

The Greatest SECRET of the Holocaust REVEALED | Stephen Kapos

Steven Kapos, a Jewish Holocaust survivor and pro-Palestine activist, shares childhood memories of bombing, hiding, rescue homes in Budapest, and his father's survival through the Kastner deal. The conversation then turns to Zionism, racism, Israel and Palestine, Gaza through Holocaust memory, European support for the war, and the moral duty to resist mass violence. Links: Interview with Double Down News YouTube: <https://youtu.be/HcCgV0dSoAM> Interview with Owen Jones: <https://youtu.be/E4PFmz4MNdg> Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Merch: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Donation: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Introduction 00:00:36 Childhood in wartime Budapest 00:03:14 Hungary, Nazis, and deportations 00:17:36 Secret rescue homes 00:32:44 Father and the Kastner deal 00:40:59 Gaza through Holocaust memory 00:43:29 Zionism and racism 00:58:35 Diverging lessons after survival 01:05:11 Palestine protests and hope

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today I have the very special privilege of being joined by Stephen Kapos, a Jewish Holocaust survivor and pro-Palestine activist. Stephen, welcome. Welcome. Thank you for having me. Well, thank you very much for speaking to us, because you are really one of a kind, I would say, because you're very outspoken about what is happening currently in Palestine. And you yourself were seven years old when the Nazis invaded your native Hungary. Maybe let's start there. Could you give us your story—where it starts and how you remember the Holocaust?

#Stephen Kapos

Yeah. But even before the Holocaust reached my hometown, Budapest, the war had, to some extent, impacted us by bombing. We were subject to bombing indiscriminately, not especially connected to being Jewish. It was just Allied bombing regularly. And we lived in a block of flats, which was a fairly modern building in the center of Budapest, and it had a designed, very safe air raid shelter. Buildings that were put up in the early '40s had that requirement. And so I do remember having to go down, and my father had the routine of wrapping the two children—myself, at seven years old, and my sister, who was five years younger, two years old.

And on the sounding of the air raid sirens, we would be wrapped in blankets very quickly, rolled into blankets, and taken down into the shelter. And there, I remember hearing the anti-aircraft guns—Bofors guns, they were called. I think made in Sweden, actually. And when the air raid was over and

the sirens sounded for the end, the kids would go out, myself included, to the streets to collect shrapnel. This was a kind of competitive game, that we would have a collection of shrapnel, and whoever had the largest one was a kind of winner. So I'm illustrating this—how children turn anything, any situation, even war, into games.

#Pascal

What happened then? I mean, in 1944, with the invasion and the Germans coming, and then the shipping of Jews to the concentration camps. How did you survive?

#Stephen Kapos

Yeah, well, first of all, what happened? Hungary officially was an ally of Germany. I think although Hungary was right-wing, with a disposition of sympathy and implied alliance with Germany, it wasn't really firmly in the German camp until it was bribed into it, virtually. How? After the First World War, the Treaty of Trianon revised boundaries, particularly of the collapsing Austro-Hungarian Empire. And Hungary then lost two-thirds of its historic territories. All those peripheral areas went to Czechoslovakia, which was then newly created, to Romania—the entire Transylvanian area, which is large, very large, and where my mother's family were farming—went into Romania. And going further south, a part of Hungary went into Serbia, and then another part into Croatia, and even a sliver was taken on the west into Austria.

Hungary lost two-thirds of its territories then, and that became a nationalist cause to restore. The Hungarian ruling class, I should say, never settled for this as a final state. And when Hitler was promising and actually returning a portion of these lost territories—about half of each, roughly, broadly speaking—that was the bribe to Hungary to go firmly into the German alliance and join the attack on the Soviet Union. So, officially, Hungary was an ally of Germany. The Hungarian ruler was, since 1920, Admiral Horthy, who ruled as a regent. He couldn't found a dynasty because he wasn't Roman Catholic, which was the state religion. So they gave him the title of regent, but he was a kind of autocratic ruler, settled down to fairly remote hands-on power, but ultimately decisions were referred to him finally.

