

**Ethnographical anti-Semitism (the special aspect of the
holocaust atmosphere in the south-eastern Moravia
in the period of 1938 to 1945)**

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Abstract: The fates of the Jewish population in the south-eastern Moravia, which we shall call Slovácko (regarding the aspect indicated in this article's caption), were enacted following the scenario valid for all the region of the Czech countries: based on the racist policy they are Slovakia deprived of their rights and human dignity, then they are centralized in transports, deported into concentration camps and exterminated. Into such horrifying scheme, just the specific regional figures could be introduced. And yet, there is something about the south-eastern Moravia, that is special and repulsively quaint – it is the misuse of ethnography in order to support tendencies and proceeding leading to holocaust.

Key Words: Jewish, anti-Semitism, Ethnography, Moravia, Slovácko, World War II, Great Slovakia, Joža Uprka

Slovácko is an area, where the civilisation progress swabbed the folklore individuality less than in other regions and at the times before World War II the folk culture had been fully alive. Its remarkable values were subject of interest for both professional and amateur ethnographical workers. However, a smaller part of ethnographical agents misused ethnography in order to support Czech and Slovak fascism and eventually they put it to serve German occupants. First of all, this concerned

the leading group of ethnographical organization named Národopisná Morava (Ethnographical Moravia), which - provided with German patronage – got an absolute monopoly in Slovácko. Almost without any exception, the people forming it inclined to fascism already in 30s and during the so-called Second Republic period some of them attempted to break the republic apart by tearing off the Slovácko region and annexing it into the scope of the Great Slovakia. Then already, they sang along the anti-Semitism tune altogether with the Slovak nationalist guardsmen. Especially since autumn 1938 they expanded a journalistic and leaflet campaign to “purify” Slovácko of Jews, with which also Viennese broadcast helped them, being supplied with news from J. Ryba, a Slovácko fascist. The anti-Jewish attacks invoked elements of traditional primitive anti-Semitism in the simple people’s minds. Persons, who later on were often getting drunk with Czech and German protectorate agents, with pleasure blamed Jews for the alcoholism spreading wild in Slovácko and that – being heterogeneous elements – they deteriorate the culture of Slovácko. After March 15, 1939 these Jews-beaters entered German service and they enthusiastically welcomed introduction of Nürnberg laws in the protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

We cannot say that more massive anti-Semitism excesses happened over the period we observe, on the contrary, we could even find manifestations of sympathy and humanistic support (e. g. in Hodonín, the town council issued a leaflet in October 1938, where they condemn the racist hate), but an exalted part of inhabitants stayed in disinterested approach towards the Jewish tragedy. It is regretful, that the Christian popular party was neither more active as for protection of Jews, its press authority – Slovácké noviny (The Slovácko Newspaper) even published a number of articles tuned to anti-Semitism. On December 15, 1938 Slovácké noviny positively commented on the speech of R. Beran about Jews, being satisfied that “the Jews issue will be resolved even at our place”. After Munich, when Jews had to waive their possession in occupied Břeclav and had to expatriate themselves in 24 hours, the authorities in Slovácko refused to accept them, so that ca 30 families even had to camp in tents in the field near Lanžhot during bad autumn weather. It was not until England’s pressure, they were transported into building

of an old factory in Ivančice. At that time, insensitive words could be read in the mentioned newspaper, refusing to help Jews, referring to the support from abroad, and among the arguments there appears what ethnographical fascist had been systematically shouting out – that Jews would disturb the “new Slovácko build-up”¹ for their character and cultural dissimilarity. Let me illustrate the style expressing the meaning “the Jewish issue does not apply for us” with one more quotation from the same source, stylized in disgusting feuilletonist joviality. On March 25, 1939 we can read in the *Slovácké noviny*: “The occupation has got its rarities. At first, in Kyjov on the Jewish shops yellow Jewish stars and *Jüdisches Geschäft* writings appeared. If we wanted to versify, we could say that Kyjov is similar to stellar skies now, with the exception though – for the stars are not red”.

The members and sympathisers of the *Národní obec fašistická* (National fascist community), *Vlajka* (The Flag), *Svatoplukovy gardy* (The Guards of Svatopluk) etc. deriving vocabulary and pseudo-arguments from the Aryan Fight, organized in the *Národopisná Morava*, represented not a large, but very loud group of Slovácko anti-Semitists. V. Rohan, a headmaster of the apprentices school in Uherské Hradiště and one of the protagonist of *Národopisná Morava*, symptomatically calls in fascist manner “Watch out!” the Jews and warns everybody “who would like to profit from our folk arts in the Jewish way”, for these end up like the Jew, who already “went under”.² Being aware of his position supported by Germans, he threatened “with wringing a neck of everybody, who would resist the *Národopisná Morava* management”.³ And when the ethnographical fascist raised up a society for establishing an exemplary ethnographical municipality of Slovač in the Luhačovice surrounding, in its statutes a regulation was not missing stating that only persons of Aryan origin can participate in this project.

