from Kunmadaras, peasants demonstrated on the street while shouting: "we are going to hang Jewish lawyer!"⁵¹

However, Apor, in his thesis, while focusing on the Communist Party daily, the articles of the *Szabad Nép*, finds the campaign against the black-marketeers the real trigger of the pogrom.⁵² The only problem with his reasoning is that hardly any inhabitants of Kunmadaras belonged to the leftist political parties. Most of them supported the Peasants Party. The fact that the majority belonged to the political right is clearly demonstrated by the long lasting fight for János Nagy.⁵³ Being on the right side of the political scale does not automatically make

⁴⁸ Pelle, 1995 p 158.

⁴⁹ Apor, 1996 p 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p 8.

⁵¹ Péter Kertész, "Letter" *Jászkunság* Vol. 9, No. 6 (December 1994): p 8.

⁵² Ibid., p 8.

⁵³ Peter Apor, "A népi demokrácia építése: Kunmadaras, 1946" [The Building of the People's Democracy: Kunmadaras, 1946] *Századok* Vol. 132, No. 6 (June 1998): p 605.

resistant of any leftist propaganda; however, *Szabad Nép* supposedly was not the most widely read newspaper in Kunmadaras.

Apor is right that the political campaign, which targeted the stabilization of the Hungarian economy in order to pave the way for the introduction of the new national currency, the forint, had openly fuelled anti-Jewish sentiments. The posters, the banners, and caricatures depicted the public enemies, the black-marketeers with the commonly shared illustration of Jewish characteristics: thick lips, thick crooked nose, etc.⁵⁴ According to Apor, “the irresponsible policy of the left indispensably resulted in a pogrom.”⁵⁵ However, the anti-Jewish expressions frequently repeated by the villagers during the riot contradict the theory which sees the pogrom only as an answer to the communist political campaign.

Apor, at some point of his thesis finds it impossible to answer the question *why*. As he writes, “the historian cannot find the reasons in the defendants’ stories why they assaulted other people, nor can he even reveal the motives of their violence or how they gave reasons for the riot.”⁵⁶ In certain sentences it seems that Apor’s goal is – instead of finding the reasons – to diminish the anti-Semitic character of the pogrom. “*Relatively few* defendants spoke about that Tóth had called upon them to be at the market on the next day, however *almost nobody* claimed that he had specified the goal of the meeting as the proposed Jew-baiting.”⁵⁷ His final conclusion is that the People’s Tribunal itself created the false narrative of an anti-Semitic event.⁵⁸ Péter Apor in his most recent article in the Hungarian historical periodical *Rubicon* crystallized his convincing theory of the pogrom. He sees the riots in the context of a

⁵⁴ Apor, 1996: pp 6-7.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p 8.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 9.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p 15.

⁵⁸ Peter Apor, “A kunmadarasi pogrom, 1946” [The Pogrom of Kunmadaras, 1946], *Rubicon* Vol. 19, No. 7-8 (July-August, 2008) p 95.

traditional village, where the obstructers of the will of the community have to be punished. He adds that the Jews breached the principles of the community by selling meat at an exorbitant price, and buying up the eggs at a triple price.⁵⁹ According to him, the mere fact that the Jews had meat evoked the traditional blood libel accusation about the Jews who allegedly kill the children of Christians.⁶⁰ Apor is certainly right when he re-contextualizes the events, but he goes too far, when he denies the anti-Jewish character of the riot, since the blood libel accusation itself demonstrates that anti-Semitism was present at Kunmadaras. However, the pogrom was obviously more complex than one can grasp through only *one* of the four authors' theory.

1.2 Miskolc

As has been mentioned already in the introduction, János Varga's study entitled "A miskolci népítélet" (The Mob Law of Miskolc) published in *Medvetánc*, in 1986 was an early phenomenon. However, till today, this is the most important work on the subject. As each and every ground breaking article, this is also very descriptive. Here the real novelty is the fact that Varga was brave enough to unfold an anti-Semitic riot in which the communists and the workers were deeply involved. Varga does not define the violence in Miskolc as a pogrom, rather he agrees with István Bibó, who sees the anti-Jewish characteristic in the selection of the rioters.⁶¹ They attacked the Jewish black-marketeers but they let the non-Jew escape. Similarly, later the workers attacked the policeman with Jewish descent, while the other police officer managed to escape.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p 18.

⁶⁰ Apor, 2008 p 95.

⁶¹ Varga, 1986 p 310.

Tamás Kende writes about Miskolc by analyzing the contemporary newspapers on the topic.⁶² He also deals with the campaign against the black-marketeers and currency-worseners, although he does not stress the fact that the campaign targeted mostly the Jews. Instead he shows that not only the communists, but Ferenc Nagy, the prime minister, who belonged to the Smallholders Party, promised: “We exterminate the enemies of the forint.”⁶³ However, Kende unfolds not only the political, but also the personal antagonism in between the Miskolc victims and the lord lieutenant of Miskolc, István Oszip.⁶⁴ Only with this information it is possible to understand the story of the Miskolc pogrom. Afterwards, Kende goes into details and provides personal information about the lynched policeman. According to him, Artúr Fogarasi himself was protestant, only his father was Jewish. His name was Sámuel Frankl, and the policeman changed his family name from Frankl into Fogarasi.⁶⁵

An important secondary source about the Miskolc pogrom is the book by Róbert Szabó.⁶⁶ He thinks that the riot of the forge workers was the moment when the Hungarian communists realized that it was too dangerous and risky to instigate more anti-Jewish feelings, since they could not direct the aggressive demonstration of the workers.⁶⁷ Although there is no evidence, according to Szabó, it is very likely that the Miskolc authorities leaked the route and schedule of the two arrested black-marketeers.⁶⁸ They wanted them to meet the demonstrators, but their lynching was not planned.

⁶² Tamás Kende, “Lincselés előtt és után” [Before and after Lynching] *Dimenziók*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2 (1993): pp 74-83.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p 74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p 76.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 79.

⁶⁶ Róbert Szabó, *A kommunista párt és a zsidóság* [The Communist Party and the Jewry] (Budapest: Windsor, 1995).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p 136.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p 137.

János Pelle blames the so-called Political Police for the death of Ernő Jungreis. Pelle sets up a conspiracy theory, in which the lord lieutenant of Miskolc, the Soviets, the workers and the police moved according to a very precise cooperation. Finally, the policeman, who ensured that the detainees did not leave their station before the necessary moment, is quoted by Pelle, as he wished to “have fun!” to the Jews, whom he sent to be lynched.⁶⁹ It is easy to realize the parallelism with Ötvös’ Zsigmond Tóth, who allegedly shouted “Let’s dance” before the pogrom in Kunmadaras.⁷⁰ However, the most interesting part of Pelle’s chapter about Miskolc is his attempt to make a blood libel case out of the mixture of a food riot and a traditional workers’ movement. Since his book is entitled *The Last Blood Libel Accusations*, he sets up the “constructed blood libel theory” in which the workers attack the Jewish policeman, because they see in his cruelty the confirmation of the traditional prejudices about Jews who kill Christians.⁷¹

1.3 Ritual Murder and Blood Libel Accusation

Since the perpetrators of the pogroms often accused their Jewish neighbors of killing defenseless children to make matzo or to make sausage, at this point it seems worth clarifying what a traditional blood libel or ritual murder accusation is. The ritual murder is an ancient accusation. First, in the 2nd century B. C. E. Posidonius reported that the Jews kidnapped a Greek, fattened him up, and slew him in a certain ritual. While sacrificing his body, the Jews swore an oath of hostility towards the Greeks.⁷² Apion of Alexandria, born between 20 and 30 B.C. E., not only confirmed this accusation, but added that this particular ritual murder was in fact a cruel Jewish custom that was repeated every year. In the Middle Ages, the ritual murder

⁶⁹ Pelle, 1995 pp 215-217.

⁷⁰ Ötvös, 1990 p 72.

⁷¹ Pelle, 1995 p 232.

⁷² Gavin Langmuir, “Thomas of Monmouth. Detector of Ritual Murder”, in *The Blood Libel Legend* ed. by Alan Dundes (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p 7.

accusation appeared relatively late, in the 12th century, in Norwich, England. The murder of the twelve-year-old William was the first in a long series of accusations.⁷³ Spread by the lower clergy, the blood libel legend arrived to Hungary. In 1494 in Nagyszombat, and in 1529 in Bazin numerous Jews were executed because of the myth.⁷⁴ In Poland, the 18th century brought so many blood libel accusations that in 1758 the Polish Jews had to turn to the Pope for help.⁷⁵ However, one of the most important blood libel cases occurred in Tiszaeszlár, in 1882, Hungary, where a fourteen-year-old servant girl disappeared right before Passover.⁷⁶ The ensuing 1882-83 trial gained international attention. Although in the end the defendants were acquitted of all charges, anti-Jewish violence spread through the country.⁷⁷

As many scholars see it, the ritual murder and blood libel accusations appeared in Europe in parallel with the spreading of the Eucharist ritual in Christianity in the 13th century. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council legislated for the doctrine of transubstantiation as an article of faith.⁷⁸ The legislation was needed because many Christians found it hard to believe that the wafer is the body of Christ and the wine is his blood. Gavin Langmuir is one of those influential historians who claim the necessity of an inner Christian motive for the charges of the ritual murder, which he explicitly names as the doubts over the doctrine of transubstantiation.⁷⁹ As he argues, once it is demonstrated that the Jews murder Christian children for their blood, then there is no sense to question the Eucharist ritual.⁸⁰ On the contrary, Alan Dundes thinks that the Christians wanted to relieve their guilty conscience by depicting the Jews as well with the habit of eating flesh and, most importantly using blood for

⁷³ Langmuir, 1991 p 7.

⁷⁴ Tamás Kende, *Vérvád* [Blood Libel] (Budapest: Osiris, 1995), p 42.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism 1700-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1980), pp 276-277.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Rubin 1999 p 29.

⁷⁹ See especially: Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), Chapter 9.

⁸⁰ Biale, 2007 p 112.

making matzo. He calls the partaking of the body of Jesus as “an act of patent cannibalism”, while the process in which the Christians passing their feeling of guilt to the Jews he calls the “projective inversion.”⁸¹

According to Cecil Roth, there are different stages in the growing of the ritual murder or blood libel legend. First, the Jews are perceived as enemies. Secondly, the Jewish celebration of Purim had to be perceived as a strange, even blasphemous act. Thirdly, the murder, the Christian Holy Week and the Jewish Passover have to coincide in time.⁸² Out of the analyzed four post-war cases only the Kunmadaras accusation fits more or less these criteria. However, most of the post-Holocaust accusations depart in time from Passover, therefore these are atypical ritual murder accusations, which may only serve as pretexts to the attack against the Jews. As in the Middle Ages the feeling of guilt over consuming the transformed body of Christ in the sacrament of Eucharist could be projected into an accusation against the Jews, in 1945 with a very similar mechanism the Poles and Hungarians could project their feeling of guilt over looting the houses of deported Jews into accusations against the returning Holocaust survivors.

1.4 Accusations in Practice: Poland after the War

In Poland, after World War II, the ritual murder accusation spread around the country. According to Gross, as early as on 12 June 1945 a ritual murder accusation appeared in Rzeszów.⁸³ Jews were arrested, passerbys threw stones at them and later robbed the Jewish flats. Somewhat later, the accusation appeared in Przemyśl⁸⁴ and in June in Kraków too.

⁸¹ Dundes, 1991 pp 354-357.

⁸² Cecil Roth, *The Ritual Murder Libel and the Jew* (London: Woburn Press, 1934) pp 520-526.

⁸³ Gross, 2007 p 73.

⁸⁴ Cichopek, 2003 p 222.

Cichopek quotes a Kraków police report recorded on 27 June 1945, in which the suspected Jewish woman was accused of intention to abduct a Christian child in order to kill it.⁸⁵ Starting from this moment Cichopek unfolds the story of a community which has to suffer not only the desecration of its synagogue but also a pogrom, including humiliating and – in three cases – mortal physical abuse and looting of Jewish properties.⁸⁶ In her other work, Cichopek writes about the case of Topol’čany.⁸⁷ In this small place in Czechoslovakia, forty-four days after the Kraków pogrom, sixty women protested against the nationalization of a Catholic school. They attacked a doctor, Karol Berger, who vaccinated the pupils in the school. The women accused the Jewish doctor of poisoning their children.⁸⁸

Cichopek emphasizes the importance of fear of losing formerly Jewish-owned assets in the Kraków and Topol’čany riots. The theory – which sees in the Holocaust survivors’ claim over the confiscated wealth a major reason for the violent attacks against them – is maintained by Gross.⁸⁹ He also names the phenomenon of blaming the Jews for killing Christian children to make matzo a *pretext*. According to him, the looting of Jewish property in Poland was so widespread during the five years of war that “each village has its own contentious microeconomic history of the redistribution of Jewish wealth.”⁹⁰ It was well known who got what from the formerly Jewish property that is why the involvement in the postwar murdering of Jews was so widespread. Gross also sees in the post-war treatment of the Jewish minority a continuity of wartime Polish Jewish relations. The Poles hated the Nazi occupiers but they took advantage of Nazi policies against their Jewish neighbors.⁹¹ In this sense the post-war

⁸⁵ Ibid., p 224.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp 232-233.

⁸⁷ Anna Cichopek, A Case for Comparative Perspective in Polish-Jewish History: Property and Pogroms in Kraków and Topol’čani in 1945, <http://icj.huji.ac.il/conference/papers/Anna%20Cichopek.pdf> (accessed 21 April 2009).

⁸⁸ Ibid., p 6.

⁸⁹ Gross 2007.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p 248.

⁹¹ Ibid., p 260.

pogroms were the last part of the Holocaust, and the post-war anti-Semitism simply meant the continuation of an attitude acquired in the war years.⁹² As Gross states: “the moral economy of Polish society after the war allowed for the murdering of Jews.”⁹³

Another Polish scholar, Joanna Michlic, also refers to the wartime experience while writing about the extreme frequency of ritual murder accusations in the attempts to create anti-Jewish pogroms. She thinks that the Poles were willing to believe in the old medieval myth only because the society was exposed to irrational cruelty and complete misuse of human values during the war. She adds that the experience of war created a deep sense of insecurity which was further maintained by the state of civil war and the murders and arrests of the new communist system.⁹⁴

Reading the Polish and Hungarian historical literature, it becomes clear that not only the post-war political situation is different in the two countries, but they also have differences with respect to the tradition of interactions between the Jews and the Gentiles. However, despite all differences, the blood libel and ritual murder accusation appear in the same time which fact itself predicts the finding of possible similarities among the rioters’ motives and the perceptions of the pogroms.