When we come to 1944, which was very much towards the end of the war, and Germany was quite clearly losing the war by 1944—and much earlier, actually, but very definitely by '44—some countries which were allied to Germany, like Italy and Romania, were seeking out of the alliance, and successfully. Romania had already declared leaving the alliance, and so did, I think, Italy by then. And the Hungarian leadership, Admiral Horthy and his circle, were also seeking terms on which they could leave the alliance, not to be on the losing side at the very end, and sent unofficial envoys from Hungary to inquire about terms from the Allied forces on how it could be done. This was monitored by German intelligence, and so Hungary became an unreliable ally. That is why they invaded Hungary. Still, the status was as an allied country, but not trusted. So they invaded in March 1944.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this can happen anytime again. So please consider subscribing not only here, but to my mailing list on Substack. That's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link is going to be in the description below. And now, back to the video. The thing, though, is that until '44, the Jewish population of Hungary was relatively safe, weren't they? I mean...

#Stephen Kapos

Relatively, yes. That's true. Hungary doesn't have a history of pogroms against Jews like Russia—like Imperial Russia, that is—and Poland. There was, and had been for a long time, a latent anti-Semitism. But that was mostly social, and there was no serious impediment for professional work for, say, the Jewish middle class. In fact, Jews did dominate a number of professions. There were many Jews in the medical profession, and journalists and lawyers, among others, and of course industrialists and in commerce generally. So that was all possible. Although Hungary also prided itself—the right, that is—on passing the first anti-Jewish racist legislation, the so-called Numerus Clausus, which limited the number of entries into universities in any particular year.

And they prided themselves that this was in the '20s, before Mussolini. It was the first legislation against Jews. But, for example, my father was a doctor, and during his training, in one year, he didn't pass the Numerus Clausus test. He was surplus to the requirement. And in that year, he had to continue his studies in Prague. There was a German university in Prague, and that's where he went. And he said it was one of the best experiences he had. You know, he loved it in Prague. And the next year he could rejoin because the numbers worked out OK. And so in the end, he qualified in Hungary as a doctor.

#Pascal

So Hungary wasn't perfect to its Jewish population, but it was far away from what followed next, right, once the Germans actually moved in? Yes, it was completely different.

#Stephen Kapos

In 1944, when the Germans did invade in March, in came with them Adolf Eichmann, and he immediately set about the deportation of the Jewish population as per the German plan. He did have, in the right wing of Hungary, quite keen supporters—sort of junior ministers, that kind of position under the Regent—whose position wasn't very actively involved. He was just turning the other way and allowing the cooperation of the right wing with the Nazis to organize the deportation. And they started in the countryside. They came in March. By the summer, more or less June, June–July 1944, they had deported 400,000 Hungarian Jews from the countryside straight to Auschwitz, and a special reception platform was built to receive the Hungarian Jews.

It was the quickest deportation, and the vast majority of them straight away went into gas chambers. A few people survived for a while because they were put to work. Now, on my mother's side, the family were farming. They had a reasonably sized estate, actually, in Transylvania, in rural Transylvania, not too far from the sort of capital city of Transylvania, which was now called Cluj-Napoca, then in Hungarian was called Kolozsvár. And they were based in a village called Zsombor, which was an hour or less than an hour's drive from Cluj. Now, that part of the family—because about half of Transylvania was reattached to Hungary from Romania.

In between the wars, it was part of Romania, but now it was reattached under the Vienna Agreement to Hungary, and immediately the Jews of that part of Transylvania were in much greater danger because the Romanians were far more tolerant and protective even of that Jewish population compared with Hungary. The Romanian king did not allow the deportation of Romanian Jews, for example, whereas Admiral Horthy kind of, as I said, turned the other way, didn't actively take part, but allowed his minions to cooperate with the Nazis in deportation. And so my entire Romanian Transylvanian family fell into the deportations quite quickly. You never saw them again? With one exception. There was a cousin who was then a teenage girl—actually, she and two sisters—and they were all kind of fairly strong teenagers.

And in the selection on arrival to Auschwitz, they were saved and put to work. They worked in one of the warehouses, selecting clothes—clothes that were left behind from the gas chambers, where people were tricked into thinking that they were going into delousing and showers and so on. So they just left all their clothes and shoes at one point with the idea that they would be collecting them later, and of course they never did. And these guys were put to work in these warehouses to sort these items, because Germany wanted to use—it was a hard winter by then—wanted to use the warm items that both the civilian population and the army could make use of. And one day, this cousin—her name was Judy—was sorting her parents' clothes.

#Pascal

Oh no.

