

In what follows we reproduce two sections of the book

THE JEWS OF TIMISOARA
in Historic perspective

by Tibor Schatteles

The Romanian translation of the book is in process of being edited by the HASEFER publishing house in Bucharest. The subsequent two sections are part of the book's English version to be published at some later time. These texts are offered for reading to the author's friends. This has been prompted by the awarding of the literary Nobel Prize, 2009, to German author Herta Mueller, a native of the Timisoara district. The Prize itself is not the issue, rather the absurd and ignorant comments in some press organs are to be countered. Among others, a French commentator claims that by giving the price to Ms. Mueller une minorité oubliée was and had to be honoured. Minorité oubliée? Well, it may be. So let's fight oblivion and, please, read the following sections of the mentioned book. In many chapters of the book the German-Jewish relations of the city and area are discussed in detail. The following sections are from the chapters VIII and IX, covering the second world war and its aftermath.

From Chapter VIII

The Jews of Timisoara during the Fascist
dictatorship and the war

Section:

(8.8) The ethnic environment

During the mid-1930s one could still distinguish two groups of local Germans as far as their behaviour towards Jews was concerned. There was, first, a hard core of declared Nazis attracting an ever growing number of mostly young followers. But then there was a still sizeable, yet increasingly ambiguous group within the German population which one might have called "neutral". Towards the end of the 1930s no opposition of any kind was recorded, only mute resignation among very few of the once followers of

Kaspar Muth, or a few, still steadfast, socialist and communist workers. But then the German victories on the front inebriated most "neutrals", so that few of them shied away anymore from demonstrating that they turned out to be members of a "master race". The details of this phenomenon cannot be adequately explained in any documentary chronicle for the very simple reason that many of the documents are still not released, while the countless nostalgic Heimatbücher of the Banater-schwäbisch emigration - but for a few(!) respectable exceptions - simply "forgot" about it. Yet the transformation of those "good neighbourly relations" into an attitude of hatred - or was it always present only, more or less, well concealed? - came just as fast as the Blitzkriege which were its source of inspiration. And it erupted ever more frequently also in various forms of thuggish violence. Some were of the most cowardly form, such as the organized attacks on outnumbered Jewish schoolchildren. There was nothing of a "spontaneous hooliganism" in these attacks. The onslaught was thoroughly, programmatically, organized by the DJ or Nazi-German youth organizations. Yet the description of the many horrible details would not offer in itself much of an explanation of the phenomenon of "transformation". That would rather require a much deeper study, since the case itself bears relevance for the entire problem of "willing executioners", dodged or simply denied by those who should know better.

Mentioning those who did not do what was required of them or refused to go all the way on the Hitler path, is the more just since their very small number was also inversely proportional to the risks they assumed. But, unfortunately, also the information on them is mostly anecdotal. Yet the chronicler should be fair to those who deserve respect: be it the worker's family, decried as "communists", who gave emergency shelter to a Jewish woman with many children evacuated in 24 hours from her now CNR owned house; or the businessman who walked out on his own business, surrendering it to his ultra-Nazi son, and who then visited for days, one after another, his once Jewish competitors apologizing to them; or the bookseller who had no choice but to sell the Nazi trash, but offered a Jewish girl, deprived now of her earlier home, his piano, so they could practice in the evening hours when visiting his family under the cover of the darkness of air-defence camouflage;

or that other factory worker who let a Jewish high-school student, knowledgeable of several foreign languages, to listen to un-jammed foreign stations on his radio (remember: Jews had to turn-in their radios), above which hang a big portrait of Ferdinand Lassale (the easier recognizable Karl Marx having been earlier confined to a coffer), to gather the information which then the boy transmitted to old Jews after the evening service at the synagogue; - and a few more. A few more.

Still, recollecting some facts recorded in contemporary documents the reader may be remembered of yet another transformation which one could qualify for the better.

