

The White Terror in a Global Context

Miscarriages of Justice and the Origins of the Racial State in Hungary, 1919–1923

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Abstract. The study interprets Hungary’s counterrevolutionary interwar regime at the intersection of paramilitarism in the immediate aftermath of World War I and the rise of the modern racial state. It traces how the failure to prosecute perpetrators of antisemitic and political violence and the enactment of exclusionary laws marked a decisive turn from the *Rechtsstaat* to the *Rassenstaat*. Drawing on judicial archives and comparative cases, the essay argues that Hungary’s miscarriages of justice created both the precedent and the source of institutional habits for later racialised governance and persecution. The impunity granted to paramilitary perpetrators reshaped interwar political culture and fed into later extreme right-wing political cultures, including the political cultures and ideologies cultivated by Hungarian collaborators in the Holocaust. By contextualising Hungary’s experience in transnational histories of race, law, and modernisation, the article redefines the White Terror as a formative episode in the global genealogy of the racial state.

Keywords: White Terror, Jews, antisemitism, racial state, Hungary, justice, *numerus clausus*, labor market, slavery, eugenics, *Rechtsstaat*, *Rassenstaat*

Introduction

This essay aims to accomplish three goals. First, it examines the prosecution of hate and political crimes committed during the “hot phase” of the counterrevolution (often described as White Terror, between August 1919 and March 1920). Second, it evaluates the long-term impact of the anti-Jewish legislation passed in the period of political consolidation from November 1920 until the end of 1924. Third, the essay puts the history of the White Terror and the counterrevolution in a global context, seeking to explain their significance for Hungarian and world history. More specifically, it evaluates the influence of these events on the rise and evolution of the racial state.

While the topic of justice served or aborted in the early 1920s is new, the narrative of the motives and social backgrounds of the perpetrators and the meanings and significance of right-wing paramilitary and mob violence in Hungary after August 1919 has a long history. The exiled leaders of the first democratic experiment and the defunct Hungarian Soviet Republic regarded the White Terror as a major event of both national and global significance. In a political pamphlet published in the early 1920s, the social scientist Oszkár Jászi, who had served as the Minister for National Minorities in the first democratic government at the end of 1918, described the White Terror as a unique regression in the process of civilisation.¹ In August 1919, Jászi argued that Hungary's "wild Asian soul raised its head again." The agents of violence, "the scum of the counterrevolution," were sadistic army officers, arrogant provincial administrators, degenerate noblemen, and semi-literate and antisemitic artisans, shopkeepers, white-collar workers, and other members of the German (*Sváb*) petty bourgeoisie. The goal of these reactionaries had been to "amputate the country's brain" by killing or driving into exile the progressive intelligentsia (of mainly Jewish, ethnic German, or Slav origin), which had been the driving force behind the Westernisation and the economic and cultural modernisation of the country before 1914. One may add to Jászi's account that the traditional social and political elite had first tolerated their excesses and rejoiced over the demise of the progressive intelligentsia. However, the same elite came to recognise that unruly militias posed a threat not only to Jews, workers, and leftist intellectuals, but also to their power. With the help of the police, the old civil service, the officer corps, and conservative politicians such as Counts Pál Teleki and István Bethlen gradually pushed the militias, "the dregs of the counterrevolution," to the side and, by 1922, restored, with small modifications, the pre-war conservative social and political system.²

The exiled leaders of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, such as the talented journalist and ex-social democrat József Pogány, described the White Terror as a world historical event comparable to the defeat of the Paris Commune in 1871.³ Wartime misery and post-war chaos had finally re-awakened the European working class from its Cinderella sleep. Frightened by the renewed militancy of the lower orders, the capitalists and landowners in Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Germany created their own private armies, the right-wing militias, to fend off the leftist threat. Led by military officers and university students, the paramilitary groups recruited their members almost entirely from the bourgeoisie. During the counterrevolution, the capitalist system, for the last time, had revealed its true nature, which was pure

1 On the life of the moderate socialist Oszkár Jászi and his academic and political careers, see Litván, *A Twentieth-Century Prophet*.

2 Jászi, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, 160–61.

3 On Pogány's life and career, see Sakmyster, *A Communist Odyssey*, 36–52.

violence. “The Hungarian White Terror,” Pogány argued, “is nothing more than the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Its [specific] form is determined by the fact that the leaders of the dictatorship are professional soldiers.”⁴

Building on this interwar precedent, after World War II, orthodox Marxist historians such as Erzsébet Andics and Dezső Nemes continued to describe the White Terror as a reaction to progress and an attempt by the ruling capitalist classes to hold on to power. According to their interpretation, the atrocities committed against workers and political activists after August 1919 had given birth to the first fascist state in Europe, which then had served as a model for both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The ex-militia men had supported Hungary’s alliance with kindred states, such as Mussolini’s Italy and Hitler’s Germany. They had also welcomed Hungary’s entry into World War II on the side of the fascist powers.

In the 1970s and 1980s, a new generation of historians questioned the cardinal importance of paramilitary violence as the midwife of the new counterrevolutionary regime and expressed doubts about its fascist character,⁵ but the full-scale attack on the rigid edifice of historical continuities between the White Terror and the Horthy regime came after the collapse of the one-party state in 1989. As a result of newer publications, the image of the violent phase of the counterrevolution, and its causes and consequences, has changed drastically over the course of the past thirty years. Modern historians tend to see violence as a sterile force. The Red and White terrors, they contend, fed chaos and misery, but they did not create anything new or permanent. The only exception is the pattern of violence: the enforcers’ conduct in Stalinist Hungary did resemble the behavioural patterns established by the Red militias in 1919.⁶ Interestingly enough, while modern historians recognise the points of continuities between the Soviet Republic and Socialist Hungary, they tend to underplay the links between the White Terror and the domestic and foreign policies of the interwar Horthy regime.⁷

With a few notable exceptions, Hungarian historians today attribute the waves of pogroms, armed robberies, bread riots, and other types of violent outbreaks after 1918 to the brutalising effects of the war, material deprivation, and cultural

4 Pogány, “Fehérterror természetrajza,” 29–32. First published by Arbeiter-Buchhandlung in Vienna in 1920; cp. also Pogány, “A munkásosztály kiirtása,” 402–03. First published by Arbeiter-Buchhandlung in Vienna in 1920.

5 See Romsics, *Ellenforradalom és konszolidáció*.

6 See Hatos, *Rosszfiúk Világforradalma*.

7 On the sources of and the main trends in Hungarian foreign policy in the interwar period, see Pritz, “Huszadik századi magyar külpolitika,” 202–04; Zeidler, “Mozgástér a kényszerpályán;” Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 198–226.

disorientation.⁸ They see the atrocities committed by the mobs and right-wing paramilitary groups as the last ripples of the war rather than the start of new era: the left-over of bygone age, rather than the foundation of a new regime and political culture. In contrast to the pre-1989 period, the White Terror and the counterrevolution in Hungary are no longer regarded as an event of major national or global significance. Instead, they have been reduced to a footnote in the annals of political violence.

Yet the continuity with later events and trends has not been completely erased. Holocaust historians, in particular, stress the continuity, in spirit, language, and agency, between the *numerus clausus* legislation of 1920, which was in part the product of paramilitary, especially student agitation and violence, and the antisemitic legislations of the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁹ In his seminal work on the history of fascism, Stanley G. Payne, for instance, describes the right-wing paramilitary groups and the Race Defenders in Hungary as typical representatives of right-radicalism and forerunners to fascism in interwar Europe.¹⁰ In two important books and several articles, Krisztián Ungváry has restored some of the earlier significance of the White Terror and the counterrevolution. Ungváry argues that it was in this period when the political elite first tried to solve the country's most pressing social problems at the expense of Jews. The early attempts to "ethnicize social policy" represented more than a kneejerk reaction to the war and Jewish participation in the democratic revolution and the Soviet Republic. The Race Defenders, whose time arrived after 1932, were, Ungváry argues, both modernisers and social reformers, similar, in regard to their political ideas and motives, to Roosevelt Democrats, Italian Fascists, and Soviet Communists. Their reforms paved the way for the Anti-Jewish Laws of the late 1930s and early 1940s. These legislations, Ungváry continues, were not borrowed goods, but the products of indigenous developments: logical answers to Hungarian problems.¹¹

This article, too, describes the White Terror and the counterrevolution as events of both national and global importance. Like Ungváry's publications, this essay is also concerned with state-building and social engineering. However, instead of social policy, the focus of this article is on the operations of the justice system and the health of the *Rechtsstaat*: the "state based on the rule of law." More specifically,

8 Cp. Révész, *Nem akartak katonát láni?* This is also true of much of the international literature on the interwar militias, which is more concerned with the origins of paramilitary violence rather than their long-term consequences. Cp. Horne, etc. For an exception to this rule.

9 See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1–39; Katzburg, *Zsidópolitika Magyarországon*.

10 Payne, *A History of Fascism*, 15–16.

11 Ungváry, "A szociálpolitika etnicizálása;" Ungváry, *A Horthy rendszer mérlege*. See also the reworked iteration of this important volume: *A Horthy-rendszer és antiszemitizmusának mérlege*.

this article is concerned with the issue of legal equality in Hungary during the years of political consolidation between 1921 and 1924. The main argument of this essay is that the state's failure to provide justice for the victims of hate crimes should not be perceived simply as a concession to the recent past and its "heroes," the right-wing paramilitary groups. These concessions cast a long shadow and could be regarded as one of the seeds of a new social, political, and legal system, the racial state (*Rassenstaat*). In a more fully developed racial state, such as Nazi Germany, the legal inequality of ethnic minorities (first for Jews, later for slave labourers from the East) was taken for granted. The main function of the law in such a state was to synchronize and legitimize social and ethnic inequalities and hierarchies, thus making the humiliation, gross exploitation, and mistreatment of ethnic minorities a permanent and key feature of the system. This paper traces a similar logic and argues that the refusal of the authorities to provide justice for the victims of the White Terror by punishing the perpetrators of political and hate crimes was part of this larger scheme and drive. With the pogroms, the armed robberies, the violent attacks on Jewish students, the ethnic cleansing of towns and villages populated by Jewish farmers and merchants, and the antisemitic legislations passed in this period, these miscarriages of justice represented a pivotal moment in Hungarian history: an important shift away from the *Rechtsstaat* towards the *Rassenstaat*. Who was responsible for this shift, who paid the price for it, and what were the short and long-term consequences of this new trend? This article ventures answers to these questions.