#Stephen Kapos

Which must have been a tremendous trauma. All three girls survived Auschwitz, but on the way back, they were in a hostel where they stayed temporarily. And there was a fire. It was never finally established whether that was arson—a deliberate fire—because refugees were staying there. But of the three sisters, only one survived. She was at a different level and could jump out, and the others couldn't. So there was one returnee, in answer to your question. From that particular group, there was a returnee from another group, which was based in the south of Hungary and a different branch of the family.

#Pascal

And you yourself, and your parents—how did it happen in Budapest?

#Stephen Kapos

Well... we had different phases, really. To begin with, for the first few months of the German occupation, if you like, when we had German soldiers around the town who didn't act in a particularly hostile fashion because they were in an allied country, officially. And there was this period when we could... we didn't have particularly heavy sanctions against us yet. And I was, as a young boy, very much into the paraphernalia of war. All my toys were tanks and, you know, model field guns and soldiers, etc. And I was very much into the military. And I would salute all soldiers on the streets that I came across, and they would salute back and smile and so on.

And including German soldiers. And in fact, I am told that one German officer said—remember, I was at that stage a blond-haired boy—and he said, "What a pity that this boy isn't German." So that was the first phase. Then came a series of restrictive legislations. Eichmann was stationed in the Buda Hills in a villa, and he organized the gradual restrictions, or, you know, in cahoots with the Hungarian right. But at that stage, the extreme right party, the so-called Arrow Cross Party, which was an ultra-right fascist setup, were not yet in power. They were influential, but not in power. So anyway, a number of restrictive legislations came rapidly.

Things like, you know, the amount a Jew could own in terms of land. So the Transylvanian family, when this came in, had to divide the family holdings into individual holdings so as to satisfy this particular requirement. There is evidence of that in the land registry we later discovered. And you had to start wearing the yellow star. And we then realized that serious danger was around the corner. To evade some of these laws, which, you know, restricted all kinds of things—what you could own, you know, not a radio, not, I think, not even a bicycle. Later, Jews weren't allowed to use trains or bikes. This kind of humiliating, restrictive legislation.

But around that time, a large number of Jews, including my family, tried to evade some of these laws by taking up the Christian religion, converting. And my family, particularly the Transylvanians, had connections to the Calvinist, so-called Reformed Church of Hungary. The Calvinist Church had a majority of followers in Transylvania, unlike the rest of Hungary, where Roman Catholicism was the state religion. There was also another Protestant church called the Evangelical Church, which didn't mean what evangelicalism means in, say, the US today. It was just a name. They were Lutherans, as opposed to the Reformed Church, which was Calvinist. But these two churches were quite friendly with each other, not so friendly with the Catholics. And an organization was established initially by the Lutheran Church, initially to look after and help.

Those Jews who converted to their religion, quite a number of them, because they weren't racist and they accepted that they were now Christian brothers and sisters and had to do something for them

in their hour of need. And they commissioned one of their pastors, who was called in by his bishop and told, look, your job is to start this organization of help. And it was called the Good Shepherds Group or organization. It was started, as I say, by the Lutheran Protestant Church, and particularly by this pastor, Pastor Gabor Stelo. Initially, he was trying to set up homes where they were organizing false identities for Jewish children, particularly, and some of their mothers, who were included in the organization as nurses. The organization was strongly supported by the Swiss Red Cross.

They had a very brave envoy representing them who organized help and support by the Swiss Red Cross. And these homes were pretended to be—there was no paperwork to back it—but they were announced to be Swiss protected. They would put Swiss emblems on them and say, well, now these homes are extraterritorial to Hungary. Nobody could enter them other than those allowed by the Swiss. And I was taken up in October 1944 into one of these protected homes. I remember the actual journey up into the Buda Hills where the villa was, because that was the day when the regent, Admiral Horthy, finally got up the courage to declare Hungary's leaving the German alliance formally and officially. He wasn't a particularly good politician.

#Pascal

He had no backing for this.

#Stephen Kapos

He just made an announcement. And of course, as he must have known, the response would be that he would be arrested by the Germans, as he was. And his place of rallying was the palace in Buda, the royal palace, which was on top of medieval fortifications, with heavy walls and catacombs and all that—a medieval system of fortifications—on top of which a turn-of-the-century palace was built, very elaborate, still in the Austro-Hungarian Empire days, and reflecting that kind of pomp. And it was a huge palace. Anyway, that's where Admiral Horthy dwelt. And the place that I was taken up into as one of the first, if not the first, such protected homes was very close to the palace, in a kind of very posh area of the Buda Hills overlooking the Danube and the other side, the flat side, Pest.

