MAKING JEWS AT HOME
JEWISH NATIONALISM IN THE BOHEMIAN LANDS, 1918-1938

By

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This dissertation examines the efforts of Jewish nationalists to end Jews’ social marginalization from non-Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands between the world wars. Through the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish nationalist movement sought to transform Czechoslovakia’s multivalent Jewish societies into a unified ethno-national community. By creating a Jewish nation, a process challenged by the significant socio-cultural differences dividing the country’s Jews, Jewish nationalists believed that they could restore Jews’ respectability and recast the relationship between Jews and non-Jews as one of mutual respect and harmonious coexistence. The dissertation explores Jewish nationalists’ struggle to make Jews at home in Czechoslovakia by investigating a series of Zionist projects and institutions: the creation of an alliance between Jews and the state; the census and the making of Jewish statistics; the transformation of the formal Jewish communities from religious institutions to national ones; Jewish schools; and the Jewish nationalist sports movement.

Exploring a Jewry on the crossroads between east and west, the dissertation delves into broader questions of the impact of nationalism on the modern Jewish experience. Within the paradoxical context of a multinational nation-state like Czechoslovakia, Zionists adopted a strategy which sought integration through national distinctiveness, a response embodying elements of both west and east European Jewish culture. The study thus complicates the history of Zionism by showing that alongside the Palestine-oriented German and Polish factions, there were significant ideological alternatives within which ideas of Jewish Diaspora nationalism co-existed with mainstream Zionism. Moreover, the study
points to the continuities in the relationship between Jews and the state. As in the time of empire, Jews cultivated partnerships with the political elite, a strategy developed to balance the interest of the state and its Jewish minority. In the interwar years, Jewish activists thus looked to the state for assistance in transforming Jewish society. This dissertation seeks to broaden our understanding of Jewish responses to nationalism, the relationship between Jews and the modern state, and more broadly, about the complex ways in which marginalized groups seek to attain respectability and assert their demands for equality within modern societies.
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Introduction
Making Jews at Home

In today’s Prague, tourists and locals eager to explore the city’s Jewish past trek through the synagogues and streets of Josefov in the inner city. Many also venture further afield to the Strašnice neighbourhood to visit Franz Kafka’s grave in the New Jewish Cemetery. Next to the cemetery is another area, known as Hagibor. Besides a Jewish retirement home, little remains to suggest to the visitor that this was once a Jewish space. The name Hagibor has insinuated itself into the city’s topography, all but divested of its Jewish origins. The area is also home to a tennis club and Radio Free Europe’s new headquarters, housed in an edifice known in Czech as “Hagibor Office Building.” However, the fact that Hagibor is Hebrew for “the hero” escapes most, as does the history of the area’s Jewish institutions. During World War II, the sporting ground served as an internment camp for Jews married to non-Jews, as well as a site for forced labour. Before that it was used as a playground for Jewish children excluded from the city’s public spaces by German racial laws. Its origin as a Jewish space, however, dates back before the war to the early 1920s, when Hagibor was synonymous with the well-known Jewish nationalist sports club, Hagibor Praha/Prag.

Hagibor was part of a network of Jewish nationalist institutions that developed in the Bohemian Lands, and across the rest of Czechoslovakia, in the interwar years. Their emergence signalled the arrival of Jewish nationalism as a cultural and political force in Jewish life. Indeed, in the Bohemian Lands, the Zionist movement cultivated a substantial infrastructure of social, cultural, and political institutions that balanced an attachment to a
Jewish homeland in Palestine with a strong commitment to the regeneration of Jewish national life in the Diaspora.

This study explores the Zionist nation building project in the Bohemian Lands. National communities had to be constructed. Zionists, like other nation makers, worked hard to create and maintain institutions, such as schools and sports clubs—a stateless nation’s ‘territory’—through which the Jewish nation was to come to life. These were strategies for mass mobilization that Jewish activists shared with other minority activists in East Central Europe. The dissertation examines Jewish nationalists’ efforts to make Jews at home in Czechoslovakia, an undertaking that involved both the creation of a Jewish nation and making Jews comfortable in the new state. It does so by investigating a series of Zionist projects and institutions: the creation of an alliance between Jews and the state; the census and the making of Jewish statistics; the transformation of the formal Jewish communities from religious institutions to national ones; Jewish schools; and the Jewish nationalist sports movement. The study thus explores the process of nationalization itself. It asks how and to what extent Jews and their communities came to be understood as a nationality, examines the ways in which the image of Jewish nationhood was constructed and maintained, and probes its successes and failures.

Hagibor as a Jewish space was destroyed by the wartime dispossession, deportation, and murder of the city’s Jews. The memory of it was suppressed by postwar antisemitism and the marginalization of the Jewish experience by the communist regime. The traumatic events of World War II and its aftermath have shaped not only the lives of people and their communities, but also the ways in which Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust has been remembered. Historians of Jewish politics in East Central Europe have concentrated mainly
on Palestine-focused Zionism and its institutions. They have neglected Diaspora-oriented Jewish nationalisms, even ignoring the branches of the Zionist movement, such as the one in the Bohemian Lands, which directed their political and cultural work primarily towards securing Jews’ rights in the Diaspora.¹ Some historians, however, such as Michael Berkowitz and Joshua Shanes, have engaged the role of Zionism in sustaining Diaspora Jewish communities.² Drawing on their works, this dissertation seeks to complicate the history of Zionism by showing that alongside the dominant Palestine-oriented German and Polish factions, there were significant ideological alternatives within which ideas of Jewish Diaspora nationalism co-existed with mainstream Zionism.³

The Bohemian Lands, the former Austrian provinces of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia that constituted interwar Czechoslovakia’s western half, had been one of the centers

¹ One important anthology on Zionism, for example, devotes most of its essays to the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine is the subject of over half of the articles), emigration, and leadership cultures. Only a few contributions examine Zionist politics on the ground in Europe. See Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, Essential Papers on Zionism (New York: New York University Press, 1996). For the historiography’s focus on Zionism over other Jewish political movements in Eastern Europe, most importantly the Bund, an anti-Zionist socialist movement with a Jewish nationalist agenda and perhaps the Zionist movement’s strongest rival, see Zvi Gitelman, “A Century of Jewish Politics in Eastern Europe: The Legacy of the Bund and the Zionist Movement,” in The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 3-19.


for nationalist activism in the late Habsburg era. However, despite the efforts of German and Czech nationalists, national identifications and allegiances remained, as historians have shown, fluid and malleable well into the twentieth century. In this region, the nationalist battle was so intense in part because the activists competed over the same population. For some time, this created a degree of flexibility and pragmatism in the construction of national boundaries that was reflected in the appeals of both nationalist groups to the region’s Jews.

The Jews of the Bohemian Lands formed an acculturated middle class. They were a secularizing and urbanizing Jewish society, similar to the Jewish communities in neighbouring Germany and southwest Austria. As in the rest of East Central Europe, Jews in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia had adopted German language and culture as part of a

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6 For Germans and Jews in Prague, see Cohen, The Politics of Ethnic Survival. For Jews in German nationalist organizations, see Judson, Guardians of the Nation, 49-52; and for Czech nationalists and Jews, see Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 21-23.

process of emancipation and acculturation that had begun in the late eighteenth century. By the late nineteenth century, however, Jews’ perceived Germaness, once a sign of loyalty to the Austrian state and its German-speaking elite, had become a symbol of their German national allegiance. The transformation of language from a means of communication to a sign of national identification pitched Jews against each other and those on all sides of the struggle between German and Czech nationalists in the Bohemian Lands.

However, as scholars have shown, nationalists were continuously frustrated by people’s lack of commitment to ‘their’ nation—educating their children in both Czech and German, shifting national affiliation when needed, and resisting nationalists’ demands to act as Germans or Czechs. Thus, when Czech and German nationalists, Jews and non-Jews alike, pointed to Jews as either especially chauvinist Czechs and Germans or indifferent side-switchers, these accusations reflected broader anxieties that nationalists harboured about assimilation, opportunism, and national indifference. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the image of the Jew as a national opportunist switching between Czech and German allegiances had become a counter type. Jews’ alleged multilingualism and

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9 This cultural reification of German did not, however, necessarily exclude Jews’ use of other languages; monolingualism was, after all, rare in this region until the mid twentieth century. Jews’ language uses and national identifications in the Bohemian Lands have been major preoccupations of historians, as it was for nationalists in late Imperial Austria, see Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka’s Fin-de-Siécle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), Kieval, *The Making of Czech Jewry*, and the essays in Nekula and Koschmal, *Juden zwischen Deutschen und Tschechen*.

10 Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*, and Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*.

11 Here I draw on George Mosse’s concept of a counter type as developed in his work on Jews and homosexuals in the construction of an ideal masculinity. George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern
national opportunism were used by various nationalists as a negative type against which to define ideal behaviour as well as to taint and incriminate the ‘uncommitted.’ Jewish activists engaged on the side of German, Czech, or Jewish nationalism declared war on Jews’ perceived national vacillation and indifference.12

In the Bohemian Lands, Zionism, like other nationalisms, was not an awakening of pre-existing but slumbering national feelings. Instead, it was the result of individual activists’ response to a specific cultural and political context and its challenges. Some historians have argued that before World War I, Zionism here constituted a way in which Jewish activists could assume a neutral position in the political battle between German and Czech nationalists. Others have countered that it allowed for Jews’ continued adherence to both Czech and German language and culture.13 Expanding on the notion that Zionism offered a form of neutrality, I argue that Jewish nationalism became a vehicle for Jewish activists’ participation in the nationalization of communities and identities. This study of interwar Jewish nationalism contends that Zionism was driven by Jewish activists’ search for respect and recognition by their social peers, for civic equality, and for integration, a process

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12 For a comprehensive study of so-called Czech, German, and Zionist Jews, see Kateřina Čapková, Češi, Němci, Židé?: Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938 (Praha: Paseka, 2005).

in which individual worthiness was inseparable from collective respectability. Indeed, in the Bohemian Lands, where there was a tradition for minority nationalist activism, Jewish nationalism was a legitimate and legible mode of political action that promised to end Jews’ marginalization.

Those Zionists who shared with their Czech and German peers the desire for clear loyalties and firm national boundaries had internalized much of the critique of Jews’ character and behaviour. They therefore envisioned nationalization as a process of moral and physical regeneration that would heal relations between Jews and non-Jews. As antisemitism intensified during and after World War I, the urgency for collective Jewish social and political action energized the Jewish nationalist leadership in the Bohemian Lands. In the wake of the war, they stepped on to the political stage with ambitions of making Jewish nationalism a mass movement. Within the paradoxical context of a multinational nation-state like Czechoslovakia, these Jewish nationalists—Jews on the crossroads between east and west—thus adopted a strategy which sought integration through national distinctiveness.

Capitalizing on the uncertainty of the Czech political elite over the loyalty of the diverse communities within the newly amalgamated Czechoslovakia, Jewish nationalist leaders cast Zionism as a cultural and political force that would transform Jews into loyal citizens and withdraw them from the struggle between Czech, German, Slovak and

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14 This reading of Zionism draws on George Mosse’s work on masculinity and nationalism in which he argues that Zionism was a way for acculturated Jews to counter marginalizing stereotypes about Jews as weak, parasitical, and unmanly, by constructing a new Jew, assertive, honorable, and manly, as their social and cultural ideal, Mosse, The Image of Man.

Hungarian nationalists. The tension between national self-determination and minority rights in this successor state allowed Jewish nationalists to present Jews as the faithful minority nation par excellence. In the interwar years, this ethos of ‘neutral loyalty’ remained central to Jewish nationalists as they cultivated a partnership with the central government. The dissertation thus sheds light on the tactics developed by minorities in the transition from empire to nation-state. While some historians perceive the nationalist ethos of the successor states as detrimental to national minority populations, my work suggests that, in contrast, some minority activists viewed the new political circumstances as an opportunity to improve their community’s socio-cultural, political, and economic position.

In their efforts to establish an alliance between Zionism and the state, Jewish activists tapped into not only a broader Jewish political tradition of fostering partnerships with political elites, but also a more local practice of nationalist activism. Like other Jewish reformers and modernizers, Zionists in the Bohemian Lands looked to the state for assistance...
in transforming Jewish society.19 As a new force on the Jewish political stage and unsure of Zionism’s clout, Jewish nationalists sought to harness the authority and resources of the state to their cultural and political agenda. My study therefore points to the continuities in the relationship between Jews and the state. As in the time of empire, Jews cultivated their practical and symbolic ties to the political elite, a strategy developed to balance the interest of the state and its Jewish minority. In the interwar years, this dynamic not only continued but also expanded in step with the emergence of the modern welfare state. In the Bohemian Lands, Jewish nationalists looked to their German and Czech activist peers and their expansive state-funded network of social welfare, educational, and cultural institutions for models for mobilizing and maintaining the nation—a process in which the census and the school assumed central importance as instruments of nation building and symbols of nationhood.20

However, in Czechoslovakia, as in Habsburg Austria, the belief that Jews lacked a shared national language turned out to be a significant obstacle for the ability of Jewish nationalists to obtain equal minority rights. While the state authorities recognized Jews as

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20 For the expanding network of social welfare and educational institutions in Central Europe’s modernizing Jewish communities beginning in the late nineteenth century, see Penslar, Shylock’s Children, chapter 5. For the interwar years, see Brenner and Penslar, ed., In Search of Jewish Community. For the importance of the population census and national schools for activists in Imperial Austria, see Judson, Guardians of the Nation., For the Bohemian Lands specifically, see Zahra, Kidnapped Souls. For the significance of the census and ethnography in creating and managing multinational states, see Francine Hirsch, Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), and Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, ed., A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
nationality on the census, they refused to extend state support for Jewish national schools. In a context in which nationality was marked primarily by language, the perceived linguistic promiscuity of Jews—the German and Czech-speaking ones in the Bohemian Lands, and their Yiddish, Hungarian, Slovak, Rusyn, German, Czech, and Hebrew-speaking cousins in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia—posed a serious problem for Jewish nationalists. Jews’ contested nationality status prevented Zionist activists from tapping into public funds for Jewish schools, limited their authority vis-à-vis the country’s Jews, and questioned the legitimacy of the Jewish nationalist project. The study thus examines the interplay between state authorities and political activists in negotiating government policies towards minorities in the interwar years. It demonstrates that initiatives from above were at times shaped and even engineered by minority advocates. However, as this study shows, when the interests of the state and minority activists were perceived to be at odds, in the absence of outside support, the latter had little recourse.

A note on terminology

In interwar Czechoslovakia, Jewish nationalists consciously and consistently employed a political-legal terminology derived from the country’s minority protection laws. Terms like “Židovská národní rada” (Jewish National Council), “Židovská národnost” (Jewish nationality), and “národnostní menšina” (national minority), cast Jews as one of the country’s national minorities with legitimate collective rights. In the Czechoslovak political context, Jewish nationalists made references to Zionism when it empowered or added prestige to the Jewish nationalist cause. In a lecture to a Czechoslovak student society, the Jewish ‘expert’ František Friedmann noted that while all Zionists were Jewish nationalists,
not all Jewish nationalists were Zionists. However, in the Bohemian Lands, there was considerable, if not complete, overlap between Jewish nationalists and Zionist activists, a fact that underlines the rhetorical importance of the use of the ‘local’ terminology. In this study I will thus be using the terms ‘Jewish nationalist’ and ‘Zionist’ interchangeably.

In the Bohemian Lands, Jewish nationalists often referred to their opponents as “asimilanti” (assimilationists), a strategy they employed to taint their rivals with the negative moral connotations of assimilation that were especially prominent in Czech nationalist discourse. However, as this study shows, Czech-Jewish activists, many of whom were Czech nationalists and who promoted Czech language and culture among Jews, as well as other non-Zionist Jews, were committed to Jewish continuity in the interwar years.

In this dissertation, many of the individual activists and nationalists that I study remain somewhat anonymous. While some were prominent politicians, intellectuals, and writers, many of the Jewish nationalist movement’s foot soldiers were less well-known. Hence, the sources that would throw light on these individuals’ lives and work are sparse and only occasionally allow me to compose biographical sketches.

Finally, maps and place names are powerful tools for depicting towns, regions, or countries, as of a particular national character. When deciding on the use of place names, a country like interwar Czechoslovakia, which consisted of multilingual regions that had formerly been under Austrian and Hungarian administration, poses particular difficulties if one wishes to avoid reproducing the claims that nationalists made on specific territories. Scholars writing on the Bohemian Lands often use both the Czech and German place names, a practice I have adopted here (aside from well-known places like Prague, Bohemia, and

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22 For assimilation, Jews, and Czech nationalists, see Kieval, Languages of Community, 203-206.
Moravia that have English names). For Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, I use the Czechoslovak name only although I am aware that this does not do justice to the complex linguistic, national, religious, and socio-cultural historical context in which this study plays out.  

Chapter overview

Focusing on Zionists’ efforts to create an alliance with the dominant Czech elites in the immediate postwar period, the dissertation’s first chapter examines how Zionist leaders crafted a partnership between Jews and Czechs by presenting Jewish nationhood as a position of ‘neutral loyalty’ vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia. Historians often focus on how Czech leaders bestowed rights on Jews, noting these politicians’ exceptionally tolerant and sophisticated strategies. In contrast, my analysis centres on Jewish activists’ work to strike a coalition with the new authorities in the months following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. Casting themselves as “victims of Austrian oppression,” Zionist leaders promoted an alliance between Jews and Czechs. In doing so, they harnessed discourses of Jewish power, American Jewish influence in particular, to their efforts to ensure the state’s protection of Jews and Jews’ rights.

Facing an upsurge in anti-Jewish hostility and violence in the aftermath of the war, Zionists insisted on Jews’ loyalty to the new state and convinced the authorities that Czechoslovakia’s image abroad might suffer should antisemitism here begin to resemble that of neighbouring Poland. This process was intended not only to strengthen the bonds between

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23 For a list of place names in the languages of the communities that lived in these towns and cities in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, see Paul Robert Magocsi, Historical Atlas of East Central Europe (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993). For an example of a contested process of naming and re-naming, see Bugge, “The Making of a Slovak City.”
Zionists and Czechs, but also to delegitimize the position of the Czech nationalist Jews. Jewish leaders skilfully employed perceptions of Jewish power and the shared interests and fate of Czechs and Jews as oppressed nations to establish a partnership between them.

Through the interwar years, the paradoxical position of Jews’ simultaneous neutrality and loyalty informed the work of Jewish statisticians and historians eager to legitimize Jews’ belonging within the new state. The second chapter examines Zionists’ use of statistics and social science in the construction of a Jewish nation in Czechoslovakia. Focusing on the importance which Jewish activists invested in the inclusion of ‘Jewish nationality’ in the country’s censuses, the chapter demonstrates that statistics and social science became a vehicle for imagining Czechoslovak Jewry. Indeed, the mapping of Jews as a nation, particularly the visibility and legitimacy awarded Jewish nationhood by its statistical representation, played a central role in the Zionist project in Czechoslovakia. Jewish activists’ production of statistical knowledge about Jews was a tool that allowed Jews to present themselves to others, to challenge critics and political opponents, and to prescribe legitimate behaviours and loyalties for Jews.

Examining the work of Jewish statistician and activist František Friedmann, I show how Zionists produced narratives that depicted the country’s Jews as a unified ethnic community whose historical boundaries conformed with and even pre-dated those of Czechoslovakia. Seeking to legitimize Jewish nationhood within the context of the multinational state, Friedmann authored statistical and historical studies that portrayed Jews as a natural and integral part of the country’s ethnographical landscape. Sensitive to the tension between Czechoslovakia’s dual character as nation state and multinational
community, Jewish activists utilized the language of both national self-determination and minority rights to cast Jews as model citizens.

Chapter Three examines efforts by Jewish leaders to enhance the respectability and sustainability of their communities by creating ‘Czech’ Jewish institutions. Jewish leaders, Zionist and non-Zionist, Czech and German, religious and secular, articulated a position of simultaneous cultural distinctiveness and adaptation as the basis for a model Jewish citizenry. The chapter highlights the ways in which Jewish activists sought to bind the authority and resources of the state to a programme of religious and cultural revival among Jews in the Bohemian Lands. In so doing, it was their desire to change the image of Jews from one based on religion to a new identity centred on ethnicity. Throughout the interwar years, these activists laboured to create an administrative structure which would reconcile the needs of the Jewish communities and the priorities of the state. They intended to accomplish this by overseeing Jewish religious education in public schools, the training of a Czechoslovak rabbinate, the distribution of state funds, and by acting as an advisor to the state authorities on matters concerning the country’s Jews. This modernization of Jewish communal structures would diminish the communities’ traditional autonomy and increase central control of administrative and religious matters by Prague Jewish leaders on behalf of the state. Thus, Jewish activists, rather than an interventionist state, engineered the growing centralization and supervision of Jewish communities in the interwar years. Significantly, this process suggests that Jewish leaders believed that the sustainability and vitality of Jewish life depended on strengthening the ties between Jews and the state.

