

Věrný and Wahr from A[ssimilationists] to Z[ionists]: An
Exploration of Bohemia's Divided Interwar Jewish Population
in Relation to Masaryk and the Czech Lands

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between assimilationists and Zionists in interwar Czechoslovakia. However, I complicate this binary division of the Jewish population into four groups: the ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis,’ ‘radical assimilationist,’ ‘Jewish-national’ and ‘political Zionist.’ Additionally, I narrow my focus to Bohemia in order to be able to provide a more in depth and concise picture. In order to do so, I focus on three particular figures: Jindřich Kohn, Alfred Fuchs, and Otokar Fischer. Through a close reading of a selection of texts by these writers, I situate them firmly in the ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis,’ ‘radical assimilationist,’ and ‘Jewish-national’ camps.

Through interaction with the selected texts in addition to periodical and secondary sources, I come to the conclusion that the competing programs of the two larger camps were largely ideological rather than practical. The fundamental disagreement about whether or not the Jews constitute a ‘nation’ aside, the ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ and ‘Jewish-national’ groups had almost precisely the same end, namely, living side by side with the Czechs in a mutually beneficial state; all four groups were fiercely loyal to Masaryk and the new Czechoslovak State.

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*For music and philosophy, every new dissonance is a journey to a new harmony...A Jew not from the Jewish nation—is one of the new dissonances, which necessarily unravels philosophically.*¹

Introduction

The statement “The Jew belongs to the nation which grants him the right to a fatherland, for he does not constitute a nationality in his own right,” was published anonymously in a brochure entitled *The Jews and the Nations* in Bohemia in 1863.² Although this statement preceded the founding of Czechoslovakia by 55 years, it encompasses the fundamental issues, which provided fodder for the internal debates and conflicting loyalties of the Jews in the Czech lands into the interwar period. This short sentence incorporates the problems of association and belonging, ‘fatherland,’ nationality, and the relationship of the Jews to their co-nationals. It is precisely this set of questions that characterized the discourse of Czech Jews in the time leading up to and during Czechoslovakia’s First Republic, both internally, between Jewish groups, and externally, with their Czechoslovak co-nationals and political leaders. The problem of disagreement within the Jewish community itself was a component of Czech Jewish discourse that became increasingly paramount with the official emergence of the Czechoslovak state. Particularly pertinent to the case of the Jews in interwar Czechoslovakia is the second half of this statement: it was precisely the question of Jewish nationality that characterized the political and cultural debate surrounding Czech Jewry between 1918 and 1938. The fact that the ‘nationality-

¹ Jindřich Kohn. “Okno s Mechem.” *Kalendář Česko-Zidovský*. Roc. 41 (1921-1922). Pgs. 52-56. 52.

² [Anonymous], *Die Juden und die Nationalen: Ein Gegenstück zur Broschüre, „Die Juden in Böhmen.“* Von einem Juden (Prague: Anton Renn, 1863), pp. 13, 15. Quoted in: Guido Kisch. *In Search of Freedom: A History of American Jews from Czechoslovakia*. London: Edward Goldston & Son LTD., 1949.

question’ played such a prominent role in the Jewish community is grounded firmly in the fact that it had the privilege of doing so, a point to which I will return later.

In order to understand the nature of the Jewish community in Czechoslovakia, specifically, it is first important to consider the heterogeneity of the Czechoslovak population. The ‘Jewish question’ in was only one of many questions regarding the nature of the new Czechoslovak state and its makeup. The combination of the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia with Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia seemed, at the time, rather contrived. The amalgam of different languages and cultures was accompanied by a drastic shift in power, with all the aforementioned territories turning their eyes towards the privileged Bohemian capital. As Mary Heimann points out in her new (and very controversial) book *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*, “Czechs and Slovaks, who were to replace Germans and Magyars as the dominant groups in the new multinational state, had as much reason as anyone to feel surprise at their change of fortune.”³ Indeed:

Subsequent nationalist propaganda notwithstanding, there was nothing inevitable about the ‘rise’ of a Czecho-Slovak or Czechoslovak ‘nation’, let alone the creation, in the second decade of the twentieth century, of an internationally recognized, independent state made up of the old Austrian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia together with large chunks of the Hungarian highlands and Ruthenia.⁴

Be this as it may, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, as the first president of Czechoslovakia, was at the helm of a government whose charge it was to lead this assembly of national and ethnic groups, united as they now were under the Bohemia-centric government.

Much like the newly dubbed ‘Czechoslovaks’ themselves, the Jews of Czechoslovakia had to grapple with the new government and their relationship to it. Like the Czechs and the Slovaks, and perhaps even more so, the Czech and Slovak Jews constituted very different

³ Mary Heimann. *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). 46.

⁴ Ibid, 46.

community-compositions. With the addition of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Ezra Mendelsohn suggests three different Jewries in interwar Czechoslovakia: Czech (Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian) Jewry, which, “was the best example in East Central Europe of a West European-type Jewish community;” Subcarpathian Rus Jewry, which he aligns with “typical East European-type Jewry;” and Slovakian Jewry, which he calls “something of an intermediary case.”⁵ Here, I will be focusing on Czech Jewry.

When dealing with Czech [Bohemian, Moravian, and Silesian] Jewry in the interwar period, two groups emerge as the most visible, exerting the most influence on Jewish political discourse both in- and outside of the Jewish community namely: the assimilationists and the Zionists. Although there is some disagreement among scholars regarding the development of these groups out of the Austro-Hungarian context and into the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, this basic dichotomy dominates the scholarly discourse surrounding this period.⁶ However, as Kateřina Čapková observes in *Češi, Němci, Židé?* [*Czechs, Germans, Jews?*], even to equate the Jewries of Bohemia and Moravia is too simplistic, given the divergent natures of the preferred political affiliations of the Jews in the two regions.⁷ She points out that it is perhaps not even pertinent to consider assimilation as a major political contender vis-à-vis Zionism outside of Bohemia:

The main handicap of the Czech-Jews as opposed to Zionists was that the Zionists agitated with great success for their movement in the whole Czechoslovak territory while the influence of the Czech-Jews was mainly limited to Bohemia... Due to the differences in historical developments in the individual lands of Czechoslovakia the idea of Czech-Jewish “assimilation” did not go over well in Slovakia, nor in Moravia.⁸

⁵ Ezra Mendelsohn. *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 133.

⁶ See: Hillel Kieval, Gary Cohen, Dmitry Shumsky, et al.

⁷ Kateřina Čapková. *Češi, Němci, Židé?* (Praha: Paseka, 2005). 140.

⁸ Ibid, 140.

Because I am primarily interested in the dialogue between the assimilationist and Zionist Jews, I will focus on Bohemia. When it is pertinent or helpful as a comparison, I will use examples from the Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia, or Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

In addition to narrowing my regional focus, I propose to complicate the assimilationist-Zionist dichotomy by breaking each group up additionally in two: the assimilationist movement encompasses what I entitle ‘radical assimilation’ and ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis,’ and the Zionist movement takes both ‘Jewish nationalism’ and ‘radical Zionism’ under its auspices. ‘Radical assimilation’ assumes the abandonment of Jewishness; whether formally through conversion, or not, the ‘radical assimilationist’ discards his Jewish national affiliation in favor of another, in this case, Czechoslovak. Although this category necessitates neither conversion nor the renunciation of Judaism as a religious confession, it does not incorporate it. In contrast is ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’; while it is still a form of assimilation—its supporters do not see their Jewishness as a nationality and because of this they identify themselves as Czechs or Czechoslovaks—it integrates Jewishness into its consciousness. The advocate of ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ maintains his ‘Czechness,’ while still embracing his ‘Jewishness.’ ‘Jewish nationalism,’ assumes the Jews as a nation rather than simply a religious community. Based on this understanding, its advocates maintain the validity of the Jewish nation as a national minority, to whom rights should be afforded as such. Finally, the ‘political Zionists’ insist on the necessity of a Jewish state populated and governed by the Jewish nation.

Within the four ‘groups’ of Czech Jews as I conceive of them—the radical assimilationists, the Czech-Jewish synthesis group, the Jewish nationalists, and the political Zionists—there was a significant amount of ideological and practical overlap, an important issue that I will regularly return to through the course of this paper. However, each group had its own

set of formulated ideologies. I will firmly locate the three figures of Alfred Fuchs, Jindřich Kohn, and Otokar Fischer into the Radical assimilationist, Czech-Jewish synthesis, and Jewish nationalist groups, respectively, through direct interaction with their scholarly and/or literary texts. I do not deal directly with any one member of the political Zionist group as such, because, as will become clear as the paper develops, this group was separated from the Jewish national group in Bohemia only formally and not practically, in any sort of large-scale sense. By positioning these three thinkers into their respective movements, I can both solidify my four-part model and complicate it by blurring the ideological relationships between the groups and the individuals that comprised their memberships. In doing so, I will explore the relationship of the groups to each other as well as to the Czech government and to their own ‘Czechness.’

As Hillel Kieval points out in his recent publication “Negotiating Czechoslovakia,” it is an oft-repeated assumption that the Jews in interwar Czechoslovakia were the only ‘true Czechoslovaks.’ Ezra Mendelsohn also references this adage: “As the old saying went, there were Czechs, Slovaks (and, it should have been added, Germans, Hungarians, and Rusyns), but the only real Czechoslovaks were the Jews.”⁹ While Mendelsohn complicates this dictum, Kieval rejects it, claiming that making this statement assumes, among other things, that “the Jews, unlike all of their neighbours, did not constitute an ethnic group, or alternatively, that *their* ethnicity, exceptionally, was not tied to territory and thus could not constitute a threat to the imperial state.”¹⁰ Although this claim about Czechoslovak Jews cannot be taken at face value, there is some truth to it, a fact that becomes more and more apparent as Kieval fails to entirely

⁹ Mendelsohn, 149.

¹⁰ Hillel Kieval. “Negotiating Czechoslovakia: The Challenges of Jewish Citizenship in a Multiethnic Nation-State.” In *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry*. Ed. Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman. (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010). 103.

disprove it in the course of his article. I propose, that it is interesting to consider the translation of this adage: if it was repeated in German, and we assume use of the word *wahr*, it becomes clear that it could just as easily be translated ‘faithful’ or ‘sincere’ as ‘real.’ Similarly, assuming Czech, the word *věrný* means both ‘faithful’ and ‘authentic.’ Although I have not, as yet, found the ‘original’ form of this saying, the second interpretation provides fodder for a more nuanced and interesting argument. And it is precisely this secondary meaning that, I argue, characterizes the relationship of the Jews in interwar Bohemia to their new country.

I acknowledge that my narrowed focus changes the scope and reduces the drama of this dictum, however, in my argument I include all the four groups that I have established. Not only the ‘radical assimilationist’ and ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ groups expressed their loyalty to the state, but also the ‘Jewish national’ and Zionist groups. This collective loyalty to the new country seems contradictory in the ‘Jewish national’ and Zionist cases. However, Czechoslovak Zionism, although associated with the World Zionist Organization, was unique:¹¹ in addition to their distinctly multi-national plan for Palestine, the Czech Zionists maintained a close relationship to Czechoslovakia and its government through contact with the persons of Masaryk and Beneš. Although Beneš was more reluctant than Masaryk to show favoritism among the Jews,¹² the Czechoslovak government was ultimately supportive of the inclusion of the Jews with a national minority status in the new state; this support bred a strong sense of loyalty among the Zionists and the ‘Jewish nationals.’ Despite the divergent political and social programs of the Jews in the Czech lands, devotion to Masaryk and the Czechoslovak program proved a uniting factor for all four groups, tying them together in a way that their ‘Jewishness’ alone could not. It is with this in

¹¹Oskar K. Rabinowicz. “Czechoslovak Zionism: Analecta to a History.” In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume II*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1971). 63.

¹²Aharon Moshe K. Rabinowicz. “The Jewish Party.” In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume II*. 274.

mind that I embark on the program of complicating my own four-part delineation of Bohemian-Jewry; although I maintain the accuracy of the model, I suggest that after the publication of the Czechoslovak constitution in 1920, the continuation of the debate between the groups was pertinent only to the relationships of the Jews to one another and not to their relationship to Czechoslovakia.

Theoretical Chapter and Translation Note

Translation and Terminology Note

When referring to the entirety of the Jews in the Czech lands, I use the term ‘Czech Jews,’ [čeští Židé] in order to differentiate it from the hyphenated term ‘Czech-Jews,’ [Čechožidé], which refers to members of the Czech-Jewish movement. I use the term ‘assimilationists’ interchangeably with ‘Czech-Jews.’