2. Kunmadaras – The Unsuccessful Return

The Jewry of Kunmadaras was relatively lucky, since most of them were deported by the Nazis to Strasshof, while the majority of the Jewish inhabitants of the Hungarian countryside

⁹² Ibid., p 246.

⁹³ Ibid., p 160.

⁹⁴ Michlic, 2000 A p 56.

had much less chance to survive in Auschwitz. According to László Ötvös, the priest and the chronicler of the village, 371 Jews were deported from Kunmadaras. 175 of them died during the deportation. 121 of them, although survived, never came back to the homeland after the Holocaust.⁹⁵ The rest, 75 Jews returned to Kunmadaras in 1945, however, almost all of them left the village after the tragic events of the next year. To have the whole picture, one can add that 112 soldiers from Kunmadaras also died in the war. Moreover, many of the war prisoners did not return from captivity before the spring of 1946.⁹⁶

2.1 The First Day: a Trial Which Instigates Anti-Jewish Sentiment

The Holocaust survivors had already been back in the village for almost a year, when the pogrom happened, on 21 May 1946. However, all scholars note⁹⁷ that the events started on the day before, with the trial of the popular teacher, János Nagy. His planned hearing in the neighboring town, Karcag, escalated the tension in Kunmadaras on Monday, 20 May 1946. Nagy, in 1944, publicly urged further fighting against the Soviets. Furthermore, he was accused of driving young local boys – the so-called “leventes” – to Nazi Germany in order to support the German military actions.⁹⁸ At first stage, he was sentenced by the People’s Tribunal, whose decision evoked strong protest from the inhabitants of Kunmadaras. János Nagy was a popular person, who had been teaching since 1927 in Kunmadaras.⁹⁹ He asked for the help of the local political parties, while his wife turned to the Democratic Alliance of Hungarian Women (Magyar Nők Demokratikus Szövetsége) for assistance. The villagers’s support was manifested in a demonstration of minimum 300 people, who tried to accompany

⁹⁵ Ötvös, 1995 p 20.

⁹⁶ Péter Gosztonyi, *A Magyar honvédség a második világháborúban* [The Hungarian Army in the Second World War] (Budapest, Európa Kiadó, 1972), pp 283-285.

⁹⁷ Vörös, 1994 pp 70-72., Ötvös, 1990 pp 81-83., Pelle, 1995 pp 154-156., Apor, 1996 pp 10-15.

⁹⁸ Vörös, 1994 p 70.

⁹⁹ Ötvös, 1990 p 91.

the defendant to his second trial to Karcag.¹⁰⁰ They wanted to defend their teacher, as they had done before, on the previous trial day in Kunmadaras, where the court had to release Nagy because of the hostile public atmosphere.¹⁰¹ The crowd was already on its way when an unknown person from Kunmadaras phoned the Karcag authorities, who stopped the march at the border of the town.¹⁰²

Here the crowd was forced to wait and long negotiations started about the possible maximum number of villagers who could be present at the trial. This is the moment when anti-Jewish sentiments first appeared during the events, most importantly, from *outside* the inhabitants of Kunmadaras. As László Ötvös and Éva Vörös report, unknown people from Karcag spread the rumor of mysteriously disappeared children, while Zsigmond Tóth, an immigrant from Slovakia declared that only Jews could have kidnapped the children, which had happened before in Slovakia too, where the mob hanged those Jews.¹⁰³ This practice appeared very typical of every modern blood libel case: after the events the testimonies try to find somebody from outside the community who maliciously infused the ill-will into their ordinary life.¹⁰⁴ To deny this attempt to passing the responsibility, it was enough to meet two Jewish survivors from Kunmadaras, Éva Quittner and László Farkas. As both of them remember, when spring came to Kunmadaras, the people had already started to talk about that the Jews need blood to the matzo.¹⁰⁵ Éva recalls her grandmother's deep shock when she realized that even their neighbor, the wife of the tailor Becskereki, this otherwise kind and helpful woman believed in the accusations.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Vörös, 1994 p 70.

¹⁰¹ Apor, 1996 p 13.

¹⁰² Ötvös 1990 p 82.

¹⁰³ Vörös, 1994 p 71, Ötvös 1990 p 82.

¹⁰⁴ See for example: Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *Rape of Poland: Pattern of Soviet Aggression* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1948).

¹⁰⁵ Interview by the author, 22 May 2009, Budapest.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Ötvös overestimates the role of Zsigmond Tóth, who, in his story acts as a secret agent. He suspects that there is a devious causality behind Tóth's trivial acts. For example, Ötvös reports that Tóth not only had conversations with the locals, but "paid them drinks too" and "he exercised an influence on the similar young boys. They paid attention to his anti-Jewish behavior."¹⁰⁷ The anti-Jewish behavior meant in his case - what all sources underline – that Tóth swore at the Jews. Ötvös quotes him when he states: "The Jews are living in the land of plenty while we don't have anything." Or, when the crowd, which stopped before Karcag digests the rumor that two children disappeared from Karcag, Tóth states: surely the Jews took away those kids, as it happened in Slovakia too. There, the people hanged those Jews."¹⁰⁸



1. The immigrant Zsigmond Tóth in 1946 (Képes Figyelő 8 July 1946)

However, the demonstration of János Nagy's supporters appeared to be a turning point of the events. The crowd at the border of Karcag included approximately four percent of the population of Kunmadaras and up to this point there was no sign of anti-Jewish sentiment. Here they were forced to wait, and the general opinion was that only the *Jews* could have phoned from Kunmadaras to Karcag, it was only because of the *Jews* that the people could not

¹⁰⁷ Ötvös, 1990 p 82.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p 82.

take part in the trial.¹⁰⁹ It seemed that the Jews of Kunmadaras betrayed their neighbors, and they obstructed the will of the community.¹¹⁰ That was the moment also when the blood libel accusation further circulated among the villagers. Additionally they listened to the stirring speeches of various local prominent persons, such as Dr. Dezső Lázár, secretary of the local Peasants Party, the priest of the village and Gergely Takács, the leader of the local Smallholders Party. According to Ötvös, Gergely Takács “further maintained the anti-Jewish atmosphere.”¹¹¹ They were joined by János Nagy himself, who in the end, could not be present at the court, since the crowd did not let him go alone. Péter Apor notes that the villagers tried to enter Karcag, but the police shot in the air. The people from Kunmadaras were very upset, and these shots irritated them even further.¹¹² In the end, this entire crowd turned back to Kunmadaras.

2.2 In the Building of the Trade Corporation

Some supporters of János Nagy, on their way home, met Ferenc Takács, secretary of the Communist Party, the main witness of Nagy’s trial. They called him and his wife “henchmen of the *Jewish People’s Tribunal*”,¹¹³ which could refer to an already presumed Jewish conspiracy¹¹⁴ – the crowd already turned against the Jews. Ferenc Takács managed to escape, threatening the attackers with his gun. Although he did not hurt anybody, three policemen were called on by the mob to disarm him. They not only fulfilled this demand, but accompanied the communist to the building of the Trade Corporation, where the people decided to write a petition to the Minister of Justice to acquit János Nagy of all charges. In

¹⁰⁹ Vörös, 1994 p 71.

¹¹⁰ Apor, 1996 p 14.

¹¹¹ Ötvös, 1990 p 82.

¹¹² Apor, 1996 p 13.

¹¹³ Vörös, 1994 p 71.

¹¹⁴ Apor, 1996 p 15.

addition, they wanted to persuade Ferenc Takács to withdraw his testimony against the teacher, but he refused this demand.¹¹⁵

Here the behavior of the policemen is at least contradictory. First they handed Ferenc Takács to the crowd, but later they rescued him to the police headquarters. Afterwards, they sent a demand for more policemen, and as a result, nine officers arrived from Kunhegyes and a further six policemen from Karcag.¹¹⁶ However, none of them stopped the mob when they started to beat their victims. The first victim was Ferenc Wurczel, the local Social Democrat secretary. It is not clear why he was the first object of the aggression. He was beaten up outside the building of the Trade Corporation, probably because he did not want to sign the petition, or because he also testified against János Nagy and he refused to change his statements.¹¹⁷ Some sources emphasize that he referred to his communist faith which did not permit him to withdraw his testimony.¹¹⁸ According to Vörös, Ferenc Wurczel lost five of his teeth, his rib broke, and he had injuries on his head too.¹¹⁹ He could not even say yes or no, since they started to beat him before he could enter the building of the Trade Corporation. That is why Vörös thinks that Wurczel was beaten because of his Jewish descent and not because of his role in the trial and his political position.¹²⁰ However, this reasoning is not that strong, and for example Apor sets up another, probably more convincing theory, namely that Wurczel suffered only because the village regarded the Social Democrat politician as a betrayer of the community's interest.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Ötvös, 1990 p 83.

¹¹⁶ Vörös, 1994 p 72.

¹¹⁷ Vörös, 1994 p 72.

¹¹⁸ Pelle, 1995 p 156.

¹¹⁹ Vörös, 1994 p 72.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Apor, 1996 p 15.

The night following this first violent act was relatively calm and uneventful. It was only the next morning when the anti-Jewish violence spread through the village, leaving three dead and eighteen injured.

2.3 The Second Day – The Eggs and the Jews

The following day was Tuesday, the day of the weekly market at Kunmadaras. The pogrom started in the market; however, three out of four authors present different versions of its actual beginning. Vörös accepts Ötvös' report, that a "Let's dance!" shout from the Slovakian emigrant, Zsigmond Tóth, signaled the beginning of the pogrom.¹²² Since Tóth did not occur during the pogrom at all, it is unlikely that he went to the market just to say this short sentence. After this hardly credible turn, in the story of Vörös the marketeers started to yell that the Jews kidnap Christian children "in order to make sausage or paprikás from them."¹²³ As Vörös describes: "the crowd shouted the well-known blood libel accusations."¹²⁴ Of course, the well-known blood libel accusation means that the Jews allegedly kill Christian children in order to use their blood in the matzo. That was well-known in Hungary, especially since 20 May 1882, when a Catholic paper first reported the disappearance of Eszter Solymosi, which case later developed into the famous *Tiszaeszlár trial*.¹²⁵ In contrast to this, as Apor argues, Kunmadaras was not a typical blood libel case. Here the accusation was only a vehicle by which the locals wanted to distance the Jewish community, stating that they were able to make food from innocent children, therefore they were inhuman.¹²⁶ Apor sees the same role of the blood libel accusation in post-war Hungary as Gross sees in it in post-war Poland: this accusation is only a *pretext* to legitimize the violence but does not serve as a real

¹²² Ötvös, 1990 p 84, Vörös, 1994 p 72.

¹²³ Vörös, 1994 p 73.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Robert Nemes, "Hungary's antisemitic provinces: violence and ritual murder in the 1880", *Slavic Review* Vol. 66, (2007): pp 20-44.

¹²⁶ Apor, 1996 p 28.

reason for it.¹²⁷ As Apor argues, the pogrom started with a row over the prices¹²⁸, and all blood libel accusations were started only after the first conflict had already appeared. The book by János Pelle focuses on the archaic blood libel accusations. Not surprisingly, his version of the beginning of the riot refers to the local woman, Eszter Tóth Kabai, who shouted at the market that her brother's son was kidnapped by the Jews. She was the one who first attacked Sándor Klein, however, the two other women, who joined her already named the victim a "shark", while beating him, an expression, which indicates economic conflict.¹²⁹

According to Vörös, following the screaming, Vilmos Fisch, a fifty-five-year-old Jew from Tiszaszentimre was beaten just because he tried to protest against the accusations. Right after Fisch, three women, including Eszter Kabai Tóth, destroyed several boxes of eggs offered for sale by Sándor Klein (Kuti), attacking him and his wife.¹³⁰ In opposite version of the beginning of the riot, Apor reports, the pogrom started with a quarrel between the women and Sándor Klein about the price of eggs.¹³¹ It is sometimes disturbing that Vörös calls the victim Sándor *Klein (Kuti)*, while the other sources name the same person simply as Sándor *Klein*. Vörös may want to refer to the cousinship between him and the later murdered other Jew from Kunmadaras, Ferenc Kuti. However, this contradiction over the names confused János Pelle so much that in his book he identifies Sándor Klein with Ferenc Kuti. In his – obviously wrong – interpretation, the attacked Jewish marketeer and the later lynched merchant are the same person.¹³²

¹²⁷ Apor, 1996 p 30, Gross, 2007 p 248.

¹²⁸ Apor, 1996 pp 17-18.

¹²⁹ Pelle, 1995 p 159.

¹³⁰ Ibid., pp 72-73.

¹³¹ Apor, 1996 p 18.

¹³² Pelle, 1995 pp 159-160.

Ötvös writes the most descriptively about the attack on the Kleins, based on a personal statement. According to it, at this point Klein was rather buying than selling the eggs, when “Julianna Ruszki” arrived. (Among the defendants in the later trial there was Julianna Bánhegyesi, who was born in Omsk, in Russia.¹³³ It is likely, that Ötvös’ informer refers to this person.) When she agreed with one of the women on the price of the eggs, that she could pay a pengő for an egg, then Sándor Klein offered triple price for the same eggs. “Julianna Ruszki” attacked first the Jewish merchant, and other women joined her, as well as a man, Bálint Somogyi. This thirty-seven year old farmer was the neighbor of László Farkas, the Jewish survivor, who showed me a documentary about the pogrom, entitled: *Midőn a vér* (*While the Blood*). In this film Sándor Klein’s son also tells his version of the attack. He recalls that Eszter Kabai Tóth screamed in the market about the Jews who had kidnapped her child, and right after this, women attacked the Kleins.¹³⁴ What is certain is that the Kleins managed to escape from the market. They were already in the outskirts of Kunmadaras, when two men, who were herding pigs, stopped them. “Megállj, te zsidó!” (“Stop you, Jew”) – they shouted and beat them so much that Sándor Klein’s skull broke in seven places, while his wife’s in three places.¹³⁵

At the same time, the crowd attacked the third Jew in the market. István Lázársfeld arrived from Budapest with the morning train.¹³⁶ He immediately went to the market, where the women beat him and kicked him, especially Mrs. Salángi, a twenty-two year old housewife, the mother of two children.¹³⁷ The case of Lázársfeld from Budapest, and Fisch from

¹³³ Files of Zsigmond Tóth’s Trial in Trials of the People’s Tribunal, Budapest Archives, V 56032, p 5.

¹³⁴ Kőszegi Edit directed *Midőn a vér*, 1994, Budapest.

¹³⁵ Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

¹³⁶ Vörös, 1994 p 73.