Throughout East Central Europe, children and youth were at the centre of nationalists’ efforts to mobilize their nations and Jewish nationalists were no exception.
Chapter Four examines Zionist policies towards the country’s Jewish youth. The focus on youth policies highlights two of the central dilemmas facing the Zionist movement in the interwar years. First, there was the tension between the two homelands, Palestine and Czechoslovakia. On the one hand, Zionist leaders were committed to preparing young Jews ideologically and practically for emigration to Palestine. On the other, however, they envisioned the regeneration of the Jewish nation at home as dependent on a new generation of Jews. Second, while Zionist leaders promoted both Jews’ national distinctiveness and Czechoslovak patriotism, they faced significant challenges when seeking to sustain this duality in practice. The failure to secure state funding for Jewish national schools most dramatically underlines this tension. In public, the government in Prague paid lip service to the Jewish nationalist cause. State authorities, however, rejected Zionists’ repeated requests for support for a Jewish national school system, an institution which they imagined as the nation’s cradle and thus as indispensable to any collective awakening. While Jewish nationalists sought to mobilize parents for the new Jewish schools, in the interwar years, most Jewish children were funnelled into the well-funded Czechoslovak-language schools, a development both welcomed and encouraged by the state. Zionists, having failed to secure a Jewish national alternative, watched with dismay.

In response, I argue in Chapter Five, Jewish nationalist leaders worked to establish other institutions through which the desired transformation of Jewish youth could be accomplished. In East Central Europe, gymnastics was a social and symbolic space intimately connected to the nation building experience of stateless peoples. As efforts to establish Jewish national schools failed, the Jewish sports and gymnastic movement Makabi ČSR (Československá republika) took on greater importance for the Jewish nationalist
In the minds of Zionist activists, Makabi became a substitute for the school and hence the most significant educational institution within the country’s Jewish societies. Zionist ambitions were, however, inhibited both by a lack of funds and by what they perceived as a nationally indifferent and disoriented Jewish youth. In response, Makabi leaders chose to downplay the organization’s Zionism in favour of a less politicized ethnic Jewish identity. While this ‘neutral’ position was intended to attract more Jewish youths, it was also a strategy to tap into state resources for physical education. Therefore, Makabi activists propagated the notion that the creation of new Jews would simultaneously transform Jews into useful and able citizens.

While some leaders emphasized the importance of internal regeneration, others believed that altering the negative public image of Jews’ physical abilities and mental character through athletic performance was paramount to the creation of a Jewish nationalist mass movement. Both factions, however, imagined the process as one of Jews becoming manly. Indeed, Makabi activists’ longing to create and display Jewish men embodied a quest for social and cultural respectability, a way of ending Jews’ marginalization. However, while Makabi activists envisioned the Zionist project as one of Jewish unity, the masculine mode in which the new Jew was envisioned excluded women from the discourse of national regeneration. While women joined and participated in Jewish clubs no less than did men, their presence in the Zionist imagination diminished as the discourse surrounding sports and gymnastics became increasingly militaristic.

My study of the Zionist movement in the Bohemian Lands engages the often repeated notion that in the interwar years “Jews were the only real Czechoslovaks.” This view suggests that not only did Jews remain apart from the nationalizing process which sought to

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24 See, for example, Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars, 149.
dissect public and private life into imagined national camps, but also that Jews alone remained faithful to the state’s alleged multinational and liberal ideals. In contrast, I propose that the image of Jews as real Czechoslovaks was itself a product of Jewish activists’ accommodation rather than resistance to the dominant nationalizing paradigm. In the name of national democracy, Zionists sought to carve out a legitimate place for Jews within Czechoslovakia by nationalizing Jewish identities and communities. Indeed, at the root of this process was a desire among Zionists to transform Jews from outsiders to insiders in the New Europe. This study of nationalism and minority politics in interwar East Central Europe thus highlights the complex ways in which marginalized groups seek to attain respectability and assert their demands for equality within modern societies.
Chapter 1
Neutral Loyalty
The Making of an Alliance between Jews and Czechs in New Europe

In 1940, Viktor Fischl, a prominent young Zionist from Czechoslovakia exiled in London, reflected on the exceptional character of the Jewish experience in his native land during the interwar years:

For centuries, the history of the Jews in the Czech countries has been symbolized by a fruitful harmony. For centuries, Czechs and Jews have lived together, enriching each other by the interchange of worldly goods and by their spiritual exchanges. For centuries the oppressed Czechs and Slovaks have known and understood the meaning of the Jewish fate, which united them in a firm bond. Long before the first World War feeling of a nearness in this fate and belief brought them, together, on the threshold of the War in the common fight, in the struggle for national self-determination and liberty, for the rights of small nations, and for democracy. In the Czechoslovak Republic, which rose from the flames of the world conflagration of 1914 to 1918, the Jews enjoyed all civic rights. The liberated Czechs and Slovaks did not intend for one moment to impose on any of its minorities, fetters such as they themselves had just removed. The Jews of the young Republic, in common with other national entities, received special minority rights in addition to their civic rights. Their protection found its place in the constitution of the State, and it was not a protection to be left on paper only. For twenty years, for twenty happy years, the relationship of the Jewish minority and the state developed in a way which could have served as an example to many a country in Central and Eastern Europe. Responsible statesmen of the Czechoslovak Republic were always fully aware of the significance of the value to the state of this minority, which in the gravest days of the Republic, differed to so great an extent from the other national minorities. The country of Masaryk and those who followed in his political footsteps never deprived the Jews of Czechoslovakia of any of their rights which they retained in their entirety even when, in the neighbouring countries the storm of barbarism broke over the reign of justice.¹

The image of Czechoslovakia as an unusually favourable environment for Jews is a trope in histories of the country’s Jews as well as in accounts discussing the exceptional character of

the Czechoslovak state in interwar East Central Europe. Yet, depictions of Czech leaders such as Thomas G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, acting as tolerant, progressive, and politically sophisticated strategists bestowing rights on ‘their’ Jews, tell only part of the story. They ignore the efforts of local Jewish activists to strike an alliance with the new Czech leaders in the months following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. Using the principle of national self-determination to legitimize both their demands for national minority rights and their leadership over Czechoslovakia’s Jews, Jewish nationalists actively sought to create a partnership between the country’s leaders and the Jewish nationalist movement. As anti-Jewish incitement and violence swept the country in the immediate postwar period this new Jewish leadership skilfully harnessed discourses of Jewish power to their efforts to ensure the state’s protection of Jews and Jews’ rights.

The objectives of the Jewish nationalists coincided in several important ways with the Czech leadership’s own goals, especially with regard to the Allied Powers’ acceptance of the Czechs’ territorial demands that included significant German and Hungarian minorities within the new state borders. The Czech authorities were particularly keen to promote an image of Czechoslovakia as more politically mature, progressive, and – above all – western than the other new and enlarged states in East Central Europe; an image they believed would

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4 Jewish activists focused their efforts on the Czech leaders rather than the Slovak representatives. The Czech leaders dominated the ‘Czechoslovak delegation’ and Jewish nationalists addressed the Czech leadership on all Jewish issues including ones concerning Jews in Slovakia. While the Jewish National Council did interact with Slovak authorities, it was with the Czechs that they sought to establish a partnership. Hence, the emphasis on “Czech” when referring to the Czechoslovak leaders.
be decisive for their political fortunes at the Paris Peace Conference. Czech leaders’ attentiveness to international public opinion and their perception of Jews’ ability to shape it in their favour became a vehicle for Jewish activists’ efforts to ensure the government’s cooperation in protecting Jews and their rights. While the collapse of the empire made some Jews in the Bohemian Lands apprehensive as to what the future would bring, others, such as the Jewish nationalists, saw it as a moment of opportunity. They hoped that the new democratic and national order as well as the internationalization of the Jewish Question would catapult them into a position as leaders of Czechoslovakia’s Jews. Uneasy about the spread of popular antisemitic violence and uncertain as to their ability to mobilize Jews for the Jewish nationalist program, these activists worked to create a partnership with the state authorities that would both quell the threat against Jews and bolster the Jewish nationalist movement’s authority as a self-appointed representative of the country’s Jews. The political gains achieved by Jewish nationalists in the immediate postwar period, the recognition of Jews as a national minority and the alliance between Jewish and Czech leaders not only became the legal and political basis for Jewish nationalist politics, but also remained central to the Jewish nationalist movement’s self-image through the 1920s and 1930s.

This chapter begins with an exploration of Jewish activists’ efforts to establish a partnership between Czechs and Jews in the wake of the war. Lobbying the Czech leaderships in both Prague and Paris, Jewish activists sought to elicit the Czech government’s commitment to both long-term national minority rights and immediate protection against the violence that threatened Jews’ lives and property. They did so, I argue in the next section, by drawing on widespread and inflated beliefs about Jewish power and influence on public opinion in the west, a familiar strategy employed by Jewish activists with few other political
options. The chapter concludes by examining the efforts of Jewish nationalists to establish themselves as competent leaders in Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands. Indeed, Jewish nationalists’ utility as partners of the Czechs depended on their ability to mobilize Jews for Jewish nationalism, a political program that promised to place the country’s Jews in a position of neutral loyalty vis-à-vis the Czechoslovak state.

From Prague to Paris and back

In early January 1919, Jewish nationalists gathered for the first Jewish National Congress in the newly minted Czechoslovakia. Over 340 delegates attended along with dignitaries from Czech political and cultural life. The congress was the culmination of months of hectic activity by Jewish nationalists seeking to take charge of the country’s Jews. In October 1918, Jews in Prague and Brno/Brünn established Jewish National Councils, as did Jews in many parts of East Central Europe. These political bodies consisted primarily of Jewish nationalists claiming to represent local Jews. Soon the Moravian council, along with the boards of many Jewish congregations, joined the Jewish National Council in Prague, now referred to as the Jewish National Council for the Czechoslovak State. By then the Prague group had already made contact with the provisional Czech government, the Czech National Council, and pledged its loyalty to the new authorities. The Jewish nationalists used this

5 “Der erste jüdische Nationalkongress,” Selbstwehr January 10, 1919. Among the Czech guests were Czech Social Democrats, members of the National Socialist and National Democratic Parties along with journalists and writers.

6 In the Austrian state, the religious congregations (Kultusgemeinden) were the only Jewish organizations recognized by the state and authorized to represent the Jewish community, see Gustav Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation, 1918-1938,” in The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, vol. 1, 267-329, here 268. In Moravia and Silesia, the regional organization of Jewish congregations (Landesverbandes der israelitischen Kultusgemeinden) supported the Jewish national program, see “Die Mährischen Juden für das nationaljüdische Programm,” Selbstwehr November 8, 1918 and “Die Forderungen der Landesverbände der jüdischen Gemeinden Mährens und Österreichisch-Schlesiens,” in Die Judenfrage der Gegenwart: Dokumentsammlung, ed. Leon Chasanowitsch and Leo Motzkin (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Judää A.B., 1919), 56. See also Ladislav Lipscher, “Die Lage der Juden in der Tschechoslowakei nach deren Gründung 1918 bis zu den Parlamentswahlen 1920,” East Central Europe 16, no. 1-2 (1989): 1-38, here 8.
opportunity to deliver a memorandum to the Czechs outlining concrete demands on behalf of the country’s “nationally conscious Jews.” They called for “recognition of the Jewish nationality and freedom of individuals to profess that nationality, full civil and legal equality for the Jewish people, national minority rights for the Jewish people, and democratization and unification of the Jewish congregations.” The Jewish National Council’s swift approach of the Czech leaders, almost a week before the board of Prague’s Jewish congregation pledged its loyalty to the Czechs, was symptomatic of the Jewish nationalists’ efficient organization, political acumen, and self-confidence. Indeed, across East Central Europe, Jews’ war experience and the international Zionist movement’s recent successes encouraged Jewish activists in their efforts to transform their Jewish communities in ways similar to the national revolutions all around them.

During the war, the various competing factions within Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands, religious traditionalists and secularists, conservatives and socialists, Jewish nationalists and assimilationists, joined forces to assist thousands of Galician Jewish refugees who poured into the region fleeing the destruction on the Eastern Front. The Czech-Jewish movement, which promoted Jews’ assimilation to Czech culture and had coveted an alliance with the Czech leaders, had experienced several setbacks during the war. Their Czech nationalism had resulted in the Habsburg authorities shutting down their press. Czech

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7 “Der jüdische Nationalrat beim Národní výbor,” Selbstwehr November 1, 1918.
nationalists’ enthusiasm for Russia’s leadership of the Slav nations made Czech-Jewish activists uncomfortable as victims of pogroms perpetrated by the Tsar’s forces appeared in the Bohemian Lands.\textsuperscript{10} Furthermore, antisemitic accusations of Jews’ parasitical character and their exploitation of non-Jews fuelled an upsurge in Czech antisemitism. This made Czech-Jews increasingly uneasy among their Russophile peers.\textsuperscript{11} In the meantime, Jewish nationalist groups continued unhindered in their political activities promoting Jewish nationalism. Heartened by Jews’ expression of solidarity with other Jews and by newfound activism embodied in charitable work on the home front, they were, however, frustrated with their lack of influence in the established Jewish communal institutions.\textsuperscript{12} Their frustration with the German and Czech assimilationist communal elites only intensified once the upsurge in antisemitism confirmed, in their minds, the Zionist diagnosis of the Jews’ condition which discredited assimilation as a strategy for coexistence. While the various factions within Jewish society had buried the hatchet during the war, once it became clear that the tables had turned and the so-called small and oppressed nationalities had become partners of the Allied powers, Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands began their quest for power.

The Jewish National Council did not, however, limit its efforts to ensure and protect the rights of Jews to pledges of loyalty and audiences with dignitaries. As anti-Jewish incitement spilled over into violence and looting of businesses towards the end of 1918, council members intervened with local authorities on behalf of victims of violence, business

\textsuperscript{10} Martin Welling, \textit{“Von Hass so eng umkreist”: Der Erste Weltkrieg aus der Sicht der Prager Juden} (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 84, 158; Lipscher, “Die Lage der Juden,” 14-16.


\textsuperscript{12} Rozenblit, \textit{Reconstructing a National Identity}, 60.
owners, Jewish soldiers, and imprisoned fellow activists. At the same time, they attempted to mobilize Jews politically by organizing public meetings and disseminating information about their program.

The Jewish National Council, however, did consider its contact with Czech leaders to be of great importance. From the outset, the Council represented itself as enjoying the support of the new authorities, an image it cultivated by publicizing statements about the virtues of the Zionist movement and Jewish nationalism made by the Czechs’ most prominent leader, Thomas G. Masaryk, and reiterated by other Czech politicians. The Jewish National Council immediately spun Masaryk’s cautious expression of “sympathy” for Zionism, offered in a message to the Zionist Organization of America, into an “act of state” supporting the local Jewish nationalists’ program. Jewish nationalists invoked the authority of Masaryk’s statement repeatedly both when addressing Jewish audiences and when intervening on behalf of Jews with local authorities. Similarly, the first Jewish National Congress opened with the reading of a telegraphed greeting from the president whose portrait was displayed alongside the other members of the Jewish nationalists’ trinity, Theodor Herzl and Woodrow Wilson.

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13 Reports about the Council’s intervention with authorities appeared towards the end of 1918. For a few cases, see the following examples: “Jüdischer Nationalrat in Prag: Interventionen,” Selbstwehr November 29, 1918; “Denkschrift des Jüdischen Nationalrats wegen des Holleschauer Pogroms,” Selbstwehr December 13, 1918; “Pravda o protižidovských výtržnostech v Karlině,” Židovské zprávy May 23, 1919.


17 The display of the portraits is an example of how Jewish nationalists used Masaryk’s authority when addressing non-Jewish and Jewish audiences alike. Masaryk’s positive statements about Jewish nationalism cast the movement as a legitimate and loyal player on the new political stage. At the same time, however, demonstrating their connection to a figure head or leader invoked traditional Jewish political strategies that sought to establish a partnership between the Jewish community and the central authority. While princes and
While the congress was a demonstration of the Jewish National Council’s legitimacy as a political player to Czechs and Jews alike, it was also a forum for discussion of the movement’s goals and strategies. These included the plans for a “conquest” of the existing Jewish communities, transforming them into national rather than religious institutions. The delegates also appointed a group of local activists to represent Czechoslovak Jewry at the Paris Peace Conference, where Jewish leaders from the Allied countries along with Jewish representatives from the new states were going to make a bid for Jews’ minority rights.18

As the negotiations in Paris came underway, Zionists and Jewish nationalists from across Europe and North America organized congresses, passed resolutions, and dispatched delegates. However, despite the Jewish activists’ great expectations, the first months of the negotiations brought little progress on minority issues. Internal fighting between the various Jewish groups was exacerbated by the Allied Powers’ inability to commit to the protection of minority rights.19 By late March 1919, Jews renewed their efforts and, under American Jewish leadership, they established a committee which united the Jewish delegates in their effort to assure protection for Jews in Eastern Europe, known as the Comité des Délégations juives auprès de la Conférence de la paix [Committee]. Members from Jewish National Councils in East Central Europe, including the Czechoslovak delegation, joined the Committee.20 In a resolution of May 10, 1919, the signatories demanded recognition of

emperors had now been replaced by democratic statesmen, the strategy was familiar to the activists and their Jewish audiences. “Eine jüdische Massenversammlung in Prag,” Selbstwehr November 15, 1918; “Der erste jüdische Nationalkongress,” Selbstwehr January 10, 1919.
19 Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 127-128, 158-160.
20 Ibid., 196.
equal rights for Jews, cultural autonomy, national rights, state support for Jewish schools, and protection of Sabbath observance.21

As the negotiations between the Allied Powers and the new states began, Jewish delegates met with representatives of the East European states, including Edvard Beneš, the head of the Czechoslovak delegation in Paris. Beneš was firmly opposed to the kind of minority protection assurances from the successor states pursued by the Committee and others. He viewed such conditions as a breach of sovereignty; a position he shared with his colleagues from the other new states.22 While the Jewish delegates pressed for a commitment from Beneš, he rejected their concerns with reference to Czechoslovakia’s general assurances of equal rights and freedoms for all its citizens.23

In late August 1919, after the Poles had signed a treaty which incorporated some of the Committee’s demands, Jewish delegates from Czechoslovakia made a last attempt to move Beneš to adopt a more cooperative attitude on the question of Jews’ rights. The tension between Beneš’ resistance and the Committee’s sustained pressure on the new states to meet its demands put Czechoslovakia’s Jewish delegates in an awkward position.

At home, over the past months, the Jewish National Council had placed great emphasis on its brewing alliance with the Czechoslovak state. As part of its strategy to assume leadership of the country’s Jews, and to hold the government to its assurances regarding their rights, the Jewish National Council had supported the image of

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21 “Die Forderungen der jüdischen Delegationen an die Friedenskonferenz,” in Motzkin, Die Judenfrage der Gegenwart, 74-78; Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 200.


