

Postwar Jewish Displacement and Rebirth

1945–1967

Edited by

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PART 2

Postwar Jewish Migration and Czechoslovakia



Dilemmas of Minority Politics: Jewish Migrants in Postwar Czechoslovakia and Poland

Kateřina Čapková

After World War II, Czechoslovakia and Poland were ruled by pro-Soviet provisional governments. Each became a Communist state within the next few years and came under the direct impact of Stalin's policies. Both championed the idea of a nationally homogenous state without the national minorities that, according to the propaganda, had been responsible for the end of their interwar democracies.

Despite these similarities, postwar Czechoslovakia and Poland developed different policies towards the Jews. Whereas the Czechoslovak government refused to acknowledge the rights of the Jewish national minority, the Polish government accepted, though only temporarily, the right of the Jewish minority to a distinct minority policy.

I would argue that the legal position of Jews in both countries was a result of a political decision that had little to do with either the needs of the Jews or empathy towards them. Instead, it was part of a political strategy in which propaganda and the democratic image of the country played the major role. The effects of these different policies towards the Jews were especially felt by Jewish refugees from the territories that had been annexed by the Soviet Union (eastern Poland and Carpathian Ruthenia). In both cases, it was in these parts of interwar Poland and Czechoslovakia that the largest Jewish communities were situated.

One could also legitimately argue that in the Polish case the argumentation was the other way round. As Yosef Litvak and Hanna Shlomi have shown, the issue of the repatriation of Polish Jews from the Soviet Union determined the recognition of Jewish nationality in Poland.⁹¹ If we compare the Polish

* Research for this article was made possible thanks to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany.

91 Yosef Litvak, "Polish-Jewish Refugees Repatriated from the Soviet Union to Poland at the End of the Second World War and Afterwards," in *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46*, ed. Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991), 227–39; Hanna Shlomi, "The 'Jewish Organising Committee' in Moscow and 'The Jewish Central Committee' in Warsaw, June 1945–February 1946: Tackling Repatriation," in *ibid.*, 240–54.

government's agreements with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, the difference is obvious. In Poland, former citizens of the former eastern Poland who held Polish nationality as well as Jewish could ask for 'repatriation'.⁹² In Carpathian Ruthenia, only citizens of Czech or Slovak nationality could opt for Czechoslovak citizenship.⁹³

The restrictions placed on Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia, who could not opt for Czechoslovak citizenship, did not prevent thousands of Carpathian Jews from moving to the Bohemian territories, where they settled mostly in the border regions from which the German-speaking population was being expelled. Because of the threat of deportation back to Carpathian Ruthenia (called 'repatriation'), a few thousand of them left for DP camps in Germany.⁹⁴ Several Carpathian Jews, sometimes even those holding Czechoslovak citizenship, were deported back to Carpathian Ruthenia during 1947.⁹⁵ Still, thousands did remain in Bohemia and re-established the Jewish communities in the borderlands, in the former Sudetenland. Even after the exodus in 1948–50, these communities were among the most vital in the Bohemian territories.

92 On 9 September 1944 an agreement was signed between the USSR and the Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego (the Polish Committee of National Liberation) in Lublin about repatriation which became the basis for the individual agreements between the Soviet republics which were to receive parts of pre-war Poland (Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania). For the text of the agreements, see Stanisław Ciesielski, ed., *Umsiedlung der Polen aus dem ehemaligen polnischen Ostgebieten nach Polen in den Jahren 1944–1947* (Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut, 2006), 76–105.

93 Jan Černý and Václav Červenka, *Státní občanství ČSSR: Ucelený výklad právních předpisů, upravujících československé státní občanství* (Prague: Orbis, 1963), 188–89.

94 Zorach Warhaftig, *Uprooted: Jewish Refugees and Displaced Persons after Liberation* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Congress and World Jewish Congress, 1946), 64. Kurt Wehle, the secretary of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia and Moravia, estimates the number of Carpathian Jews fleeing to the DP camps in the American occupation zone of Germany at 6000; see Kurt Wehle, "The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, 1945–48," in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, ed. Avigdor Dagan, Gerture Hirschler, and Lewis Weiner, 3 vols. (Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968–84), 3:507.