And we had to go past a German, as I was carried—I was small enough to be carried—somebody was sent down from the organization, I think a gardener, to simply physically take me up into this home. And we had to go past a German checkpoint close to the palace. And I remember a field gun trained on the castle. It was the day of the arrest. And the person who was taking me had some kind of magic pass. I don't know what it was. I sort of fantasized that he probably visited Germany at one stage or another and got hold of some piece of paper which carried Hitler's signature. Anyway, he flashed this document to the German guard, you know, the checkpoint. And they all stood to attention, seeing this document, and waved us on. That was it. I would love to know what it was.

But anyway, it worked like magic. Now, this home where I was taken to was a palatial villa. It was originally the home of the family Hagemacher, who were the big brewers in Hungary. There were two kinds of beer you could have in Hungary, either a Hagemacher beer or a Dreher beer. A Dreher beer you can still get today, not the Hagemacher. I don't know what happened to them. But the Hagemacher family had Swiss connections. They weren't Jewish. They had Swiss connection by family connection, by birth. And at the beginning of the war, they left Hungary for Switzerland and vacated their wonderful villa. The pastor, the Lutheran pastor I mentioned, Stelo, Gabor Stelo, was a cousin of the Hagemachers. And he was contacted to say, you can have, you can use, our villa for this purpose of the rescue home.

So when I arrived, it was initially into a palatial setting, and then we were distributed into smaller groups at different addresses. But I want to say that that's how it started, this rescue group, the Good Shepherds Rescue Group. It had four organizers: Stelo, Gabor Stelo was the leader, and there was a Calvinist priest in it, and two Jewish lawyers, one an uncle of mine. That formed the organizing group, but it was supported by this wonderful Swiss envoy who was calling himself von Born. And so they produced the false identities for all these kids. And from the first original villa, Gabor Stelo actively searched for and established more and more such homes so that it became an archipelago of homes. And by the end of the war, altogether, he saved 2,000 children and a few adults.

#Pascal

Wow. Were your mother and father among the people saved, or did they not survive?

#Stephen Kapos

In different ways. The women of the family were all employed as nurses in these Swiss homes. Boys and girls were separated. My mother was a nurse with a kind of improvised nurse's uniform and a Red Cross emblem and some kind of headdress, you know, sort of looking like an authentic nurse. She was the nurse in charge of a group of girls, and my younger sister, who was only two years old, was with her. I was with a group of boys, the subgroup of which was led by my aunt, Aunt Ergie. But we weren't allowed to recognize the family connection. I was under her protection and direction, along with my two cousins, her two sons, who were older—five years and six years older.

They weren't allowed to recognize my aunt as their mother either. And then we were all on false papers. We were supposed to have been refugees from the advancing Russians from the east—some as war orphans and some as having lost contact with their parents. My father, during this time, was in Belgium. And that's another rather complicated story because he was part of the Kastner project. Have you heard of Rudolf Kastner? Well, Rudolf Kastner was a very prominent Transylvanian Zionist with very high connections in the Zionist hierarchy in Palestine at that time. When that part of Transylvania was reunited with Hungary, he came up to Budapest. And this is Kastner.

And negotiated with the Hungarian Jewish leadership that he could have negotiating rights with the Nazis. And he had an initiative and an agreement eventually with the SS themselves about saving a certain number of mostly Transylvanian and mostly middle-class or upper-class Jews against delivery of certain goods and trucks via Switzerland to the Germans in return, and with the proviso that the trucks would only be used on the Eastern Front, and against which the Nazis—and this involved Himmler himself—would allow the passage of, in the end, it turned out to be 1,600 Jews to Switzerland via Belsen. I don't know why via Belsen, but that's how it was. So they would be transported to Belsen.

They were kept separately and then transferred from Belsen to Switzerland. And the first such transport, which was pretty much 1,600, was divided there in Belgium. One part was immediately transferred to Switzerland, and the other was kept waiting until Christmas and then transferred. And my father was in another transport organized by Kastner to follow this. And it was a voluntary entry into this deal. Can you imagine the German Nazis, the SS, actually going to Belgium and believing that you would be transferred to Switzerland? I wonder how and why people could trust the Germans with this kind of life-threatening deal. But they did, because the alternative was worse.

#Pascal

I mean, because there's no other way. It's either true or it's not. Either way, yeah, it is what it is.

