

***‘TODAY, THE SITUATION WITH JEWS IN CROATIA IS
JUST UGLY’***

**FROM DIVISION TO PLURALISM IN CROATIAN JEWISH
COMMUNITY**

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the current situation of the division in the Croatian Jewish community goes beyond the binary discourse of revival vs. disappearance of Jewish communal life in post-communist Europe. The emergence of *Bet Israel*, an Orthodox religious community in Croatia, in 2006 serves as a case study for examining the impact of internal and external determinates on the group(s) making process. The methodology employed to argue the hypothesis involves qualitative research conducted in Zagreb, in April 2016, with three generations of Croatian Jews. Findings of the research propose that there is a strong need for belonging to a significant Jewish group among Jews in Croatia. Expressed in different institutional options, it reflects the plurality of groupness crystallization processes.

Key words: *Jewish revival, disappearance thesis, groupness, pluralism*

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
1. The Context.....	8
1.1. History of Jews in Croatia.....	8
1.2. Jewish Community of Zagreb (ŽOZ) in the post-Yugoslav period.....	12
1.2.1. The Rabbi issues	13
1.2.2. Praška Project.....	15
1.2.3. Community Schism.....	17
1.3. <i>Bet Israel</i> and the emergence of more ‘authentic’ Jewishness.....	19
2. Theoretical Framework.....	23
2.1. The crystallization of Jewishness in Croatia.....	23
2.2. Jewish Revival(s)?	27
2.3. Need for groupness and plurality of options.....	29
3. Methodology.....	32
3.1. Why qualitative?	32
3.2. Sample and researcher’s reflexivity.....	33
4. Analysis & Interpretation.....	36
4.1. Community schism and the emergence of Orthodoxy.....	37
4.1.1. Interpretations of the schism.....	37
4.1.2. Rabbi issues and the emergence of religiosity.....	38
4.2. Need for groupness and plurality of options	40
4.2.1. Groupness as a survival strategy.....	40
4.2.2. Generational differences	41
4.2.3. Do more options equal pluralism?	48
4.3. Future of Jewish life in Croatia.....	50
4.3.1. Is there a revival?	50
4.3.2. External determinants	53
5. Discussion.....	56
5.1. Groupness from the within.....	56
5.2. Groupness from the outside	59
Conclusion	63
Bibliography	65

Introduction

In June 2006, not more than ten members of the two hundred years-long existing Zagreb Jewish Community (*Židovska Općina Zagreb* [short: *ŽOZ*]) decided to step out of *ŽOZ* and found a new community. Named *Bet Israel*, it aims to invite all “believers and traditionalists who will connect the foundations of Judaism with the contemporary flows of the Jewish world” thus claiming to respond to the unsatisfied needs of a section of the Jewish community in Zagreb.¹ The unsatisfaction came with the contract termination of *ŽOZ*’s Orthodox Rabbi Kotel Da-Don, due to his “too Orthodox” direction. The schism in the Community² culminated with a public quarrel and official division of its members. Jewish communal life has been one of the most important (if not the most important) corner stones of Jewish identity preservation in Croatia. Turbulent history, regime changes and social values transitions have been influencing Jewish self-perception in Croatia since its foundation. In spite of violent ruptures and a strong assimilationist environment, *ŽOZ* preserved a remarkable continuity in its functioning, operating even during the World War II, after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. Precisely because *ŽOZ* pertained a firm point in spite of wars, state creations and dissolutions, along with government breakups, the internal division of the Community is a traumatic event for Croatian Jews.

From the outsiders’ point of view, the emergence of a new community which presents its mission in terms of authenticity and ‘back to the roots’ Judaism, looks like a part of a wider phenomenon of Jewish revival in Europe. Presented as Jewish awakening on the continent where Jewish life was almost completely destroyed, it is a concept advocated by American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, defining it as a remarkable revitalization of every kind

¹ ‘Povijest Zajednice [The History of the Community]’, *Židovska Vjerska zajednica ‘Bet Israel’ u Zagrebu*, accessed 24 January 2016, <http://www.bet-israel.com/home/povijest-zajednice/>.

² I will refer to *ŽOZ* before the schism as the Community, with the capital ‘C’.

of Jewish experience.³ One of the main proponents of the revival was Diana Pinto who coined a term ‘third pillar’, indicating that the European Jewish community has the potential to stand side by side with Israeli and American Jewish pillars in the global Jewish perspective.⁴ On the other hand, the phenomenon has been widely criticized by scholars like Zvi Gitelman⁵, Ruth Ellen Gruber⁶ and Andras Kovacs⁷ as a loose assemblage of social movements and cultural initiatives that have some elements of a revival, except the most important one - the Jews. Low numbers of people identifying as Jewish in post-communist Europe (with the exception of Hungary) have been pessimistically translated into a theory of disappearance of Jewish communities due to secularization and high rate of intermarriages⁸, and notions of vanishing Diaspora.⁹

In the case of Croatian Jews, I will argue that the emergence of an Orthodox community doesn’t indicate a Jewish revival in a sense of a remarkable revitalization of Jewishness in Croatia. Nevertheless, in spite of very small number of registered Jews in Croatia (according to the last census, there are 509 Jews in ethnic, and 536 in religious category), I will argue

³ ‘American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee: Global Jewish Revival’, *Www.jdc.org*, accessed 3 June 2016, <http://www.jdc.org/get-involved/global-jewish-revival/>.

⁴ Diana Pinto, ‘The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity’, *Jewish Studies at the CEU I. Yearbook (Public Lectures)*, 1999 1996, http://web.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_pinto.pdf.

⁵ Zvi Gitelman, ‘Reconstructing Jewish Communities and Jewish Identities in Post-Communist East Central Europe’, *Jewish Studies at the CEU I. Yearbook (Public Lectures)*, 1999 1996, http://web.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_gitelman.pdf.

⁶ Ruth Ellen Gruber, ‘Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe’, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99, no. 4 (2009): 487–504.

⁷ András Kovács, ‘Jews and Jewishness in Post-War Hungary’, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 1 (2010), <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?issue=1&id=192>.

⁸ Harriet Pass Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community*, 1st edition (Jewish Pubn Society, 1979); Gitelman, ‘Reconstructing Jewish Communities and Jewish Identities in Post-Communist East Central Europe’.

⁹ Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996, n.d.).

that the Croatian Jewish community is far from vanishing.¹⁰ By conducting a qualitative research with ‘ordinary’ Jews, where I focused on the interpretations of the schism and future of Jewish life in Croatia, the strong notion of the need to belong to a Jewish group emerged. The need for groupness, as argued by Brubaker, follows the need to belong when individuals crystalize group feelings due to certain political, social, cultural and psychological constellations.¹¹ The theory of groupness goes beyond concepts of religion, ethnicity, class or gender, thus trying to reexamine the notion of implied internal group homogeneity. It goes beyond the essentialist understanding of a group which inevitably simplifies social reality and erases all the variations and differences in member’s behaviors. As a major contribution to the Studies of Nationalism, Brubaker’s groupness theory provides analytical tools for examining why in some situations groups happen, and in some - don’t. In this thesis I argue that, against all odds or scholars’ predictions, the need for groupness among Croatian Jews not only exists, but is expressed in a variety of ways. The research aims to show the specific socio-cultural constellations in Croatia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the schism in the Community which brought about the diverse expressions of groupness.

Therefore, these are the research questions I will address:

1. Why did the traditionalist and religious wave of understanding Jewishness emerge among Croatian Jews in this particular time?
2. Why did precisely the Orthodox expression of Judaism emerge in form of *Bet Israel* community, since the community has been assimilated and secular in the Croatian society throughout the history?

¹⁰ ‘Popis Stanovništva 2011 [Official State of Croatia Census]’, Official State of Croatia Census (Zagreb: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2011), http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2012/SI-1469.pdf.

¹¹ Rogers Brubaker, ‘Ethnicity without Groups’, *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43, no. 2 (August 2002): 163–189, doi:10.1017/S0003975602001066.

3. How does the Croatian case fit into a larger debate on religious revivals in general, and European Jewish revival in particular?
4. What are the main differences between the different types of needs for groupness among Croatian Jews?

This research contributes to the existing literature about Croatian Jewish identity formation after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Main authors dealing with this topic provide a comprehensive analysis of the position of Jewish minority inside of this turbulent context. Zlatković Winter and Gordiejew write about Jews in Croatia in 1995, right after the end of the War for Independence when Jewish minority status was not defined in the legal framework.¹² The authors give valuable insights into what really means to be in a position of the small minority that is caught in the middle of a larger ethnic conflict - losing its secure place in the politico-symbolic order of a single multiethnic state. By demonstrating it on the Jewish case, both authors depict two things: first, specifically Jewish minority survival strategies developed throughout the history and second, the dialectic nature of relationship between Jewish minority and the state in which Jewish survival mechanisms take the shape and form of surrounding society. While certain notions of antisemitism during the period of War for Independence seriously endangered the position of the Jewish community as a legitimate actor in the Croatian public life, local Jewish communities, which have become a part of new states, faced the task of refashioning their identities once again. Šiljak adds that Jewish self-identification process in Croatia is a continuous individual and collective pursuit,

¹² Jelena Zlatković Winter, 'Židovi u Hrvatskoj: migracije, etno-socijalna obilježja, status i odnos s okolinom [Jews in Croatia: migrations, ethno-social characteristics, status and relations with the surrounding society]', *Migration and Ethnic Themes* 11, no. 3–4 (1995): 329–42; Paul Benjamin Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

influenced by outside factors; especially the Holocaust, the communist regime and the rise of national consciousness in Croatia.¹³

The most valuable work for this thesis is Nila Ginger Hofman's anthropological research *Renewed Survival. Jewish community Life in Croatia* published in 2006 right before the Croatian Jewish community split.¹⁴ The aim of her research was to recognize, describe and analyze the patterns of Jewish self-identification after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The author identifies two dominant forms of Jewish identity; integrationist and traditionalist. Traditionalists are the ones who had seen Rabbi Kotel Da-Don, coming to Croatia from Israel in 1998, as an essential figure in saving the community from its disappearance and who eventually decided to step out of the Community and found *Bet Israel*. Integrationists, or the ones who remained in ŽOZ, didn't perceive their secular and cultural understanding of Jewishness as distancing the Community further away from the *authentic* Jewish life. Although she depicted the main differences between the two dominant expressions of Croatian Jewish identity, she could not predict the Community schism. I see my research as a continuation of Hofman's work, thus following up on the schism and the consequences it caused among the members.

Since there is no qualitative research conducted after the schism, at least not to my knowledge, I see the relevance of this thesis in providing a deeper insight in consequences it left on Jews in Croatia. The contribution of this research is in its attempt to look beyond the 'ugly' situation currently happening in the Croatian Jewish context and reflected in the thesis title. In a personal conversation with Ruth Ellen Gruber in March 2016, she mentioned that ŽOZ was considered to be an example of unity before the split. It was a great example of a

¹³ Lea Šiljak, 'Židovski identiteti u Hrvatskoj – sociološko-psihološki aspekt [Jewish Identity in Croatia - Socio-Psychological Aspects]', *Migration and Ethnic Themes* 19, no. 4 (2003): 363–90.

¹⁴ Nila Ginger Hofman, *Renewed Survival: Jewish Community Life in Croatia* (Lexington Books, 2006).

Jewish community in Europe led by an Orthodox rabbi under one umbrella. Today, Croatian Jewish Community is perceived as a place of personal quarrel, or as she put it in one sentence: ‘*Today, situation with Jews in Croatia is just ugly*’. After ten years the tensions have lessened, but the division has influenced Jewish everyday life. Alongside personal resentments, real consequences are also visible in the functioning of Jewish institutions. Jewish kindergarten *Mirjam Weiller*, officially under *ŽOZ*, and Jewish elementary school *Hugo Lauder Kohn*, officially under *Bet Israel*, reflect the division in the small number of children attending them. This research shows that ‘ordinary’ Croatian Jews want to move on and prevent the transmission of personal disputes onto next generations. Participants expressed hope for a brighter future where the discourse of schism and division will be perceived as a discourse of pluralism and enriching diversity.

This thesis is organized in six chapters in the following manner. The first chapter examines the context providing a historical overview from the first Jewish settlements in Croatia to the rising number of Jews by the end of 19th century due to formal emancipation, the golden age of Jews in Croatia in-between two world wars, the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia, Jewish communal life during the period of Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav period and Croatia’s war for independence. Furthermore, I provide a closer look into the context of the biggest Croatian Jewish community *ŽOZ* in post-Yugoslav period and the challenges the Community faced before the formal division. At the end of the chapter a short analysis of *Bet Israel* community’s narrative presented in their publication *Ruah Hadasha* is offered. This chapter is crucial for understanding the importance of the topic in focus in this thesis because it shows how the schism broke the continuity chain of the Jewish Community.

The second chapter gives the theoretical framework I use to analyze the data collected with the qualitative research conducted in April 2016. Since the schism resulted in emergence

of Jewishness with the emphasis on Orthodox religiosity Brubaker's theory of groupness is employed in order to analyze why this particular version of Jewishness wanted to be legitimized as authentic. Furthermore, the theory of Jewish revivals is used to go deeper in the analysis of why *Bet Israel* appeared in 2006 and not before or after. In opposition to the theory of disappearance which sees the future of Jewish communities in Europe as vanishing due to small number of Jews after the Holocaust, Jewish revival theory predicts re-emergence of Jewish Diaspora, thus becoming the third pillar (next to Israel and USA) in the Jewish world.