Step by step the attitude of some elements(!) within the Romanian authorities, inclusive the police, changed. This change was not spontaneous, though its first signs could be noticed soon after Romania joined Germany in the war against the Soviet Union. The gradual realization by an increasing number of Romanians that they were transformed into just a menial instrument of the Nazis who also despised them, had a lot to do with the change of minds and attitudes. Police also became wary of the fact that they, as Romanians, might have to surrender their authority in their own land. So, whenever they had an opportunity and some legal basis, police demonstrated strength and reason. A careful reading of old, partially published documents could also reveal a regional differentiation in the attitude of the local authorities under the fascist government. In areas where there was a large, Nazi infested German population, even Jews may have benefitted from occasional police protection. This was unlike many other areas, particularly in the small towns of the "Kingdom", and in the early phases of the war, when police and local fascist thugs worked together.

An early case of police intervention opposing Nazi hooliganism is reported in a document of the Arad police, dated July 9, 1941, referring to Timișoara and the neighbouring town of Lipova. This is the text of the report:

"We give you notice that on the days of 1 and 3 July of this year, in the

cities of Timișoara and Lipova, members of the German 'Todt' organization fastened on Jewish houses and businesses posters with the inscription 'Juden hinaus' ('Out with the Kikes') and 'Die Juden sind unser Unglück' ('The Kikes are our ill fortune'). And because such affixing of posters could be made also in other cities of our area, you should forthwith contact the prefect and the commander of the local garrison so that, in consensus, they should take the appropriate measures in order to prevent incidents between the Jewish and the German or Romanian population ..." ["V/ aducem la cunoștință/ c/ în zilele de 1 și 3 iulie a.c. în orașele Timișoara și Lipova, membrii organizațiilor germane 'Todt' au lipit pe casele și magazinele evreiești afișe cu inscripția 'Juden hinaus' (afară/ cu jidanii) and 'Die Juden sind unser Unglück' (jidanii sunt nenorocirea noastră). Cum asemenea afișurile s-ar putea face și în alte orașe din regiune, veți lua imediat contact cu dl. prefect și dl. comandant al garnizoanei locale ca de comun acord să se ia măsură din timp, pentru prevenirea incidentelor între populația evreiască și cea germană/sau română/... "]*)

*)EdR [Evreii din Romania între anii 1940-1944, Editura 'Hasefer', Bucurest, 1993-1998] v.III, part I, p.298

This happened very early in the war just while the evacuation of Jews from Lipova and other rural communities was proceeding. Witnesses of this occurrence recall something the authorities may have had in mind when talking about inter-ethnic incidents, and which is equally characteristic for the new mood. In several instances local, casually walking-by citizens of Romanian ethnicity ripped off some of these posters in front of the Nazis who displayed them. In a country at war for only two weeks and still claiming some victories this was certainly cause of concern for the powerful.

All this, though symptomatic of some undercurrent, was not yet characteristic for the general situation. Various thuggish attacks on Jews continued throughout the war years, their frequency and virulence being often related to the situation on the front. It is also interesting to note that attacks

from Romanian students, particularly against Jewish schoolchildren, were much less frequent now than organized physical harassment in various forms coming from German youths. Some even remember cases when students of the local military college, the Liceul Militar Mihai Viteazul, intervened on the street to protect Jewish boys when attacked by hitlerist hooligans.

The victories of Nazi Germany created new obligations for Hitler's local followers. The ever growing losses of fighting men forced the Wehrmacht and the SS to search for new human resources to be tapped. Thus a new chapter in the Nazi war effort was opened by recruiting Volksdeutsch (ethnic German) volunteers from their East European diaspora, an important part of which was settled in Romania. The Romanian authorities gave their assent so that even Germans already serving in the Romanian army could now switch to the Wehrmacht or the SS.

