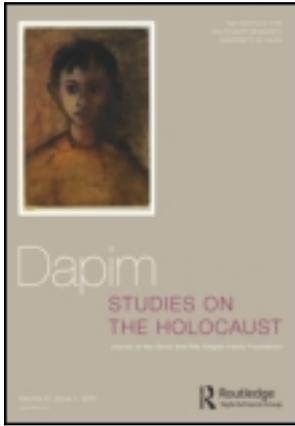


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To Terezín and Back Again: Czech Jews and their Bonds of Belonging from Deportations to the Postwar

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What was Jewish belonging in Central Europe, and how was it influenced by the Holocaust? This article examines the ways in which Czech Jews negotiated their bonds with Jewishness immediately before, during and after the Second World War. Building on a theoretical framework of affiliation developed by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, the essay portrays the differentiation among the Czech Jews in the Terezín (Theresienstadt) ghetto. Much of the ideological differences between the groups of Czech Jews were informed by access to resources and also emotional ties which played a key role in the menacing environment surrounding them. Rather than producing common Jewishness, Terezín generated differences. In the immediate postwar, ties to Jewishness were arbitrary and often accidental, only rarely corresponding with one's previous affinities. The article argues that group belonging is situational and contingent on the social space.

Keywords: Holocaust; Czechoslovakia; identity; Jewish history; Zionism; Theresienstadt

How did Czech Jews grapple with questions of their Jewishness during the Holocaust and the early postwar period? How did their self-understanding change as they faced deportation to a forced community that was entirely Jewish? What role did Judaism play in early postwar years as the survivors struggled to rebuild their lives? Why did some survivors decide to leave Czechoslovakia after the war, while others stayed behind? Unlike German, Polish, Slovak or Hungarian Jews, almost all of the Czech Jews who experienced the Holocaust were shipped to the transit ghetto Terezín and spent some time there. Their comparable war experience makes the Czech Jews a suitable group to examine the ways in which they came to understand their Jewishness during and after the war.

In this essay, I offer a window into the social, political and cultural loyalties of Czech Jews by presenting a deconstructivist take on the concept of 'identity'. I examine their bonds of belonging during a span of time of six to nine years, between their deportation and when they settled down after the war, from 1941/1942 to 1948/1950. Examining these two periods together allows one to determine the many factors behind the formation of their identity and to show that their Jewishness was situational. Because these two periods were consecutive and because the groups of people I write about were identical, or very similar, in both phases, I can point out the influence of structural, material and ideological factors in the genesis of the ways in which Czech Jews understood their relationship with Jewishness.

Scholarship of Czech Jewry has not analyzed the war in the context of the postwar.¹ Such a chronologization implies that what happened during the Holocaust was a different story and that postwar Czech Jews were a disparate kind of people. Although a sizeable segment of what became postwar Czech Jews were former Slovak, Hungarian and Carpatho-Russian Jews who had moved westwards, many, indeed a majority, of Czech Jews were people who had lived in Czechoslovakia before 1945. Moreover, comparing the social, cultural and gender histories of the Czech Jews before, during and after the war helps us recognize lasting factors and continuities and, equally importantly, lack thereof. I argue that we should understand the changing factors behind the way in which Czech Jews understood their Jewishness not as a reason to break the chronology, but as a rationale to reconsider the nature of the bonds of belonging among Czech Jews.

The central category of analysis for this undertaking would traditionally be ‘identity’.² Yet identity has various meanings, which denote very diverging matters. ‘Identity’ denotes both the external and internal ascriptions of self. It describes how one feels subjectively, how the individual relates to his or her group, and how the society, state and institutions perceive the individual, all at the same time. The quality of what we would call ‘Jewish identity’ depends on the meaning that is at play. In order to grasp the factors behind its emergence, we must disentangle this term.

Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have pointed out the constructedness of ‘identity’, a concept that both scholars and popular opinion like to see as axiomatic.³ They have suggested an analytical breakdown of ‘identity’ into several sub-categories.⁴ The first sub-category includes *identification* and *categorization*, which describes the state and institutional perception of people. *Categorization* is a symbolic, yet powerful force of the state as well as organizational work that enables bureaucracies, schools and institutions to function. The second sub-category covers *social location* and *self-understanding*. *Social location* describes the sense of self, where one ‘is’, i.e. one’s position on the social field, per sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. *Self-understanding*, how one sees who one is, can change over time. Both *social location* and *self-understanding* are internal, subjective and individual perceptions of self. The third and last group of categories is *commonality*, *connectedness* and *groupness*. This is the emotionally charged sense of belonging to a distinctive group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from specified outsiders. While *commonality* describes sharing an attribute with others, and *connectedness* is a relational link to others, *groupness* surpasses both previous categories and frequently refers to a national sense of self. When a diffuse *self-understanding* as a member of a particular nation crystallizes into a strongly bounded sense of *groupness*, this is likely to depend not on relational connectedness, but rather on a powerfully imagined and strongly felt *commonality*, *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*, as defined by Max Weber. Although these differentiations may appear at a first look cumbersome, they are indispensable for an analytic approach to grasp the loyalties, self-understanding and networks of Czech Jews.

¹This lacuna stands in contrast with the historiography of East European Jewry; see Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); idem, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006); Anna Cichopek-Gajraj, *Beyond Violence: Jewish Survivors in Poland and Slovakia, 1944-48* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²For example, Livia Rothkirchen, *Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln, Nebraska & Jerusalem: University of Nebraska Press & Yad Vashem, 2005), 20 and the overall conceptualization in Kateřina Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé? Národní identita židů v Čechách, 1918–1938* (Prague: Paseka, 2005); see also the English translation of her book, *Czechs, Germans, Jews? National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia*, translated by Derek and Marzia Paton (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

³Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity.” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 27.

⁴Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 1–47.

The various meanings of identity have been understood both as a category of praxis and as a category of analysis, similar to other charged terms, such as ‘assimilation’ or ‘collaboration’. Instead of asserting the concept as a category of praxis (namely that such-and-such belonging would be good or bad), I analyze the bonds of belonging as a category of analysis. In his examination of the charged history of the ‘assimilation’, Till van Rahden cites the scholar of German Jewry Michael A. Meyer. According to Meyer, the role of the historian is to understand ‘the complexities, ironies, [and] paradoxes’.⁵ It is not my goal to ironize or heroize the paths of Czech Jews, in whatever ways, stable or changing, they understood their Jewishness. The task of this essay is to ascertain the factors that defined their belonging and hence also contribute to our understanding of the sense of belonging.

In my analysis of Czech Jewish understanding of Jewishness, I concentrate on the generation born after 1910, who was socialized in interwar Czechoslovakia. The core of my sources are various self-testimonies of Czech Jews, both of those who survived and those who perished: oral histories from the large collection of the Prague Jewish Museum and interviews from the 1960s and 1970s by the Terezín Memorial, but also interviews from other projects such as that of The Prague Gender Studies Center. I also use documents from private collections, contemporaneous diaries, letters and memoirs written in the 1990s. In her analysis of survivors’ interviews, the historian Ulrike Jureit shows how the postwar social environment massively shaped survivors’ narratives.⁶ Religious and/or cultural affiliation is integral to the self-fashioning of coherent biographies. We are prone to take this affiliation as ephemeral and private, but we also like to believe that it is a matter of individual choice.