¹³⁷ Ötvös, 1990 p 85, Files of Zsigmond Tóth’s Trial in Trials of the People’s Tribunal, Budapest Archives, V 56032, p 9.

Tiszaszentimre show that the rioters did not address their attack only at the local Jewry. However, when the crowd finished its job in the market, mostly the local Jews were in danger.

2.4 Marching Around the Village

László Farkas recalls the days of the pogrom. According to him, the rioters left the market in smaller groups in order to search for more Jews in other parts of Kunmadaras. He was nineteen years old then. Before the war his family had had a shoe-shop in the village, but when they arrived home from the deportation, they found their house and shop empty. “Nothing was there, except some straw with lice in which the Russian soldiers slept.” – he adds.¹³⁸ His family was also involved in the egg and hen business after the war. On 21 May 1946 they heard the voices of the riot, so they hid in the attic. From there, they saw a group of armed peasants walking in their street. The above mentioned Bálint Somogyi, the neighbor of the Farkas family led that group. The peasants wanted to rob their house, but Somogyi said no. He said that good people were living here, and the group marched forward.

Vörös, who tries to emphasize the anti-Jewish character of the events, reports the next violent act. She describes that, right after the Kleins’ escape, eight persons attacked the shop of László Hasznos and its Jewish owner, shouting: “Here is a stinky Jew, we must strike him dead”¹³⁹ The fact, that “only” eight rioters attacked Hasznos confirms that the crowd split into smaller groups. Ötvös adds that this was the group which left the market square towards Tiszafüred, namely northwards. He also adds that Hasznos’ shop was demolished.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Interview by the author, 22 May 2009, Budapest.

¹³⁹ Vörös, 1994 p 73.

¹⁴⁰ Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

After him – goes on Vörös – the crowd arrived at Rosenberg Gyula’s home.¹⁴¹ Ötvös argues that this was another group of the rioters than the one which attacked Hasznos. He even publishes the participants’ names: Gizella M., Mrs. B. Nagy, Margit Kusák and Julianna Kántor.¹⁴² Pelle adds to them Sára Kerepesi to the list.¹⁴³ They attacked Mrs. Rosenberg and ordered her to give back the kidnapped Christian children.¹⁴⁴ From the files of their trial, it appears that they were ordinary women, fifty, forty, twenty-two, twenty-one and twenty-four years old. They acted on behalf of all Christian mothers, however, in their case as well the blood libel accusation could be only a pretext, and not the real cause of the attack.¹⁴⁵ Pelle quotes some of the sentences the attackers shouted while beating Mrs. Rosenberg: “Let’s beat the Jews, because they take away our children!” or “Do you want one more child?” and finally the one which indicates the real nature of animosity: “you have to suffer these hits because of the reclaimed duvet.”¹⁴⁶

It was around 10 a.m., when ten to fifteen rioters arrived at the Neulanders. This group was led by Eszter Kabai Tóth, the illiterate woman, who first screamed in the market about the children kidnapped by the Jews in the morning. She was the one who first hit Ferenc Neulander, and urged the other peasants with the words: “Kill the Jew!”¹⁴⁷ According to Vörös, they accused Ferenc Neulander of phoning Karcag the day before and informing the police about the demonstration which tried to hijack the trial of János Nagy. They were shouting: “Do you need a People’s Tribunal? Here comes the Tribunal. Enough of the reign of

¹⁴¹ Vörös, 1994 p 73.

¹⁴² Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

¹⁴³ Pelle, 1995 p 161.

¹⁴⁴ Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

¹⁴⁵ Files of Zsigmond Tóth’s Trial in Trials of the People’s Tribunal, Budapest Archives, V 56032, p 3-7.

¹⁴⁶ Pelle, 1995 p 161, 153.

¹⁴⁷ Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

the Jews! You take our children.”¹⁴⁸ As a result of the injuries suffered Ferenc Neulander lost his life.¹⁴⁹ Three men and five women took part in the actual lynching.¹⁵⁰

Ferenc Weinberger was the hairdresser in Kunmadaras. When he heard the voices of the pogrom, he closed his salon, and hid with his wife in his neighbor's attic.¹⁵¹ However, Eszter Kabai Tóth and others found them and beat them up.¹⁵² Mrs. Weinberger remembered that three women and a man by a shovel hit her.¹⁵³ Forty days after the pogrom, the daily called *Köztársaság* published a report about the Weinbergers. The article entitled “*Eladó ház*”, (“A House for Sale”) which refers to the family's intention to leave Kunmadaras. Ferenc Weinberger, who was just released from the hospital of Karcag, says that he sees no way of returning to his home, that is why he decided to sell the house and emigrate from Hungary. The Weinbergers describe how they wanted to get back the family duvets and a mirror after coming back from deportation. As they explain, during the pogrom, the attackers informed them that they were beaten up especially because of the attempts to recover the family's values.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ Vörös, 1994 p 74.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

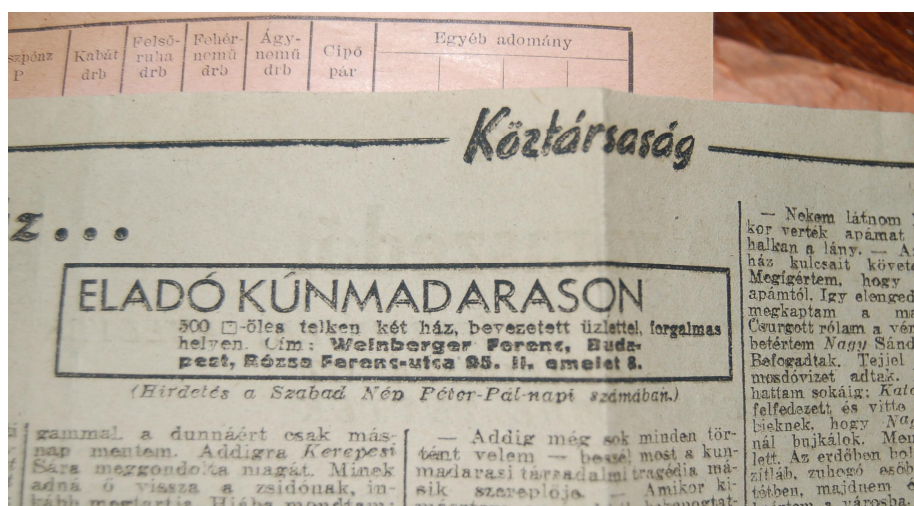
¹⁵⁰ Ötvös, 1990 p 85.

¹⁵¹ Vörös, 1994 p 74.

¹⁵² Ötvös, 1990 p 86.

¹⁵³ Vörös, 1994 p 74.

¹⁵⁴ *Köztársaság*, 1st July 1946, p 7.



2. The issue of *Köztársaság* on 1 July 1946 (Collection of the Jewish Museum's Archive)

Bertalan Weisz closed his shop on Kunhegyesi Street, and tried to hide at the railway station. The rioters caught him, walked him back to the marketplace where Eszter Kabai Tóth and other women beat him, and broke his hand in two places.¹⁵⁵ At this point the police lieutenant called the rioters to disperse. The crowd did not obey, and the lieutenant drove away without giving orders to the staying policemen.¹⁵⁶

2.5 The Role of the Police

Vörös blames the inability of the police to stop the rioters as one of the most important factors, although she fails to unfold the reasons of this failure. She also mentions the attempt, when a high-ranking officer called for dissolution in vain.¹⁵⁷ It is likely, that the police itself, as a representation of the communist ruled Ministry of Internal Affairs had very limited respect among the villagers. Just as on 20 May, when the policemen fulfilled the demand for disarming Ferenc Takács, on the next day yet again the crowd called three policemen to disarm their victim: Ferenc Kuti. The rioters did not dare to enter his house because according

¹⁵⁵ Ötvös, 1990 p 86.

¹⁵⁶ Vörös, 1994 p 74, Ötvös 1990 p 86.

¹⁵⁷ Vörös, 1994 p 74.

to the rumor Kuti had a gun.¹⁵⁸ Out of the three, two policemen joined the police on 1 May 1946, only twenty days before the pogrom,¹⁵⁹ thus they did not have any authority over the peasants. The policemen entered Kuti's place and came back not only with the news that he did not have any gun, but with Kuti himself. The mob started to beat him up, somebody even stabbed him and Ferenc Kuti finally died in June, in the hospital of Karcag.¹⁶⁰ The progressive *Haladás* newspaper interviews Mrs. Kuti on 18 July 1946. According to the article, she received an anonymous letter threatening to kill her if she did not leave Kunmadaras forever.¹⁶¹

János Pelle argues that the cooperation of the police with the rioters in certain situations had the message of approval. By this approval the local authorities allowed the inhabitants of Kunmadaras to "finish off" its Jewish community.¹⁶² He suggests that some of the policemen possibly shared the blood libel accusation, since for example they confiscated all sausage from Kuti's house and took it to the local police headquarters as clues.¹⁶³ However, Pelle places the pogrom in a broader perspective. As he shows, the destruction of the legal institutions, the dissolution of the gendarmerie, the emigration of the corrupted local higher class, the pillage committed by the Red Army and the post-war poverty all together made the breakout of the violence in Kunmadaras possible.¹⁶⁴ In his view, political and the economic factors mingled. The returning Jews claimed their assets, their houses, their animals, and their clothes from the locals. However, they did not claim the confiscated wealth if it was

¹⁵⁸ Ötvös, 1990 p 86.

¹⁵⁹ Ötvös, 1990 p 86.

¹⁶⁰ Vörös, 1994 p 74.

¹⁶¹ Haladás 18 July 1946 p 5.

¹⁶² Pelle, 1995 p 159.

¹⁶³ Pelle, 1995 p 160.

¹⁶⁴ Pelle, 1995 pp 151-152.

possessed by the representatives of the Communist Party. In return they expected support from the police vis-à-vis the peasants.¹⁶⁵

The last murder of the pogrom happened outside Kunmadaras. László Farkas knew József Rosinger, who tried to escape from the village. He was going towards Karcag, where his sister was living. Beside the road, next to an army airport, people were working. As Ötvös reports, they heard that two children had disappeared from the village.¹⁶⁶ What is more important: they probably heard that the Jew-baiting was permitted that day. First, they only followed the man. Then, they took his stick out of his hand, and beat him with it in turns, one after another.¹⁶⁷ According to the files of the later trial, when the workers left József Rosinger's collapsed body, they saw three unknown men from Karcag, who allegedly approached Rosinger, and beat the helpless man to death.¹⁶⁸

2.6 The End

Pelle does not stop interpreting the events where Ötvös, Vörös and Apor do. He recalls a police officer, Pál Drukker's first experience. When Drukker arrived from Kunhegyes, he found the rioters gathered around the police's building. The inhabitants stood there with blood on their cloths and tried to justify their cruel act. They tried to explain to the regional police captain of Szolnok how the Jews had kidnapped and killed the Christian children. Their clothes were full of blood, but they expected sympathy from the authorities.¹⁶⁹ Pelle's source

¹⁶⁵ Pelle, 1995 p 153.

¹⁶⁶ Ötvös, 1990 p 86.

¹⁶⁷ Apor, 1996 p 21.

¹⁶⁸ Files of Zsigmond Tóth's Trial in Trials of the People's Tribunal, Budapest Archives, V 56032, p 34.

¹⁶⁹ Pelle, 1995 p 161.

adds: “it seemed that these people wanted the police to protect their children from the Jews. They did not even think that they could be arrested.”¹⁷⁰

However, the locals gathered not only around the police headquarters. There was also an inter-party meeting, which issued a proclamation about the pogrom.¹⁷¹ The representatives of the local political parties – with the leadership of Gergely Takács – called the Jewry of Kunmadaras to leave the village. Later this decision of expulsion was modified and targeted only those Jews “who could not adopt themselves to the democratic life of the village.”¹⁷² The proclamation also called Ferenc Takács – the main witness of the János Nagy trial – to leave.¹⁷³

Péter Apor in his thesis analyzes the campaign against the black-marketeers and its role of the pogrom.¹⁷⁴ Although he may overestimate the effects of the newspapers and posters, he is right that the economic tension is very important in understanding the pogrom of Kunmadaras. The long lasting political-economic campaign which called for a fight against the black-marketeers as the enemies of the Hungarian stabilization further fuelled anti-Semitic sentiments.¹⁷⁵ However, the economic tension relied also on the Jews’ claims for wealth looted from the abandoned houses of the deported Jewish inhabitants. As László Farkas says: “In April 1944, the Jews from Kunmadaras were taken either to the Karcag ghetto or to Dévaványa. As soon as we left the village, they robbed our houses. You can imagine, how disappointed they were, when we returned.”¹⁷⁶ Éva Quittner, who was only thirteen years old in 1946, recalls her mother’s memories: “My mother had given some valuables to her

¹⁷⁰ Pelle, 1995 pp 161-162.

¹⁷¹ Vörös, 1994 pp 74-75.

¹⁷² Apor, 1996 p 25.

¹⁷³ Ötvös, 1990 p 87.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p 8.

¹⁷⁵ Apor, 1996 pp 6-7.

¹⁷⁶ Interview by the author, 22 May 2009, Budapest.

Christian friends and neighbors. When we arrived back from the deportation, she asked back these things, but the answer was always the same: ‘Oh, my dear, everything was taken by the Russians.’ We had to start everything from zero.”¹⁷⁷

However, the Jews were quickly recovering, which fact produced even more dissatisfaction among the locals. Apor quotes a defendant of the later trial, as he complained about the local Jewry. “In Kunmadaras a lot of people talked about...that the Jews, sure enough, were well off, hardly arriving from the deportation how well they lived through buying and selling...they worked nothing still they ate white bread, had suits made, while we, war-prisoners had nothing.”¹⁷⁸ The quick economic growth of the local Jews increased the disappointment of the peasants, who also suffered because of the drought.¹⁷⁹ The riot started at the market place, because this was the place where the women wanted to buy food for their family. The market was also central in the life of the day-laborers, since if someone wanted to hire one of them, it was mostly possible in the market in the morning. The tension finally erupted by the blood libel accusation, and the local policemen were reluctant to block the growing aggression. In Kunmadaras some part of the villagers had claimed the right for a “judgment day”, and partly with their aggression and partly with the proclamation of the inter-party meeting they expelled the Jews from the village.

3. The Two Waves of Turbulence in Miskolc in 1946

In the summer of 1946 violent turbulence occurred in Miskolc, a traditional industrial city, the second biggest city in Hungary. The events had numerous commentaries in Hungary and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Apor, 1996 p 21.