The creation of Nazi military units among Germans from Romania and occupied Yugoslavia started in 1942. The move was accelerated as things got complicated and Hitler needed more and more soldiers on the East just as he needed them to fight the partisans, mainly in Yugoslavia. A particularly significant case to be mentioned is the creation of the "7 Freiwillige Prinz Eugen Division" ordered on March 1, 1942. This SS unit was based on Volksdeutsche, who so far were mixed into various other units, and who were now joined with enthusiasm by lots of ultra-Nazi youth. Then followed a new massive exit after June 10, 1943, i.e. after Stalingrad. At the end of the same year at least 50,000 Germans from Romania were already in the service of various units of the Nazi army. Many, though not all, did it with enthusiasm. The recruiting was said to be of "volunteers", though some may have yielded to pressure. Not that there were too many wanting in Nazi zeal. But now they were called to duties more difficult than just beating outnumbered Jewish students. Yet they lived-up to the wishes of the Nazi leaders. In a book signed by one Otto Kumm, a Nazi officer is quoted saying the following about the Schwaben of the Banat and "Temeschburg" in the Prinz Eugen Division:

"The Division consisted 90% of non-volunteers and was at the beginning

a big sow herd. I often said: 'This is the greatest sow herd of all times!' And nobody blamed me for that since I was [myself] a Donauschwabe [i.e. a Schwab from the Danube]; a Reichs-German would have had to express himself more decently. Yet you cannot make overnight Prussian parade horses from peasants of the Banat; but an elite Division from a sow pack! That I wouldn't have thought possible." ["Die Division bestand zu 90% aus Nichtfreiwilligen und sie waren am Anfang ein grosser Sauhaufen. Ich habe oft gesagt: 'Das ist der grösste Sauhaufen aller Zeiten!' Und das hat mir niemand übelgenommen, weil ich ja ein Donauschwabe bin - ein Reichsdeutscher hätte sich etwas dezenter ausdrücken müssen. Aber aus Banater Bauern kann man nicht über Nacht preussische Paraderösse machen; doch aus einem Sauhaufen eine Elitedivision! Das hätte ich nicht für möglich gehalten."]^{*)}

^{*)} Kumm, Otto: Vorwärts, Prinz Eugen!: Geschichte d. 7. SS-Freiwilligen-Division "Prinz Eugen", Minin, Osnabrück, 1978; page 39.

It is not clear how Reichsdeutsche military men may have expressed themselves about this particular SS unit, but it is well known that they had a disdainful attitude towards the so enthusiastically Nazi Banater Schwaben. Some of them did not shy away to express their spite even in front of local Jews. But the "Sauhaufen" became what it was meant to be. The author of the above quoted Nazi nostalgia book glorifying the SS admitted that though not everybody in this unit was all that "freiwillig" or "voluntary", still

"that wouldn't mean that the majority of the soldiers of this Division were unwilling; to the contrary, few Divisions could rely on soldiers so willing, unpretentious, constant, and able to demonstrate the most extreme forms of bravery. In spite of the most difficult initial conditions, they have lived-up to the extreme requirements of an SS-Division." ["Damit ist nicht gesagt, dass die grosse Mehrheit der Soldaten dieser Div. unwillig gewesen sei - im Gegenteil, nur wenige Div. konnten sich auf so willige, anspruchslose, ausdauernde und zu äusserster Tapferkeit fähige Soldaten verlassen. Sie haben trotz schwerster Startbedingungen

die hohen Anforderungen einer SS-Division erfüllt!]*)

*) ibid.

The song of the unit was a musical paraphrase of the song on Prince Eugen, the "liberator" of the Banat, to which they added lines openly expressing their aims in neighbouring Yugoslavia:

"And quite a lot of Serbian skulls

"Just as many Serbian gals

"Do I see already fallen".

Und gar manche Serbenschädel

und gar manches Serbenmädel

sehe ich gefallen schon.