#Stephen Kapos

Now, Rudolf Kastner set up a collecting camp in Budapest prior to transportation to Belgium. And you could enter this by agreement with Kastner if you were on his list. You could join his list with certain provisos, like you had a Transylvanian connection or some other reason. And my family did have that connection. So the whole family moved into this camp in Budapest, which was in the grounds of a large institution for the blind or something like that, on its grounds, with the sort of wooden huts that were typical of German concentration camps—one of those or several of those in these grounds—and we stayed there for a while, which I remember quite vividly, what that was like, you know, not very... And that camp was guarded by the SS on the outside and had Hungarian police on the inside.

And you could leave it. You couldn't enter it except by arrangement, but you could leave it if you changed your mind. And so we entered, the entire family, these camps, and were temporarily there in these barracks. And I particularly remember being very scared of the lavatories. There was an improvised latrine, which I found a very frightening place because it was a great big pit with some planks poised over it, which you had to use, and I was very scared of falling. But other than that, you know, the children could play and so on. We were ill, etc. But after a while, for some reason—because every decision in those days was based on rumors—there was no reliable official information. And there must have been some negative news about the reliability of this arrangement, so my family left. And that's when I was taken up into the hills.

Then my father and uncles also left, but later returned to this camp. And they were, in fact, transported at Christmas '44, or near enough at Christmas '44, to Germany, to Belgium. Unfortunately for them, Hitler discovered this deal. It was behind his back that Himmler arranged it. And I think Himmler and Kaltenbrunner were the two negotiators. And Himmler really got the sack from Hitler. He was furious about this arrangement and stopped it. There was no further transfer to Switzerland. All the same, the Germans had some kind of token regard for having made a deal and kept this transport, including my father, in the camp, within the camp, as hostage status rather than inmates, which meant that they weren't given tattooed numbers. They were allowed to keep their own clothes. And they had a degree of kind of self-management.

#Pascal

My father worked as a doctor in this camp, for example. And they survived in that camp?

#Stephen Kapos

Yes. Eventually, with the advancing Russians, they were transferred to Theresienstadt. I don't know if their relative privileges remained there. I doubt it. But Theresienstadt was a milder sort of camp compared with the others, although it was a waiting room for Auschwitz. From time to time they would transfer on to Auschwitz. But this was so late in the war, they didn't have time for that. And that's why my father was liberated.

#Pascal

So, you know, you have that experience and you remember this so clearly. When we now, when we fast forward to the present day and we look at what's happening in Gaza and we look at the way Israel developed, I mean, you were there when Israel was founded and you've seen the development of this country over the last 70 years. Yeah. How does it make you feel, and how do you relate to it?

#Stephen Kapos

Before I turn to that, I just want to add to the story of that period that not only did we have the experience of hiding and danger from discovery, but unfortunately, where we were physically, in close proximity to the royal castle in this area, that was where the final stand of fighting between the Germans and the invading Soviet Red Army was fought out. It was the epicenter of the fighting in Budapest. And the frontline moved through us, and we had to relocate several times into uncertain new locations, etc. I'm mentioning this because the two things overlaid on top of each other are a very important background for empathy with the Gazan experience. Because we had the

fighting, the total destruction around us, and the displacement several times. So what I then later saw on the screens in Gaza kind of rhymed or echoed with that experience. So it was the danger plus the wartime. And it was hard for us to survive it.

#Pascal

And is it... can you relate to the Zionists who say that the experience of the Holocaust is the reason why currently the violence is happening? You know, that Israel needs to be a place for the Jews, a country for the Jews, where the Jews will be safe forever from this kind of persecution, and they need to have that land, and the Palestinian population is a problem in that concept. How do you view that?

#Stephen Kapos

Well, again, just to start with a bit of background, Hungary, in the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the position of the Jews was different from some other Eastern European countries because, as an official policy, the Habsburgs and the ruling classes realized the usefulness of the educated Jewish population to use them in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism. Therefore, they had a policy of integration for them. A very good example of that is their encouraging and initiating that Jews should change names from recognizably Jewish names into indigenous-sounding names so that in their daily work they would not be identified and subject to prejudice, etc. So that was official policy.