Before the war, there were some 140,000 Jews living in the Bohemian provinces of Czechoslovakia.⁷ There was a bilingual, Czech-German community, in transition toward the Czech language and Czech gentile culture.⁸ The community was mostly urban, but a sizeable number of Jews lived in smaller cities and towns. These people, particularly Bohemian Jews from the countryside and of the generation born after 1900, who did not come from the Western or Northern areas with large Sudeten German population, were more prone to speak Czech. Indeed, among the generation born in the interbellum period, many people did not speak German well.⁹ Yet, those for whom German was their first language usually had very good command of Czech. The overwhelming majority of Czech Jews was assimilated, and most of them were religiously liberal, even lax.¹⁰ This attitude corresponded with the substantial Czech, and particularly Bohemian, gentile indifference to religion.¹¹ The rate of intermarriage was the highest in the entire world; by 1930, every second marriage of a Jew in Bohemia was to a gentile.¹²

⁵Till van Rahden, “Verrat, Schicksal oder Chance: Lesarten des Assimilationsbegriffs in der Historiographie zur Geschichte der deutschen Juden.” *Historische Anthropologie* 13 (2005): 245–264, 264.

⁶Ulrike Jureit, *Erinnerungsmuster: Zur Methodik lebensgeschichtlicher Interviews mit Überlebenden der Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1999).

⁷This passage follows the biographic information from the sources (interviews, testimonies, diaries) I have been using, as well as Franz Friedmann, *Einige Zahlen über die tschechoslovakischen Juden: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der Judenheit* (Prague: Barissia, 1933); Čapková, *Češi, Němci, Židé?*; Tatjana Lichtenstein, *Making Jews at Home: Jewish Nationalism in the Bohemian Lands, 1918–1938*, Ph.D. University of Toronto, 2009.

⁸In the following, by ‘Czech Jews’ I mean people marked by Nuremberg laws as Jews who by 1933 lived in Bohemia, Moravia or Silesia (hence not German or Austrian refugees).

⁹Bedřich Hoffenreich, APT, sbírka vzpomínek, 1095.

¹⁰For a critical discussion of the concept of assimilation, see Van Rahden, *Verrat, Schicksal oder Chance*.

¹¹Zdeněk Nešpor, “Der Wandel der tschechischen (Nicht-)Religiosität im 20. Jahrhundert im Lichte soziologischer Forschungen.” *Historisches Jahrbuch* (129, 2009): 501–532.

¹²Friedmann, *Einige Zahlen über die tschechoslovakischen Juden*. The second largest intermarried Jewish group were Italian Jews with ca 44% of intermarriages, Joshua Zimmerman, Introduction, in: Zimmermann,

A small, yet significant group were, in actuality, Christians – Catholics, Protestants or Husites – often baptized two generations earlier. Many others were atheists. Many Jewish males were not even circumcised. That said, the majority of the Czech Jews belonged to the Jewish community, most of the children attended Jewish religion classes in school, just like their Catholic classmates took classes with a Catholic priest, and families attended the synagogue on high holidays. Socially speaking, Czech Jews, particularly the younger generation, were integrated into society at large and had gentile friends, colleagues and romantic relationships.¹³ The connection with Jewishness was just one of the many layers of who one was, a private and subtle sense of self. In Brubaker and Cooper's model, the Czech Jewish tie with Jewishness was exhibited in the form of self-understanding as a weak sense of commonality.

In Terezín

As the general history of Terezín, or Theresienstadt in German, is well-known, this essay focuses on a few core facts crucial to the article's overall argument. Terezín was founded in November 1941 as a transit camp for Jews of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Later, when German and Austrian Jews arrived, its function changed into that of a ghetto for the elderly and a 'camp for the privileged'. Later still, the SS fashioned Terezín into a propaganda camp to be shown to an international delegation of the Red Cross. While this aspect dominates public perception, what is ignored, however, is the rather minor impact that the Red Cross visit and the subsequent propaganda film had on daily life in the ghetto. Prisoners died of malnutrition, were surrounded by dirt and vermin, and lived with the ever-present threat of deportation to the East, which they feared to be deadly. Over 33,000 people died in Terezín of diseases related to malnutrition, the majority of them elderly.

Altogether 148,000 Jews were transported to Terezín, of whom almost 74,000 came from the Protectorate, over 42,000 from Germany and over 15,000 from Austria. These 'large' groups were joined by smaller groups of Jews from the Netherlands (4900), Denmark (471) and, toward the end of the war, also Slovakia and Hungary (1450 and 1150, respectively). Families lived separated, men and women in different rooms with bunk beds for 8–200 inhabitants. Most children were accommodated in Czech and German-language youth homes. Theresienstadt fell under the administration of the SS, but with only 30 members present, the SS was thinly represented, so Czech gendarmes did the actual guarding.

The ghetto had a Jewish body of self-administration, a combination of individuals of different 'national' (Czech, German, Austrian and among others) and 'ideological' (Zionists and Czecho-Jewish) streams. This body created a complicated system of departments in charge of every single branch of life in the ghetto. In this respect, Terezín was rather over than underorganized. Unlike Lodz and other places, Terezín never became a labor ghetto. Due to the run-down conditions of the town and high percentage of elderly, 90% of the labor was used to maintain the town's infrastructure.¹⁴ There was general labor duty for everyone between 16 and 60 years of age, though these age boundaries shifted throughout the duration of the ghetto.

ed., *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 4, suggesting that the level of assimilation of the local Jewry was also an important factor.

¹³For instance, the kosher butcher and charcutier Rudolf Benda who owned a shop in Prague's central street Pařížská had three children: Bohumil, Růžena and Ludmila. All three children were given markedly Czech first names. Both daughters intermarried, Bohumil was engaged to a gentile woman, but deported before the marriage. Benda family police registration files, National Archive, Prague and the interview of Ota K., 103 Vzpomínky, Jewish Museum Prague [hereafter ŽMP]. Thanks to Zdeňka Kokošková for her help.

¹⁴Miroslav Kárný, "'Pracovní' či 'zaopatřovací' Terezín? Iluze areality tzv. produktivního ghetta." *Litoměřicko* 25 (1989): 95–107.

Czech Jews were the first to be deported to the ghetto and were the pioneer group thanks to their arrival seven months ahead of other groups. They were also the largest group in the ghetto and the only one with a sizeable young and middle-aged population as the group of Czech Jews was the only one deported to Terezín in its entirety. The later arrivals – German, Austrian, Dutch and other Jews – often perceived the Czech Jews to be a homogeneous group and remarked on their shared characteristics, looks and cultural traits.¹⁵

From their own perspective, however, Czech Jews formed a highly fragmented group. Apart from strong generational differences, the most pronounced category of differentiation was ideological distinctions partly dating back to the interwar period. These distinctions corresponded to the lines of connectedness (networks of social ties) and commonalities defined by the sense of home. Czech Jews in Terezín were segmented based on their perceptions of loyalties and the places of belonging of their peers, other Czech Jews, but also based on their individual friends and their loyalties. This segmentation was at first horizontal and did not take into consideration one's position within the social hierarchy, but its many consequences often had vertical implications. Whereas in the prewar period, allegiances did not influence one's social position, or at least not directly, in Terezín, association with particular groups played a part in determining an inmate's social location and social and symbolic capital. One's friends then shaped the access to social networks and the way in which one was perceived among the community of inmates. In Terezín, the importance of connectedness increased significantly. What may have been, prior to the war, a protean part of who one was, often only a weak commonality, became, in the ghetto, a more salient statement on the individual's social position. Outside of Terezín, in the 'normal' world, bonds of belonging among Czech Jews were a private matter; they only rarely influenced their lives and careers. In Terezín, the gentile majority was obviously absent, and connectedness to one of the three major groups affected one's access to resources.

The Terezín community, and its social elite of young Czech Jews in particular, functioned in conjunction with a previously established network of acquaintances, friendships and affiliation to a group or groups. The networks were created through normal friendships, but, on a larger scale, more often by affiliation with the 'ideological' groups. In Terezín, one's friends and group signified much more than a statement on friendship and ideological background. The three main segments of Czech Jews – Zionists, Czecho-Jews (Čechožidé in Czech; term describing Jews who sought to integrate into the Czech majority which I prefer to the more charged 'assimilationists') and Communists – who together constituted the social elite of young Czech Jews, secured the best positions and the most power in the ghetto.