The war in Yugoslavia has also highlighted various, so far only secondary aspects of ethnic relations. Serbs were now in a smaller number in the city than Jews, however, they were still the second largest ethnic minority in the district whose concerns were obvious to most everybody and shared with sympathy by Jews. Anti-Semitism, though never absent, was only a marginal phenomenon among local Serbs. At the same time the local Nazis did not shy away from manifesting their gun-supported "superiority" over the Serbs who inhabited this city and area well before the German colonization. Under such circumstances the casually friendly cohabitation of Serbs and Jews advanced to some sort of underground solidarity. This has shown itself also when Yugoslav prisoners of war were moved by the Wehrmacht through Timi[oara. They were first concentrated in various locations in the Fabrik district where the Serb ladies' chapter of the local Red Cross provided them with badly needed victuals. Part of these basic necessities were contributed by Jews. As recalled by some involved with this action, Jewish children were bringing daily to their schools bags of food which then were transferred by lady teachers to the Serb ladies. There were also Jews among the prisoners, one of the officers having been lieutenant Dr. Alkalay who acted at some time as president of the Sephardi community in Beograd. *)

*) Recorded in the 1950s in Israel by Geza Kaufteil,

formerly secretary of the Jewish Community in Tms., in: "Adalekok a temesvari zsidóság történetéhez", typewritten manuscript property of the author's family p.69.

The tides of the war changed and Nazi bitterness increased also in Timișoara. And so the attacks on objectives considered to be Jewish, multiplied. Some of these assaults were of little impact and only "casual". But others were massive and organized. Probably the largest of its kind, with a clear pogrom-like character, took place on the night of 5-to-6 February 1943, that is soon after the February 2 capitulation of Feldmarschal Paulus at Stalingrad, and was organized by local Nazi outfits.*)

*A partial account of it, based on police reports, is to be found in EdR IV, p.6-7.

It included attacks on stores, homes and apartments in all five city districts. Interestingly the attacks did not spare "Romanized" stores some having the name of the Romanizer quite conspicuously posted. At first the police detained two local thugs caught in flagranti.*)

*In the police report some names can also be found, such as that of Emeric Eichler, str. Cormona no.10 and Ioan Bocker, str. Dacilor 9.

Then another group was apprehended while ready to start a further series of acts of aggression against Jews.*)

*Investigated were the individuals Rudolf Csattary, Rudolf Meixner and Andreas Schops, all from the German Teachers College (Timișoara Normala German).

Among the objectives of this group was the vandalization of the bookstore "Libraria Centrala" on the Lloyd boulevard (Bul. Regele Ferdinand). This bookstore must have irritated very much the local Nazi establishment because of the manner in which it commercialized - strictly within the prevailing law! -

publications originating from neutral countries such as Switzerland. It so happened that certain magazines, newspapers, etc., which were admitted into the country, have often been censored so that the controlling authority overpainted with a tar solution the texts thought to be "subversive". But the thus expurgated publication could still be sold with the black blotches on its pages. Now the Jewish owners, or now co-owners of the "Romanized" bookstore, the Lövy brothers, regularly displayed their foreign publications in the state in which they arrived to the store from the censor's office. So it often happened that, e.g. the Neue Zürcher Zeitung was exhibited in the showcase with the first page completely blackened. Yet this proved to be a very good buy. The customer could take home the newspaper, wash away with a kerosine solution much of the black paint, dry the pages on the sun by putting the paper in the window, and then read it, though with some difficulty. This was obviously very irritating for all those who believed that the ultimate source of information for everybody should originate in the offices of Dr. Goebbels.

Soon after this, on the evening of Saturday, February 6, 1943, young German apprentices, all youths born between 1926-27, were apprehended by the police in a local drinking joint where Jews were unerwünscht and where they plotted to beat up old Jews expected to be leaving some time later the main synagogue in the Fabrik.*)

*)Those named in the police report were Ladislau Pokorni, Egon Frantz, Friederich Michel, Peter Rancov and Ioan Liedl.