Capitalism, technological modernisation, and the origins of the racial state, 1880–1918

The racial state (as a corpus of laws, institutions, and administrative practices, and biopolitics as political culture and practices of violence) was certainly a product of modernity. Its origins can be traced back to colonisation and the creation of the world economy in the early modern period and to the rise of imperialism in the nineteenth century. Its home was the settlers' colonies, such as the United States, Australia, and South Africa and the modernising imperial states. The ethnic cleansing practiced in the settlers' colonies testified to the determination, expansionist drive, and cruelty of the newcomers. While it led to the deaths of millions of aboriginals, ethnic cleansing tended to be a spontaneous process driven by local actors acting on private interests, rather than plans drafted in far-away capitals. This is not to say that the settlers did not enjoy the sympathy of their governments, and with only a few exceptions, they could, when needed, count on their political and military support. For example, in the United States, the new political class not only tolerated but aided the expulsion of Aborigines from their native lands and the destruction of their culture between

1830 and 1900. As a result of this shared effort, the scale and intensity of ethnic cleansing in North America surpassed the death and devastation produced by the interstate conflicts and civil wars in Europe in the same period.¹² Paradoxically, the United States was a democracy at the time. The European liberal empires, including Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, also sought to spread the benefits of modernity in the form of new social services, higher wages, and improved standards of living among the lower classes. By 1900, the modernising empires in Europe could be described as *Rechtsstaaten*, which treated their citizens equally before law, irrespective of social or religious background. Greater civility, improved standards of living, and expanding rights (including the right to vote in elections) in the metropolises went together with gross exploitation and increased formal and informal discrimination in the overseas colonies.

In these colonies, ethnic cleansing was inexorably linked to the institution of slavery.¹³ Slavery was not merely a matter of economic profits. It also had many non-economic, i.e., cultural, political, and psychological benefits. “Whiteness” became a source of pride and the basis of cultural identity among the rural poor in the southern states of the United States (as well as other settlers’ colonies). While the Civil War put an end to the institution of slavery, these cultural and psychological benefits, alongside economic factors, go a long way to explain why racism continued to persist in the South long after the military defeat of the Confederate armies. Racism not only persisted, but along with economic and social inequalities, it remained the main principle of social organisation in the South after 1870. The passing of a series of legislative measures, collectively known as the Jim Crow Laws, not only kept most Blacks in the South in bondage and in dire poverty, they also created administrative structures, reinforced political convictions, and entrenched habits. Many of the stipulations of the Jim Crow Laws (like the American constitution after the world wars) became export items. Rigid separation of the races in the

12 American leaders from George Washington to Abraham Lincoln (some of the worst atrocities happened during Lincoln’s presidency in the 1860s) justified the removal of native Americans on strategic, cultural, and increasingly racial grounds: as an alleged military necessity, as a price to be paid on the altar of progress, and finally as a proof of the settlers’ cultural and biological superiority. Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy*, 91–100. Cited in Schlögel, *American Matrix*, 721.

13 Most of the statesmen who had gathered in Philadelphia in 1776 were slaveholders. Some, like Thomas Jefferson, the main author of the *Declaration of Independence* and the American Constitution, can be described as early and committed racists. Thomas Jefferson, who had six children from an African American woman, can be considered typical of the members of his class. However, by failing to manumit her, or indeed any of his slaves, Jefferson represented an exception (and it spoke volumes about his character). It is less known that the third president of the United States was also one of first public figures to use science in support of his notion of the alleged moral inferiority of African Americans. Schlögel, *American Matrix*, 693–96.

public arena, discrimination on the job market, and the interdiction of sexual relations between members of different so-called races found admirers and imitators, from the South African Republic to Nazi Germany and its satellites in the twentieth century. These elements of law came to be the key features of the racial state.¹⁴

The New South rested not only on laws, institutions, and the economic interests of the elites: segregation was also deeply rooted in the political culture, the prejudices, and self-understanding of the general population. Everywhere, the foot soldiers of the nascent racial state came from the middle and lower strata of society. The dirty work of removing Native Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had been the done by local national guards: citizens' militias which regarded themselves as the backbone of White democracy. The slave patrols in the pre-Civil War era in turn gave birth to the Ku-Klux-Klan (KKK) after 1865. While the early militias in the frontier states had specialised in expulsion and murder, the slave patrols and the KKK were more interested in confining, exploiting, and terrorising African Americans, for instance via lynchings. The two practices (expulsion and murder on the one hand and exploitation and terrorising on the other) were only superficially at odds with each other; in fact, the forced removal of one group normally went with the subjugation and enslavement of others.

Ethnic cleansing in the settlers' colonies, in turn, was closely tied to restrictive immigration policies and, after the 1880s, racial preference as an increasingly prominent element of the majority's political identity. This meant support for the influx of the "right kind" of immigrants and the exclusion of people perceived as a threat, as well as the elimination, via medical measures, of those deemed a burden. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, immigration and population policy became a major concern not only for civil servants and politicians, but also for health officials, doctors, and social scientists. Social hygiene and eugenics became an important instrument in the hands of civil servants and various experts engaged in the process of nation and state-building. Many of their policies, such as marital counselling, motherhood training, and financial aid given to large groups seen as racially valuable and "deserving," were perceived both as rational and beneficial to the majority population. However, eugenicists were even more interested in exclusion through the elimination of the "undeserving," the "unworthy," the "antisocial," and the "hereditary ill." Even before 1914, British, American, and German eugenicists began to advocate voluntary (later compulsory) sterilisation to remove "dead weight," prevent degeneration, and solve the most pressing social problems.¹⁵ Eugenicists were also quick to forge a link between the elimination of the "burdensome" population via medical means and restrictive immigration policies. Early eugenicists,

14 Proctor, *Racial Hygiene*. See also Burleigh and Wiperman, *The Racial State*.

15 Kühl, *The Nazi Connection*.

such as Charles Davenport, were among the main advocates of laws and regulations designed to keep allegedly inferior ethnic groups and races, such as the Chinese and the Japanese, out and maintain their continued segregation from the rest of the population.¹⁶ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 crowned their efforts with success. This law provided inspiration for nationalists in other part of the world. The same law, for example, inspired politicians in Austria–Hungary to introduce legislation in 1883 to exclude Jewish immigrants from the East.¹⁷

The Jim Crow Laws and anti-immigrant agitation were closely tied to paramilitary and mob violence. Vigilante groups, such as the KKK, followed Black migrants to the cities in the North before World War I. Hostile not only to Blacks but also to Catholics, Jews, and other minority groups, the KKK spread terror in the African American and immigrant neighbourhoods after 1918. Alongside the KKK, the American Legion (AL), which was the largest veteran organisation, organised and led attacks on immigrant communities. Regarding its ideology, the social backgrounds of the leaders and the rank-and-file, and its organisational structure, the AL bore an unmistakable resemblance to the interwar right-wing paramilitary groups in Europe. Like the antisemitic German *Freikorps*, the Nazi SA, and the Hungarian *szabadcsapatok*, the AL wanted to cleanse the land of “subversive” and “racially inferior” elements and maintain and strengthen social and racial hierarchies. Tied to the government and the political elite, the AL and the KKK became the most important agents of the racial state in the United States in the 1920s.

The right-wing paramilitary groups in Europe were the product of the war and the conflicts and tensions in its wake. At the same time, they prolonged the these conflicts and contributed to the outbreak of civil wars.¹⁸ The presence of the militias ensured that the war would continue in the form of ethnic conflicts, border clashes, regional wars, and domestic political conflicts. Many of the interwar militias were outright fascist or proto-fascist (particularly in Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Italy), but even those which later became the backbone of the new democratic states (like the Czech Legion and the Baltic militias) were fiercely nationalistic, embraced many authoritarian and even fascist ideas, and committed many atrocities against Jews and other minority groups between 1918 and 1921.¹⁹ In the Third Reich, paramilitarism and the *Freikorps* were often celebrated as the “vanguard to Nazism” and

16 Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*.

17 Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna*.

18 Böhler, “Enduring Violence;” Tooley, “German Political Violence;” Gatrell, “War after War: Conflicts, 1919–1923;” Schnell, *Räume des Schreckens*; Jones, *Am Anfang war Gewalt*, 9–74; Newman, “The Origins, Attributes and Legacies of Paramilitary Violence in the Balkans.”

19 Kučera, “Exploiting Victory;” Balkalis, “Demobilisierung, Remobilisierung. Paramilitaerische Verbaende in Litauen, 1918–1920.”

a model for Nazi organisations, such as the SS, which was one of the pillars of the racial state. Although the lines of continuity between the *Freikorps* and the Third Reich were not as strong as many earlier historians believed, without the right-wing militias, the regime certainly would have taken a different form.

The deep roots of the racial state in Hungary, 1867–1919

The racial state in Hungary also had its origins in the immediate post-1918 period. However, at least some of its components, such as discrimination against minorities and limited social mobility for non-Hungarian speakers, already existed in the Dualist era. Like their Austrian counterparts, Hungarian liberals before 1914 were ready to concede active citizenship only to a small part of the population (relatively well-to-do men of voting age). The rest (more than 94 percent of the adult population) had to be content with passive citizenship.²⁰ The parliament and political life in general remained the domain of a small socially and culturally homogeneous Hungarian-speaking group. Representatives of the ethnic minorities, which made up about half of the population, continued to exercise little control over the legislative process. The ethnic minorities had many reasons to complain about discrimination. Non-Hungarian speakers were absent in the economic elite and remained underrepresented in the middle class, as well. The Constitution of 1867 guaranteed both individual and collective rights. However, with the onset of the “Magyarisation” policy in the final decades of the century, the state began to minority schools closely and restrict access to local administration in the minorities’ languages. It also cracked down on minority organisations and arrested, tried, and jailed religious and community leaders on trumped-up charges.²¹ It was of little consolation that police and the courts treated the ideological and political opponents of the liberal regime, especially the agrarian socialists and the social democrats, even more harshly and unfairly.