Belonging to a group thus represented not only a common ground, shared ideas and cultural values, but also a material statement. For example, a member of the leftist Zionist *Hechalutz* movement could expect to be placed on a list of people protected from transports, to be assigned accommodation with other *chaverim* (comrades), and to obtain what was considered to be a good work assignment, for example, as a cook or worker in the agricultural sector.¹⁶ In contrast to the 'material world' of social networks I have examined in other works, here I

¹⁵Anna Hájková, "Mutmaßungen über deutsche Juden: Alte Menschen aus Deutschland im Theresienstadttäter Ghetto," *Alltag im Holocaust: Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941–1945*, eds. Doris Bergen, Andrea Löw, and Anna Hájková (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013): 179–198, 196–197.

¹⁶Gonda Redlich's diary, entry for 11 February 1942, Egon Redlich, *Zitra jedeme, synu, pojedeme transportem: Deník Egona Redlicha z Terezína 1.1.1942–22.10.1944*, ed. by Miroslav Kryl (Brno: Doplněk, 1995); interview Pavel O., 111, Vzpomínky, ŽMP; communication Šimon Kolský (pseudonym) to the author, Haifa, 16 January 2009.

focus on the ‘inner’, ideological world of the three major segments of Czech Jews found in Terezín.¹⁷

The Zionists were the hegemonic group in the ghetto for two reasons: for one, the Zionists had a well-developed youth movement that had already become popular among Jewish youth in the interbellum period. From the onset of the German occupation, the Zionist group was the only one that provided leisure time activities for Jewish youth, thus securing a monopoly of sorts. Second, the first Elder of the Jews in Terezín and his team were all Zionists, and this gave the Zionist faction strong advantages. For example, for the entire duration of the ghetto the youth care and the labor center remained under strong Zionist influence.

Being a Zionist in Terezín referred, above all, to having been educated with the goal of living a Zionist lifestyle in the future Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionists held discussions about topics such as the differences between socialism and Zionism, about collective agriculture or the meaning of capitalism. They organized Hebrew classes and lectures on Zionist role models such as Joseph Trumpeldor. Children in the youth homes were raised to be what the Czech Zionists believed a Jewish child should be. Much of this Zionist education was compartmentalized knowledge and opinions. Evidence of homework that survived the Holocaust of youth home residents makes a somewhat schematic impression, a recitation of an idealized Zionist world.¹⁸ Indeed, several survivors remarked on the somewhat doctrinaire character of the Zionist education in Terezín.

It is not entirely surprising that with this education, children in the youth homes were sometimes more confused than informed and drew the wrong conclusions. One young *madricha* (instructor), Irena, remembered her pupils putting on a show presenting countries of the world. For Poland, they were instructed to present the introduction of a new rabbi:

They staged it, kept bowing and singing. They gave him the task to sing the main prayer and then he sang, completely out of tune, *Baruch atah adonai* ... They kept bowing, it was simply a burlesque. Then they told him, ‘But, brother, you have to sing to a melody known to God and the people.’ And then the boy, he started singing to the melody of a German tune sung often in Terezín, *Es klappen die Mühlen* [sic, *Es klappert die Mühle*]. So he started singing that *Baruch atah adonai* to this tune and they kept bowing and saying “Klip klap”.¹⁹

Irena received grief from her superior, Avi Fischer, that she had allowed such a mix-up. Fischer worried about criticism of the leadership of the youth care, had an inspector been present.

The anecdote has an additional layer: Irena did not know then nor in the 1990s when she narrated the incident that *Die Mühle* is a romantic children’s song by Carl Reinecke appropriated by the *völkisch* movement in the late nineteenth century. The children, similarly ignorant of the tune’s etymology, picked the melody because of its catchy nature. It is not clear whether Fischer reprimanded Irena because of the mix-up of deeply religious content and a German tune or whether he was aware of the song’s associations. The pupils did not care; for them, the play was a game, and

¹⁷Anna Hájková, “Die fabelhaften Jungs aus Terezín: Junge tschechische Männer als dominante soziale Elite im Theresienstädter Ghetto,” *Im Ghetto: Neue Forschungen zu Alltag und Umfeld* (Beiträge zur Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus, 25), ed. by Christoph Dieckmann and Babette Quinkert, 2009, 116–135.

¹⁸See the homework of Maud Stecklmacherová, 3534, O33, Yad Vashem Archives [hereafter YVA].

¹⁹“Protože oni za Polsko prováděli přijímání nového rabína. A to bylo tak, že oni se tam neustále klaněli a furt zpívali. A dali mu za úkol, aby zazpíval hlavní modlitbu a on to zpíval zcela falešně Boruch ato adonaj ... Ted’ oni se tam furt klaněli – no prostě fraška. Načež mu řekli: ‘Ale, bratře, zpívej přece melodii známou bohu i lidem.’ A ten kluk prostě, on byl takový německý šlágr, v Terezíně zpívaný, *Es klappen die Mühlen*. Takže on to Boruch ato adonaj začal zpívat na tuhleto melodii a oni se klaněli a říkali: ‘Klip klap.’” Irena S., 407, Vzpomínky, ŽMP.

the way in which they treated the very essence of Jewish prayers demonstrates that what they were taught about Judaism and Zionist identity did not always leave deeper marks.

Zionists regarded Terezín as a kibbutz or a *hachshara*, a scouting camp of sorts where diaspora Jews, through hardships, would toughen up and survive in order to make *aliyah*.²⁰ Today this understanding may appear naïve, even disturbing, knowing what we do about the dimension of the Holocaust and the small number of survivors from Terezín. However, it is more interesting to trace why the Zionists had such a strong appeal beyond the structural reasons: they offered a positive interpretation of the sense of self and assisted Jews experiencing their social death (a concept established by Orlando Patterson and later applied to the Holocaust by Marion Kaplan) to find a positive relationship with the persecuted group with whom many would otherwise find no commonality.²¹ The Zionists in Terezín offered a viable alternative. Their rituals of singing and Hebrew learning, discussions and religious rites, even if understood in a national and not a religious sense, and visions of a future in a different country were instrumental in establishing a tight-knit community.²² For many inmates, this set of practices was an establishment of a territory of self (to use a concept of Erving Goffman's), a positive world outside of the suffering, everlasting conflicts, hunger and transports to the unknown.²³

Finally, the Zionists, just like the other two large groups – Czecho-Jews and Communists – were also a community. It was so much easier to manage being in a ghetto when one belonged to a body, especially one as tight-knit as the Zionists in Terezín.²⁴ This coherence is not surprising when we take into account that, generally, rituals are a powerful mechanism of inclusion and/or exclusion. Indeed, the rituals employed by the Czech Zionist group were probably the strongest in the ghetto.

In addition to the Czech Zionists, who were, by far, the largest Zionist group, there were also smaller groups of Zionist youth from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. The Czech Zionist segment never welcomed these 'foreign' newcomers. There were a few instances in which Austrian or German colleagues – many of whom the Zionist functionaries knew from the time before the deportation – gave a talk, which the Czech Zionists attended often enough.²⁵ But the Austrian, German and Dutch Zionists usually found Czech Zionists to be a closed group.²⁶ The Czech Zionists did not recognize Zionists of other nationalities as fellow comrades; to them, they were mostly 'the Germans', 'the Austrians' and generally 'foreigners', whom the Czech Jews

²⁰Interview Hanuš S., 166, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

²¹Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1985); Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²²Irena S. stressed that the Hebrew classes had a more ritual character—hardly anyone in Terezín learned anything beyond the alphabet and a few songs. I. S., 407, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP. See also diary of Gonda Redlich, entry for 10 October 1942.