Czechoslovakia and its leaders, Masaryk in particular, as exceptionally tolerant, democratic, and western. Now, Beneš impressed on the Jewish delegates that precisely because Czechoslovakia was an exception to the rule among the new states, Jews should satisfy themselves with the general assurances of the protection and equality of minorities already made by the Czech leaders. Beneš warned that “in the interest of Jewry, as well as, the interest of our Republic, I consider it inexpedient to raise this question at this time. A number of complaints and criticisms concerning certain Jewish elements have come to our attention, so that to raise the problem at this time would mean to bring up the question [all over again] and provoke renewed recriminations from one side or the other.” The Czech leader’s response was outlined in a letter handed to one of the delegates, Ludvík Singer, when he arrived to meet with Beneš in the latter’s Paris office. While this humiliating gesture infuriated the delegates, it also alerted them to the risk of alienating Czech leaders. Torn between their dual loyalties and fearful of repercussions at home, Ludvík Singer, Hugo Bergmann, and Markus Ungar, the Jewish delegates from Czechoslovakia, disagreed about how to proceed. In the end, they handed the case over to the Committee and left Paris. The leader of the international Zionist delegation Nahum Sokolow made a last attempt to ‘reason’

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with Beneš. His efforts were in vain, however. The Allied Powers had already accepted the
Czechs’ position. 28

Beneš’ challenge to the Jewish delegates was just one instance which revealed a
broader rift among members of the Committee undermining their efforts on behalf of Jewish
minorities in East Central Europe. 29 Hugo Bergman commented in his diary that Ludvík
Singer’s fear of a possible backlash at home hampered his ability to remain true to the
Committee’s demands and the shared interest of East European Jewry. 30 He noted with
disdain how Singer “would have been completely content with that letter [Beneš’ letter].” 31
Bergman, a young ambitious Zionist, was unrelenting in his criticism of Singer. 32 As he was
climbing the ladder in the Zionist movement and preparing for immigration to Palestine, he
had little sympathy for the Jewish activists who were anxious to secure alliances with their
local governments. Furthermore, having spent the spring and summer abroad in Bern, Paris,
and London, Bergmann was perhaps less aware of the volatile situation back home than his
colleagues who had arrived in Paris from Czechoslovakia. 33 Indeed, the tension between
Singer and Bergmann was symptomatic of the conflicting interests within and powerlessness
of the Committee. In this case, the disagreement between the Palestine-bound Bergmann and
Singer, who was a firm believer in Jewish national life in the Diaspora, also reflected a

28 The report from the meeting quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 174-177. For Great Power
leniency with regards to Czechoslovakia, see Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 269.
29 Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 127-128.
30 Bergman, Tagebücher und Briefe, 125; Lipscher, “Die Pariser Friedensverhandlungen,” 173.
31 Bergman, Tagebücher und Briefe, 125.
32 Letter from Hugo Bergman to Leo Hermann August 26, 1919; Quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish
Minority,” 250-251.
33 Considering the Czech authorities’ efforts to sustain an image abroad of a stable Czechoslovakia through
propaganda as well as censorship along with Bergmann’s complaints about not receiving mail from Prague, one
wonders to what extent the delegates abroad were aware of the situation at home. On Czech propaganda, see
Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 269; for examples of censorship of articles describing antisemitic events
in Slovakia and the Bohemian Lands, see “V zoulalství nejvyšším,” Židovské zprávy July 11, 1919; “Doklad o
Slovensku,” Židovské zprávy July 11, 1919; an untitled segment on page three in Selbstwehr July 11, 1919;
“Protižidovské bouře v Karlině,” Židovské zprávy August 27, 1919; on letters, see Hugo Bergman to Else
Bergman, Bern March 12, 1919 and Paris April 7, 1919, Bergman, Tagebücher und Briefe, 118, 120.
fundamental rift within the Zionist movement between supporters of national minority rights and proponents of political sovereignty. Having to make a choice, Singer determined that he had too much to lose by alienating the Czech leaders. Back home, his colleagues were working hard to garner the Prague government’s support for reforms that Jewish nationalists believed would assist them in assuming control of the local Jewish communities. Appearing to obstruct the Czechs’ negotiations might cost the Jewish nationalists their chance to become the state’s preferred Jewish partner. However, as Bergman’s notes imply, Singer’s concern reflected the awareness that in the end the future of Czechoslovak Jews depended on the Prague government’s will to protect Jews and ensure their rights. For Singer, the larger Jewish cause had to be sacrificed in the interest of Jews at home.34

Upon the delegates’ return to Prague, however, Ludvík Singer showed no sign of defeat. In his report on the result of the delegation’s work, Singer pointed out that due to the general minority clauses already adopted by the Czechs and the “exceptional character of the conditions for Jews in this country” it had not been deemed necessary to include the Committee’s demands in the treaty between the Allies and Czechoslovakia.35 Making no mention of the disagreement between the delegates and Beneš, Singer presented the exclusion of the Committee’s request as a sign of the smooth cooperation between the Jewish National Council and the Czech leaders. This was a message that was particularly important

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34 Ludvík Singer had begun his political career among the Czech-Jews, but shifted his allegiance to the Zionist movement in 1907. After World War I, he assumed a leadership position among Zionists in the Bohemian Lands acting as chair of the Jewish National Council. He was an elected member of the Prague Municipal Council through the 1920s and became a member of the Czechoslovak National Assembly for the Jewish Party shortly before his death in 1931. For pre-war activities, see Hillel J. Kieval, The Making of Czech Jewry: National Conflict and Jewish Society in Bohemia, 1870-1918 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 98; for his post-war career, see “Smrt Singra,” Židovské zprávy July 24, 1931.

at a time when anti-Jewish incitement, boycotts, and violence led many Jews to question the image of Czechoslovakia’s “exceptional” hospitality.

**Protecting Jews**

While anti-Jewish violence had been common during World War I in Eastern Europe, the explosion of attacks against Jews that followed in the wake of the armistice was particularly worrisome to activists both in the region and abroad. As the pogroms highlighted the urgent need for minority protection, western audiences’ indignation with the atrocities, aroused by publicity campaigns, became an important tool for activists concerned with the fate of the Jewish minorities.36 Just as Jewish leaders in the Bohemian Lands breathed a collective sigh of relief that the collapse of the monarchy had not resulted in the chaos experienced elsewhere, anti-Jewish sentiments spilled over into violence and looting. The Jewish National Council rose to the challenge, feverishly intervening with local authorities, dispatching reports abroad, and attempting to ensure government action to stop antisemitic attacks.

In the late fall of 1918, anti-Jewish violence erupted in parts of Bohemia and Moravia.37 By early December, it had spread to the capital. While the unrest in Prague was quelled, attacks continued in other areas in the days following. Most riots took the form of looting and beatings, some of which resulted in deaths. The Jewish National Council had anticipated violence and drafted a set of codes with which it could communicate the extent of the violence to the Zionist headquarters in Copenhagen with instructions as to what action

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36 For the press campaign surrounding the Lemberg and Pinsk pogroms and their political effect, see Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 125-130; 220-226.

should be taken by Zionists abroad. These codes show that Jewish leaders in Prague were
expecting that the perpetrators would be not only be soldiers and workers, but also
“democrats” and “Czech bourgeois elements.”38 When two Jews were murdered in
connection with a pogrom in the town of Holešov/Holleschau in Moravia on December 3-4,
1918, the Jewish National Council intervened with the Prague government. In their open
letter, the Jewish leaders condemned the local authorities’ passivity in the face of widespread
looting and violence and warned of the spread of anti-Jewish unrest.39 They urged the
central authorities to suppress further incidents by prosecuting the perpetrators and stopping
the press’ anti-Jewish goading. The vicious campaign, however, continued unabated and was
followed by a boycott of Jewish businesses in early 1919. Using the slogan “Each to his
Own” (Svůj k svému), Czech nationalists, invoking the memory of their turn of the century
forbearers’ tactics, cast the postwar campaign as a struggle by Czechs against “German
domination.”40 To the Jewish press, the thin veil of a national struggle was a poor disguise.41
As attacks became “the order of the day” Jews grew increasingly anxious.42 By March 1919,
the “topics of daily discussions and worries among Jews [were] the boycott against
everything Jewish, the untruthful press campaign (Hetze), the unjust and inhumane treatment
of the [Jewish] refugees, attacks on Jewish citizens, [and] the recent assaults in the streets
which has created a state of panic among Jews.”43 By then reports of the fate of Jewish

38 Max Brod to Leo Hermann, quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 246-247.
40 For discussion of the earlier boycott, see Jeremy King, Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local
History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 127-128; the early
boycott and Jews, see Hillel J. Kieval, Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands
41 “Wirtschaftlicher Boykott gegen die Juden,” Selbstwehr December 13, 1918.
43 “Mitteilungen des Jüdischen Nationalrats in Prag,” Selbstwehr March 28, 1919; see also “Der Jüdische
Nationalrat beim President Masaryk in Prag,” Jüdische Volksstimme April 4, 1919.
communities in Slovakia were also adding to the increasing uncertainty as to the authorities’ ability and willingness to protect Jews and their livelihoods.\footnote{For Jewish activists’ work to defend Jews in Slovakia, see Rebekah Klein-Pejšová, “Among the Nationalities: Jewish Refugees, Jewish Nationality, and Czechoslovak Statebuilding” (diss. Columbia University, 2007), 77-80.}

The main Jewish papers blamed the Czech press, especially the Czech nationalist and agrarian papers, for stirring up the violence against Jews. In reports on antisemitic incidents and in open letters to the Czech authorities, the Jewish authors stressed how anti-Jewish sentiments had been shaped by newspapers. With regard to the events in Holešov/Holleschau, the Jewish National Council stressed that “opinions expressed in the local press had fed an anti-Jewish atmosphere for some time.”\footnote{“Denkschrift des Jüdischen Nationalrats wegen des Holleschauer Pogroms,” Selbstwehr December 13, 1918.} Similarly, in connection with the riots in Prague, the Jewish National Council accused the Czech press of “having inflamed a hostile atmosphere against Jews.”\footnote{A communiqué was sent to Jewish national councils and Zionist organizations in various countries as well as Jewish press bureaus, according to “Communiqué des Jüdischen Nationalrats über die Ausschreitungen in Prag,” Selbstwehr December 6, 1918.} During their first meeting with President Masaryk, Jewish leaders pointed to the “hostile and injurious tendencies of the Czechoslovak press” when discussing the recent “pogrom-like incidents.”\footnote{Extract from the Report of Activities of the Jewish National Council in Prague, January 1919, Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 222.} In one such episode in Prague in May 1919, a Jewish couple was attacked after being accused by a “mob” of wartime spying for the Austrians. In its report on the spectacle, Židovské zprávy argued that “the systematic incitement of the people against their Jewish fellow citizens, which has taken place for months in the Czech press, does from time to time need a victim in order to become a heroic ‘deed’.”\footnote{“Pravda o protižidovských vytřžnostech v Karlině,” Židovské zprávy May 23, 1919.}

While the Jewish nationalists were convinced that antisemitic goading fuelled attacks on Jews, their message about the disorder created by irresponsible journalists and the need
for intervention against this behaviour was directed at the government in Prague. Knowing full well that the Czech political leadership was anxious to uphold an image of a stable Czechoslovakia abroad, Jewish leaders’ attempted to harness this concern to their efforts to protect Jews. As the discussion of the violence in late 1918 by the Czech National Council, acting as a provisional government, shows, Jewish activists’ message did not fall on deaf ears. Urging the Council to officially condemn antisemitic incitement as it could harm the “interest of our republic,” the Social Democrat Josef Stivín argued, “[w]e would like to see our press stop nourishing and stirring up antisemitic sentiments among the people, who should be raised with the awareness that freedom is not anarchy and independence not the right to commit atrocities.” In response, a lone voice was heard shouting, “What have they [the Jews] been doing to us!”

The central authorities were, however, conspicuously absent in the articles reporting on or discussing anti-Jewish incidents. While local authorities were depicted as powerless, passive, and at times conspiratorial, criticism of the Prague leadership was generally not openly voiced in the Jewish press. By shying away from the role of the Czech political elite in not stopping the anti-Jewish campaign, the Jewish writers were practising a form of self-censorship meant to keep the official inspectors away. While the censors could allow for blame being cast on Czech newspapers and individual politicians, reports depicting the central government as condoning or complicit in anti-Jewish attacks could damage the country’s prestige.

49 Minutes from the meetings of the Czech National Council and provisional national assembly (Národní shromáždění československé) [NSČ], Josef Stivín December 20, 1918; http://www.psp.cz/eknih/1918ns/index.htm.
Wariness of the censors was, however, not the only reason for the absence of criticism. As mouthpieces of the Jewish National Council, papers like Selbstwehr and Židovské zprávy supported the leadership’s efforts to establish a partnership with the central authorities. The reports on the Council’s meetings and communications with the government in Prague were generally positive, and its intervention with local authorities on behalf of wronged Jews often successful. Thus, the writers conveyed an image of smooth cooperation between the government and the Council, casting the Jewish nationalists as the only leadership which could act successfully on behalf of Jews. The representation of the Czech government as forthcoming and attentive to Jews’ concerns was then a result of both self-censorship and political strategy. There were times, however, when Jewish journalists could not restrain their indignation. Thus, in the wake of another incident in Prague, an editorial protested that Jews had become the objects of “street justice.” “[I]n Prague under the eyes of the authorities, the crowd severely maltreated Jewish citizens,” an incident which proved, according to the author, that Jews’ rights were thus far to both the “mob” and the “authorities” a theoretical obligation rather than an everyday commitment.

While direct criticism of the central government was subdued in the Jewish papers, reference was often made to the antisemitic policies of the Polish government and their damaging effects to that country’s cause on the international stage. In an article describing attacks on Jews and looting of Jewish property, one author warned, “it would be a shame if the Czech nation, who enjoys so much sympathy abroad, would attract the attention of the

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51 There were three main Zionist papers in the Bohemian Lands in the interwar years: The Brno/Brünn-based and German-language Jüdische Volksstimme (established 1904); the Prague-based German-language Selbstwehr (1907); and the Prague-based and Czech-language Židovské zprávy (1918).
52 “Judenrecht,” Selbstwehr May 23, 1919.
53 For a discussion of the campaign in the wake of the Lemberg pogrom, see Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 110-130.
Allies in the same manner that the Poles have done.”\textsuperscript{54} Another cautioned against more Polish-style Jew-bashing as “the Czechs now see for themselves the detrimental effects that the Polish pogroms against the Jews have had on that country’s prestige.”\textsuperscript{55} With an eye to the negotiations underway in Paris, Jewish leaders reminded the Czech authorities that the negative effects of antisemitism on the country’s reputation could be limited if action was taken to restrict incitement and violence, a step the Polish government had failed to take.

While the postwar months were far more chaotic and violent in Poland than in the Bohemian Lands, events there shaped the way Jewish leaders experienced and presented the outbreak of antisemitism in Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{56} Despite the pervasiveness of anti-Jewish violence during and in the wake of the war, the pogroms in Poland still attracted considerable attention in the Jewish press in Prague and Brno/Brünn. The “[m]ass murder in Lemberg” was described as the “most horrible pogrom in world history.”\textsuperscript{57} Inflated estimates of Jewish casualties, reports of atrocities both reflected and sustained a sense of apocalyptic destruction descending on East European Jewry.\textsuperscript{58} The “violent attacks, lootings, mutilations, and arsons” were described as a “war of extermination (Vernichtungskrieg)” and “the systematic destruction of Eastern Jewry (die systematische Ausrottung der Ostjuden).”\textsuperscript{59} Once the familiar Polish routine of civilians and soldiers joining forces to attack Jews and their

\textsuperscript{54} “Plünderungen,” Selbstwehr January 17, 1919.
\textsuperscript{56} For a comparison of the postwar months in Poland and Czechoslovakia, see Anthony Polonsky and Michael Riff, “Poles, Czechoslovaks and the ‘Jewish Question,’ 1914-1921: A Comparative Study,” in Germany in the Age of Total War, ed. Volker R Berghahn (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 63-101.
\textsuperscript{57} “Der Lemberger Massenmord,” Selbstwehr November 29, 1918. In late November 1918, more than 70 Jews were killed and several hundred injured in a large-scale pogrom in Lemberg, see Fink, Defending the Rights of Others, 110-130.
\textsuperscript{58} “Der Lemberger Massenmord,” Selbstwehr November 29, 1918.
property appeared in the Bohemian Lands, community leaders were alarmed and began dispatching news of the events abroad.\textsuperscript{60} Unable to separate fully the pogrom images disseminated by reports about Poland from the slander, looting, and violence in their own communities, Jewish activists were increasingly uncertain as to what the future would bring.

The wave of anti-Jewish violence that swept the new states highlighted the need for international intervention on behalf of the battered minorities. At the same time, the attention that western audiences afforded the fate of Eastern Europe’s Jews became a vehicle for Jewish activists’ efforts to make governments protect Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{61} Invoking beliefs about Jews’ alleged influence on shaping public opinion in the West, Jewish nationalists saw an opportunity to make headway on their goals of protecting Jews by employing discourses of Jewish power to catch the attention of state leaders, thereby positioning themselves as players to be reckoned with at home as well as abroad. With a lack of both precedence and interest among the Allies to intervene on behalf of threatened minorities, Jewish rights advocates and local Jewish leaders had to convince East European governments that it was in their interest to end the pogroms. While Polish and Romanian leaders were uncooperative, Jewish activists had better luck with the Czechs.

**Perceptions of Jewish power**

As anti-Jewish sentiment and unrest intensified, the Jewish National Council in Prague stepped up its efforts to create an alliance with the state by depicting themselves as well-connected with powerful Jewish circles abroad.\textsuperscript{62} In doing so, Jewish nationalists

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\textsuperscript{60} “Communiqué des Jüdischen Nationalrats über die Ausschreitungen in Prag,” Selbstwehr December 6, 1918.

\textsuperscript{61} Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others*, 129.

\textsuperscript{62} Theodor Herzl had employed a similar trope of international Jewish power when negotiating with state leaders since the Zionist movement’s inception in the late 1890s. For a discussion of Herzl’s methods, see
encouraged the perception among Czech leaders that Jews held considerable influence with the American president and with public opinion in the West generally. In employing discourses of Jewish power, these activists walked a fine line. They used widely held beliefs about Jewish power as both stick and carrot to make statesmen pay attention to Jews’ concerns. They did so by implying that cooperation would be rewarded and hostility punished. At the same time, however, their eagerness to enlist the cooperation of the Prague government in protecting Jews betrayed the activists’ awareness that in the end their fate depended, not on American Jews, but on the attitudes of the new authorities in Czechoslovakia.

The admiration for American Jewry among Jewish nationalist writers was shaped by the same discourses of Jewish power that informed broader perceptions of Jews held by Jews and non-Jews alike. While Jews might have used these shared notions strategically, they did so because they to some extent believed them. As the United States emerged as a major political and economic power, so did American Jewry in the eyes of European Jews. Thus, at the same time as these perceptions informed and fuelled antisemitism, they were also internalized and reshaped to serve Jews’ interests.63

This image of American Jews’ power influenced Czech leaders’ attitude towards antisemitism and anti-Jewish unrest as well as their perceptions of the consequences that these events might have for Czechoslovakia. Central to their views was the belief that Jews were influential with President Wilson and with Western public opinion more broadly.64 In his study of the encounter between Jews and the Czech leaders in the immediate postwar


63 For a good example of the perception of American Jews’ influence, see “Zpráva o plenárním zasedání Národní Rady Židovské dne 3. května 1919,” *Židovské zprávy* May 16, 1919.

64 Hadler, “‘Erträglicher Antisemitismus?’,” 196.
period, Frank Hadler argues that the ‘Jewish Question’ in Czechoslovakia was a marginal one to Czech leaders both during their exile and after the war.\(^6^5\) At the same time, however, Hadler’s analysis suggests that while the question of Jews in Czechoslovakia was left largely unattended, the role of Jews and Jewish power on the international political stage was less so. Beneš had a “confused fear of Jews,” he contends, and was rather suspicious of Jews with regards to their role on the international political stage.\(^6^6\)

Masaryk shared with Beneš this perception of Jewish power. Hillel Kieval argues that Masaryk never divested himself of an emotional suspicion and fear of Jews and their foreignness.\(^6^7\) His commitment to rationalism and moral regeneration, however, enabled him to overcome his negative emotional predisposition towards Jews. “Throughout his career,” Kieval suggests, “he managed to combine support for the Jews of Bohemia with naïve prejudices and expressions of resentment and mistrust.”\(^6^8\) Thus, his fight against antisemitism in the Hilsner ritual murder trial and endorsement of Zionism as “a movement of great moral value” were products of this commitment rather than the philo-Semitism that some Jews and critics assumed.\(^6^9\) Masaryk placed great significance on the support of American “Zionists and other Jews who have publicly endorsed our program.”\(^7^0\) They had rewarded him for his opposition to antisemitism by facilitating personal contacts to Wilson and by otherwise supporting the Czech cause. Looking back on his accomplishments,

\(^6^5\) Ibid., 177, 183, 190.
\(^6^6\) Ibid., 177-178.
\(^6^7\) Kieval, Languages of Community, 206-208. As Kieval shows, Masaryk was aware of this and admitted that he was not able to “overcome…the anti-Semitism of the common people.” Kieval, Languages of Community, 206. For a similar analysis, see Michael A. Riff, “The Ambiguity of Masaryk’s Attitudes on the ‘Jewish Question’,” in T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937): Thinker and Critic, vol. 2, ed. Robert B. Pynsent (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1990), 77-87. For a different interpretation of Masaryk and antisemitism, see Gordon Skilling, T.G. Masaryk: Against the Current, 1882-1914 (Houndsville: Macmillan, 1994), 88-91.
\(^6^8\) Kieval, Languages of Community, 206.
\(^6^9\) Ibid., 214.
\(^7^0\) Hadler, “‘Erträglicher Antisemitismus?’” 178.
Masaryk evaluated the role of Jewish power as follows: “In the United States, as in Europe, Jewish influence is strong in the press; it was very beneficial for us that this great power was not against us.”71 Thus Masaryk distanced the Czech cause from antisemitism both for moral and strategic reasons.