Theoretical Chapter

Since I will be dealing with the problem of Jewish nationalism in Czechoslovakia, it is relevant to define what is meant by nationalism and how the particular case of Jewish nationalism is both located within and deviant from the traditional model. Hans Kohn’s definition of nationalism encompasses both political and the ‘emotional’ factors. Its growth, he points out, “presupposes the existence, in fact or as an ideal, of a centralized form of government over a large and distinct territory.”¹³ However, in addition to the political aspirations of any individual national movement, nationalism has an emotive effect: “There is a natural tendency in man...to love his birthplace or the place of his childhood sojourn...Man has an easily

¹³ Hans Kohn. *The Idea of Nationalism*. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961). 4.

understandable preference for his own language as the only one which he thoroughly understands and in which he feels at home.”¹⁴ However, it is not always clear where this is and if the national bond is in keeping with the nation to which the land belongs. Rogers Brubaker complicates the notion of national belonging with the construction of a triangular model: “groupness,” which is “more a political project than a social fact,” “homeland nationalisms,” those of the place which a person belongs, and “nationalizing nationalisms,” those of the place where a person lives.¹⁵ He suggests that in places where this triangular relationship is conflictual, the interplay of the competing nationalism can be ‘explosive.’¹⁶ These competing nationalisms all contribute to the national identity of any give group. But what if the ‘homeland’ does not exist?

Kohn suggests that the Jewish national bond is rather historical than national in nature; its collective identity is based in a “common stock of memories of the past and of hopes for the future.”¹⁷ He stresses the centrality of Jewish messianism as a bonding factor, and the national character of messianism, which remains at its core despite the universality and continuity of history, a history that includes a place for all people, but within which the Jews playing a special role. The Jewish national makeup is complicated, Kohn explains, by the fact that they, “became a nation not by blood but by an act of volition and of spiritual decision.”¹⁸ The Jewish nation is fluid, but its collectivity lies in its common history and the Covenant of each individual Jew with God.

¹⁴ Ibid, 5.

¹⁵ Rogers Brubaker. “National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External National Homelands in the New Europe.” In *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56.

¹⁶ Ibid, 57.

¹⁷ Hans Kohn, 35.

¹⁸ Ibid, 37.

Jacob Katz, dealing with the problem of Jewish nationalism in the Diaspora, points out that it deviates from ‘the normal’ [form of nationalism] already in its ‘prenational foundations’ on two fundamental bases: the Jewish people did not have a common language or territory.¹⁹ He points out that despite this, “nobody would have doubted at the end of the eighteenth century that the Jews were an ethnic unit, separate from the local inhabitants in any place where they may have built a community.”²⁰ Neither was their transnational unity called into question. Despite the fact that the Jews were, Katz asserts, “on the threshold of modern times...better prepared for a national movement than any other ethnic group in Europe,” this potential was not realized until later because of their actual situation; they were, in a practical sense, embedded in non-Jewish society.²¹ However, returning to the idea of a messianic future as Jewish nationalism, we must consider the fact that Zionism is, in some sense, a practical manifestation of messianic aspirations.

The first proponents of religious Zionism, Rabbis Kalischer (d. 1874) and Alkalay (d. 1878) would not accept that European political emancipation of the Jews in *galut* would be the crux of Jewish history. Because of this, as well as the relatively favorable situation in Europe at the time, both rabbis suggest a gradual colonization of Palestine:

The establishment of the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the tangible political influence of Jewish notables like Moses Montefiore and the Rothschilds were taken to suggest that the resettlement of the Jews in their ancient homeland by human means was not impossible. Such attempts at resettlement were regarded as necessary to the messianic enterprise; it was expected that a divine response would follow and complete the process.²²

¹⁹ Jacob Katz. *Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1986). 90.

²⁰ Ibid, 90.

²¹ Ibid, 91.

²² Jacob Katz. “Israel and the Messiah.” In *Essential Papers on Messianic Movements and Personalities in Jewish History*. Ed. Marc Saperstein. (New York: New York University Press, 1992). 480.

Katz points out that “until the seventies they never used the argument that Jews needed a country for securing their physical existence, which was to become one of the main planks of Zionism proper.”²³ Because this form of Zionism was not based on fear of bodily harm or even the ‘need’ for a Jewish state, but rather the conception that the ingathering of Jews to Palestine would hasten the coming of the messianic age, there was no suggestion of mass emigration. Kalischer and Alkalay’s contemporary Moses Hess (d. 1875) based his “Jewish nationalism on the concept of a “national spirit,” which, in the ancient Jewish state, permeated the entire life of the Jewish people.”²⁴ Hess believed that this spirit was disintegrating, and that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was the only way to salvage it. Katz goes on to situate Jewish liberalism in the tradition of messianism. Although it did not prefigure a messiah or a return to Palestine, it was a vision of a utopian future. He points out that, in contrast to early forms of Zionism, liberalism used the messianic vision to justify the integration of Jews into surrounding society and highlights the fact that the two disparate movements came out of the same idea.²⁵ I will utilize this model to mirror the split between the Zionists and the assimilationists in the Czechoslovak case. Also directly pertinent to the Jews of Czechoslovakia is Katz’s suggestion that a post-emancipatory state is necessary for the flourishing of Jewish nationalism and that, indeed, nationalism is the next logical step after emancipation.²⁶

Ezra Mendelsohn provides another model of Jewish nationalism—one that flourishes rather on anti-Semitism than freedom. He suggests three Jewish political camps: the

²³ Katz (*Jewish Emancipation and Self-Emancipation*), 95.

²⁴ Ibid, 95.

²⁵ Ibid, 97.

²⁶ Ibid, 99.

integrationists, the nationalists and the Orthodox.²⁷ Tracing the successes of each group, he claims that “antisemitism in general...is a “good thing” for Jewish nationalism, for one thing because it disabuses Jews of the hope that integrationist solutions are possible, for another because it often precludes Jewish economic progress and upward social mobility,”²⁸ both of which are boons to acculturation. Another positive atmosphere for Jewish nationalism is in

Binational (or multinational) regions inhabited by two or more well-defined national groups whose national status is officially (or informally) recognized by the state rather than in countries that are (or claim to be) mononational and refuse to grant legitimacy to the existence of full-fledged national, as opposed to religious or even ethnic, minorities.²⁹

Although interwar Czechoslovakia fits quite neatly into the second case, Mendelsohn points out that due to lack of anti-Semitic violence and a strong Czech acculturation preceding World War I, Jewish nationalism in Czechoslovakia was “a significant but not a very impressive force.”³⁰ Although this excludes the violence surrounding the Badeni language ordinances and the Hilsner affair, both of which I will deal with later, he follows the generally accepted assumption that, at least comparatively, there was little over anti-Semitism in the Czech lands. He rejects the label ‘assimilationists’ as pejorative, preferring the term ‘integrationists.’ More important than the choice of terminology is, however, his understanding of “hereness” and “thereness” the former implying “a strong attachment to the land in which the Jews resided along with an even stronger objection to the idea that the Jews should establish an autonomous or sovereign territorial unit somewhere else in the world” and the latter representing Zionism and “other forms of Jewish territorial nationalism.”³¹ However, along with their rejection of Zionism, Mendelsohn’s ‘integrationists,’ much like the group that I characterize as providing a ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’

²⁷ Ezra Mendelsohn. *On Modern Jewish Politics*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). 28.

²⁸ Ibid, 38.

²⁹ Ibid, 38.

³⁰ Ibid, 40.

³¹ Ibid, 10.

“really wanted...to integrate into the majority society without being entirely swallowed up by it.”³²

With regard to the roots of Jewish integration into the surrounding non-Jewish society, Michael Meyer points out that Jewish existence in the ghetto was “all-encompassing” and possessed a “unquestioned-character,” a state that altered only after the middle of the eighteenth century: “it is with the age of Enlightenment that Jewish identity becomes segmental and hence problematic.”³³ With the disappearance of this confine, the Jewish citizen has the opportunity, if he should choose, to engage with his non-Jewish surroundings. Simon Dubnow points to the roots of Jewish assimilation in Europe, claiming that it “came upon the heels of the sudden transition that Jews made from a condition in which they had no rights at all to that of full citizenship,” as in France in 1791 and Germany in 1848.³⁴ However, according to Dubnow, this process leads not to any sort of synthesis, but rather to the “abandonment of the national needs of Judaism...[and] the denial of the individual freedom of the Jewish nationality and of its equal worth in the family of nations.”³⁵ He does not believe in the ability of the Jew to integrate culturally or nationally into the majority of his birthplace without the side effect of the substitution, or at least subordination, of his own Jewish nationality. Dubnow’s conception is directly applicable to the Czechoslovak case. Indeed, Koppel Pinson points out in the introduction to the above-cited collection of Dubnow’s works that Dubnow, his affinity to

³² Ibid, 16.

³³ Michael A. Meyer. *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-1824*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967). 8.

³⁴ Simon Dubnow. “The Jews as Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nationality in the Midst of Political Nations.” In *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*. Ed. Koppel S. Pinson. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958). 111.

³⁵ Ibid, 114.

Masaryk's views. Both are what Koppel labels "humanitarian nationalists" who strive for 'positive nationalism' and the creation of 'multinational states.'³⁶

David Sorkin's discussion of the German-Jewish case suggests that it is not accurate to assume that emancipation simply breeds assimilation, but rather, at least in the German case, that it creates a subculture. He asserts rather, that "the appropriation of German culture did not lead to the loss of the 'Jewish' but to the creation of the 'German-Jewish.'"³⁷ If we adopt this model for the Czech case, an exercise which seems justified given the Bohemian affinity with the Germans and the fact that Bohemian Jewry represented a typically Western Jewish community,³⁸ we can also complicate the notion of Czech Jewish assimilation and abolish the dichotomous nature of the Zionist-assimilationist model.

Methodology

This paper only deals with certain sub-sections of the Zionist and assimilationist groups. I will not address every Zionist group that was founded even in Bohemia, but rather utilize a similar approach to Martin Wein's broader bilateral division of Palestino-centric Zionism and Zionism with a focus on *Landespolitik* [regional politics], which mirrors my own model of 'traditional Zionism' and 'Jewish nationalism.'³⁹ Departing from this, I will go on to complicate the binary nature of this relationship throughout the course of the paper. Regarding the division of the 'assimilationist' Jews, I adopt a very similar archetype to Čapková's. She suggests five

³⁶ Koppel S. Pinson. "Simon Dubnow: Historian and Political Philosopher." Introduction to *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*.

³⁷ David Sorkin. "The Impact of Emancipation on German Jewry: A Reconsideration." In. *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Ed. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 193.

³⁸ Mendelsohn, 133.

³⁹ Martin J. Wein. "Zionism in Interwar Czechoslovakia: PalestinoCentrism and Landespolitik." In *Judaica Bohemiae* (Judaica Bohemiae), issue: 44 / 2009, pages: 5-47.

possible models of Jewish interaction with their Czechoslovak milieu in the interwar period: cultural integration, assimilation, “melting pot”, culturally-pluralistic integration, multiculturalism, and cultural segregation. The first three terms can be seen as belonging to the larger assimilationist group, the second two as the two subsections of the Zionist designation, and the last not pertinent to the Bohemian case.⁴⁰ She calls the process of assimilation the “most extreme form of cultural integration” and her “melting pot” option combines with her “cultural integration” option to encompass what I label ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis,’ a term that she also employs, but only with regard to the “melting pot” label.⁴¹ I will, of course, also utilize the definitive works of Hillel Kieval, *Languages of Community* and *The Making of Czech Jewry* along with the newest “Negotiating Czechoslovakia.” I adopt his conception of “secondary acculturation” and utilize his assumption that both the Zionists and the assimilationists saw their program as the best way to integrate into the new Czechoslovak state. However, I also complicate his understanding of national identification with Shumsky’s model of Czech-German Jewish identity as he presents it in his article, “On Ethno-Centrism and its Limits.”

In my exploration of these four groups, I use the direct literary sources of individual figures within this milieu in order to demonstrate the nebulous nature of the theoretical stances of the persons that comprised each group. Instead of focusing solely on the press in order to explore the dialogue between the bilaterally divided Zionist and assimilationist communities, I will use the annual almanacs *Židovský Kalendář* [Jewish Calendar/Almanac], and *Kalendář Česko-židovský* [Czech-Jewish Calendar/Almanac], in which Fuchs, Kohn, and Fischer published their works, as well as collections of essays and poems published outside of the Czech Jewish press. I will also use the weekly publications *Rozvoj* [Development] *Selbstwehr* [Self-Defense] and

⁴⁰ Čapková, 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Židovské zprávy [Jewish News] in order to support my larger arguments regarding the divisions between and within the assimilationist and Zionist groups. In the interwar period, *Rozvoj* was the weekly organ of the assimilations⁴², *Selbstwehr*⁴³ and *Židovské zprávy*⁴⁴ of the Zionists. I rely more heavily on *Židovské zprávy* than on *Selbstwehr*, both because my interest lies in the Czech-language discourse between the Zionists and assimilationists and because it was on the pages of the two Czech-language papers [*Rozvoj* and *Židovské zprávy*] that the debate was taking place.⁴⁵ I will, however, return to the topic of the relationship between these two Zionist publications at a later point. The *Židovský Kalendář* was the yearly literary publication of *Židovské zprávy* and the *Kalendář Česko-židovský* was the first Jewish periodical to appear in Czech. It was first published in 1881 by the *Spolek českých akademiků-židů* (SČAŽ) [Association of Czech Academic Jews], the first organized Czech assimilationist group, and it ran from 1881 until 1914 and then again from the end of World War I until 1939.⁴⁶

Despite the fact that these newspapers ran until the Nazi occupation of what was by now called Czecho-Slovakia in March 1939, things took a drastic turn for Czechoslovakia and its

⁴² “By 1907, *Rozvoj* had replaced *Českožidovské listy* as the paper of choice among Czech-national Jews. *Českožidovské listy* ceased publication. *Rozvoj* changed from a fortnightly to a weekly, expanded its format, and moved its editorial offices to Prague. From there it continued to publish the single most influential organ of Czech-Jewish opinion until the Nazi occupation of 1939.” Hillel Kieval. *The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). 85.