²³Interview Hanuš S., 166, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP; on S.'s activity in Hechalutz in Terezín, cf. his report to the Budapest Magyarországi Cionista Szövetség Hasomér Hacair, 3 May 1945, Beit Terezín Archives [hereafter BTA], Nr. 585; correspondence of Věra Silbingerová (who later married Hanuš S.) with Zeev Scheck (1945–1946), 132, BTA. For territory of self, see Erving Goffman, "Territories of Self," in Goffman, *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Maja Suderland applied the concept for the concentration camps: *Territorien des Selbst: Kulturelle Identität als Ressource für das tägliche Überleben im Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2004).

²⁴Interview Willy G., 82, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

²⁵Beate Meyer's interview of Trude Simonsohn (née Guttmannová), 9 April 2003, private archive Beate Meyer. I should like to thank Beate Meyer for sharing the interview. Interview Petr Lang (22 July 1965), ICJ OHD, 34, 3.

²⁶Eva Fränkel, YVA, O33, 913; also her telephone interview with the author, April 2001; author's interview of Leo Säbel, 22 January 2010, Charlottenlund.

viewed through a set of mostly derogatory stereotypes. German Jews were perceived as apprehensive, annoying and rigid Prussians, sticking to the rules and trying to please the SS. Karel Poláček, the much-beloved Czech Jewish novelist, expressed such an opinion in a lecture in 1944, 'Germans and the German Jews whom they educated do not talk but they order; they do not walk but they march; Prussian grandmothers are better in standing in a line-up than our active soldiers'.²⁷

Ethnic boundaries were often expressed in cultural terms and vice versa. Those 'foreign' prisoners who managed to surpass the group boundaries were women dating Czech men. They were usually described as sweet, markedly feminine, attractive women, who were taken care of by their strong partners who knew their way around. The women were typically expected to join their Czech partner's circle of friends and learn some Czech, at least. Some men, especially when their partners were not very young, pushed the women into becoming intimate or made the sexual dimension of the relationship prominent. Inclusion in the socially dominant group corresponded with social categories, which were negotiated based on cultural and sexual background. Thus the ideological similarities, the claimed Zionist commonality, did not overcome the ethical/cultural boundaries and did not create a transnational Zionist connectedness in the ghetto. Being a Zionist in Terezín always depended on one's respective ethnicity. Common ideology was not enough to connect people; belonging was enacted on a common ground of culture and habitus.

Communists were another group with their own pre-war tradition of organization and association life. However, they were never able to appeal to Czech Jewish youth in the way that Communists had in Germany, Austria or Poland, simply because the class background of Czech Jews was, in their majority, too comfortably middle-class. Those young Czech Jews associated with the Communist organizations, such as the student organization *Kostufra* (Communist student faction) in the 1930s, were a small group of young, leftist and educated intellectuals. Although the appeal of radicalization along with the exposure became stronger after the occupation, Communists in Terezín never succeeded in becoming as popular as Zionists. Due to their connections to the illegal Communist resistance movement outside of the ghetto, they were more secretive and selective than the Zionists and tight-knit in different ways.²⁸

Similar to the Zionist faction, Communists employed a series of rituals: they met for discussions, debating how independent postwar Czechoslovakia would look and how to eliminate social injustice, fascism and racial hatred, phenomena which they understood to be interconnected. They smuggled in *Rudé právo*, a communist newspaper published illegally, and engaged in a discussion group of crucial Marxist works of literature, such as *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, written by Lenin and heavily re-edited by Stalin. Some of the leading members, always men, got carried away at times. They spoke of the Communist struggle against the fascist oppressor, forgetting that their situation was different, as they were persecuted for racial reasons and locked up in a ghetto, unlike their fellow Communists outside.²⁹

At one point, the radical-left wing of the Zionists, the Marxist *Hashomer Hatzair*, started cooperating with a segment of the Communist group. Among other things, two members of *Hashomer Hatzair*, Miloš Pick, a young Communist with a background in national economy and Pavel Löwinger, a teenage Zionist from Ostrava, who spoke several languages, spent over a year translating a Yiddish copy of *Capital* into Czech, the only copy present in Terezín.

²⁷The story is cited by Jiří Borský who attended Poláček's lecture, BTA, 66.

²⁸For instance, widow of the famous murdered Communist Ivan Sekanina, Gertruda Sekaninová, was kept at a distance from the group's core political activities. Interview Miroslav K., ŽMP, Vzpomínky, 328; interview of Gertruda Sekaninová-Čakrtová, 24 July 1985, family archive. I am greatly indebted to Martin Čakrt for letting me listen to the tape.

²⁹Interview Erna F., 125, ŽMP; author's interview of Irena Seidlerová, 26 January 2013, Prague.

When they were nearly done, they were deported with the large autumn transports of 1944.³⁰ The Communists in Terezín had a stronger ideological background than others in the ghetto, save for their political counterparts. Reading Marxist literature, self-study, and improvement was understood to be an integral part of being a good Communist. Engaging in these activities was a means to an end. For some of the ardent Communists, in addition to being a framework of interpretation, ideology offered a safe territory in the threatening conditions of the ghetto. But even more so, ideologically charged activities were a means of demarcation from the other inmates. Hence translating a Yiddish version of *Capital* into Czech, which may seem like a pursuit particularly out of touch with reality, was very much a part of the dynamic among Czech Jews in Terezín.³¹

Hashomer Hatzair and the Communists also had joint discussion evenings, where they debated the similarities between both movements and the future of the Jews. Certain differences apparently proved insurmountable; for instance, the Communists never agreed with the notion of an independent Jewish state. More relevant, however, is that these discussions showed the thin lines between both groups. Several people felt at home in both groups and had friends in both. Many of the young, leftist inmates moved in the political space between the Communists and *Hashomer Hatzair*.³² After the German occupation of Czechoslovakia, many among the leftist Zionists shifted toward the Communist group, whether before the deportation or in Terezín.³³ In their testimonies, many of the Communist prisoners, like the Zionists, stressed the importance of having belonged to a community, to a group of friends who took care of them in the threatening environment.

Czecho-Jews formed the least coherent group of these three. The average age of its members was somewhat older than the previous two. However, despite the vagueness of the group's boundaries, it may have contained as many members as the Zionist group did and possibly even more. Unlike the two former groups, the Czecho-Jews did not have a significant ideological program of their own. Most of these were people who were not persuaded by the Zionist appeal and 'did not want to leave for a desert'.³⁴ Conversely, due to their class background, professional experience and age, most of them were not receptive to leftist ideas. Indeed, many of these people had not thought much about their commonality with Jewishness, nor about any ethnic commonality in general.³⁵ Being deported from their original surroundings and forced to reside in a ghetto meant for them, most importantly, missing home.

³⁰Miloš Pick, *Přes Acherón zpátky to šlo hůř: Opožděná zpověď' vnučatům* (Litomyšl: Augusta, 1997); Eva Štichová gave a different version of the story, according to which it was herself and her husband Heřman Steiner who translated the first part of the German copy of *Capital* into Czech. Testimony of Eva Štichová (15 June, 1972), A, Terezín Memorial Archives (hereafter APT).

³¹Finally, the tale offers an interesting footnote of Western and Eastern Jewish encounter in Terezín, the only ghetto with a majority of assimilated Western Jews.