The perception of Jews’ ability to control the press, and by extension influence public opinion in the West, caused concern among Czech leaders as violence against Jews erupted throughout newly independent Czechoslovakia in late 1918. With an eye to the international outcry against the recent pogroms in Poland, Masaryk warned the ministerial council against giving in to local public pressure to act against Galician Jewish refugees. He argued that “it is half the victory, if we can keep things tidy up to the peace conference.”72 At the same time, Karel Pergler, the head of the Czechoslovak National Council in the United States, warned Masaryk about a “campaign of falsehood against us, charging for instance that an order was issued to deport all Jews from the Czechoslovak Lands. As you see, they do not differentiate between the Galician refugees and our own Jews.” “[I]t is very essential,” claimed Pergler, “that our people at home be quite careful in the handling of the Jewish situation.”73

The notion that Jews were able to influence the fate of the Czechoslovak cause was shared by Czechs from the ‘home guard’ as well. At a public meeting on October 25, 1918,

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73 Letter quoted in Hadler, “‘Erträglicher Antisemitismus?’” 187.
Václav Klofáč, a prominent member of the Czech National Council and later Czechoslovakia’s first minister of defence, cautioned that “we should not consider all Jews equally guilty [of profiteering and other crimes during the war] and should not forget that the Jews are very influential advisors of Entente leaders like Wilson. Proceeding thoughtlessly in this matter could result in a setback.”74 Similarly in the aftermath of the pogroms in December 1918, Karel Kramář, the head of the Czech National Council and the country’s first prime minister, warned in a speech to the provisional National Assembly: “allow me to say as someone who oversees foreign affairs and receives reports from abroad that any violence [against Jews] would cause real damage to our freedom.”75

While Czech politicians both at home and abroad called for an end to anti-Jewish violence, they displayed a certain amount of unease about suppressing popular calls for punishment of alleged Jewish profiteering and loyalty to Austria. In order not to run the risk of appearing as if in the pocket of Jews or protecting the interests of the nation’s enemies, Czech politicians used widely-held notions of international Jewish power to present antisemitism as detrimental to Czech interests. Hence Josef Stivín implored: “It is imperative that we, gentlemen, stand up to this fashion [of antisemitism], that we oppose it forcefully not only in the interest of justice, but also in the interest of our republic, as we know that it might harm us at the peace conference and in the eyes of the civilized world.”76 Similarly, in explaining how antisemitism would damage the “exceptional respect” that the Czech nation enjoyed abroad, Karel Kramář argued “that it would be a monstrous crime if we were to damage the good name of our legionaries because of disorder, pogroms, looting, and pillaging […] the government is committed to cracking down firmly on anything that

74 “Die Tschechen und die Juden,” Selbstwehr October 25, 1918.
75 Karel Kramář December 20, 1918, NSČ, 1918-1920.
76 Karel Kramář December 20, 1918, NSČ, 1918-1920.
would cause disorder.” “[E]very window pane that is destroyed in a store, and every scrap that is stolen,” Kramář continued, “the Czechoslovak Republic will have to pay for with her future.”

If humanitarian concerns motivated these politicians to condemn attacks on Jews, they chose not to phrase their disapproval in those terms.

To the Czech leaders, the image of exceptional stability was important to their strategy for negotiating a favourable treaty with the Allied Powers. Their support, after all, was key to the Czechs’ territorial demands. The air of respectability that surrounded the Czech cause was, of course, linked to the ‘face’ of Czech nationalism, namely Masaryk, who had spent the war years generating support among Western audiences for the Czech cause.

In the following months, as Zionists abroad intervened with Czech and Slovak leaders on behalf of Jews, they invoked the importance of the fledging nation’s reputation on the international stage. “We were gratified to learn that President Masaryk had, on the 22nd of June [1919], openly recognized the moral importance of the Jewish national movement, and the place it takes within the republic,” Chaim Weizman wrote in a letter protesting Slovak authorities’ antisemitic policies and arrest of local Zionists in July 1919. “No one would regret more than ourselves,” he continued, “if as a result of these occurrences in Slovakia, the Jewish and non-Jewish circles of England, America and other Entente countries, which have always inclined to the Republic, should call public attention in their respective countries to the dangerous position of the Jews in Slovakia.” Similarly, in the wake of Beneš’ rejection of the Czechoslovak Jewish delegation’s requests a couple of weeks later, Nahum Sokolow

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77 Karel Kramář December 20, 1918, NSČ, 1918-1920; for more examples, see Lipscher, “Die Lage der Juden,” 23-24.
78 Ivan T. Berend, Decades of Crisis: Central and Eastern Europe before World War II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 164-165. American Zionists implied that Masaryk’s public commitment to equality for Jews and to “the rights of all minorities” demonstrated that the Czech leader was indeed “one of the noblest statesmen of the Allied Powers,” see the telegram as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 244.
79 Letter from Chaim Weizmann to Minister Vavro Šrobár, July 8, 1919, as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 223-224.
explained to Beneš, “[i]n America, where there was much sympathy for the Czechoslovak Republic, it was expected that the Czechs certainly would not raise any difficulties [for the Jewish people], and so our friends Mack, Marshall and Brandeis there would be all the more disappointed.”\textsuperscript{80} When Beneš refused to accept Sokolow’s arguments, the latter cautioned, “[w]e have been friends of the Czechoslovak people. If these articles [treaty articles regarding Jewish education and the protection of the Sabbath included in the Polish treaty] should not be included in the Czech treaty, the Jews who until now have been friends of the Republic will be thunderstruck, and a press campaign might very well begin which we will not be in a position to avert.”\textsuperscript{81} However, while Beneš was unsure of the extent of Jews’ influence, he did not give in to Jewish activists’ demands.\textsuperscript{82}

Distancing the Prague government from “certain Jewish elements” became particularly important to Czech leaders as the outbreak of hostilities between Czechoslovakia and “Bolshevik” Hungary led to more antisemitic violence and propaganda.\textsuperscript{83} In the Czech nationalists paper \textit{Národní Listy}, the prominent historian and politician Josef Pekař thundered against “Jewish Bolshevism” and suggested that the increasing popular support for Socialism “proved the power of world Jewry’s solidarity [with each other] and that internationalism is a special and particularly interesting form of Jewish nationalism.”\textsuperscript{84} Following a script popularized by \textit{The Protocols of the Elders of Zion}, he cast Jewish capitalists and

\textsuperscript{80} Report from meeting on August 28, 1919, between Nahum Sokolow and Edvard Beneš, Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 174-177, here 174-176.
\textsuperscript{81} Report from meeting on August 28, 1919, between Nahum Sokolow and Edvard Beneš.
\textsuperscript{82} Beneš had stated earlier that he believed that level of culture of a nation was reflected in its treatment of its Jews implying that the “absence” of antisemitism in Czechoslovakia reflected the exceptionally cultured character of the state. “Die Pariser Delegation des Prager Jüd. Nationalrates beim Minister Beneš,” \textit{Selbstwehr} April 18, 1919. Both Beneš and Masaryk tended to plead ignorance of antisemitism or anti-Jewish violence when faced with complaints by Jewish activists, which served to dismiss these complaints as rumours and to exonerate the states men from any association which such accusations, see Hadler, “‘Erträglicher Antisemitismus?’,” 190, 193; Stözl, “Die “Burg” und die Juden,” 99.
\textsuperscript{83} For more on the events in Slovakia, see Lipscher, “Die Lage der Juden,” 26-35.
\textsuperscript{84} Josef Pekař, “Židé a bolševictví,” \textit{Národní Listy} August 31, 1919.
revolutionaries as pursuing shared ends. Jews’ goal, Pekař maintained, was to create more “Jewish states” in Europe alongside Hungary and the Soviet Union. Similar sentiments warning against the Jews’ contamination of Slav culture were also voiced in the Czech Catholic weekly Miř.85

Discourses of Jewish power were paradoxical.86 ‘Jews’ embodied capitalist and socialist forces and were perceived simultaneously as powerful and powerless. These amorphous notions were reflected in the Czech leadership’s perceptions of Jewish power. Beneš, for example, while careful not to appear uncooperative towards Jews, also cautioned them against not supporting the government. Hinting at possible retribution, he capitalized on Jewish anxiety, knowing full well the precarious position of Jews back home. In other words, while sensitive to the possibility of damaging publicity about antisemitism in Czechoslovakia, Beneš also used the recurring anti-Jewish violence as a way of repelling Jews’ demands. Similarly, while they did censor Jewish papers reporting on attacks in Slovakia in July 1919, Czech leaders did little in response to complaints from Jewish circles about the antisemitic campaign in the Czech press. Thus, even though Czech leaders believed that Jews held considerable influence with Allied governments and western public opinion, they also acted on the assumption that Jews, as ‘pariahs,’ would be reluctant to damage their relations with the central government dependent as they were on its protection. This was a fact of which Jewish activists were acutely aware.

While delegates from the Committee impressed Jews’ concerns on the Czech leaders abroad, in the Bohemian Lands, Jewish activists employed discourses of Jewish power both

to make the case for state intervention against antisemitism and to boost the Jewish National Council’s profile as an important ally for the new state. Their campaign emphasized an alliance between Zionists and the Great Powers embodied by the Balfour Declaration. It also utilized American Jews’ important role in securing Woodrow Wilson’s support for the Czech cause, and the international community’s expectations that the Czechs would behave better than their Polish neighbours.

From the outset, Jewish activists used the authority of the Entente to support their demand for the recognition of their national rights in the new state. When addressing Czech leaders, the Jewish National Council pointed to the British government’s recognition of Jews as a nationality in the Balfour declaration. Reminding the Czechs of its implications, they admonished, “those nationalities which have just obtained their freedom on the basis of the right to self-determination will certainly be eager to facilitate the practical application of this right in the case of the Jews living among them as a minority nationality.”

By aligning Jews’ national rights with the principles that were to ensure a just and peaceful settlement in East Central Europe, Jewish activists not only legitimized their cause by using the prestige of Entente endorsement, but also equalled themselves to the “small and oppressed nationalities” who had now seized power. Alluding to “the various Entente governments’ statements and expressions of sympathy for the Zionist movement,” Jewish nationalist leaders presented themselves as the Allies’ chosen partners in solving the ‘Jewish Question.’

Furthermore, Jewish nationalists were eager to counter the Czech press’ accusation of Jews’ Austrian loyalties and anti-Czech attitudes. At public meetings, Zionists hailed Wilson

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88 Ibid., 219.
89 “Eine jüdische Massenversammlung in Prag,” Selbstwehr November 15, 1918.
as the liberator of the small nationalities, including the Jews. Jewish nationalists pointed out that prominent Jewish activists, such as Louis Brandeis and Julian Mack, were influential in the circle of advisors surrounding the American president.\textsuperscript{91} In fact, as \textit{Selbstwehr} reported, “Jews had played a decisive role in fulfilling the Czech aspirations through the Entente.”\textsuperscript{92} The author argued that Brandeis and the French representative in Washington, Henri Bergson, also a Jew, had worked with Masaryk to deploy the Czechoslovak Legions in Siberia, thereby ensuring the Entente’s recognition of the Czechoslovak National Council as an ally. Thus, the writer depicted Jews as supporters rather than enemies of the Czechoslovak cause. “[I]t is clear,” the article continued, “that the Czech people should be very grateful to [these] Jews, representatives of the world’s most powerful states, for the freedom and independence that it enjoys today. It is obvious that the policy of the Czechoslovak state has to take this circumstance into account along with the more important consideration that the Jewish people, which is already a very important international power, [when] organized on a national basis will gain a still unforeseeable influence on world politics, financial and economic affairs.”\textsuperscript{93}

While the belief that Brandeis was influential with Wilson was used strategically, the attention Jewish writers’ afforded American Jewry and its alleged power suggests that, like their non-Jewish peers, Jewish activists believed that Jews in the United States had gained unprecedented political and economic power and influence.\textsuperscript{94} When Slovak leaders prepared

\textsuperscript{91} “Brandeis Begleiter Wilsons,” \textit{Selbstwehr} November 22, 1918.
\textsuperscript{92} “In Washington und in Prag: Brandeis, Bergson und Lord Reading für das tschechishe Volk,” \textit{Selbstwehr} November 8, 1918.
\textsuperscript{93} “In Washington und in Prag: Brandeis, Bergson und Lord Reading für das tschechishe Volk,” \textit{Selbstwehr} November 8, 1918.
\textsuperscript{94} “Masaryk für den Zionismus, Eine Botschaft an die amerikanischen Zionisten über die Juden im tschechoslowakischen Staat,” \textit{Selbstwehr} November 8, 1918; see also the multiple articles on page three of that
to pass legislation damaging to Jews’ livelihoods as part of their campaign against Jews as enemies of the state, Emil Waldstein, the editor of Židovské zprávy, indignantly reminded his readers that “Jews had a hand in the creation of the Czechoslovak state. We will leave it to the conscience of those people who did not reject the help of world Jewry at the most critical hour whether or not they will support the implementation of this destructive legislation.”

It was, however, not only foreign Jewish celebrities who were depicted in the Jewish press as supporting the new state in important ways. While preparing for the Paris Peace Conference with other Jewish delegates in Switzerland, Hugo Bergman had made several interviews with “Entente and allied journalists” in which he spoke favourably about the conditions for Jews in Czechoslovakia and the government’s support for the goals of the Jewish national movement. He had emphasized that antisemitism there was the work of the press, not the government, and “stressed that it was urgent that the food supply to Czechoslovakia be improved.” Thus, at a time when Czech leaders were anxious to preserve stability at home and uphold an image of order abroad, Jewish activists cast themselves as supporting these efforts not only by speaking highly of the government’s treatment of Jews, but also by attempting to enlist material and political support for the Czechoslovak cause among Jews in the Allied countries. At the same time, however, Bergman’s activities made it clear that the channels of information to the West were open; a

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issue; “Der Wortlaut von Masaryks Botschaft,” Selbstwehr November 15, 1918; “Th. G. Masaryk,” Selbstwehr December 20, 1918. This admiration of the perceived accomplishments of American Jewry, many of whom were from the Habsburg and Russian Empires, was common among Jews in Eastern Europe. See, for example, Rebecca Kobrin, “Rewriting the Diaspora: Images of Eastern Europe in the Bialystok Landsmanshaft Press, 1921-1945” Jewish Social Studies 12, no. 3 (2006): 1-38, here 15.


96 “Die Lage der Juden im tschechoslowakischen Staat,” Selbstwehr March 28, 1919. During their meeting with Masaryk on March 22, 1919, the members of the Jewish National Council documented their efforts to enlist international Jewish support for Czechoslovakia. Max Brod’s report as quoted in Weltch, “Masaryk und der Zionismus,” 83.
hint that the fate of Jews in Czechoslovakia might very well determine whether the country was going to retain its respectability in the eyes of Western statesmen and audiences.

If the strategy of invoking Jewish power reflected local Jews’ admiration and trust in their American allies, it also betrayed that Jews had few other tools at their disposal. In the face of waning support for minority protection among the Great Powers, Jews had few other choices than to play on non-Jews’ inflated perceptions of Jewish power. While this strategy might have worked to hold the attention of Czech leaders to Jews’ concerns, the encouragement of this discourse became a threat once Jews’ goals were no longer in sync with those of the Czech leaders. Furthermore, while Jewish leaders worked to create an image of shared interest between themselves and the Czechoslovak leadership, their voices were hard to hear amidst the clamour of a much broader and more ingrained discourse of the threat of Jewish power to the Czech and Slovak nations. Indeed, one wonders to what extent Jewish nationalists’ employment of these discourses – their grandiose depictions of Jews’ influence with American leaders and world politics and their threats of international press campaigns and sanctions – nurtured anti-Jewish perceptions. Trapped in the midst of an avalanche of antisemitism, Jews were damned if they didn’t utilize these beliefs—and damned if they did.

**Making an alliance with the state**

If Jewish nationalists pursued an alliance with the Czechs in order to commit them to the protection of Jews, they also sought to use this image of a partnership to strengthen their own bid for the leadership of the country’s Jews. The Zionists, who saw themselves as marginalized by old elites within the Jewish communities, believed that a partnership with
the state would enhance their prestige and further the reforms necessary to transform Jews’ religious communities into national institutions. In their effort to make the Jewish national movement appealing to the Czech leadership, Jewish activists invoked tropes from Czech nationalist discourse, thereby creating an affinity between Czech and Jewish nationalism. In addition, the Jewish National Council presented its leadership as the only one which could make Jews into loyal citizens.97

In the weeks following the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, Zionists worked hard to depict Jews as victims of Austrian tyranny. Employing the well-known image of Austrian oppression of the small nationalities, Jewish activists emphasized the parallels between the fates of Jews and Czechs. At a public meeting in early November 1918, Ludvík Singer made comparisons between the Jews’ longing for a homeland in Palestine and the Czechs’ recently fulfilled aspirations.98 He claimed, “we Jews have no reason to shed tears over Austria, which was guided by clerical anti-Semitism and always understood how to exploit Jews. Germany and Austria had no sympathy for the Zionist efforts and obstructed their fulfillment.”99 To the Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands, the similarities between the national awakenings of the two people were clear.100 The Czech national rebirth, they stressed, had long served as a model for Jewish nationalists, a point they eagerly conveyed to counter accusations of Jews’ hostility to the Czech cause.101 In an article encouraging Jews to support the Zionist cause, the author argued, “we trust the moral conscience of all Czech leaders who, when they recall the Czech war of liberation, will only welcome when a nation

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100 See also Felix Weltsch’s discussion of this in Weltsch, “Masaryk und der Zionismus,” 94-95; and for the anachronism of this comparison used by Jews and Czechs alike, see Stölzl, “Die “Burg” und die Juden,” 105.
101 “Der Jüdische Nationalrat,” Selbstwehr November 1, 1918.
that lives among them […] finally uplifts itself, comes to its sense, and removes all its masks.”