The third chapter is the methodology chapter where the method and the process of collecting the data with interviews are described. I shortly introduce my participants and finish the chapter with explaining the nature of the role of researcher (in this case the author) in a qualitative research.

The fourth chapter provides a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data. The chapter is structured in three subchapters; Community schism and the emergence of religiosity, Need for groupness and plurality of options, and Future of Jewish life in Croatia.

The fifth chapter brings a discussion of the analyzed data, where the main findings of the research in the wider framework are placed. The schism of *ŽOZ* is a symbol of internal division of a community that has been under the external threat throughout the history. The division on the institutional level indicates heterogeneity of the community; although due to extremely small numbers of Jews in Croatia, this is often perceived as a dead end. Nevertheless, this research shows that despite varying differences, all participants express a strong need for belonging to a group - in institutional or non-institutional way.

1. The Context

This chapter provides a deeper understanding of the Croatian-Jewish geo-historical context. Firstly, the history of Jews in today's Croatia, from the first settlements until the period of full emancipation will briefly be presented. Second, I will show, in a more detailed manner, the most important issues Zagreb Jewish Community has been dealing with, since the dissolution of Yugoslavia and establishment of the Croatian state. Lastly, a short analysis of the narratives offered by *Bet Israel* community is provided. Through an ideological discourse analysis, I will discuss the emergence of a new “more authentic” version of Jewishness through Orthodox religious observance and support of the State of Israel.

1.1. History of Jews in Croatia

Although there is an evidence of Jewish presence in today's Croatian territory in the first century CE near Split, Dalmatia, first Jewish settlements were established with the major wave of Sephardic immigration, followed by the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492. They became a part of the Sephardic cultural area, together with other Balkan regions ruled by Ottomans. Considered tolerated and protected, Jews were subjected to second-class citizens, thus placing their trade and administrative skills at the service of Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ Ashkenazim Jews were banned from settling in Croatia until the late eighteenth century. They first appeared in Zagreb in 1783, after the *Edict of Tolerance* was enforced. Coming from different parts of Austro-Hungarian Empire, already fairly assimilated Jews spoke German and Hungarian. As the Austro-Hungarian province, the northern part of Croatia was attractive because of its commercial potential on Sava River.

¹⁵ Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 5.

The *Edict of Tolerance* granted civil rights and liberties which created significant differences in lifestyle and worldviews comparing to Jews in Eastern Europe. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Croatian Jewish community was very small, comprised of only twenty families. Due to successful participation in country's economic life, medicine, and arts, the number of Jews grew rapidly. Although Jewish population never exceeded the number of 20 000, being relatively small compared to other Eastern European countries, they played an important role in advancing Zagreb's commercial prosperity. Jewish linguistic and social acculturation, together with the high rate of inter-marriages demonstrated Jewish eagerness to integrate, especially during Croatian's national awakening at the verge of twentieth century. Some of them even croaticized family names in order to earn the full acceptance in the Croatian society.¹⁶

After World War I, creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from 1929 until World War II brought together two distinctive Jewish communities under one political unit. Sephardim of the former Ottoman territories and Ashkenazim of the Habsburg lands successfully cooperated under the umbrella organization named the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia. There were approximately 20000 Jews living in Croatia, mostly Ashkenazi Jews identified as *Neologue* observers¹⁷ (at that time only 2 % of Jewish population in Zagreb were Orthodox Jews).¹⁸ Zionist ideas proliferated in the beginning of the century invited Croatian Jews to learn about their own Jewish history and culture. One of the most prominent Croatian Zionists Lavoslav Schick supported the idea of Croatian Jews who could truly express patriotic feelings towards Croatia only if they fully

¹⁶ Melita Švob, *Jews in Croatia* (KD Miroslav Šalom Freiburger, 1997); Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu: 1918-1941 [Jews in Croatia: 1918-1941]* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2004); Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*. (For example one of the most prominent Croatian Jewish Zionists Lavoslav Schick phonetically transliterated his surname to Šik).

¹⁷ *Neologue* (Greek: "new thought") is a branch of Judaism associated with the Jewish Enlightenment originated in Hungary, after the failed attempt of Hungarian Jewish Congress to elect one official representative in 1869.

¹⁸ Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 376.

accept and take pride in their Jewish background.¹⁹ Although the period in-between two wars is seen as a golden epoch for Croatian Jewry, antisemitism in Croatia was used as a part of political discourse already in the turn of the twentieth century.²⁰ The *Catholic magazine* openly called for the clergy to organize politically in 1902, thus blaming Jews for all the putative threats of the modern world.²¹

Yugoslavia was occupied by Germany in April 1941 and the destiny of Yugoslav Jews followed the destiny of their European fellow (wo)man. Northern part of Croatia and a big part of Bosnia constituted Independent State of Croatia under which rule Jasenovac, the notorious labor camp, was operating. In Zagreb alone, 10740 Jews lived on the eve of World War II. Only 2500 Jews from Zagreb survived the Holocaust - mostly ones who managed to hide their Jewish background and receive the 'Aryan certificate'. In 1948, after the establishment of the State of Israel, half of the Jews of Zagreb immigrated, leaving the community with only 1200 members.²² Small in numbers, the process of assimilation of Croatian Jews culminated in the period of Socialist Yugoslavia. Strong loyalty towards Yugoslavia was a result of Tito's Partisan's' leadership – the organized army form to fight against the Axis powers during the World War II – with whom Croatian Jews fought side-by-side.²³

¹⁹ Ljiljana Dobrovšak, 'Prva konferencija Zemaljskog udruženja cionista južnoslavenskih krajeva Austrougarske monarhije u Brodu na Savi 1909 godine.', *Scrinia Slavonica* 6, no. 1 (2006): 234–66.

²⁰ Ari Kerkkänen, 'The Transition from Yugoslav to Post-Yugoslav Jewry', *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 85, (1999): 21–54.

²¹ Marija Vulesica, 'How Antisemitic Was the Political Catholicism in Croatia-Slavonia around 1900?: Quest CDEC Journal', *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 3 (2012), <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=301>.

²² Ivo Goldstein, 'Restoring Jewish Life in Communist Yugoslavia, 1945-1967', *East European Jewish Affairs* 34, no. 1 (2004): 58–71, doi:10.1080/1350167042000267998.

²³ Jelena Zlatković Winter, 'Dijaspóra i Židovi na području Jugoslavije', *Migracijske i etničke teme* 3, no. 2 (30 September 1987): 161–75; Goldstein, 'Restoring Jewish Life in Communist Yugoslavia, 1945-1967'.

The story of the Jewish communal life rebuilding in Socialist Yugoslavia is a story with many twists and subplots. Jewish community leadership tried to reach for continuities with prewar Jewish politics, as a way of finding a basis for a viable Jewishness after the Holocaust, that would be compatible with the emerging narrative of the new Yugoslav project. Features of the prewar Yugoslav Jewishness forged by the Yugoslav Zionists provided a link to tradition on which the new Jewishness could be based, even in new circumstances.²⁴ The former distinction between Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Neolog and Orthodox disappeared. The focus of Jewish community life was purely cultural which became even more obvious when the word 'Religious' was removed from the official title of the Jewish Federation in 1952.²⁵ Alongside the fact that there was no religious life in Jewish community, the willingness to identify themselves as Yugoslavs was visible in the high percentage of mixed marriages, high assimilation rate and members' advanced age. Although communities were active, Jewish distinctiveness almost faded away.

Dissolution of Yugoslavia, the transition from socialism to democracy, and inter-ethnic civil war brought another economic, political, social, and religious turmoil, demanding yet another (re)identification effort from the members of the Jewish Community. Despite retaining status of equal citizens within the new republic of Croatia, a sense of uneasiness sneaked in the Community. It appeared mostly due to the new government's nationalistic rhetoric which was seen as the revisionism of Ustaša movement – a situation that overwhelmingly reminded of the Pavelić's ISC regime.²⁶ In August 1991, ŽOZ's headquarters and the Jewish cemetery in Zagreb were bombed with no casualties. In Croatia, the ethnic conflict created an authoritarian climate with ethnocentric, xenophobic and even

²⁴ Emil Kerenji, *Jewish Citizens of Socialist Yugoslavia: Politics of Jewish Identity in a Socialist State, 1944-1974* (ProQuest, 2008).

²⁵ Freidenreich, *Jews of Yugoslavia*, 198.

²⁶ Ivo Goldstein and Slavko Goldstein, 'Revisionism in Croatia: The Case of Franjo Tudman', *East European Jewish Affairs* 32 (2002): 52–64, doi:10.1080/13501670208577963.

racist politics, with significant negative impact on the minority groups.²⁷ Mostly implicit, but at times open, accusation for being communists and Yugonostalgic brought antisemitic labels of anti-national “Jewish Lobby” with dangerous international connections, especially in the beginning of the conflict.²⁸ Although the official rise of antisemitism in Croatia during the 90s cannot be claimed, Jewish example demonstrates the usage of a minority group in the reinterpretation of the past and present in order to construct a particular version of national future, and its criteria of inclusion and exclusion.²⁹

1.2. Jewish Community of Zagreb (ŽOZ) in the post-Yugoslav period

ŽOZ was founded in 1806 and it has been the biggest and the most significant community of Jewish life in Croatia. External forces that influenced the course of Jewish life in Zagreb after World War II; the Holocaust, anti-religious setting and supra-national ideology, shifted the importance of Jewish family to Jewish community as the identity preserver.³⁰ As suggested by Šiljak, ŽOZ became a viable unit of Jewish activities and expressions in Zagreb. It became a place of social interactions, exchange of ideas, values and traditions. For this reason, a sense of Jewishness arose from complex networks and social relationships which represented the institution of extended family for Croatian Jews. Community was seen as a safe place where its members felt protected.³¹ Moreover, they were

²⁷ Ivan Šiber, ‘War and the Changes in Social Distance toward the Ethnic Minorities in Croatia’, *Politička Misao*, no. 5 (1997): 3–26; Goran Čular, ‘Political Development in Croatia 1990-2000: Fast Transition – Postponed Consolidation’, *Croatian Political Science Review* 37, no. 5 (2001): 30–46.

²⁸ Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*, 224.

²⁹ Katherine Verdery, ‘Nationalism, Postsocialism, and Space in Eastern Europe’, *Social Research* 63, no. 1 (1996): 77–95.

³⁰ Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*, 178.

³¹ Šiljak, ‘Židovski identiteti u Hrvatskoj’, 375.

very supportive of living in a society of ‘*Bratstvo i Jedinstvo*’ [Brotherhood and Unity] where there was no ethnic or religious divisions.

Croatia’s independence brought new state symbols; the currency *Kuna* and the flag with a red and white chequered shield – both used during the Ustaša period. In 1991, Zagreb square called ‘Victims of Fascism’ was renamed to the ‘Square of Croatian Rulers’. The same was done to the streets named after partisans, anti-Fascists or victims of Ustaša regime, thus renaming them in a “more Croatian” manner. In this situation Jews felt confused and lost, no matter how much they wanted to keep their loyalty to Croatia.³² Since it was no longer possible to identify with Yugoslavia and most of the members of Jewish community could not relate to nationalistically inclined Croatians, suddenly they found themselves as an independent unit. Dissolution of Yugoslavia meant breakup of Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia and foundation of the new umbrella organization of Croatian Jewish Communities, with ŽOZ at the head. In 1995, ŽOZ officially had 1400 members channeling different activities through seven boards; Financial, Social, Educational, Cultural, Board of Religious Affairs, Board of Information and Board of Jewish Heritage Protection. Next to the Youth Club, Sunday school for children, Mirjam Weiller Kindergarten, Women’s Club, Miroslav Šalom Freiburger Cultural Society, Makkabi sports group and Lavoslav Schwartz Retirement Home, Jewish Dance School, and Jewish Youth Summer Camps were popular places for younger Jewish generations.

1.2.1. The Rabbi issues

Until 2006, ŽOZ was a unique communal organization where many different and competing aspects of Jewish life were experienced under the same roof. One of the most important events for the Community in its recent history happened in 1998, when a full-time

³² Kerckänen, ‘The Transition from Yugoslav to Post-Yugoslav Jewry’, 32.

Rabbi Kotel Da-Don was appointed, the first one after 65 years, ever since Rabbi Miroslav Freiburger was deported to Auschwitz in spring of 1943. In the preceding period, rabbis from Hungary and Israel visited Croatia only during the High Holidays. Rabbi Kotel Da-Don, as an Orthodox rabbi born and educated in Israel, started to transform Jewish life in Croatia in many ways; Practicing Orthodox Judaism, observing religious rituals or celebrating Jewish holidays. He also provided the access to kosher food in Croatia. Rabbi Da-Don's appointment created a deep division between members of the community who were in favor of Orthodox learning and non-observant members. While those in favor of the Rabbi followed the track of the renewal of an *authentic* Jewish life, others wanted to learn about Jewish traditions and history, without the religious doctrine they perceived as backwards.³³

Majority of the ŽOZ Community wanted a rabbi who would occupy primarily a social position, thus educating Croatia Jews about their Jewish history and cultural traditions. At the same time he would have to cooperate with Croatian political and religious leaders. The division emerged due to Rabbi Da-Don's understanding of his role as a religious educator who would bring the Community closer to the wider Orthodox world. Introducing strictly kosher food for observance rituals no longer allowed home-cooked meals for Family's Shabbat gatherings, not to mention that the cook who worked in ŽOZ for a long period of time was asked to leave because of not being Jewish. Moreover, Rabbi Da-Don, when first arrived to ŽOZ in 1998, could not speak Croatian or English. With his knowledge of Hebrew and Hungarian, the Rabbi had significant communication difficulties with the members of his Community. These events lead to a situation best described in Hofman's study of ŽOZ by one of the members:

We had been promised a rabbi for quite a while now. It felt like we had been waiting for the messiah to arrive and save our community, but when he finally came we felt disillusioned.³⁴

³³ Hofman, *Renewed Survival*, 74–75.