⁴³ In 1907 *Selbstwehr* “became the official organ of the Bohemian District of the Zionist Organization, and, after 1918, of the Zionist Organization of Czechoslovakia.” Avigdor Dagan. “The Press.” In: *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, Volume 1*. (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968). 525.

⁴⁴ “In 1916, Ludvík Singer, who later became the first Zionist member of the Czechoslovak Parliament, tried to start a Czech-language Zionist paper but his efforts did not bear fruit until April 1918, when a new Zionist fortnightly, *Židovské Zprávy*, was launched...The paper was a fortnightly for only a little over half a year. At the end of 1918, it was changed into a weekly.” Dagan, 526.

⁴⁵ Dagan, 530.

⁴⁶ Kieval, 28-29. Dagan, 524.

Jewish population already in 1938,. Mendelsohn points out that “The Munich agreement created a totally new situation in Czechoslovakia.”⁴⁷ In addition to territorial changes, the Jewish citizens of the former Czechoslovakia found themselves stuck between the Germans and the Czechs in the case of the Sudeten Jews, or returned to Hungary, in the case of some Slovakian Jews. Indeed, “the achievement of Slovak autonomy as a result of the Munich agreement and the establishment of a new type of Czech regime marked the beginning of the end of that Czech-Jewish alliance which was unparalleled in interwar East Central Europe.”⁴⁸ For this reason, I will not deal with the period of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, as the ideological disparity regarding the nationality of Bohemian Jews were, during this period, rather moot.

Instead I will focus on the years 1918-1938, providing some background regarding the development of the assimilationist and Zionist movements in the years preceding the foundation of the First Czechoslovak Republic. The remainder of this paper will be broken into two sections, one dealing with the Czech-Jews and the other with the Czech Zionists. This model provides the most logical ordering since Czech Zionism could not exist in the form that it does were it not for the existence of the Czech assimilationist movement. The two movements undeniably colored each other’s ideologies and were in constant discourse with one another, so the chapters will account for this fact while maintaining their focus on each individual movement. Throughout the course of this paper, I will devise sub-sections of the assimilationist and Zionist groups—namely the aforementioned ‘radical assimilationist’ and ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis,’ ‘Jewish national,’ and ‘radical Zionist’—and then complicate the divisive nature of even the larger bilateral division through closer ideological comparison.

⁴⁷ Mendelsohn, 166.

⁴⁸ Mendelsohn, 168.

The Assimilationists

Understanding Jewish assimilation in Bohemia is complicated by the fact that the process began already before the foundation of the Czechoslovak state; the Jews in the Czech lands had already acculturated, if not assimilated into two different national groups: the Czech and the German. Although the Jews of Bohemia, under Austro-Hungarian rule, were not fully emancipated until 1867, “in 1852 the famous Prague ghetto, the *Judenstadt*, had already been abolished; Jews received permission to settle anywhere, and the former ghetto was renamed *Josephstadt*, in honor of the enlightened monarch of the preceding century.”⁴⁹ This freedom of movement, combined with the abolition of the family laws, which had previously limited Jewish marriage, drastically altered the situation of the region’s Jews, allowing for further integration into the surrounding non-Jewish economic, cultural and social spheres. However, as Hans Kohn points out, the atmosphere in mid-19th century Austria-Hungary was not conducive to an easy integration for the Jewish minority, particularly outside of Vienna. He suggests that,

In Central Europe, in the period from 1848 to 1867, and increasingly so later on, the various ethnic groups continued to emphasize their heritages, their differences, and their disparate and often conflicting histories and historical claims. The awakening of the national consciousness of the Czech people in this period...stressed its unique past and its distinctiveness from other peoples, above all from the Germans.⁵⁰

The fact that Czech nationalism at that time was more emotive than political, as per Kohn’s model, did not weaken its impact in Bohemia. In contrast to what Mendelsohn calls the ‘monocultural character’ of Germany, Austria and Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia were ‘bicultural’ and as the Jews were “obliged to choose between German and Czech,” they were “caught between two competing cultures,” an uncomfortable position for a minority group.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 16.

⁵¹ Mendelsohn, 133.

Indeed, the Jews had many reasons to ‘choose’ the German culture over the Czech. As Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein points out, “the short-lived victory of German liberalism, favored by the military defeats of Austria during that period, did promote the political, cultural, and economic absorption of the Jews;” similarly, the Jews living in Bohemia, “regarded German culture and German schools as gateways to the “great wide world” for themselves and their children, while Czech culture was limited only to the tiny Czech people.”⁵² However, this placed the Jewish population of Bohemia in an awkward position. It did not endear the Jews to the Czechs, then, that they were seen as aids in the process of Germanization.⁵³ Nationalist Czech politicians utilized the intense struggle between the Czechs and the Germans, combined with the perceived Germanizing influence of the Jews as an anti-Semitic trope.⁵⁴ Kieval points out that in the 1860s, with the initial upswing in Czech nationalism, the Jews remained primarily *regierungstreu* [loyal to the regime]. Indeed, he argues, “Czech nationalist writers in the 1860s and 1870s seemed both to take for granted and to resent the notion that there existed in Prague a German-Jewish cultural alliance.”⁵⁵ He cites Neruda’s *Pro strach židvoský* as an example, expounding on Neruda’s anti-Semitism, which was couched in his belief that not only were the Jews on the side of the Germans, but also overtly against the Czechs.

Neither did the Germans accept the Jews into their community entirely without question. Indeed, Kohn suggests that this integration was particularly problematic in Bohemia and

⁵² Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein. “The Jews Between Czechs and Germans in the Historic Lands, 1848-1918.” In. *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*. 32.

⁵³ Tara Zahra. *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948*. (Ithica and London: Cornell University Press, 2008). 22; Tatjana Lichtenstein ““Making Jews at Home: Zionism and the Construction of Jewish Nationality in Inter-war Czechoslovakia.” *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 1, June 2006. Pgs. 49-71. 58; Kohn. “Before 1918 in the Historic Lands.” 18.

⁵⁴ Mendelsohn, 134.

⁵⁵ Kieval. *The Making of Czech Jewry*. 21.

Moravia. He stresses that the German students at the University in Prague saw their Jewish colleagues as ‘aliens’ in their midst.⁵⁶ Although the Jews made up 45 percent of the ‘German population’ of Prague, German Catholics and German Jews rarely lived in the same buildings.⁵⁷ Additionally, German völkish groups began to command more influence, radicalizing their national policies and excluding Jews from the ranks of their Lese- and Redehalle in the 1890s.⁵⁸

Despite earlier loyalty to the Austrian government, the combination of growing German anti-Semitism and an emerging Czech national and cultural consciousness around the turn of the century resulted in a growing Jewish identification with Czech nationality. This is not to say that Czech anti-Semitism did not dampen the trend of assimilation. Indeed the *svůj ke svému* [each to his own (kind)] campaign in the 1890s along with the failed Badeni language ordinances and the Hilsner trial in the same period all served as indications of a still strong Czech anti-Jewish sentiment.

The eponymously titled Badeni language ordinances, which would have institutionalized bilingualism in the Czech lands had they succeeded, resulted instead in massive riots and violent mobs made of Germans and Czechs, who agitated against one another and against the Jews. The aforementioned situation of the Jews ‘between’ the Germans and the Czechs surely exacerbated their use as scapegoats, but as Kieval so lyrically points out, “the carefully constructed plans and cherished hopes of countless Czech-speaking Jews lay strewn along the sidewalks of Prague...together with the shards of glass and broken furniture of Jewish homes and shops.”⁵⁹ Indeed, this was a devastating let-down for the Czech assimilationists, only aggravated by the Hilsner trial, in 1899, when in the town of Polná a poor Jewish man was accused of having killed

⁵⁶ Hans Kohn, 18.

⁵⁷ Cohen, 136.

⁵⁸ Kieval. *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 73.

a Christian girl to use her blood for ritual purposes. Although he was initially found guilty sentenced to death by hanging, he was later granted a re-trial “largely in response to a brochure published by Masaryk.”⁶⁰ The man who would become the first president of Czechoslovakia in 1918 could surely not have predicted what an effect this act would have on his future relationship to the Jews in Czechoslovakia and around the world.

Despite strong Czech anti-Semitism in the 1890s, in Bohemia “by 1900, the Jews professing Czech nationality represented a majority of Bohemian Jewry—55 per cent as against the 45 per cent who chose German nationality.”⁶¹ While we must acknowledge the lack of a formal ‘third option’ in this data, namely the identification with Jewish nationality—an alternative that was not officially available under Austro-Hungarian leadership because the census was based on *Umgangssprache* [language of daily use]—it is significant that the Bohemian Jews began to associate themselves with the Czech nationality in greater numbers even before any kind of concrete independent Czech political entity was imminent.

Much of this had to do with the redistribution of Czechs, Germans, and Jews at this time. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Czech Jews relocated en masse in two waves. According to Kestenberg-Gladstein, a study of the *Statistical Tables*, which documented the first wave instigated by the *Freizügigkeit* in 1849, “gives the impression that each of the migrating families...set out in a different direction, settling down just two or three miles from their former homes.”⁶² However, this wave was short-lived, and the second, which concluded about forty years later, in 1893, “collided head on with the centripetal urban movement of population fostered by industrialization,” resulting in the movement to the northern and northwestern parts

⁶⁰ Ibid, 74.

⁶¹ Kestenberg-Gladstein, 34.

⁶² Ibid, 27.

of Bohemia along with a general trend of urbanization.⁶³ This trend was not unique to the Jews of the region. In fact, many non-Jewish Czechs were moving in the same direction, namely, from the more ‘Czech’ east to the more ‘German’ west.⁶⁴ It was precisely because of this that the formerly ‘German west’ became less and less so. Indeed, by 1900, “immigrants made up almost 60 percent of the “citizen residents” of [Prague] and the inner suburbs; fully 85 percent of these people had originated in the predominantly Czech-speaking parts of Bohemia.”⁶⁵ The mass influx of Czechs into Prague combined with the radicalization of Czech politics in the 1890s resulted in a flip-flop of dominant cultural influence: by the turn of the century 92.3% of the total population of Prague claimed Czech nationality.⁶⁶ Kieval claims that the immigration of Czech Jews to Prague, which corresponded to that of their non-Jewish co-nationals, was inherently different in that the Czechs did not feel the need to integrate into the previously dominant German culture, while the Jews, by joining the existing Jewish cultural institutions, necessarily did.⁶⁷ This argument is complicated, as we will see, by the fact that participation in German-language activities or organization did not necessitate German national allegiance; neither did it mean that the Jews abandoned their Czech affiliation, but likely functioned bilingually.

It is important to point out that as early as the 1840s, some Jewish students and intellectuals in Prague, despite the fact that most had been educated in German, sought to “promote Czech nationalism.”⁶⁸ However, these early attempts at national assimilation met with mostly negative reactions on the part of the Czechs; this was epitomized by Karel Havlíček

⁶³ Ibid, 28.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 31.

⁶⁵ Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*. 14.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 16.

⁶⁸ Hillel Kieval. *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). 30

Borovský's publicized rejection of Siegfried Kapper's publication of *České listy* in 1846. Kieval points out that, "Havlíček reproached those Jews who wanted to abandon their culture, including their "natural" language, Hebrew. To those who had already thrown [it] overboard he offered the advice that they cultivate German...European Jewry's second mother tongue."⁶⁹ In the face of this rejection by the Czechs, the so-called Jewish "Young Czechs" frequently re-aligned themselves temporarily with the Austrian-German camp, leaving to study in Vienna, though, of course, as Hostovský points out, even this rejection "did not deter individual Jews from continuing to strive for what they believed would be a cementing of the close ties between Jews and Czechs, who, as they pointed out, shared the same fate."⁷⁰ The trope of a Czech and Jewish shared fate is one that comes up repeatedly in the discourse surrounding the national development of both groups, characterized as they are as a nation without a homeland.⁷¹ It is revealing that this image was employed both by those with a Jewish national agenda, distinguishing the Czechs and the Jews, and those who sought to bring the Czechs and the Jews closer together.