Central to the Jewish nationalist activists’ strategy of employing the trope of Austrian oppression was the notion of the Austrian state’s denial of Jews’ nationhood. In the Zionist reading, Austria had encouraged Jews and other stateless peoples to assimilate to the dominant nationalities. At the same time, the Austro-Hungarian authorities’ refusal to acknowledge Jews as one of the empire’s nationalities had denied them the possibility of following their true national feelings. Thus, according to Zionist activists, Austria had not only created hostility between Jews and the smaller nationalities by making Jews instruments of Austrian national domination, but also fuelled a deterioration of Jews’ character into one marked by pragmatism, opportunism, and indifference. From the outset, the Jewish National Council presented itself as committed to restoring relations between Czechs and Jews, arguing that,

what we have fought against, and are still fighting against, is that vacillating, insincere sort of assimilation which is to be blamed not on the unfortunate Jewish people, but on the conditions of their dispersal, and on the fact that the Austrian government (particularly under Magyar influence) consistently opposed the recognition of Jews as a nationality group. The governments of Austria and Hungary continually sought to use the Jews as tools for oppressing the small nationalities, an exploitation that we Zionists have always emphatically deplored. The Jewish National Council regards as its primary aim the promotion of honest and frank relations between the Jewish and Czech peoples.103

Austria’s denial of Jews’ national rights and Jews’ assimilation into the German and Magyar nations went hand in hand when Jewish nationalists rationalized the souring of relations between Czechs and Jews. In their postwar narrative, the two peoples were depicted as

brothers in arms. “In all parts of former Austria,” one author claimed, Jews posing as Germans and Magyars tempted by the prospect of receiving a rank or a title had resulted in “antisemitism so radical and widespread that it takes one’s breath away.”\textsuperscript{104} Thus, by pointing to this failed imperial legacy, Jewish nationalists encouraged the Czechs to act differently than the Austrian leaders by recognizing Jews as a nationality. In their view, they were only asking of the Czechs what that nation had just won for itself.\textsuperscript{105}

At the same time, however, Jewish activists also pointed to assimilation as a catalyst for antisemitism. As these nationalists were attempting to position themselves as partners of the Czechs, they did not deny the accusations levelled against Jews from moderate Czech politicians and journalists. Rather, they confirmed some claims of Jews’ German loyalties, opportunism, and anti-Czech behaviour, but stressed that Austria was the source of Jews’ wrongdoing and proposed the Jewish national program as a remedy for their flaws.\textsuperscript{106}

To Czech nationalists, cultural assimilation, understood as the adoption of a national identity different from one’s “real” nation, was an act of opportunism and reflected a lack of moral character. The so-called national awakening of the Czech nation was accordingly a process of moral regeneration. Czech nationalists had worked to discourage ‘Czechs’ from becoming ‘German’ for decades. Thus, the negative perception of assimilation and the moral triumph of the ones who resisted the temptation were well-established tropes in Czech nationalist discourse. Hence, when Ludvík Singer likened Zionism to the Czech national movement, he pointed out that Jewish nationalists’ efforts were similar to the ones of “the

\textsuperscript{104} “Poctivá politika,” Židovské zprávy May 30, 1919.
\textsuperscript{105} Memorandum from the Jewish National Council in Prague to the Government of the Czechoslovak State (October 28, 1918), as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 218.
\textsuperscript{106} Kieval, Languages of Community, 204-205. Weltsch, “Masaryk und der Zionismus,” 91; “Der Wortlaut von Masaryks Botschaft,” Selbstwehr November 15, 1918. For more on Masaryk’s view of Jewish moral regeneration and prewar contacts with Zionists, see Kieval, Languages of Community, 208-210.
Czech people who fought against assimilation for three hundred years and thereby made the assimilationists unwelcome.” “The regeneration efforts of the Czech people,” he continued, “serve as a great model.”

The Jewish National Council, however, did not limit itself to expressions of admiration for the resilience of Czech resistance against assimilation, but set out to discourage such behaviour among Jews. Perhaps anticipating an avalanche of Jewish side-switching and wishing to distance itself from such obvious opportunism, the Jewish National Council issued an address to the Jewish public. The Council argued that Jews stood before a once in a life-time opportunity to commit themselves to the Jewish nation and demonstrate their loyalty to the new state. The Council cautioned the indecisive:

While the Czechoslovak people are rightfully suspicious of the individuals of Jewish origin who, in light of the changed circumstances, identify as Czechs, it has only respect for Jews’ honest, unconditional identification with the Jewish people […] conscious of our mutual responsibility we will unite and we are intent on our moral perfection. With the same vigour with which we will fight and condemn the pests within our midst, who are harming the collective, we will summon the best forces among us in the interest of the Jewish people and friendly relations with the rest of the population.

Opportunist loyalties were, however, not the only problem that Zionists identified. Similar to their peers on the Czech nationalist side, Jewish nationalists lamented Jews’ indifference to national questions and inability to recognize the harm caused by their lack of national commitment. “We will educate the indifferent masses and force them to make a decision,” Ludvik Singer promised as he spoke before a large audience in Prague. One author traced this indifference to assimilation “which was an ideology that embodied the fearful politics

and concealed manners of the ghetto. [Assimilation] caused not only moral damage to Jews individually, but also an extraordinary debilitation of Jews’ appreciation for politics.”

Whereas Jewish nationalists had recognized the relation between national awareness and moral regeneration, the official Jewish leadership, the “plutocracy” governing Jewish communal institutions, posed an obstacle to this process in the same way that the aristocratic and imperial order had been a hindrance to the democratic Czech movement, and Zionism as well. During the war and in its wake, Tara Zahra suggests, Czech leaders perpetuated an image of their nation as particularly committed to democratic and humanist values; an image embodied in the philosopher statesman. The close correlation between national self-determination and democracy, a staple of so-called disenfranchised nationalist rhetoric, offered Jewish activists in the Bohemian Lands an opportunity to tap into a triumphant discourse of political legitimacy. When meeting with Masaryk in late December 1918, representatives of the Jewish National Council impressed upon the President that citizens’ freedom to express their national convictions was as central as the right to express their religious convictions and “in the moment of national freedom and democracy [the principle of religious freedom] should be joined by the principle of freedom to profess one’s own national conviction.” Thus, recognizing Jews as a nationality in the new state would not only affirm the Czech leaders’ commitment to democratic values, but also, the Council argued, be a step towards ending nationality conflicts the same way the commitment to religious freedom had ended religious struggles.

111 For an example of this contrast, see “Der Zirkular der Kultusgemeinde,” Selbstwehr November 29, 1918.
113 Hadler, “‘Erträglicher Antisemitismus?’,” 199.
114 Ibid., 199.
The correlation between democracy and co-existence was at the heart of the Jewish National Council’s program, which called for democratization of the Jewish communities in the new state.\textsuperscript{115} Making democratization central to the “improvement of general conditions” such as the relations between Jews and Czechs and Slovaks, the Council asked for the state’s support for reforms that would secure a representative Jewish leadership elected by a direct and universal vote. Casting themselves as popular leaders, Jewish nationalists insisted that these changes would transform the religious congregations into national institutions.\textsuperscript{116} Removing laws that both denied Jews national rights and empowered non-representative leaders, Jewish nationalists argued, was the first step in bringing about the transformation of Jewish life necessary to rectify relations between the new country’s nationalities. Doing so would bring to power a legitimate leadership, they maintained, who represented Jews’ true interests and loyalties.\textsuperscript{117}

At the same time, the Jewish National Council also approached the board of the Jewish community in Prague, the largest Jewish community in the Bohemian Lands. The intention was to pressure the board to adopt voting rules that would, in their minds, ensure a more representative leadership. The Council’s efforts on behalf of the city’s disenfranchised Jewish community members failed.\textsuperscript{118} Ironically, now Jews had more political rights outside than inside the Jewish community. By representing the Jewish national cause as one of

\textsuperscript{115} Memorandum from the Jewish National Council, October 28, 1918, as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 220-221.

\textsuperscript{116} Memorandum from the Jewish National Council, October 28, 1918, as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 220-221.

\textsuperscript{117} There are striking parallels between the populist strategies of Czech nationalists of the late nineteenth century who claimed to represent the Czech-speaking masses and, as Tara Zahra argues, “used the banner of democratization to make populist demands for collective, national rights.” Zahra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 504.

democratization and by depicting the existing Jewish communal leadership as a plutocracy, the Council distanced itself, and Jews more broadly, from the failed strategies and tainted loyalties of the allegedly autocratic, German Jewish leaders.\textsuperscript{119} The image of a Jewish plutocracy as not representative and out of touch with the country’s Jews was strengthened by the unlikely alliance between Jewish nationalists and Czech-Jews in calling for democratization and removal of the existing communal leadership.\textsuperscript{120}

By emphasizing the shared experience of victimization by Austria, and the similar regenerative and democratic character of Jewish and Czech nationalism, Jewish nationalists tapped into discourses which lent them political legitimacy and aligned them with the values and goals of the new state leaders. Similarly, with an eye to the integration project the Prague government faced, the Jewish National Council presented itself as a centralizing force. Hence, as soon as the geographical boundaries of Czechoslovakia became clear to the Jewish nationalists, they widened their organizational efforts to include Slovakian Jewry although their horizon had not yet extended to the Jews in the autonomous province of Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

The Jewish National Council dispatched representatives to the eastern province not only to test the conditions for establishing a regional national council, but also to monitor any antisemitic activities and incitement there.\textsuperscript{121} With great excitement in early January 1919 the Jewish National Congress in Prague hosted twenty representatives of the Jewish national movement in Slovakia, a presence hailed as evidence for the Council’s claim that it represented three quarters of the country’s Jews.\textsuperscript{122} The organizers of the Congress were

\textsuperscript{119} “Der Jüdische Nationalrat,” Selbstwehr November 1, 1918.
\textsuperscript{120} “Eine jüdische Massenversammlung in Prag,” Selbstwehr November 15, 1918.
\textsuperscript{121} Klein-Pejšová, “Among the Nationalities,” 77-80.
\textsuperscript{122} “Der erste jüdische Nationalkongress,” Selbstwehr January 10, 1919.
thus hoping to show their non-Jewish Czech guests the extent to which the Jewish national program acted as a unifying force in the new state. By early April, the Jewish National Council reported significant progress for the Zionist movement in Slovakia and sent Emil Waldstein, one of the editors of Židovské zprávy, to establish an office representing the Prague leadership in Bratislava. Hence, at a time when the government in Prague was still in the process of establishing its sovereignty in Slovakia in the face of local opposition and clashes with Hungarian forces on the country’s southern border, Zionists offered to act as an integrative force reorienting Jews in Slovakia towards Prague by way of Jewish nationalism.

One important aspect of this unification process was the dissemination of the new state languages, Czech and Slovak. To Czech nationalists, establishing Czech as a state language was central to the accomplishment of national self-determination. More than anything the struggle between Czech and German nationalists had centered on language. The gradual elevation of the Czech language from one used by the ‘masses’ to an official minority language taught in schools and used in public institutions during the last decades of the Habsburg Empire, a process that culminated in the establishment of Czech as the dominant state language, mirrored Czech nationalists’ vision of the path of the Czech nation to national self-determination. However, despite the ‘victory’ of Czech over German, Czech nationalists continued to perpetuate a sense of siege, casting Czech-speakers as threatened by German-domination. Nowhere was this more true than in the borderlands and in communities where German and Czech speakers mixed.

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123 “Židé v Československém statě: Národní Rada Židovská,” Židovské zprávy April 9, 1919. In late May, 1919, the main Jewish nationalist organization in Slovakia (Volksverband die Juden für die Slowakei) formally committed to cooperation with the Jewish National Council in Prague, Lipscher, “Die Lage der Juden,” 9.
In this climate, the image of the Jew as a “Germanizer” constituting the staunchest bastions of German culture in an otherwise Czech environment was particularly damaging. While Czech nationalists accused Jews of war time profiteering, Bolshevism, and opportunistic side-switching, the accusation of Jews’ loyalty to the German language and culture branded them as enemies of the Czech nation. As power shifted hands in the Bohemian Lands, Jewish nationalists, particularly in Prague, were conscious of the need to counter this dangerous image.

Two central representatives of the Jewish National Council, who appeared at public meetings and events more than any other members, were Ludvík Singer and Angelo Goldstein. Goldstein, like Singer, was a lawyer from a Bohemian small town, who embarked on a career in municipal and national politics after the war. Both were proponents of a Czech language orientation within the Jewish nationalist movement in the Bohemian Lands. In an article that appeared in Židovské zprávy, Goldstein discussed the relationship between linguistic and national assimilation. While he credited the Czech-Jewish movement for having correctly assessed that it was Jews’ adoption of German language and culture which bred Czech antisemitism, he disputed the notion that “to de-Germanize oneself” (odněmčit se) should also be a process in which one was “to de-Jewify oneself” (odžidovštit se). The “new conditions,” Goldstein argued, made the adoption of Czech a necessity not a choice.

He continued,

I am sure it is not necessary to repeat that we adopted a program of linguistic assimilation long ago, and therefore we are working on making local Jews orient

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125 Goldstein took over Singer’s seat in the National Assembly after the latter’s death in 1931 and remained a member of parliament until 1938. He left Czechoslovakia for Palestine in 1939, where he remained until his death in 1947. For Goldstein’s biography, see “Goldstein poslancem,” Židovské zprávy September 11, 1931 and Rudolf M. Wlaschek, Biographia Judaica Bohemiae, vol. 1 (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa, 1997), 68.

126 “Asimilace jazyková – asimilace národní,” Židovské zprávy April 18, 1919.
themselves, in so far as they haven’t already done so, towards the Czech language. If we haven’t been successful in Prague, Plzeň, and České Budějovice then the point should have been brought home by antisemitic acts in the street and the [recent] riots, which, however, are crucial to avoid [in the future] in the interest of both Jews and Czechs. Another danger, which could emerge if our movement did not take on this task [process of linguistic assimilation], is that when carried out by someone else [than Zionists], the assumption could emerge that the goal is to become part of the Czech nation, in other words national assimilation.127

The Czech language orientation in the Jewish national program was fuelled by both strategic and cultural forces. Responding to Czech antisemitism, Zionists stepped up their efforts to make the adoption of Czech part and parcel of the Jewish national platform. Impressing their role as ‘promoters of Czech among Jews’ upon the Czech authorities and the Czech public, the Council members furthered their effort to present themselves as useful partners to the state while playing their rival’s, the Czech-Jewish movement, strongest card. Since the 1880s, Czech-Jewish assimilationists had promoted the Czech language among Jews. It was thanks to their efforts, Hillel Kieval argues, that a Jewish national identification which incorporated Czech language and culture resonated with Jews in the Bohemian Lands.128

Indeed, the Jewish nationalists were individuals whose affinities for Czech and German were perhaps shaped by both nostalgia and opportunism. Some, like Angelo Goldstein, were part of a generation of Jews that had grown up with Czech language and culture.129 This linguistic preference and skill now helped the young Zionist’s political career take off in the postwar period.

Efforts to inform Czech audiences about the Jewish nationalist movement and the Jewish National Council’s program began shortly after the end of the war. In early November 1918, a special edition of Židovské zprávy was distributed widely as a flyer in

128 Kieval, Languages of Community, 148-151, 158.
129 Ibid., 158.
order to combat antisemitic propaganda. Once Czechs were informed about the loyal, conciliatory, and constructive efforts of the Jewish National Council, Zionists believed, antisemitism would surely decrease.130 Soon, Jewish nationalist leaders were intensifying the production and distribution of material about the movement and the Jewish society in Palestine in Czech and for Czech audiences in the Bohemian Lands.131

At the same time, however, the profile of the Zionists was far from ‘Czech.’ Until the Czech language Židovské zprávy resumed publication as the mouthpiece of the Jewish National Council in April 1919, the Zionist press was German. Indeed, German was the shared language of Jewish nationalists in Central Europe. German periodicals and books dominated the market for Zionist literature. While Zionists in the Bohemian Lands had never bothered with translations or wide distribution of these texts in Czech, the need to create propaganda materials relating the Jewish national program to Czechs and, more importantly perhaps, to appear Czech became urgent after the war. By informing Czechs about their program for Jews’ moral and national regeneration, publicising American Jews’ efforts on behalf of Czechoslovakia, and advertising the Jewish National Council’s loyalty and admiration for the Czech nation, Jewish activists hoped to counter the suspicion that Jews continued to be a bastion of German language and culture.

Jewish nationalists’ unease with the use of German was reflected in the report from the first Jewish National Congress in Prague. Hugo Bergman was the first to address the delegates, which he did in Hebrew.132 Bergman had been chosen, the author noted, because the Council wanted to invoke Hebrew as a poignant symbol of Jewish nationhood, the progress of Jews’ national ‘awakening,’ and the unity of Jews throughout the world. The

130 “Ein Aufruf der böhmischen Zionisten an das tschechische Volk,” Selbstwehr November 8, 1918.
131 “Sionistický obvodový sjezd,” Židovské zprávy April 25, 1919.
author of the report consistently made a point out of emphasizing whenever a delegate was speaking in a Jewish language, whether modern Hebrew or Yiddish. German and Czech, presumably the languages of most delegates, went conspicuously unmentioned. While the writer wanted to stress the legitimacy of Jews’ claim to nationhood by pointing to the use of Jewish languages, he or she also wanted to avoid the embarrassment of the reality that the lingua franca of the Jewish nationalist movement in Czechoslovakia was, and incidentally continued to be, German.

Indeed, Jewish nationalists were particularly vulnerable to accusations of Germaness. Czech-Jewish assimilationists repeatedly labelled Jewish nationalists as Germans, arguing that the Zionist program’s Czech orientation was both recent and opportunist. During public debates between Czech-Jewish and Jewish nationalist activists, the former would often make the point that Zionism was only a disguise for Jews’ continued adherence to German culture. The Czech-Jews pointed to Zionists’ incomplete command of Czech, thereby invoking antisemitic perceptions about Jews’ inability to master the language of their surroundings in order to de-legitimize their opponents—a strategy that the Jewish nationalists were no strangers to themselves. Indeed, employing antisemitic stereotypes, such as the images of Prague’s Jewish plutocracy, and Jews’ fence-sitting and moral flaws, was central to the Jewish nationalists’ political game.

While some Zionist leaders called for Jews’ reorientation to Czech language as both a tool of integration and a sign of loyalty to the new state, the Zionist movement did not adopt

133 See for example “Manifestační schůze českožidovská v Praze,” Židovské zprávy May 5, 1919.
134 For perceptions about Jews’ inability to master the language of their surroundings, and Jews and language more generally, see Sander Gilman, Jewish Self-hatred: The Hidden Language of Jews (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
Czech exclusively. In the postwar period, Jewish and non-Jewish nationalists alike came to think of national belonging as something racial rather than defined by everyday language or mother tongue. This primordial definition of nationality coexisted, however, with the notion that national consciousness was something that could be learned and unlearned.

To Jewish nationalists, the shift away from language as a defining characteristic towards race helped legitimize both their claim that Jews constituted a nation and their efforts to transform the mass of allegedly indifferent or misguided Jews into a self-aware nationality. Language, however, continued to play an important symbolic role as a sign of nationhood and political allegiance. As we shall see, Jewish nationalist groups often carried their names in three languages: Czech, German, and Hebrew. However, even though Jewish nationalist activists believed that their political position was one of neutral loyalty to Czechoslovakia, others viewed it differently. To the Czech nationalists, who saw themselves in a continuous struggle against German domination and despised the national “hermaphroditism” embodied in multilingual practices, this ‘trilingualism’ was sure to appear as nothing but Jews’ continued vacillation.

**Conquering Jewish communities**

While Jewish activists had set aside their differences in order manage the influx of Jewish wartime refugees from Galicia, this Burgfrieden came to an end at the close of the war and the struggle for leadership and the benevolence of the state began. As it became clear what the new order entailed, Jewish nationalists and Czech-Jews pitted themselves both against

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135 Some Zionists, like Max Brod, supported a position, where language was an intellectual choice rather than an expression of a political and national platform, see “An die tschechischen Juden,” Selbstwehr June 20, 1919.


137 For a discussion of Czech and German nationalists’ attitudes towards so-called national hermaphrodites, see Zahra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 519.
German-Jewish assimilationists and against each other. In other words, the Czech-Jews and Jewish nationalists agreed that continued use of German language was a dead end, but when it came to the future direction for Jews, they were fierce opponents. However, while the Jewish National Council skilfully caught the attention of Czech leaders, its utility as a partner of the state depended on the Jewish nationalists’ ability to mobilize the country’s Jews. In their efforts to do that, Jewish nationalists chose strategies that de-legitimized their rivals and presented their own program as the only way to eliminate antisemitism and restore Jews’ dignity.

In late November 1918, Selbstwehr reported with great indignation the content of a message sent to board members of Jewish communities in Bohemia.138 In it, the chairman of the Prague community, Alois Košerák, announced that a delegation representing communities in Prague and its suburbs had met with Alois Rašín, a prominent member of the Czech National Council. They had done so as “the official representative of Jews of the Czech and German nation as well as Zionists” in order to assure him of Jews’ loyalty.139 The message emphasized that while Rašín had assured the board that loyal citizens of Czechoslovakia would have equal rights regardless of their religion, he had stressed that “Jews should not attempt to seek [political] representation as a nationality, as they can only expect to be entitled to such a high office according to individual ability.”140 In their response to the news, Zionists denounced the delegation’s attempt to play Jews and Czechs against each other by soliciting anti-Zionist statements that contradicted the declarations made in favour of Jewish national rights by Masaryk and some of Rašín’s colleagues in the

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138 “Das Zirkular des Kultusgemeinde,” Selbstwehr November 29, 1918. The meeting took place on November 4, 1918 (and the memorandum was delivered in Czech, the author emphasized).
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
Czech government. Further, the author ridiculed the “secretive” manner in which the news of this meeting had been announced. While the Jewish National Council published its memoranda and reports from meetings with Czech officials widely in order to “inform the Jewish public,” the delegation had gone about such important matters in a secretive manner, allegedly typical for this “colloquium of notables.” The incompetence and illegitimacy of the existing leadership had become obvious, the author insisted, by the fact that,

[…]

in the last couple of weeks the Jewish National Council has had to focus exclusively on fending off attacks on Jews and protecting their rights. Every day the Council receives telegrams, letters, and cries for help from all districts committees, and for weeks the members of the National Council and their collaborators have been constantly and feverishly active neglecting their occupations and their health. While not lifting a finger, only discussing their endowments and at most how to delay [the introduction of] democratic voting rights just so that they can hold on to their power and office, these few gentlemen, the ’representation,’ dare to claim that they are the new state’s only Jewish authority; something they did by putting shared Jewish interests aside and stabbing [the Council] in the back.