³⁴ Ibid., 68.

1.2.2. Praška Project

The second, less familiar reason for the Community division revolved around the rebuilding process of the Community synagogue, destroyed during the World War II. Zagreb synagogue was officially consecrated in 1867, according to Franjo Klein's design, who found the inspiration in the *Tempelgasse* synagogue in Vienna. During 74 years of its existence, synagogue underwent only one major modification. It was enlarged in order to accommodate a larger congregation because the Community had around 6000 members by 1921.³⁵ Zagreb synagogue was systematically dismantled from the end of 1941 until spring 1942, without using explosive not to affect the surrounding environment.³⁶ The official reason given by the Zagreb mayor was that the synagogue is not fitting into the urban plans. In 1959, a department store was built on the empty space, and since 1980, after the store was destroyed in a fire, the space has been used as a parking lot.

The first initiative for the synagogue rebuilding came in 1986, but with a little support from the city authorities. Dissolution of Yugoslavia in 1991, ŽOZ's stepping out from the Yugoslav Jewish Federation and the bomb attack changed all plans for the *Praška Project*.³⁷ The interest was revived in 1996, when architects Ivana and Tomislav Kušan made a virtual reconstruction of the synagogue, placed in a modern background, followed by the exhibition entitled "Zagreb Synagogue – *Reliquiae Reliquiarum*".³⁸ In 1999, the property was returned

³⁵ 'Židovi i Zagreb. Sinagoga i Zagreb 1806 - 2012' (Židovska Općina Zagreb, 2012), <http://www.zoz.hr/files/sinagogasec.pdf>.

³⁶ Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*, 122.

³⁷ This is an informal title of the synagogue rebuilding project because the original synagogue was built in what is today Praška Street in Zagreb. Also, it is called a project because there are two contested visions of what should be built on the place of the ruined Zagreb synagogue.

³⁸ This refers to the phrase *Reliquiae reliquiarum olim et incltyti regni Croatiae* or remnants of the remnants of the once great kingdom of Croatia. The phrase was coined in 16th century after Croatian kingdom lost majority of its territory in the war with Ottoman Empire. The title of the exhibition refers to the memory remnants of the synagogue.

to ŽOZ through the denationalization process, and the debate on the type of object (re)building began. Views about the function of the future building ranged from strictly religious observance replica of Klein's synagogue to those favoring a multipurpose use of the space with a contemporary design.

One of the people supporting the replica of synagogue was Ivo Goldstein, a respected Croatian historian and the future president of *Bet Israel*. He argued that his generation did not buy the property where the synagogue was built, but inherited it from the generation that disappeared in the Holocaust. Accordingly, his generation is not completely free to do what it wants with the space.³⁹ Other proponents of the replica believed that the synagogue would serve as a memorial site that could rehabilitate the urban character of the city. Additionally, the synagogue in the city center would contribute to the nurturing of Jewish tradition - something that the residents of Zagreb owe to urban history of Zagreb, the Jewish community, and to Jewish-Croatian common memory.⁴⁰

In contrast to the prominent and public voices on the topic, many members of the ŽOZ disagreed with the replica of Klein's synagogue, not in style, nor the function. They argued for a building that shouldn't be used only as a synagogue, but incorporate a Jewish museum and a Holocaust memorial. This "realistic way" of representation would portray Jewish community in Croatia as a modern community firmly rooted in Croatian society and the memory of the Holocaust. Also, the building should respond to the needs of ŽOZ which has not been a very religious one, with the museum representing not only past, but the present and the future. The space should be seen as a lively, urban and cosmopolitan gathering place for community members, interested residents of Zagreb, and cultural heritage tourists revering the memory of the past and contributing to the creation of the community's future.

³⁹ Hofman, *Renewed Survival*, 78.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 80.

1.2.3. Community Schism

Tensions between members of the Community on the continuation of Jewish life in Croatia reflected deeper understandings of Jewish identity and its future path. Division appeared between the past-oriented *traditionalists* and present-oriented *integrationists*. Traditionalists perceived the future of Jewish life in “going back to the roots”, with the need to commemorate the past, while the integrationists saw Jewish Community continuing its integration in Croatian society by preserving Jewishness in a cultural sense and connecting the past with the future. As insightfully stated by Hofman, essentialism is at the heart of the traditionalist view of Jewish identity.⁴¹ The religious element of the essentialist view is in a direct conflict with the more open ways in which Jewish identity in Croatia was expressed throughout the history.

Nevertheless, the closed and static understanding of Jewish identity was encouraged by the government-sponsored cultural diversity programs, as well as by International Jewish support organizations.⁴² On one hand, having a Jewish community with clear boundaries and preserved distinctiveness was seen as a mechanism against the disappearance of Jewish communities, as perceived by International Jewish organizations. On the other hand, Croatia’s path to the EU was monitored, among other indicators, through its relations to minority groups. Having good relations with a distinctive and diverse minority group would show Croatia’s high level of tolerance and inclusiveness, thus facilitating the process of becoming an EU member state.

In May 2005, the ŽOZ board had decided not to renew Rabbi Da-Don’s contract. Thirteen of the twenty-five board members voted against renewal, eleven voted for retaining him, and one vote was undecided. Those in favor of terminating the contract, believed that the Rabbi created a division in the Community, that his salary was too high and that he

⁴¹ Ibid., 82.

⁴² Ibid., 84.

propagates “embarrassing creationist views”, thus placing too many unrealistic demands on the secular community.⁴³ Those in favor of Rabbi Da-Don showed the support in 160 signatures collected for the contract renewal. The quarrel became public when the former Croatian president Stipe Mesić joined the dispute in-favor of the Rabbi, by publicly stating: ‘*One rabbi in Croatia was killed (during the World War II), and I don't want the other to be expelled*’.⁴⁴

Soon after the president’s meddling in the internal affairs, ŽOZ’s president Ognjen Kraus was accused for financial mismanagement and bad Community leadership. The accusations were directed towards the *Praška project*, laying the blame on delaying the synagogue rebuilding project, due to financial profit Kraus was making from the parking lot. In this situation of high tensions, there was an attempt to erase the ŽOZ Community from the Register of Religious Communities⁴⁵. This created an unbridgeable gap between the two groups. All the disputes were covered by Croatian media, thus exposing the internal affairs and personal resentments in the public sphere.

In June 2006, those supporting the Rabbi and opposing Kraus founded *Bet Israel* - a religious community based on the Orthodox Jewish learning. Also, *Bet Israel* founded Jewish school *Lauder-Hugo Kon*, a private elementary school following the program prescribed by Croatian Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, supplemented with the Tal-Am Hebrew language program. ŽOZ continued with its activities and appointed Rabbi Luciano Prelevic -

⁴³ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴ ‘Croatia’s Jewish Leaders Fire State Rabbi, Say He Divided Community’, *Haaretz Press*, accessed 20 May 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2.209/croatia-s-jewish-leaders-fire-state-rabbi-say-he-divided-community-1.169234>.

⁴⁵ The attempt to erase ŽOZ from the Register came as a reaction of Bet Israel’s leadership ŽOZ’s strong opposing to the recognition of Bet Israel as a religious community. Calling upon Article 21 of Religious minorities’ legal status law, ŽOZ indicated that a formally recognized religious community should have at least 500 members and exist for five years. Bet Israel responded by claiming that they are not new, but representing a formal continuation of historical Jewish laws in Croatia. In addition Bet Israel argued that ŽOZ is not doing anything for religious life of Jews in Croatia and should therefore be erased.

its dedicated member who finished rabbinical studies in Israel Yeshiva in 2004 - as the head of the Community. Rabbi Prelevic's learning follows the thought of the Progressive Judaism, thus allowing culturally oriented non-religious members to learn about Judaism and Jewishness in a modern way.

1.3. *Bet Israel* and the emergence of more “authentic” Jewishness

Bet Israel was founded to offer an “authentic” Jewishness to its members. Following ‘back to the roots’ logic, this organization has profiled as a place where religious members can learn how to observe and celebrate Jewish holidays. Financed by Croatian Minority Office, *Bet Israel* can boast with rich publishing activity. In the last eleven years they have been publishing a quarterly magazine ‘Ruah Hadasha’. It is a magazine that aims to empower *Bet Israel*’s members’ religious and national Jewish identity. In order to gain deeper understanding in the type of a narrative *Bet Israel* offers to its members, I did an analysis for one of the classes’ final paper. My aim was to engage in an ideological discourse analysis because: “ideologies of writers may be ‘uncovered’ by close reading, understanding or systematic analysis if language users explicitly or unwittingly ‘express’ their ideologies through language and communication”.⁴⁶

I analyzed the Editorial named *Jer Zapovijed je Svijeća...* [Because the Candle is a Command], given by the (late) Editor-in-chief Sanja Samokovlija.⁴⁷ Her introduction column was interesting for two reasons; first, it appeared in every issue from 2006 until 2015 (unlike other sections of the magazine). The continuity and similarity of the form allows the process of tracking the emergence, development and change of discourse patterns. Second, since it is written in a more informal manner, it gives an insight in a more subjective and honest

⁴⁶ Teun A. Van Dijk, ‘Ideological Discourse Analysis’, *New Courant* 4, no. 1 (1995): 135.

⁴⁷ I analyzed 18 issues published from 2006 to 2015.

narrative. I analyzed three topics reflecting three ideological narratives; religious and national component of Jewish identity, the relationship with the State of Israel, and the relationship with Croatian government and the surrounding society. Looking at the most general findings, one can notice a quite clear underlining strategy present in almost all introduction columns - in simple terms there is a repeating positive in-group (Jewish) and negative out-group (non-Jewish) representations. Moreover, offered narratives call for strengthening of more 'authentic', more 'Jewish' Jewishness through Orthodox religious observance, strong connections to the State of Israel and clear division between Jews and non-Jews.

The positive, non-critical narrative is offered when dealing with the religious and national components of Jewish identity. The religious narrative is built through stories of Jewish holidays and the notion of choosiness;

The holiday of Hanukah reminds us that we have to act in a manner of multicultural understanding and respecting others, different than us. While doing that we must not forget who we are and what are the things that make our nation special. Every mentioning of the light has something to do with us, the Jews.⁴⁸

In referring to the history, an essentialist narrative is offered, combined with anger over constant submissive position of Jews. It is followed by the complementary tone when discussing contemporary Jewish affairs. The relationship with the State of Israel is expressed in a very positive manner. Romanticized perception of Israel, need to defend and unconditional support Israeli political moves are narratives offered without any deeper argumentation. Classical nationalistic discourse of simplification and clear notions of the dichotomies of good-bad and us-them is used in order to justify all the actions the State of Israel is undertaking;

⁴⁸ Sanja Samokovlija, 'Jer Zapovijed je Svijeća', *Ruah Hadasha*, 2008, 2.
All the translations were made by the author, unless it is indicated differently.

We are shining with our lights, making the World a better place and our little Israel gives the World numerous medical, technological, chemistry innovations... unfortunately, a lot of them live in ignorance, fear and who knows what else, disabling them to have clear and rational thought. Some of them even try to turn our lights off... with the terrorist attack... but we are here and we will be here.⁴⁹

The relationship with Croatian government and the wider Croatian society in general is portrayed negatively. One of the reasons is the re-negotiation and the reconstruction of the Jewish identity in post-communistic countries that occurred in the wake of social, political and economic changes. Choices are not made by decontextualized individuals in the quest for self-identity, but rather in the context of social networks and resources.⁵⁰ Losing sense of morality and widespread ignorance presents a threat to Jewish traditional values;

I imagined the concept of democracation in a different way... I was hoping that the Croatian Government would introduce some positive changes in our society that that is becoming more and more primitive. I thought that with the Government's effort and our support we would swim to the surface of muddy water we are sinking deeper and deeper.⁵¹

From this short analysis, we can see that *Bet Israel* employs a narrative which reminds to a familiar nationalistic discourse used in Croatia in the 1990s to a large extent. It is giving its members a sense of uniqueness and threat, chosenness and victimhood. Through the positive in-group narrative and negative out-group narrative, *Bet Israel* aims to reconstruct and redefine secular, assimilative, "false" Jewish identity of Croatian Jews.

The emergence of traditional Orthodox option in Croatian case resembles the ones in other former Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe. In the situation of a great social change like the collapse of communist system there is a general strengthening of the

⁴⁹ Sanja Samokovlija, 'Jer Zapovijed Je Svijeća', *Ruah Hadasha*, 2009, 3, https://issuu.com/betisrael/docs/ruach_br_12.

⁵⁰ Leonard Mars, 'Cultural Aid and Jewish Identity in Post-Communist Hungary', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, no. 1 (2000): 85–96.

⁵¹ Sanja Samokovlija, 'Jer Zapovijed Je Svijeća', *Ruah Hadasha*, 2011, 3, https://issuu.com/betisrael/docs/ruach_br_15.

demand for ethnic and religious identities. Kovacs, dealing with the Hungarian case, stated that the repression and full assimilation during the communist era have resulted in the emergence of a new positive Jewish identity.⁵² This new identity has been fostered by younger generations whose search for social identities was facilitated by the growing acceptance of multicultural orientations, strengthening relations with Jews in Israel and United States and the will to get rid of the stigmatized identity of the older generation. However, Croatian Jewish case finds its specificity in two levels. First, in the context of Croatia's development after the fall of communism when the violent ethnic conflict took place and Jews ended up as a bystander minority. Second, most of the ŽOZ Community members who stepped out of the Community and supported the Orthodox Rabbi were middle (second) generation who were born and raised in the communist system.