³²In the contemporary jargon, such people were called 'amphibians'. Miloš Hájek to the author, 6 December 2012. Today, historiography refers to ethnically instable or indifferent inhabitants of the Czech countries as 'amphibians'. Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped souls: National indifference and the battle for children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) and also Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi rule and Czech nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

³³For the former: Erna Friesová and Jany Lebovič: Alena Hájková, "Die sieben Tapferen," *Theresienstadt in der "Endlösung der Judenfrage"* ed. by Miroslav Kárný, Vojtěch Blodig, and Margita Kárná (Prague: Logos, 1992): 202–212; for the latter: Karel B., 133, ŽMP.

³⁴Testimony of Jiří Borský (1970), 476, A, APT.

³⁵For ethnic indifference of the Czech population in this time, see Zahra, *Kidnapped souls* and Bryant, *Prague in Black*.

This homesickness translated into the appearance and evocation of all sorts of Czech rituals and symbols. For instance, several inmates cut little wood lions, which were very popular, as a double-tailed lion is the Bohemian coat of arms.³⁶ During the Christmas season, some read aloud from the Bible of Kralice, the sixteenth century Bohemian Brethrens' translation of the Bible, prominent in its associations of being anti-Habsburg and pro-Masaryk-Czechoslovakia. Reading the Bible of Kralice situated Terezín in the master narrative of the Czech national struggle, as another example in line with the 'centuries of the Habsburg oppression'. Most of the Czech Jews – not only the Czecho-Jews, but nearly all Czech inmates – in Terezín celebrated Christmas, Easter and St. Nicholas' Day, as well as the birthday of Tomáš Masaryk, the first president of interwar Czechoslovakia, on 7 March. These holidays played a much more emotional role than Passover and Yom Kippur, though these were observed, too. Czech inmates sang songs from the Liberated Theatre, the independent modernist theatre of Jan Werich and Jiří Voskovec. The first child born in Terezín, like many boys after him, was named Tomáš after Masaryk. Some kept a map of Czechoslovakia on the wall and wrote underneath, 'Byli jsme a budem, přišli jsme a půjdem' (We were and we shall be, we came and we shall return), echoing a poem by popular Czech poet Josef Sládek.³⁷ Josef Bor, the Czech Jewish writer who later authored the famous *Terezín Requiem*, remarked on the many cultural events and activities of the Czech Jews: 'Terezín was the culmination of the Czech national independence fight'.³⁸

The Czecho-Jewish faction had a number of organized functionaries. These were people organized around Rudolf Bergmann, František Weidmann and the former members of the *Akademický spolek Kapper* (Academic Club Kapper), an association of proponents of Czech Jewish assimilation.³⁹ According to one of its members, František Fuchs, the group had been preparing armed resistance and a hide-out for women and children. Moreover, many among the hundreds of former Czechoslovak army officers in Terezín were close to the Czecho-Jewish movement. Some of them participated in the planning of an uprising. However, the SS, anticipating resistance, ordered a registration of all former officers in mid-July 1944.⁴⁰ They were then placed into the first two transports that started the liquidation transports in the fall of 1944.⁴¹

This dramatic episode, however, remained known to only a fraction of the Czecho-Jewish group in Terezín. Indeed, many of the people affiliated did not even know about the existence of such a severe organization.⁴² Among the three groups mentioned, the boundaries of this group were the most fluid, given that they were marked by shared cultural values of what was understood as a Czech home.

These three groups frequently fought with one another, whether over the assignation of work positions or names on a transport list or over accommodation allotment. One group frequently blamed another for putting its members in a disadvantageous position, such as filling the

³⁶Jaroslav B., 64, ŽMP, Vzpomínky.

³⁷Testimony of Jiří Borský (1970), 476, A, APT. The last word of the inscription, půjdem [we will go], refers to the return home rather than leaving on a transport, endowing the slogan with a heroic rather than an ironic note.

³⁸Bor, *Stručný přehled o českožidovské organisaci v Terezíně*.

³⁹František Fuchs, "Die tschechisch-jüdische Widerstandsbewegung in Theresienstadt." *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (1997): 141–156; for the Kapper association, see Jiří Křesťan, Alexandra Blodigová, and Jaroslav Bubeník, *Židovské spolky v českých zemích v letech 1918–1948* (Prague: Sefer, 2001).

⁴⁰Mitteilungen der Jüdischen Selbstverwaltung, nr. 30, 22 July 1944, Anna Hyndráková, Raisa Machatková, and Jaroslava Milotová, *Denní rozkazy Rady starších a Sdělení židovské samosprávy Terezín 1941–1945* (Prague: Sefer, 2003), 453.

⁴¹Miroslav Kárný, "Die Theresienstädter Herbsttransporte 1944." *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (1995): 7–37.

⁴²Bor, "Stručný přehled o českožidovské organisaci v Terezíně."

transports with members of the other groups. For instance, Josef Bor accused the Zionist administration for decimating the Kolín transports. Only few younger Jews of Kolín stayed longer in Terezín; many of them were deported to the East within a week or two after their arrival.⁴³ Kolín, an old Czech Jewish community, was well-known for the Czecho-Jewish association of most of its members. But Bor may have been mistaken: many of the transports that arrived in Terezín from smaller cities almost automatically filled the next departing transport for the East. The brief stay of the Kolín Jews was not necessarily the Zionists saving their own. However, this impression quickly came into being and stuck.

Sometimes, two groups did collaborate, such as when the leftist Zionists and the Communists translated Marx. At a different point, the Communists and the Czecho-Jews attempted to drive a wedge into the tightly organized youth care, which was entirely in Zionist hands, to ensure that ‘their’ children would not become subject to Zionist propaganda.

There were many people who did not belong to one of the three mentioned groups. Usually these were elderly and German-speaking Czech (*böhmisch*) Jews or parents with children. In contrast, in Terezín, many young people underwent their political awakening or radicalization, while the elderly, especially if they had to take care of a family, often became apolitical.⁴⁴ For this group, everyday needs, such as finding food, clothing, holding the family together, were far more pressing than ideological issues. This position is exemplified in a diary entry by 55-year-old Bedřich Kohn from Prague:

There is nothing new, only ‘průser.’ [Czech colloq. something that went very wrong] Otherwise, politically inside the ghetto the mood is quite wretched, the Czecho-Jews against the German Jews against the Zionists and contra and Zionists among themselves. If you ask someone for something, they only help you if you belong to the same ‘party,’ otherwise all pleas are in vain – unless you can pay. How can so many differences, injustices and indecencies be possible in a Ghetto!⁴⁵

Some proclaimed, ‘When this is over, we will have to cut off all things Jewish’.⁴⁶ Even though most Czech Jews did not go that far, many expressed doubts about whether a group that had always been a minority would fare well when it became the exclusive group. A former high school teacher, remembered as Professor Polák (who was probably Artur Pollak of the Stephansgymnasium in Prague), stated, ‘Our people are the salt of this earth. But so much salt at once?’⁴⁷

Yet others realized that the Jews, a perpetual minority who ‘always had to pay attention to not waking antisemitic resentments’, had come to a place where they were among themselves. Now they could and did behave as a ‘normal’ society, with all the ups and downs of a forced community under extreme stress. Thus, arriving in Terezín because they were Jewish, many realized that Terezín made them, in the last instance, human rather than Jewish.

Postwar

Once the war was over, few of those Czech Jews who had been deported to Terezín were still alive: only 10,818 of over 81,000. About 3000 of them returned from the satellite camps in

⁴³Database of the Terezín prisoners, Terezín Initiative Institute.

⁴⁴Testimony of Růžena Ranschburgerová, 579, A, APT.