The depiction of the existing Jewish leadership as autocratic, incompetent, and deceitful was indicative of Jewish nationalists’ populist attempts to de-legitimize its rivals by portraying them as out of touch with the democratic and nationalist spirit of the times. In contrast, the members of the Jewish National Council were represented as assertive and courageous leaders who showed up during anti-Jewish riots to help Jews under attack, and used their connections with influential Jewish circles abroad to safeguard Jews’ rights at home. Descriptions of Jewish audiences’ hostility towards Czech-Jews and the existing Jewish

\[141\] Ibid.
\[142\] Ibid. Indignant about Minister Rašín’s alleged warning against pursuing Jewish national rights, Max Brod, vice chair of the Council, and Rudolf Kohn, Council member and head of the local Poale Zion (a socialist Zionist party), arranged to discuss the statement’s authenticity with the minister. Subsequently, the latter authorized a statement that denied the content of the Board’s memorandum claiming to have been misquoted and declared “that Minister Rašín is a friend of the Jewish nationalist movement.” “Das Zirkular des Kultusgemeindepräsidenten Dr. A. Košerák – eine Unwahrheit!,” Selbstwehr December 6, 1918.
leadership as only contained by the presence of Zionist leaders to whom the masses responded, conveyed an impression of mass support for the Jewish nationalist platform. The image of Jews’ discontent with communal elites and assimilationist ideologues cast the Council as leaders by popular demand. It lent credibility to the Jewish nationalists’ program which envisioned the healing of relations between Jews and non-Jews. It also promised dignified and secure conditions for Jews in Czechoslovakia. Thus, the Jewish nationalists’ efforts to ascend to leadership depended both on the state’s endorsement of the proposed democratic reforms of the existing Jewish communities and on the responsiveness of the Jewish public to the Jewish national program. In the minds of the Jewish nationalists, success in the former depended on success in the later and vice versa. As Zionists lobbied Czech leaders in Prague and Paris, the test of the Council’s democratic legitimacy arrived with the municipal elections in the Bohemian Lands in June 1919.

While the Jewish National Council had called for Jews to make a “sincere” commitment to Jewish nationalism in the weeks after the war ended, once the Council’s election campaign began, a more pragmatic platform formed the basis for the Jewish national candidates’ program. Instead of appealing to Jews’ national feelings, the campaign asked Jews to act pragmatically. The Council encouraged Jews to elect Zionist candidates in order to signal Jews’ neutrality in the nationalist struggle between Czechs and Germans and to ensure representation of Jewish interests. In the Council’s view, antisemitism was nurtured by Jews’ participation in the struggle between nations other than their “own.” Jews’ nationally indifferent and opportunistic political behaviour had been sustained by the voting system in the Austrian state which placed individuals in voting registries according to their

143 A good example of one of these public encounters was a meeting in late April organized by the Czech-Jewish movement, see “Manifestační schůze českožidovská v Praze,” Židovské zprávy May 5, 1919.
144 “Židovským voličům a voličkám!,” Židovské zprávy May 9, 1919.
everyday language. Thus, since Jews were denied nationality status and had adopted German or Czech as their everyday language, Jewish voters had had no choice but to take part in the battles of foreign nations. As Angelo Goldstein argued, “Jewish candidates are particularly important in Prague and in linguistically mixed areas. In mixed areas, the presence of Jewish national candidates [on the voting lists] is the only way local Jews have the opportunity to remain neutral in the nationality conflict between Czech and Germans and thereby satisfy one of the most important principles of our political program.”

Considering the upsurge of antisemitism, the need to signal neutrality had become particularly urgent. However, the so-called neutral position of the Council was one of loyalty to the new order rather than an impartial stance; a point the Council indeed never failed to emphasize. Thus, by voting for the Council’s candidates, Jews could do their part to take the wind out of the antisemitic sails of the Czech corner, while simultaneously remaining loyal to the authorities on whose protection they depended. The claim that non-Jews would perceive the election of Zionist candidates as neutral loyalty was emphasized in an article from the state-sponsored *Tschechoslowakische Korrespondenz*. Its author argued that “without Jews’ votes Prague Germans are nothing but an enlarged social club. Jews have the chance not only to obtain their own representatives who care for Jews’ interests, but also to adopt a new attitude, given the changed circumstances, towards the Czech majority, with whom they surely want to live in peace.” Reprinted beneath the Council’s address to Jewish voters, Jewish nationalists now expected their target audience to cast off its indifference, abandon misconceived interests, and vote for Jewish representatives.

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146 “Schůze předsednictva Narodní Rady Židovské v Praze dne 24. dubna 1919,” *Židovské zprávy* May 5, 1919; the same principle was a staple of the program of the Jewish National Council in Brno/Brünn, see “Juden Brünnst,” *Jüdische Volksstimme* January 1, 1919.
Anti-Jewish violence, boycotts, and discrimination strengthened the Council’s argument that only by electing Jewish national candidates could Jews’ interests be represented in the municipality. Addressing the Jewish public, the Council stated that “lately many events must have convinced you of the need first and foremost to protect your livelihoods […] these days Jews are excluded from applying for municipal employment or contracts. It is necessary to change this unjust and undignified state of affairs […] a better future for us demands that we do not participate in the nationalist battle and retain complete neutrality. We must consider our own, our Jewish interests.”

Thus, while Jews were dragging their feet in coming around to a commitment to Jewish nationalism, according to Jewish nationalists, non-Jews already treated Jews as a nation apart. The interest of the non-Jews, the Council argued, would always trump that of the Jew, even among Socialists. The popularity of antisemitism among the population at large showed that Jews could only rely on a leadership committed exclusively to their interests and to the protection of their rights.

Jewish nationalists deplored Jews’ national indifference and alleged timidity in face of gross violations of their rights. Like their fellow Czech and German nationalists, Jewish activists perceived the ‘masses’ as lacking national consciousness. A vote cast for a Jewish candidate, the Council claimed, was a sign of changing attitudes, a determination to defend one’s rights, and a step towards regaining one’s dignity and the respect of non-Jews. As Ludvík Singer proclaimed, “every Jew who feels solidarity primarily towards Jews should vote for a Jewish candidate in order for the election to become a protest against the injustices that have afflicted Jews and a sign that from today onwards Jews will defend their

148 “Židovským voličům a voličkám!,” Židovské zprávy May 9, 1919.
Thus, while Jews could protest against persecution and discrimination, the violations would only end once Jews had undergone an internal transformation and committed themselves to their own nation.\textsuperscript{152}

As the election results became known, the Jewish nationalists were triumphant. “Great Jewish victory at the polls,” an analysis of the election began.\textsuperscript{153} Elections had been held in almost all districts in the Bohemian Lands, and the Jewish national list had received a total of 20,386 votes.\textsuperscript{154} The “resounding success for the Jewish lists [of candidates] in Greater Prague” was a particularly important victory for the Jewish nationalists, who had their headquarters in the city, and where the Jewish communal leaders had been particularly obstinate in their rebuffing of the advances by the Jewish National Council. In Prague and the suburbs of Vinohrady/Weinberge and Karlin/Karolinenthal, according to the report in \textit{Selbstwehr}, the Jewish national candidates collected 60\% of Jews’ votes.\textsuperscript{155} The Jewish nationalists were now represented with nine mandates on the city council.\textsuperscript{156} Jewish nationalists were encouraged by the results, as one author put it, “we have repeatedly stressed the importance of the republic’s first elections to us Jews. The result of the elections in

\textsuperscript{151} “Velká schůze židovských voličů v Praze,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} June 6, 1919.
\textsuperscript{152} “Poctivá politika,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} May 30, 1919.
\textsuperscript{153} “Grosse jüdische Wahlerfolge,” \textit{Selbstwehr} June 20, 1919.
\textsuperscript{154} For distribution of votes, see table 35, \textit{Volby do národního shromáždení v dubnu roku 1920 a všeobecné volby do obecního zastupitelstev v Čechách, na Moravě, a ve Slezku v červnu roku 1919} (Praha: státní úřad statistický, 1922).
\textsuperscript{155} “Grosse jüdische Wahlerfolge,” \textit{Selbstwehr} June 20, 1919. \textit{Selbstwehr} estimated the total number of Jewish voters to be 15,000 of which 8,046 voted for Jewish national candidates (according to the State Statistical Bureau 1922 publication, the Jewish parties collected 8,012 votes in Prague). The basis for this calculation, i.e. the total number of Jewish voters, appears to have been the number of “Israelites” living in Greater Prague (31,731 in 1921). If about half of the total population of the Bohemian Lands was enfranchised according to the new election rules, then this percentage should point to the approximate number of Jewish voters in a given locality. For information on Jewish population in Greater Prague, see “Die Juden Prags in der letzten Volkszählung,” \textit{Selbstwehr} February 6, 1931. For new voting rules in 1919, see Thomas Weiser, “Die Gemeindewahlen in der Tschechoslowakei 1919,” in \textit{Das Jahr 1919 in der Tschechoslowakei und in Ostmitteleuropa}, ed. Hans Lemberg and Peter Heumos (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1993), 215-223, here 216.
\textsuperscript{156} In Central Prague, four Jewish national candidates were elected (three Jewish nationals and one Jewish socialist (Poale Zion)), two mandates in Vinohrady/Weinberge, and three from Karlin/Karolinenthal, see “Der Erfolg bei den Gemeindewahlen,” \textit{Selbstwehr} June 20, 1919.
Prague gives all our representatives the necessary legitimacy and supports our claim that we have the backing of a large majority of the Jews.”

Indeed, “the elected Jewish deputies are now in a position to make further delay and neglect of Jewish communal elections impossible.”

The overall results of the municipal elections had seen a significant strengthening of the political left, especially the Social Democratic party, a result of the new voting rules that enfranchised an unprecedented number of citizens. An atmosphere of populism also pervaded the depictions of ‘election night’ at the Jewish nationalist headquarters where “in this predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, the crowd welcomed the election results with jubilation that proves that the Jewish people [sic] are behind us.”

Despite their “success” the Jewish nationalists were embittered by the way the election campaign had proceeded. They were, not surprisingly, particularly upset at the Czech and German assimilationists. The former had, according to Jewish nationalist observers, “terrorized” Jewish voters by claiming that “a vote for the Jews [i.e. Jewish nationalists], is a vote against the Czechs” and denouncing Jewish nationalists as “enemies of the state” and “German.”

While Czech-Jews were depicted as aggressive and irresponsible, producing suspicions about Jews’ loyalty to the state, the Jewish nationalists represented themselves as an assertive, able, and responsible leadership. They had a political program which addressed Jews’ immediate concerns about protection against antisemitism and assurances of equal rights in the new state. Furthermore, Jewish nationalists offered to heal relations between Jews and non-Jews. By ridding themselves of the national

157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
indifference, which angered non-Jews and made Jews pawns in the hands of ‘foreign’ nations, antisemitism would eventually subside and Jews’ dignity be restored. However, this outcome depended, according to Zionists, first on Jews’ votes in favour of Jewish nationalist candidates and second on Jews’ commitment to Jewish nationalism.

As the culmination of Jewish activists’ efforts at home and abroad, the Czechoslovak National Assembly implicitly recognized Jews’ national rights in the country’s first constitution of February 29, 1920. In the constitutional articles, Jews were recognized as a nationality and Jewish citizens were free to identify nationally as Jews regardless of their language abilities and use. The Jewish National Council welcomed the state’s recognition of a Jewish nationality as a sign of Czech leaders’ commitment to full equality for Jews ensuring them both civil and national rights. In his evaluation of the implications of the establishment of Jews’ national rights, Ludvík Singer recalled the efforts of the Jewish National Council to enlist the support of the state as well as the mutual trust that had characterized negotiations between the Jewish activists and Czech leaders.162 The Council had refrained from pressuring the Czech leadership to include minority protection articles, he noted, knowing that the Czechs feared that it would afford disloyal minorities an opportunity to harm the republic. Subsequently, Czech leaders’ rewarded Jewish nationalists’ loyalty at that critical moment with a recognition of their demands. “Our trust [in Beneš’ assurances] was strengthened when the president, the minister of foreign affairs, and all the Czech statesmen committed to democratic values showed a true understanding for our goals,” Singer recalled.

To the Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands, the formal recognition of a “Jewish national minority” confirmed that the Czech leadership had acknowledged the

162 “Židovská národnost v ústavě,” Židovské zprávy March 1, 1920.
usefulness of an alliance with the Jewish nationalists. Furthermore, while the state afforded individual Jewish citizens the freedom to choose Jewish national belonging, Jewish nationalists believed that the Czech leaders had endorsed the Jewish nationalists’ diagnosis and cure for the country’s ‘Jewish Problem.’

Conclusion

While historians have interpreted the Czech leaders’ recognition of Jews as a national minority as evidence of Czechoslovakia’s progressive and democratic character, they have paid little attention to the role that Jewish activists played in ensuring national rights for Jews. As I have shown, Jewish activists did not wait for rights to be bestowed on them, but worked hard to convince the Czech leaders that a forthcoming attitude towards Jewish demands would be rewarded on both the international and the domestic stage. They did so by exaggerating the character of Jews’ influence on western public opinion and political leaderships and by nurturing antisemitic stereotypes about Jewish power and Jews’ need for moral regeneration. In doing so, they cast themselves as the ones able to harness American Jews’ power and to transform Jews into worthy citizens. Thus, capitalizing on the upsurge in antisemitism that accentuated the need for resourceful and bold Jewish leaders as well as on the discrediting of the ‘old’ elites in the Jewish communities, Jewish nationalists assumed a position of leadership in Bohemia and Moravia’s Jewish societies.

The alliance that Jewish nationalists sought to create between Jews and Czechs was a continuation of a familiar Jewish political tradition. Strategic partnerships between central authorities and Jewish leaders had been part and parcel of Jewish politics in Europe for centuries. In many ways the alliance between Czech and Jewish leaders was a continuation
of this tradition, regardless of the revolutionary rhetoric in which it was clad. As in the Habsburg Empire, the discussion concerning Jews’ equality centered on Jews’ potential respectability which the state authorities recognized in exchange for Jews’ unconditional loyalty to the state. This postwar partnership differed, however, in that it depended on Jewish nationalists’ ability to mobilize popular support for their program among the country’s Jews, thereby demonstrating Jewish nationalism’s ability to transform Jews. Informed by amorphous beliefs about Jews’ power and unsure of its extent, Czech leaders pursued a bipartite strategy. While they resisted recognizing specific national minorities in their treaty with the Allied Powers, which in their mind would have encouraged irredentism, they still managed to appear responsive to Jews’ concerns. Jewish nationalists carefully fostered the notion among Czech leaders that Jewish national belonging was not only one of neutral loyalty, but also an identity to which Jews would ‘naturally’ gravitate once given the opportunity, a process which would allegedly weaken the country’s German and Hungarian minorities. Indeed, Jewish nationalists’ attracted the attention of Czech leaders by addressing the latter’s concerns about Jews’ anti-Czech attitudes. By offering a program for transforming Jews into loyal, useful, and Czech-speaking citizens of the state, Jewish nationalists proposed to correct Jews’ alleged parasitic and anti-social behaviours. Hence, Czech leaders supported Jewish nationalism because they believed that Jews were in need of moral reform and that Zionism could act as a bulwark against German and Hungarian nationalism among the country’s Jews. Their Jewish ‘helper,’ meanwhile, enabled them to retain their respectability as more civilized, tolerant, and western than other states in East Central Europe.
These Jewish activists, part of a nationalist movement that had only recently entered the Jewish political stage in the Bohemian Lands and whose popular support remained questionable, thus played a key role in shaping Czech perceptions of the Jewish Question in Czechoslovakia. Although Jewish nationalists had secured an initial political victory by having Jewish nationality recognized by the Czechoslovak Constitution, the battle for the legitimacy of both their leadership and Jews’ national rights had just begun.
Chapter 2

Mapping Jews

Statistics, Social Science, and the Construction of Czechoslovak Jewry

In anticipation of Czechoslovakia’s 1930 census, Jüdische Volksstimme assessed the importance of this statistical event for the Jewish nationalist movement,

[to us the upcoming census is more than merely a way to obtain reliable data about changes and demographic developments among the Jewish people. We are anticipating an increase in the number of Jews choosing ‘Jewish nationality,’ and thus for us the census, much more so than for other peoples in this state, is an event of national importance […] once the Jewish public becomes aware of the significance of the census, it will be pointless for the other nationalities to attempt to restore their own ranks by decimating the Jewish nation in Czechoslovakia.1

In the interwar years, Jewish nationalists employed the census as a vehicle for the construction of a legitimate place for Jews in Czechoslovakia. As self-proclaimed leaders of the country’s Jews, these activists were determined to create order out of the perceived chaos of Jews’ fluid loyalties and multivalent linguistic and cultural identities. Faced with demands of Jews’ unconditional commitment to the new order, Jewish nationalists were intent on transforming Jews into a unified national community with firm boundaries and legitimate loyalties. The census’ summarizing and homogenizing categories in general, and its creation and enumeration of ethnic collectives in particular, facilitated the construction of a Jewish ethnicity in Czechoslovakia.2 In turning to statistics as an instrument for political

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assertion and nation building, Jewish nationalists adopted an important mode of governance and legitimization developed by the modern state.

Since the mid nineteenth century, social sciences in general and statistics in particular have played an important role in the modern state’s management of its population and resources. Statistical practices have made territories and their inhabitants legible to the administrative centers often far from their objects in geography and culture. This process of mapping, however, rather than depicting an objective reality, as its practitioners trusted, reflected the way in which technocrats imagined the landscapes, economic and social networks, and communities they were studying. While these statistical practices were first developed by states eager to control and extract resources from within their borders, the authority of numbers to convey ‘facts’ became useful to other groups competing for power. For the disenfranchised, statistics was also a language of social contestation. As Jacqueline Urla suggests, statistics and social sciences became a way in which marginalized groups made themselves visible, enabling them to articulate their differences, and make claims upon the state and its resources. This chapter examines how Jewish nationalists turned to statistics as a means for establishing themselves as a political force in interwar Czechoslovakia. Having failed to secure national political representation and uncertain of their political weight within Jewish society, Jewish nationalists used statistics and social science to cast themselves as the Jewish nation’s natural leaders. Eager to portray the country’s Jews as a loyal and useful minority, these activists spun narratives which cast the

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Jewish nation as an integrative and stabilizing force in Czechoslovakia, thereby countering anti-Jewish voices questioning Jews’ commitment to the new state.

By doing so, Jewish nationalists from the Bohemian Lands tapped into a well-established tradition among Jewish activists in Central Europe of using statistics and social science as a form of resistance to dominant discourses about Jews. Historians have shown how Jewish activists employed statistics and social science to diagnose and treat the ‘Jewish Problem.’ Whether they perceived the problem to be of a socio-economic, cultural, medical, political, or national nature, the discourses they created were often simultaneously self-critical and apologetic. In other words, they sought to both remedy the Jewish condition and challenge misconceptions about Jews while insisting on their amenability and equality. By drawing on the power of numbers and science, Jewish experts sought to establish their narratives as authoritative and shape the ways in which Jews and non-Jews alike perceived the Jewish Question. By the late nineteenth century, Jewish nationalists were at the forefront in the collection and publication of statistical knowledge about Jews as a national community. As Mitchell Hart shows, Zionists believed that statistical and scientific knowledge about Jews was an integral part of the process of national regeneration and the

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5 John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economic and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), and Oren Soffer, “Antisemitism, Statistics, and the Scientization of Hebrew Political Discourse: the Case Study of Ha-tsefirah,” *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (2004): 55-79. When employing the term ‘Jewish statistics’ or ‘Jewish social science,’ I am referring to the body of research on Jews as a social collective undertaken by Jewish experts from a broad range of disciplines beginning, as Mitchell Hart notes, in the 1880s. As he points out, the term ‘Jewish statistics’ served as a short hand for a wide range of research categories relying methodologically on descriptive statistics, history and ethnography. From 1902 to 1925, Berlin was the institutional focal point for Jewish social science. The organizing body, The Bureau for Jewish Statistics (Verein für jüdische Statistik), set up its main office here and it was where its journal, *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden*, was published. Furthermore, it was an institution closely connected to the Zionist project. Nevertheless, as Hart argues, scholars from a wide variety of places and with very different interests and agendas used the methods and concepts of Jewish statistics, see Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity*, 3-4.
knowledge itself a vehicle for nation building. This chapter shows how this double process of policy making and nation building played itself out on a local level in interwar Czechoslovakia. It demonstrates how Jewish nationalists navigated the tumultuous waters of postwar politics, drawing simultaneously on local discourses on national belonging as well as on the concepts and terminology of Jewish social sciences, to construct new and useable narratives about Jews’ past, present, and future. Thus, statistics served these activists to articulate legitimate differences between Jews and other nations as well as to make Jews legible as an integral part of the country’s ethnographical landscape.