¹⁷⁹ Vörös, 1994 p 72.

abroad too. This was the period when the victorious powers were preparing the peace-agreement with Hungary, and the pogroms in the Hungarian countryside were not presenting a desirable picture of the country. That time, in a coalition government, MKP, the Hungarian Communist Party controlled the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the full support of the Red Army. Since the communists instigated the violence and from 1948 they ruled the whole country it is not surprising that for forty years nobody wrote extensively about the anti-Jewish events in Miskolc. It was still a brave act when János Varga raised the question of responsibility in his study published in 1986.¹⁸⁰ Interestingly till this day this is the best historical work on the topic.

This chapter reconstructs the turbulences and demonstrates that the characteristics of the events resemble traditional food riots and workers demonstrations, while most scholars depict them as organized, violent expressions of anti-Jewish sentiment, as pogroms.

3.1 Preconditions

In 1783 only seventy Jews lived in the city, while in 1941 10,428 Jewish inhabitants were registered.¹⁸¹ Two local preconditions should be underlined, namely the unusual concentration of industrial workers and a tragic event, which roughed Miskolc up the wrong way: the reburial at Létrástető. Here in November 1944 the SS, with the members of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Movement, killed 121 people. Most of the victims were Jewish men, the members of the Labor Service Forces beside the Hungarian Army. Seven months later the Politburo of the Miskolc Police ordered several alleged – captured but yet not sentenced – Hungarian Nazis and collaborators to rebury the Jewish victims, and drag their coffins into the

¹⁸⁰ Varga, 1986 pp 310-311.

¹⁸¹ Tamás Csíki, *Városi zsidóság Északkelet- és Kelet-Magyarországon* [Urban Jewry in Northeast and East Hungary] (Budapest: Osiris, 1999) p 17.

city. The police hung plates on them with the following messages: “That is what we’ve done” or “We are the fascist criminals” or “Here we are bringing our victims”, etc.¹⁸²

However, most preconditions of the Miskolc anti-Jewish riots were general characteristics in the postwar Hungary. First and foremost in the so-called “coalition era”, in between 1945 and 1948, a parliamentary democracy was installed. This unprecedented political system was installed and at the same time limited as well by the Allies.¹⁸³ The Soviets, and as their local representative, the Hungarian Communist Party ruled the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which controlled the police and the secret services. However, the government was in a hard situation, especially because of the danger of famine. In the winter of 1945 the lack of wheat was the biggest problem, since only 40 percent of the necessary amount was available. Approximately a million gross tons of wheat was missing due to the war and drought of 1945. In addition, in 1946, inflation rose very high. As a result, most Hungarians had to exchange their valuables for food on the black market.¹⁸⁴ The American Jewish Distribution Committee, the Joint provided remarkable financial support and provisions for the Holocaust survivors. This is why, for certain Hungarians, it could seem that the Jews were in a privileged situation.¹⁸⁵

It is also important to note that from 1945, for the first time in Hungarian history, masses could take part in the political decisions.¹⁸⁶ The Independent Smallholders Party won the 1945 election, and the communists did everything to extend their political basis, which they tried to achieve by more and more political campaigns. One of their most important campaigns

¹⁸² Szabad Magyarország, 6 May 1945 p 3.

¹⁸³ Karády, 2002 p 12.

¹⁸⁴ Pölöskei, Gergely, Izsák, 1995 pp 186-187.

¹⁸⁵ Szabó, 1995 p 45, Karády, 2002 p 48.

¹⁸⁶ Éva Ständeisky, “A Háború Utáni Vérvádak Történelmi Háttér” [The Historical Background of the Post-war Blood Libel Accusations] in *Vérvádak Üzenete* (Budapest: Minoritas Könyvek, 1996) pp 63-64.

targeted the stabilization of the Hungarian economy, in order to pave the way for the introduction of the new national currency, the forint. As it is demonstrated by Apor, the campaign had induced anti-Jewish sentiments by speeches, posters, articles and banners, which suggested that the black-marketeers were Jews.¹⁸⁷

3.2 The Echo of a Call for Fight against the Black-marketeers

As a part of the campaign against the black-marketeers, on 23 July 1946, Mátyás Rákosi, General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party, made a speech about the economic stabilization in Miskolc. Here he told the following to the gathered, approximately 250,000 audience: “Whoever speculates with the forint, whoever wants to undermine the economic base of our democracy has to be hanged.”¹⁸⁸ On the next day, in the communist daily *Szabad Magyarország* the commentary about Rákosi’s speech had an even more precise subhead: “Death to the speculating black-marketeers!”¹⁸⁹ On 27 July 1946 the local communists in Miskolc formed the “Forint-defender Committee”, which shortly after achieved its first significant success. They uncovered the “black-marketeers” of the Florian mill, by signing a contract with the owner Sándor Rejtő. According to the contract, the buyer – the printer of the local communist newspaper – would pay triple price for the wheat, 240 forint instead of 80 forint per quintal. At first the Jewish owner of the mill did not want to sign the contract, which is why the director of the printing press had to blackmail him: if he did not sign there could be a demonstration against the mill. On 28 July the police stopped the mill’s truck, and the director and his employee, Ernő Jungreis were arrested.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Apor, 1996 pp 6-7.

¹⁸⁸ Szabó, 1995 p 136.

¹⁸⁹ Szabad Magyarország, 24 July 1946. p 1.

¹⁹⁰ Varga, 1986 p 295.

On the following day the *Szabad Magyarország* reported the arrest and published an interview with István Oszip, the lord lieutenant of Miskolc, who declared that he himself acted in the case against the black-marketeers, and added that it was enough of the hardship.¹⁹¹ The words of the communist newspaper were echoed in the most important factory in Miskolc, in the Diósgyőr forge. Soon after a proclamation appeared on the bulletin boards of the factory with the telling title: “Death to the black-marketeers of the Florian mill!” The proclamation emphasized the fact that the black-marketeers stole the food of the workers, and it was high time to use mob law against them. It stressed that the black-marketeers took out the bread from the mouth of the worker while he worked on the machine. The author also called all mindful forge workers to meet at 2pm and proceed to the police headquarters in Miskolc in order to demand capital punishment for the black-marketeers.¹⁹²

3.3 The Route of the Workers

(Forge - Vörös Church - County Hall - Búza Square)

In the early afternoon the forge workers started to walk in structured lines. The morning and afternoon shifts contained approximately 10,000 workers. As they proceeded under banners they followed the tramline leading towards the center of Miskolc. At the same time the two arrested Jews, Rejtő and Jungreis, were sent to work to the so-called Baross mine with another detainee. They were accompanied by only one policeman and they traveled by public transport. At the Vörös or Saint Anna church they got off the tram to wait for the connection. Unfortunately, instead of the tram a huge crowd approached them. Since the authorities knew about the demonstration, it is possible that the crowd and the victims did not meet by

¹⁹¹ Varga, 1986 pp 294-296.

¹⁹² Ibid., p 297.

accident.¹⁹³ However, the policeman did not want to deliver Rejtő and Jungreis when the workers recognized the alleged black-marketeers. At the end, the crowd decided to let the third detainee go, but they confiscated his backpack, which Rejtő had to wear. He also had to hold a plate on which it was written: “Death to the forint-worseners!” From this point the two Jewish men led the crowd which shouted anti-Jewish and forint-defender slogans.¹⁹⁴ When the march arrived at the County Hall, from the balcony of the building Ágoston Szkladán, General Secretary of the Borsod county communists, and Ferenc Kiss, police lieutenant-colonel called the people to return to their workplace and let the court sanction the alleged crime. However, the crowd did not obey. Instead several people lifted the issue of the communist newspaper and showed it towards the balcony¹⁹⁵ as some kind of written permission for jurisdiction. They shouted “We are going to hang them!” and “We don’t trust the police!” or “We want to see the hanging!” János Pelle cites one of the eyewitnesses of the riot, who remembered particularly numerous women around, not only from the forge, but also other women from Miskolc. A lot of “plebeian people” joined the crowd, which took Jungreis and Rejtő to Búza Square. These women were shouting “They have to be killed. Our children are starving.”¹⁹⁶ Here, on Búza Square somebody took the plate from the hands of Rejtő and hit him with it on the head. He collapsed and the crowd kept hitting and kicking him. At the same time somehow the backpack departed from his body, opened, and food fell out of it. The spectacle of food made the hungry rioters mad.¹⁹⁷ They wildly beat up the unconscious mill owner, whose life was finally saved by the policemen and the Soviet soldiers who took him into the Erzsébet Hospital. However, the crowd hit Jungreis even more times, since he “had a more Semitic look.”¹⁹⁸ One of the rioters hanged him by his belt

¹⁹³ Pelle, 1995 pp 215-218.

¹⁹⁴ Varga, 1986 p 297.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p 298.

¹⁹⁶ Pelle, 1995 p 223.

¹⁹⁷ Varga, 1986 p 298.

¹⁹⁸ Pelle, 1995 p 223.

on a dray, which drew him approximately seventy meters. At this time a bigger group of policemen arrived, who took the corpse away from the rioters. They took him to the police headquarters, where a doctor pronounced him dead.¹⁹⁹

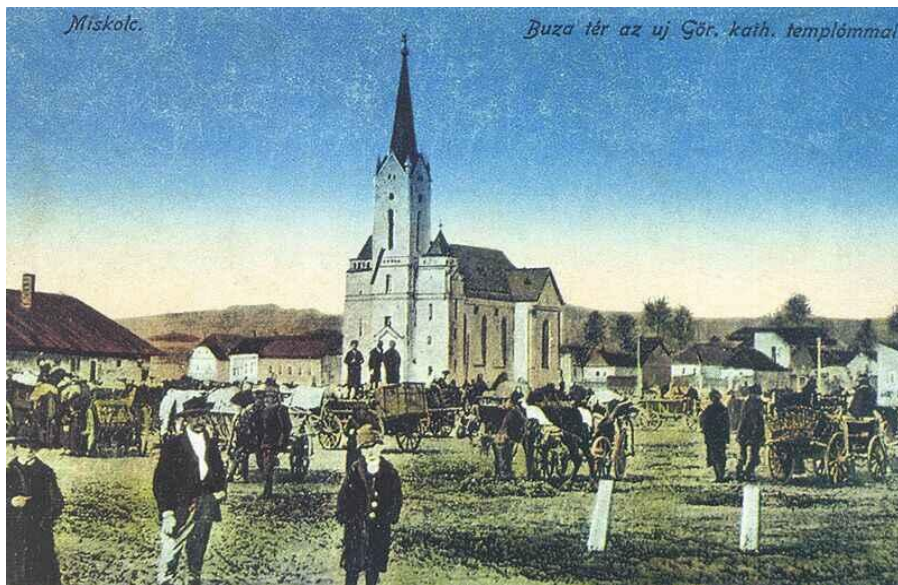
3.4 *Genius Loci*

It was not by accident that the crowd chose the venue of the lynching: Búza Square was the traditional marketplace of Miskolc. Its name itself refers to the wheat which was sold here as early as in the nineteenth century. None of the scholars stress this fact. Pelle even quotes Mihály Fekete, who remembers the forge workers' wives who were often disappointed as they returned home from Búza Square market, because they could not buy even the most basic food from their husbands' salaries in 1946. They were particularly angry at the black-marketeers and the instigators of the inflation.²⁰⁰ It seems that the rioters wanted to teach all Jewish merchants a lesson by lynching Rejtő and Jungreisz at the place of the wheat selling. Búza Square once more appears in Pelle's book: "on the day following the pogrom a smaller group started Jew-baiting in Búza Square. They caught a Jew, pushed him, shouted at him." – these are the words of a former inspector of Miskolc Municipal Police.²⁰¹ It is obvious that Búza Square was the place where Jews could be found any time, where one had to go to Jew-bait.

¹⁹⁹ Varga, 1986 p 299.

²⁰⁰ Fekete, 1983 p 124.

²⁰¹ Pelle, 1995 p 233.



3. The market on Búza Square in 1910 (Source: private postcard collection)

From a later prospective it is striking that none of the scholars stress how closely the Miskolc riots resemble the demonstrations of the working class before the First World War in Hungary. Gábor Gyáni analyzes the forms of collective violence in Budapest, in between 1869 and 1914. In his work one can read the following: “Most workers’ action took place where the addressees of their petition resided or had their place of business, or in front of government buildings, police departments, etc., in any event in the heart of the city.”²⁰² In the case of the 1946 riots in Miskolc it was first the County Hall, the seat of local rulers, then Búza Square where the Jews did their business, and finally at the police headquarters, where the demonstrators wanted to free the arrested co-workers and punish the cruel Jewish policemen. Just as in Budapest, in the last decades of the 19th century: “The regularly recurring demonstrations usually involved a thousand or, occasionally several thousand workers. Frequently the demonstrations were in support of people arrested at earlier public

²⁰² Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the Urban Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p 143.

demonstrations...In these cases the demonstration was usually held in front of the police headquarters.”²⁰³

Gyáni also notes that street demonstrations temporarily suspended the accepted rules of behavior in public. The city center had special importance, with the buildings of municipal authorities. Also these areas often served for public ceremonies, marches, military parades, celebrations initiated by the authorities. The Miskolc workers did a symbolic conquest, since – as Gyáni puts it – “when the same space was used ‘unofficially’ for similar purposes, the demonstrators were, in fact, seizing control of the space.”²⁰⁴

3.5 Two Interpretations of the Authorities’ Behavior

According to Róbert Szabó, it is very likely that the Miskolc authorities leaked the route and schedule of the detainees, so the encounter of the demonstrators and the black-marketeers did not happen by accident.²⁰⁵ He goes on to blame the police that they did nothing in order to dissolve the demonstration, although members of the Communist Party notified them in advance about the possibility of lynching. However, he thinks that the control of the events simply slipped through the organizers’ fingers.²⁰⁶ As János Pelle argues, everything happened according to the plan of the so-called Political Police. He is not surprised that István Oszip, the lord lieutenant of Miskolc left the city in the morning and returned only in the late evening from Budapest. Pelle is sure that the “deterrent scenario” made the workers and the alleged black-marketeers meet at the tram stop under the Vörös church. He quotes the testimony of the survivor Rejtő, who said that they were supposed to leave the internment camp almost two

²⁰³ Gyáni, 2005 pp 137-138.

²⁰⁴ Gyáni, 2005 p 146.