In addition to the policy of Magyarisation, the heavy-handedness of the police, and the ethnic and class biases of the judges, the rise of integral nationalism and racism and the spread of hostile and increasingly racist stereotypical images in newspapers and periodicals before 1914 also poisoned the relationship with the minorities and the neighbouring countries and left a heavy legacy for interwar Hungarian society.²² As had been and was the case in Great Britain and France, the rise of racism in Central Europe was linked to imperial ambitions and conquest. Austro–Hungarian expansion into the Balkans at the turn of the century quickened the transition from

20 Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 344–84.

21 Katus, *Hungary in the Dual Monarchy*, 428–78.

22 Tamás, *Nemzetiségek görbe tükörben*.

democratic nationalism and foreign policy, based on Lajos Kossuth's idea of the equality of small nations and states, to a more exclusivist type of nationalism and foreign policy moved by imperial ambitions and the fashionable belief in ethnic and racial hierarchies.²³ The rise of political antisemitism in the same period both testified to and quickened the erosion of the liberal foundation of Hungarian nationalism. Like their Austrian counterparts and nativists in the United States, Hungarian antisemites were obsessed with the influx of allegedly inferior and dangerous "aliens." Győző Istóczy was the first prominent figure in Europe to link the demand for anti-Jewish legislations and strict immigration laws to the necessity of social reforms. He was also one of the first antisemites to advocate the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and the resettlement of European Jews overseas in 1878. While Istóczy hoped to protect peasants from Jewish usurers and save the noble estates from Jewish speculators, Christian Socialists such as Ottokár Prohászka and Béla Bangha paid more attention to the material interests and the cultural and psychological needs of politically underorganised middle and lower/middle class groups (peasants, non-Jewish artisans and shopkeepers) and modern middle-class professionals and students. Moreover, the Christian Socialists were concerned not only with the material interests of their clients. They also wanted to cleanse elite and popular culture of liberal, socialist, foreign and Jewish influences. Thus, early on, political antisemitism in Hungary was linked to the fate of social and immigration reforms, cultural revival, "racial rejuvenation," and the vision of a state and society in which Jewish Hungarians would be stigmatised and excluded from vital aspects of national life.²⁴

The link between nationalism and demographic policy (in the resettlement of Magyar farmers to the disputed border regions) had already been forged before 1914. The war revolutionised eugenics and gave its proponents more publicity and power. The establishment in 1917 of two new institutions, the Hungarian Society for Racial Hygiene and Population Policy and the National Welfare Office for Disabled Servicemen, testified to the growing interest of the political elites and the medical professions in eugenics. The new institutions played a key role in the diffusion of eugenic ideas. The eugenicists fused scientism with radical politics. "Race-breeding" with antisemitism and the fight against purported degeneration with the struggle to restore family life and improve the health of the population.²⁵

The war undermined the liberal foundation of the economy and the social and political order.²⁶ Predictably, the position of the ethnic and religious minorities in

23 Romsics, *Összeomlás és útkeresés*, 119–42.

24 Gyurgyák, *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon*, 295–301; Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*; Szabó, "A kontinentális Európa konzervatív ideológiájának új vonásai a századfordulón."

25 Turda, "The Biology of War."

26 Bihari, *Lövészárkok a háttérországban*.

Hungarian society also deteriorated significantly during the war, as the minority leaders felt compelled to defend their communities against accusations of disloyalty and lukewarm support for the war. The minorities also resented that the Budapest governments failed to make concessions to their demands, concessions that might have averted the final collapse and the painful dismemberment of the country. The invasion of the country by the armies of the neighbouring states and the annexation of the disputed regions at the end of 1918 and early 1919 put an end to this debate. Hungary's loss of its historical territories became a source of national humiliation and innumerable individual tragedies. The fusion of revisionism and racism was not inevitable, but in the historical circumstances and political climate (and in the context of earlier intellectual and cultural developments), it hardly came as a surprise.

The counterrevolution

Modernisation opened new possibilities for social and political developments. The first path promoted liberalisation and democratisation. It favoured spontaneity in human relations, increased social mobility, the removal or at least the lowering of cultural and religious barriers, the expansion of individual rights, and more respect for ethnic and religious minorities. The second path led in a different direction. It reinforced rather than weakened the existing social and ethnic hierarchies and even created new ones. It did not strive to conceal such differences but rather made them more visible through laws, regulations, ideological indoctrination, customs, rituals of violence, and social pressure. In these societies, race and ethnicity came to replace class as the chief principle of differentiation, which divided society into antagonistic groups and largely determined one's opportunities and place in society.

In the survey of the pre-1919 period, I have identified several components of the future racial state. These features included demographic engineering (via forced settlements, strict immigration laws, ethnic cleansing, and genocide), social engineering (via laws, formal and informal discrimination on the job market, and social reforms at the expense of ethnic minorities, all aimed at creating a society in which social and ethnic hierarchies overlapped), biological engineering and the fusion of science/racism and nationalism (via medical surveillance, health reforms, breeding projects, sterilisation, and euthanasia), ideological indoctrination and propaganda, and, finally, political mobilisation and paramilitarism (via the creation of citizens' militias). The task of the paramilitary groups was to enforce racial laws and customs, censor behaviour, and punish deviation and deviants, or in other words, to keep the ethnic and racial minorities in line through violence.

Hungary was very far away from this state in 1919 or even in 1944, but it took important steps in this direction during the counterrevolution. The period of the White Terror served as a hothouse for political experimentation. The right-wing paramilitary groups and the fascist and proto-fascist parties, patriotic associations, and pressure groups were the most important agents of change.²⁷ These organisations did not simply want to restore the pre-1914 social and political system. They also sought to create a more egalitarian society.²⁸ The level of violence against Jews and political opponents was also new, as was the brutality and complexity of the assaults, which ranged from verbal attacks, muggings, and public humiliation to the confiscation of private goods, pogroms, armed robberies, kidnapping, extortion, torture, murder, and rape. The paramilitary groups bore responsibility for the expulsion of tens of thousands of Jews from their homes and the emigration of even more. The fate of Hungarian Jews mirrored the plight of the more than 300,000 ethnic Hungarians who had been forced to flee their homes in the border regions that had recently been annexed by the neighbouring states.²⁹ The White Terror taught Hungarian society that Jewish property was up for grabs and that Jews, under the right circumstances, could be robbed and killed with impunity. The expulsion of local Jews and the plundering of their property by the members of the paramilitary groups, the gendarmes, municipal employees, and even mere neighbours and acquaintances helped establish a pattern of behaviour that would be repeated countless times during both the deportation of Hungarian Jews in 1944 and the expulsion of ethnic Germans after 1945.³⁰

The counterrevolution also created a second precedent. The Hungarian government and public opinion had been concerned about the influx of Jewish refugees from the provinces of the Dual Monarchy since the start of the war. While every government (including the Soviet Republic) had considered the repatriation of Jews from the east (whom the tabloid press had accused of all sorts of petty crimes) a priority, the actual arrest and deportation of these “illegal aliens” only began during the counterrevolution. Although there was no evidence that the refugees had played any role in the Soviet Republic, rumours to that effect and general paranoia solidified the alleged link between Jews and Soviet-Russia into received wisdom. Between 1919 and 1922, the militias and the police detained thousands of “illegal aliens.” Those who could not prove that they resided in the country legally were put in internment

27 Kántás, *Double Cross Blood Union*. For an excellent survey of social and economic problems, see Bódy, ed., *Háborúból békébe*.

28 Egry, “Armed Peasants, Violent Intellectuals and Political Guards.”

29 Mócsy, *Radicalization and Counterrevolution*.

30 Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 27–41; Karsai, *Holokauszt*, 236; Gerlach and Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet*, 131–277, cited in Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 229.

camps, where they awaited deportation. The guards treated the detainees in the camps poorly. They raped women, tortured male prisoners, stole the inmates' food rations, and took their shoes and clothing. The arrest and deportation of "illegal aliens" did not end with the onset of consolidation in April 1921 but continued until the closure of the last internment camp in Zalaegerszeg in 1924. Like the expulsion of Jews by the local militias, the state-sanctioned deportation of Jewish immigrants set the precedent for administrators, politicians, enforcers, and the antisemitic public at large. The link is especially obvious regarding the behaviour of the gendarmes. The collection and deportation of unregistered Jews in the early 1920s foreshadowed the arrest and deportation of more than 20,000 "illegal aliens" in July and August 1941. Then, just like during the counterrevolution, Hungarian gendarmes who had robbed, tortured, and even killed hundreds of deportees on route handed, upon arrival at the border, the hapless people over to German SS units, who, with their Ukrainian henchmen, murdered more than 16,000 Hungarian Jews in Kamenez-Podolsk.³¹ The White Terror and the deportation of Jews during the counterrevolution provided the blueprint and the excuse for the concentration of Jews into temporary camps before their deportation to Nazi Germany or the death camps in occupied Poland. Just like in 1919, in April and May of 1944, Hungarian administrators and military leaders used the well-worn argument that Jews were unreliable crypto-communists and traitors as a justification for deporting them first from the regions close to the frontline and later from the town and villages in the country's interior.

The perpetrators of anti-Jewish violence believed that they had done nothing wrong. The robbers thought that the acts that they had committed were a matter of justice and self-defence. Since Jews had gained their property through trickery and theft, the perpetrators had only taken back what had originally belonged to them (either as individuals or members of the race and the nation). The perpetrators of these acts of violence were convinced that the people they had victimised, whether Jews, democrats, socialists, communists, free-masons, spies, traitors, or alleged foreign agents, deserved their fate. In dozens of cases, the paramilitary groups created a spectacle before the executions. They tried the arrested Jews in kangaroo courts to establish their guilt or innocence. The ritualised process, called "the people's judgment" (*népítélet*), bore an unmistakable resemblance to lynchings in the United States. The main difference between the two processes was that in the United States, the accused were normally charged with sexual transgressions. In Hungary, the detainees were believed to have committed political crimes (supported

31 In July and August of 1941, the Hungarian authorities deported more than 20,000 "illegal aliens." Komoróczy, *A zsidók története Magyarországon II*, 623–26. On the connection between this early deportation and the genocide in 1944, see Eisen, *A magyar holocaust főpróbája*, 252–84.

communism, spread rumours, insulted the authorities, etc.). The punishments, which were inflicted in the wake of the mock trials, were meant to restore moral balance, provide justice to the injured party (the dominant group), teach the minority a lesson about proper behaviour and its place in society, and reinforce old and build new social and racial hierarchies. In other words, these punishments served to strengthen the foundations of the future racial state.