Unlike some studies on Jews and statistics in interwar Czechoslovakia, this chapter does not claim that the census results can be read as evidence of individuals or groups’ sense of national belonging or national identification. The anti-Zionist Jewish Conservative Party in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, for example, claimed to have convinced a majority of the region’s Jews to claim Jewish nationality in the 1921 census as a sign of loyalty to the state and hence not as an expression of a commitment to Jewish nationalism or nationhood. As the chapter shows, the 1921 and 1930 census results were contested by contemporary observers, activists, and respondents not only due to the definitions employed and the categories included and excluded, but also due to the census’ highly politicized execution. Indeed, individuals’ choices were likely shaped by a multiplicity of social, cultural, political, and legal concerns and considerations as well as by a general uncertainty as to the consequences of one’s answer to the question about national belonging. People’s nationality,

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6 Both Hart and Efron locate this impetus in Max Nordau’s [1901] speech calling for the collection, production, and publication of knowledge about Jews, Hart, Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity, 29-31; Efron, Defenders of the Race, 168-169.

for example, determined not only in which schools their children belonged, but also what language they could use in correspondence with public offices.

Furthermore, it is unclear to what degree census commissioners influenced or overruled individuals’ answers, and even to what extent individuals and communities were actually visited by census commissioners considering that the censuses took place in the winter months.\(^8\) One observer, the scholar Emanuel Rádl, who was highly critical of the political weight and scientific authority awarded the census, pointed to the ways in which census commissioners adopted their own criteria for determining the accuracy of individuals’ statement of national belonging. While the regulations stated that mother tongue was the primary ethnic marker and that commissioners should verify whether the respondent was answering truthfully, census takers routinely, according to Rádl’s witness, employed other methods:

Among Jews we did not bother to persuade ourselves whether they really spoke Slovak at home. We knew that their language is Hungarian or German. This is still the case today and yet they would still declare themselves to be Czechoslovaks. The point is not whether they really speak Slovak at home, but what language the individual declares when asked, that is what language he could speak if he did not consider it a language of maids, something inferior, and thus unsuitable for the intimate sphere of the home.\(^9\) 

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\(^9\) Emanuel Rádl, Národnost jako vědecký problem (Praha: Orbis, 1929), 48. Rádl insisted on citizens’ right to choose nationality rather than be ascribed national belonging according to mother tongue or other so-called objective markers. While he touched on the subject in his 1928 book length analysis of Czech-German relations, Válka Čechů s Němci (Praha, 1928), which was highly critical of Czech policies towards the country’s German minority, his polemic with Czech statisticians, Antonín Boháč in particular, regarding the validity of nationality statistics was published in Národnost jako vědecký problem.
In other words, the importance of the census for this study thus lies primarily in the meaning with which it was invested by activists, politicians, and social scientists rather than as a reflection of social reality.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the political significance of statistics in interwar Czechoslovakia by examining the Jewish National Council’s efforts to secure Jews statistical visibility among the country’s other nations in the interwar censuses and the subsequent effects of Jews’ right to declare Jewish nationality. Then, I turn to the work of František Friedmann, the foremost Jewish statistician in interwar Czechoslovakia and one of Prague’s leading Jewish nationalist activists, in order to study the interconnections between statistics, Jewish politics, and nation building. In this section, Friedmann’s body of work serves as a case study for the way in which statistics and social science facilitated the construction of a Czechoslovak Jewry.

Statistics in the service of nation builders

While Jewish nationalists gained political representation in local elections, they failed to secure national representation, despite receiving a substantial number of votes, in the subsequent parliamentary elections.¹⁰ To these Jewish leaders the census’ inclusion of the category “Jewish nationality” was of crucial importance for not only making Jews visible as a nation among others, but also adding legitimacy to the Jewish national program. Jewish leaders hoped, in light of the electoral disappointment, that the Jewish nation’s statistical representation would establish Jews as a community with valid demands for resources and representation. In other words, if the Jewish nationalists were to cement their position as

¹⁰ On the importance of the census in light of recent elections, see “Sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy January 21, 1921.
leaders of the country’s Jews, the census, imbedded with the authority of both science and state sponsorship, was to make their community visible and deserving. This visibility was important both in establishing Jewish nationhood as a social fact and in enabling Jewish nationalist leaders to ensure and document Jews’ position of neutral loyalty. The process, however, was fraught with challenges. Throughout the 1920s, critics questioned the legitimacy of Jews’ inclusion as a national minority. As time went by, it also became clear that, in some cases, collective national visibility came at the expense of individual rights.

Soon after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, the newly established State Statistical Bureau began preparations for the country’s first census. This statistical event was defined in important ways by its Habsburg legacy. In the previous decades, Czech nationalists had been fiercely critical of Austrian census practices, particularly the use of everyday language as a marker of nationality, which they claimed effectively erased the Czech as well as other minority nationalities from the map. In the Bohemian Lands, where German and Czech nationalists alike perceived one nation’s gains as the other one’s loss, propaganda and intimidation were part and parcel of the census days when nationalists sought to capture as many souls for their nation as possible.¹¹ According to Czech nationalists, the category of everyday language favoured the dominant German population at the expense of the socially weaker Czechs who were “forced” to use or declare German as their everyday language, thereby unjustly diminishing the Czech population’s language rights and weakening their demands for Czech schools.¹² To the Czech activists, who

imagined their nation as a community of origin, mother tongue defined an individual’s true national belonging. Thus, the Austrian experience, according to the prominent Czech demographer Antonín Boháč, had galvanized a consensus among Czech statisticians that in the new postwar census mother tongue, “the most objective and stable marker of ethnic belonging,” was to act as a sign of national belonging, thereby replacing everyday language.13

However, the Czechoslovak census makers’ search for objective ethnic markers was not as much a departure from Austrian practices as perhaps imagined. By the turn of the century, in Austrian legal practice national belonging was increasingly understood in ethnic terms and believed to be verifiable through objective markers such as language, social and professional affiliations, and origin.14 Furthermore, individuals’ ability to choose national belonging was trumped by public and nationalist authorities’ ability to ascribe to individuals and their children a particular ethnic belonging.15 Thus, while Czech nationalists imagined their nation to be under constant Austrian assimilating pressure, ethnic ascription and the primacy of the national collective over individual rights had become the legal practice in the Bohemian Lands during the last decades of Austrian reign.

Despite this alleged consensus among the Czech statisticians and politicians, once they found themselves on the other side of the table so to speak, and in search of a statistical

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13 Everyday language was dismissed by these experts as a flexible and adopted tool of communication not an expression of national belonging, Antonín Boháč, “Národnost či jazyk?” Československý statistický věstník 2 (1921): 40-58, here 52.
majority, considerable disagreement erupted among the members of the Statistical Bureau. While some called for individuals’ subjective choice of nationality, others wanted objective criteria to govern national identification either by listing nationality and language as separate categories or by making nationality dependent on corresponding ethnic evidence. In the end, a narrow majority decided on the procedure where “nationality is understood as ethnic belonging for which the main external marker is mother tongue.”\textsuperscript{16} However, while the Czech authorities claimed that the census “would provide correct, accurate, and honest information about the character of the population,” there was significant uncertainty as to the census results’ ability to document a significant Czech and Slovak majority; a desired result which would help silence the voices pointing to the injustices of the postwar order.\textsuperscript{17} As Jeremy King notes, the category “Czechoslovak,” which merged claims of Czech or Slovak nationality, “helped to paper over the inconvenient fact that ethnic Germans in the Slavic state numbered too many: only about 50 percent less than ethnic Czechs, and about 50 percent \textit{more} than ethnic Slovaks.”\textsuperscript{18} This insecurity among Czech leaders as to Czechoslovaks’ numerical strength, and by extension the census’ utility in documenting the justice in awarding Czechs and Slovaks national self-determination, made them receptive to demands that the census include special regulations for determining the nationality of the country’s Jewish population. Czech statistical experts agreed that Jews, despite having “lost their national language,” shared physical, socio-economic, and religious characteristics constituting a distinct although particular ethnic group. There was disagreement in the

\textsuperscript{16} Antonín Boháč, “První všeobecné sčítání lidu v Československé republice,” Československý statistický věstník 2 (1921): 104-120, here 116.
\textsuperscript{17} Boháč, “První všeobecné sčítání lidu v Československé republice,” 104.
Statistical Bureau, however, whether this particularity should find expression in the census.\textsuperscript{19} In the end, Jews were awarded an exemption from the general rule ascribing nationality according to mother tongue as the census regulations added that “Jews can declare Jewish nationality.”\textsuperscript{20} Thus, Jews could choose either Jewish nationality or a nationality according to mother tongue. For the purposes of the census, religion was to act as the objective marker of Jewish ethnicity.

The Jewish National Council actively sought to influence the census makers in order to secure the exemption for the country’s Jews. In late October 1920, just days before the Statistical Bureau was to publish the census guidelines, the Jewish national leadership submitted a memorandum to the government warning that failure to consider Jews’ particularity would produce “unwelcome results.”\textsuperscript{21} Opposing what they perceived to be the dominant view on the Statistical Bureau, namely that the census would register individuals’ mother tongue rather than nationality, Jewish leaders noted that such a procedure “might falsely strengthen certain nationalities with members of the Jewish nationality whose mother

\textsuperscript{19} As some experts noted there was considerable discussion in the scientific community whether Jews were a nation or not precisely because of their lack of language. The census makers attempted to accommodate both views by allowing Jews to choose Jewish nationality or any other nationality according to their mother tongue. For disagreement about Jews’ status, see Boháč, “Národnost či jazyk?” 42. For the position that nationality should be a subjective choice, see Dobroslav Krejčí, “Má se při našem přístím sčítání lidu zjišťovat národnost nebo řeč mateřská?” Československý statistický věstník 1 (1920): 275-285, here 285. For the position that objective verifiable markers were necessary, see Antonín Boháč, “Přístí sčítání lidu,” Československý statistický věstník 1 (1920): 268-275, here 272-274. Both authors, however, agreed that Jews constituted a distinct ethnic group. The discussion in Czechoslovakia reflected a more widespread uncertainty regarding the classification of Jews as a nationality, see for example, the debate among Soviet ethnographers in Francine Hirsch, Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 132.

\textsuperscript{20} For regulations regarding the census’ question of nationality, see Boháč, “První všeobecné sčítání lidu v Československé republice,” 116. For the perception of the sociological importance of religion in preserving Jewish distinctiveness thereby legitimizing it as an objective marker, see Boháč, “Národnost či jazyk?” 54.

tongue is one of these nationalities’.”22 Leaving no doubt as to what groups might benefit, they suggested that a question about language would “strengthen the domination (država) of the Hungarian and German nationalities.”23 Drawing on the Czech nationalist trope of old Austria’s manipulative and de-nationalizing census practices, Jewish nationalists pointed out that polling language rather than nationality would not only make the census scientifically inaccurate by erasing the Jewish nation statistically, but also unconstitutional as Jews, contrary to the guarantees made just months earlier, would be counted as members of other ethnic communities.24 Instead, they proposed, in order to ensure “satisfactory results,” that the census ought to include questions about both nationality and mother tongue. Aware of the census makers’ disagreement regarding objective markers or subjective choice of nationality, the Jewish leadership insisted that Jewish nationality could be defined both objectively by ethnic origin (kmenová příslušnost) and subjectively by national consciousness (uvědomění národní).25 Thus, only by asking directly about national belonging in the census, the Jewish National Council concluded, would it be possible for “the majority of people of Jewish origin who identify as Jewish nationals” to express their true national belonging.26 A few days later, the census regulations were passed defining nationality according to mother tongue, but explicitly exempting Jews from this general rule thus effectively meeting the Jewish National Council’s demands.

22 Memorandum October 24, 1920, 29.
23 Ibid., 30.
24 Ibid., 29. The constitutional articles supplementing the Constitution’s §128 regarding the protection of minorities stated “that Jews could not be forced to declare other ethnic national belonging than Jewish during censuses, elections, and other public events” regardless of their language of use, see Ústavní listina, Národní shromáždění československé 1918-1920, tisk 2421 část č. 3, available electronically at www.psp.cz
25 The Jewish National Council did not consider religion the only marker of Jewish descent asking specifically for individuals with another or no religion to be allowed to claim Jewish nationality. In practice, however, this seems to be the only way in which Jewish descent could be determined aside from an individual’s own statement or the census commissioners’ observation of other “ethnic Jewish markers,” see Memorandum October 24, 1920, 30.
26 Ibid., 29.
Historians who have pondered the question of the Czech leaders’ receptiveness to Jewish demands point to both ideological and pragmatic answers. Hillel J. Kieval and Kateřina Čapková alike argue that Thomas G. Masaryk’s active support for the Jewish nationalists’ demands and wider program played an important part in ensuring Jews’ inclusion as both a religious and national community in the census. However, as Kieval, Čapková, and other scholars have noted, there were also more immediate and pragmatic motives at play. Indeed, considering the importance of the census results such ideological sympathies were only likely to gain a political life if the government perceived them as enhancing the Czech and Slovak cause, in this case minimizing the numbers of Germans and Hungarians in relation to the “Czechoslovak” majority. In the postwar period, both Czech and German nationalists believed that Jews made up a significant part of the German population in the Bohemian Lands. Some German leaders feared that allowing Jews to opt for Jewish nationality would harm German minority language and nationality rights as German-speaking Jews “withdrew” from the German nationality. As language rights were dependent on minority language speakers constituting twenty percent or more of a jurisdiction’s total population, German nationalists worried about their ability to obtain rights in communities with a Czech majority. Likewise, Czech leaders believed that recognizing

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28 As presented in an article in Židovské zprávy denouncing Heinrich Rauchberg, a prominent German statistician and member of the Statistical Bureau, for calling on Jews “not to endanger their own rights and those of their German fellow citizens” by opting for Jewish nationality in the upcoming census, a warning echoed by the German press, see “Židé a sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy February 3, 1921. Jewish nationalists were particularly incensed by Rauchberg’s “Jewish origin” and to them he served as an example of the chauvinistic character of assimilating Jews eager to prove their ‘Germaness.’ “K sčítání lidu (Návrh, který musí padnouti),” Židovské zprávy February 14, 1930.
Jewish nationality and distinguishing between ethnic belonging and language in the case of
the Jews would significantly diminish the number of Germans.\footnote{While Židovské zprávy
generally cited Czech support for the Jewish nationalist cause, Brno/Brünn’s Jüdische
Volksstimme reported that both Czech and German nationalists were competing for Jewish ‘numbers,’ see
“Volkszählung,” Jüdische Volksstimme February 10, 1921.}
The potential for
“withdrawing Jews from the German numbers” was, according to Heinrich Rauchberg,
decisive for the Bureau’s Czech members in opting to register nationality rather than mother
tongue so “that Jews could be separated from Germans.”\footnote{Rauchberg wrote about his experience of the Bureau’s decision making process in an article published in mid-January 1921 in Znaimer Tagblatt, as quoted by Emanuel Rádl in Národnost jako vědecký problem, 43-44.}

As time passed and the country’s second census came around in 1930, however, some
Czech politicians began to doubt whether Jews’ exemption diminished German or Czech
numbers in the Bohemian Lands and considered polling language rather than national
communities, defining Hebrew and Yiddish as Jewish national languages. Responding to the
Jewish National Council’s letter protesting this initiative, President Masaryk’s office noted,
“that the inclusion of the Jewish nationality in 1921 was the outcome of the fact that in that
census nationality was to be defined according to language. Thus, for political reasons,
namely in order to weaken the Hungarian and German communities (Madarstvo a Němeectvo)
Jews were exempted from this general rule.” Arguing that this “creation of a new sixth
nationality,” had also decreased the numbers of “Czechoslovaks,” the letter continued, “the
fact that Czech nationalist members of the Statistical Bureau initiated the proposed changes
reflects that the anticipated political gains were overestimated.”\footnote{This letter is quoted in Kateřina Čapková, Češi, Němci, Židé: Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938 (Praha: Paseka, 2005), 43-44. Letter d. 15.2.1930 from the President’s Office to Ludvík Singer (Singer’s letter to the President’s Office was dated 10.2.1930, Archiv Kancelář prezidenta republiky [AKPR] D 1274/30.} However, despite the
heated public debate on the proposed changes, the 1921 census regulations regarding

\footnote{While Židovské zprávy generally cited Czech support for the Jewish nationalist cause, Brno/Brünn’s Jüdische Volksstimme reported that both Czech and German nationalists were competing for Jewish ‘numbers,’ see “Volkszählung,” Jüdische Volksstimme February 10, 1921.}

\footnote{Rauchberg wrote about his experience of the Bureau’s decision making process in an article published in mid-January 1921 in Znaimer Tagblatt, as quoted by Emanuel Rádl in Národnost jako vědecký problem, 43-44.}

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nationality remained more or less in place. While the presidential office might have felt secure about Jews’ “Czechoslovak” identity in the Bohemian Lands, some Czech nationalist circles were less so. Acting on the perception that Jews’ preferred language was German or Hungarian and imaging themselves as still on the defensive against the socially and economically stronger German and Hungarian communities, Czech nationalists opposed the proposed changes, fearing that it would weaken the Czechoslovak position.

**Jewish nationalists and the census**

The Jewish nationalist leadership was as adamant about the importance of the statistical representation of the Jewish nationality in 1930 as it had been in the immediate postwar period. To them, the inclusion of Jewish nationality as a census option and Jews’ ability to choose this national belonging was central to their legitimacy as Jewish leaders and as loyal partners of the state. In their addresses to the Jewish public preceding both the 1921 and the 1930 census, Jewish leaders stressed that opting for Jewish nationality would send a clear signal of Jews’ commitment to neutrality in the struggle between the other nationalities in

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33 Ludvík Singer noted publicly that there were “political” benefits in retaining the 1921 definition of ‘Jewish nationality’ i.e. fewer ‘Germans’ and ‘Hungarians,’ in his parliamentary speech on February 22, 1930, see NSČ, 1929-1935. See also his address to the parliament on Czech fears of “defeat” in mixed urban areas if the definition of Jewish nationality changed, as the Statistical Bureau had proposed earlier that year, Singer November 26, 1930 NSČ, 1929-1935.

34 For Czech nationalist circles who believed ‘Czechoslovaks’ were on the defensive against Germans and Hungarians, see comments in Národní politika as quoted in “Nationalität und Sprache,” Prager Tagblatt February 11, 1930. See also Mark Cornwall, “Struggle on the Language Border,” 939, Tara Zahra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation: Germanization, National Ascription, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1945,” Central European History 37, no. 4 (2004): 501-543, here 516. Čapková argues that both right-wing German and Czech nationalist parties supported the continued exemption for Jews, see Čapková, Češi, Němci, Židé?, 44-45.
Czechoslovakia. While they assured their readers of the legality of this option and the secrecy of their choice, Jewish leaders also emphasized the consequences of “unwelcome results” whose publication, they warned, would fuel antisemitism.35 One author emphasized that the intense politicization of the census only heightened the importance of Jews considering the consequences of their statement of national belonging. “Everybody is trying to recruit Jews for themselves today,” and, the author warned, if Jews fail to opt for neutrality, “in the same way, they will all [my emphasis] turn against the Jews accusing them of siding with their enemies.”36 The current climate, Jewish leaders cautioned, was indeed not one in which Jews could afford indifference or loyalty to any other nation but the Jewish one.37

Despite the census makers’ claims that the census was registering objective ethnic markers, nationalist groups acted to persuade individuals of their “true” nationality much as in an election campaign. Jewish nationalists were no exception. In the Jewish nationalist press, opting for Jewish nationality and casting a vote for the Jewish Party were presented as similar events through which Jews could demonstrate their “commitment to neutrality in the nationality conflict” and loyalty to the new order.38 As the 80,000 votes that were cast for the Jewish Party in the recent elections had not gained the Jewish nationalist movement any seats in parliament, the Jewish nationalist press urged its readers to make the census another forceful public statement of Jews’ “will to Jewish nationhood.” Jews’ unity, these writers suggested, would make it impossible for the authorities to ignore the interests of this

35 “Sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy January 21, 1921.
36 “Židé a sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy February 3, 1921.
37 Ibid. For similar sentiments in Moravia, see “Jüdisches Volk!” Jüdische Volksstimme February 10, 1921; “Volkszählung,” Jüdische Volksstimme February 10, 1921.
38 See for example “Jüdische Wähler und Wählerinnen!” Jüdische Volksstimme October 24, 1929.
“sizeable minority.” Thus, for Jewish nationalist leaders the census was, as the recent local and national elections had been, an opportunity to assert their popularity and fitness as leaders of a unified and significant constituency in the new national democratic order. Almost a decade later, neutrality and public unity remained central themes in Jewish nationalists’ campaign to mobilize Jews to ‘vote’ for Jewish nationalism in the 1929 national elections and in the country’s second census the following year.