⁵² András Kovács, 'Jewish Groups and Identity Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary', in *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Central European University Press, 2003), 211–42.

2. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the qualitative empirical research will be presented in the following pages. The framework is to be seen as a coordinate system of theories and debates about the notions of groupness in Nationalism Studies and Jewish self-identification in post-communist Europe in Jewish Studies. These two fields intersect in the process of de-essentializing the phenomenon of Jewish belonging in post-Yugoslav Croatia while identifying its contextual specificities.

2.1. The crystallization of Jewishness in Croatia

Long-lived assimilationism of Jewish community in Zagreb has been one of the main traits of Croatian Jewish identity throughout the history. However, the dissolution of Yugoslavia has created the atmosphere of uncertainties and loss of security. After losing Yugoslav identity and in a position where the new ethno-political category of *Croatianess* has emerged, the community and individual Jews needed new categories of identification. The rational decision was to turn to their Jewish roots, which meant making an unprecedented act of choosing Jewishness as a primary identification instance.⁵³ Although Jewishness in Croatia was understood in symbolic terms throughout the history, as a cultural background with universalist values and ecumenical attitudes, after the violent ethnic conflict in the first half of 90s, it seems that a part of the Community started to see the religious component of Jewishness as an important identification option.

Barth's landmark work *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* argues that the existence of a particular ethnic group depends on the boundaries between the groups.⁵⁴ According to him, the relative existence and 'continuing

⁵³ Kerckänen, 'The Transition from Yugoslav to Post-Yugoslav Jewry', 37.

⁵⁴ Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Little, Brown, 1969).

dichotomization between members and outsiders' is what makes individuals imagining a group identity. It is not the particular traits and behaviors inside of a group we should focus on, but the self-definition in comparison with the outsiders. Following this line, Graham points to the internal differences by recognizing only the 'threads' of shared attitudes, values, and practices linking Jews in different countries.⁵⁵ Diversity and changes of Jewish self-understanding can be categorized through typologies of ethnic origin, scales of religiosity and observance, historical and generational typologies, identity and characterization typologies, and typologies of ties, engagement and process.

In his definition of minority groups, Henri Tajfel emphasizes the importance of group consciousness and the crucial effect social environment has groups.⁵⁶ Minorities suffer from social, economic and symbolic disadvantages causing the appearance of counterbalancing behavioral strategies that can go in two different directions; one is rejecting the minority condition and either fighting the disadvantage status or stop identifying with the group. The other is the acceptance strategy which results in a clear in-group - out-group boundaries and strengthening of group cohesion. Given the dramatic disintegration of multiethnic Yugoslavia and the hostile situation of nation building process in Croatia, the Jewish community have lost its secure place and had to reorient to a new identification framework. From organized auspices of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, Croatian Jewish Community became united by the threat and fear of what the uncertain future could bring.⁵⁷ In the situation in which the whole nation building process was based on the ethno-religious boundaries making (mostly between Croatian Catholics and Serbian Orthodox), Jewish Community could not stay neutral.

⁵⁵ David Graham, 'European Jewish Identity at the Dawn of the 21 Century: A Working Paper', Report (Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2004), 27–31, <http://archive.jpr.org.uk/object-eur47>.

⁵⁶ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories : Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁵⁷ Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*, 409–10.

In this context, Brubaker's take on the group crystallization process becomes useful for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon⁵⁸. Although structural changes and offered narratives indicate the existence of groupness among the individuals who are sharing the same traits, Brubaker is cautious about presuming the emergence of group feelings;

Groupness, or group identity is something that happens, or not, depending on the political, social, cultural and psychological processes through which individuals crystallize group feelings⁵⁹.

The schism in ŽOZ and the foundation of the Orthodox Jewish community *Bet Israel* only emphasized the need for Jewish distinctiveness, both in religious and ethnic sense. Researching Jewish identity means taking the concept of Jewishness out of isolation and focusing on factors that activate inter-group behaviors. In the case of Jewish group identity, things often get complicated due to its dynamic multi-facetedness, reflected in the combination of religion, culture, nationality, ethnicity, language, education, connection to the Holocaust and relationship with Israel.⁶⁰ Enlightenment, antisemitism and Zionism approached as particular political and social elements have had a profound effect on the construction of modern Jewish identity.⁶¹

Historically, Jews have oriented themselves towards those in power, but Croatian example shows how symbolic forms change along with radical political changes. The situation in which Jews have lost their *Yugoslavianess* and could not consciously choose *Croatianess*, as a primary identification, shows all the complexity of the social dependence of structural changes on one's identity. Following the assimilationist pattern would mean aligning with the dominant Croatian national narrative or at least the parts of it. Although it

⁵⁸ Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups'.

⁵⁹ Rogers Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without Groups', *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43, no. 2 (2002): 168.

⁶⁰ Bensimon Doris, 'Herman (Simon N.) Jewish Identity. A Social Psychological Perspective', *Archives de Sciences Sociales Des Religions*, no. 2 (1978).

⁶¹ Michael A. Meyer and Margaretta S. Handke, 'Jewish Identity in the Modern World', *History: Reviews of New Books* 20, no. 1 (1991): 43.

was impossible to embrace violent nationalism propagated by the dominant political option, part of Croatian Jews did find the thread of Croatian version of their Jewish identity. In 1996, Ognjen Karus have published a book about two hundred years of ŽOZ with a clear focus on Croatian history, leaving the period of Yugoslavia in the shadow. Independent Croatian Jewish history started to be emphasized in the post-Yugoslav era.⁶² Nevertheless, this research, as suggested by Brubaker, aims to analyze how categories of Jewishness are:

Proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality”.⁶³

Although structural changes and offered narratives tell us a lot about what to expect from the group and individual identification process, this research gives agency and voice to ordinary Croatian Jews who have their own ways of understanding the offered narratives, changing social values and conditions under which their Jewishness is reified as a group feeling. The division of ŽOZ crystalized very different understandings of what it means to be Jewish in Croatia in 21st century. Although the internal division was possible in 2006 when the political situation in Croatia was more stable and Jewish Community felt secure enough to claim internal differences, it presents a deep trauma for its members. In this research the theory of groupness will be employed to analyze conditions and narratives emerged after the Community schism in order to depict members’ notions of belonging and need for groupness.

⁶² Kerckänen, ‘The Transition from Yugoslav to Post-Yugoslav Jewry’, 33.

⁶³ Rogers Brubaker, ‘Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice: A Note on the Study of Muslims in European Countries of Immigration’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–8, 3.

2.2. Jewish Revival(s)?

Choosing Jewishness in the early 90s was not made in a vacuum. *New Europe*, a term coined after the disintegration of Soviet Union, fall of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany, collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, and dissolution of Yugoslavia, marked a significant change for all, not only for Jews. Democracy and values of pluralism had spread across the continent, thus creating a notion of Europe as a union with shared ideals. The idea of reviving Jewish communal life in post-communist Europe first came from Diana Pinto, soon after the consolidation phase.⁶⁴ Pinto's optimism in the mid-90s resulted in seeing new European Jewishness as a third pillar, next to Israeli and American one. She argues it with the processes of rapid democratization and rise of values of pluralism and multiculturalism in the Eastern European countries. Although she clearly sees the qualitative differences between the three pillars of Jewishness, Pinto, similar to Webber, believes in the bright future of Jews in Europe.⁶⁵ Croatian Jews had found themselves in a difficult situation, but they certainly had the opportunity to search for inspiration in the European Jewish revival debates.

Another important factor during the process of deciding on one's Jewishness in Croatia during the 90s was the presence of International Jewish organizations. Interested in rescuing Jews from the 'evils of communism' and rehabilitation through the religious education, organizations like World Jewish Congress, United Jewish Agency and Jewish Joint Distribution Committee saw the East-Central Europe as an untapped opportunity for *aliyah*.⁶⁶ Regeneration strategies emphasized the revival of Jewish communities by placing full-time Orthodox rabbis in community centers, rebuilding synagogues and promoting Jewish religious education. In Croatia, the pressure from the 'outside' came precisely in the form of Rabbi Kotel Da-Don, engaged in koshering community centers throughout Croatia

⁶⁴ Pinto, 'The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity'.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Webber, ed., *Jewish Identities in the New Europe* (Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization, 1994).

⁶⁶ Hofman, *Renewed Survival*, 115–16.

and providing opportunities to study and practice Orthodox Judaism. The Rabbi found sponsors among Orthodox communities outside the country in order to finance young Croatian Jews' religious education abroad.⁶⁷ Furthermore, not recognizing *bat mitzvah*⁶⁸ or personalized burial rites - rituals reflecting more inclusive form of Judaism and representative of the intercultural reality of Zagreb Jewish community – came as a main stumbling block for the unity.

Today, religious and boundary-making understanding of Jewishness falls into a debate about a possibility and reality of Jewish revival(s) in Europe. By seeing the opportunity for the revival of a distinctive European Jewish identity, Pinto makes a claim responding to the Israeli-American perception of Europe as a dangerous place for Jews. She responds to Goldberg who states that the new era of antisemitic violence in Europe differs from the previous one in a way that the traditional Western patterns of anti-Semitic thought have now merged with a potent strain of Muslim Judeophobia, claiming that “renewed vitriol among right-wing fascists and new threats from radicalized Islamists have created a crisis, confronting Jews with an agonizing choice”.⁶⁹ Pinto asks for Jews in Europe to not be perceived as “collateral damage” in the ‘war against the Muslims’ stating that they are fighting for shared values inside Europe.⁷⁰

Gruber emphasizes the challenges of representation of Jewish culture, tradition and religion in Europe today by questioning the possibility of Jewish authenticity.⁷¹ To what extent is the Jewish revival just another capitalist inquiry and the exploitation of unfortunate

⁶⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁶⁸ Bat mitzvah is the coming of age ceremony for young women, installed by non-Orthodox Judaism.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey Goldberg, ‘Is It Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?’, *The Atlantic*, April 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/is-it-time-for-the-jews-to-leave-europe/386279/>.

⁷⁰ Diana Pinto, ‘I’m a European Jew—and No, I’m Not Leaving’, *New Republic*, March 2015, <https://newrepublic.com/article/121388/why-jews-arent-leaving-europe-contratlantics-jeffrey-goldberg>.

⁷¹ Gruber, ‘Beyond Virtually Jewish’, 493.

history? By examining the Polish case, Gruber questions the agency in Jewish representations and how non-Jews should engage in the process of European Jewish life renewal. She gives an important cultural study analysis of this phenomenon, but leaves the space and possibility of the real and authentic expression of Jewishness in Europe today – especially among young Jews who are re-discovering their Jewish roots.

The hypothesis of European (and Croatian) Jewish revival falls into a bigger debate revolving around post-secular age and other religious revivals across the Europe. Gitelman argues that the collapse of communist regimes, dissolution of states, upsurge of state nationalisms, re-evaluation of ethnic and religious commitments, attempts by various ethno-religious groups to claim public roles and redraw social and ethnic borders compelled Jews to rethink who and what they are.⁷² Furthermore, the opening of the closed societies in East Central Europe and the Balkans made it possible for Jews, after many decades, to freely discuss about their ethnicity and/or religion. Using the offered framework I will ask how the event of the schism and emergence of *Bet Israel* can be interpreted as revival of Jewishness in Croatia. Although my analysis will show that the current situation with Croatian Jews cannot be placed in the narrative of a Revival, I will show why it is a compelling narrative to engage in by both leadership of *Bet Israel* and International Jewish Organizations.

2.3. Need for groupness and plurality of options

People's actual identities are not always characterized by the clear ethnic and/or religious dispositions. Especially in the case of Jewish minorities, the ethnic-religious framework has been employed in order to track the changes from within and from outside the Jewish community throughout the history. Post-communist era and the phenomenon of

⁷² Zvi Gitelman, Andras Kovacs, and Barry Kosmin, *New Jewish Identities* (Central European University Press, 2003).

Jewish revival(s) brought about a new version of plurality. This is not a plurality reflecting different ratio between Jewish ethnicity on the one side, and practicing Judaism on the other. According to Gudonis, rise of liberal values, modernization and democratization in post-Communist countries are reflecting in Jewish identifications, thus creating plurality of thin sub-identities, addressing particular needs.⁷³ Due to processes of rationalization, roles specialization and increasing fluidity of modern society, Jewish cultural identity in post-communist era have changed because of the greater prosperity and leisure time extension. Since individualism and uniqueness (in this case ethnically) are reached through social markers and symbolic consumption, it has increasingly become possible to define oneself by the content one consumes. Wearing a necklace with Star of David, going to Jewish dance group or using own Jewish background for the purposes of being ‘different’ and ‘cool’, demonstrates the need to belong to a group in a new, more convenient way.