And by and large, the educated, particularly middle-class Jewish population, embraced this completely. And they were all integrationists and indeed had, by and large, those who were with any ability, good careers in their professions. My father was a GP to begin with and later trained on as a psychoanalyst. By 1944, he was a psychoanalyst. As a result of this, there was very little influence of the Zionists. There was only a tiny group of Zionists in Hungary, and they were regarded by the Jewish population that I knew and the educated Jewish people as freaks and extremists, not to be taken seriously and to have nothing to do with them. And so that's very different from, say, the experience of Poland or some other places.

#Pascal

How do you view them today? How do you view Zionism? And how do you view the results of Zionism that we're seeing now?

#Stephen Kapos

Yeah. So, in other words, my family didn't have any Zionist influence, inclinations, inclinations. And nor did I see any around in Hungary. Now, I... I became aware of what Zionism was when I visited a part of my family who, after the Second World War, when Transylvania was reattached to Romania,

suddenly became part of Romania again. And eventually, under the Romanian communist rule, they were, in inverted commas, sold to Israel. The one place you were allowed to leave the country was by a deal with the Israeli authorities, towards Israel. And Israel was paying so much — I don't know how many thousands of dollars per head — for Jews allowed to leave. And then a big part of my family, the Transylvanians who then lived partly in Transylvania or in Bucharest by then, left for Israel, Haifa.

So when I visited them, it was then that I was first really confronted with what Zionism was. And I was horrified because it was clearly an extremely racist setup there. I just want to mention one particular example of an experience. I was part of a little group organized as a kind of tourist tour to visit Jerusalem from Haifa. And in this group, improvised for the purpose, were some visiting middle-aged to elderly Jewish people from the U.S. There was this particular lady, I remember, who was kind of elderly, and we were in this group about to leave, and there was an Israeli soldier, a young soldier with a machine gun, etc., standing by. And then she saw this Jewish soldier, she broke down crying and said that she had lived to see the day when she could see a Jewish soldier. So which year was that? This was before the '67 war. '65, something around there.

This year was '65. I understood that this was a reaction to their memories of pogroms and humiliation. And Israel and a Jewish army meant some kind of fundamental liberation to them. And I could understand the emotional beginnings of that feeling for Israel. That was a good example of it. It was not pretended. It was completely genuine. To some extent, my own relations had that, not quite so dramatically as well. And they were subjected to the propaganda after they arrived in Haifa. So I can understand the roots of this sort of feeling and Zionist attitude. What I cannot understand is that once you start seeing what that meant to the local population, that it wasn't an empty place where you suddenly could build a new state, but you were actually taking the land of some other people and also subjecting them to unjust treatment all the time and treating them as enemies.

That I found revolting. And unfortunately, I found that members of my family, almost without exception, became racist in this way. They talked about the Palestinians — they called them Arabs — as an unequal, lower species who had to be kept down. They bought into, I think, artificially created fears that the Palestinians, unless they were kept rather forcibly down, would chase the Jews into the sea. They often had that image that unless they were vigilant and violent, that would happen to them, which was a result of continuous propaganda. And it was tragic. And even the cousin who, I explained, was sorting her parents' clothes and eventually survived and came back was as racist as any of the others. And I found that terrible, really.

#Pascal

And she could never relate the suffering of the Arabs, of the Palestinians, to her own suffering that she went through as a child?

#Stephen Kapos

They had no empathy for the local people. Somehow, they bought into this awful racism, which actually was leveled against the Jews in some countries — of not being equal, not to be taken seriously, they weren't of equal value at all. Today, in Hungary and the Czech Republic, the same fate is visited on the Roma population. They are almost replacement Jews in some respects, because they're not integrated. They're regarded without individuality; they're not taken as individuals, but as people who just always give in to thieving and don't work. And there is an apartheid against them in practice.

#Pascal

And this, it's a very European sentiment, isn't it? And that was transplanted and actually then implanted in Israel or in Palestine, isn't it? And continues there to this day. The thing to me is that I don't understand how people can look at Gaza and not see a concentration camp. I mean, it so clearly functions like a concentration camp, an extermination camp by the time you started bombing it, mass bombing it. How did you then perceive these last years of that new genocide that we saw? Did it evoke those feelings in you?

#Stephen Kapos

Yeah, yes, of course it did. Because of my wartime experience as well, I had been sort of reliving almost those feelings and dangers. I have to emphasize that at the time this was happening to me as a seven-year-old boy, I wasn't afraid. It's difficult to understand now for me because the situation was extremely dangerous all the time, either from the fighting or the persecution and the danger of discovery, etc. But the truth is that I was too young to really understand it as it was happening.