²⁰⁵ Szabó, 1995 p 137.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p 138.

hours earlier, but a policeman kept them there with an administrative reason. Finally, when they left, this policeman, instead of saying good bye, said: “have fun!”²⁰⁷

Pelle states that the members of the Political Police marched at the head of the demonstration. They were the ones who recognized Rejtő and Jungreis and they shouted the first anti-Semitic slogans.²⁰⁸ How does Pelle know that these people belonged to the secret services? He has two witnesses: one is Rejtő himself, who testified, that he had never seen the workers before who attacked him. However, Pelle cites another testimony about the unknown young men, this time his source is István B., who marched in the middle of the crowd with a plate in his hand, on which it was written: “death to the enemies of the forint!”²⁰⁹ Pelle’s version gets closer to a conspiracy theory when he declares that the third detainee, who stood at the tram stop with the Jewish millers was certainly a cloaked agent of the Political Police. This is why he had a backpack with food in it. Pelle sees the responsibility of the secret services for making it sure that the crowd forced Rejtő to wear the backpack, and then somewhat later, for hitting him that way, which let the food fall out of the same bag.²¹⁰ He thinks that the passive attitude of the police also supports his theory.²¹¹ It is very hard to argue against Pelle’s version, since he only deduces, and does not really prove the facts. On one hand, one can see in this complicated conspiracy yet another attempt to blame outsiders for a community’s own shame. On the other hand, one has to bear in mind that nobody was ever sentenced for the lynching in Miskolc. The Public Prosecutor’s Office brought a charge against thirty-five people, most of them forge workers, nine employees of the public railway company (MÁV), four craftsmen, a merchant and a teenager. However, the trial was twice postponed due to the

²⁰⁷ Pelle, 1995 pp 215-217.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp 219-220.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p 220.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p 221.

²¹¹ Ibid., p 222.

illness of the leading judge. The legal solution of the case was provided by the amnesty on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 1848 revolution.²¹²

3.6 The Arrests Which Led to the Second Demonstration

On the afternoon of 30 July 1946, on the same day when Ernő Jungreis was lynched by the mob, the local party leader, Ágoston Szkladán had a meeting to discuss the situation with high-ranking policemen. They received a telegram from the leader of the Political Police in the Hungarian Countryside, who ordered the arrest of the murderers. Ferenc Kiss, police lieutenant-colonel, who previously tried in vain to calm down the crowd from the balcony of the County Hall, disagreed with the order and proposed that the police should wait a couple of days before acting. However, his proposal was rejected and sixteen people were arrested by the next morning. The investigation was led by lieutenant Fogarasi, who physically assaulted some of the suspected workers. All sources note that Fogarasi was of Jewish descent,²¹³ although according to Szabó, only the father of the lieutenant was Jewish.²¹⁴ Since all alleged persons were kept in the same room, the physical violence became known by everybody. However, on 31 July four out of sixteen suspects were freed.²¹⁵ Two of them, József Ficsor and Ágoston Ocsenás went directly to the forge, where the workers actually discussed the previous day's demonstration. The freed workers explained to their colleagues the cruelty of the policemen, and the group was led to the conclusion that the arrested "workers had to be freed from the hands of the Jewish torturers."²¹⁶ On the same day Mihály Fekete, secretary of the Miskolc communist party traveled to Budapest to inform László Rajk, that time Minister of Internal Affairs, that some of the workers thought that the black-marketeers deserved the

²¹² Varga, 1986 pp 309-310.

²¹³ Varga, 1986 p 301, Pelle, 1995 p 227.

²¹⁴ Szabó, 1995 p 139.

²¹⁵ Varga, 1986 p 299.

²¹⁶ Varga, 1986 p 299, Pelle 1995 p 230.

lynching and therefore saw the arrests as unjust. He also mentioned that the workers wanted to free their colleagues.²¹⁷

3.7 The Route of the Workers and the Siege

(Forge-Erzsébet Hospital-Theatre-Zsolcai Gate)

On 1 August 1946 the workers of the forge started to demonstrate again. This time they were accompanied by the railway employees and miners. Three-four times more people gathered than two days before. They also armed themselves with sticks, metal bars, and picks, since they went to besiege the building where their colleagues were kept and beaten by the Jews. When the shop-committee in the forge of Diósgyőr saw these preparations, they went to the police headquarters to demand the freeing of the arrested workers, to prevent further violence. László Rajk via telephone ordered the discharge of the twelve workers. As one of them remembers in Pelle' book, the policemen even gave them flowers, before they were taken on a truck. Then the gate of the police headquarters was opened and the freed workers were taken around the city, while the inhabitants congratulated them.²¹⁸ At the same time the crowd from the forge marched towards the building of the police. A smaller group strayed to the Erzsébet hospital, where the alleged black-marketeer, the injured Sándor Rejtő, the owner of the mill was recovering. He was saved in the last moment by public prosecutor, Pál Ágoston, who drove to the hospital in his car on the orders of the lord lieutenant of Miskolc. The mainstream of the demonstration marched forward towards the center of Miskolc. They chanted anti-Semitic slogans and they met the freed workers at the theatre, in Széchenyi Street.²¹⁹ The shop-committee called the workers to return to the forge, but they did not obey. Under the influence of the recently heard stories about the cruelty of the policemen the crowd decided to

²¹⁷ Varga, 1986 p 300.

²¹⁸ Pelle, 1995 pp 232-239.

²¹⁹ Varga, 1986 p 301.

continue its way to the police headquarters at the so-called Zsolcai gate. Here again, István Oszip, the lord lieutenant of the city, and a Soviet commander of Miskolc tried to calm down the mob with speeches. The crowd demanded the policemen who used violence against the arrested workers. They started the siege only when the prominent speakers left the building. According to János Varga, approximately three thousand rioters besieged the police headquarters. They searched for further arrested workers, and most importantly: they searched for Fogarasi. They let out all arrested criminals, before they found the “dirty Jewish lieutenant”,²²⁰ in the cellar. The mob took him out to the courtyard, where they beat him with metal instruments. Just as they had done two days before with Jungreisz, the rioters hanged Fogarasi on a dray, which drew him couple of meters. Later, he was taken to the truck of the forge because the crowd wanted to transport and hang him. However, the truck broke down, so they dropped him on the pavement where the rioters trampled on him and kicked him several times.²²¹ According to the next day’s local daily, the *Miskolci Hírlap*, the perpetrators trailed Fogarasi to *Búza Square*, where lynched him.²²² At last, Soviet soldiers arrived with machine guns. They took Fogarasi to the Erzsébet hospital, where the lieutenant died some hours later.²²³

3.8 Further Differences in Interpretation

János Pelle’s book is about the post-Holocaust blood libels. He tries to fit the second wave of the Miskolc riots in his topic, which is not an easy task. In order to do this, he shows the fear from the cruel Jewish policeman as a main cause of the disturbance. He calls the imaginary situation, where the Jewish policemen threaten the lives of innocent Christians, the

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Pelle, 1995 p 243.

²²² Miskolci Hírlap, 2 August 1946 p 2.

²²³ Varga, 1986 p 302.

“constructed blood libel.” According to him, in the rumors about the cruel Jewish policeman the workers saw the confirmation of their prejudices about the savagery and infamy of the Jews.²²⁴ However, there are facts which contradict this view. First of all that a group of the workers visited the Erzsébet hospital in order to use further punishment on the injured mill owner, Sándor Rejtő, who was not in a position to threaten anybody. Secondly, the picture of the cruel Jewish policeman was real: Artúr Fogarassi in fact hit and tortured the arrested workers, at least, that is written in the official police report²²⁵ of the incident, and it is supported by various testimonies. Two of them recalled that the lieutenant put pencils into the ears and noses of the detainees and hit them.²²⁶ Thirdly, and most importantly, the mob did not attack the majority of Miskolc Jewry. This shows that the workers did not want to dispel their fellow-citizens. They simply wanted to show that they did not tolerate certain behavior.

The anti-Jewish characteristic of the riots occurs in the unmistakable selection process, as was concluded by István Bibó in 1948: the anger of the mob selects and leaves the non-Jews to escape.²²⁷ On 30 July 1946, the demonstrators attacked Rejtő and Jungreis, however, they let the third detainee, the Christian Péter Baranyai go, although he was also arrested for black-marketing.²²⁸ On 1 August the rioters wanted to catch the Jewish Fogarassi, although other policemen were torturing the arrested workers too. János Varga agrees with Bibó and sees this selection as the most important distinguishing factor as opposed to the Kunmadaras pogrom in May 1946, where the crowd attacked a significant part of the local Jewish community.²²⁹

²²⁴ Pelle, 1995 p 232.

²²⁵ Varga, 1986 p 299.

²²⁶ Pelle, 1995 p 231.

²²⁷ Bibó, 1984 p 275.

²²⁸ Pelle, 1995 p 221.

²²⁹ Varga, 1986 p 310.

The Hungarian Communist Party definitely misused the traditional anti-Jewish sentiment of the workers during its campaign against the black-marketeers. However, this campaign targeted the Jews not as survivors of Holocaust, not as people who came back and reclaimed their confiscated values. Rather the communists instigated against the Jews, who belonged to the rival Social Democrat and Smallholders Party. The forge workers of Diósgyőr had already committed violent actions in the center of Miskolc before the speech of Rákosi on 23 July 1946. They regularly stormed the coffeehouses in the city center, they attacked the office of the Smallholders Party. In a way the demonstration on 30 July 1946 fits as a political act into these attacks, while the siege of the police headquarters was a reaction for the “unjust” arrests and mistreatment which – as one can see in Gyáni’s article – was a typical reaction of the working class already in the 19th century. What makes the Miskolc riots special is the suggested approval of the authorities to express anti-Jewish feelings – or at least the communists, who were represented by the police – in speeches and newspaper articles. That is why the workers showed the communist journal, the *Szabad Magyarország* to the authorities, who wanted to stop the lynching from the balcony of the County Hall,²³⁰ as if they were saying: “Here is your permission, what are you talking about?”

The other special factor follows from the economic situation: the combination of extreme inflation and serious shortage of food. Without this precondition the campaign against the black-marketeers could not have had an effect on the workers. The campaign referred to a moral concept of the ideally working economy which includes the rightful price. Since this concept was breached by the black-marketeers, who sold wheat at a triple price, the violence against them was justified. Since the breaching of the moral concept of economy is the typical motivation force behind the food riots, in a way the riot against the black-marketeers on 30

²³⁰ Pelle, 1995 p 213.

July 1946 in Miskolc was itself a food riot. The place of the lynching, its Búza (Wheat) Square name and market function refers to this. The statements of the proclamation about the cruel activity of black-marketeers, who stole the food from the workers' mouths, also refer to this. Just as the scene when the backpack forced on Rejtő fell down, opened, and food fell out of it. The eyewitness, Mihály Fekete, remembers that sausage fell on the pavement from the backpack²³¹, according to Pelle, sugar cubes, cheese and oranges. Whatever it was, it was smashed by the rioters, just as the life of the victims.

4. Two Pogroms in Poland

Before World War II more than 3,500,000 Jews lived in Poland, but 90 percent of them perished in the Holocaust. According to the Central Committee of Polish Jews (CKŻP), 243,000 Jews lived in the country in the middle of 1946.²³² It seems that the Nazi occupation did not signal the end of life threat for the Jewish inhabitants. Scholars estimate that between November 1944 and the end of 1945, approximately 350 of them were murdered.²³³

Anna Cichopek, on the basis of Krystina Kersten, places the first wave of post-war anti-Jewish violence in the spring of 1945, when Jews were reportedly killed in Ostrołęka, Siedlce or Śniadów.²³⁴ However, it is not easy to find any real break in the horrors of the Polish Jewry. According to Gross, as early as in August 1944, the CKŻP had to deal with the problem of security in the newly liberated towns.²³⁵ The Jewish communities recommended to

²³¹ Varga, 1986 p 298 and footnote 29.

²³² Natalia Aleksy, "The Vicious Circle" in *Jews and the State* ed. by Ezra Mendelsohn (Oxford University Press, 2003) p 159.

²³³ Cichopek, 2003 p 221.

²³⁴ Ibid., p 222.

²³⁵ Gross, 2007 p 31.

the survivors to move to big cities.²³⁶ As the minutes of a conference of delegates of Jewish communities – held in Kielce, on 14-15 May 1945 – formulated it: “Jews should leave small towns that are dangerous for them and where there is no work for them, either for big cities or for the West.”²³⁷ Soon after this proclamation, in one of the largest cities of Poland, in Kraków, a pogrom terrified the Jewish community. This Chapter draws the outlines of the two most important post-Holocaust pogroms in Poland. For the Kraków pogrom, I base my statements mostly on Anna Cichopek’s studies²³⁸, while in regard to the Kielce pogrom I will follow the description of Jan T. Gross.²³⁹

4.1 Pogrom in Kraków

Michlic describes the Polish national mythology, which portrayed wartime Poland “as a community of heroes and martyrs only”.²⁴⁰ This self-image did not accept any critical inquiry into Polish history. Since the major threats to this self-image were the anti-Semitic actions during and right after the war, many Poles rejected the restoration of pre-war Jewish life.²⁴¹ However, when Michlic writes about the post-Holocaust blood libel accusations, she blames the circumstances, and states that only the long lasting extraordinary sufferings and cruelties of Nazi occupation could make numerous Poles believe in these superstitious myths.²⁴²

Cichopek quotes a regional report of the Kraków Voivodship, which depicts a threatening picture about the Polish-Jewish relationship in June 1945: “In regard to the attitudes of the

²³⁶ Gross, 2007 p 35.

²³⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of Jewish Committees of the Kielce Voivodeship, held on 14-15 May 1945 in Adam Penkalla, 2000 p 243.

²³⁸ See especially Anna Cichopek, “The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945, A Narrative Reconstruction” in *Contested Memories, Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and its Aftermath* ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2003) pp 221-238.

²³⁹ Gross, 2007, pp 83-117.

²⁴⁰ Michlic, 2005 p 211.

²⁴¹ Michlic, 2005 pp 210-214.

²⁴² Michlic, 2000 A p 56.

Polish population towards the Jews, the remains of the Nazi influences grafted during the occupation still linger...Robberies combined with murdering Jews occur...An utterly insignificant event, or the most improbable rumor can trigger serious riots.”²⁴³ These rumors were already present in Kraków in the summer of 1945, only the number of the alleged “victims” grew day by day. The blood libel rumor spread mostly in marketplaces, such as the flea market next to Kupa synagogue in Kazimierz Quarter, once the Jewish quarter of the city.²⁴⁴ It became a regular weekly practice that people from the market threw stones and other objects at the Kupa synagogue on Saturdays, while the Jews celebrated the Shabbat.²⁴⁵

Some sixty Poles abused the ceremony on 11 August 1945 the same way. According to an excerpt from the military report of the pogrom, Polish soldiers of Jewish descent came out of the building and, caught one of the boys, who had thrown the stones and beat him up.²⁴⁶ This scene already created strong anti-Jewish sentiments. On the same day, an approximately thirteen year old Christian boy entered the synagogue and soon after ran out, screaming for help and stating that the Jews wanted to murder him.²⁴⁷ As Cichopek argues, these two incidents led to the actual pogrom.²⁴⁸

It seems that in Kraków, just as in Kunmadaras, the market as a place gained importance in the outbreak of the pogrom. First and foremost, this was the place where almost everybody was present – someone rarely, others maybe every day – therefore more and more people were informed here about the rumors that the Jews allegedly kill Christian children. The market was the place where the blood libel circulated, therefore, not surprisingly this was also

²⁴³ Report on the situation in Kraków Province for June 1945, State Archives, Kraków, II. 905 in Cichopek, 2003 p 223.