95 This is stated in a memorandum sent by the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia and Moravia to the Ministry of Interior, dated 17 December 1947; quoted in Jaroslav Vaculík, "Židé z Podkarpatské Rusi jako optanti pro československé státní občanství v letech 1945–1947," in *Mezinárodní vědecká konference: Akce Nisko v historii "konečného řešení židovské otázky": k 55. výročí první hromadné deportace evropských Židů: sborník referátu*, ed. Ludmila Nesladkova (Ostrava: Facultas Philosophica Universitatis Ostraviensis, 1995), 296.

In contrast, the ‘repatriation’ of Jews from the eastern regions of the former Poland was organized by the Polish government and the Central Committee of Polish Jews. The trains were destined mostly for Lower Silesia, another territory from which the Germans inhabitants were expelled.⁹⁶ Many of the approximately 100,000 Jews who were in Lower Silesia in July 1946 left during the second half of that year or 1947 because of the pogroms, mostly with the help of Brihah organizers.⁹⁷ Like some of the Carpathian Jews, most of them ended up in DP camps in Germany. But even after this flight and after the emigration to Israel following its establishment, the Jewish population in Lower Silesia played a considerable role in postwar history, since nearly half of all remaining Polish Jews were living there.⁹⁸

The main argument made in this article is that even though recognition of Jewish nationality in Poland was temporary, lasting only until 1949, it had a far-reaching impact on the postwar history of Jews in Poland. A comparison with the Carpathian Jewish refugees of Czechoslovakia elucidates the difference.

Before setting out to compare the Jewish refugees’ reactions to these different external political settings, it is worthwhile to reconsider the question whether these two Jewries were already different at the end of the war. There are two primary distinctions to be made between Polish Jews coming from the Soviet Union and those from Carpathian Russia: their wartime experiences and their numbers. Most of the approximately 200,000 Jewish repatriates from the Soviet Union were either deported to the interior of the USSR after the Soviet attack of Poland in September 1939, or they fled to the Soviet Union during the war. Some survived gulags, but most of them were working in different parts of the USSR and their children had to attend mostly Russian-language schools. That is why many of the repatriates were fluent in Russian after the war alongside their frequent knowledge of Polish and Yiddish.

96 For details about the repatriation, see Elżbieta Hornowa, “Powrót Żydów polskich z ZSRR oraz działalność opiekuńcza Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce,” *Biuletyn ŻIH (Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego)* 133–34 (nos. 1–2) (1985): 105–122 (Polish, with English summary); Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku 1945–1950* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000), 44–60.

97 Natalia Aleksium-Mądrzak, “Nielegalna emigracja Żydów z Polski w latach 1945–1947,” Parts 1–3, *Biuletyn ŻIH*, 96 (nos. 2–4) (1996): 67–90; 34–49; 36–48 respectively; Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970).

98 See the map in Bożena Szaynok, “Migrationen der polnischen Juden in den Jahren 1944–1956,” in *Zwangsumsiedlung, Flucht und Vertreibung 1939–1959: Atlas zur Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2010), 147. According to this map, 47 percent of all Jewish inhabitants of Poland lived in the spring of 1947 in Lower Silesia.

Some of the Carpathian Jews, too, survived in the Soviet interior and enlisted in the Czechoslovak Army units of the Red Army in 1943. Still, a proportionally high number of Carpathian Jews hid in Hungary, while several thousand of them survived work camps (operated by Hungarians after the occupation of Carpathian Ruthenia by Hungary in March 1939) or Nazi concentration camps. The relatively high number of Holocaust survivors among Carpathian Jews corresponds with quite late deportations to Auschwitz from May to June 1944.⁹⁹ It is assumed that approximately 20 percent of the pre-war Jewish population (i.e., about 25,000) of Carpathian Ruthenia survived the war.¹⁰⁰ Even though this number represents only a fraction of the Polish repatriates from the Soviet Union, according to my estimate Carpathian Jewish refugees accounted for approximately 40 percent of the postwar Jewish population in the Bohemian territories and were clearly dominant in the Jewish communities in north and west Bohemia. Linguistically, most of the Carpathian Jews were multilingual thanks to their pre-war and war experiences. Yiddish, Hungarian, and Czech/Slovak were among the languages most frequently spoken.