In spite of thinness of Jewishness, plurality of ways to express particular Jewish content shows the need for groupness. Instead of complete assimilation and dissolution of feelings, assertions and behaviors, people find different (more appropriate or fitting) ways for expressing their Jewishness. Because crystallization of one’s identity happens at a certain moment - as a powerful and compelling reality, Brubaker and Cooper advocate for finding different analytical terms to describe the complexity of the process of identification. They suggest three indicators that can create a feeling of groupness among members; categorical communality, relational connectedness and feeling of belonging. Although relational connectedness is not a necessary condition for the construction of groupness (mostly in cases

⁷³ Marius Gudonis, ‘Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis’, in *New Jewish Identities: New Europe and Beyond* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 259.

of large-scale collectivities like nations), perceived similarities among members of one's group and expressed feeling of belonging to the group are crucial.⁷⁴

The need to belong is universal, contrary to the claims of predominant individualism in modern societies. Claims that individuals will overcome the need for membership in a cultural, religious or/and a historical group are challenged by the theory of belonging.⁷⁵ Guibernau suggests that the main difference between pre-modern and modern times is in a relative freedom to choose which group to belong too.⁷⁶ The authors argue that precisely the act of choosing is what makes the membership stronger. More conscious, informed and reflexive decision on belonging to a particular group creates stronger bonds. Plurality of choices to perform one's Jewishness reflects great diversity of individual's perceptions, interpretations and intentions. Second part of the thesis - the analysis, interpretation and discussion - gives answers following questions: How different solutions satisfy different actors and how is the perceived groupness translated into attachments to different institutional levels?

⁷⁴ Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 20.

⁷⁵ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Belonging and the Politics of Belonging', *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (1 July 2006): 197–214.

⁷⁶ Maria Berdún and Montserrat Guibernau, *Belonging: Solidarity and Division in Modern Societies* (Polity, 2013).

3. Methodology

In this chapter my research method and justification for choosing precisely in-depth, semi-structured interviews as a research technique, will be explained. Furthermore, I will present the structure of the sample in more details, together with the role of a researcher in a qualitative research, embedded in a particular social context.

3.1. Why qualitative?

The constructivist nature of knowledge stands in the core foundation of qualitative research methods. Perception, memory, emotions and understandings are human constructs. By taking place within a particular cultural setting, which provides a strong framework for the meaning-making process, constructs are not random chaotic processes. Although we share similar understandings within our social group(s), we also bring our individualized traits in the process of event interpretations. In order to understand how the respondents frame their cognitive, affective and behavioral segments of attitudes, different social situations require different research methods. Interviews are, as a tool of qualitative research methods, employed to understand fresh situations – less governed by social rules, social norms and social conventions.⁷⁷ The schism in Croatian Jewish community definitely represents a situation in which an abrupt decision destabilized the well-known patterns of Jewish communal life in Croatia. It is a situation in which attention is focused on different interpretations of the social reality, thus providing an insight on value-led, interest-led and convention-led choices respondents made in a situation as they saw it.

Interviews represent a bottom-up approach, thus providing micro-level explanations of why the schism happened and how it reflects on present, and the future of Jewish life in Croatia. In this thesis I used semi-structured, in-depth interviews in order to adjust questions

⁷⁷ Hilary Arksey and Peter Knight, *Interviewing for Social Scientists : An Introductory Resource with Examples* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1999), 14.

to the direction they themselves considered important. Age was a significant factor in the process of interviewing. The younger the participants – the more questions and sub-questions I the opportunity to ask. This method allowed me to understand the world of participants, to relate it to particular social phenomena, and to interpret them in the given social context. Considering the complexity and sensitivity of the topics involved, this type of interview appeared as the most appropriate form of data collection and analysis.

I conducted nine interviews in the course of three weeks, in April 2016. Participants were either active members of the two Jewish communities or consider their Jewishness as a significant identity trait in their everyday life. All interviews lasted from 53 to 70 minutes and each took around five hours to transcribe. After transcribing, four dominant themes emerged; Perception of Jewish community schism, understanding of own Jewish identity, future of Jewish communal life in Croatia, and the relationship with the State of Israel. I have created abbreviations for the participants in order to maintain their anonymity. Nevertheless, since one of the most important findings of this research is generational differences between the participants, they were classified in three groups. Letter ‘P’ stands for the participant and Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 stand for generational differentiation; ones born in 1950s (Group 1), in 1970s (Group 2), and in 1990s (Group 3).

3.2. Sample and researcher’s reflexivity

Sampling was done by using the snowball technique. I approached two prospective participants independently in the very beginning of the research and expected their recommendation for their friends and acquaintances. The plan didn’t work out. Nevertheless, I managed to interview four participants with a help of a non-Jewish friend who forwarded my email to a person he knows has a Jewish background. This person, without ever meeting me, forwarded my email to her friends and acquaintances, of which four responded. I have

additionally contacted three participants directly via official email listed on official web sites. Four participants were connected (not necessarily affiliated) to *Bet Israel* organization, three with *ŽOZ*, while one participant is not connected to either of the two communities. Although an outsider, this participant is involved and knowledgeable about the situation with Croatian Jewish community. As a president of one of the most important foundations responsible for financing Central-Eastern European Jewish communities, this participant was a valuable help for understanding the context and potential consequences of the Croatian Community schism. Although she didn't formally participate in this research, I have had the opportunity to talk shortly with Ruth Ellen Gruber - a journalist, writer and expert on contemporary Jewish issues in Europe, and include her impressions about Croatian Jewish Community. With this research my goal was to collect a diverse sample in order to include different perspectives and interpretations of what it means to be Jewish in Croatian today.

I have approached my participants directly, with the two-page long email in which the topic of the research was explained. Alongside the academic research interest, I have included a short description of the personal motivation. The notion of having a Jewish grandfather was very important for my participants because it explained the research interest in a more intriguing manner. When I started the interview with one of my older participants, she stopped me after two sentences and asked: "*So, why are you here? Are you...?*" After I told her that my personal connection with this topic is the fact that I have a Jewish grandfather who survived the Holocaust, but never spoke about his Jewishness due to the trauma, she changed her tone and said: "*Why didn't you say so immediately? Why didn't you say you're ours?*" Mentioning, or even talking about my personal story in more details (on participant's request), had a positive effect on participant's openness and motivation to talk about their own experiences in a genuine manner. This is understandable because at this point, by showing the shared experience, I stopped being a complete outsider.

Researcher's position in qualitative research is an important factor and should be included in the process of data interpretation. According to Bourdieu, there are three aspects which can blur the process of analysis; researcher's social background, academic position and intellectual discrepancy.⁷⁸ He stresses that authors should explicitly position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers' knowledge claims in terms of situated aspects of their social selves and reveal their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge my position of a researcher as both outsider and insider. As someone with Jewish background, I showed up as a complete stranger in both communities. This unclear position required further explanation, especially with participants who are strongly affiliated with one community or another. A clear awareness about this role and potential biases can reduce possible subjectivity during the process of collecting and analyzing the data.

⁷⁸ Karl Maton, 'Reflexivity, Relationism, & Research Pierre Bourdieu and the Epistemic Conditions of Social Scientific Knowledge', *Space and Culture* 6, no. 1 (2003): 55, doi:10.1177/1206331202238962.

4. Analysis & Interpretation

The answers given by the participants of this study were highly diverse, thus creating a complex pool of opinions and attitudes. Although one of the goals was to get answers from a diverse sample in order to capture as many different standpoints as possible, the categorization of phenomena emerged from the interviews inevitably simplifies social reality of Jews in Croatia today. Therefore, I will present results according to research questions and theoretical framework elaborated in previous chapters. The results are analyzed in context-based interpretative manner, thus reflecting participant's own perception of events following the division of the Community.

The chapter is organized as following; first, participants' interpretation of the Community schism and Rabbi Da-Don's Orthodox religious learning as a cause of the schism is presented and analyzed. The focus will then shift to the group-specific reasons of the schism, by placing participants' answers in the framework of needs for groupness in the particular context after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the violent inter-ethnic conflict in Croatia. As it will be presented in more details, after the schism (and influenced by surrounding structural changes in Croatia and Europe) the need for groupness emerged in plurality of options one can choose from. Finally, several different future scenarios given by the participants are depicted. The future of Jewish life in Croatia is presented in the context of the internal dynamic of Jewish community and external threats of the surrounding society.

4.1. Community schism and the emergence of Orthodoxy

4.1.1. Interpretations of the schism

When I asked my participants about the schism; their knowledge about reasons and arguments for division, the main actors, and their own interpretation of the situation, most of them started answering quite cautiously. From their tone and non-verbal communication it was obvious that the topic is not pleasant and that it requires careful wording. The reason can be found in the fact that the institution of ŽOZ is crucial for expression of Jewishness and has been deeply rooted in Jewish tradition due to extensive periods of external threat throughout the history.⁷⁹ Moreover, Jewish life after World War II was totally transferred to communal level due to external forces. Gordijew and Šiljak argue that after the Holocaust family stopped being the basic unit for transmittance of Jewish tradition.⁸⁰ The fear and trauma prevented Jews who survived the Holocaust to transmit the feeling of belonging to Jewish community to their children. Parents were not the ones who wanted to teach their children about Jewish traditions because they were afraid the Holocaust could happen again. Community became responsible for the preservation of Jewish life and it seems like all there was left was ŽOZ. Taking this into account, it is not hard to imagine that the internal division represents a deep trauma for its members. In words of participants affiliated with ŽOZ:

Well, generally (let's say for publicity), every separation, whether it is in a marriage or something else, has several issues that didn't function for a longer period of time. It is our own fault that we had chosen Orthodox rabbi who came from Hungary and who started to with the oriental Orthodox direction (P2, Group 1)⁸¹

This has affected ŽOZ tremendously bad. They don't know how to deal with the situation. I understand why, there was a lot of dirty laundry outside - like

⁷⁹ Aloup Hareven, 'A Matter of Choice: Jewish Identity in the Coming Generation', *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 56, no. 3 (1980): 220.

⁸⁰ Šiljak, 'Židovski identiteti u Hrvatskoj', 379.

⁸¹ All the interviews are conducted in Croatian language. The translation of participants' answers quoted in this thesis is made by the author.

when *Bet Israel* made an attempt to erase ŽOZ from the State Minority Register and now they are acting like they have amnesia - but you know what, 10 years passed. I don't care anymore; I want to move on! (P2, Group 2)

In words of participants affiliated with *Bet Israel*:

It was all a moment of disorientation, or misunderstanding. Members who are not religious thought that there was a group created against them, which is not true. (P1, Group 1)

To be honest, both communities disguise me. I had this typical negative attitude about the schism - like you put Jews in the same city and of course they end up fighting. I mean it is a normal process in interpersonal relationship, but first of all, Jews as people are already cursed. Second, we are so few! (P2, Group 3)

On the other hand, one participant expressed a humorous side of the story:

I am one of those who go to both communities, without any shame. My husband is a member of ŽOZ (actually his mother), and my mother was one of those people who decided to leave ŽOZ and found *Bet Israel*. When I decided to get married it was like Romeo and Juliet (laughter). (P1, Group 2)

4.1.2. Rabbi issues and the emergence of religiosity

Bet Israel was founded on the principles of Orthodox understanding of Jewish life, thus profiling religion as a main differentiation factor in comparison with ŽOZ. The rise of new religious movements appearing in Europe since the fall of communist regimes have been acknowledged by many authors due to lessening restrictions of religious activities and the emergence of 'religious economies', allowing re-evaluation of ethnic and religious commitments.⁸² Also, alongside the formerly suppressed post-communist societies, Ungureanu and Thomassen criticize the false premise of Western societies becoming secular,

⁸² Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, 1 edition (University Of Chicago Press, 1994); Charles Taylor, 'Religious Mobilizations', *Public Culture* 18, no. 2 (2006): 281; David Lyon and Charles Taylor, 'Being Post-Secular in the Social Sciences: Taylor's Social Imaginaries', *New Blackfriars*, 2010.

rational and neutral.⁸³ Stating that we are living in the age of accelerated pluralization in all societal fields, in which the shift from secular is just one of socio-cultural trends, the authors acknowledge that it's not only possible, but unavoidable to witness all sorts of religion related revivals.

After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Rabbi Da-Don was the first rabbi appointed after almost 60 years. Seen as a community leader, the decision to terminate his contract was unacceptable to some members. *Bet Israel* members see Rabbi's arrival as a crucial moment and a turning point in Croatian Jewish life, for all the good he did for the Community:

There was a time in our Community when rabbis were coming only for High Holydays, but then Rabbi Kotel came and said: 'I cannot make you religious, but I will teach you about your religion'. He managed to gather around 100 people who could not accept ŽOZ's decision in 2005 to fire him. People who are not religious didn't understand what happened and they got scared and confused. We could not accept that so we left and founded our own community. (P1, Group 1)

On the other hand, participants who were active in ŽOZ see the situation in a different light:

Here in ŽOZ we are all children of parents who were atheists – our Jews before the Holocaust were aristocrats and secular, they all came for High Holidays, but the point was that they were all together, with strong cohesion. *Religious things* were just one small part and no one *molested* them with the kosher food and long ceremonies. (P3, Group 1)

I don't know if some other rabbi would manage to do what Rabbi Da-Don did. Maybe it has something to do with his charisma. It definitely had in the beginning... But now when I think, I always get surprised when I see people in *Bet Israel* I have never seen before... He collected them somewhere, or these are those *new-born Jews* or *new-born believers*... (P2, Group 2)

Hofman has depicted differences between integrationists and traditionalists members of ŽOZ before the schism, but she could not predict that this pluralism of attitudes towards Jewish religiosity will culminate in a full-fledged conflict. When I asked a participant how

⁸³ Camil Ungureanu and Lasse Thomassen, 'The Post-Secular Debate: Introductory Remarks', *European Legacy* 20, no. 2 (2015): 103–8, doi:10.1080/10848770.2015.1006928.

she explains the sudden appearance of religiosity in ŽOZ before the schism, although she said that ŽOZ was '0.0 % religious during the Yugoslavia' she made an interesting comparison:

This is like the difference between yoga and meditation. You have people who come to yoga just to work out and to get sweaty and who are terribly annoyed with this breathing and doing nothing... On the other hand you have people who want both. (P1, Group 2)

It is implied that Rabbi Kotel Da-Don was a crucial person in introducing the religious component to the formerly atheistic, assimilative Jews. The emergence of Orthodox religious understanding of Jewishness in Croatia in early 2000 could be explained with the Rabbi's personal traits, but also with the need to add something more to the existing Jewish 'workout'. However, in the next part of this chapter, I will focus on the structural changes in Croatian society which could have influenced members' need for belonging.