²⁴⁴ Cichopek, 2003 p 224.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Central Military Archive, Warsaw, sygn. 1265/336, k. 122-133. in Cichopek, 2003 p 225.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Cichopek, 2003 p 225.

the place from where constant trouble fell on the Kupa synagogue, at the beginning in the form of stones thrown. However, a striking difference comparing to Hungary is that no scholar mentions a significant number of Jewish traders in the post-war Polish markets. It can mean that they relied more on the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and other Jewish organizations than the Hungarian Jewry, but it also can mean that a general hostility simply made it impossible for them to trade with most of the Poles.

Cichopek quotes the report of the Soviet NKVD on the pogrom²⁴⁹ which indicates that when a considerable crowd from the market gathered at the entrance of the synagogue, three men in uniforms entered the building. These people who called themselves “the soldiers of the Kraków Military Region”²⁵⁰ arrested four Jews and walked them to the police station. As Cichopek argues, these uniformed men confirmed the blood libel accusation with their action.²⁵¹ Just as in Hungary, the cooperative behavior of the authorities incited the mob for violence. Gross, also refers to the Kraków pogrom, after which at least twenty-five people were arrested, among them five soldiers and six militiamen.²⁵² To this, one can also add what one of the civilian defendants confessed: “Everybody around said the Jews were murdering children. I saw the soldiers were catching mostly Jews, and the old hatred of Jews started boiling in me so I simply let it out.”²⁵³

Finally the crowd destroyed and desecrated the synagogue while searching for the “murdered Christians.” This couple of hundred people not only attacked the Jews inside the synagogue,

²⁴⁹ Report from Poland, Chart 15, A Report from to Seliwanowskii Berija, NKVD SSSR, d.98 (336-337a) in Cichopek, 2003 p 227.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Cichopek, 2003 p 227.

²⁵² Gross, 2007 p 81.

²⁵³ Central Military Archive, Warsaw, sygn. 767/322, k. 23-24, protocols from the interrogation of Franciszek Bandys, 11 August, 1945, in Cichopek, 2003 p 227.

but also started looting the Jewish apartments and community shelters around the building.²⁵⁴ Here, in the Kazimierz Quarter of Kraków, just as in Kunmadaras, the rioters had to have a virtual map in their head of where the Jews resided. Dozens of Jews were beaten and robbed.²⁵⁵ Those who tried to defend the attacked Jews were also suspected of Jewish origin or were simply hit by the rioters.²⁵⁶ According to one of the testimonies which Cichopek quotes, the militiamen also looked for Jews who allegedly shot at the mob.²⁵⁷ Because of this false rumor even more soldiers joined the rioters,²⁵⁸ many of them were drunk.²⁵⁹ They “*searched through the buildings*”, which practically meant looting and assaulting the Jewish inhabitants or anybody who they thought to be a Jew. They mistakenly beat up for example a Catholic woman, while shouting: “You lousy kike, you murdered two Polish children.”²⁶⁰ During the pogrom three people died and numerous others were wounded.²⁶¹

In those days there were many foreign journalists in Poland, most of them arriving to make reports about the horror of the concentration camps. All of them were deeply shocked by the news of the pogrom in Kraków, just as was the Polish intellectuals, who regarded Kraków as the cultural capital of the country.²⁶² They asked in disbelief: how could it happen?

Michlic, while writing about the immediate post-Holocaust situation of the Polish Jewry draws the historical background of the murders and pogroms in post-war Poland with the following elements:

²⁵⁴ Cichopek, 2003 p 228.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p 229.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Central Military Archive, Warsaw, sygn. 767/322, protocols from the interrogation of Franciszek Bandys, 13 August, 1945, in Cichopek, 2003 p 229.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 230.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 231.

²⁶⁰ Central Military Archive, Warsaw, sygn. 1265/336, k. 76-81, protocols from the interrogation of Jan Podstawski and Edmund Bartos, in Cichopek, 2003 p 230.

²⁶¹ Cichopek, 2003 p 232.

²⁶² Gross, 2007 p 82.

- The pre-war multinational Polish state was turned into a homogenous nation-state. While approximately 5 % of Poles died in the war this figure is 90 % among Polish Jews.²⁶³ The Germans from Silesia were moved to Germany while the Ukrainians suffered a combined Polish-Soviet oppression.²⁶⁴
- The Communist Party (PPR, Polska Partia Robotnicza: Polish Workers Party) led the country with the support of the occupying Soviet army. In the new state administration three or four Polish Jews held high-ranking positions.
- On one hand, the communists condemned anti-Semitism as a reactionary characteristic of prewar Poland. On the other hand, the leaders of the party emphasized that they wanted a homogenized nation-state.²⁶⁵

The illegal opposition regarded the communist rule as a Jewish takeover. Their pamphlets and newspapers often stated that the Jews were the political enemies of Poland and they called the new system “Judeo-Communism.”²⁶⁶ To this, one can add how in September 1945 Kazimierz Wyka comments the pogrom happened in his hometown. Wyka states that the pogrom in Kraków showed that his fellow-inhabitants refuse the reconstruction of pre-war Jewish life. He emphasizes the paradox of the fact that in the country where resistance against Nazism is the highest value, anti-Semitism stays part of patriotic identity.²⁶⁷

Despite the disgrace and disbelief of Polish intellectuals, the anti-Jewish violence further escalated. From the end of Nazi occupation to the end of 1947 an estimated 1,500-2,000 Jews

²⁶³ Michlic, 2005 p 208.

²⁶⁴ Gross, 2007 p 28.

²⁶⁵ Michlic, 2005 p 209.

²⁶⁶ Michlic, 2005 p 210.

²⁶⁷ Kazimierz Wyka, „Potęga ciemnoty potwierdzona” (Confirmation of the Existence of the Powers of Darkness) in *Odrodzenie*, 23 September 1945.

were murdered in Poland.²⁶⁸ The cruelest attack in those years and in general in peacetime 20th century Europe, happened in Kielce, in an otherwise cheerful and welcoming town of central Poland. The center with its well planned streets and with its 19th century houses recalls the happiest days of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. One of the most pleasant streets of the town is the Planty Street, where the Silnica creek crosses the town. Alongside the water old oaks give pleasant shade on hot summer days. 4 July 1946 was a day like this, when a growing crowd gathered under the trees in front of 7 Planty Street.

4.2 The Pogrom in Kielce

As it is well-known, the Kielce pogrom's foreplay was the disappearance of the nine-year-old Henryk Błaszczuk. The boy visited his friends at his former village without the permission of his parents, who got frightened and reported the missing of their child to the police. Two days later little Henryk returned and his father went back to the police. He wanted to report that although the Jews had kidnapped his son, he was smart enough to escape, but the proud father was too drunk, hence the police ordered him to come back in the morning sober.²⁶⁹

In the next morning, Henryk Błaszczuk, with his father and their neighbor went to the Jewish community building at 7 Planty Street, where approximately 180 Jews were living, to find the men who allegedly captured him and kept him in the cellar. They were accompanied by three police investigators and another eight policemen.²⁷⁰ As they were walking, they spread the news and urged others also to help to liberate the Christian children from the alleged Jewish

²⁶⁸ Michlic, 2000 p 39, Gross, 2007 p 28, pp 109-110.

²⁶⁹ Gross, 2007 p 83.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p 84.

captivity. The crowd grew further in front of the building, and a new rumor was circulated that the Jews had killed a child.²⁷¹

The communist investigators of the pogrom with the lead of comrade Buczyński wrote numerous reports on the event and its circumstances. According to them “Anti-Semitism is present to a high degree among the petit bourgeois....It should be mentioned that most of the property in Kielce had belonged to the Jews in the past. Thus the new possessors of Jewish property fear the return of the original owners.”²⁷² Although the police searched through the building and found neither Christian children nor any cellar, the crowd started to throw stones and other objects at the Jewish community house.²⁷³ The above quoted report states also that the Jews fired at the mob in order to defend themselves.²⁷⁴ It is only sure that the head of the community phoned the police, the army and his deputy even asked for help from the Soviet military adviser, all in vain.²⁷⁵ Therefore, it is possible that the Jews tried to defend themselves.

Somewhat later, dozens of soldiers arrived. They entered the house at 7 Planty Street and disarmed the Jews, taking their handguns. It is not clear whether the Jews kept some guns and they fired first from inside or the officials started the shooting.²⁷⁶ It is more important that the soldiers entered the building again, and somewhat later started to take out the victims and passed them to the angry mob. After them, the civilians also entered the house and beat the Jews already inside, and also helped the soldiers in expelling the Jews. However, Gross

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² 5. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michilc, 2000 B p 263.

²⁷³ Gross, 2007 pp 85-86.

²⁷⁴ 5. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michilc, 2000 B p 263.

²⁷⁵ Gross, 2007 p 86.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., pp 86-87.

underlines that the civilians did not attack the building before the soldiers did.²⁷⁷ Once again, the behavior of the authorities as an approval led to further aggression.



4. The former Jewish community house at 7 Planty Street, Kielce. (a photo by the author)

Some Jews locked themselves in a room on the second floor. The soldiers shot at them, broke in and ordered the Jews outside. Already on both sides of the staircase civilians stood and beat the Jews who were forced to go down.²⁷⁸ These people were not only lynched but also robbed, many of them losing even their shoes or boots. Seweryn Kahane, the leader of the Kielce community was shot to death while he phoned for help.²⁷⁹ As the witnesses recall, the whole scene was chaotic, the soldiers did not have any order and they attacked the Jews in cooperation with civilians. This was the first wave of the attack, which ended around noon.²⁸⁰ Comrade Buczyński reports that he himself saw the “soldiers and policemen were mixing with the crowd” and he estimates that approximately seven Jews were shot by the officials,

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p 88.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p 89.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p 90.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

including the leader, Mr. Kahane.²⁸¹ Among the civilians, women acted with extreme cruelty. Michlic quotes an eyewitness to depict their role: “There were already several people armed with sticks, bars and stones. Among them a group of furious and unrestrained women was the worst. When the next victim taken out of the building was a Jewess, I saw that the [male] perpetrators hesitated for a moment...but the women shouted cruelly, ‘Beat up the Jewess!’”²⁸²

The second wave of the attack was performed by the forge workers of the Ludwików factory, who murdered fifteen to twenty Jews.²⁸³ Gross refers to Bożena Szaynok, who estimates that 600 workers left the foundry in the lunch break in order to take part in the pogrom.²⁸⁴ Just as in Miskolc, in Kielce too the forge workers lynched the Jews who remained in the community shelter. This is probably related to the traditional picture of the Jew who does not work, instead exploiting the others and especially the workers’ strata. As Wilhelm Mahr, the German journalist, who coined the term “antisemite” in 1879, writes in his powerful pamphlet “the general enmity toward the Jews had other grounds: first, in their aversion to honest labor.”²⁸⁵ Similar accusations of idleness, as part of Nazi propaganda appeared from time to time during World War II as well. For example in the Hungarian *Esti Újság*, on 15 May 1944 priest József Csík writes about how the Jewry exploits the working class.²⁸⁶ On 22 May 1944 another daily, the *Magyar Szó* reports that “the Gypsies learnt the idleness from the Jews.”²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ 1. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michlic, 2000 B p 258.

²⁸² Michlic, 2000 A p 60.

²⁸³ Gross, 2007 p 91.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Wilhelm Mahr, “The Victory of Jewry over Germandom (1879)” in Richard S. Levy, *Antisemitism in the Modern World*, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1991), P 78.

²⁸⁶ József Csík, A zsidóság a kereszténység ellen... (Jewry against the Christianity...), *Esti Újság*, 15 May 1944, p 4.

²⁸⁷ A cigányok megtanulták a zsidóktól a naplopást (The Romas learnt the idleness from the Jews), *Magyar Szó*, 22 May 1944, p 7.

This view was a commonly shared characterization of the Jews in Kielce. As comrade Buczyński finishes his first and most important report on the pogrom: “Regarding the Jewish problem: in the future, we should aim to avoid a situation where they live in one big group and are not engaged in productive work. The Jews achieve wealth by engaging in various shady businesses with impunity...These facts are used by hostile political elements.”²⁸⁸ The fifth report added to this that “...One hundred and eighty Jews lived on Planty Street in Kielce. They did not work and only two of them were members of the Communist Party. Also in Ostrowiec many Jews are out of work. Rich Jews...were usually the visitors of state’s health resorts...The masses feel dissatisfied and unjustly treated.”²⁸⁹ Thanks to the dissatisfied masses forty-two bodies were buried on 8 July 1946 in Kielce.²⁹⁰



5. Memorial plaque at 7 Planty Street, Kielce (a photo by the author)

²⁸⁸ 1. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michile, 2000 B p 259.

²⁸⁹ 5. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michile, 2000 B p 264.

²⁹⁰ Gross, 2007 p 93.

4.3 Blaming the Other

In Poland the communists took over political power as early as in 1944 with the support of Stalin, who established the Polish Committee of National Liberation in Moscow as a competitor of the London based emigrant Polish government.²⁹¹ Natalia Aleksion argues that the Polish Jews did not have a free choice on the political map of Poland, since the anti-Communist opposition had the general characteristic of hatred of Jews.²⁹² Cadres of Jewish descent, as Hilary Minc, Jakub Berman or Roman Zambrowski – born as Rubin Nusbaum – controlled important posts either in the new state administration or in the Communist Party.²⁹³ During pre-war political campaigns, the Jews were traditionally accused of spreading socialism in Poland,²⁹⁴ consequently it seemed that the Jews politically threatened the state. After World War II the Soviet Union endangered Polish independence and freedom. The cooperation of the Polish Jews with the Soviet authorities, furthermore, the appointment of Poles of Jewish descent to important positions revived the myth of the Jewish danger.²⁹⁵ In June 1946, only weeks before the pogrom, the representatives of Kielce Jewish community met the local bishop, Kaczmarek.²⁹⁶ They informed him about the hostile atmosphere in the town and asked for his help in calming down the masses. The bishop rejected the request, because he thought that animosity was a natural reaction to the Jewish presence in the political leadership of Poland.²⁹⁷

These two pogroms – Kraków and Kielce – were part of an almost continuous stream of assaults on Polish Jews. In regard to the region of Kielce for example, from March till August

²⁹¹ Michlic, 2005 p 2009.