And this is what the police had to report to the Prefect:

"Regarding this, we respectfully ask you to invite Hans Jung, the leader of the German Ethnic Group, and make it clear to him that he should circulate an order among the members of the various formations of the German Ethnic Group, ordering them to abstain from any act contrary to the public peace and order, as well as the security of the state." ["Fa↔/ de cele de mai sus, avem onoarea a v/ ruga s/ binevoi↔i a-l invita pe conduc/torul Grupului Etnic German, Hans Jung //i s/ i se pun/ în vedere

ca s/ dea un ordin circular tuturor forma iunilor membrilor din Grupul Etnic German s/ se ab in/ de la orice act contrar ordinii  i lini ii publice precum  i suguran ei statului."*)

*) EdR IV, p.7

All this happened in the changing atmosphere created by the defeat of the Nazi army at Stalingrad. The local authorities, who never had much love for the arrogant, assertive German leaders of "Temeschburg", and managed quite often to deflect acts of aggression of the DJ against Jews, were now more openly claiming their right and asserting their duty to defend public order in their country. And it may also be - as it was rumoured - that one or another of the higher ranking police and district officials also completed their information about the international and military situation, among others, by ordering a loyal subordinate to employ kerosine to wash off the tar from the censored foreign publications.⁴⁷

From the Chapter IX
After August 1944

Section:

(9.8) About the new ethnic relations.

The reader, scanning the previous sections, could have gotten a general idea about the new status and stand of various minorities. Still, some addition is needed before this chronicle comes to its end.

The Jewish community in Timișoara is now only the size of a small fraction of what it used to be. At the same time the entire city also changes. History's irony is seldom gentle. Thus the traveller, if he is informed about antecedents, will notice that also another ethnic community in the city is fast shrinking. Germans, once the single largest group in the city, to the advancement and prosperity of which they contributed so much, emigrated just as the Jews, and for many similar reasons. The process started in the 1960s and accelerated under Ceaușescu's rule, and already in 1975 an apparently knowledgeable traveller reported in the New York Times his own conclusions:

"Whatever material progress three decades of Communism may have brought to many Rumanians, they have not advanced the lot of Germans, who were regarded as diligent peasants and artisans." [Henry Kamm, NYT, April 26, 1975]

It may have been, sometimes, harder for them than for the Jews, among whom even the most irresponsibly optimistic learned a very different lesson during the second World War. After all, quite a few Germans were firmly convinced of their "superiority" and their "calling" to rule over others. But now it was over with all this and while equality among nationalities, races and creeds was officially proclaimed, all Germans were made to pay for the past. Indiscriminately. What followed was not comparable to the Nazi's racial

persecutions, yet neither was it in line with the principles which were supposed to prevail after their defeat. The few, very few, Germans who bravely refused collaboration with the Nazis, had sometimes to pay the same toll as the Nazis. Here is a short rehearsal of the main facts.

The first and also the most serious action against the German minority was the forced labour service, in some cases for as long as three and a half years, in the Soviet Union. It started early while the world was still at war. In January 1945 the Soviet Army in Romania went about to organize the transportation to the Soviet Union of German forced labourers from Transylvania and the Banat, including Timișoara. Men between 17 and 45, and women between 18 and 35 were recruited and carried away. Various sources agree about a number of 40-45,000 only from Timișoara and the three districts of the Banat. There was hardly any basis in international law for such an operation except the precedent created by the Nazis. Yet the Nazi precedent was followed only as far as the deportation to forced labour camps was concerned. Otherwise, however ruthless and inhuman such an action was in the eyes of those who always(!) disapproved of such, most all returned gradually to their homes after 22-32 years. There were also some who died, yet not by extermination but as a consequence of disease worsened by the inclement conditions of working in coal mines and other places to which these men and women were not used. From the Banat and Timișoara there were about 250, identifiable by name, who lost their lives in the Soviet labour camps. Quite a few of those who in the past had no misgivings about such actions, discovered it now as profoundly unjust. At last we reached to a point of agreement.