Dmitry Shumsky complicates the notion of national affiliation as a purely linguistic issue. Assuming that the daily usage of German or Czech implies a sense of corresponding national loyalty, is, Shumsky argues, an oversimplification.⁷² Instead of dividing the Bohemian Jews into

⁶⁹ Ibid, 31.

⁷⁰ Kestenbergl-Gladstein. 23. Egon Hostovský. "The Czech-Jewish Movement." In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume II*. 150.

⁷¹ See, for example: Jindřich Kohn's article "Masaryk's School of Thought." In *Masaryk and the Jews*. (New York: The Night & Day Press, 1941). Also Iveta Vondrášková's article: "The Czech-Jewish Assimilation Movement and its Reflections of Czech National Traditions." In *Judaica Bohemiae*. Volume XXXVI, 2000. Židovská Muzeum v Praze, 2001.

⁷² Dmitry Shumsky. "On Ethno-Centrism and its Limits—Czecho-German Jewry in Fin-de-Siecle Prague and the Origins of Zionist Bi-Nationalism." *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*. Volume 5, 2006. Pgs. 173-188. 178.

the two groups “Czech Jews” and “German Jews,” he suggests a reconciliation of these two conflicting categories into what he calls “Czecho-German Jewry,” a term which,

is by no means intended to refer to any bounded collectivity which possessed a kind of “Czech-German-Jewish” identity. Rather, the intention is to grasp a sort of socio-cultural experience on the part of much of the Prague Jewry, characterized by a peculiar combination of German educational patterns, Czech social affinities on a daily basis, and, indeed, a core identity of Jewish ethnicity.⁷³

Although Shumsky creates one group out of the majority of Bohemian Jews he, like Kieval and Cohen, acknowledges that the Jews were caught between the sparring Czech and Jewish national movements. Indeed, although their bilingualism is not an indication of national allegiance, it was seen as such by the opposing camps.

In the light of the tendency of Czech-German ethno-national discourse to unequivocally identify linguistic patterns and national affinities, Jewish bilingualism was regarded as an evidence of Jewish national duplicity. Because of their unwillingness to adopt a clear linguistic-cultural stance, the Czecho-German Jews therefore found themselves caught in crossfire from both sides, German and Czech, as is evident from German and Czech anti-Semitic pamphlets.⁷⁴

Shumsky’s argument provides an interesting platform from which to explore the notion that the Jews in the Czech lands were inherently multinational. Although he uses it as a basis for the understanding of Czechoslovak Zionism, it can also add a dimension to the examination of Jewish assimilation. Indeed, this model of multi-ethnic and national association is central to the understanding of all the Jewish groups in interwar Czechoslovakia. Whether Jewish national or cultural identity, all of the figures that I deal with in this paper struggled to reconcile and incorporate the multiple levels of identity and loyalty. It is particularly interesting to consider how the perceived Czech-German dichotomy of Jewish association shifted in the interwar years into an assimilationist-Zionist dichotomy.

⁷³ Ibid, 178.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 179.

Although he complicates assumptions about the dichotomous nature of Jewish identity and suggesting a fusion of Czech, German, and Jewish, Shumsky's model does not take into account the emergence of a strong ideology of assimilation, a trend which he does not address, but without which the emerging Zionist movement cannot be understood. Cohen suggests that the Jews of Prague in the second half of the 19th century were split into three camps: those who were loyal to the Germans, the Czech nationals, and the new Jewish national group.⁷⁵ The emergence of the third group,

threatened the equilibrium of organized Jewish life no less than had the Czech-Jewish movement a decade or two earlier...Rightly or wrongly, Prague Zionism was interpreted by many to have been a defection from within the ranks of German-speaking Jewry, an internal weakening of the German cultural edifice, and thus qualitatively distinct from the challenge posed by the Czech-Jewish movement.⁷⁶

I will deal more with the makeup of the Jewish national movement in the chapter devoted to this group, but it is interesting to consider the shift in potential ideological alignments, perceived or actual with the foundation of Czechoslovakia.

Egon Hostovský proposes that Jewish assimilation in the Czech lands can be divided into two distinct temporal phases: the eighteenth and early nineteenth and the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: "In the earlier phase, the ideal of assimilation centered around religious liberty and human freedom in general, while in the later phase the stress was on the desire of the Jews to live side by side with the Czechs, sharing the Czech national ideals."⁷⁷ It seems that the second phase could not have emerged without at least the relative success of the first. For this reason it is pertinent to look at the emergence of Jewish allegiance to their Czech co-nationals in Austria-Hungary and how this loyalty played out with the emergence of a Czechoslovak state.

⁷⁵ Cohen, 32-3.

⁷⁶ Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*. 22.

⁷⁷ Hostovský. 150.

Originally, the Czech nationalist Jews aligned themselves with the ‘Young Czech’/‘National Liberal Party’ but the alliance dissolved,

under pressure from a number of directions: the radicalization of student politics in Prague, the government’s disastrous handling of the Badeni language ordinances of 1897, the Hilsner ritual murder trial of 1899, and the irresistible appeal of popular anti-Semitism. It had already buckled during the outbursts of popular violence that erupted in Prague and elsewhere in 1897 and was probably dead before the Hilsner affair provided the coup de grace two years later.⁷⁸

With the dissolution of their association with the Young Czechs and Masaryk’s involvement in the Hilsner trial, the Czech-Jews realigned themselves with Masaryk’s Realist party, clearly the viable partner for the Czech Jewish nationals.⁷⁹ The assimilationists believed that with the victory of the Realist party and the appointment of Masaryk to president, “their political purpose... [was] reduced to ensuring Jewish support for the new state, their cultural program to achieving a more effective integration with the Czech national majority.”⁸⁰ This appeared to be a possibility in the first years of the new Czechoslovak Republic. Indeed, as Kieval points out, with the foundation of the state with the liberal and openly anti anti-Semitic Masaryk as its president, “a good part of the political—if not the cultural—program of the Czech-Jewish movement had come to pass by the end of 1918.”⁸¹ Instead of being a a group of Jews in the ‘provincial capital’ of Prague within the larger Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, they were now officially Czechoslovaks.

Despite what appeared to be an intial victory for the Czech-Jews, this was only the first step in the foundation of the policies of the emerging political entity towards the Jews. The assimilationists did not account for the political saviness of their ‘competitors’ in the form of the Zionists, who became the offical collaborators of the Czechoslovak government on issues of

⁷⁸ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 200.

⁷⁹ Kieval. *Languages of Community*, 198.

⁸⁰ Kieval. *The Making of Czech Jewry*. 184.

⁸¹ Ibid, 183.

Jewish policy instead of the assimilationists. I will deal later with how this came to pass, but Čapková calls the success of the Zionists and the ‘failure’ of the Czech-Jews ‘bewildering,’ consequently suggesting some of the possible reasons behind this letdown:

Above all Czechoslovakia as a multi-national state could not accept the “assimilation” model like France and Germany. Additionally, with relation to Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia this model wasn’t viable for the majority of Jews in Czechoslovakia.⁸²

She goes on to point out that the Zionists ‘took advantage of this fact’ to become the ‘main partners’ of the government. The other cause of disenchantment for the Czech-Jews according to Čapková, was the ‘Jew baiting’ in the first years of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Although the *Národní Výbor* [Czech National Committee] “discouraged suggestions that Jews be excluded from active participation in the triumphant national movement,” the national fervor did result in some anti-Semitic violence: in December 1918, Czech troops joined with civilians in attacking Jews and Jewish property in Prague.⁸³ Again, in 1920, Czech violence erupted against the Jews of Prague, “when mobs broke into the ancient Jewish Town Hall, tore apart paintings and furnishings, rifled through desk drawers, and destroyed priceless documents relating to the history of the Jews in the city.”⁸⁴ However, aside from these incidents there was little anti-Semitic violence in interwar Bohemia and Czechoslovakia’s reputation as a liberal bastion for the Jews in this period remains justified, at least in the western regions. Indeed, as Čapková points out, these relatively low levels of anti-Semitism combined with the ‘stabilization’ of the government to lead to,

Quicker integration of the Jewish population into Czech cultural and linguistic society, which resulted in lower levels of interest in an organized Czech-Jewish movement. Many Jews in the Czech territories felt so embedded in Czech society that the activities of the

⁸² Čapková, 107.

⁸³ Kieval. *The Making of Czech Jewry*.185.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 186.

Czech-Jews seemed to them to be superfluous, unnecessary. The integration of Jews into the Czech nation was already their reality.⁸⁵ Since many Czech Jews had already integrated successfully, the necessity of an organized movement for this group was understandably contestable. Perhaps this is where the distinction can be drawn between those who were proponents of ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ and those whose assimilation was radical.

Czech-Jewish Synthesis

Despite the fact that the Czech-national Jews had supported his party, Masaryk’s ideology made him more sympathetic to the Zionist group, a theme that I will return to later. His “frequent endorsements of Jewish national positions...produced genuine consternation in the Czech-Jewish camp.”⁸⁶ This ideological conflict came to a head, when the Czechoslovak constitution was officially released in 1920. In it,

the government formally announced its recognition of the Jewish nationality...Jews who regarded themselves as members of a separate nationality had the right to express this choice in censuses and elections, yet they could not be required by the states to do so. The Jews, moreover, were the only national minority not to be defined by a linguistic criterion, nor did they necessarily have to identify with the Jewish religion.⁸⁷

Because the choice of Jewish identification was the only one that was not tied to a corresponding language, the Jews could choose this orientation regardless of their pre-war linguistic allegiances. This was not only a victory for the Zionist camp, but also a strategic move for the Czechoslovak government, whose goal was to diminish the number of citizens who identified as Germans.

I will discuss more at length in my chapter on the Zionists how this came to pass, but the recognition of Jews as a national minority had visible demographic results. In the 1921 census,

⁸⁵ Čapková, 140.

⁸⁶ Kieval, *Languages of Community*. 199.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 213.

“Czechoslovak census takers counted 420,000 fewer Germans in the Bohemian lands than had been counted by Habsburg authorities only ten years earlier.”⁸⁸ Though it has been argued that the census-takers may have manipulated the results or that the Jewish population may have identified their nationality based on various social or political pressures, the results certainly indicate a serious shift away from mass Jewish alliance with German nationality.⁸⁹ Tara Zahra points out that,

The state instituted several new policies designed to boost Czech numbers through the census in 1921. First Czechs and Slovaks were counted together as members of the Czechoslovak majority (compared with 23 percent Germans, 5.6 percent Hungarians, 3 percent Ruthenians, and 1 percent Jews) and helped to affirm Czechoslovakia’s legitimacy as a nation-state...In 1900, out of 44,255 Jews in Moravia, 34,261 (72.42 percent) had declared themselves to be German speakers. In 1921 in Moravia and Silesia, 13,623 (30.7 percent) registered as Germans, and 18,955 (41.84 percent) declared themselves Jews. The number of “German” Jews thereby decreased by 42 percent.⁹⁰

Although these figures deal with Moravia, rather than Bohemia, they are representative of a trend, which is why I consider them in relation to Bohemia’s numbers. Hans Kohn points out that in Prague, already at the turn of the century, “of the 24,000 Jews who lived in the metropolitan area of Prague, 14,145 regarded Czech as their language of daily use (*Umgangssprache*) and only 11,346 so considered the German language.”⁹¹ In the first Czechoslovak census in 1921, the Germans lost large numbers, presumably mostly to the Jewish camp: 14% fewer Jews identified as German, around two percent fewer as Czech, and 14.8% identified as Jews.⁹² Not only is it important that more Jews were identifying as such, but that there was a move away from identification with the Germans. And this was precisely the point.

⁸⁸ Zahra, 119.

⁸⁹ Mendelsohn, 146.

⁹⁰ Zahra, 120. The figures for the 1921 census in Bohemia are as follows: Jewish: 14.6%; Czechoslovak: 49.49%; German: 34.85%. Mendelsohn, 146.

⁹¹ Hans Kohn, 18.

⁹² Čapková, 51.

Whatever the cause, the allowance of the census to “recognize[...] Jewish national autonomy,” was a blow to the Czech-Jewish faction. “After decades of painstaking work promoting Czech national culture and Czech political loyalties among the Jews, the Czech-Jewish movement had to face the predicament of an independent Czechoslovakia that supported the principle of Jewish cultural autonomy.”⁹³ Although the Jews no longer had to fight for their right to equal rights, the concept of ‘Jewish autonomy’ was fundamentally against their assimilationist ideology, and it dashed their hopes of being accepted as Czech co-nationalists in the new state.