⁴⁵Entry for 5 June 1943, diary Bedřich Kohn, 11981, A, APT. “Neues gibt es nichts, nur ‘průser.’ Sonst innenpolitisch ist die Stimmung auch mies genug, čecho-Juden gegen deutsch-Juden gegen Zionisten und contra und Zionisten noch untereinander. Wenn man etwas erbittet, wird es nur erledigt, wenn man derselben ‘Partei’ angehört sonst alle Bitten umsonst – wenn man es nicht bezahlen kann. Warum sind in einem Ghetto nur so viele Unterschiede, Ungerechtigkeiten und Unanständigkeiten möglich!”

⁴⁶Entry for 25 October 1943, diary Arnošt Klein, 324, collection Terezín, ŽMP.

⁴⁷Interview Irena S.

what is today Poland, Germany and Austria where they had been shipped from Auschwitz. Some managed to flee and hide during the last months of the war. The liberation was followed by three hectic postwar years before the Communist takeover in February 1948. These three years were shaped by a number of factors influencing the survivors' decision to stay or emigrate to somewhere else.

As for the hard numbers, we have some rough estimations of the number of people who emigrated, when and where.⁴⁸ However, we do not know how many of the emigrants were survivors, re-emigrants returning after the liberation, soldiers from the Svoboda Army or others still. Also, these numbers do not differentiate between Czech, Slovak, Hungarian and Carpatho-Russian Jews. The latter groups often settled in the western part of the country after 1945. Thus, numbers are not always equally reliable. Here I am interested in looking at the factors that influenced the Terezín survivors in their decision regarding where to settle and build their future.

The four most important 'external' factors in the decision to stay in Czechoslovakia or to leave were probably: (1) the expulsion of the German population and the difficulty of obtaining Czechoslovak citizenship for those who had indicated 'German' as their nationality in the census of 1930; (2) the rise of the Communist party; (3) the nationalized and xenophobic sentiment among gentile Czechs and (4) the draft into military service for all young men.⁴⁹ The four crucial 'internal' factors were: (1) age; (2) whether the survivor had relatives or close friends abroad or in Czechoslovakia, gentile or Jewish; (3) marital partner and marriage and finally, (4) ideological affiliation. In the following, I argue that these seemingly clear reasons to stay or emigrate, in connection with the beliefs these people held before the war and in Terezín, affected the survivors in a myriad of ways.

People who survived rarely returned with a clear vision of their future and a meaningful sense of their Holocaust experience. The overwhelming majority returned to the place from which they had been deported and waited for any of their relatives to come back.⁵⁰ In the distressing period after having experienced their own social death, as well as witnessing the death of many fellow prisoners in the last months of the war, and the exhaustion, filth and extreme violence, many clung to something positive and a new permanent affirmative value. Yet many other survivors did not want to return to where they had lived with their loved ones, who would never return. They wanted to turn a new page, to leave the continent which, as they believed, had made racial hatred and the Holocaust possible. So they left, some of them for a country 'where Jews would be safe' (Palestine) or where they could start beyond their Jewish roots, thus leaving Europe for another continent, most often Northern America.

Crossing the border on the way back from the camps was a powerful emotional experience that made clear for many that although they probably did not have any family left, they had deep cultural ties to Czechoslovakia. Doris Donovalová remembered her return from Bergen-Belsen as follows:

We were finally getting close to the Czechoslovak border. Just before reaching it, we took a break and went into a restaurant, where we got something to eat. One of the girls sat down at a piano in the room

⁴⁸Petr Sedlák, "Židé v českých zemích v letech 1945–1949," *Terezínské studie a dokumenty* (2008): 13–45.

⁴⁹On draft in postwar Czechoslovakia, see Jiří Bílek, Jaroslav Lánik and Jan Šach, *Československá armáda v prvním poválečném desetiletí, květen 1945 – květen 1955* (Prague: Ministerstvo obrany České republiky, 2006). Thanks to Dagmar Hájková for drawing my attention to this book.

⁵⁰For an illuminating overview of the women's survivors situation, see Christa Schikorra, "Rückkehr in eine sich neu konstituierende Gesellschaft: Jüdische Remigrantinnen in der Tschechoslowakei," *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (2006): 364–398.

and started playing the Czechoslovak anthem. It was so moving; I can still feel it to this day. Home is the most beautiful thing anyone can have. And I loved Czechoslovakia.⁵¹

Once the survivors arrived in Czechoslovakia proper, they started settling down, regardless of whether they eventually planned to leave or stay or whether, as was often the case, they did not have any plans. They applied for new identity papers, social support, clothes, accommodation and food. Many had to spend a long time in hospitals and sanatoria. Younger survivors often enrolled in high schools or at the university in order to finish their education. These provisorias often developed into something permanent; some met their future partners at school and realized they craved a family of their own. Soon they were married and had children. While some of these partners were Jewish or *Mischlinge*, many were gentile.

Single men under the age of 25 were drafted into service, which was shortened for the survivors, though they had to serve nevertheless. While, for some, the draft was a reason to emigrate,⁵² for others, it offered a possibility for resocialization and even a life-long career. Rudolf was one of only two surviving children from a large family. In January 1943, as a 16-year-old, he was deported to Auschwitz and from there to the concentration camp in Warsaw, where prisoners had to clean away the ruins of the former ghetto. Rudolf survived Warsaw, a long death-march to the Dachau auxiliary camp of Kaufering, and excruciating forced labor there. Serving in the military after the war offered him a place of belonging, a possibility of a steady income and a collective of friends and colleagues. Every time his contract was almost over, he was offered an extension, and so, summarizing 50 years later, he noted that ‘the army became my home’.⁵³

By and large, Czech Gentile society reacted with little patience or encouragement toward survivors. Postwar Czech society was highly nationalized and almost hysterically anti-German, celebrating its political prisoners and cherishing the myth of resistance.⁵⁴ Jews were a foreign body, and it was up to them to find a way to fit in.

Many survivors experienced repulsive antisemitic statements from both strangers and acquaintances. Perhaps most familiar is the motif of the returning survivor who approaches former neighbors or family friends, asking them to return the belongings they promised to harbor during the war. There are two main tropes: in one, the arrogant and/or cowardly gentile lies and refuses to return anything, hiding the Jewish china or the mink fur.⁵⁵ In the other, the survivor is welcomed by an honest and helpful family that shares whatever they have and gives to the narrator far more than he or she ever believed to be his or hers. In most accounts, this encounter is often cited as the decisive moment regarding whether to stay in Czechoslovakia or leave. Both scenarios took place; the former far more often than Czech historiography, let alone Czech public opinion, acknowledges to this day. My point here, however, is that individual perception was an important factor. For some people, the glass is half full; for others, it is half empty,

⁵¹“Konečně jsme se přiblížili k československým hranicím. Před hranicemi jsme si udělali zastávku a šli jsme do restaurace. Dostali jsme tam najíst. V lokále měli klavír. Jedna dívka si sedla ke klavíru a zahrála československou hymnu. Bylo to tak dojemné, že mě to dojíká ještě dnes. Domov je to nejkrásnější, co člověk může mít. A já jsem Československo milovala.” Doris Donovalová, interview by Pavla Frýdlová on 25 July 1994 in Kladno, archive Gender studies Prague. For a similar experience, see also Margita Kárná, “Očima vzpomínek.” (1982) *Tereziánské listy* 27 (1999): 100–110.

⁵²Bedřich T., 87, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

⁵³Interview of Rudolf R., 645, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

⁵⁴Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Peschel, *The Prosthetic Life*.

⁵⁵Josef Škvorecký described such an incident in a short story: “Fragments about Rebecca,” transl. Paul Wilson, in *When Eve was Naked* (New York: Picador, 2003 [1964]): 70–75.

an attitude that can be traced throughout the narratives.⁵⁶ Often enough, the survivors experienced both situations, but in their narratives, they stress only one of them. The decision to stay or to leave was also contingent on the character of the individual.