It is questionable whether they also differed in ideological and religious terms. In the historiographical literature, on the one hand we can find the dominant narrative of the mostly leftist Polish-Jewish repatriates and, on the other hand, that of the mostly Orthodox or other religious Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia. Even though this might have been true for a part of both groups, I would like to argue that both migrant groups were heterogeneous and that the external political setting after the Second World War surely added more arguments for the above-mentioned narratives.

My research comparing the situations in the two neighboring countries reveals that there were three phenomena that differed in them. These had an impact on the different integration processes of Jewish refugees as well as on different models of identity. The condition of the Jews in each country differed from that in the other in institutional infrastructures, linguistic conditions, and the extent of recognition and appreciation of the Jewish communities re-established by the Jewish refugees.

99 See Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus and Mukachevo, 1848–1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 325–27.

100 Paul R. Magocsi, “Jews: ‘Subcarpathian Rus’ and the Prešov Region,” in *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*, ed. Paul R. Magocsi and Ivan I. Pop, rev. and exp. ed. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 220.

Institutions

In postwar Poland, the administration of Jewish affairs was placed on a totally new basis, independent from the religious communities. Since November 1944 the Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce (CKŻP; Central Committee of Polish Jews), with Emil Sommerstein as chairman, was responsible for all matters concerning the Jews in postwar Poland. As David Engel has convincingly demonstrated, the accusations that the CKŻP was a Polish Yevseksia are misleading. The CKŻP was the transformed Jewish Committee of Lublin, an organization established spontaneously by local Jews to help needy Jews. It was important for the CKŻP that diverse Jewish political parties were represented in this body, to ensure that the Communists did not have a majority. Moreover, even though it was under the direct supervision of the Polish Ministry of the Interior and, in its first year, was dependent on government funding, the CKŻP enjoyed relative independence in decision making.¹⁰¹

The CKŻP was responsible for the registration of Jews, organizing the repatriation of Jews from the Soviet Union, all social and charitable networks, the establishment and control of separate Jewish primary and secondary schools, legal matters, and the restitution of property. An important item on the agenda of the CKŻP was the so-called 'productivization' of the Jews. This project was clearly part of Communist ideology and actually also mirrored Polish prejudices against Jews who allegedly had been only slightly integrated into the working class. However, it also largely corresponded to the concept of constructive relief offered by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). From the end of 1945, it was the JDC which generously supported all the activities of the CKŻP and its branches and funded, for example, orphanages, schools, hospitals, so-called productivization programs, theater, and periodicals.¹⁰²

The local Jewish communities played only a minor role in the organization of Polish Jewry in the postwar period.¹⁰³ The Jewish Committees were much

101 David Engel, "The Reconstruction of Jewish Communal Institutions in Postwar Poland: The Origins of the Central Committee of Polish Jews, 1944–1945," *East European Politics and Societies* 10, 1 (1996): 85–107.

102 See the Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, New York (hereafter, AAJJDC), files 728–33.

103 For the pressure applied by the CKŻP on Jewish religious communities to acknowledge its supremacy, see Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej ludową," in *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie (do 1950 roku)*, ed. Jerzy Tomaszewski (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 429–33. On religious communities in Lower Silesia, see Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej*

more visible and active. The CKŽP was alone at the top of the pyramid, ruling over Jewish Committees at the level of the voivodeships, with local Jewish Committees at the bottom.

After the dissolution of the CKŽP in late 1949, a new organization, the Towarzystwo Społeczno Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce (TSKŻ; Social and Cultural Association of the Jews in Poland) was established.¹⁰⁴ In a very limited way it continued some of the CKŽP activities. All the charitable institutions, as well as the schools, were put under state control. Nevertheless, the TSKŻ in Lower Silesia organized courses in Yiddish and dance, theater groups, bridge parties, music lessons, lectures on Jewish history and culture, meetings for different age groups, and summer camps for Jewish children, where Yiddish and Hebrew songs were learnt and the Polish and Israeli flags were flown from the masts in the middle of the camp (something hardly imaginable in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and early 1960s).

The integration of Carpathian Jews into Bohemian society took totally different forms. Because of the refusal of the Czechoslovak government to recognize Jewish national rights, the only focal centers of Jewish life were the Jewish religious communities. In the Bohemian territories the highest institutional organ was the Council of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia and Moravia (*Rada židovských náboženských obcí v Čechách a na Moravě*) with its headquarters in Prague. The responsibilities of the representatives of the Council went far beyond the religious framework—registration of Jews, restitution of Jewish property, and charitable institutions—and they were also involved in the joint organization of the Brihah. Whereas in Poland the CKŽP was the agency distributing money from the JDC, in Czechoslovakia the Council of Jewish Religious Communities was the most important recipient of these funds.