The counterrevolution also gave rise to the first laws and regulations that served as the cornerstones of the Hungarian racial state. Militia violence was about the social conflict between the Jewish and the non-Jewish members of the middle class, a fight over well-paying and high-status jobs, social prestige, and self-respect. However, the same people who had joined the militias and bore responsibility for anti-Jewish violence in 1919 also put pressure on their parliamentary representatives to pass legislation to turn temporary inequality and discrimination into law. The members of student militias not only terrorised their Jewish classmates, they also made clever use of their connections to public intellectuals, religious leaders, and influential politicians to enact the infamous *numerus clausus* law of September 1920. The alleged purpose of the new law was to remove temporary bottlenecks, produced by the mass influx of refugee and female students after 1918, in the process of university registration. The barely denied and more important purpose of the new law, however, was to remove Jews, both as fellow students and future colleagues, from the competition for well-paying and high-status jobs.³²

Yet it was not only the students who seized the chance to improve their job prospects through violence and legalised discrimination. Local administrators fired thousands of civil servants on the grounds that they had served the democratic governments or the communist regime. In many cases, politics was only a cover for ethnic discrimination. As a result of this “cleansing” campaign, the Jewish presence in the public sector, while never high, had been reduced to a minimum by 1921.³³ In the parliament, the representative of the influential fascist organisations, the Association of Awakening Hungarians (Ébredő Magyarok Egyesülete or ÉME), demanded that the *numerus clausus* be extended to the majority of the professions and trades, even those which required no academic qualifications. While no law was passed, in many places municipal and country administrators refused to renew (or issue new) licences to movie operators, tavern keepers, peddlers, and other types of petty merchants and small entrepreneurs. These measures destroyed the livelihoods of thousands of middle-class Jews. More importantly, these rather ad hoc measures created a precedent for the first two anti-Jewish laws, passed in the 1930s and early

32 Karady, “The restructuring of the academic marketplace;” Szegváry, *Numerus clausus*; Kovács, *Törvénytől sújtva*.

33 Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*.

1940s, which seriously reduced the share of Jews in the professions. Equally ominous was the passing of the Land Reform Act in 1920. The lawmakers' professed goal was to satisfy the peasants' hunger for land at the expense of war profiteers and speculators, but these were mere codewords, which, in the political vocabulary of the day, stood for Jews. The law marked a new and more intense phase in the "ethnification of social policy" in the interwar period and the building of a new political system, the racial state.³⁴ This law, like the *numerus clausus* legislation of 1920, served both as a precedent and a model for later legislations. It presaged the Third Anti-Jewish Law of 1942, which forbade Jews from owning farmland and engaging in agricultural production. The confiscation of land from alleged speculators and wartime profiteers, which the public equated with Jews, did alleviate misery among and gave hope to millions of desperately poor peasants. At the same time, it increased greed and channelled hatred towards the Jewish rural populations, and this hatred broke out in orgies of violence in the forms of robberies and the pillaging of the property that the deported Jews and the expelled ethnic Germans left behind in 1944 and after the war.

Justice delayed, justice denied

These laws represented a break with the past (in particular with the idea of equality before the law) and the start of a new era: the dawn of the *Rassenstaat*. Most historians believe that political consolidation, which began in earnest with the appointment of Count István Bethlen as Prime Minister in the spring of 1921, led to the almost full restoration of the social, political, and legal system of the pre-1914 period. This article argues otherwise. It contends that the old system may have been, in the main, restored by 1922. However, Hungarian history took a different turn in 1919. Political violence (the White Terror) not only gave birth to new laws and regulations, which then cast a long shadow on subsequent events. It also changed political culture, especially the attitude of civil servants towards the ethnic minorities. The Jewish victims of the White Terror and their family members, who demanded justice and compensation for their suffering *after* the onset of political consolidation in the spring of 1921, sensed these changes immediately. Had the *Rechtsstaat* been fully restored, their just demands for justice would have been fulfilled. The perpetrators would have been punished and the victims would have been morally and financially compensated.

Since the White Terror led to more physical attacks and caused more suffering among Hungarian Jews than all the anti-Jewish riots in the nineteenth century, serving justice after the onset of social and political consolidation was not a trivial

34 Ungváry, "A szociálpolitika etnicizálása."

matter, but a political act of the highest importance. It tested the strength of the *Rechtsstaat* and the will of its representatives to obey the law and uphold the liberal principles upon which the Hungarian state after 1868 had been based. It also gave evidence (or would have given evidence) of the fitness of the justice system and the quality and integrity of civilian and military prosecutors and judges. Since the elite officers' companies were part of Admiral Horthy's National Army, their members were under the authority of the army. Their cases had to be tried in military rather than civilian, courts. Very few of the investigations started by the army reached the trial stage, however. Minor offenses, such as verbal attacks and physical assaults resulting in minor injuries, were normally ignored. In such cases, Major General Sándor Kontz, the Commander-in-Chief of the Gendarmerie, and Major Dr. Rezső Schmitz, the Gendarme Prosecutor, simply forwarded the letters of complaint to the commanders of the elite units with the request that the culprit be investigated and disciplined.³⁵ If the victim of abuse was a reserve officer, the Gendarme Prosecutor simply advised him to challenge the wrongdoer to a duel.³⁶

For fear of retaliation, most of the victims of minor assaults tried to obtain justice by first contacting the source of their suffering, the army. However, in more serious cases, when their loved ones had been detained and had disappeared without a trace for days or weeks, for example, the victims' relatives normally felt compelled to ask for legal help. The better-off among them, and their attorneys, often conducted their own investigations. If they were able to locate the detainees, only then did they request that the Minister of Defence or Regent Horthy get involved and order the release of their loved ones. After liberation, the victims may have demanded justice and compensation. In one such rare case, Gendarme Prosecutor Dr. Schmitz claimed that his detectives had been unable to identify the officers who initiated the arrest. To add insult to injury, he also stated that the detectives had found no evidence to show that the victims had been tortured or otherwise abused

35 The night of 15 January 1921, Lieutenant Dénes Bibó cursed at and then manhandled a civilian, Gyula Vásárhelyi, in Budapest. The incident was witnessed by several bystanders. The prosecutor of the Gendarmerie notified the radical detachment leader Lieutenant Colonel Baron Pál Prónay and asked him to punish his officer. As punishment, Prónay revoked Bibó's furlough for a few days. See HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 122. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, lieutenant colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie. Budapest, 14 May 1921.

36 In the Vigadó-building in Budapest, Lieutenant István Balassa, an officer of the Prónay Battalion, slapped Zoltán Koncze, an economist (*közgazdász*) or, more likely, a business major at the university, in the face. The victim claimed to be a reserve officer. The prosecutor of the Gendarmerie moved that the case be settled in a military honour court. HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 122. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie. Budapest, 10 June 1921.

in captivity.³⁷ The Gendarme Prosecutor normally sided with the accused men in uniform and accepted their stories at face value. Once, Dr. Schmitz even claimed that Prónay's men had saved the life of their victim, named Dezső Krausz, by placing him under arrest. Had they not detained him, the Gendarme Prosecutor told the victim's relatives, the crowd, which allegedly had been infuriated by Krausz' thoughtless remarks about the benevolent aspects of communist rule, would have torn him to pieces. Instead of denouncing the officers, Krausz should have thanked Prónay's men for having saved his life.³⁸

In these cases, the Gendarme Prosecutor violated the principle of *in dubio pro reo* (in case of doubt, the plaintiff is always right), which had served as the basis of justice since Roman times. This violation was partially the result of solidarity with fellow officers. Even more importantly, however, the oversight had to do with the ethnic and religious background of the plaintiff. The Gendarme Prosecutor found the accusations of corruption made by Jewish civilians especially unnerving. When the attorney of a kidnapped Jewish estate owner claimed that his client had been tortured in captivity and that the officers had also tried to extort money from his family members, the Gendarme Prosecutor could barely control his anger. In a short letter written in abrupt language, he notified the attorney that he had closed the file because his detectives had not been able to locate the accused, who, in any case, had long since been discharged from the army.³⁹

37 See the case of Tibor Mann, who had been arrested by the officers of the Prónay Battalion in May 1920. He was released from captivity on the order by the Minister of Defence. The investigation into his case lasted for two years and produced no results. See HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászszázlój (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 17 March 1922.

38 In October 1921, Aranka Klein asked the authorities to identify and punish the officers who had detained and tortured her friend, Dezső Krausz, at the Hotel Britannia. The members of the Prónay Battalion denied that they had beaten Krausz; telling the investigator that the physical abuse Krausz had suffered must have been work of the "enraged crowd." The prosecutor of the Gendarmerie closed the file citing insufficient evidence. See HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászszázlój (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 122. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 5 October 1921.

39 György Löwy, an estate manager and resident in Siófok, was arrested by four soldiers on 17 August 1919. They took him to the well-known Hullám [Wave] Hotel. There, they forced him to hand over all his valuables and savings. He was then taken to Újpuszta, an isolated farmstead in the outskirts of the town, where he was tortured repeatedly and forced to do menial labor. The soldiers also robbed his house and the estate that he had managed. HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászszázlój (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 1 June 1922.