²⁹² Aleksion, 2003 p 158.

²⁹³ Jonathan Kaufman, *A Hole in the Heart of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), p 106.

²⁹⁴ Michlic, 2000 A p 40.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p 4.

²⁹⁶ Michal Borwicz "Polish-Jewish relations, 1944-1947" in *The Jews in Poland* ed. by Abramsky, Jachimczyk, Polonsky (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p 195.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

1945, fourteen attacks were registered in which thirty-two Jews were killed.²⁹⁸ However, the pogrom on 4 July 1946 as a last drop started a massive wave of emigration in which more than 100,000 Jewish citizens left Poland.²⁹⁹

5. Conclusion

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 Blood Libel and Other Accusations

Two scholars, the Hungarian Apor in 1996 and the Polish Gross in 2007, come to the same conclusion, that the post-war blood libel accusation are not real accusations, they only serve as pretext for the attacks against the local Jewry.³⁰⁰ As Apor argues the accusation distances the Jewish community from the attackers, and demonstrates their inhuman nature.³⁰¹ One must agree with these explanations, however, it can be still important *why* the blood libel accusation play the role of pretext. I believe that the blood libel suited especially to post-Holocaust pogroms, partly because it referred to the entire Jewish community, and partly because it was that time a popular myth.

On the one hand, blood libel accusation was a perfect pretext for attacking the Holocaust survivors, because it refers to a collective crime. As Tamás Kende shows, the consumption of Christians' blood or flesh makes the whole community guilty, which is why the blood libel can serve as a general vehicle of the rank and file's hatred against the attacked minority.³⁰² That was the case both in Kraków and Kielce, where all Jews were attacked. In contrast, in

²⁹⁸ Penkalla, 2000 p 237.

²⁹⁹ Aleksion, 2003 p 159.

³⁰⁰ Gross, 2007 p 245.

³⁰¹ Apor, 1996 p 28.

³⁰² Kende, 1995 p 18.

the Hungarian cases, as István Bibó points out, the crowd selected the Jewish persons out of the possible victims.³⁰³

In the immediate post-war era, on the other hand, the blood libel was part of the commonly shared knowledge. In Hungary, the Nazi propaganda wanted to distance and ghettoize the Jews so it used the blood libel legend. In 1942 and in 1944, for example, the *Püski* publishing house twice republished the popular memoirs of Zoltán Bary, who was the chief investigator of the Tiszaeszlár case. The book – in which Bary tries to prove the reality of the blood libel by listing and analyzing primitive cases from the Middle Ages beside the Tiszaeszlár libel – was sold in more than 11,000 copies.³⁰⁴ In Poland, cases and details of the blood libel legend were regularly published in popular periodicals and dailies already before World War II.³⁰⁵ The myth became an integrated part of the Catholic belief so much so, that the Bishop of Częstochowa himself told to the English ambassador the following: “there was some proof that the child (Henryk Błaszczak), whose alleged maltreatment by Jews provoked the Kielce pogrom, had in fact been maltreated, and that the Jews had taken blood from his arm.”³⁰⁶

However, it must be underlined that although the blood libel was a popular myth in post-war Hungary, it very rarely generated violence. Kunmadaras is one of the unique cases in this context. Quite opposite in Poland the anti-Jewish violence was part of everyday life, and in many cases the perpetrators acted as defenders of Christian children. Hence the pogroms in Kraków and Kielce were episodes of a long series.

³⁰³ Bibó, 1984 p 275.

³⁰⁴ László Karsai, “Bary József vizsgálóbíró emlékiratainak sorsa” *Élet és Irodalom*, 30 January 2004, p 8.

³⁰⁵ Michlic, 2000 B p 56.

³⁰⁶ Telegram by Victor Cavendish, 28 August 1946, in Michlic, 2000 B p 57.

Another accusation which can be also characterized as *collective* and *traditional* one refers to the allegedly parasitic lifestyle of Jews. As it was above demonstrated, in the words of Wilhelm Mahr, the Jewish “aversion to honest labor”³⁰⁷ and other accusations of idleness were part of the propaganda in both Poland and Hungary. The support of the international Jewish organizations, first and foremost, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s help strengthened the impression that the Jews were in privileged position. More than two thirds of the Hungarian Jews living on the countryside lived exclusively from the Joint’s aid in 1945.³⁰⁸ Both in Kielce and in Kunmadaras, the perpetrators complained about that the Jews did not work but still lived on better standard than the majority of the inhabitants.

5.1.2 Rioters in Miskolc

At the end of 1946, the weekly called *Demokrácia* published interesting parts of the indictment against the Miskolc rioters. It also published the names of the thirty-five defendants, together with their professions. Most of them reported to be forge workers, engine fitters, unskilled laborers, a carpenter-trainee, two railway officers, two crane operators, a locomotive engineer, and a fifteen-year-old boy. Some of them were of Roma origins, and out of thirty-five, there was only one woman.³⁰⁹ Similarly, according to János Varga, out of thirty-five defendants seventeen were forge-workers and ten were officers or intellectuals. The officers worked for MÁV, the public railway company. Varga also mentions four craftsmen, a merchant, a person from the shop committee, an under aged and a criminal.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Wilhelm Mahr, The Victory of Jewry over Germandom (1879) in *Antisemitism in the Modern World*, ed. by Richard S. Levy (Chicago, University of Illinois, 1991), p 78.

³⁰⁸ Karády, 2002 p 48.

³⁰⁹ “A miskolci lincselés hiteles története” in *Demokrácia*, 15 December 1946. VII.

³¹⁰ Varga, 1986 p 309.

Out of thirty-five people eighteen were in custody. Those eighteen were transported to Budapest in September, 1946.³¹¹ In Fáklya newspaper on 20 April 1947 a report was published about the release of these defendants. According to the article, eighty female forge workers visited Tivadar Pártay, Member of Parliament, and asked him to intervene in order to release the arrested workers. In the middle on January, 1947, the same women had an audience at Zoltan Tildy, the president of Hungary. Finally the court released the eighteen arrested people, since the trial was once again postponed, and the custody was lawful only for the duration of six months.³¹²

As *Demokrácia* writes, István Oszip, the communist lord lieutenant of Miskolc – who arrested the black-marketers before the riots – welcomes the return of the workers. As he sees, the families of the defendants suffered a lot while these people were away from home. The article also includes an interview with one of the released rioters: he does not feel guilty, adding that his monthly salary was reduced to fifty percent in the period of custody. The author also reports that the freed forge workers are diligent in their work and they have already managed to reintegrate into their everyday life. They still think that Sándor Rejtő was a black-marketeer, however, they think that Ernő Jungreis was innocent.³¹³

5.1.3 Rioters in Kunmadaras

Studying the files of the first trial of the Kunmadaras pogrom (“Trial of Zsigmond Tóth and accessories” in *Trials of the People’s Tribunal*, Budapest Archives, V. 56032) the rioters’ profiles are the followings:

- Among the fifty-five defendants there were only three with intellectual professions.

Their role was mostly limited to anti-Semitic speeches on the first day of political

³¹¹ Ibid., p 308.

³¹² “A bíróság kiengedte mind a tizennyolc letartóztatottat” in Fáklya 20 April 1947, p 3.

³¹³ Ibid.

demonstrations, or to leading the inter-party meeting, which decided about the expulsion of the local Jewry. None of the three were directly involved into the aggression.

- Three policemen were also accused and condemned as accessories to the murderers.
- Out of the remaining forty-nine people, forty-one were poor and did not possess any property or wealth.
- Twenty-four out of forty nine were agricultural day-laborers.
- Twenty out of forty-nine were women, most of them housewives.
- Concerning age, five defendants were less than eighteen years old. Beside these five juveniles, thirty-five out of forty-nine belonged to the 18-35age-group. Some of them worked as trainees: there were shoemaker-trainees, a baker-trainee, etc.
- To summarize the above mentioned data³¹⁴, it seems that mostly younger members of the lower social strata were involved in physical violence.



A kunmadarasi pogrom vádlottjai, Képes Figyelő, 1946

6. The Defendants of the Kunmadaras Pogrom in *Képes Figyelő*³¹⁵ (Collection of the Jewish Museum's Archive)

³¹⁴ Files of Zsigmond Tóth's Trial in Trials of the People's Tribunal, Budapest Archives, V 56032, pp 1-9, p 18.

³¹⁵ The Defendants of the Kunmadaras Pogrom in *Képes Figyelő*, 10 July 1946, p 1.

The correspondent of *Új szó*, one of the most influential Hungarian dailies at the time, opposed the picture of the male and female defendants: “The women are pretty, young, well-groomed, some even with new perms in their hair. Most of the men are shabby, only a few of them have shoes. Many of them are 14-16-year-old young peasants, pimpled children.”³¹⁶

The *Független Magyarország* reported on 16 December 1946 that one of the defendants gave birth to a daughter in the Markó Street prison, in Budapest.³¹⁷

To the *significant role of women* one can add that Eszter Kabai Tóth, a thirty-six-year-old woman was the initiator and leader of the riot.³¹⁸ She reportedly shouted at the start of the market day that her child was murdered by the Jews, and it was high time to take revenge for the murdered children.³¹⁹ Pál Drukker, the police investigator of the pogrom, stated in Edit Kőszegi’s documentary movie that Eszter Kabai Tóth “stood on the lowest degree of primitivism, so much so, that it was close to debility.”³²⁰

5.1.4 Rioters in Poland

It seems that in Kielce too, just as in Kunmadaras, women acted with extreme cruelty. As the eyewitness formulates it: “There were already several people armed with sticks, bars and stones. Among them a group of furious and unrestrained women was the worst.”³²¹ It is noteworthy mentioning that in Łódź, the female workers of the Scheibler and Grohman factories reacted by strikes for the sentences of the Kielce trial. Moreover, during the strike they attacked the secretary of the local Communist Party.³²² In the reports what Michlic quotes becomes clear, that the strikes spread to other firms of the cotton and sewing sectors,

³¹⁶ “Ami a kunmadarasi nagy főtárgyalás tudósításából kimaradt” in *Új Szó*, 7 July 1946, p 3.

³¹⁷ “Gyereket szült az egyik kunmadarasi vádlott” in *Független Magyarország*, 16 December 1946, p 4.

³¹⁸ Ötvös, 1990 pp 85-86.

³¹⁹ Ibid., Ötvös, 1990 p 85, Vörös, 1994 p 73, and *Midőn a vér*: Documentary directed by Kőszegi Edit, 1994, Budapest.

³²⁰ *Midőn a vér*: Documentary directed by Kőszegi Edit, 1994, Budapest.

³²¹ Michlic, 2000 A p 60.

³²² Michlic, 2000 B p 261.

where women worked, but did not reach plants where the workers' majority was men. Furthermore, the women in strike called for vengeance in case the sentenced perpetrators of the pogrom suffered execution.³²³

Anna Cichopek argues that in Kraków simple, uneducated people attacked the Jews.³²⁴ Cichopek herself thinks that most of these people were poor newcomers, who settled in Cracow's Jewish quarter, in Kazimierz after World War II. Somewhat later she calls the members of the crowd lumpenproletariats, who had no permanent jobs.³²⁵ While describing the twenty-five arrested people, she stresses that with the exception of three they were all uneducated: "workers, tradesmen who completed only three or four grades of elementary school, and one illiterate."³²⁶ There were twelve officers among the twenty-five defendants.³²⁷ As a result of the soldiers' participation, the Fifth Military District Court decided in the case and sentenced ten accused up to seven years in jail.³²⁸ In a broader sense the rioters include the nurses of the St. Lazar Hospital at Kopernika Street who made remarks at the wounded Jews, or the railway worker who in the same place even hit an injured person.³²⁹ According to Joanna Michlic, the nine men sentenced to death right after the Kielce pogrom "were all of peasant or working-class background and of low education. Among them were two low-ranking policemen."³³⁰

³²³ Ibid., p 262.

³²⁴ Cichopek, 2003 pp 221-222.

³²⁵ Cichopek, 2003 p 231.

³²⁶ Cichopek, 2003 pp 234-235.

³²⁷ Cichopek, 2003 p 230.

³²⁸ Cichopek, 2003 p 234.

³²⁹ Gross, 2007 p 82, Cichopek, 2003 p 232.

³³⁰ Michlic, 2000 A p 52.

5.1.5 Economic Threat:

As László Farkas says in his interview, their houses were empty when they arrived back in Kunmadaras.³³¹ Police investigator Pál Drukker, who took part in the questioning of the arrested villagers from Kunmadaras, states in the documentary, that several of these people already had police files because they had stolen goods from the closed houses of the deported local Jews in 1944.³³² It seems obvious that the rioters' economic interest played an important role in the aggression, just as it appears in the interpretation of Polish pogroms. As comrade Buczyński's report declares in July 1945: "It should be mentioned that most of the property in Kielce had belonged to the Jews in the past. Thus the new possessors of Jewish property fear the return of the original owners."³³³

In addition, in Kunmadaras the ratio of survival was much higher than in the surrounding places. Almost all Jews from the Hungarian countryside were killed in Auschwitz in 1944, while more than half of Kunmadaras' Jewry survived the Holocaust.³³⁴ Consequently, here the economic tension was also higher than elsewhere in the immediate post-war era.

5.1.6 Role of Authorities

Beside the two policemen executed after Kielce, Gross refers to the Kraków pogrom, after which at least twenty-five people were arrested, among them five soldiers and six militiamen.³³⁵ One can add to this, that there were three policemen among the defendants of Kunmadaras. In most cases, uniformed and armed persons cooperated with the rioters, moreover, in the Polish pogroms even their violent behavior incited the crowd. In Miskolc, politicians' speeches and interviews instigated the crowd. Therefore, the rioters showed the issues of the communist newspaper as their permission for judgment, when the other

³³¹ Interview by the author, 22 May 2009, Budapest.

³³² *Midőn a vér*: Documentary directed by Kőszegi Edit, 1994, Budapest.

³³³ 5. Report by the Brigade: visit to Kielce district, 4-5 July 1946 in Michilc, 2000 B p 263.

³³⁴ Ötvös, 1995 p 20.