One fascinating phenomenon that took place in these early postwar years was the striving of survivors to settle in. Early postwar years in Czechoslovakia were marked by an enormous will to build up, to start afresh and to construct a new and better society without injustice, Germans, or fascism. It was difficult not to be a part of this reconstructionist zeal. The testimonies point to a surprising ability and a tendency to adapt, even when the person in question actually did not plan to stay. For instance, two of the leading Zionist functionaries in Theresienstadt, Hanuš and his fiancée, Věra Silbingerová, both planned to emigrate to Palestine. But as they pursued their studies, Věra and Hanuš started a romantic relationship, began to settle in, and eventually carved themselves a future in Czechoslovakia. Hanuš evolved from a fierce member of *Hashomer Hatzair* into a believing Communist.⁵⁷ Yet other Zionists did emigrate, most often people who did not continue their studies and remained solely within the Zionist circle in the Jewish community and at the Joint.⁵⁸

This predilection can be also demonstrated by the example of conflicts surrounding the issue of citizenship. As a part of the expulsion process, the Czechoslovak state dispossessed the Germans and Hungarians who had become citizens of Germany or Hungary of Czechoslovak citizenship. The decree explicitly stated that it did not apply to those who had always been loyal to the Czechoslovak state and had not engaged in crimes against the Czech people. However, Jews who, in the 1930 census, had opted for German nationality soon faced serious problems from the state authorities and had to fight for their citizenship. By 1946, the state issued an exception for Jews, but it was not always implemented; there were survivors who were expelled to Germany.⁵⁹ For many survivors, this blatant injustice became a reason to emigrate. Over a thousand of these ‘German Jews’ applied for emigration to Palestine and left.⁶⁰ But a sizable number of survivors took up the challenge and fought for their rights.⁶¹ The narratives suggest that this fighting for something that was actually theirs ironically created a permanent connection – fighting to keep Czechoslovak citizenship sometimes made the loyalties more binding. In the terms of Brubaker and Cooper, it transformed commonality to groupness and moved them from feeling a shared category to sharing a strong emotional tie to a state.

Indeed, many surviving Jews developed great flexibility or ability to adapt that was more of an automatic reaction than a deliberate choice. In the postwar anti-German hysteria in Czechoslovakia, most of the Jewish German speakers ceased to speak their native tongue, even at home.⁶² They did so not only to acquiesce the Czech surrounding, but also because the survivors often

⁵⁶For the ‘optimist’ vs. ‘skeptical’ view of the world, see the autobiographies of Miloš Pick (Communist, stayed in Czechoslovakia) and Ruth Bondy (Zionist, emigrated to Israel): Pick, *Přes Acherón zpátky*; Ruth Bondy, *Mehr Glück als Verstand: Eine Autobiographie* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1999).

⁵⁷Interview Věra S., 308, *Vzpomínky, ŽMP*; see also fn. 24.

⁵⁸Ruth Bondy or Zeev Scheck, for example: Bondy, *Mehr Glück*.

⁵⁹David Gerlach, “Juden in den Grenzgebieten: Minderheitenpolitik in den Böhmisches Ländern nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg,” *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (2008): 12–47; also interview of Lukáš Příbyl with anonymous, NY, email Lukáš Příbyl to the author, January 16, 2014.

⁶⁰Sedlák, *Židé v českých zemích v letech 1945–1949*. Many of the German-speaking Bohemian Jews emigrated elsewhere, for instance H.G. Adler emigrated to the UK: Adler to Franz Steiner, 7 January 1947, H.G. Adler papers, Franz Steiner section, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

⁶¹Interview Doris Donovalová; interview Jana Š., 555, *Vzpomínky, ŽMP*; Milan Kuna, *Dvůkrát zrozený: Život a dílo Karla Reinera* (Jinočany: H & H Vyšehradská, 2008).

⁶²Marietta Š., 105, *Vzpomínky, ŽMP*; varia postwar correspondence, Jana Šindelářová papers, personal archive Lenka Šindelářová. I should like to thank Lenka for sharing her family papers. Schindlers

shared these anti-German sentiments. Sometimes the spouses taught each other Czech, paying attention to each other's pronunciation mistakes; other times the Czech-speaking partner taught the German native speaker.

As part of the state's failed aim to expunge Germanic surnames and replace them with Czech versions,⁶³ many survivors decided to give up their German-sounding – and often typically Jewish – surnames. Thus Popper became Pojar (or Pojarová), Taussig Tesař, Gut Dobrý, Kraus Kalenský, Schindler Šindelář and Bondy Bor. However, the decision to fit in was not taken at all costs. The clerks at the renaming office had considerable leeway and sometimes confronted the applicants with antisemitic statements. When Vilma Arnsteinová, a survivor of Lodz, Auschwitz and satellite camps of Buchenwald came to apply to change her name and the name of her two daughters to Alešová, the clerk replied that the name of the famous Czech painter Mikoláš Aleš was too good for Jews. 'Girls, you will get married even with your old surname', said Vilma to her daughters. And, indeed, both did.⁶⁴

A parallel tendency of survivors was to make their postwar testimony 'fit in' – they emphasized their status as members of a wider Czech community of suffering, rather than as victims of the Holocaust.⁶⁵ Accordingly, the Jewish witnesses at the postwar trials often opened their affidavits with a variation of the phrase, 'I was arrested because of my affiliation with the Jewish religion and sent to the concentration camp Terezín'. Even the former secretary of the Jewish community and, at the time of the affidavit, the director of the Joint in Czechoslovakia, Adolf Beneš, formulated the circumstances of his deportation thus: 'In July 1943, I was detained as an affiliate of the Jewish religion and transferred to the concentration camp ghetto-Theresienstadt, where I remained until October 1944'.⁶⁶ The formulations were kept in the passive rather than the active voice, which would say, 'As a Jew, I came to Terezín'. That makes a stilted impression. The reason for the deportation was given as an attribute, not as a first-person narrative. The narrator did not call himself directly a Jew nor did he give the reason for his deportation his being a Jew. This indirect expression – as someone affiliated with the religion and not something the narrator simply was – is somewhat cumbersome. Moreover, the phrasing echoed the discourse of political prisoners: *transferred, seized, German authorities*.

Furthermore, Beneš and others denoted Terezín as a concentration camp called 'Ghetto-Theresienstadt', which of course is nonsensical. This figure was quite striking, as not only was Terezín a ghetto and the inmates and the SS referred to it as such; indeed, within the ghetto itself 'Terezín' and 'ghetto' became synonymous. The long-standing postwar debate as to whether Terezín was a ghetto or a concentration camp began with the early postwar designation.⁶⁷ Survivors framed Terezín as a concentration camp because the Czech postwar master narrative defined concentration camps as the sites of authentic suffering. A ghetto had no place in this discourse; it was a place of lesser suffering. In their published memoirs, Terezín survivors followed

married before the deportation, and after the war they changed their surname to Šindelář. They had been German speakers, but after the war, they only spoke Czech.

⁶³Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 256–257.

⁶⁴Personal communication to the author, Věra Š., née Arnsteinová, 6 December 2009, Prague.

⁶⁵For a discussion of narratives in witness depositions, see my "The Professional Witness: Theresienstadt Survivors Speaking Before Czechoslovak, Austrian and Western German Justice, 1945–1968," *German Studies Association*, Louisville, 22–25 September 2011.

⁶⁶"Im Juli 1943 wurde ich auch als Angehöriger der jüdischen Religion sichergestellt und ins Konzentrationslager Ghetto-Theresienstadt überführt, wo ich bis Oktober 1944 blieb." Affidavit Adolf Beneš, 18 November 1947, Municipal and Provincial Archives of Vienna, Volksgericht Wien, Vr 314/50 gg. Johann Wostrel.