4.2. Need for groupness and plurality of options

4.2.1. Groupness as a survival strategy

Kunovich and Hodson's salience hypothesis gives a possible explanation of why religion is instrumentalized as a main differentiation factor while creating in-group - out-group divisions in the situation of a violent conflict on one hand, and fall of any restrictions regarding communal religious life on the other.⁸⁴ Part of the Jewish Community has responded to the growing religious and ethnic tensions in Croatia by replicating the pattern of religious distinctiveness. According to this argument, Croatians proclaimed Catholicism as a main differentiation line with the ethnic Serbs. Following the same logic, the need to identify with Judaism happened in order to earn religious distinctiveness. The situation of conflict and

⁸⁴ Robert M. Kunovich and Randy Hodson, 'Conflict, Religious Identity, and Ethnic Intolerance in Croatia', *Social Forces* 78, no. 2 (1999): 643–68.

violence requires taking a stance in order to legitimize it. One participant gave her understanding of the religious emergence in a very similar way:

He [the Rabbi] came in the right time, in late 1990s when the critical mass of people started to find out things about Jewish Orthodoxy. Why precisely in the '90s? Because that was a situation already happening in Croatian society, like in all transition societies. In all countries, whether socialist or communist where religion was... I wouldn't say forbidden, but definitely not encouraged. In the same way that people found Christianity, they have found Judaism. Situation in larger Croatian society can be copied to the Jewish community, but with one big difference – in Jewish community religion didn't bring primitive, traditional, patriarchal patterns, as it did in Croatia because most of the Jews were highly educated people. (P2, Group 2)

In this sense, the need to have a religion can be seen as 'forced upon' Jews in Croatia in order to (re)claim the etiquette of authenticity and differentiate from *Yugoslavianess*. In a situation of the state nationalism upsurge and re-evaluation of ethnic and religious commitments, part of the Jewish Community expressed the need for 'more Jewish' Jewishness not because it was always there and waited to surface out, but out of protection. On the other hand, explanation for Rabbi's success in promoting Orthodoxy can be given through a framework of psychological need to believe:

Rabbi Kotel's way was different from what we were used to... There was a group around him who apparently wanted an authority, someone who will tell them what to do. You know that blind people who are *stuck* with something allegedly supernatural and spiritual... These are the people who were missing something and the Rabbi promised them *that something*... Those were mostly middle-aged women, but also some younger people who were not really successful and who wanted to become professional Jews with him. (P2, Group 1)

4.2.2. Generational differences

Having a diverse age, religiosity and orientation sample allowed me to depict several different types of interpretations of what it means to be Jewish in Croatia today. Kovács argues that two factors have a special role in determining identity strategies of the group;

generation and social mobility.⁸⁵ According to age, as briefly stated earlier, I divided participants in three categories; Group 1 (born in 1950s); second generation of parents who were affected by the Holocaust and who lived most of their lives in communist era of Yugoslavia, Group 2 (born in 1970s); third generation who witnessed the collapse of communism during their formative age and experienced the period of the Croatian extreme nationalistic upsurge, and Group 3 (born in 1990s); third generation raised in the democratic system and Croatian path of becoming a member of the European Union. Out of eight participants, three belong to group 1, three to group 2 and two to group 3.

The second generation participants are both members of *ŽOZ* and *Bet Israel*. What is interesting is that part of the Community, who left *ŽOZ* in 2006, was mostly second generation, with their children who were mostly following their parents due to inertia and a feeling of loyalty. Although Kovács suggests that the complete lack of tradition is particularly characteristic of second generation Jews, these were the people who initiated the schism and established *Bet Israel* community. On the other hand, ones who stayed in *ŽOZ* remained active propagating non-religious Jewish tradition. Furthermore, the important characteristic of the second generation is that their relation to Jewishness was considerably influenced by their parents - survivors. Kastenberga argues that the children of survivors tend to treat the *Shoah* secret as their own, and feel they have to hide it from their own children.⁸⁶ The transmission of the trauma from their parents took place through slips and silences and spontaneous outbursts, what psychologists call "acting out".

We are the children who were growing up with people with this *unspoken tragedy* - something we could not understand. We took over their suffering, without knowing the real reason behind it. It was the anxiety I could not digest for a long time... When there was a bomb in *ŽOZ*, I could not ignore it anymore. I had to come. This is where I found people with the same story and this is where I finally became sane. (P3, Group 1)

⁸⁵ Kovács, 'Jews and Jewishness in Post-War Hungary'.

⁸⁶ Judith S. Kastenberga, 'Children of Survivors and Child Survivors.', in *Echoes of the Holocaust 1*, 1992, 27–50.

The situation of external threat mobilized people with similar stories. The external forces pushed members of second generation to crystalize their Jewishness and this can be a reason for unusual active roles they took afterward. Whether that was stepping out of ŽOZ, or actively advocating the type of Jewishness Croatian Jews should and want to nurture (integrationists). In each case the quest for communal expression of Jewishness was dominant. If this was not the case, the unsatisfied part of the community would just step out as individuals. Instead, a new community - with a different agenda emerged.

Third generation (born in 1970s), usually called ‘the revivalists’⁸⁷, seems to be different in Croatian case⁸⁸. Whereas the second generation claimed their own definitions of Jewishness, and expressed it in communal sense, their children simply followed. Nevertheless, third generation expresses nostalgia about the Community before the dissolution of Yugoslavia and before the division, together with regret for the lack of unity, thus reflecting the importance of communal life for Jews of this generation:

I would go there [to ŽOZ] on Thursdays and we would get drunk in the hallways. We were the group of around 30 people and we were all friends. It was much easier... not easier... much more fun to be a Jew back then because that was Yuga [Yugoslavia]. There were cute Macedonians, funny Sarajlije [boys from Sarajevo], macho guys from Belgrade and that was Jewishness to us – we were like scouts you know... falling in love, getting drunk in the train to Belgrade. No one was religious; we were ‘Commies’. When Yuga fell apart, we fell apart as well (P1, group 2)

When I got married I was so happy that our friends from both communities came to the wedding. You see, that is the biggest tragedy. This division among young people is a bigger tragedy than the war... People have no idea why they stopped hanging out; they were just following their parents (Ibid.)

⁸⁷ The term ‘revivalist’ should, as Kovacs argues, be used carefully. The process of a complete revival of religious tradition affecting all aspects of life will probably be the identity strategy of a few. Also, comparing the Hungarian case other Central European countries (including Croatia) where the number of Jews is substantially higher than in Poland or Slovakia, Kovacs emphasizes that the ‘revival movements’ seem unable to prevent the gradual disappearance of Jewish Diaspora Kovács, ‘Jews and Jewishness in Post-War Hungary’..

⁸⁸ Kovács, ‘Jewish Groups and Identity Strategies in Post-Communist Hungary’, 239.

During my interviews with third generation, I became aware of the existence and popularity of the third option - the Chabad Community *Menora*. Several years ago Chabad Rabbi Pini Pinchas Zaklas came to Croatia with his family and founded a community according to the Hasidic philosophy, focused on religious and spiritual concepts of God, the soul and the meaning of the Jewish commandments. The lack of establishment and political activity is what attracts more and more people:

Something really funny happened. Around five years ago a Hasid came to Croatia... like some kind of an *alien*... and it happened that people, like me who didn't want to choose between the two options, came to him. What an irony... that I and my friends gather around the most religious guy for High Holidays (laughter). You can find people who are *stuck* in one or the other side, but I choose Pini. (P1, Group 2)

Rabbi Pini was neutral... that was good. They (The Chabad Community) gained people because they are smart and they knew that no sides should be taken because Jews in Croatia are sick of both. Also, they are not that stupid to insist on rigid Chabad rules because they know they would turn people away. For example, they were calling me for *Shabbat*, but after they found out I'm Jewish because of my father, they stopped calling. Than they apologized and realized that that's not how it goes. (P2, Group 2)

Frustrations caused by the quarrel between members of once unified community made the third option attractive. On the other hand, according to the (only) participant defining herself strictly as a modern Orthodox, Chabad is the only real Jewish option in Croatia today:

I spend my Holidays with the Chabad because they are the ones offering real religious alternative in Croatia... because they are very strict in defining who is a Jew..., and it is impossible to understand Jewish life without them... When it comes to our children, the biggest help came from Chabad kindergarten where they became bilingual, speaking Hebrew without the foreign accent. (P3, Group 2)

Third generation expressed a close relationship with the State of Israel. One participant made an *aliyah*⁸⁹ and came back to Croatia after six years. The other one studied in Israel for a year, and the third one visited the country several times and seriously considered moving there several years ago. She gave up on the idea for the moment, but the third participant expressed quite strong feelings towards the country:

I was living there for a year, while studying, but my husband and I think about moving there every single day. We want our children to have a positive identification with their Jewishness and not with the Holocaust and quarrels in this Community, which keeps getting smaller and smaller. We are too old to start from peeling potatoes in a *Kibbutz*, and that's why we are working on our careers so we can shift there... not for longer I hope. I don't want my children to be too old when we leave. (P3, Group 2)

Group 3, representing younger third generation (born in 1990s), differs in a large scale from the one born in 1970s. The lack of Yugoslav Jewish Community experience and not witnessing violent political and social ruptures had a significant impact on participant's answers. In post-communist Jewish communities we can differentiate between 'discoverers' and 'non-discoverers', or the ones who found out about their Jewish heritage in their adolescent age and the ones who have been knowing their connection with Jewishness since they were born⁹⁰ My participants were both conscious about their Jewish background, but they came in terms with it only after their trip to Israel. One participant went to a birth-right trip, and the other one was in the 'Future Leaders' program. The aim of both trips to Israel is to empower and foster identification with the State of Israel, thus focusing on ethno-national definition of Jewishness. While one participant expressed only positive experiences:

⁸⁹ *Aliyah* is the word that describes the return of the Jewish People from the exile in the Diaspora back to the Land of Israel. The word Aliyah is derived from the verb *laalot* which means "to go up", or "to ascend" in a positive spiritual sense. A person who makes Aliyah is called an *Oleh*, meaning "one who goes up" (<http://www.science.co.il/Aliyah.php>).

⁹⁰ Kamil Kijek, 'Return of the Jew: Identity Narratives of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation of Jews in Poland', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 332–33.

I was scared a bit before going because I'm not religious, but once I arrived to Israel I saw that everyone is like me! I won't even start talking about Israel because it is a perfect country... Despite the war, it is just perfect. You have the sea, you have mountains, Jerusalem is beautiful, Tel Aviv is like Miami... I would go again, tomorrow if I could! (P1, Group 3)

The other one was more skeptical:

I know what they're doing... they show you the best parts of Israel, fill your head with it... but what's good is that you're surrounded with other normal Jews, and that's the most important thing. You finally see that there are normal Jews who are not walking around in long skirts, who are just like you... You feel like home there. (P2, Group 3)

This trip was a turning point for both participants:

When I came back home, I was not ashamed of my Jewish background anymore... I was calm about it and even proud. I became more assertive about the whole thing (in elementary school I was so ashamed when my teacher asked me to do a short presentation about my grandfather - a Holocaust survivor. (P2, Group 3)

I didn't care before the trip, but now I realize that this is simply a part of my blood, and that's why I am a part of this community... Also, the strongest connection is the Holocaust. A lot of members of my family were killed and this is what brings us together. (P1, Group 3)

There was no mentioning of either *ŽOZ* or *Bet Israel*, except knowing about the quarrel and not showing any willingness to align with neither. Focused on Holocaust as a main identifier, younger third generation expressed high level of individualism. This individualism allows engaging with Jewishness through the practice of memory and the individual decision to act upon own version of Jewishness.⁹¹ Gudonis sees this type of Jewish practice as a convenient vehicle for expressing liberal perspectives, against the traditional

⁹¹ Berdún and Guibernau, *Belonging*; Frederick S. Roden, *Recovering Jewishness: Modern Identities Reclaimed* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2016).

nationalism context. Jewishness comes in as a symbolic affiliation with a minority group, thus having the experience and right to talk about equality and tolerance.⁹²

I have the need to raise awareness about Jews in Croatia, and I'm trying to do it in my network of people. Sometimes I just throw some provocations to see how people will react... I'm also active on Facebook. For example I was trying to educate people about Jasenovac Commemoration. (P2, group 3)

Although Graham mentions 'threads' of shared attitudes and practices linking Jews in different countries, it is visible from this research that perception of Jewishness differs inside one city. Generational differences revolve around different attitudes toward institutional Jewishness. Members in Group 1 are closely affiliated with one community and take sides, whether *ŽOZ*'s or *Bet Israel*'s, because they were the ones who initiated the division. Although the need to participate in communal life still exists, members of the Group 2 had search for the third way because they don't see the quarrel as their own battle. Because they refuse to take a side (at least declaratively), they chose the Chabad Community. It is an attractive place because of its neutrality and the lack of quarrel baggage. It is a place where they can come and freely consume *all things Jewish*. They are doing it in their own way, without worrying if anyone will judge them.