In retrospect, a few years later, I did realize how humiliating and dangerous various situations were. One particular episode around Christmas was when we were still in hiding, but Budapest was already surrounded by Soviet forces, and the last fight was about to start around Christmas time. But the German army still celebrated Christmas in a very formal way, and they invited us to be their guests — our group of friends, Jewish boys in hiding. And that was a very dangerous situation to be in, but I didn't realize it was dangerous. I remember the setup, which was very beautiful — you know, a long white table.

This is wartime conditions, remember. And a nicely decorated Christmas tree at the end, and a great swastika flag at the end of the room, almost from the ceiling, and a very depressed atmosphere, because we were seated one German soldier, one Jewish boy, one German soldier, one Jewish boy. They didn't know you were Jewish boys, right? Of course not. That's why we were invited. But there was a danger of discovery that particularly the adults in charge were aware of. If a Jewish boy was asked to be taken to the loo and a German soldier taking him would discover that the boys were circumcised, that would give away our cover. Yeah, yeah. And my aunt, who was in charge, she was very, very worried that something like this would happen. It didn't happen.

#Pascal

So your life then was filled with these kinds of very dangerous experiences. And we can only imagine how extremely dangerous Gaza must be, right? And the life of Palestinians in general, also in the West Bank, right? Being under constant repression and danger of being killed. How do you explain to yourself that you developed this kind of obvious connection between the suffering of these people who are 80 years apart and geographically apart, but obviously experience very similar things, and that your cousin couldn't — that she never — that she obviously didn't make that connection? Well, the big difference is what influences we were under.

#Stephen Kapos

The cousin I mentioned arrived in Israel in, I don't know, the early 50s from Romania, and immediately came under the drip-drip influence of extreme nationalist propaganda — propaganda which emphasized the dangers all the time from, not Palestinians, but Arabs, and how they were all bent on killing Jews, etc. If you hear it all the time, it will work on you. And at the same time, I myself had completely different influences. First of all, my father was very enlightened and, as I say, as well as a qualified doctor, he was a psychoanalyst. When he returned from Belgium — and by the way, from the moment he was taken until the day of his return, we had no news of him — that was an agonizing experience.

But when he and my uncles all returned from Theresienstadt — not Belsen, because they were transferred to Theresienstadt — they eventually returned in the summer of 1945. They all joined the Communist Party because they felt that the only true resisters in their experience were the Communist Party, which was, by the way, illegal in Hungary. There was a brief Hungarian Soviet, if you like, in 1920, very much on the pattern of the Russian Revolution, rather. And there was a brief communist rule and briefly a Hungarian Red Army even organized against the attacking surrounding countries. But they didn't have very much chance, and it was a short-lived thing, you know, sort of less than that, about half a year at the most.

And the Communist Party, in response to that, was banned. And right after the brief communist rule, the incoming right-wing forces supported by the Western powers, particularly France at that time, started what is described as the White Terror — a lot of pogroms and killings. The only pogroms that I think Hungarian Jews experienced were then because the communist rule and Jewishness somehow were conflated. These marauding white-armed groups went from village to village and sought out the communists and the Jews. And there was a lot of bloody retribution in response to the brief communist period.

#Pascal

And despite that memory, your father and your uncle, they joined the Communists in 1945 because it was the resistance, it was the resistance against the fascists.

#Stephen Kapos

Now, my experience as a teenager was entirely under the communist regime, and although it was also with almost continuous hardships and living under an increasingly autocratic system, on the question of race, we had a completely different education than the drip-drip propaganda in Israel. So it's hardly surprising that I was anti-racist. That was the influence I had. It's an interesting detail that the word for Jew in Hungarian is zsidó. I think it's the same in Poland, similar. And that word was banned officially because it was regarded as a racist mark. Oh, really? Okay. And you could be arrested for using that word, in the same way—try and think of it in the same way—as “Negro” is non-acceptable and, in fact, something that you can legislate for if people are using it in a malicious way.

#Pascal

So the communists tried to, for all their flaws, they did try to root out these kinds of racisms in the population against each other. They tried to create an egalitarian society.