Memories about these deportations are subjected, in most cases, to a selective censorship. By whom? Very often by those who publish crypto-Nazi nostalgia books. They will never tell you about such to have happened during the age of Nazi supremacy. Missing are also reports about a time, later on, when the forced labourers were also paid for their work in the USSR. Neither will they tell you about people in the Soviet Union helping the forced labourers, often in a rather risky fashion. Such stories told and sometimes published by

groups of fair minded people, came to be considered only by those willing to listen and who may have known also about other ways of treating forced labourers, the ways "forgotten" by the scribbling nostalgia-Nazis. Yet fairness calls upon us to remember also those who thought differently. A literary fragment should tell something about this, however shortly. After all, it testifies about people's minds, and what is in the minds of people is also historic fact, because it explains how material facts come about. The quoted fragment is from a collection of short stories cum memoirs titled "Den unsere Heimat ist unser Herz", or "Our homeland is our heart" signed by a German from Romania, once forced labourer in the Soviet Union, named Anton Galister.*)

*) The book was published in Vienna in 1963 by an East-European German emigrants' organization. I read the book, without knowing much about the author. However, the stories I heard from other German deportees corroborate the substance of the one to be quoted.

The first-person storyteller was assigned in the Soviet labour camp to the camp's pharmacy under the command of a Jewish captain, himself a pharmacist. The captain, called Fuxmann, spoke an approximate German and thus they could understand each-other in a friendly yet restrained fashion. Then things warmed up. Literally. The administration building was aflame and so the room of Fuxmann. Then the captain and his two German subordinates went on salvaging everything they could. It was not much. We find out about this in the story:

"In the room there was an iron bed, a little table with a basin, and in the wall, substituting for a chest, a few spikes with clothing items hanging on them, as well as a small, framed picture representing a woman with a child having the big black eyes of Fuxmann. [There were also] two suitcases, one was half empty the other one very heavy. - Much later I saw the contents of the latter - only books! Atop, nicely bound, was ... the Faust of Goethe, in Russian, published by the University of Leningrad."

"Im Zimmer ein Eisenbett, ein Tischchen mit Lavoier, an Stelle eines Schrankes ein paar haken an der Wand, daran

Bekleidungsstücke, ein schmal gerahmtes Bild: eine junge Frau mit einem Kind mit den grossen schwarzen Augen von Fuxmann - und zwei Koffer, der eine halblehr, der andere aus Holz, sehr schwer. - Viel später einmal habe ich den Inhalt gesehen - lauter Bücher! Obenan eines, schön gebunden, das war ... Goethes Faust - russisch - eine Ausgabe der Universität von Leningrad."

These objects were saved and brought into the captain's service room. And then, one evening, Fuxmann invited "his" prisoners to this room.

"Just to say something, I pointed my finger to the picture on the wall and asked: 'Comrade Captain, is this your family?' - 'Yes, my wife and my daughter. They aren't anymore. Both are dead, it's been now three years ... they have been in Kharkov at that time.'"

"Ich fragte nur um etwas zu sagen, auf das Bild an der Wand zeigend:

"Ist das ihre Familie, Genosse Capitän?"

"Ja - meine Frau und meine Tochter -, sie sind nicht mehr, beide tot, seit drei Jahren ..., sie waren damals in Charkow."

They were there "at that time", i.e. during the massacre of the Jews of Kharkov. And then the captain lit a candle and said to them all "Sholem Alechem". Galister continues:

"Ever since, many years went by; I read many statistics, novels, journals ... passionate accusations. Yet all these were misty and powerless compared to the light of the single candle on that Sabbath night and the words we could read from the lips of the lonely man: 'Shalom Alechem' - 'Peace with you'".

"Seitdem sind viele Jahre vergangen; ich habe Statistiken gelesen, Romane, Tagebücher ... flammende Anklagen. Die waren aber alle grau und kraftlos neben dem Lichte der einzigen Kerze, damals am Sabateingang und gegen die Worte, die wir von den Lippen des Einsamen ablesen konnte: 'Schalem Alechem'

- 'Friede mit euch'".

It may be added that the book is known only to very few Germans of the area. Yet the local crypto-Nazis make a great issue of their "loss of freedom". And when they don't know who you are, the Jews will also be blamed for it.