As a result of the Holocaust, the Prague religious community cared not only for Jews who were members of a Jewish religious community before the war, but also for those of another faith who were considered Jews under the Nuremberg Laws or who had Jewish spouses, and also for Jews who were convinced Communists. The Council decided to represent all these Jews in their efforts at rehabilitation and restitution of their property.¹⁰⁵ In Slovakia,

Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej, 1945–1968 (Wrocław: Wydawn. Uniwersitetu Wroclawskiego, 1999).

104 For more on this organization, see Grzegorz Berendt, *Życie żydowskie w Polsce w latach 1950–1956: Z dziejów Towarzystwa Społeczno-kulturalnego Żydów w Polsce* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008).

105 See Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 502–3. As noted above, Kurt Wehle was the secretary of the Council of Jewish Religious Congregations in Bohemia and Moravia.

by contrast, the agenda of religious communities and restitution issues was divided between the Central Union of Jewish Religious Congregations in Slovakia (Ústredný Sväz židovských náboženských obcí na Slovensku) and the Organization of Victims of Racial Persecution at the Hands of the Fascist Regime (Sdruženie fašistickým režimom rasove prenasledovaných).¹⁰⁶ This self-understanding of the Jewish community, which goes beyond a religious definition, is still present in the Czech Republic today. That is also why, after the great political changes of November 1989, the name of the institution was changed to the Federation of Jewish Communities in Bohemia and Moravia, and the word 'religious' was omitted.¹⁰⁷

The non-recognition of Jewish nationality in Czechoslovakia had a direct impact on the integration of the Carpathian Jews. The only place of regular meeting with other Jews was the prayer hall (most synagogues in the former Sudetenland had been destroyed during the Kristallnacht). There was a clear difference between the religious service conducted by these newcomers, who were mostly Orthodox, and that of the local German-speaking Jews, who favored Reform Judaism. Therefore, a network of people who supplied the community members with kosher food had to be established. No Jewish schools existed alongside state-run schools in Czechoslovakia, though in Aussig/Ustí nad Labem for example, an afterschool *heder* was introduced for boys. Cantor Samuel Landerer met with his pupils in the prayer hall.¹⁰⁸

Language

Stalin's theory of nationalism was based on the assumption that a nation requires a national language. In reaction to this theory, which was thoroughly analyzed in the Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw,¹⁰⁹ and also in keeping with the ideology of the Bund,¹¹⁰ Yiddish was favored in Poland

106 Ibid., 503–4.

107 See <http://www.fzo.cz/> [accessed 2 Aug. 2012].

108 Interviews with Malvina Hoffmann, 21 Oct. 2010, Prague; Pinchas Landerer, 18 May 2011, Tel Aviv; Harry Farkaš, 6 Jan. 2010, Prague.

109 See, e.g., A.M. Pankratova, "Di badaytung fun J.V. Stalins artikel vegn sprach-kentnish far der historisher visnshaft," *Bleter far Geshikhte, Yidisher Historisher Institut in Poyln* 3, 3–4 (1950): 135–61 (Yiddish); P. Tretiakov, "Etlekhe frag vegn der apshatung fun felker in likht fun di shafungen fun J.V. Stalin vegn shprakh un shprakh-kentenish," *ibid.*: 162–87 (Yiddish).

110 Der Algemeyner Yidisher Arbeter Bund in Lite, Poyln, un Rusland (The General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), known simply as the Bund, was a dominant Jewish organization in Poland in the 1930s. Their interwar leaders were influenced

as the Jewish national language. Wavering between Yiddish and Polish was typical of the Jews of postwar Poland. The discussions of the CKŻP Presidium were conducted in Polish, whereas its official periodical, *Dos naye lebn*, was in Yiddish. Most Jewish schools in Lower Silesia used Yiddish as the language of education and the CKŻP school inspectors had to ensure that all school signs in the classrooms were in Yiddish.¹¹¹ On the other hand, the inspectors' reports reveal that the schools had difficulty finding enough teachers to teach in Yiddish and that most of the children spoke better Russian or Polish than Yiddish. Summing up the situation in Jelenia Góra, Jawor, Boków, Złoteria, and Chojnów, the inspector Calina Gitler writes:

The abortive and forcible implementation of the Yiddish language as the language of instruction for the children and the teachers, who (with small exceptions) do not know Yiddish, causes new pedagogical problems. Teaching of Yiddish in those schools became a fiction and the Polish language is prohibited. As a result the children do not know either Polish or Yiddish and they continue to speak Russian.¹¹²

Hebrew was taught only to a very limited extent, mostly in the few Zionist-run schools and in the kibbutzim. The only primary school with Hebrew which was under the auspices of the CKŻP was in Białystok.¹¹³

Because of this official support of the Yiddish language and culture, hundreds of books were published in Yiddish. Most of these publications were pro-Soviet, aimed at mobilizing the Jewish masses for the Communist cause. Such Yiddish-language Communist propaganda was not a new phenomenon;

by Marxism, but were at the same time promoters of Jewish nationalism. For more see Daniel Blatman, "Bund," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, <http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bund> [accessed 2 Aug. 2012].

111 Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw (hereafter, AŻIH), CKŻP, Oświata, 303/IX/4, letter of the Presidium of the CKŻP to Ministerstwo Oświaty, 16 Apr. 1948. Regulations about the use of languages: inside the school all inscriptions should be in Yiddish, outside the school-building in Yiddish and Polish.

112 "Nieumiejętne wprowadzanie siłą języka żydowskiego jako wykładowego do środowiska dziecięcego i nauczycielskiego, w którym żydowski /z małymi wyjątkami/ nie jest znany stwarza nowe trudności pedagogiczne. Nauka żydowskiego w tych szkołach staje się fikcją, a język polski czemś zakazanym. W rezultacie dzieci nie znają ani polskiego, ani żydowskiego i mówią w dalszym ciągu po rosyjsku." AŻIH, CKŻP, Oświata, 303/IX/22, Protokół Wizytacji na Dolnym Śląsku, 29 December 1946–9 January 1947.

113 Helena Datner, "Szkoły Centralnego Komitetu Żydów w Polsce v latach 1944–1949," *Biuletyn ŻIH* 169–71 (nos. 1–3) (1994): 106.

it continued the tradition of similar publications by Jewish Communists in interwar France, Poland, and the Soviet Union, to name just the most important European centers. But in addition to these ideological writings, published in tens of thousands of copies, a remarkable number of original works were also published, mostly testimonies of Holocaust survivors and fiction based on the postwar reality. The great Yiddish writers—Sholom Aleichem, Mendele, and Peretz—were also published in huge numbers.¹¹⁴ Yiddish was heard in theaters as well; there were two official Yiddish theaters, both directed by Ida Kaminska.¹¹⁵

In the Bohemian territories, including the former Sudetenland, Czech was the only official language of education and the civil service. During the resettlement of the border regions after the expulsion of the ethnic Germans, many linguistically different groups came together. In addition to Czechs from the interior of the country, there were Magyars from Slovakia, Slovaks, Roma and Sinti, Greek Communists, and many Czechs from Czech national minority communities in Yugoslavia, Ukraine, and elsewhere, whose language was often hard for other Czechs to understand.¹¹⁶ Whereas some of these groups, despite state pressure, tried to maintain their linguistic differences, the Carpathian Jews supported Czechoslovak linguistic policy. In all the interviews I have conducted so far, the interviewees have emphasized how well they spoke Czech and also that they or their parents spoke without an accent. One of the reasons for this smooth linguistic assimilation was their positive attitude to the Czechs, who, thanks to the image of interwar Czechoslovakia, were considered pro-Jewish and democratic, unlike the Ruthenians, Ukrainians, and Slovaks, with whom these Jews had recently had negative experiences during the war. This linguistic assimilation was, however, also part of their tactic not to stand out, to try to be invisible to the state and avoid any police interrogation, especially

114 Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikow, "The Last Yiddish Books Printed in Poland: Outline of the Activities of Yidish Bukh Publishing House," in *Under the Red Banner: Yiddish Culture in the Communist Countries in the Postwar Era*, ed. Elvira Grözinger and Magdalena Ruta (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 111–34; Magdalena Ruta, "The Principal Motifs in Yiddish Literature in Poland (1945–1949): Preliminary Remarks," in *ibid.*, 165–84.