On the other hand, Group 2 and Group 3 differ according to the very existence of the need for community. While Group 2 still expresses this need, Group 3 sees their Jewishness in a more international context. For younger third generation, the need to find someone similar to them is more important than being a formal member of a community. This is partly because they know about the quarrel and have no interest in taking sides, and partly because the trip to Israel allowed them to find peers who introduced them to a positive Jewish identity. Group 2 has the experience of peers' confirmation through a direct experience of the Community during Yugoslavia. This memory created a feeling of loyalty towards communal expression

⁹² Gudonis, 'Particularizing the Universal: New Polish Identities and a New Framework of Analysis', 260.

of Jewishness and they cannot just give up and forget about *ŽOZ*, or *Bet Israel*. Survival strategy in this situation is finding a third way.

4.2.3. Do more options equal pluralism?

Throughout the history, one of the constants concerning communal Jewish life in Europe has been diversity and pluralism. Different interpretations of what means to be Jewish followed the changes in overall understanding of what should be the main domain of one's identity. Jewish Enlightenment reflected broader philosophical debates on what constitutes an individual and a group, thus shifting from the dominant religious differentiation to national framework of affiliation. With the division of private and political, and development of Zionist ideas, numerous ways to see oneself according to religious, ethnic and national belonging emerged inside of Jewish circles. For the Croatian case, the question is whether having more options to define, and attaching this definitions to different institutions, really reflects pluralism. The main issue here is the number of Jews in Croatia. Having 509 formally declared Jews in ethnic category, 536 in religious category and 30 as having Hebrew as a mother thong, represents a big challenge for sustaining Jewish life. Of course, the census doesn't capture the real number of Jews, but neither do numbers *ŽOZ* nor *Bet Israel* have (*ŽOZ* around 1200 members, *Bet Israel* around 300).⁹³

When I asked my participants whether they see the division of *ŽOZ* as an unbridgeable obstacle which will ruin already fragile and small Jewish community, or as a sign of pluralism, I got few optimistic answers:

The biggest difference between the two communities is that *Bet Israel* has a religious direction, and it should stay this way. I mean, in all the big cities there is pluralism and variety of options, so why not! (P1, Group 1)

⁹³ 'Popis stanovništva 2011'.

I don't know if this division can be seen as pluralism... Of course, it is better if someone who goes on your nerves is not in the community because you will feel better and come more often, but I really don't tolerate when someone airs dirty laundry in public... because whether we wanted or not, we live in a slightly fascist state where some people think Jews hold all the banks and world power... people tend to exult over Jewish quarrels. (P2, Group 2)

Although pluralism sounds like an attractive interpretation of the current situation, one of the participants stated that pluralism can exist in cities like New York, even in Budapest, but not in Zagreb. Besides the quantitative problem, there is a lack of clear visions of what different institutional interpretations of Jewishness offer:

Unfortunately, private interests of few people brought about the schism, but I think the possibility for reconciliation is high enough. However, I don't see me and my family in neither of those. (P3, Group 2)

One participant reported that having more options was not beneficial in the institutional level, precisely because of the small number of Jews:

The biggest damage is done to our children. My generation is very fertile and we have a lot of children born recently. If there wasn't a division, we would have a huge kindergarten and a big Sunday school... now we don't because everything is divided in two. (P2, Group 2)

Today, a Jewish person in Zagreb can choose between three different ways to participate in the communal life. Whether this is a cultural and traditional expression of Jewishness through lectures, research activity or other cultural events in *ŽOZ*, or religious and more 'serious' understanding of Jewishness that needs to be protected and preserved in *Bet Israel*, or just celebrating High Holidays and having fun with friends and with Rabbi Pini, the Chabad. Although this is a small community and everyone knows everyone, it seems like these are three legitimate options one can choose from. With a sense of humor and turning the discourse of division into a discourse of diversity, one participant stated:

Oh, that's so funny because we really take advantage of the situation. The Holiday lasts for three days so we go to ŽOZ the day before, to *Bet Israel* on the day and to Pini's the day after (laughter). (P1, Group 2)

4.3. Future of Jewish life in Croatia

4.3.1. Is there a revival?

When I asked my participants how they see the situation with ŽOZ, *Bet Israel* and Chabad *Menora* organization in the next ten years, they gave the whole range of answers. Very optimistic projections of strengthening Jewish traditions and religion come from acknowledging the importance of Jewish Elementary School *Hugo Lauder Kohn*, its capacity to educate and raise future Jewish leaders. On the other hand, some projected disappearance of *Bet Israel* because it has very few active members, while ŽOZ will survive due to inertia, although in smaller numbers and less active. These answers reflect two different sides of a wider debate of European Jewish revival after the fall of communism. The question is not whether the last Jew will die or emigrate from Europe, but is there a (bright) future for Jewish communal life. Framed as *Silent Holocaust* or the *Crisis of Jewish identity*, many scholars have predicted the disintegration of the Jewish community. Decline of religiosity⁹⁴, growing secularization and intermarriages⁹⁵, life under communism and diminishing number of Jews in Croatia after World War II are seen as main factors for inability to see Croatian Jews neither as Croats, nor as 'authentic' Jews by the religious law.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Robert P. Amyot and Lee Sigelman, 'Jews without Judaism? Assimilation and Jewish Identity in the United States', 1996, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=2846>.

⁹⁵ Webber, *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*; Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry*; Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Religion or Ethnicity?: Jewish Identities in Evolution* (Rutgers University Press, 2009); Kovács, 'Jews and Jewishness in Post-War Hungary'.

⁹⁶ Hofman, *Renewed Survival*, 6.

Diana Pinto was quite optimistic when she wrote about European Jewry as a ‘third pillar’ that will once again rise strong in its own authenticity, but she was not alone.⁹⁷ Šiljak rejected the disappearance hypothesis by emphasizing the crucial role the Community played for its members after the World War II and Croatian war for Independence by replacing the institution of family as the most important identity barrier.⁹⁸ The internal differences that culminated in the schism had a substantial impact on participants’ perception of the future:

In ten years I see ŽOZ in the same place as today. Although, at some point I was sure everything will just disappear. I see that *Bet Israel* has around 50 active members, regularly attending the events and they do function in a way ŽOZ was functioning in the past. They function as a family. There is no family atmosphere in ŽOZ anymore... It is not a Community anymore (P2, Group 2)

Another interesting topic regarding Jewish future in Croatia is the willingness to provide Jewish upbringing to one’s own child. Jewish leaders and religious authorities consider intermarriages as a path (or a manifestation) towards assimilation, precisely because of the potential lack of Jewish identity transmission to their children. Nevertheless, the series of studies by JDC International Centre for Community Development on communities in France, Germany and Netherlands have shown that the road to "assimilation" is not as linear and inevitable; that the children of mixed couples never quite disconnect from Judaism, on the contrary, Judaism is, if nurtured in a positive way, widely recognized to be an element of their identity.⁹⁹ Participants of the Group 2 expressed their attitudes towards ways and intensity of cultural and religious transmission to their children. Diversity of standpoints is presented. Two participants expressed practical obstacles:

⁹⁷ Pinto, ‘The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity’.

⁹⁸ Šiljak, ‘Židovski identiteti u Hrvatskoj’, 375.

⁹⁹ Julia David, “‘My Jewish Part: Being a Part of Judaism of Keeping Judaism Apart?’ The Transmission of Judaism among Children of Mixed Marriages Residing in the Paris Metropolitan Area. Children of Intermarriage in Three European Countries [Series]’ (JDC International Centre for Community Development, 2014), 5, Paris, France, <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/details.cfm?PublicationID=21928>.

I won't be enrolling my kid in the Jewish school. Why? To learn Hebrew? Well, he won't learn it in school. It is better for him to hang out with his own peers from the neighborhood than to be isolated. Also, a lot of kids in the Jewish school have nothing to do with Jewishness of any kind, it is an elite school and I don't want to see a gun every day when I bring my child there. (P1, Group 2)

My heart says yes, but my brain and my financial situation say no. Public kindergarten is 30 seconds away from our apartment. I would like to transmit the knowledge and the culture to her, but I wouldn't want to go over her father's comfort zone as well. But we are on the same page here because he recently said "Well, you won't keep the child in Zagreb during the summer, you'll send her to the Jewish camp at the seaside". (P2, Group 2)

Participant who identified with modern Orthodoxy had very pronounced and clear attitude about Jewish upbringing:

This is the most important mission my husband and I care about. Since we live Judaism, which we both accepted fully only in our 30s, and many of the routines are new, I can proudly say that my children have acquired routines like: saying blessings, washing hands before eating Challah bread, asking about all the food (including the sweets) if it is kosher before diving in. We have weekly Torah readings with them in Hebrew as well. (P3, Group 2)

Participant of the Group 3 shared her own vision of her parents' attempts to bring Jewishness closer, but admitting the challenges she had with creating a positive Jewish identity:

No one is religious in my family... we didn't celebrate High Holidays, on contrary; we celebrated Croatian Catholic holidays... Since my father was active in *Bet Israel* we did go every once in a while to celebrate Pesach... this was the only really Jewish thing we did. When I came to school, there was some bullying - 'She is a Jew! She is cheap', was what I was getting. Then I would come home my parents were claiming that all those 60 kids are wrong and they are right... I always had a feeling that my mom and dad are hiding something for me, that Jews did something wrong for being so hated. I had a feeling they wanted to create an illusion... But they didn't give up, that's good. Although my mom has nothing to do with Jewishness, she was the one who really transmitted knowledge about Jewish culture and tradition. She was much clearer than my father, since both he and my grandfather are more interested in Jewish things academically. (P2, Group 3)

4.3.2. External determinants

The process of identification cannot be understood without comprehending the wider social discourse surrounding minorities in general, and Jewish minority in particular. Although Croatia is not a country where direct antisemitism is a prevalent phenomenon, it is a place where usage of fascist symbols in 2016 (mostly national symbols of Independent State of Croatia) is not sanctioned; formally – it is not outlawed, informally – it is rarely publicly denounced. Ustaša greeting; “Za dom spremni” [*For home (land) – ready!*] has been used in public sphere (e.g. during the football match between Croatia and Israel in March where Prime Minister Tihomir Oreskovic was present at the game, but did not react) officially condemned this act.¹⁰⁰ Last year, a research conducted on 1146 senior high school students showed that only 23% of them consider Independent State of Croatia as a fascist state.¹⁰¹ Moreover, one fourth of students think Ante Pavelić, its main figure, was one of the anti-fascist leaders. Couple of weeks ago Croatian film director Jakov Sedlar, released a documentary named *Jasenovac – the Truth*. The documentary gained significant criticism for Holocaust relativisation, historical revisionism and for simply being untrue^{102 103}.

Although Jewish life in Diaspora have seen numerous situations in which the threat from the outside have brought high levels of intra-group cohesion and strong feeling of

¹⁰⁰ Sven Milekić, ‘Croatia’s “Banal” Fascism on Display at Israel Match: Balkan Insight’, *Balkan Transitional Justice*, accessed 23 April 2016, <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/israel-match-scandal-shows-banalization-of-croatia-s-fascism-03-24-2016>.

¹⁰¹ ‘Mladi U Hrvatskoj Podržavaju Diktaturu, NDH Im Važna, a Povijest Ne Znaju [Young People in Croatia Support the Dictatorship, Independent State If Croatia in Important for Them, but They Don’t Know the History]’, *Novilist.hr*, accessed 14 April 2016, <http://www.srednja.hr/Novosti/Hrvatska/Mladi-u-Hrvatskoj-podrzavaju-diktaturu-NDH-im-vazna-a-povijest-ne-znaju>.

¹⁰² Boris Dežulović, ‘Jakov Sedlar: Čas Lobotomije [Jakov Sedlar: The Lobotomy Class]’, *N1 HR*, accessed 23 April 2016, <http://hr.n1info.com/a116840/Kolumne/Boris-Dezulovic/Jakov-Sedlar-Cas-lobotomije.html>.

¹⁰³ Hina, ‘Israeli Ambassador: Sedlar Doc Depicts History Selectively, Tries to Revise History’, *About Croatia*, 2016, <https://about.hr/news/culture/israeli-ambassador-sedlar-doc-depicts-history-selectively-tries-revise-history-16870>.

belonging, the new Croatian Government, often compared with Tuđman's government in the times of the war, is perceived as a common challenge:

Situation today is very difficult, and we are unsatisfied with the current government. The whole Jasenovac issue for example... well of course we don't want to be a part of the formal commemoration ceremony because politicians expect cooperation, while not reacting or condemning fascist evocation of Ustaša symbols. They are flirting with things which are not to be flirted with... I hope this will motivate people [Jews] to come to the community and help, although, people are tired. They are tired of proving what has happened in Jasenovac for four generations now. Croatia has a big problem with it, and we are in this problem together with Croatia. (P1, Group 1)

Antisemitism has played a major role in determining who is Jewish from the outside of the community throughout the history. Šiljak argues that the Holocaust has served as a strong Jewish consciousness stimulator among elder and middle generations of Jews in Croatia¹⁰⁴. However, Holocaust is no longer only Jewish memory and Jewish trauma. Education about Holocaust transformed in education about human nature and, in its most basic level, education of what we as human beings are capable of doing to our own species. Exposure to the Holocaust aims to inoculate future generations against its replication, while raising awareness and sensitivity about various forms of discrimination and support of human rights¹⁰⁵.

Insufficient education about the Holocaust and the role of Independent State of Croatia in it, together with political attitudes incompatible with democratic political culture¹⁰⁶, foster current situation in Croatia. As stated by scholars of democratic transitions in the past two centuries, the modernization discontinuities in the Croatian society have not favored the development of democratic values – quite the opposite. Authoritarian values, institutions and

¹⁰⁴ Šiljak, 'Židovski identiteti u Hrvatskoj', 378.