The accusation of theft angered military officials not only because this crime was normally associated with lower-class civilians. It was also embarrassing because the sanctity of private property remained the foundation of the social and political system. Because of foreign and domestic pressure, state officials could not claim immunity for the officers simply because the victims had been Jews. They declared, instead, that Jews had become second-class citizens, who no longer had any claim on the Hungarian state. Their main line of defence thus remained that confiscations and other types of improprieties had taken place in the early phase of the counterrevolution, when the country had been in a state of civil war. Second, they argued that the officers' detachments had been permitted by the Ministry of Defence to collect weapons and uniforms and to requisition motor vehicles, carts, horses, fodder, and other vital supplies. Still, many of the confiscated goods (such as cash, watches, jewellery, clothing, hunting weapons, etc.) did not fall into these categories, and this fact humiliated the prosecutor and his underlings, who remained determined to defend the honour of their uniforms. Prónay's superior and the Supreme Commander of the Gendarmerie, Major General Kontz, also reacted with anger and shame to the accusation made by Jewish victims that the officers of the National Army had committed common crimes. Had his men indeed taken anything, the Supreme Commander countered, they would have surely given the injured party a receipt. The Supreme Commander of the Hungarian Gendarmerie expressed regret over the inconvenience and the loss of property, but he refused to apologise for his men's behaviour or promise compensation.⁴⁰

Not only did the military judges fail to observe the principle of *in dubio pro reo*: the authorities also used every chance to question the credibility and integrity of the Jewish plaintiffs. Playing on a well-known antisemitic stereotype, the Gendarme Prosecutor claimed that the injured party had exaggerated his losses or had been mistaken or had deliberately lied about the identity of the attackers. To protect the reputation of the army, he alleged that no army or gendarme units had stayed in the community at the time of the incident and that the attackers most likely had been local peasants.⁴¹ Accepting rumours at face value, Dr. Schmitz argued that the thieves had not been soldiers but civilian criminals and communists dressed in

40 In Sörnye, a small village in the outskirts of Kaposvár, Prónay's men took seven horses, one wagon, and various horse accoutrements from the estate of two Jewish entrepreneurs, Samu and Lipót Ringle in August 1919. HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 122. Ruling by General Kontz, inspector general of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, no. 139/21. Budapest, 7 April 1921.

41 In late 1920, a squad of the Prónay Battalion plundered the farm of a Jewish entrepreneur, Miksa Szekulecz in Kunszentmiklós. The investigation, which lasted for almost two years, produced no results, or at least no one was found guilty, despite the significant damage, of any impropriety. See HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 2 June 1922.

stolen army uniforms. The goal of these unscrupulous provocateurs allegedly was to damage the reputation of the Prónay Battalion and the National Army.⁴²

The *Rechtsstaat* was supposed to administer justice automatically and without consideration of the ethnic or religious background of its citizens. However, in the first half of the 1920s and after the onset of political consolidation, the Gendarme Prosecutor still failed to hide his prejudices towards and dislike of Jews. In his reports and verdicts, he described the injured party as a “Jew” both to deprive the injured party of the readers’ sympathy and to trivialise the crime. Sometimes, as an even cruder form of dehumanisation, the Gendarme Prosecutor did not even name the victims.⁴³ The Gendarme Prosecutor’s main task seems to have been to defend the perpetrators and excuse their crimes. In his readings of the events, Prónay and his men had merely followed orders. The situation in 1919 had been volatile, and the soldiers had had to show strength in the face of the country’s enemies. The murders, in any case, had been the work of angry peasants, not officers. The Gendarme Prosecutor admitted that occasionally the officers of the Prónay Detachment and other paramilitary groups, who had lost family members to the Red Terror, may have taken the law into their own hands. However, such rare transgressions did not diminish the services they had performed for the nation. Since Regent Horthy, with his general amnesty order of November 1921, had already pardoned such mistakes, Dr. Schmitz informed the victims’ family members that he had no option but to end the investigation and close the file.⁴⁴

42 A detachment, allegedly from the Prónay Battalion, occupied the municipal building in Szilasbálhás and took 3,000 crowns from its coffers on 15 August 1919. Dr. Schmitz argued that no squad from the gendarme reserve battalion had been present in the community at the time of the robbery. He suspected that unscrupulous civilians in stolen army uniform carried out the robbery. See HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 3 May 1922.

43 The language of the prosecutor’s summary of the events speak volumes about his attitude towards the victims of paramilitary violence. The Prónay Detachment was said to have killed “several Jews” in the village of Lepsény in the fall of 1919. In Siófok, the same unit hanged thirty-two people, “all Jews.” In the village of Tamási, the militia handed over “a number of Jews” to the peasants who had lost family members to the Red Terror. The peasants allegedly hacked “the Jews” to pieces with their hoes and spades first. Then, they plucked their eyes out. Finally, they hanged them all in “in revenge for the violent deaths of their loves ones.” In the village of Simontornya, the Prónay Detachment executed the university student and the scion of a wealthy family, László Andor (born Lőwy). Later, municipal employees denied that in the town of Siófok the militias had killed thirty-two “Jews.” They claimed that “every Jew in the town has been accounted for.” HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 21 February 1922.

44 HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123.

Historian Tibor Zinner argues that in the summer of 1921 the military and civilian authorities dragged their feet because they expected that Regent Horthy would soon issue a general amnesty which would make investigation into the crimes committed during the counterrevolution unnecessary.⁴⁵ They turned out to be right. Indeed, the amnesty order of November 1921 greatly simplified the work of military and civilian judges. The amnesty decree in practice meant that the execution of political prisoners fell into the category of pardoned offences, and that the authorities thus were obliged to prosecute only common crimes, such as kidnapping, extortion, theft, and armed robbery. Since the borders between murder and robbery (between crimes committed out of “an overflowing love for the homeland” and patriotism on the one hand and misdeeds motivated by greed on the other) remained fluid, it was up to the Gendarme Prosecutor to decide which crimes should be investigated in depth and who should be prosecuted.⁴⁶ The letters sent to the victims’ family members show that he believed that the amnesty order covered the overwhelming majority of the offenses committed by the elite paramilitary groups. They also show that providing justice for Jews was not a priority for the Gendarme Prosecutor.⁴⁷

45 Zinner, *Az Ébredők fénykora*, 103.

46 On 16 August 1919, the members of the Prónay Detachment executed Károly István Faragó and three other detainees in Újpuszta on the outskirts of Siófok. His wife learned about the place of the execution from one of Prónay’s men. An exhumation was ordered, and the authorities indeed found the remains. Lieutenant Orosz admitted that he had met Mrs. Faragó, but he denied he had told her about the unmarked grave. The case was closed in 1920. In 1922, Mrs. Faragó insisted that the Gendarme Prosecutor restart the investigation and indict the suspects. Dr. Schmitz refused the request, once again taking the side of the accused and violating the principle of *in dubio pro reo*. He also told the widow that the executions of political prisoners fell into the category of “excessive measures,” which was covered by Regent Horthy’s amnesty order. HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 7 April 1922.

47 In early May 1920, a squad of the Prónay Battalion, led by Lieutenant Endre Molnár, tortured and murdered five former functionaries of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and five apolitical Jews. They robbed the victims of all their possessions before the execution. The militia buried the remains in an unmarked grave in the garden of the Schwarz family residence in the village of Fegyvernek. The case dragged on for two years. In 1922, the prosecutor of the Gendarmerie informed the victims’ family members that that he had found no evidence proving that it had been Molnár and his men who had robbed and killed the ten men. More likely, he argued, the perpetrators had been the local peasants (who had suffered under the communist regime). The execution, too, was covered by Regent Horthy’s amnesty order. HL, Horthy kori csapatanyag, 1589. Szegedi vadászászlóalj (Prónay), Kt. 2439-2947, Box 123. Ruling by Dr. Rezső Schmitz, military court prosecutor, colonel, prosecutor for the inspector general of the Hungarian Royal Gendarmerie, 16 May 1922.

The best-known example of military (mis)justice involved the prosecution of the kidnapping, torture, and brutal execution of two socialist journalists, Béla Somogyi, the editor-in-chief of the social daily, *Népszava* (People's Voice), and his young colleague, Béla Bacsó, in February 1920. The fact that both victims were of Jewish descent was not irrelevant. The perpetrators did not want to distinguish between Socialists and Jews. The investigators and the wider public also viewed the incident, and formed an opinion of the parties, through the prism of political antisemitism. The case offers a typical example of the brutality of the militia men and the way in which they murdered their victims and dispensed with the remains. What was unique about the double murder was the extent to which many influential politicians and institutions, from Admiral Miklós Horthy to his Army High Command (*fővezérség*), the Army Prosecutor, the Ministry of Defence, General Béla Dány, the Supreme Commander of the Military District in Budapest, the chief veterans' organisation, the Hungarian National Defence Association (*Magyar Országos Véderő Egyesület* or MOVE), became implicated either in the killings or in the cover-up. Even though the investigators found the damaged car which the kidnapers had used to transport the victims from downtown to a distant shore of the Danube River (where they had first tortured and then murdered their victims) and even though they were almost immediately able to identify the assassins as the members of the elite Ostenburg Battalion, the long investigation and prosecution did not lead to any conviction on the charge of murder. On 15 June 1920, five months after the event, the military court sentenced the two main defendants on a lesser charge (lending their unit's car, which was state property, to strangers) and with a mild punishment (thirty days' garrison duty). The victims' relatives and the opponents of the regime tried to get the investigation reopened in the mid-1920s. The authorities, however, were quick to suppress any new revelations about the double assassination case and severely punished the new whistle-blower, Ödön Beniczky (who had served as Minister of the Interior at the time of the murders).⁴⁸

Local administrators were ambivalent about the prosecution of political and hate crimes. In the communities where the militias had taken control of the local government, they did everything to sabotage the investigations. Still, the letters of denunciation continued to pour in. Forced to act, the local investigators, with the assistance of detectives from the capital, were able to locate a mass grave (containing the remains of 190 people) in the forests of Orgovány in early December 1919. To escape prosecution in the civilian courts, Iván Héjjas and his company, the elite Prónay Battalion, placed themselves under military jurisdiction. On 1 February 1920, István Bárczy, Minister of Justice, sent a confidential memorandum to Admiral Horthy asking to take a strong stance against the militias. However, the Supreme

48 Gergely and Schönwald, *A Somogyi-Bacsó gyilkosság*, 60–85.

Commander of the National Army dragged his feet. Instead of encouraging the prosecutors to finish their jobs, on 22 March 1920, Horthy invited all the parties—the Minister of Justice, the chief administrator (*főispán*) of Pest Country, the Crown Attorney of Pest County, and the main suspect, Iván Héjjas—to a meeting in the town of Kecskemét to work out a compromise. The meeting ended with the decision to put an end to the investigation into the militia's misdoings in the region. The decision did not silence the victims' family members, professional organisations, or the more liberal segments of the middle class, however, The Budapest Chamber of Attorneys (*Budapest ügyvédi kamara*), the oldest and most important professional organisation of attorneys, continued to demand that the attacks on Hungarian Jews be stopped and that those responsible for the armed robberies and murders be brought to trial and punished. After the so-called Club Café incident (during which the militias killed an influential Jewish attorney) in the summer of 1920, the Bar sent a memorandum to both the government and parliament warning about the corrupting influence of injustice: that by failing to find and punish the guilty, all of Hungarian society would become an accomplice to robbery and murder. The professional organisation admonished the political class that “there can be only one kind of terror in the land: the terror of the law.”⁴⁹

Only in the summer of 1921, after the appointment of Count István Bethlen as Prime Minister in April 1921 and as a reaction to the public outrage over the murder of a Jewish merchant, Adolf Lederer, by the Héjjas militia, did the government finally decide to take a strong stance. Bethlen entrusted Albert Váry, who, as the Chief Prosecutor of Budapest had gained a reputation as an enemy of the paramilitary groups in 1920, to find the killer and investigate the extralegal executions and armed robberies committed in Central Hungary in 1919 and 1920. Váry, indeed, had made several arrests and had even prepared a long list of suspected assassins and robbers by the end of August. However, he could not proceed with the prosecution, because the suspects (the members of the Héjjas Detachment) had fled the region to join the militia uprising in Western Hungary. After the end of the uprising, in November 1921, Regent Horthy issued his famous order, which made it exceedingly difficult for Váry and his committee to make further progress. In February 1922, Váry's assignment ended. Claiming that the majority of the suspects had been military personnel, Váry had to send over the files to the Ministry of Defence and the Gendarme Prosecutor for further deliberations.⁵⁰

Horthy's amnesty order infuriated the legal experts. The Budapest Chamber of Attorneys worried about Hungary's reputation abroad and the amnesty order's

49 *A Nap*, 31 July 1920; “Az Ügyvédi Kamara közállapotainkról” [The Chamber of Barristers on the State of our Public Affairs]. *Világ*, 19 May 1922.