115 Izshak Turkow Grudberg, *Yiddish Teatr in Poyln* (Warsaw: Yiddish Bukh, 1951) (Yiddish); Krysia Fisher, Michael C Steinlauf, Henryk Grynberg and Robart Newman, *Ida Kaminska (1899–1980): Grande Dame of the Yiddish Theater: Exhibition Catalogue* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 2001).

116 Jaroslav Vaculík, *Poválečná reemigrace a usídlování zahraničních krajanů* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita v Brně, 2002); Matěj Spurný, *Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945–1960)* (Prague: Antikomplex, 2011).

during the first few months after the war when most of them still did not hold Czechoslovak citizenship.

Yiddish remained the language of everyday communication at home and after services in the prayer halls, though it was mostly only the older generation that spoke Yiddish at home; with children born after the war, most parents spoke Czech. Linguistic assimilation accelerated Jewish integration into the surrounding society. In the interviews, the phenomenon of living in two separate worlds is strikingly prevalent. Carpathian Jews were well integrated into Czech society. Most of them quickly found jobs as laborers, in the management of factories, and in the civil service. Smooth integration into the economic infrastructure was actually one of the reasons why, in the final tally, many of these Jews were not sent to the Soviet Union, since the Czechoslovak Ministry of Labor intervened to permit them to remain in Czechoslovakia.¹¹⁷ Their children joined the Communist youth organization and had an active social life at school. They went to summer camps with their non-Jewish classmates, raising problems for children from Orthodox families, that were mostly resolved by compromise. In contrast, the other part of their recollections has to do with their Jewish life, which most of them tried to conceal once outside the home or the prayer hall. One interviewee told me that she and her brother were even called by their Yiddish names at home and in the Jewish community, but went by other names at school and elsewhere in public.¹¹⁸ Even under such conditions most of these Jews managed to maintain Jewish traditions, and a remarkably high proportion of the second generation now belongs to Orthodox communities in the United States, Israel, or Germany.

Status of the Jewish Communities in Border Regions

The last major difference between the situation in Czechoslovakia and that in Poland relates to the role of the Jewish communities re-established by the Jewish refugees, which appears in the narrative of postwar Jewish history in both countries.

Jewish sources relating to the new communities in Lower Silesia strongly reflect the idea that a new experiment was starting in a new era—namely, homogenous Jewish settlement as part of a Polish democratic state. This idea of a ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’ in Lower Silesia was associated with the revival of the Yiddish language and culture, with the huge project of productivization of

¹¹⁷ Wehle, “The Jews in Bohemia and Moravia,” 507.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Malvina Hoffmann, 21 Oct. 2010, Prague.

local Jews, and the idea of remaking the former German (and therefore Nazi) territories into a region where Jews would rebuild democratic Poland. The term ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’ appears in the Jewish press of the time, in the materials of the Jewish faction of the Polish Worker’s Party, and in documents and speeches of CKŻP members.¹¹⁹ There is even a twenty-minute propaganda film in Yiddish by Nathan Gross, *Yiddisher Yishuv in Nidershlesye* (1946), which praises the achievements of Jewish repatriates in rebuilding postwar Poland. It shows their cultural life as well as their achievements in industry and agriculture. In some of the secondary literature there are comparisons of the Jewish entity in Lower Silesia with those of Birobidzan and the Crimea.

I would argue that the Polish Communists never seriously supported the idea of a ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’. Unlike the Jewish Communists, who were mostly unhappy about the illegal and legal emigration of Jews after the Kielce pogrom in July 1946, the Polish Communists could scarcely conceal their satisfaction that the Jews were leaving the country. As Bożena Szaynok has convincingly argued, this clash of the Jewish and the Polish visions of Lower Silesia is clearly manifested in the 1948 exhibition on the ‘Recovered Territories’: when the Jews tried to show their achievements, their part of the exhibition was cancelled by the Polish organizers only a day before the exhibition opened.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, some remnants of the project of the ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’ were misused for propaganda as late as the 1960s. One example is the last Yiddish-language secondary school in Wrocław. Until 1968, when it was closed down, official visitors to Communist Poland from Cuba and the Soviet Union, or Communist journalists from Western countries, traveled from Warsaw to Wrocław to visit this symbol of successful Jewish integration into Communist society.¹²¹