It is useful to take a moment to identify the groups that made up the Czech-Jewish movement in the interwar period. The oldest established group that added its voice to the assimilationist ideological movement was the so-called *Spolek akademiků Čechů-židů* [The Association of Academic Czech Jews]. This early association of Czech-speaking Jewish students was behind the aforementioned *Českožidovský Kalendář*, the first Czech language Jewish publication. Before the foundation of the Czechoslovak state, there were two main groups of Czech assimilationist Jews: the *Politická jednota českožidovská* [Czech-Jewish Political Union], which had aligned politically with the Young Czechs, and the *Svaz českých pokrokových židů* [Association of Progressive Jews], founded by Viktor Vohryzek as an alternative to the former group, which aligned politically with Masaryk’s Realist party. These groups combined in 1919 under the title *Svaz Čechů-židů* (Union of Czech Jews [SČAŽ]), after which the group’s members voted “to change its bylaws to accept members from all religious groups.”⁹⁴ Likewise, the Kapper Club, now renamed *Academický Spolek “Kapper”* [Kapper Academic Society], presumably consciously having dropped the word ‘Jew’ from its title, defined its goal as “to

⁹³ Kieval, *Languages of Community*. 199.

⁹⁴ Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, 184.

further simultaneously the well-being of the Czechoslovak state as well as Jewish integration into Czech society. Toward those ends it welcomed the participation of liberal-minded non-Jews.”⁹⁵ *Rozvoj* became the official voice of this movement; the ideological goal of the paper and its publishers was to “deepen the sense of Czech national identity among Jews, effect a social and economic reorientation and modernization of Czech-Jewish life, and promote a new religious sensibility—teaching Jews the difference (as *Rozvoj* put it) between religion and piety.”⁹⁶ While the publishers and writers did not call for Jewish secularization, they did encourage Jews to abolish separatism and integrate into Czech society culturally, linguistically, and politically.

According to Hostovský’s aforementioned model of the two ‘phases’ of assimilation in the Czech lands, the Jews in the interwar period, it seems, were confident enough in their freedom to practice their religion, that their primary goal shifted from the pursuit of general religious liberty to that of synthesizing with the Czech national agenda; this is clear from the stated objectives of the SČAŽ and the *Academický Spolek “Kapper.”* Čapková identifies the leadership of the ‘young generation’ as Viktor Vohryzek, Bohdan Klineberger, Jindřich Kohn, Max Pleschner, Stanislav Schulhof, Viktor Teytsem, and Eudard and Max Lederer.⁹⁷ This group of philosophers, journalists, and political theorists maintained their relationship to their Jewishness, while at the same time resolutely declaring their Czechness. These men all represent the ideals of the ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ group, however, Jindřich Kohn is perhaps the most important representative of the Czech-Jewish synthesis—a fact that becomes clear when one explores his publications, oratory, and political affiliations.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 184.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 201.

⁹⁷ Čapková, 101-102.

In an essay entitled *Okno s Mechem* [A Window with Moss], which was published in the *Kalendář Česko-židovský* in 1921, Kohn addresses his feelings toward Jewish assimilation lyrically:

And in the little room whose boundary is the little window with moss, emerges a belief in the immutable extent of everything. That belief is regarded here as Jewish. But it's a faith grown in the earth of astronomy...For me however the question of real measurement [of time] isn't a question of books, to me that isn't the charge of tradition. To me, my window with moss is a '*middle kingdom*.' There the measurements of rabbinical wisdom and human art met. Here these measurements found their middle together. That is my childhood feeling of life by the window with moss...Beyond the window with moss however, as it seems to me, rises up an immeasurable land. That immeasurability sometimes functions as a broadness, which necessitates an exhalation and draws the gaze to the heavens. In other times the boundlessness can be frightening, something that brings melancholy and living visions. And then, from the oval window in the half-bricked house opposite, my window with moss looks like a half veiled face.⁹⁸

In the 'little room' of Kohn's childhood, he sits at the window. He is 'in between' on a threshold.

His love of his homeland, expansive and terrifying as it may be, is colored by his Jewishness but not lessened because of it. He goes on to explain:

Let's look at the future motives of the assimilationist philosophy. What is the true relationship of Eastern philosophy [Jewishness] without understanding and the Western spirit of peace? Is that which we call assimilation some kind of preparation to the solution of this problem? Is it one theme? That is a host of questions. A second theme is the following parable: assimilation is expected sitting by a closed window with moss [the topic has been much talked about and nothing has been done]. It's a hesitation between the desire for freedom and the fear of infinity [the unknown]. What is the balance between this and that kind of fear?⁹⁹

Kohn looks for a solution to the position of the Jews in Czech society. Moss grows on the window separating the little room from the wide world because the window is not opened, and the solution, Kohn suggests, is to overcome the fear of the boundless and open the window. The relationship between Eastern philosophy, Jewishness, and the Western spirit of peace, democracy, can be mutually beneficial.

⁹⁸ Jindřich Kohn. "Okno s Mechem." 54.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 54.

Egon Hostovský points out that, for Kohn, “assimilation [was] a way to peace and serenity.”¹⁰⁰ In contrast to some of his peers, who struggled to reconcile the duality of their identities, Kohn,

looked to assimilation to provide the answer to every problem. Assimilation, he stated, reconciled the longing for eternity with the fear of it. Man was above all an adaptable creature, and Kohn viewed the entire history of mankind as a constant process of adaptation.¹⁰¹

Kohn’s philosophy was in line with the optimism of the Czech-Jewish movement regarding the potential for its members to be both fully committed Czechs and Jews. However, he opposed “the nationalist interpretation of assimilation *usque ad finem*, which would end in a total fusion of Jews with the Czech nation. He maintained that Czech national identity was rooted in Czech culture and Czech spiritual values rather than in a nationalist political program.”¹⁰² It is this attitude that characterizes the values of Czech-Jewish synthesis, a set of values to whose end Kohn worked for his whole life.

The Czech Jewish movement’s main periodical organ, *Rozvoj*, published articles openly speaking against the Zionist movement and asserting their loyalty to the Czech nation along with their confidence in the success of the project of assimilation. In one article in 1919, they call upon their readers to accept the reality of assimilation and act upon it and become ‘good Czechs’:

Assimilation is not a process, we are not calling our Jewish brethren from different nations to our Czech nation: that would be immoral. Assimilation is a fact and our movement wants Jews to acknowledge this fact. It desires the change of their passive belonging to the nation from physical nationality to spiritual nationality, [into] active participation in the work towards the national ideal. Out of poor Czechs, who comprise

¹⁰⁰ Hostovský, 444.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 444.

¹⁰² Kateřina Čápková. “Jindřich Kohn.” In *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe Volume I*. Ed. Gersohn David Hundert. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). 912-13.

even the majority of Christians, [our movement] would like to make good [ones]. This concerns nationalization.¹⁰³

The goal of the *Svaz Čechů židů* was to make good Czechs out of its members, to accept assimilation as a fact and to make the Czech-Jewish association not physical, but spiritual [*duševní*]. It was, “our charge, not as Jews, but as people, is to work towards that end intensively everywhere and always.”¹⁰⁴ It is precisely this ideology that makes the members of the Czech-Jewish movement in general, and Jindřich Kohn specifically epitomize the notion of Czech-Jewish synthesis and what sets Czech-Jewish synthesis apart: “unlike similar groups in other countries, they tried to achieve a Jewish transformation by means of a transformation of the host nation.”¹⁰⁵ The fact that the goal of collaboration and mutual edification was not entirely limited to the Czech-Jews is what makes the Czech case so unique.

The Radical Assimilationists

The group of people that I have labeled the ‘radical assimilationists’ includes Czech Jews who left the religion formally and those who simply severed their cultural relation to it. For that reason, and due to of lack of data, I will not include statistics on conversion and intermarriage in this section. However, the phenomenon is an interesting one to consider. As in other Jewish communities of the western model, assimilation, and even conversion in the Czech lands were not out of the ordinary. Although I was not able to do my own research regarding this trend, Mendelsohn provides a good basis from which to approach the subject. He points out that intermarriage, “always a good test of how “Jewish” a given community is, was quite high in the Czech lands;” indeed, “in Bohemia, in 1931, 32 of every 100 Jewish grooms married gentile

¹⁰³ *Rozvoj*. 1919. číslo 13, Strana 3. Dr. Klineberger

¹⁰⁴ *Rozvoj*, číslo 3, Leden 1919, Strana 3, ‘Nase Budoucnost!—Beerich Weiner

¹⁰⁵ Hostovský, 148.

women; for Jewish brides the figure is a bit lower.”¹⁰⁶ He goes on to assert that “few conversions took place anywhere in Czechoslovakia, as in East Central Europe in general, with the single exception of Hungary.”¹⁰⁷ So although few Jews left the religion formally, there was a high level of ‘radical assimilation’ in the sense of Jews abandoning their Jewishness on a practical level.

As Kateřina Čapková points out, a side effect of the uniquely multi-dimensional Jewish community in the interwar Czech lands was a certain amount of mutability, a phenomenon that revealed itself in a certain amount of movement between groups and shifting national identities:

in many cases, that the affiliation to organized national parties of some individuals changed according to current societal and political situations. From the Czech-Jewish group people became Zionists, from the German Jews people became Czech-Jews or (more often) Zionists, from the group of Zionists people became cosmopolitan founding communists. In the wake of concrete historical milestones, which led to these changes in national identity, a role was played by the personal search for individual identity.¹⁰⁸

This is certainly the case for Alfred Fuchs, whose search for identity took him from Zionism, to the Czech-Jewish movement, and ultimately to the most extreme form of assimilation—namely, conversion.¹⁰⁹ This decision to abandon his Jewishness to become a Catholic provides an interesting case study.

Kieval situates Alfred Fuchs in the group of the young generation of Czech-Jewish thinkers; his name is listed alongside Viktor Teytz’s, the editor of *Rozvoj* and Jindřich Kohn’s, among others. This group, Kieval argues, made it their goal to target the ‘nationally indifferent’ Jews who “may no longer have advocated German cultural and political dominance in the Czech

¹⁰⁶ Mendelsohn, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 145.

¹⁰⁸ Čapková, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Hostovský, 448.

lands, but he lacked outward dedication to Czech nationalism.”¹¹⁰ This was in the early years of the 20th century, before Czechoslovakia gained independence and, as the years progressed the *českožidovská otázka* [Czech-Jewish question] shifted focus from the problem of strong German cultural influence to the problem of defining ‘postemancipatory Czech-Jewish culture.’¹¹¹

With the foundation of the Czechoslovak state, the Jews in Bohemia could, should they so choose, justifiably claim Czech nationality. Kieval claims that Fuchs, who was “the highest ranking member of the SČAŽ at the close of the first World War,” left Judaism for Roman Catholicism as a consequence of his “zeal for religious mysticism.”¹¹² While this is likely a part of it, it is interesting to consider other potential motivations for his conversion. As a Czech patriot, his choice of Catholicism seems odd, when one considers that at the core of Masaryk’s vision of a Czech revival is the reawakening not only of Czech language and national consciousness but also a return to Protestantism, which

Masaryk interprets not in the theological or polemical terms of the Hussite Reformation but as an assertion of intellectual freedom, of the right for the a search for truth against any authority, and, even more importantly, as an assertion of the common humanity of man, the truly Christian practice of brotherhood, and the love of one’s neighbor.¹¹³

In addition to the fact that Protestantism plays such a prominent role in the Czech past, its 20th century liberal manifestation served as a good partner for Masaryk’s political ideology.

In an article entitled “K ethice assimilačního hnutí” [On the Ethics of the Assimilationist Movement], written in 1920, before his conversion, Fuchs contrasts the situation of the Czechs to that of the Hungarians and the Poles; he claims that the Hungarian government “required Jews to

¹¹⁰ Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*. 155.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 155.

¹¹² Ibid, 160.

¹¹³ Rene Wellek. “T.G. Masaryk on the Meaning of Czech History.” In *On Masaryk: Texts in English and German*. Ed. Joseph Novak. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988). 274

avow the stance that the Hungarian government does” while in Poland where there is a “chauvinistic government,” “anti-Semitism supports ‘assimilation’ and curbs Zionism, exactly the opposite of here [in the Czech lands].”¹¹⁴ He goes on to point out that the Zionist and anti-Semitic arguments are the same in the Czech lands, as they both believe that the Jews are a “foreign element, and because of that they always oppose assimilation, even though this assimilation has always been morally of an entirely different character than Hungarian, Polish or German-liberal [assimilation], in that it came to adherence to an oppressed nation.”¹¹⁵ He continues to assert the unique quality of the Czech-Jewish situation:

In Russia or Poland, where the Jewish *masses* were persecuted, Zionism also instilled a collective self-confidence. In the Czech lands the relations are fairly different. Our assimilation is not the ‘liberal’ kind, but the consciousness of the movement, whose ethical self-confidence does not shelter itself behind any euphemisms such as “Israelites” or “citizen of the mosaic faith,” we do not renounce or hide our Jewishness [*židovství*]. The heart of the cultural work of our thinkers is to the goal of showing which cultural components our Jewishness creates in our *Czechness*. We have a different historical philosophy than the Zionists. We are convinced that the work of Jewry is in the Diaspora and nowhere in Palestine, that the work of Jewry is to be the salt of the earth.¹¹⁶

Fuchs claims that the Zionists and the assimilationists in the Czech lands are looking for the same thing—namely, “a relationship to the land” and “roots” for their “life philosophy” but that the two groups are searching for the solution to this “Jewish pain” in two different places, the Zionists “in the land of Palestine” and “us in the Czech lands.”¹¹⁷ If Fuchs’ engagement with the question of what his “Jewishness creates in [his] Czechness,” his conversion indicates that his own answer to this question is “nothing.” The salve for his ‘Jewish pain’ was the abandonment of the root of this pain—Jewishness. This interpretation is based on Fuchs’ understanding of his

¹¹⁴ Alfred Fuchs. “K ethice assimilačního hnutí.” *Kalendář Česko-židovský*, Roč. 40 (1920-1921), pages 42-44. 42.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 42.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 43.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 43.