¹⁰⁵ Karel Fracapane et al., eds., *Holocaust Education in a Global Context* (Paris: UNESCO 2014).

¹⁰⁶ Dragan Bagić, *Does school raise good citizens? Study on political socialization of Croatian high school students* (GONG : Fakultet političkih znanosti, 2011), <https://bib.irb.hr/prikazi-rad?&rad=539717>.

norms, as well as the social climate favorable for various forms of personality cults, the hero code, and loyalty to a party or a nation is what characterizes Croatian mentality¹⁰⁷:

Latent antisemitism has a significant impact on the process of ‘coming out’ as a Jew due to the intolerant atmosphere in Croatia. Deeply embedded stereotypes about Jews don’t seem to create feeling of threat in a large extent, but they do create a challenge to the process of Jewish life preservation in Croatia today.

Why do I know so few Jews? I think they are not educated and they don’t know what it means to be Jewish... they don’t know enough, so they remain silent. (P1, Group 3)

I have a friend who is Jewish, but she is ashamed of it. I told her to go to Taglit, but she didn’t want to. I mean, I know... we live in Croatia and all, but her parents are highly educated people and they missed to provide this heritage for her (P2, Group 3)

¹⁰⁷ Ivan Rogić, *Tehnika i samostalnost: okvir za sliku treće hrvatske modernizacije* [*The technique and the independence: The frame for the third Croatian modernization*] (Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada, 2000); Josip Županov, ‘Industrijalizirajuća I Dezindustrijalizirajuća Elita U Hrvatskoj U Drugoj Polovici 20. Stoljeća [Industrializing and de-Industrializing Elite in Croatia in the Second Half of the 20th Century]’, in *Upravljačke Elite I Modernizacija*, ed. Ivan Rogić and Drago Čengić (Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar, 2001), 11–36.

5. Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate ‘ordinary’ Jews’ perception of the Zagreb Community schism that took place in 2006. Ten years have passed and today, anyone who considers Jewishness an (important) part of their life can choose between three options; two officially recognized Jewish communities; *ŽOZ* and *Bet Israel*, and the Chabad community. The situation with the Jewish community in Zagreb seemed doomed to failure in 2006, not only due to overall small number of Jews, but also because the quarrel between both communities’ leaders became huge and public. However, after ten years tensions have lessened and the variety of options existing reflect member’s need to belong to a Jewish group, no matter in which form. In this chapter, I will engage in a deeper analysis of the presented data by placing it in a wider context. I will employ two different lenses and look at the main topics from within and from the outside of the community. While looking from within allows understanding of the internal logic of the community and changes that took place after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, looking from the outside provides a deeper explanation by identifying the group’s response to surrounding society.

5.1. Groupness from the within

In this research the schism was deliberately chosen as a starting point because it represents a moment showing that Croatian Jewish community is not a homogeneous community led by an Orthodox rabbi. Croatian Jews needed a rabbi since the last rabbi (Miroslav Šalom Freiburger who was arrested by the Independent State of Croatia regime and murdered in Auschwitz) was appointed over sixty years ago. Orthodox Rabbi Kotel Da-Don came to *ŽOZ* without knowing a word of Croatian, after already two generations rose in the secular, Yugoslavian-Jewish culture oriented climate. After eight years, the part of the Community expressed the need for a rabbi whose leadership would be more progressive and

fitting to the members' needs. However, one fraction saw Rabbi Da-Don as the only way to save Croatian Jewish Community from its disappearance. They saw the religious element of Jewishness as a crucial one and took over a discourse of authenticity and *back to the roots* direction. Although the schism happened ten years after the end of the war in Croatia, some of its elements reminded of a process of Croatian nation building. The need to draw clear boundaries between "real", "authentic" Jews and the rest reminds of the essentializing group narrative Croatian nationalists used in order to differentiate from the rest (especially Serbs) and legitimize the ethnic conflict.

Since the Jewish Community was a main institution of transmission of Jewishness throughout the history, and especially during Yugoslav times, the division left deep consequences on its members' lives. *ŽOZ* as a firm, familiar, unifying and important group disappeared and left its members confused. Ones who decided to leave and found *Bet Israel* did it because they had different vision of satisfying members' needs for belonging. Majority who stayed in *ŽOZ* could not go back to the previous way of functioning, acting like nothing happened. Personal differences and accusations contaminated the separation by leaving members of both communities in resentment. In this hard situation with extremely negative atmosphere, new ways of seeing the future of Jewish life started to emerge. Participants of this research showed that generational differences are crucial when it comes to perceiving what it means to be Jewish in Croatia today. Divided in three groups, participants represent three different visions of the present and the future of Jewish life.

Group 1 stands for the second generation Holocaust survivors. Their perception of Jewish life is strictly communal, whether the community serves as a place of Orthodox religious practice (*Bet Israel* has a small synagogue in its building) and education or a place of social, cultural and intellectual gathering, as is the case with *ŽOZ*. The need to belong to the Community and perceived similarities between the members have slightly different basis.

For members of ŽOZ the need for groupness arises from the long history of the Community and being proud of the specific secular Croatian-Jewish identity expression. Assimilated into Croatian society, members of ŽOZ cannot understand how this deeply rooted way of functioning can change over-night, as was the case, in their opinion, with *Bet Israel*. Members of *Bet Israel* found their common connectedness in the act of protest against assimilative, secular Jewishness because it is, according to them, a dangerous road to Jewish disappearance. Members of *Bet Israel* have took over a revivalist discourse in which Jews in Europe should finally, after so many years of discrimination, stand up and claim their right for distinctiveness. Differences in groupness grounds between the two Communities show the variety of needs for the same thing - a significant place of identification.

Group 2 represents the third generation born in 1970s whose parents were involved in the Community schism. During the period of Yugoslavia ŽOZ was a part of the Federation of Jewish Communities, thus facilitating communication and cooperation between numerous the Yugoslav states. As stated by one representative of the group, ŽOZ was a place where one can meet a ‘funny Sarajlija’, a ‘macho Serbian’ and a ‘cute Macedonian’. It was a place of intercultural exchange, friendship, and having fun. Strong feelings of belonging to the Community were based on the peer support during the time of puberty and adolescence. This feeling was shaken in the 1990s. First big shock was the dissolution of Yugoslavia and second was the war between former Yugoslav countries and the collapse of the idea of *Brotherhood and Unity*. The same participant summarized it: ‘When Yuga fell apart, we fell apart’. It was, and has remained, a deep trauma for the members of ŽOZ in this group. The third shock came after the schism of the Community. Witnessing all the ruptures, this generation created strong feelings towards the communal expression of Jewishness. Unfortunately, the bad blood created between the two sides turns them away from both. As expressed in the research, they have found a third option for expressing the need for

socializing in a Jewish environment, and they found it with the Chabad community. Although Chabad is, by the definition, a religious community, members of this generational group see it as a place where they can satisfy the need for belonging without resentment, guild or bad blood.

Group 3 represents the third generation, born in 1990s whose parents' are involved in the division. Unlike Group 2, members of this group were raised in Croatia after the declaration of its independence. They experienced the adolescence phase during Croatia's last phase of transition and its path to become a member of the European Union, a completely different socio-political climate comparing to the Group 2. Another big change this generation experienced more intensively than the other two is the rise of social networks importance. Development of technology has substantially influenced generation born in the 1990s, together with their perception of belonging to a community. Not having a direct experience of communal life in Croatia reflects in their detachment from all communities existing in Croatia today. Both participants see the trip to Israel as a turning point in acknowledging and accepting their Jewish heritage. Meeting young Jews from all over the world was crucial because it allowed this generation to transform Jewishness from something to be ashamed of to a positive identification pillar. Although their need for groupness is not satisfied with one of the three options offered in Croatia, they express the feeling of belonging to their peers from all over the world with whom they can sustain regular connections with. Additionally, Jewishness serves as a facilitator for transmission of liberal ideas of freedom, equality and tolerance.

5.2. Groupness from the outside

Since the dissolution of Yugoslavia, Croatia have had three significant political shifts. Right after stepping out of the Yugoslav Federation and declaring independence, HDZ [Croatian Democratic Union] won the first Croatian parliamentary elections with

overwhelming majority. Croatian independence campaigns during the first half of the 1990s focused on purifying Croatian language from Serbian, or non-Croatian words, thus reflecting Croatian ethno-religious separatism. However, already in 1996 Croatians began to express the concern for emerging ethnonationalism spreading in neo-fascist direction. In November 1996, Radio 101, the only independent radio station at that time, organized the largest public protest since the Independence declaration.¹⁰⁸ This event marked a political shift in Croatia. In the year 2000, following elections allowed SDP [Croatian Social Liberal Party] to take over and lead the country towards the European Union. Although HDZ won the elections again in 2003 and 2007, the dominant direction towards country liberalization remained. In 2011 SDP came to power and Croatia became 28th European Union member state on 1st of July, 2013.

End of 2015 brought yet another twist in Croatian political sphere when neither rightist, nor leftist party gained the majority of votes.¹⁰⁹ Third option - MOST [The Bridge] appeared only few months before the elections and won unexpected amount of votes, thus getting to decide who to enter in the coalition with. After many twists and turns, MOST decided to align with the rightist option. Since the beginning of 2016, the political situation in Croatia has been shifting towards a direct expression of conservative values, followed by ethnocentrism and xenophobia. In order to show the unsatisfaction with the current government, both *ŽOZ* and *Bet Israel* have decided to boycott the state official Jasenovac Commemoration event in April and organize their own. This is the first public act since 2006 in which the two communities expressed a unison voice and the will to cooperate.

The feeling of threat from the surrounding society has been the most common Jewish minority unifier throughout the history. Therefore, it is not too difficult to imagine a scenario

¹⁰⁸ Hofman, *Renewed Survival*, 37.

¹⁰⁹ The rightist option is named *Patriotic Coalition*. HDZ had to enter the coalition in order to remain the power. The leftist option is named *Croatia is Growing* with SDP as a party in the coalition.

where Croatian communities overcome internal differences and resentments in order to fight the common enemy. Standing up against the fascist symbols evoked in Croatian public space puts pressure on both communities to cooperate and react in a clearly pronounced and powerful manner. One of the participants summarized it:

I really like the fact that the communities found a common ground and boycotted the official Jasenovac Commemoration because that's how you express the attitude against the fascism in this state. But this antifascism has to be stronger, more trenchant and show the facts, not just blabbing (P2, Group 3)

Although the scenario of the group cohesion strengthening due to external threat is a bitter-sweet one, I am not convinced that it is a sustainable. In an informal conversation with the participant who follows the situation with Croatian Jews from the outside, I learned that the small number of Jews in Croatia is by far the biggest problem for the Croatian, and most other European Jewish communities. The external determinants can be a strong motivator, but the existence of the deep internal disagreements and the lack of strong internal unity are too big for such a small community.

In the week of writing this thesis a big protest was organized against the current government, which is, on the day of finishing the thesis, on the brink of collapse.¹¹⁰ As the second biggest protest in the history of Independent Croatia (first was the one mentioned earlier), it reflects a current raising wave of dissatisfaction with the overall political situation. This is a moment when the Jewish minority unites with a significant part of the society and joins the oppositional wave. The question remains if the line of threat is thick enough to bring

¹¹⁰ The protest was organized on June 1st 2016 as a reaction to postponement of 'Curriculum Reform' implementation which would liberalize Croatian education curriculum. One of the controversial figures in Croatian public life Željka Markić proposed the exclusion of all changes which are not in line with Catholic conservative learning. For example, she proposed to exclude certain contemporary Croatian authors who engage in the political and social critique of Croatian socio-political environment.

different sides together, or it will just postpone the personal resentments for the next, more peaceful period.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to argue that the current situation with Croatian Jews goes beyond the binary discourse of revival vs. disappearance, regarding Jewish communities in post-communist Europe. The event of the schism and the emergence of *Bet Israel*, an Orthodox religious Community in the Croatian context where Jews have been secular and assimilated throughout the history, served as a case study for examining the mechanisms of Jewish re-identification processes. There are three main findings of the qualitative research conducted with three generations of Croatian Jews:

1. Younger generations of Jews don't perceive the division of the Community as part of their own story but rather the story of their parents. Moreover, they see the schism as a matter of personal differences and a reflection of the wider boundary-making project that started in Croatia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia.
2. Since there is an expressed need for belonging among all generations, pluralism of options to express the need for a significant Jewish group has emerged. This pluralism arises from generational differences and different types of Jewish communal or non-communal experiences. Those born in the 1950s choose *ŽOZ* or *Bet Israel*, depending on where they have positioned themselves during the schism. Jews born during the 1970s, having experienced the communal life, choose the third option - the *Chabad Community*, where they can satisfy the need for belonging without the burden of the quarrel. Those born in the 1990s, lacking any kind of Jewish communal experience, turn to the international community. Although physically distant, new technologies allow the members of the global Jewish community to stay connected.
3. The future of Jewish life in Croatia is shaped by internal, as much as by the external determinants. Responding to the dominant social values of the surrounding society,

the group cohesion changes. This means that the future of the Jewish community in

Croatia depends significantly, on the future of Croatian socio-political constellations.

Although this research brings deeper understanding of the Croatian-Jewish case specificities, it also reaffirms the importance of the groupness theory in de-essentializing the notions of ethnic, national and religious entities. However, the research is limited in its scope and possibilities for any kind of generalizations, due to the small number of participants. Further research in this particular field should focus more closely on one of the generational groups. Revealing differences between the members of the same generational group could tackle upon the complexity of self-identification processes even more closely.

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