In clear contrast to the idea of the ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’ in Lower Silesia, the re-established Jewish communities in north and west Bohemia were neglected not only by Czechoslovak politicians, but also by the Jewish religious community in Prague. Some representatives of the Prague Jewish community welcomed the Carpathian Jews, who helped restore religious life in the Bohemian territories. The few cantors and ritual slaughterers in postwar Bohemia came mostly from Carpathian Ruthenia, a trend that had actually begun in the

119 See the many articles about the ‘Yiddisher Yishuv’ in *Dos naye lebn*, e.g., “Di gest ant-sikt min Yiddishn Yishuv in Nidershlezye,” *Dos naye lebn*, no. 42 (9 June 1947): 6; see also Yaakov Egit, *Tsu a nay lebn: Tswey yor yiddisher yishuv in Nidershlesye* (Wrocław: Nidershlesye, 1947) (both in Yiddish).

120 Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska*, 169–70.

121 See Szyja Bronsztejn, *Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993), 36.

interwar period. On the other hand, some local Jews feared that the arrival of Orthodox Jews from Carpathian Ruthenia would incite antisemitism.

The different religious traditions, educational backgrounds, and often also different wartime experiences of most of the Carpathian Jews raised an invisible barrier between the refugees and local Jews.¹²² This barrier also led to the border-region communities being omitted from postwar Bohemian Jewish history, with a far-reaching impact on historiography.¹²³



In conclusion, the short-lived recognition of the Jewish national minority in postwar Poland and the refusal to grant Jews special national rights in postwar Czechoslovakia had direct consequences for the daily life of Jewish refugees in each country. In the early postwar years a diversified institutional network headed by the CKŻP was created in Poland, twelve Jewish political parties renewed their activities, a network of Jewish schools—mostly with Yiddish as the main language—was established, and a huge number of Yiddish books were published. The shock caused by the change in policy in late 1949 and early 1950 was enormous. The only legal organization, apart from the religious communities, was the TSKŻ. There were few Yiddish schools and the two Yiddish theaters were nationalized and unified. In comparison to Czechoslovakia, however, this was a great achievement, since no such parallel secular Jewish institutions existed there alongside the religious communities.

In Bohemia, the refugees were mostly concentrated in Jewish communities and developed a widespread social network that enabled them to maintain Jewish traditions. Thanks to their linguistic assimilation they integrated well into the surrounding society. Whereas Yiddish was misused in Poland for ideo-

¹²² Jelinek, *Carpathian Diaspora*, 330.

¹²³ The Jewish settlers in north and west Bohemia are neglected in all of the newest publications about the resettlement in the borderlands: Adrian von Arburg, "Abschied und Neubeginn: Der Bevölkerungswechsel in den Sudetengebieten nach 1945," in *Als die Deutschen weg waren: Was nach der Vertreibung geschah, Ostpreußen, Schlesien, Sudetenland: das Buch zur WDR-Fernsehserie*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej (Berlin: Rowohlt Berlin, 2005), 185–220; František Čapka, Lubomír Slezák, and Jaroslav Vaculík, *Nové osídlení pohraničí českých zemí po druhé světové válce* (Brno: Akademické nakladatelství, 2005); Matěj Spurný, *Flucht und Vertreibung: Das Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Niederschlesien, Sachsen und Nordböhmen* (Dresden: Sächsische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2008); id., *Nejsou jako my*; Andreas Wiedemann, "Komm mit uns das Grenzland aufbauen!": *Ansiedlung und neue Strukturen in den ehemaligen Sudetengebieten 1945–1952* (Essen: Klartext, 2007).

logical reasons and to put political pressure on the Jewish minority, Yiddish in Czechoslovakia, because of government policy, became a language associated with religion and tradition. It is perhaps a freak of history that in both cases the year 1968 witnessed the end of lively activity in the Jewish communities of the Bohemian and Polish border regions. Most Carpathian Jews, who were hardly visible in Bohemia, left the country after the invasion by troops of the Warsaw Pact. The years 1967–68, marked by antisemitic propaganda of the Gomułka government, also mark the absolute end of the dreams of a Polish-Jewish symbiosis that had been developed by the last Jewish Communists.