Jewishness. This disregards the notion that what it means to be a 'Jew' is interpreted as cultural, racial, ethnic or religious by different groups in different situations, a notion that I do not disregard in general.

Fuchs was not the only member of the SČAŽ to prioritize his Czechness over his Jewishness. Although they may not have converted to realize their goal of becoming true Czechs, Čapková points out that there was a split along these lines in the Czech-Jewish movement as a whole:

With the reaction to the changing political and social conditions, there was an internal debate between the supporters of radical assimilation, for whom the most important thing was the national program and the suppression of the Jewish component and some of the former 'Association of Progressive Czech Jews' who worked for the synthesis of Jewishness and Czechness, "Czechness with a Jewish tint."¹¹⁸

In contrast to the proponents of 'Czech-Jewish synthesis,' this younger group was more focused on the necessity of Jewish support for the Czech cause; they created a model that privileged the Czechness over the Jewishness rather than placing the two on equal footing, able to benefit from one another.

Although it remains unclear why he chose Roman Catholicism as a Czech patriot, Fuchs' loyalty to the Czech lands and later Czechoslovakia was complete. Perhaps Christianity was enough. In the 1920s Fuchs "became an important figure in modern Christian universalism, stressing the social aspects of the religion and concerning himself with the role of Christianity in the modern world."¹¹⁹ In this way he followed in the footsteps of Masaryk's liberal Christian universalism, stressing the importance of the individual in the creation of a humanitarian society.

¹¹⁸ Čapková, 122.

¹¹⁹ Helena Krejčová. "Alfred Fuchs." In *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe Volume I*. 554.

Iveta Vondrášková suggests that “the Jews had to prove they were entitled to the Czech traditions and that they were worthy of them.”¹²⁰ If this is the case, perhaps Fuchs simply took the ‘last step’ in the organic development of ‘proving’ his worth. Whether or not this is the case, this particular instance needs and deserves more research to come to a conclusive answer on the choices of Fuchs as an individual. The fact that Fuchs never “denied or concealed his Jewish origins,”¹²¹ adds another interesting dimension to this choice. Most important is that Fuchs was a Czech above all else.

The Zionists

The Zionist tradition in the Czech lands extends back to before the establishment of Czechoslovakia. However, while Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia each comprised their own “separate, and in many respects, autonomous” district in the ‘West Austrian Zionist Organization,’ Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia were included in the ‘Hungarian Zionist Organization’ without any regional governance.¹²² The combination of these different Zionist groups would pose its own challenge to interwar Czechoslovak Jewry. Oskar Rabinowicz points out that in Bohemia, there was particular emphasis “on cultural and political activities in the Diaspora (*Gegenwartsarbeit*—present-day activity in addition to the hope for a future National Home in Palestine)” as opposed to purely political Zionism, an important point to which I will return later.¹²³ Although he goes on to address the multiple organizations, I will not spell out all of them here, but refer to them as they relate to the division into two ideological groups, which is a more pertinent comparative approach than looking at each of these bodies individually.

¹²⁰ Vondrášková, 159.

¹²¹ Hostovský, 448.

¹²² Oskar K. Rabinowicz. “Czechoslovak Zionism: Analecta to a History.” In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume II*. 19.

¹²³ Ibid, 20.

Another factor to consider is that Czechoslovakia hosted multiple international Zionist events, a fact that “enlivened Zionist discussions.”¹²⁴ This atmosphere allowed both for a sophisticated conception of Zionism, but also for internal divisions. Indeed, since the inception of the state, “Czechoslovak Zionism was...divided on the political aspects of Diaspora activities both in principle (whether or not it was compatible with Palestino-centric work) and in practice (party divisions).”¹²⁵ Divided as it was, the uniting factor of the Political Zionists and the Jewish nationals, and thus the point of departure for the understanding of both groups is the belief that the Jews constitute a nationality independent of the majority nationality in any given country.

However, this was not the only factor that contributed to organized Jewish nationalism, Palestino-centric or not, in the years leading up to the foundation of Czechoslovakia. Indeed, affiliation with the Jewish nationality provided an alternative for those Jewish inhabitants of Bohemia who did not want to ‘choose sides’ in the cultural and demographic war between the Czechs and the Germans. Though, during Austro-Hungarian rule, this ‘national alliance’ was more symbolic than concrete, given that the censuses poled language of use rather than national alliances, it provided a new space that was peripheral without being ‘in between.’ Dmitry Shumsky suggests that the unilateral choice between the Czechs and the Germans would have difficult anyway due to the inherently multi-linguistic and ethnic nature of the Jews in the Czech lands up until the formation of the state; because many Jews found themselves speaking Czech in their everyday interactions, but had chosen German as their language of education, each

¹²⁴ Ibid, 28.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 34.

nationality claimed that this was an indication of Jewish ‘national duplicity.’¹²⁶ In this situation, Shumsky claims, Zionism acted as a third option; it was not a “quest for Jewish identity,”

Nor had it to do with promoting a kind of neutrality in the sense of turning their backs on both German and Czech culture. On the contrary: as it became more and more problematic to maintain the multicultural routine of their daily existence under conditions of the escalating Czech-German national conflict without being constantly blamed for national duplicity, they hoped to find in Zionism a sort of framework for reaffirming the socio-cultural mosaic of their lives.¹²⁷

Mendelsohn, too, points out that the ‘fierce struggle’ between these two groups “had a retarding effect upon Jewish efforts at assimilation...and encouraged the development of Jewish nationalism.”¹²⁸

Hans Kohn (1891-1971) recalls in his memoirs how he had become a nationalist in Prague because of “its persuasive mood of nationalist stirrings,” but he did not become a German or Czech nationalist—rather, he turned to Zionism. The same was true of Brod, and to some degree it was true of Kafka. A number of Jews who enrolled at the University of Prague (which in 1882 was divided into two—one German, the other Czech) discovered, or rediscovered, their own Jewish identity after being rejected by both opposing groups...It is clear, therefore, that the intense nationalistic atmosphere in Bohemia and Moravia imposed upon many the need to choose between competing nationalisms—and, in the Jewish case, to opt for Jewish nationalism.

Whether the Jews of Bohemia in the 1890s declared their Jewish nationality as a ‘way out’ of the difficulty of choosing between the two national camps, because of national fervor, or

¹²⁶ Dmitry Shumsky. “On Ethno-Centrism and its Limits—Czecho-German Jewry in Fin-de-Siecle Prague and the Origins of Zionist Bi-Nationalism.” (Leipzig: Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook 5(2006), 173-188). 179.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 183.

¹²⁸ Mendelsohn, 134.

in an attempt to solidify their Jewish identity, the effect was the same.¹²⁹ Zionism emerged as a strong movement, appealing to a large enough portion of the Jewish population to make it a major contender for the assimilationists.

This is particularly interesting to consider given that, in many ways, Zionism in Bohemia is necessarily post-assimilationist. In addition to the fact that Czech assimilationism had already existed in an organized form since 1876, before the Czech Zionists had officially coordinated, many of the first members of *Bar Kochba*, the Prague Zionist group founded in 1899, “were from acculturated, German-speaking families, others came from Czech-speaking backgrounds and had identified previously with Czech nationalism.”¹³⁰ Although the leading members of the Zionist movement corresponded in German, their national affiliations followed Shumsky’s model—namely they had been educated in German, but often spoke Czech at home; at least, they were bilingual.¹³¹ Indeed, Shumsky directly refutes the aforementioned model, claiming that

[the] notion of “from German or Czech assimilation to Jewish nationalism” cannot be applied to central figures of Prague Zionist movement on the eve of World War I. In fact, the socio-cultural experience of prominent Zionists such as Hugo Bergman, Max Brod, Hans Kohn, and Robert Weltsch proves to be too complex and multiple to be understood in the monocultural terms of “assimilation.”¹³²

Because they went to German schools but lived in mixed buildings, studied Czech and had ‘affinities’ with Czech culture, Shumsky sets these leaders up to epitomize his notion of Czecho-German Jewry.

Shumsky makes a convincing ideological argument, but there are some political considerations to be taken into account as well. Except for the aforementioned Jew-baiting in the

¹²⁹ Hans Kohn. “Before 1918 in the Historic Lands.” 20.

¹³⁰ Oskar K. Rabinowicz, 29. Mendelsohn, 138.

¹³¹ Shumsky, 182. Wein, 32.

¹³² Ibid, 182.

years directly following Czechoslovakia's birth, Masaryk's liberalism proved another convincing factor in the choice to align with the Zionists. Čapková elucidates this relationship:

Especially during the First World War and after, Masaryk didn't make a secret about the fact that the Zionist party was much closer to him than the opposing Czech-Jewish party. I believe that the Czech-Jews themselves contributed to Masaryk's tepid relationship to the Czech-Jewish party. Especially unpleasant to Masaryk's were the efforts of some of the Czech-Jewish ideologues in the First Republic who in the pursuit of the Czech-Jewish party considered not only the integration of Jewish citizens into the Czech nation, but also their fusion with their surroundings: assimilation in its original meaning.¹³³

In order to understand this attitude, it is pertinent to give a brief introduction both of Masaryk's fundamental philosophies and also his attitude towards Jewish nationhood and integration.

Rene Wellek points out that Masaryk's specific brand of humanism is often misunderstood as sentimental or secular; instead, he argues Masaryk's humanism is "the perfection of man conceived as a religious, moral and responsible being;" he goes on to equate this conception of man with democracy.¹³⁴ If we assume that Masaryk's humanism is inherently democratic, we must acknowledge that it is still both nationally specific and applicable to the individual. It is each nation's charge to live up to its potential by acknowledging its weaknesses and addressing them head on.¹³⁵ This was a standard that he set not only for the Czech nation, but also for all the others living in Czechoslovakia.¹³⁶ For the Jewish population, Masaryk suggested "that Jewish self-consciousness provided the best means of insuring peaceful

¹³³ Čapková, 36.

¹³⁴ Wellek, 278.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 277.

¹³⁶ "Once before the War, Masaryk was questioned concerning German, Czech, and Catholic radicalism, one after the other. He answered the three inquiries concerning three different types of radicalism with one answer. "We shall understand one another sooner when Germanism becomes more German, radicalism becomes truly radical, and Catholicism penetrates once again to the roots of Catholicism." This means in other words, "Each one ought to be more himself. Then we will all seek our inner self. Then we will find a connection between all of this, a beginning, so that all may discover the correct relationship to each other." Jindřich Kohn, "Masaryk's School of Thought and Its Relation to Judaism." In *Masaryk and the Jews*, 34.

coexistence between Jews and non-Jews.”¹³⁷ By coming to terms with the strengths and weaknesses of their own nationality, the Jews would be able to interact with the members of the new state in a way that would be peaceful and mutually beneficial. Indeed, it was because he applied his ideal to the Jews as a national group that Masaryk favored the Zionists in interwar Czechoslovakia. He was particularly sympathetic to Ahad Ha’amian cultural Zionism,¹³⁸ which focused on what was particularly Jewish in Jewish nationalism: “secular, liberal, but nonetheless embedded (as [Ahad Ha’am] argued) in the fundamental teachings of Judaism.”¹³⁹

Similarly, Masaryk did not believe that Jews *could* fully assimilate into the Czech nation. In an interview with Dr. Teyz, Masaryk distinguished between cultural and racial assimilation; equivocating on an earlier statement that the Jews could not assimilate, Masaryk stated that:

Cultural assimilation is justified and natural...The nation is not homogenous. It has an entire line of characteristic: language, origin, religion, tradition. Language is certainly the most important. Certainly the Jews can become cultural Czechs. There remains, however, a difference; the different origin and race which cannot be established so easily as religion, tradition.¹⁴⁰

It seems that by assuming that the Jews could be ‘cultural Czechs,’ Masaryk likely had in mind the use of Czech language at home, attendance of Czech schools and participation in Czech social life. Indeed, in this case, the term ‘cultural integration’ rather takes on the meaning of acculturation: the Jews should adopt Czech language and national traits without attempting to

¹³⁷ Kieval. *Languages of Community*, 205.

¹³⁸ Kieval. “Negotiating Czechoslovakia.” 116.

¹³⁹ Steven J. Zipperstein. *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha’am and the Origins of Zionism*. (London: Peter Halban, 1993). Xix.