³³⁵ Gross, 2007 p 81.

politicians tried to stop the lynching.³³⁶ The police especially often showed signs of sharing the accusations. That happened in Kielce, where they seriously examined the obviously false accusation of kidnapping Christian children. This was the case also in Kunmadaras, where the policemen confiscated all sausage from the victim's house and took it to the local police headquarters as clues.³³⁷ As Gross argues, the official intervention in these cases confirmed the prejudice.³³⁸

The sentences of the trials seemed lighter in Hungary than in Poland, although the nine executions of Kielce may not seem that high, taking into consideration the number of perpetrators. Furthermore, none of the higher military officers were charged after the pogrom, where soldiers handed over the victims to the perpetrators.³³⁹ However, in post-war Poland, most murders of the 1,500-2,000 Jews left unanswered. The turmoil and strike after the Kielce trial shows how dangerous it was to condemn the rioters.³⁴⁰ In Miskolc, thanks to the Communist leaders, the rioters' trial was postponed so many times that eventually it did not happen at all. All charges were annulled by the amnesty on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the 1848 revolution.³⁴¹ Kunmadaras is a special case, since the first sentence of the People's Tribunal contained the capital punishment of three defendants while it sentenced the others for long stays in prison.³⁴² However, this judgment was revoked and the Supreme Court significantly mitigated the sentences.³⁴³

³³⁶ Varga, 1986 p 297.

³³⁷ Pelle, 1995 p 160.

³³⁸ Gross, 2007 p 157.

³³⁹ Ibid., p 158.

³⁴⁰ Michlic, 2000 A pp 52-53, Michlic, 2000 B p 261.

³⁴¹ Varga, 1986 pp 309-310.

³⁴² Vörös, 1994 p 77.

³⁴³ Ibid., Ötvös p 87.



7. A caricature of the Kunmadaras trial's sentence³⁴⁴ (Collection of the Jewish Museum's Archive)

5.1.7 The Market

In three out of the four cases, the market was an important scene. In Kraków, the flea market next to the Kupa synagogue was the place, where the blood libel rumor circulated and from where the first assault started.³⁴⁵ In Kunmadaras, the actual pogrom started there, and most of the perpetrators were the regular market attendees: women who wanted to buy food for their families and day-laborers who went to the market to find work.³⁴⁶ In Miskolc, the perpetrators dragged their victims to Búza Square, where the Jewish usually traded, from whom the forge workers' wives hardly could buy the basic provision.³⁴⁷ The criminal market behavior is also

³⁴⁴ *Ludas Matyi*, 8 December 1948. Translation of the caption: "After Kunmadaras"

- "Sir Rubbers and Murderers, you are acquitted!"

- "Well, gaffer, I wonder on what basis?"

- "On the basis, that you are decent men. You believe in blood libel legend."

³⁴⁵ Report on the situation in Kraków Province for June 1945, State Archives, Kraków, II. 905 in Cichopek, 2003 p 223.

³⁴⁶ Apor, 1996 p 18.

³⁴⁷ Fekete, 1983 p 124.

a traditional and collective accusation against the Jews. This was revoked in Hungary, by the Communists' political-economic campaign against the black-marketeers.³⁴⁸

The war destroyed both Hungary and Poland. In 1945-46, the drought and the economic problems increased the danger of famine. In many occasions these pogroms showed the signs of food-riots. In Kunmadaras, the women destroyed eggs,³⁴⁹ in Miskolc, the spectacle of food made the hungry rioters mad.³⁵⁰ They trampled the sausage and sugar which fell out of Rejtő's backpack, before they lynched him and his colleague.³⁵¹

5.1.8 The Role of Politicians

The politicians' role in the outbreak of the pogroms is contradictory. In Hungary, the campaign against the black-marketeers and forint-worseners instigated the pogroms by fuelling anti-Semitic sentiments.³⁵² Especially the case of Miskolc is interesting. The Smallholders Party's daily, the *Kisújság* quotes the following from the prosecutor's indictment on 10 November 1946: "the movement of the forge workers happened by the permission, moreover, by initiation of the political parties."³⁵³ Rákosi's infamous words – "Whoever speculates with the forint, whoever wants to undermine the economic base of our democracy has to be hanged!"³⁵⁴ – gave clear instructions in this case. In Poland, the Jewish politicians' presence itself provoked violence and provided justification too. The head of the Polish Catholic Church, Cardinal Hlond declared seven days after the Kielce pogrom, that the

³⁴⁸ Apor, 1996: pp 6-7.

³⁴⁹ Ötvös, 1990 p 84, Vörös, 1994 p 73.

³⁵⁰ Varga, 1986 p 298.

³⁵¹ Varga, 1986 p 298.

³⁵² Apor, 1996 pp 5-7.

³⁵³ *Kisújság* 10 November 1946, p 6.

³⁵⁴ Szabó, 1995 p 136.

attacks were only the expressions of the Poles' dissatisfaction with the Jewish Communist reign.³⁵⁵

5.2 The Echo of the Rabbi's Speech

These days, in Kraków and in Miskolc there is no commemoration of the riots. In Kielce, the Communist Party organized the victims' burial ceremony, on 8 July 1946,³⁵⁶ which turned into a mass movement, and party units all over the country had to condemn anti-Semitism.³⁵⁷ Nowadays, Kielce visibly makes efforts to process the memory of the pogrom and to change its reputation of hostility against Jews. One of the moves of reconciliation is the erection of Jan Karski's statue – a member of the resistance and politician of the emigrant Polish government during World War II, who reported personally to Roosevelt the existence of the concentration camps³⁵⁸ – in the infamous Planty Street. Besides commemorating, the growing number of memorial plaques on the building at 7 Planty Street may serve the same purpose. There are already four of them, reminding the traveler of tattoos on a criminal's body.

Interestingly, all four plaques were placed on the building after the fall of Communism. The first from 1990 is a bilingual plaque with the Star of David on it. It is dedicated "to the memory of the Jews murdered on 4th of July 1946." The second indicates – in Polish, Hebrew and English – that this commemorating plaque was placed on the 44th anniversary of the events, which means that in the same year as the previous one. It also says that the initiator of the plaque is Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the Solidarity movement, but the sponsor is the Nissenbaum Foundation. Another plaque was placed on the house by the citizens of Kielce in

³⁵⁵ Michlic, 2000 A p 48.

³⁵⁶ Michlic, 2000 B p 267.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p 266.

³⁵⁸ See: E. Thomas Wood, Stanisław M. Jankowski: Karski: *How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust* (New York: Wiley, 1994).

1996, on the 50th anniversary of the riot, with the following words: “to the memory of the *Jewish* pogrom’s victims.” The most recent one is from 2006, proclaiming Pope John Paul II’s prayer which he inserted into the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 2000. The text of the prayer is the following:

God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness, we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant.

On 30 October 1994, somewhat more than forty-eight years after the pogrom the inhabitants of Kunmadaras erected a memorial. To the ceremony they invited representatives of the Hungarian Jewish Community (MAZSIHISZ), from whom four persons arrived: the chairman, Gusztáv Zoltai, the spokesman, Péter Kertész, rabbi Péter Kardos and a high-ranking security guard.³⁵⁹ As a part of the ceremony, rabbi Kardos gave a speech, which evoked emotional reactions not only among the people of Kunmadaras, but also among the Hungarian Jews, several of who were present in the audience. In his speech the rabbi repeated four times that he is scared to be in Kunmadaras, since he is a Jew. He remembered that the Holocaust had happened exactly fifty years earlier, and he said that there were people who robbed the houses of the deported Jews, and even there were people who shouted that the Jews drank Christian children’s blood.³⁶⁰ Rabbi Kardos revealed that he did not have the right to accept the locals’ gesture of apology on behalf of the murdered Jews. According to testimonies the rabbi said that the later murdered József Rosinger escaped “*from you*”, although, in the printed version of his speech instead of the expression “*from you*” one can

³⁵⁹ Interview with Péter Kertész by the author, Szentendre, 15 May 2009.

³⁶⁰ Péter Kardos, “A beszéd” (The Speech), *Új Élet*, 1 December 1994 p 5.

read “*from here*”.³⁶¹ However, in both versions, he declared that the sign of Cain stays forever on the forehead of the murderers.³⁶² He added that this sign stays on the forehead of even those who did nothing to stop the pogrom. Rabbi Kardos, in his speech’s closing part, recalled the proclamation made by the inter-party gathering on the day of the pogrom, in which the locals called those Jews “who could not adopt themselves to the democratic life of the village” for leaving Kunmadaras.³⁶³ In the rabbi’s interpretation that meant that the perpetrators passed the responsibility for the events to the victims. “Dear Ladies and Gentleman” – finished rabbi Kardos – “Let me not only be scared, but to be disgusted too.”³⁶⁴

On the next day, the local daily, *Új Néplap* reports the event and publishes excerpts from various speeches. The mayor of the village, Imre Kemecsi apologizes and remembers those who became victims of hatred. The author quotes the words of rabbi Kardos, and the speech of priest László Ötvös. The latter does not refer to the speech of Kardos, instead recalls the Holocaust memorial ceremony, which happened eight years before (in 1986). According to him, another rabbi that time declared that the name of Kunmadaras became the symbol of atonement. It is striking that the priest does not talk about the victims at all. Rather he asks all Jewish *brethrens* and Hungarian *compatriots* to do their best for the rise of Hungary.³⁶⁵

Four days later, in the same *Új Néplap* somebody under the name “b.gy.” states that the speech of rabbi Kardos was harsh and offensive. As the author argues: “Let’s declare finally: victims were everywhere. And in every temple and at every plaque we remember them by

³⁶¹ Interview with Péter Kertész by the author, Szentendre, 15 May 2009, handwritten version of the speech owned by the Mayor of Kunmadaras.

³⁶² Péter Kardos, “A beszéd” (The Speech), *Új Élet*, 1 December 1994 p 5.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ “de” abbreviation, “Félek, mert Kunmadarason vagyok” (I am scared because I am in Kunmadaras) *Új Néplap*, 31 October 1994, p 3.

bowing our head.”³⁶⁶ On the same day in the newspaper *Telegráf*, János Jurkovichs in his article entitled “Kelő Gyűlölet” (Rising Hatred) writes: “the audience soon had to realize, that the rabbi did not bring forgiveness even after forty-eight years.”³⁶⁷

Several members of the memorial ceremony’s audience felt that they had to comment on the rabbi’s speech. Ferenc Czető’s letter was published in the local *Új Néplap*, on 17 November 1994.³⁶⁸ In this, the retired merchant says that rabbi Kardos had no reason to fear since in the hands of the locals there were flowers and not bludgeons. He asks the rabbi why he came to Kunmadaras if he did not come for atonement. He adds that most members of the audience were children at the time when the pogrom happened, and that rabbi Kardos had to know when he spoke that the inhabitants of Kunmadaras donated sufficient money for the memorial plaque.³⁶⁹

Not surprisingly the *Magyar Fórum*, leading journal of the Hungarian extreme right that time, also comments on the memorial celebration. As the author, Béla Győri explains the background of the pogrom was that the locals kindly asked the Jews to assist in getting the acquittal of the teacher János Nagy, but they refused the demand.³⁷⁰ As he argues, the political campaigns of the Hungarian Communist Party led to the pogrom. He refers to the Jewish origin of the party leaders and concludes his story by stating that in Kunmadaras, just as in Miskolc, “Jewish lords made other Jews beat Jews.”³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ “b.gy.” abbreviation, “Fekete lyuk” (Black hole) *Új Néplap*, 4 November 1994, p 3.

³⁶⁷ János Jurkovichs, “Kelő gyűlölet” (Rising Hatred) *Telegráf*, 4 November 1994, p 6.

³⁶⁸ Ferenc Czető, “Ki fél és undorodik Kunmadarason” *Új Néplap*, 31 October 1994, p 5.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Béla Győri, “A tudós főrabbi kaddist mondott egy keresztény asszony halálakor” *Magyar Fórum*, 5 January 1995, p 17.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

Three Jewish participants of the memorial ceremony also wrote letters to the mayor of Kunmadaras. All three letters were published in the periodical *Jáskunság*. János Quittner thanks the mayor for erecting the memorial plaque.³⁷² Péter Tamás rather says thank you to the locals for taking part in the ceremony and not reacting to the rabbi's speech. He proposes that rabbi Kardos should be examined by psychiatrists.³⁷³ The third letter came from Péter Kertész, who also thanks for the memorial plaque and expresses his belief that the crime will not stay forever with the community of the locals.³⁷⁴ The last letter's author, Mr. Kertész, sued rabbi Kardos at the Beth Din, the rabbinical court of the Hungarian Jewish Community. Rabbi Kardos reacts to the attack in the official journal of the Jewish Community, *Új Élet*. In his answer he explains the negative Jewish reactions to his speech as *identity search*, *readiness for assimilation* and first and foremost, *fear*.³⁷⁵ At the Beth Din Kardos and Kertész agreed that the rabbi was going to openly clarify the misunderstanding of his speech. Since it did not happen Péter Kertész turned again to the Beth Din to demand action from rabbi Kardos. This time the court rejected his demand, stating that on the last trial day – for the Beth Din's pleasure – the two sides managed to come to an agreement, hence there is no need for further action.³⁷⁶ I believe that the answer of the rabbinical court is symbolic. Not only for the inhabitants of Kielce and Kunmadaras is hard to process the memories of the pogroms. The other side also struggle to find answers.

In 2009, Marika Kohn is the last and only Jew in Kunmadaras. She shows the former police headquarters where the injured Jews were taken. She opens the abandoned Jewish cemetery, where József Rosinger has his tomb. However, the most interesting object is the Holocaust memorial monument in the center of the cemetery. On it, one can read the names of all local

³⁷² "Szelet vetett a főrabbi beszéde, de a vihar elmaradt" *Jáskunság*, XL., No. 6 (December-January.)

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Péter Kardos, "Előszó" (Foreword), *Új Élet*, 1 December 1994 p 4.

³⁷⁶ The letter of the Chief Rabbi's Office to Gusztáv Zoltai, copy at the author.

Jewish victims of World War II. Among them there are the three victims of the 1946 pogrom. On one hand, they are hidden among the people perished in Auschwitz. On the other hand József Rosinger has a tomb only twenty meters away, which indicates the date of his death: 1946. The words proclaim that he died as a martyr.

In 1946 Sándor Márai, the famous Hungarian author, noticed in his diary that in those days everybody wanted to buy tickets to public executions.³⁷⁷ In Poland partisan and militia units carried out mass killings. The institutionalized public murder happened every day in both countries. The society got accustomed to violence that is why ordinary people could exercise lynch law. While the pogrom in post-war Hungary was unique, in Poland it became a more frequent phenomenon, and as a consequence, the Jews left Poland. The Kielce pogrom became a stigma of the Polish nation rather than a tragedy of the Jews, while in Hungary the memorial ceremony in Kunmadaras sparked a heated debate over assimilation within the Jewish community.

³⁷⁷ Sándor Márai, *Napló 1945-1957* [Diary 1945-1957] (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 1999), p 32.

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