50 BFL Fond VII5e, Héjjas és társai [Héjjas and Associates] 20630/49, Vádirat [Indictment]. 13672/5, 1946. f. 935–36.

long-term impact on law and order at home. Democrats and liberals in the political class, such as Győző Drozdy, a member of the National Smallholders and Agrarian Workers Party, also voiced their frustration over Horthy's decree. In his parliamentary speech in early 1922, Drozdy described Horthy's decree as "an immoral compromise and [a manifestation of] irresponsible use of power. It has exposed the bankruptcy of the state and the abdication of its responsibilities. For the first time in world history, robbers and murderers have been pardoned only a few weeks after they committed their hideous crimes."⁵¹

Horthy's amnesty order made the prosecution of political and hate crimes exceedingly difficult after 1922. However, it did not completely end the process. Although the exact number is still to be established, in my estimate, about 150 people appeared in civilian and military courts in connection with the White Terror. The legal system was full of biases, not only towards the Jewish and socialist victims, but also towards the perpetrators. With a few exceptions, those who ended up before the judges were of lower-class background. Though aristocrats were overrepresented in the most violent paramilitary unit (the officers' company under Prónay), the commander Baron Pál Prónay was the only aristocrat formally charged in military court (on the lesser charge of extortion), in the summer of 1921. Baron Jenő Babarczy, who ran an extortion racket from Hotel Britannia in Budapest, too, spent a few months in prison after the government's crackdown on the civic militias in early November 1920. Thanks to his connections, however, Babarczy was released from captivity in early 1921, and his case was thrown out of court.

Though workers made up only a small percentage of the right-wing militias, the state succeeded in finding and punishing them as perpetrators. Four of the five people who were charged for the murder of police officer József Soltra in November 1920 came from working-class backgrounds. One of them, Imre Mészáros, was sentenced to death and was executed on 18 December 1920. His three working-class accomplices received long prison sentences. The only middle-class person among the attackers, a university student by the name of Attila Rumbold, who was also charged with having tortured and extorted money from Jews, was sentenced to death. However, unlike Mészáros, he was not executed. His sentence was subsequently reduced to fifteen years in a penitentiary. Rumbold was released from prison because of Regent Horthy's amnesty order at the end of 1921.⁵²

The most important event concerning the prosecution of crimes committed during the White Terror was the trial of Iván Héjjas's men in a military court in Kecskemét in July 1922. As one might expect, every defendant was a peasant.

51 *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, 15 December 1922, 15.

52 Zinner, *Az Ébredők fénykora*, 103.

The leader of the unit, Héjjas himself, did not appear on the list of the accused. In the formal indictment, the Gendarme Prosecutor Colonel Dr. Rezső Schmitz described the defendants as common criminals. The purpose of the trial in his opinion was to show “the whole world that the rule of law exists in this country and that even though that monstrosity, known as the [Treaty of] Trianon, mutilated our country and turned us into beggars by depriving us of everything, it could not take from us the faith in justice—the most important of all moral possessions, and the guarantor of our future.” To reach this elevated goal, the Gendarme Prosecutor asked the President of the Court to punish the defendants to the full extent of the law (by condemning them to death). The defence attorneys, on the other hand, praised their clients as patriots and soldiers who had only followed the orders of their superiors. They also tried to exploit the antisemitic prejudices of the judges and the audience by describing the two revolutions and the Red Terror as the work of Jews. Making a false comparison, one of the defence attorneys claimed that the atrocities committed by Héjjas’s men in Kecskemét and Orgovány paled in comparison to the crimes committed by the communists.⁵³ In his verdict, the President of the Military Court Major Dr. László Győrffy repeated in a less blatant form the antisemitic arguments of the defence attorney. In the end, the court found the defendants guilty only of the lesser charges of theft or of having been an accessory to robbery.⁵⁴

In November 1923, a second six-member squad of the Héjjas Detachment, led by Mihály Francia Kiss, was put on trial in Kecskemét for the kidnapping, torture, and brutal murder of five Jews, including the high-school student Jenő Wertheimer, in November 1919. The same military judge acquitted them of every charge, including armed robbery.⁵⁵ A few months earlier, Francia Kiss had faced trial for the murder of a Jewish merchant and commercial farmer, Vilmos Kalmár, in Pusztamérges (Csongrád Province) in late 1919. The corpse of the hapless merchant had been

53 “Hétfőn lesz ítélet az orgoványi perben” [Ruling Expected on Monday in the Orgovány Trial]. *Szózat*, 8 July 1922, 5–6.

54 “A bíróság kihirdette Zbona János és társai ügyében az ítéletet” [The Court Announced Its Ruling in the Trial of János Zbona and Associates]. *Szózat*, 11 July 1922, 11; “Orgovány: Kihirdették az ítéletet.” *Világ*, 11 July 1922, 7. Taking the extenuating circumstances, such as the defendants past lives and their service during the war, into consideration, the presiding judge Dr. Győrffy sentenced János Zbona to seven years, Mihály Danics to six years, István Juhász to five years, and Gyula Cs. Tóth to two years in prison for armed robbery. He stripped Zbona and Danics of their ranks and expelled them from the gendarmerie. The judge found Ambrus Tóth and Imre Tóth guilty of theft and accessory to armed robbery, sentencing them each to three years in prison. Every month, the defendants had to spend one day on bread and water alone and sleep on a hard-wood bunk bed with no mattress and blanket. PIL, Fond 658, Unit 7, f. 13–14.

55 “Dr. Schmitz, koronaügyész a Héjjas-különítmény tagjainak esetében, 1923. november 27” [Dr. Schmitz, Prosecutor of the Crown in the Case against the Members of the Héjjas Detachment, 27 November 1923], Nemes, *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez* I, 271–76.

found in the forest of Orgovány in December 1919, along with the badly mutilated remains of thirty-seven other victims of paramilitary violence. The prominent militia man's arrogant behaviour, his callousness, and his open disregard for the rule of law scandalised even neutral observers in the courtroom. To the judge's question of why he made the arrest, even though the village authorities and his neighbours vouched for Kalmár's character, Francia Kiss responded that "he had to be arrested because he was both a dirty Jew and a communist." The militia leader lost patience with the process, and without the military judge's permission, he simply stood up in the middle of the process and stormed out of the building. As he was leaving, people in the audience noticed that Kiss had been carrying a gun. The military judge was kind enough to warn the victims' family members to leave the town immediately. After the trial, which predictably ended with the acquittal of the defendant on all charges, the military judge called a coach taxi (*fiáker*) to take the victims' family members to the local railway station. On the train, the conductor hid them in the separate compartment on the train. To confuse their pursuers, the witnesses got off the train in Kiskunfélegyháza and followed an alternative route to the capital. Kalmár's case was not tried again in the interwar period.⁵⁶

The proceedings launched against Lieutenant Károly Kmetty, one of Prónay's officers, was one of the last trials of ex-militia men to attract great public attention. Accused of kidnapping, extortion, and murder, Kmetty had escaped Hungary before the conclusion of his trial in 1924. He applied for asylum in the centre of fascism in Milan. He was extradited to Hungary, however, and the authorities prosecuted his case. In the end, the court found him guilty of kidnapping and extortion, and the judge sentenced him to two and half years in a penitentiary. Much as had happened with other people convicted of similar crimes, Kmetty spent only a few months in jail and was released from prison early, either at the end of the year or in early 1925.⁵⁷ Angered by the publicity surrounding his trial, Kmetty put the blame for his humiliation on the system and the "Jewish newspapers." In 1927, he accused the conservative liberal journalist Jenő Rákosi of libel and demanded financial compensation and an apology. He failed to get the latter, and Rákosi, backed by the victims' family members, raised the stakes by countersuing and raising new charges against the dreaded militia man.⁵⁸

56 BFL Fond XXV. 4.a. 1798/57 FB Bttő, Fr. Kiss Mihály. Statement by Mrs. Jenő Rácz, of Szeged. Protocol. Rácz Jenőné szegedi lakos bejelentése. 22 March 1957. f. 91–92.

57 He was acquitted in 1925, as a consequence of Regent Horthy's amnesty decree, on the more serious charge of murder.

58 "Fényképek Kmetty akasztásairól a bíróság előtt" [Photographs of Kmetty's Hangings Brought Before the Court]. *Népszava*, 2 October 1927, 9–10.