¹⁴⁰ Felix Weltsch. “Masaryk and Zionism” in *Masaryk and the Jews*. 80.

fully assimilate, thereby denying their own national origin. Masaryk was clear on his belief that the Jews comprised their own national group with their own national characteristics.¹⁴¹

Jewish Nationalists

Masaryk's preference for Zionism over assimilationism carried over from ideology into politics. Despite this, Kieval claims that Masaryk's government was initially 'suspicious' "particularly [of] the former Hungarian citizens in Slovakia and German-speaking Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, but, to a certain extent, [of] Jewish nationalists as well."¹⁴² Although the assimilationists expected a 'great expansion' with the foundation of an independent Czechoslovakia,

It was the Zionists who organized themselves (October 22, 1918) during the revolutionary days of emerging Czechoslovakia as the Jewish National Council (*Jüdischer Nationalrat—Židovská národní rada*), which later expanded into the Jewish party (*Jüdische Partei—Židovská strana*) and became the representative political body of Czechoslovak national Jewry.¹⁴³

The National Council was made up of Ludwig Singer, Hugo Slonitz, Norbert Adler and Max Brod, who represented the Zionists and Emil Waldstein, Karel Fischl, I. Schonfeld and Oskar Altschul representing Po'ale Zion, a socialist Zionist movement focused on the colonization of Palestine.¹⁴⁴ All of these representatives were proponents of the Jewish national cause in one-way or another. The group would admit other members

provided that they unconditionally subscribe to our national program...Our basic demands are as follows: 1. Recognition of Jewish nationality, and freedom of individuals to profess same. 2. Full civic equality. 3. National minority rights and

¹⁴¹ See for example: Edvard Lederer, "Memories of Masaryk." In *Masaryk and the Jews*.

¹⁴² Ibid, 104.

¹⁴³ Oskar K. Rabinowicz, 31.

¹⁴⁴ Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, "The Jewish Minority." In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume I*. 157; Oskar K. Rabinowicz, 77.

democratization of the Religious Congregations, the latter to be combined under a Supreme Jewish Central Authority...¹⁴⁵

The nucleus of their ideology was equally cultural and national. It is interesting to consider that the group of Jews who were to serve representatives for all of Jewry in Czechoslovakia was made up solely of those who sought to further the Jewish national cause and involved in the Zionist movement. While this seems odd, it was perhaps inevitable. Not only would the Czech-Jews not have chosen to organize a separate group since they hoped to integrate fully into the new Czechoslovak state and government, but also, this group of Jewish nationals had to prove its loyalty to the new state to solidify its position and rights. The fact that they disallowed the participation in their newly formed *Židovská národní rada* [ŽNR] to any Jews who did not share their political and national program is indicative of the ideological split of the time.

However, this strict adherence to their own national aims was, in many ways appealing to the new Czechoslovak President. Kieval points out that in asserting their loyalty to the Czechoslovak state along with their rights as a national minority, they managed to underscore the legitimacy of Czechoslovakia itself.¹⁴⁶ Tatjana Lichtenstein builds on this point; the *Židovská národní rada*, with Brod at its helm, maintained that if the government accepted their proposal, it would “allow Jews to adopt a position of ‘neutral loyalty’ *vis-à-vis* the new state.”¹⁴⁷ Both Kieval and Lichtenstein address the strategic nature of the Zionists’ proposition, in which they directly addressed the fact that the recognition of Jews as a national minority would “‘withdraw’ Jews from the Czech and German national camps.”¹⁴⁸ Since a Czechoslovak majority on the 1921

¹⁴⁵ Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority.” 157.

¹⁴⁶ Kieval. “Negotiating Czechoslovakia.” 110.

¹⁴⁷ Lichtenstein, 50.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 50.

census was among the political aspirations of the new Czechoslovak government, the Jewish nationals used this fact to further their agenda:

Playing on the negative perception of assimilation in Czech nationalist discourse, Zionists proposed that placing Jews firmly into a Jewish camp would put an end to decades of ‘opportunistic’ assimilation. This ‘withdrawal’ would simultaneously, Zionists maintained, neutralize Jews’ role in the national struggle and assert their loyalty to the new state. In addition, Czech support for the Zionist program, they argued, would assist the process of moral regeneration of the country’s Jews.¹⁴⁹

Not only would this help the political end of Czechoslovakia’s new leadership to create a Czechoslovak majority, but it was in line with Masaryk’s particular brand of humanism as well. Indeed, this group cast “their own experience with German and Hungarian acculturation in terms borrowed from Czech and Slovak national narratives.”¹⁵⁰ This proposition was ultimately both ideologically appealing and politically beneficial to the new government.

The results of this meeting were ultimately favorable to the Zionists. When the Czechoslovak constitution became effective on February 29th, 1920, it included a ‘Nationality Code.’¹⁵¹ Contained in it were the requests of the *Židovská národní rada*. Also born out of this

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 50.

¹⁵⁰ Kieval. “Negotiating Czechoslovakia.” 110.

¹⁵¹ Section 122,80 which was based on Articles II and VII, 1-2, of the Treaty for the Protection of Minorities, guaranteed freedom of religious belief and practice, prayer and worship, and explicitly stated that this freedom applied in equal measure to all those residing in the State—aliens and citizens alike. The text of the law employed three different synonyms: *vyznání* (creed), *náboženství* (religion) and *víra* (faith), in order to give the broadest possible definition to the concept of religion. Section 121 of the constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and conscience. Section 124 stated in greater detail that all “creeds” were equal before the law. According to Section 123 of the Constitution, no one could be compelled, directly or indirectly, by parent, guardian, school personnel, military authorities or by officers of penal institutions to perform a religious act against his will. The term “conscience” (*svědomí*), as employed in Section 121, was understood to refer to any given religious, philosophical, or ethical view of life, while the term “creed” (*vyznání*) was defined as affiliation with a religious faith preached or advocated by a religious group. Non-affiliation with any religious group was also included under the definition of “conscience.” In Sections 121-122 the Constitution guaranteed complete

meeting were the beginnings of an official Jewish party: the *Židovská strana* was created shortly after. However, before this happened, the ŽNR issued a statement to the Jews of the new state. In it, they called for their fellow Jewish citizens to identify with the Jewish nation because:

Just as the Czechoslovak people is rightly suspicious of individual of Jewish descent who, due to changed conditions attempt to pass themselves off as Czechs, *so it truly respects the honest, unconditional acknowledgement on the part of Jews of their membership in their Jewish nationality*, as shown by official statements made by leading personalities of the new State. The only course in keeping with the dignity of the Jewish people is to make this avowal and to act accordingly, without deviation.¹⁵²

The statement calls on Jewish loyalty to the Czechoslovak state and its leaders through the cultivation of Jewish culture and national character. This undertaking would be beneficial “not only for the sake of Jewry but also for the sake of strengthening and consolidating friendly relations with the general population.”¹⁵³ The ŽNR had successfully situated the Jews in the multinational Czechoslovak state as another national minority with Masaryk’s blessing on Jewish participation in the Czechoslovak National Assembly.¹⁵⁴ In an attempt to create one group to represent all of Czechoslovak Jewry, a ‘conference of National Jewry’ was called in 1919 and the “Jewish Party of Czechoslovakia” was created; this party accepted the “principles of the Jewish National Council as guiding principles in national issues.”¹⁵⁵ Since the ŽNR was made up entirely of Zionists, the Jewish party’s ‘guiding principles’ followed in this vein.

A Jewish party, whose ideals revolved around the solidification of Jewish nationality, seems out of place in a multinational democracy. However, it must be pointed out that, although made up of members who had Zionist leanings, the party’s political activities were ‘Diaspora-

freedom of conscience and creed and hence also the absolute equality for all religious faiths.” (Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority.” 183)

¹⁵² Quoted in: “The Jewish Minority,” Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz. 160.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 160.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 167.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 161.

oriented' and that the party "operated separately from, and independently of, the Zionist Organization."¹⁵⁶ Although the members of the Jewish party were most certainly infused with Zionist ideology, what provides the most engaging fodder for discussion is where they deviated and what made the Czechoslovak Jewish national case unique and separate from political Palestino-centric political Zionism in the Czech lands and elsewhere.

Martin J. Wein takes an interesting approach to this issue. He suggests that Czechoslovakia's Zionists had two sets of conflicting agendas: the upbuilding of a Jewish state in Palestine and *Landespolitik*—the creation of a local political agenda for the Jews. However, rather than allowing these two goals to be at odds with one another, Czechoslovak Zionists "squared the circle, at least rhetorically."¹⁵⁷ He quotes Max Brod, who, when seeking to define the Czechoslovak Zionist platform wrote:

We do not want to lead all the Jews away to Palestine, and we are not even capable of doing so [...] Just like Czechs, who are American citizens, will stay in the States even after the establishment of a Czechoslovak State, so will [...] the Jews continue to live [...] where they have lived so far, while our center in Palestine will blossom.¹⁵⁸

Firstly, this article was published in *Židovské zprávy*, the Czech-language Zionist publication, which had joined *Selbstwehr* as an official publication of the Czechoslovak Zionist movement in 1918. Indeed, once it began its official collaboration with the Czechoslovak state and formed the Jewish party, the Jewish national movement began to use the Czech language more and more, for both strategic and cultural reasons.¹⁵⁹ Lichtenstein points out that

When addressing Jewish audiences, Zionists preached that shedding German would communicate respect for the newly victorious Czech nation, distance Jews from the

¹⁵⁶ Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz. "The Jewish Party." 253.

¹⁵⁷ Wein, 7.

¹⁵⁸ Wein (including his translation from a *Židovské zprávy* article: 7 November 1918, p. 6), 7.

¹⁵⁹ Lichtenstein, 57.

symbol of the old social and cultural power of Austria, and enhance the ability of Jews to enter the public sphere without accusations of Germanizing and disloyalty.¹⁶⁰

With the emergence of a Czech language Jewish national press and the Jewish party actively encouraging its members to integrate linguistically into their surroundings, the character of the Jewish national movement took on a new bent. Because they were officially recognized as a national minority in the new state, the members of this group could turn their attention away from the pursuit of this end toward the edification of their group. This took the traditionally Zionist form of cultural activities and sport clubs.

The Jewish ideal of national regeneration was heavily influenced by Masaryk's 'realist ideals' for the Czechoslovaks. Felix Weltsch, a noted Zionist in the period, writes in his contribution to the collection *Masaryk and the Jews* about the Jewish implementation of this ideal.

The value of the individual is solitary, even among nations. We Zionists must often enough tell this to our Jewish opponents who are too ready to console themselves with the decline of the Jewish people. The decline of a nation is an irreplaceable impoverishment of the culture of mankind. And who should be more concerned that this impoverishment does not occur than this nation itself, than each single individual who belongs to this nation which has fallen into need? This is the moral motive with which Zionists call on all Jews for their cooperation.¹⁶¹

The decline of the nation, in this case, is assimilation into another culture. He claims that the assimilationist movement desires a break with the past of the Jewish nation, instead of the 'newly formed affirmation' that the Zionists seek to create.¹⁶² By affirming the past of the Jewish nation, the Jews can move into the future with a cohesive, regenerated ideological and moral program, which would improve Jews' self esteem; with this as their point of departure, "they would earn

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 58.

¹⁶¹ Weltsch, 108-9.

¹⁶² Ibid, 110.

the respect of non-Jews, freshly awakened themselves to the significance of nationalism.”¹⁶³ By gaining the respect of the Czechoslovaks, they could live side by side instead of ‘in between’ the various other nationalities in the new state.

This form of cultural Zionism characterized the group that I call the Jewish nationalists, in contrast to political Zionism. Wein suggests that thinkers such as Brod and Emil Margulies, an officer of the Jewish party, were “somewhat unaware of the inner ideological contradictions inherent in nationalism in general and Zionism in particular” and that they must have “[compartmentalized] their ‘national identity into separate ‘ethnic’ and political aspects [in order to] pretend that there was no conflict between Palestino-centrism and Landespolitik, or between Jewish and Czechoslovak ‘national interests’.”¹⁶⁴ While I find the latter part of this argument convincing, I think that the claim that they were unaware of the inherent ideological contradictions in their position is unlikely. Rather, in all likelihood, they constructed their ideology around an awareness of this contradiction, consciously distinguishing, for that reason, ‘ethnic’ and ‘political’ aspects of national identity. Indeed, this group of Jewish nationals became cultural Czechs precisely in the sense that Masaryk allows for in the above-quoted text: culturally, linguistically, and politically involved with their surroundings, they still maintained their Jewish ethnicity.

However, this form of ‘cultural’ integration, which should rather be called ‘acculturation,’ was, in some ways, necessarily post-assimilatory. One way in which this manifested itself was, that the early movement of Czech-Jewish assimilation in the latter part of the 19th century assisted in reorienting the Jewish population of Bohemia away from German

¹⁶³ Lichtenstein, 50.