⁶⁷See Miroslav Kárný, "Zur Typologie des Theresienstädter Konzentrationslagers," *Judaica Bohemiae* 1,17 (1981): 3–14; Peter Klein, "Theresienstadt: Ghetto oder Konzentrationslager?" *Theresienstädter Studien und Dokumente* (2005): 111–123.

the narrative patterns established by the Czech political prisoners' memoirs, describing Terezín as a concentration camp and frequently stressing their Czech-focused activities as a form of resistance.⁶⁸ Changing the label helped to have one's story accepted.

In the end, for many, the decision to emigrate came as a reaction to the Communist takeover. By 1948 or 1949, most young people had finished their university studies or had started a business. People emigrated because they were threatened by the emerging new totalitarian regime. Many ended up in Israel by chance. Some went there because it was the only option for Jews that the Communist authorities tolerated.⁶⁹ Hana Steinová remembered that her second husband was a Czecho-Jew and 'didn't want to emigrate among the Jews'. But he had to leave quickly, and Israel was the only option. The Steins emigrated, adapted and spent a lifetime in Israel.⁷⁰ The actress Vlasta Šchönová emigrated because a friend told her there was a free spot on a Haganah plane, which, as it turned out, smuggled weapons. She decided to go, quite spontaneously, impulsive as she was throughout her whole life. She left two sisters behind, her only living relatives.⁷¹

On the other hand, others, when offered the same possibility, turned it down; for them, these family members were all they had. The later distinguished logician Karel, who had finished his university degree earlier and had just been released from the army, remembered:

Then they called on me to go and fight. It was one of the last Haganah transports. Either I would fall in battle, or who knows what I would become. Perhaps an officer in the Israeli Army. But I didn't go, my mother still lived here, again and again the emigration talk. [...] Just like in '39 when we didn't leave because of Granny.⁷²

Personal ties as a reason to stay are a repeating pattern in many interviews. These were aunts and uncles, parents, siblings or best friends, sometimes gentile family friends. Many survivors believed that they were responsible for their older relatives or felt that the human connection was, at that point, the most important factor in their lives.

Conclusion

The purely Jewish environment of Terezín did not produce any shared Jewish belonging. It did not produce groupness, 'an emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group', nor connectedness, nor the weakest of these three forms of subjective belonging to a larger group, commonality. People affiliated themselves with groups within the fragmented ghetto society of Czech Jews, competing for resources and authority. Postwar society had a different dynamic. Survivors were eager to start a new life and fit in. Perhaps because Czech postwar society did not make it easy for the survivors, they tried even harder. The decision to emigrate or not was subject to various factors, many of them situational and emotional. Ironically, people's prewar – social, cultural and ideological – position on Jewishness, as well as those from Terezín were, at best, weak factors. The postwar years were characteristic for their ambivalent,

⁶⁸Peschel, *Prosthetic Life*, ch. 3 and 4.

⁶⁹Sedlák, "Židé v českých zemích."

⁷⁰Hana H.-P.-Steinová, 314, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

⁷¹Nava Shan, *Chtěla jsem být herečkou* (Prague: Ivo Železný, 1993).

⁷²"Tenkrát jsem byl vyzván, byl to jeden z posledních transportů haganá, abych šel bojovat. Buď bych padl nebo co bych byl. Asi důstojník izraelské armády. Já jsem nešel, měl jsem tady matku, pořád ta emigrace. [...] Opakovalo se to, co bylo v roce 39, kdy jsme nešli pryč kvůli babičce." Interview Karel B., 133, *Vzpomínky*, ŽMP.

at times even chaotic character. Therefore, we should not categorize or even judge the motivations or loyalties of those Czech Jews who went versus those who stayed.

Both those Czech Jews who stayed behind and those who emigrated cherished similar values. They believed that families, children and grandchildren gave meaning to their lives. In contrast to former political prisoners, many Czech Jewish survivors lived a fairly unpolitical life. Perhaps this ‘retreat into the private’ was their reaction to what they had lived through and the loss of family members. After nearly 70 years in Czechoslovakia, today they are inconspicuous grandmothers and grandfathers; they differ perhaps only by the blue tattoos on their forearms.

What distinguished the emigrant group from those who stayed, however, was the relationship to their Jewishness. Regardless of whether the emigrating Czech Jews went to Israel, Great Britain, the USA or South America, their connectedness with Judaism almost always molded itself to the dominant local mode. Participation in the Jewish community, religious services, marriage patterns as well as memories of the Holocaust were contingent on the surrounding society.⁷³ What people remembered, how they narrated it, and how they made sense of the Shoah in general and Terezín in particular fit into the master narrative at hand.

A crucial point that influenced survivors who settled in North America and Israel was their understanding of Jewishness as an ethnic and cultural identification. Most Czech survivors who live in the USA see themselves as Americans and Jews. They may add ‘Czech’. ‘Czech’, however, is a cultural statement, while ‘Jewish’ is ethnic *and* cultural. Moreover, here, ‘Czech’ represents commonality, ‘Jewish’ groupness.⁷⁴

Few among the Czech survivors would identify themselves as Jewish; that is, only a small minority among them have a Jewish groupness. I would not explain this as resulting from latent Czech antisemitism, but rather from postwar assimilation or re-assimilation to the Czech gentile environment. For Czech survivors, their Jewishness was something private, often connected to the war years. Their Jewishness is a weak, socially coded commonality, at times reaching to connectedness – when aging survivors, using the resources that became possible after 1989, became a part of social networks of other survivors. Czech Jewish survivors who stayed in the Czech Republic have a commonality in the form of Jewishness, but a weak sense of connectedness.

Both in the Czech and emigrant cases, we have at hand far-reaching assimilation into the dominant local cultural code of commonality, of who one is and how one’s belonging is talked about. While Czech Jews fit in with the gentile majority, emigrants strove to integrate into their respective environments. The two largest Czech Jewish emigré communities, those in North America and Israel, are home to vibrant Jewish community life, or, in case of the latter, a Jewish national state with a Zionist master narrative.⁷⁵ In both the USA and Israel, Czech Jews merged culturally into the dominant and open group at hand, which, unlike in Czechoslovakia, was Jewish. The same occurred in Czechoslovakia, but the dominant group to which the Czech survivors integrated was radically different. Emigrants to the USA and Israel mostly assimilated into the Jewish group, while those who remained in Czechoslovakia toward the gentile one. The sense of self and the relationship to Jewishness – self-identification and connectedness – was directly influenced by the place the survivors spent their lives calling home.

⁷³Julian Ilicki came to a similar conclusion in his analysis of the second generation emigrant Polish Jews to Sweden: Julian Ilicki, “Changing Identity Among Younger Polish Jews in Sweden after 1968.” *Polin* 4 (1989): 269–280. I would like to thank Andrea Genest for pointing out the piece to me.

⁷⁴Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” 20.

⁷⁵I tracked down six interviews and testimonies of Czech Jews who emigrated to Great Britain, not enough for a comparable basis.

Brubaker and Cooper's analysis facilitates the examination of cultural, social, ethnic and religious components and factors in the construction of 'identity'. However constructed and interconnected these categories are, they are, at the same time, highly salient. The differences between social, cultural, religious and ethnic definitions of Jewishness are highly meaningful for the self-understanding as a Jew. Brubaker and Cooper stated that identity is a construction just like ethnicity or culture.⁷⁶ We like to assume that 'identity' is a conscious choice, especially in the case of genocide survivors, to honor their agency. It is not. The war and postwar paths of the Czech Jews show, in fact, just how situational – and in the case of the chaotic postwar, therefore often arbitrary – Jewish belonging is.

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⁷⁶Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond Identity," 25–28 and passim.