Kmetty's case was typical. The militia men not only escaped justice but, with a few exceptions, were able to pursue successful careers under the Horthy regime. The White Terror and the miscarriage of justice during the period of consolidation had grave consequences for the parties in the interwar period and beyond. The wave of antisemitic violence, which was by far the strongest before the Holocaust, taught the perpetrators and potential perpetrators two important lessons: first, that under the right circumstances, they could steal Jewish property and take Jewish life, and that neither the state nor the public would stand in their way. Second, that they would not be prosecuted or punished for what they had done. The failure of the authorities to provide justice for the victims both justified and legitimised their offences. The prosecutors' behaviour created a precedent and functioned as a licence to commit the same crime or a similar crime. The two lessons were not lost on the gendarmerie or the army, the two institutions most implicated in the White Terror and bodies in which many ex-militia men found employment after the onset of consolidation. These precedents explain the canny resemblance, in form as well as substance, between the atrocities associated with the White Terror and the actions of Hungarian paramilitary groups, gendarmes, and army units in Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939, Yugoslavia in 1941, the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1943, and the Holocaust in 1944. Finally, the White Terror created new patterns of behaviours among and reinforced the ethnic prejudices of the military and civilian judges. It was no coincidence that only in a few cases and only under strong public pressure, such as during the prosecution of the Novi Sad Massacre of 1942, did the courts actually give any justice to the victims of war crimes during the Horthy regime.⁵⁹

The racial state at its zenith

In this essay, I have described the racial state as an envisioned utopia (for some) and a constantly evolving trend rather than an accomplished fact. I have argued that this trend was present in most countries in Europe and in America in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it enjoyed the greatest support in imperial states, settlers' colonies, and immigrant countries with large non-White populations and a long tradition of formal and informal discrimination. The best candidates for the racial state before 1914 were the Russian Empire in the East and the United States in the West, followed by the old imperialist states of Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, and, as a distant third, by the new imperialist countries (Imperial Germany, Japan, and Italy).

⁵⁹ Klimó, *Cold Days*.

However, the Russian Empire did not survive World War I, and its successor, the Soviet Union, rejected (in principle if not practice) both integral nationalism and racism. While centralisation under Stalin favoured the revival of Russian nationalism, Soviet leaders, at least on the level of rhetoric, remained loyal to the founding principles of federalism and multiculturalism. They used, with varying intensity and commitment, affirmative action to preserve cultural diversity and reinforce established nations and even invent new ones.⁶⁰ Racism gradually loosened its hold on the cultural and political elite in the United States, as well. While segregation remained a fact of life in the South, in the northern states, and at the level of federal policy, history moved, with occasional setbacks, in the direction of expanding rights and greater equality. The strict immigration laws passed in the final phase of the war and its aftermath accelerated the assimilation of the immigrant masses. The success, both in social and cultural terms, of assimilation, in turn, raised the value of the new immigrants as voters, thus favouring their inclusion in the political process. Simultaneously, the mass migration of African Americans from the South led the emergence of a small but politically assertive African American middle and lower middle class, which increasingly raised its voice against informal discrimination in the North and the continued existence of an apartheid regime in the South. The new alliance of Blacks, Jews, Italians, and Eastern Europeans in the Democratic Party not only changed the ideological, social, and ethnic profile of the Party in the North, it also brought tangible benefits to and improved the social standing of minority groups under Roosevelt and subsequent Democratic administrations. The KKK and other racist organisations survived and even gained more members, especially in the North, in the interwar period. The anti-immigration laws, too, remained in effect. During World War II, the Roosevelt Administration deported more than 120,000 Japanese Americans from the West Coast into government camps. In Hawaii, where the Japanese represented the largest ethnic group, they were treated as potential traitors. The government withdrew their fishing licences, thus destroying the livelihoods of countless families. The police searched their homes and subjected about 10,000 Japanese Americans to humiliating interrogations.⁶¹ These setbacks notwithstanding, the general trend after 1932 was to expand rather than restrict the rights of the minorities.

History moved in a different direction in Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s. Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess aptly described Nazism as "applied biology." The Third Reich came to approximate best the ideal of a racial state in Europe and the world. Nazi doctors and scientists registered many important alleged breakthroughs in the field of medicine, from preventive care to fighting cancer, syphilis, and heart disease

60 See Martin, "Affirmative Action Empire."

61 Schmitz, *Enemies Among Us*.

and reversing falling birthrates.⁶² Even more important than these developments were the measures taken to remove the so-called “ballast population” and prevent the procreation of people deemed mentally and physically unfit. Under the new laws, an estimated 400,000 Germans who suffered from one of the illnesses defined as hereditary by Nazi scientists were sterilised.⁶³ In the Third Reich, the role of the political police also changed. In the first two years of Nazi rule, the Gestapo filled the concentration camp with political opponents. After 1935, however, they arrested mainly those who alleged had violated moral codes and transgressed ethnic lines (via illicit sexual relations with “Aryan” women, for example). The main task of the political police in the Third Reich after 1935 was to “cleanse” the German nation of homosexuals, anti-socials, and criminals and remove threats posed to the supposed purity of the race.⁶⁴ The mass arrests (and the emerging racial state) enjoyed significant popular support. The understaffed Gestapo offices could respond to only 10 percent of the denunciations.⁶⁵ The process of so-called breeding and demographic engineering moved into a higher gear with the euthanasia campaign ignited on the eve of World War II. The medical personnel employed in the program killed about 250,000 disabled patients in Nazi Germany and the recently conquered territories over the course of the next two years. Until 1941, German society failed to react to the euthanasia campaign. The victims’ family members normally received thinly disguised letters of condolence sent by the hospitals and health authorities with a mixture of indifference and relief. Their reaction, in turn, encouraged the Nazi authorities to embark on even more daring experiments.⁶⁶ Most of the doctors and nurses who had participated in the euthanasia campaign were transferred, after its completion, to Yugoslavia and the Eastern front. There, they put their accumulated experience in poisoning and mass murder at the disposal of the SS, thus making the link between nation and state-building, “breeding,” and genocide explicit.

The new Nazi government regarded the solution to the so-called Jewish question as a priority. In the first five years, the Nazis’ goal was to segregate, impoverish,

62 Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer*.

63 The Marital Health Law of October 1935 banned unions between the “hereditarily healthy” and persons deemed genetically unfit. In 1936, the Reich Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion was established to step up efforts to prevent acts that obstructed reproduction. On 14 July 1933, the Nazi state enacted the Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases, which mandated voluntary sterilisation. They included feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive disorder, genetic epilepsy, Huntington’s chorea (a fatal form of dementia), genetic blindness, genetic deafness, severe physical deformity, and chronic alcoholism. See Burleigh and Wippermann, *The Racial State*, 1–75.

64 Herbert, *Best*, 163–225.

65 Gellately, *Gestapo in German Society*.

66 Aly, *Wie konnte das geschehen*, 347–82.

and socially and culturally marginalise German Jews. The first anti-Jewish laws served to “cleanse” the civil service, army, universities, and professions of Jews and build an ethnically (religiously) homogeneous middle and upper class.⁶⁷ Jews in the racial state could do menial jobs or look after, as doctors, dentists, and other professionals, the needs of their Jewish clients only. The Nazi proposal to solve the so-called “Jewish question” did not stop with the synchronisation of ethnic and social hierarchies. After 1938, the main goal of the Nazi state and the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) changed from segregation and social marginalisation to deportation and forced emigration. The campaign achieved almost complete success under the leadership of the Jewish expert and later transportation and logistics expert Adolf Eichmann in Germany and the recently annexed Austria. By the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, the Third Reich had become virtually *Judenfrei*.

The expulsion of Jews worked against German interests. The need for workers increased drastically during the war, as millions of German men were forced to put on uniforms. Since German women, because of practical political consideration and Nazi ideology, could not take their places in the workplaces and factories, the Third Reich became dependent on foreign workers. Workers from friendly or neutral states (the Netherlands, Hungary, Slovakia, and Croatia) were lured into Germany by the promise of higher wages. However, most slave labours were POWs and forced recruits, whom the Nazis simply kidnapped from the streets of the occupied countries of Eastern Europe. Historians estimate that about 15 million people worked as slave labourers during the war in Nazi Germany. These conscripted workers may have made up as much as 20 percent of the German work force at the height of the conflict.⁶⁸ It was not only arms manufacturers and the Nazi state that profited from the influx of free labour. Working-class Germans received higher wages and rose in the social hierarchy by becoming foreman, and peasant wives were able to hire Polish POWs to work on their farms for free, and the population at large benefited from forced labour. In addition to the material benefits, the racial state gave wives, children, and disabled men the chance to vent their frustrations over the war and the allied bombing on helpless inmates.⁶⁹ Nazi militias, such as the SA, and civic organisations, such as student fraternities, had already played an important role as the leaders of pogroms and the enforcers of Nazi laws before the war. The importance of these civic and political organisations as the guardians of the racial state only

67 The “Blood Protection Law” (better known as the Nuremberg Laws of 1935) prohibited marriage and sexual relations between Jews and “Aryans.” The state severely punished those who violated the law.

68 Panayi, “Exploitation, Criminality, Resistance.”

69 Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers*.

increased during the war. The Hitler Youth and, in the final phase of the war, the national militia or *Volkssturm*, which mobilised mainly disabled and elderly men, committed countless atrocities against slave labourers and deserters.⁷⁰

The racial state in Hungary, 1921–1945

The switch from the *Rechtsstaat* to the *Rassenstaat* proved more difficult in authoritarian Hungary than in Germany, which had a longer experience with democracy in the interwar period. The reason for this difficulty was manifold. The sciences were not held in such a high regard in Hungary, and modern professionals, such as doctors and their professional organisations, had less influence on decision-making processes and public opinion. Second, Hungary had nearly become an ethnically homogeneous nation state by 1920. The minorities simply were not present in large numbers. The future of the racial state in Hungary, thus, became dependent on the success of revisionism and imperial expansion. However, the country possessed neither the resources nor the outside support to retake its old possessions or conquer new lands and create a large empire. In addition to the lack of foreign support, the relative backwardness of Hungarian society and the conservatism of the political elite also hindered the quick transformation of the *Rechtsstaat* into a *Rassenstaat*. Traditional social groups and institutions, such as the aristocracy and Catholic Church, remained opposed to social experimentation. The middle class in Hungary was also smaller, less confident, and more divided along political and religious lines than its counterpart in Nazi Germany. The members of the radical right, who after 1932 shared power with the traditional political elite in Hungary, had made too many compromises and had been too wedded to the existing social and political system to represent a real alternative. The socialist left exercised limited influence on politics after 1920, while the right-radical, fascist and national socialist groups, though more prepared to embark on drastic social and political reforms along Italian and German lines, remained divided. They could not even agree on the introduction of a dictatorship. Civil servants, army and gendarme officers, and minor aristocrats rarely make good revolutionaries, after all.⁷¹

The formation of racial states implied the conflation of social and ethnic hierarchies and the reduction of minorities into pariahs and slaves. In the Hungarian context, it also meant the “cleansing” of the professional class of Jews and the redistribution of Jewish wealth among Christians. The *numerus clausus* law of 1920 did dramatically reduce the share of Jews in the student population by the late 1930s.