The functionaries of *Národopisná Morava* in the Slovácko traditional costumes were a gladly welcome part of crowds at various events. All this took place at the time when tragic fate of Slovácko Jews was becoming complete. For that, they became praised, popular, obtained paid offices and fees as well as the share in the confiscated Jewish possession.

It is symptomatic, that right from the Národopisná Morava constituency a completely solitary collaborate act arose. On July 4, 1941 a letter of “Moravian-Slovácko nationalists” to Adolf Hitler was written, saying they want to get involved into the decisive fight of German army against the Jewish-bolshevism. And at the period of heydrichiade, Jan Uprka, a representative of Národopisná Morava, performed a speech along the side of renowned collaborating minister E. Moravec at the famous pilgrimage place of St. Antoníček, in which he defamed the Czechoslovakian Republic and where he call president E. Beneš “a Jewish-Bolshevik beater and thief”.⁴

During the whole period of the war, the fascist ethnographers persistently supported Nazism. On August 17, 1942 in the Moravská orlice newspaper J. K. Boček enthuses for “the heart of Slovácko should live in firm harmony with a heart of a huge nation, whose iron fist was not raised to enthrall, but to emancipate the mankind from the today’s slavery”, and he continues: “Already the fact, that we have been quit of Jews, is a great benefaction for Slovácko, while Jews, those were the weight levelling the ethnography because of their purse. This morality of theirs, which annoyed Slovácko, is still sitting in many people.”

The leading article of Uprkův kraj in the July to August 1943 issue, entitled “With the blood of fathers”, was filled with anti-Semitism assaults all throughout.⁵ In the same magazine in January 1944, Jan Uprka gives thanks to Germany as the patron of Slovácko again, saying:

“We know, that the matter is, whether new age of nationalism – the right patriotism – shall permanently ascend, or the era of a general crash in the worldwide triumph of Jews.” And still in February 1945, Národopisná Morava encourages against lack of faithfulness, though the war was getting near the Czech borders. However, a few months later the agents of Národopisná Morava were indemnified by the restored Czechoslovakian power and brought to extraordinary public justice for national betrayal. The protocols from these pleas are both embarrassing and grotesque testimony of human smallness, being able to misuse anything for its personal career, even the ethnography.

In this fascist ethnographical burlesque, Joža Uprka takes a special part, though he was not a member of Národopisná Morava and he died

in January 1940 already. This notable artist was a very distinctive citizen with a limited political scope, he did not pick his words much and many of his irresponsible statements enabled political adventurers to operate with Uprka's name. He often joined his regrettable anti-Semitism statements with invectives toward the Prague government.⁶ The Nazis spectacularly appreciated his work (actually they bought his paintings for the imperial protector office) and by his funeral also wreath from the imperial protector was laid down on his grave. Joža Uprka did not protest much against political misusing of his name and arts. His son Jan Uprka was not of comparable talent and none the less he had political scope. He became an exploited piece, healing his complex of living in the famous father's shade; he allowed getting the name of Uprka onto the flag of ethnographers of Slovácko, many a time echoing anti-Semitism assaults of his father as well.

From the concentration camps, only few out of 5 000 Jews from Slovácko came back. Though the ethnographical fascists did not cause their death directly, but regarding the higher morality principles they became co-responsible for holocaust.

Notes:

¹ Slovácké noviny (The Slovácko Newspaper), November 3, 1938.

² Moravská orlice (Moravian Eagle), July 14, 1940.

³ Archive of the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic, Extraordinary public justice in Strážnice. J. Uprka, T 600/49.

⁴ From the same source.

⁵ It is absurd, when political vocabulary of anti-Semitism is used in the ethnographical magazine: "Aryan race, Pharisees' doctrines, Old-testament hate, Jewish ghettos, Jewish lie-democracy, bacilli of breakdown and decay, international Judaism" etc., all this in enthusiastic tirades on necessity of saving national culture by fighting alongside of Germans – against "the world-ruling lusts of Jews" – at the times when millions of them were dying in concentration camps.

⁶ To sadly illustrate I shall quote Joža Uprka's statements as published in Moravská orlice on December 3, 1939: "On our arts any Jew was

allowed to speak... When they find out, that you are a capable and honest man at the same time, the Jewish editors shall send any political secretary, having no idea of arts” etc.

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