#Stephen Kapos

That's right, yeah. Equally poor living for everybody because an unfortunate overemphasis was on fast industrialization. They were kind of copying the Soviet experience unnecessarily, and they did not use the strengths of the country, which was a very successful, mainly agricultural country, with various good exports in that line. And instead, they were building great steelworks where Hungary had neither raw material for it nor energy for it. They were just under the dictate of the Soviets, which tried to create mini-Soviet policies in all the satellite countries very unwisely.

#Pascal

Anyway, that's another story. But in the last five minutes, because we do need to come to an end, I just wanted one more—like your views on what is happening in Palestine and how you relate that to yourself. And you go to the street, you protest against the genocide in the UK. I mean, what are your thoughts on that?

#Stephen Kapos

I just want to mention that during my experience of the Holocaust and the war, I was very much aware of the kind of invisible pain that is involved, such as the relocations which some families cannot manage because of a disabled member of the family. My Transylvanian family got transported to Auschwitz because they turned down some local Romanian peasant workers' offer to take them by horse and cart on secret passages towards the Romanian border, where they would have been saved probably. They couldn't accept this offer because there was a disabled member of

the family who couldn't take that journey, they judged, and all of them perished. This kind of thing is not very visible. You can see the destruction and the killing, but there are these and similar pains and difficulties that we had gone through, and I recognize that the Gazans also have such problems — you know, the frequent relocations without transport.

Sometimes it just couldn't be carried out because of disabled members. And also just the mental agony of having to make life-defining, life-and-death decisions based on information from your enemy or based on rumors. Like my father, sort of based on rumors, accepting a deal with the Nazis and trusting it. Similarly, people in Gaza had to act on a statement that you've got to go to area X, which is the protected or safe area, which of course turned out not to be. But you have no reliable information, and yet you have to make decisions affecting the entire family. The pain of all this and similar things, a few others which are not totally visible on the screen, I was very aware of because of the experience we've gone through.

#Pascal

Did you imagine that European governments would ever support something like this again? I mean, to me, it comes as quite a shock, although I must say I just didn't pay enough attention, but I didn't think we would.

#Stephen Kapos

No, I agree. It's very hard to explain, very hard to explain. And there's no doubt that it will be regarded by future generations as criminal — the attitude of all the European governments, and the division between the government and their people in almost all European countries. I think in this country about 70% of the people would be supporting the Palestinian cause, and yet the government is actually partnering a genocide.

#Pascal

The UK is part and parcel of the genocide.

#Stephen Kapos

And all other European countries as well, France. Today, that is the exception with Spain, I believe, but most of them. And their people are not in support of what the governments are doing. So there is this divide. In the longer term, it's an insupportable situation. It will end at one point.

#Pascal

It's just so frightening, right, that the Holocaust is, of course, a crime of many, many people collaborating. Many countries, many governments collaborating to make it possible. State borders

crossed, people massively migrating, and so on. And the current genocide is, again, the collaboration of all of these countries, some of them just looking away and some of them actively helping and lending a hand, and then cooperating in the extermination of an entire people. Absolutely.

#Stephen Kapos

It will turn out to be regarded by a later consensus as criminal. And those in power today who are still available for trial will find themselves in court having to defend what they've been doing.

#Pascal

If you could talk, if you could speak to a seven-year-old Palestinian boy in Gaza, what would you tell him? For the future, you know? If he survives the way you did, what would you tell him? Like, so that this doesn't happen one more time.

#Stephen Kapos

That the future holds a tremendous number of fundamental changes yet. And we have to hope that some of the changes coming will be in a good direction. If I think of what I experienced since I was seven years old — a brief period of democracy, then communist rule, then an uprising in Budapest in Hungary, then being replaced into a totally different country and environment, and then the activism — huge changes all along the line. You cannot foresee it when you are seven years old, obviously. But there can be fundamental changes to come, and we have to make them positive changes. And it's possible.

#Pascal

Very wise words. Fundamental changes will come, and it's up to us to make them good changes. Exactly. Thank you. These are very hopeful words. Stephen, people who want to read more from or about you or follow you somewhere, is there any place where you regularly publish something?

#Stephen Kapos

I think a number of my earlier interviews cover much the same, plus a bit more or slightly different aspects. And there are interviews available on Instagram and YouTube. I had an interview with Double Down News, which is an extensive one. I had an interview with Owen Jones, which might be of interest, and so on.

#Pascal

I will try to find them and link them in the description box of this video. And I will, of course, send you a copy once this one is out. Thank you. Stephen Kapos, thank you so much for your time today.

#Stephen Kapos

Thank you for having me.