¹⁶⁴ Wein, 7-8.

influences, resulting in a “secondary acculturation” into Czech culture.¹⁶⁵ Although some Jews still saw themselves as Germans after the foundation of Czechoslovakia, those numbers, as I discussed earlier, had already shrunk significantly under the influence of the Czech-Jewish movement. If we combine Kieval’s model of “secondary acculturation” with Shumsky’s “Czecho-German” Jewish model to understand the character of this phenomenon, we can see that the Jews in Bohemia leading up to the foundation of Czechoslovakia had most certainly experienced some form of Czech acculturation. This does not necessitate a Czech national identification, but it does indicate that the Zionist movement in Bohemia was colored by Czech culture. Indeed, it was precisely the interaction between the Germans and the Czechs, with the Jews who had failed to fully integrate ‘caught in the middle’ that caused the Jewish-national model to be so appealing.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of a return from assimilation to Jewishness comes in the figure of Otokar Fischer. His national identification took the opposite direction to Alfred Fuchs.’ In 1909, Fischer joined the faculty of the Czech university in Prague as a professor of German literature and was later the head of the ‘Drama Division of the Czech National Theater.’¹⁶⁶ Although he had assimilated into the surrounding Czech culture to the point of being baptized and was a respected Czech poet “completely alienated from the faith of his fathers,” Fischer, in the early 1920s began to ““hear voices” that he had neither heard nor desired to hear before.”¹⁶⁷ In 1923, he published a collection of poems entitled *Hlasy* [Voices], in which he first expressed his relationship to his Jewishness: ““I feel an aversion toward the trail my people trod, and yet I am myself the desert through which Israel wanders.”... “I stem from them [my fathers],

¹⁶⁵ Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 158.

¹⁶⁶ Hostovský, 442.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 442-43.

and yet I hate them.’”¹⁶⁸ Hostovský points out that Fischer’s struggles in *Hlasy*, “found unique response in many Czech Jews as proof of the Talmudic adage: “Throw a branch into the air and it will always return to its roots.’”¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Fischer battled his Jewishness without success from then on. In a collection of poems entitled *Poslední Básně* [The Last Poems], he includes a poem called *Má vlast* [My Homeland], certainly a nod to Smetana’s patriotic symphony of the same name:

Such a healthy glow you have, you my love,
 And yet you are all as if transparent,
 That is because in your soul, until the day you that you sojourn to me,
 And I close my eyes, you come closer and closer.
 I beyond the castle, behold you in your tragic place,
 You are luminous alabaster, that falls on Špičák,
 And Kolín and Radim, there an orchard and here a house,
 That island and those trees, the silence and noise,
 It is all the truth, again united in your spirit
 In your magical crib, surrounded in your story.
 My château is a cloud, I an undulating reflection,
 Your glow I absorb, I am full from your specter,
 And if they took me, on which to breathe and live,
 Still from you, my soul, they cannot take me away,
 And if I would have needed, I, your outcast,
 Wander from homestead to homestead like a beggar and a glutton,
 You would always be strict, you, my judge,
 As in forged metal made present to me,
 My loyalty will not be sent into the world anymore,
 Only you, to whom I, in yearning, quickly dash:
 I want to approach near to your tenderness and your praise,
 Your genuine love. And not only its dregs.
 On the Sabbath, I revere the Soul [Duše]—and not the soul [duše].
 To me, the man is a sphere, not where the little man glows.
 I love the one who knows his mind, not one who raises his little head.
 I venerate the blaze and not the twinkling stars---
 But it’s all the same, until the light blazes out my head,
 I want to lay in your arms... mother of mine.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Quoted in Hostovský, 443.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 443.

¹⁷⁰ Otokar Fischer. “Má Vlast.” In *Poslední Básně*. (Praha: FR. Borový, 1938). 27-28. (My—very rough—translation).

Though he may not have been able to abandon his Jewishness, neither could Fischer forget his Czechness. Even in his later writings, his love of his homeland comes out, bitter and rejected by her as he is. However, his collection *Hlasy* “even served to strengthen the Zionist sympathies of some of the leading on-Jewish personalities in Czech political and cultural life, including Tomas G. Masaryk.”¹⁷¹ This is not surprising given Masaryk’s understanding of the limits of Jewish assimilation; indeed, Fischer ‘proved’ Masaryk’s point.

The Political Zionists

Although supportive of Zionism as a means for Jewish national regeneration, Masaryk was less staunch in his support for the creation of Jewish state in Palestine. Weltsch points out that Masaryk was skeptical about the viability of this project.¹⁷² In fact, this seems fair, retrospectively, given the positions of the Czech Zionists themselves. Although they remained committed to the cause of the creation of a Jewish state, this was mainly an ideological stance. Very few Czechoslovaks immigrated to Palestine.¹⁷³ Rather

aliyah remained an individual, marked choice, even among Zionists – in fact even among Zionist activists and leaders. The acceptable situation of most Jews in Czechoslovakia and the possibility of ‘semigration’ to the Bohemian lands for the disadvantaged and poor Jews from Slovakia and Ruthenia further diminished the social prestige of *aliyah*. In fact,

¹⁷¹ Hostovský, 443.

¹⁷² Weltsch, 77.

¹⁷³ This is true for many reasons, one of which is the fact that there were British restrictions on Jewish immigration and “first priority for the limited number of certificates available had to be given to the Jews of Poland, Rumania, and Germany who were increasingly menaced by anti-Semitism; Czechoslovakia was still considered a place of peace and safety for Jews. Hence during the period from 1920 until the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, no more than 5,895 certificates were issued to Czechoslovak Jews. It should be noted, however, that in addition to these “legal” immigrants, there were considerable numbers of young men and women who went to Palestine merely to visit, but decided to stay there.” Fini Brada. “Emigration to Palestine.” In *The Jews of Czechoslovakia, Volume II*. 592.

in Slovakia and Ruthenia the ratio between emigration to Palestine and ‘semigration’ to the Bohemian lands was at least 1:10.¹⁷⁴

The same names come up repeatedly with regard to Palestino-centric Zionism and *Landespolitik* Jewish nationalism. Indeed, though there were many Zionist organizations in interwar Czechoslovakia with active memberships, it is unclear how ‘politically Zionist’ they actually were.¹⁷⁵ Wein suggests that most of the organizations

Were merely *somewhat* Zionist, adopting parts of the Zionist ideology and adding it on to other activities or interests...Far from commanding these communities, Zionism was used by them for their own particular needs, and above all as a new cross-community bond, replacing or supplementing the dying bond of religious creed with new, fashionable nationalist creed.¹⁷⁶

If we assume that cultural Zionism did, in fact, supplant religious communities as a bonding factor, we cannot disentangle that Czechoslovak cultural Zionism from the state, as discussed above. If Czechoslovak Zionism is inherently post-assimilationist, this must have influenced political Zionism as well as cultural Zionism, or Jewish nationalism.

Central to Dmitry Shumsky’s argument is the assumption that the multi-national character of Jewish association in the Czech lands carried over into the Czech Zionist political program. He cites Hugo Bergmann, who advocated for a cooperation between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine. Just as he believed the Jews who had identified with the German culture should incorporate Czech linguistic and cultural components, so should the Hebrew culture in Palestine should be exposed to the Arab one.¹⁷⁷ With this in mind, Bergmann, along with Hans Kohn and Felix Weltsch, advocated for a bi-national state in Palestine simultaneously rejecting

¹⁷⁴ Wein, 18.

¹⁷⁵ Oskar K. Rabinowicz, 24.

¹⁷⁶ Wein, 36.

¹⁷⁷ Shumsky, 187.

what Shumsky calls “narrow-minded ethno-nationalism.”¹⁷⁸ Because they were couched in a tradition that was in the habit of synthesizing competing Czech, German, and Jewish cultural and national identities—Shumsky claims that this is precisely what defined Bohemian Jewry—the political Zionists transcribed that tradition onto their proposed synthesis of Arabic and Hebrew culture.

It is hard to imagine how Zionism would have played out in Bohemia if the Nazis had not invaded. The influence of the biggest names in Czech Zionism, Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, Hans Kohn and Hugo Bergmann are to be found in both the Jewish national movement and the political Zionism movement. Hans Kohn left for Palestine in 1925, where he founded the *Berit Shalom* Society for the purpose of implementing his ‘binational’ vision. He stayed in Palestine only until 1929 after which he left for the United States.¹⁷⁹ Hugo Bergmann emigrated in 1920. Although he had been active until then in the propagation of cultural Zionism, he “became skeptical of [its] value” once he moved to Palestine.¹⁸⁰ He did, however, like Kohn, maintain his binational program for the Jewish state, calling attention to the ‘Arab presence’ and encouraging dialogue with them.¹⁸¹ Brod and Weltsch, two of the most prolific and outspoken Zionists in Bohemia, stayed in the Czech lands until 1939, when they both fled to Palestine.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 184.

¹⁷⁹ Dmitry Shumsky. “Hans Kohn.” In *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe Volume I*. 912.

¹⁸⁰ Scott Spector. “Hugo Bergmann.” In *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe Volume I*. 159.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 159.

¹⁸² Avraham Greenbaum. “Felix Weltsch.” In *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe Volume II*. Ed. Gersohn David Hundert. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008). 2021

Conclusion

In the years leading up to the foundation of Czechoslovakia, Jindřich Kohn speculated on the position of Czech Jewry. The Jews of the Czech lands, Kohn asserted, were under the influence of “two contradictory cultural signals,” one of which “called for the completion of assimilation” and the other “for breaking it off.”¹⁸³ This dilemma was intensified rather than alleviated with the foundation of Czechoslovakia in 1918. Despite assimilationist support for ‘Realist’ party, Masaryk was not entirely comfortable with the concept of total Jewish assimilation. The Zionists, knew that that their fate lay in Masaryk’s hands. Brod wrote to his colleague Dr. Herrmann: “Is there any way of getting to Masaryk? Everything depends on him. A declaration from him in favor of Zionism and Jewry as a nationality would take care of everything.”¹⁸⁴ Having received the decision that they hoped for, the Zionist faction could begin to formulate their Jewish-national program in Czechoslovakia. However, this program was fundamentally post-assimilationist and in many ways based on Masaryk’s particular brand of humanism. The Jewish Party, like the Czech-Jews, sought to distance themselves from the notion of the Jews in Bohemia as a Germanizing element, pushing both for the upbuilding of a fundamentally Jewish identity as well as the adoption of Czech language among its members to legitimize their representation of Czech Jews.¹⁸⁵

Although a fundamental part of the Jewish-national agenda included the foundation of a Jewish state in Palestine, this was because, “without Palestine, there can be no Jewish dignity. The fate of Palestine is the fate of the entire Jewish people.”¹⁸⁶ This did not stop the Zionists from assimilating, or at least acculturating, into their surrounding Czech society. Neither did they

¹⁸³ Kieval, “The Making of Czech Jewry.” 156.

¹⁸⁴ Aharon Moshe Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority.” 158.

¹⁸⁵ Lichtenstein, 58.

¹⁸⁶ Dr. Singer. Quoted in “The Jewish Party.” 276.

leave en mass. Wein suggests that *Landespolitik* became “something of a substitute passion for Zionists unwilling or unable of leaving for Palestine.”¹⁸⁷ However, even *Landespolitik* had little practical application, and very few of the Jewish Party’s political initiatives were realized.¹⁸⁸ Ultimately, “the Zionist attempt of building a Jewish *Volk*-minority collapsed first *into* and then *along with* the government project of Czechoslovak nation—building.”¹⁸⁹

Practical applications aside, the ideologies of the ‘Czech-Jewish synthesis’ group and the ‘Jewish-nationals’ were almost identical. In order to create a space for the Jews in Bohemia, maintaining a Jewish identity and remaining *regierungstreu*, the Jews should live alongside the Czechs and the cultures should both influence and benefit each other. Perhaps the most dramatic uniting factor of Czechoslovak Jews was loyalty to Masaryk. The book *Masaryk and the Jews* provides an interesting case study in itself. Thinkers as widely ranging as Eduard Lerderer, an even stauncher assimilationist than Jindrich Kohn, who was not wholly unsympathetic to Zionism,¹⁹⁰ to Felix Weltsch contributed their thoughts on Masaryk and his relationship to Czech Jewry. All of these essays express an admiration for Masaryk’s treatment of the Jews and his humanistic program. To cite Jindrich Kohn’s contribution

My Czech feeling of responsibility was strengthened by my Jewish inner experience. The European meaning of Masaryk’s wisdom became clear to me prior to the war...I took part in the consequences of the third stage of Jewish assimilation...There is a protective assimilation, an assimilation of interests, an assimilation of responsibility for history.¹⁹¹

If anyone would be able to create a Czechoslovak nation, Kohn asserts, it would be Masaryk, capable even of turning Jewish loyalty away from Vienna. Divided as they were among the two

¹⁸⁷ Wein, 45.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 46.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 46.

¹⁹⁰ Čapková, “Jindřich Kohn.” In *YIVO Encyclopedia*. 913.

¹⁹¹ Jindrich Kohn. “Masaryk’s School of Thought and Its Relation to Judaism.” In *Masaryk and the Jews*. 42.

larger and four smaller groups, the Jews in interwar Bohemia were united in their loyalty to the new Czechoslovak state and its leader.

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