70 Yelton, *Hitler's Volkssturm*.

71 Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 71–98.

Furthermore, the law also failed to lower academic unemployment or significantly cut the number of Jewish professionals.⁷² The vanguards of the racial state (the paramilitary groups and patriotic associations) had either been dissolved or their influence had been drastically reduced after 1921. The most radical of these old and surviving pressure groups, the student fraternities, continued to terrorise Jewish students and demand the introduction of new antisemitic legislation in the interwar period.⁷³ The agitation efforts of radical students and liberal professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers, who had feared and wanted to eliminate Jewish competition, proved successful in the end. Modelled on the *numerus clausus* of 1920, the first two Anti-Jewish laws (introduced in 1938 and 1939) and the accompanying decrees achieved one of the most important demands of the advocates of the racial state. By the spring of 1944, when the Germans occupied the country, the Jewish presence in the modern professions had dwindled. The destruction of Jewish wealth also proceeded in stages. It began with the first antisemitic laws in the 1930s, switched into a higher gear with the passing of the fourth Anti-Jewish Law of 1942 (which prohibited Jews from owning land), and took the form of naked robbery after the German occupation of the March 1944. The appropriation of businesses, apartments, and valuables during the Holocaust bore an unmistakable resemblance to the White Terror (but on a much larger scale). As had been the case in 1919, the beneficiaries in 1944 were political activists, civil servants, and the members of the local elites. Often, apolitical neighbours also took their share in the plunder, in the form of stolen bicycles, radios, and other household items.

The advocates of the racial states tied the elimination of Jewish influence in the cultural realm and the reshaping of social hierarchies along racial lines to alleged health improvements and the supposed biological rejuvenation of the Magyar population via social hygiene and eugenics. No one did more than Prime Minister Pál Teleki to turn utopic visions and plans based on eugenic ideas into reality.⁷⁴ Paul Hanebrink has rightly described Teleki's last major achievements, the Act XV of 1941, better known as the Third Anti-Jewish Law (which prohibited sexual relations between Gentiles and Jews and also made medical examinations before marriage and claiming social welfare assistance compulsory), as a key piece of legislation and the law that transformed Hungary into a *Rassenstaat*.⁷⁵ Earlier health legislation, such as Act VI on the Prevention of Tuberculosis and Venereal Diseases

72 Ladányi, "On the 1928 amendment to the Hungarian *numerus clausus* act," 111–12.

73 Kerepeszki, "The racial defense in Practice."

74 Many of the institutions created and the laws passed allegedly to improve the health and racial qualities of the Hungarian nation either enjoyed his support or had been drafted by him since the early 1920s. Ablonczy, "Bethlen István és Teleki Pál konzervativizmusa."

75 Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 170.

(Lex Veneris), introduced in early 1940, and Act XXIII of 1940 on the National Fund for the Protection of Family, was also intimately linked to the passing of the third Anti-Jewish Law.⁷⁶ Yet, in spite of eugenics and health legislation, the process proved slow and was never really completed. There were many medical institutions and experts who, on Nazi models, advocated sterilisation and euthanasia on a mass scale. However, they seem to have lacked both the resources and the political support to carry out their plans.⁷⁷

The plans of the advocates of the racial state in Hungary went beyond health legislation and anti-Jewish laws. These people also dreamed of the complete reshaping of the ethnic map of the region during and after the war. Their plan to bring back the more than one million Hungarian peasants who had emigrated overseas before 1914 never came to fruition, however. The much advertised resettlement of the 13,000 Székelys from the Romanian region of Bukovina into the newly returned Bácska (the northern part of Vojvodina) in 1941, as well as a few thousand Csángós from Moldavia, was certainly a success. The campaign, however, brought few economic or political benefits, and it barely changed the demographic makeup in the region.⁷⁸ The division (by the Axis powers of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) of Transylvania between Hungary and Romania in 1940 created a new wave of migration (during which 190,000 Hungarians left the southern part of the region, while 220,000 Romanians fled their homes over the course of the next four years). Despite the larger numbers involved, these events, too, failed to alter the demographic balance in favour of Hungary. On the other hand, the deportation of about 18,000 Hungarian Jews from the north-eastern part of the country in 1941 and the Holocaust in 1944 clearly reduced the share of the Hungarian population in the ethnically mixed and politically disputed regions.⁷⁹

While partially successful, the revisionist foreign policy of interwar Hungarian governments did not significantly change the position of the country in the international system. Hungary remained a mid-sized, weak, and relatively backward East-Central European state even after 1941. The size of the minority population increased drastically after the return of some of the lost territories. However, the poor Romanian, Serbian, and Slovak peasants, confined to their native villages and historical regions, had no desire to become industrial workers. Nor did the Hungarian state have the means or the will to transform these ethnic minorities and women, following the Nazi model, into slave labourers. The Magyar administrators

76 Turda, "In Pursuit of Greater Hungary."

77 Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 198–210.

78 Vincze, "A bukovinai székelyek és kisebb moldvai csángó-magyar csoportok.;" Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 171–98.

79 Ablonczy, *Az utolsó nyár*, 152.

treated the native Romanian and Serbian population in the newly returned provinces dismally. In Transylvania, for example, native Romanians were permitted to do almost exclusively menial jobs.⁸⁰ Yet the synchronisation of class with race did not progress far enough to call Hungary a fully-fledged racial state at the end of the war.

Like the Nazis, the Hungarian advocates of the racial state achieved their greatest (and cruellest) successes in the realm of anti-Jewish policy. The forced emigration of Jews had been one of the oldest demands of the radical right. The conservative segment of the political elite, led by Prime Minister István Bethlen, did not consider the issue of Jewish emigration a priority, neither before nor during the war (even though the conservatives, too, accepted the idea that Jews had to find a new homeland after the war). The radical part of the political elite around Pál Teleki, on the other hand, wanted most Jews to leave the country as soon as possible, and they were prepared to take extreme measures to force them out. Thus, in the summer of 1940 (more than one year before the first instance of mass genocide in Hungary), Teleki told Hitler that he wanted to deport Hungarian Jews with German help.⁸¹ However, the conservatives in the Kállay government, in office between 1942 and 1944 continued to resist the demand of the Hungarian radicals and, after the spring of 1943, the demand of the Nazi government to follow the course of the neighbouring states. The refusal of the Kállay government to address the so-called Jewish question through deportation and genocide was one of the reasons, if not the most important one, why Hitler decided to occupy the country in March 1944.⁸² After the entry of the *Wehrmacht* and (with German assistance) the establishment of the government under the resolutely pro-Nazi figure Döme Sztójay, the construction of the racial state moved into a higher gear. The series of anti-Jewish laws and regulations put into effect in March and April 1944 surpassed in their numbers, sophistication, and cruelty even those of the Nazi original. With Horthy's knowledge and approval, the Sztójay government, the local administrations, the gendarmerie, and the German SS deported more than 430,000 Hungarian citizens in the spring and summer of 1944. The number of Hungarian Jews who died between 1941 and 1945 exceeded the wildest expectations of the most fanatical antisemites. The genocidal wave of massacres brought the project of the Hungarian racial state closest to realisation.⁸³ The Holocaust, coupled with war and the expulsion of ethnic Germans in its wake, also ignited a social revolution in East-Central Europe.⁸⁴ Yet, from the perspective of the racial state and its advocates, the social revolution came too late.

80 Ablonczy, *A visszatért Erdély*.

81 Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, 368–69.

82 Borhi, *Magyarország a hidegháborúban*; Ránki, 1944. *Március 19*.

83 Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*; Kádár and Vági, *Self-Financing Genocide*.

84 Abrams, "The Second World War and the East European Revolution."

By the mid-1940s, as a result of the Nazi defeat, race, the ideas of a racially pure *Volksgemeinschaft*, and the racial state as its legal and political form had lost all credibility. In East-Central Europe, the small nation states of the region, under the watchful eyes of Soviet political and military leaders, began to replace intense competition and contestation with one another, which had been their traditional *modus operandi*, with solidarity and close cooperation. In 1945, “[f]aith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small” became enshrined, as a guiding principle, in the foundation charter of the new United Nations, a document which was signed by both the United States and the Soviet Union. In the 1950s and 1960s, following the allied victory over Nazism and, then, the increasingly rapid processes of decolonisation, imperialism, racism, and demographic engineering via restrictive immigration policies, notions of breeding, and ethnic cleansing became taboo practices. They may still have been practiced piecemeal, but they could no longer be publicly acknowledged or embraced.⁸⁵ The idea of race as the foundation of the social and political order survived only on the margins of the Western civilisation, such as in South Africa. Even there, it slowly lost its legitimacy and was finally dismantled after 1995. Many right radical parties in Eastern Europe rediscovered integral nationalism and racism after the collapse of state socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Pronatalism, too, became popular among the new patriots, who were and are concerned with declining birthdates and the alleged disintegration of traditional family structures. Yet the political programs of these parties and this movement have remained eclectic. They lack the clarity of vision, conviction, and determination of their interwar predecessors. The radical and fascist right in Europe today is far more conservative than its interwar predecessor was. Its main goal is to defend and preserve established social and ethnic hierarchies rather than to engage in so-called breeding and social experimentation. The liberal and socialist parties, on the other hand, have remained committed to the postwar system, which is based on multiculturalism and respect for individual and human rights. Still, whether the ideal of a racial state, where social and ethnic hierarchies overlap and reinforce each other and where the ethnic privileges are inscribed in law, remains a taboo in the Western world is not clear. The strong counterrevolutionary current in European and American policies, especially illustrated by the elitist schemes of techno-billionaires like Elon Musk, bears a partial resemblance, in scope and mendacity, to the utopias of the eugenicists and population experts of the interwar period.

85 Until the 1970s, British government every legal loophole to prevent the influx of unwanted immigrant ex-British colonies, such as India and Pakistan. See Holmes, *John Bull's Island*.

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