While the inclusion of Jewish nationality was central to the Jewish nationalist movement’s position of neutral loyalty, the statistical representation of a Jewish ethnic collective was a crucial step in establishing the legitimacy of Jewish nationhood. As the public debate preceding the two censuses showed, the notion that Jews constituted both a religious and a national minority was a contested one. Jewish nationalists and their opponents alike were well aware of the importance of the census in establishing the existence of a Jewish nation as a social fact. In the week following the 1921 census, Otto Bondy, writing in the Czech-Jewish weekly *Rozvoj*, lamented,

> in accordance with the results of the census, our schools will now be teaching with textbooks that state that in our republic alongside so and so many Czechs, there are this many Germans, this many Hungarians, and this many Jews. It is only natural that in a child’s mind Germans, Hungarians, as well as Jews are thus going to be considered foreigners […] and the only ones who can take the credit for this are the Zionists […] through their petitions they made the ministry include a fake (fingované) Jewish nationality in the census regulations that were distributed in the millions across the country.

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40 As Tara Zahra shows the ideal of national democracy promoted by Czech and German nationalists was one of collective rights rather than individual ones, see Tara Zahra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 542.
42 See the sources on the debates preceding both the 1921 and 1930 census.
While Czech-Jews believed that the recognition of Jewish nationality was detrimental to Jews, excluding them from the state-nation community, Jewish nationalists were convinced that nationality status was the first step in revolutionizing the relations between Jews and non-Jews. Depicting the country’s Jews as a community of origin or race (kmen), a notion supported by widespread belief that Jews were culturally and racially different from non-Jews, Jewish nationalists positioned Jews as equal to the country’s other nations defined similarly as ethnic communities. In a series of articles on the results of the first census, Gustav Fleischmann, a Jewish nationalist activist from Prague, analyzed the success of Jewish nationalism by comparing the numbers of ethnic Jews i.e. Jews by religion (Israelites) to the number of Jewish nationals in each locality across the Bohemian Lands. Using religion to demarcate the real Jewish nation, Fleischmann focused on the reasons for the discrepancy between the numbers in the two columns. By suggesting that Jews’ choice of other national belonging than Jewish was the result of intimidation, conformity, or indifference, Fleischmann depicted inconsistency between ethnic and national identities as untruthful and opportunistic. “Either out of habit or fear,” he argued, “many Jews who are both subjectively and objectively Jewish nationals chose to declare their nationality according to language.”

46 Fleischmann, “Výsledky sčítání lidu II,” Židovské zprávy May 22, 1922; see also “Výsledky sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy March 2, 1921.
The blurring of boundaries between religious and national Jewish communities, thereby ascribing ethnic national belonging to all Jews was a common practice among Jewish nationalists. Like many of their nationalist peers, Jewish nationalists believed that the Jewish nation was a given “community of blood.” Individuals fancying themselves as part of a nation different from their ethnic community simply suffered from a sort of ‘false consciousness.’ While Jewish nationalists paid lip service to the importance of both national consciousness and ethnicity in determining nationality, in practice, they believed that the only authentic national option for Jews was that which corresponded to their ethnic origin. In a parliamentary speech criticizing the proposed changes to the 1930 census, Ludvík Singer described his constituency as “the country’s 350,000 Jews, of which 180,000 identify as Jews nationally.” Similarly, in a lecture presented to the Society for the Study of the Minorities Question, Emil Margulies, another prominent Jewish nationalist leader, discussed the issues facing “the 365,000 Jews that live here, the fellow citizens of Jewish nationality in this state,” likewise referring to the approximate number of Jews as defined by religion in Czechoslovakia as constituting the country’s Jewish nation. As the ‘natural’ representatives of this ethnic community, Jewish nationalists presented themselves as a leadership with influence across the country, ensuring that Jews in both East and West acted

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49 For this use of the term, see Zahra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 521.

50 See Ludvík Singer’s speech in the National Assembly on February 22, 1930, NSČ, 1929-1935.

51 Singer February 22, 1930 NSČ, 1929-1935. For Jewish nationalist MPs constituency as including all Jews, see also “Was antwortet die Regierung,” Jüdische Volksstimme February 13, 1930.

as an integrative force unified in their loyalty to their ethnic community and by extension to the Czechoslovak state.

To Jewish nationalists, the right to claim Jewish nationhood was a benchmark for the state’s commitment to Jews’ individual as well as collective rights. Individual Jews’ civil equality had to include their right to express their ethnic national belonging as did the country’s non-Jewish citizens.\(^{53}\) Furthermore, as one of the country’s national minorities, Jews expected to be entitled to both state support for cultural and educational institutions and representation in political and administrative institutions.\(^{54}\) The Jewish nationalist movement ensured, however, that it differed in one important way from other minority nationalists in its attitude towards the census.

In the aftermath of both the 1921 and 1930 census, some national minority activists denounced the results as fake, citing systematic abuse and misconstruction by census commissioners determined to increase the number of Czechoslovaks.\(^{55}\) Similar criticisms were also raised in an article in Židovské zprávy shortly after the first census. “The census results regarding nationality will in no way reflect the truth that much we can already say with confidence,” the author stated. Recounting several instances where the Jewish National Council was called on to intervene when Jews were not allowed to declare Jewish nationality, the author accused the census officials of systematic manipulation of people’s answers even hinting that the abuse was sanctioned by the authorities.\(^{56}\) However, aside

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\(^{54}\) In anticipation of both censuses, Jewish nationalists stressed the importance of the census results for Jews’ political and legal position, see “Sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy January 21, 1921; “Židé a sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy February 3, 1921; “Volkszählung 1930,” Jüdische Volkstimme January 23, 1930.


\(^{56}\) “Výsledky sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy March 2, 1921.
from this initial criticism, the Jewish nationalist press embraced the event itself as well as the statistical material which it produced, thereby consciously setting themselves apart from other minorities. Uncertain of Jews’ choices in the census, the Jewish National Council continued its strategy of cultivating an alliance between itself and the Czech authorities. After all, the government had been forthcoming in meeting Jewish nationalists’ demands. In return, they were now expected to fulfill their role as a loyal partner of the state.

The lack of a national language and Jews’ rights

The belief that Jews had “lost their national language” was at the root of the contested nature of Jews’ nationality status. Even though Jews were considered a separate ethnic group, census makers allowed for Jews alone to adopt a national identity different from their perceived ethnicity. While the census’ privileging of mother tongue as the primary ethnic marker sought to ‘uncover’ individuals’ authentic national belonging, Jews were allowed both “backward-looking” and “forward-looking” national identification. Thus, according to the census regulations, their national flexibility was defined by their ethnic origin, while their national identification depended on their adoption of another nation’s language. In other words, outside observers considered Jews’ language use a political or opportunistic choice rather than an integral part of Jewish identity thereby making change or continuity a sign of political loyalties. So as Germans and Czechs had competed for Jews’ allegiance during the last decades of the Austrian Empire, in Czechoslovakia, Jews’ formalized national

flexibility ensured that the contest continued. As one Jewish nationalist author commented, “Czechs and Germans of every political orientation [...] are preoccupied with the question how they can enlarge their own numbers at the expense of the other nation, they both agree that the Jews are the only ones that can enlarge their numbers (Volkszahl).” While the Jewish nationalist leadership was eager to demonstrate the existence of a Jewish nation through the census results, they also understood the precariousness of the exemption made for Jews in the census regulations. In anticipation of both censuses, the Jewish National Council called on Jews to opt for Jewish nationality if not for any other reason than “to withdraw” from the contest between Czechs and Germans, thereby refusing “to become the foot soldiers (trabanty) of other nationalities.”

As the interwar censuses reflect, the dominant belief among the political and scientific elite was that language reflected individuals’ national belonging. In their view, however, one could only belong to one nation. The designation of mother tongue as an ethnic marker was thus an attempt to determine individuals’ so-called authentic national belonging. In the last decades of the Habsburg Empire, minority nationalists had focused on children and schools as particularly important for the nation’s fortunes. They insisted that children be educated in schools according to their nationality. In Moravia, a law known as

58 As historians show, nationalists’ construction of ‘Germans’ and ‘Czechs’ was an attempt to order and co-opt a social reality where a multiplicity of languages and identifications were the rule rather than the exception. Jeremy King argues that Jews constituted perhaps the only identifiable ethnic group in the Bohemian Lands in the late nineteenth century; a claim supported by Marsha Rozenblit’s research on Jewish identities in late Austria. It is still a question, however, to what extent Jewish ethnic identity was a localized one; see Jeremy King, “The Nationalization of East Central Europe: Ethnicism, Ethnicity, and Beyond,” in Staging the Past: The Politics of Commemoration in Habsburg Central Europe, 1848 to the Present, ed. Maria Bucur and Nancy M. Wingfield (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001), 112-152, here 127; Marsha L. Rozenblit, Reconstructing a National Identity: the Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).


60 See the Czech version of the Jewish National Council’s address published as “Sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy January 21, 1921; and the German version, “Volkszählung,” Jüdische Volksstimme January 27, 1921. For a similar sentiment in 1930, see “Volkszählung 1930” Jüdische Volksstimme February 13, 1930.
Lex Perek came into effect in 1905 (paragraph 20 of the Moravian Compromise) specifying that children could only attend schools in whose language of instruction they were proficient.\(^61\) Over time, as Tara Zahra argues, Lex Perek became the legal basis for the courts’ assertion that the nation has a right to its children, thereby gradually limiting parental rights vis-à-vis the national collective.\(^62\) Furthermore, after 1918, Zahra contends, in accordance with the courts’ reinterpretation of Lex Perek, children in Moravia had to attend a school that corresponded to their nationality; language proficiency was no longer enough.\(^63\) However, while the law was not extended to Bohemia as such, the belief that the nation has a right to its children did inform the continuous nationalist campaigns there to win over more children for one or another nationality.\(^64\) As Zahra shows, in Czechoslovakia, a child’s ethnic origin rather than language ability determined in which school it belonged.

For Jews in Moravia, the construction of the category ‘Jewish nationality’ which lacked a national language allowed them, provided that they opted for Jewish national belonging, a degree of autonomy over their children which parents of Czech and German nationality did not formally possess in the interwar years. In the late 1920s, the German school board in Moravia took the question of Jewish national children to the country’s Supreme Administrative Court.\(^65\) In the case of the child Zuzana Friednerová whom the

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\(^{62}\) Zastra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 511.

\(^{63}\) Zastra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 126-127.

\(^{64}\) Over three hundred cases on contested children in Moravia reached the Supreme Administrative court in the interwar years, two of which involve children of Jewish nationality, although other might involve Jews with a different national belonging, see Zastra, “Reclaiming Children for the Nation,” 504, for information on the collection as a whole. For case of Wilhelm Trattner (of Czech nationality, but of Jewish origin) and František Fried, see also Zastra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 133. However, according to Zastra, every year, thousands of children were ‘reclaimed’ for Czech schools in interwar Czechoslovakia, Zastra, *Kidnapped Souls*, chapter 4.

\(^{65}\) Case of František Fried, NA-Nejvyšší správní soud [Nss] karton 858 doc. 58 case no. 16046/29 d. 7.9.1929 [Fried]; case of Zuzana Friednerová, NA-Nss karton 858 case no. 16836/30 d. 4.11.1930 [Friednerová].
German School Board in Brno/Brünn attempted to reclaim from her Czech school, the courts obtained information from the parents in order to assess the child’s Jewish nationality:

According to the testimony of the child’s mother, Berta Friednerová, the child’s father was born in Těšín and is of Jewish nationality. His parents were and are of Jewish nationality. The child’s father attended German elementary school and uses Czech and German with his father and relatives. The child’s mother is of Jewish nationality, as were and are her parents, she uses Czech and German with her relatives. At home, the child speaks both Czech and German and knows both languages well. The family reads Czech and German newspapers and books. In their day to day life they socialize with both Czechs and Germans.66

Based on this evidence, the court concluded that both parents and child were of Jewish nationality and thus Zuzana could not be reclaimed by the German school board through Lex Perek as she did not belong to the German nation.67 Since there were no public elementary schools with Jewish language of instruction, the court concluded, Zuzana’s parents were not restricted in their choice of school for their child. In a similar case concerning the child František Fried, the court dismissed the German school board’s attempt to de-legitimize Jewish nationality and have language use overrule national belonging. Citing the census regulations of 1920 and the notion that “the majority of Jews had not preserved their original national language,” the court confirmed Jews’ right to claim Jewish nationality regardless of language.68 Thus, Jewish nationality status, particularly the related notion that Jews’ did not have a national language, allowed these Moravian parents formal autonomy in deciding their children’s education. As Zahra’s work shows, in their dealings with the authorities ‘German’ and ‘Czech’ parents adopted such well defined national labels in an attempt to assert their autonomy.69 The two cases involving children of the Jewish nation reflect how these Jewish

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66 Friednerová, 1-2.
67 Friednerová, 4.
68 Fried, 6.
parents stressed the bilingualism of their families in general, and of the child in question in particular, thereby signalling that their children were equally at home in both languages. Whether a conscious strategy or a reflection of social reality, they adopted both a national identity according to origin and multilingualism as a family tradition, a practice that was considered legitimate among Jews, as they lacked their own language, but not for Moravia’s other nations.

This freedom, however, was a double-edged sword as it strengthened the notion that Jews’ choice of language and school was a question of loyalty and guided by opportunism and cultural preferences. Thus, while the subjective character of Jewish nationality did allow Jews to “withdraw” and “transform their relations to the Czechs,” as Jewish nationalists hoped, it also made heavier the responsibility of Jewish parents to act loyally. In the context of intense national struggle, competing school boards, journalists, and politicians called upon Jews to support their nation, thereby making Jews more vulnerable to attacks from the abandoned nation’s head counting champions.

However, if the belief that Jews’ lacked a national language allowed people of Jewish nationality to escape some constrictions, it also restricted German and Hungarian-speaking Jewish nationals’ right to use these minority languages publicly, a development which complicated the Jewish nationalist movement’s agenda in several ways.

In early December 1929, Prager Presse announced that the country’s Supreme Administrative Court had reached a verdict ending the yearlong strife over the question whether or not Jewish nationals were entitled to claim minority language rights.70 The

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70 According to the Czechoslovak language law, if a national minority made up twenty percent of more of a jurisdiction’s total population, minority language speakers had the right to the use of their own language in correspondence with public offices, courts etc, see articles related to section 129 of the Constitutional Charter, as quoted in Rabinowicz, “The Jewish Minority,” 239.
Court’s ruling determined that Czechoslovak law considered “language an expression of national belonging” and concluded that minority language speakers could only claim minority language rights if they were members of the corresponding national community. Thus, members of the Jewish nationality could not claim minority language rights.\(^\text{71}\)

In the case that had been before the court, a German-speaking Jewish national from Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, Philip Rauchberger, and his lawyers argued that Czechoslovak law recognized the ‘fact’ that Jews had lost their own national language and adopted the languages of the people among whom they lived. Thereby, they became members of linguistic communities which did not, however, correspond to their national belonging. Considering that large parts of the Jewish nationality were minority language-speakers, the litigants argued, denying them language rights effectively amounted to discrimination. In their view, Jewish nationals were denied rights that they would otherwise have enjoyed had they declared, for example, German or Hungarian nationality.\(^\text{72}\)

The decision was important to the Jewish nationalist movement. While the Jewish National Council did not play a public part in the case, they had been consulted by Rauchberger’s lawyers.\(^\text{73}\) The previous year, in a series of letters discussing Rauchberger’s chances of winning the appeal, Emil Margulies and Paul März, both prominent Zionists, speculated that Germans and Czechs alike would benefit from a negative outcome for Rauchberger. März suggested that the German Minister of Justice, Robert Mayr-Harting (German Christian Socialist), whose decision was being challenged, was seeking to damage

\(^{71}\) “Jüdische Nationalität und Sprachenrecht,” *Prager Presse* December 5, 1929.


\(^{73}\) Letter from Paul März to Emil Margulies April 12, 1928 NA-Fond Emil Margulies inv.č. 25 karton 9, 1919-1928 doc. 20.
the prospects for Jewish nationalism of gaining further strength among Jews particularly in “mixed communities.” By limiting the rights for German-speakers of Jewish nationality, Mayr-Harting sought to make it necessary for Jews to claim German nationality. The Czech authorities, Margulies believed, were also interested in a negative result for Rauchberger. According to Margulies, this enabled the state “to force us to send our children to Czech schools in German areas,” thus claiming Jewish children for Czech schools. In Margulies’ view both Germans and Czechs were attempting to boost their numbers in areas where they constituted a minority with Jewish ‘souls.’ Margulies especially feared that in German dominated areas, the threat of ‘Czechification’ would be detrimental to the Jewish nationalist movement. Critical of the Jewish nationalist leadership’s strategy to solve the question of Jews’ minority language rights through a legal rather than a political process, Margulies noted that the Minister’s decision, “threatens our political activity, indeed, our Zionist activity as a whole with complete extinction. If this was to become practice [denying Jewish nationals the right to use German publicly] then the result could be that we will be required to speak Czech in the town councils, that is that they will push us out of this office and thereby push out our party as a whole. For you over there [in the Zionist headquarters in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau] this is a theoretical and abstract question – for us here, however, it is a vital matter (Lebensfrage).”

Like their Czech and German nationalist colleagues, Jewish leaders perceived themselves to be under siege from other nationalists attempting to claim Jews for themselves.

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74 Ibid.
76 Letter from Emil Margulies to Paul März April 21, 1928 NA-Fond Emil Margulies inv.č. 25 karton 9, 1919-1928 doc. 23.
77 Ibid.
At the same time, the case tested the state’s tolerance for Jews’ particularity as defined by the Jewish National Council. Jewish nationalists lamented the court’s unwillingness to accept Jews’ distinctive linguistic conditions as out of touch with the spirit of the Czechoslovak Constitution. As *Jüdische Volksstimme* suggested, this decision threatened to revert the gains that Jewish nationalism had achieved in limiting the influence of the German and Hungarian minorities. However, a few months later, when the Statistical Bureau proposed to count linguistic rather than national communities in the upcoming census, a change which would in fact award Jewish minority speakers language rights, Jewish nationalists opposed this motion. To them the Council’s proposal was yet another way in which other nations conspired to claim Jews for themselves and denying Jews their right to Jewish nationhood.

If Jewish nationalists, on the one hand, argued that in the case of Jews language did not determine their national belonging, they were, on the other, aware of the significance of language in legitimizing their claim to nationhood. While both Hebrew and Yiddish were recognized as Jewish languages in public discourse, Zionists in the Bohemian Lands, like most of their peers within the Zionist movement generally, privileged Hebrew as the language of the Jewish national revival. Even though Yiddish could probably have qualified as a mother tongue, according to the Statistical Bureau’s criteria, among the majority of the Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Zionist activists created schools with Hebrew as the language of instruction rather than Yiddish. If Zionists in the Bohemian Lands did

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80 In 1921, the population census recorded 180,855 individuals who claimed Yiddish or Hebrew as their mother tongue. In 1930, 186,642 individuals were counted in that language category. The vast majority were Yiddish-speakers. For statistics, see Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 89.
not waste any ink on this matter, it was perhaps because it was obvious that adopting Yiddish as Jews’ national language was politically impossible and culturally undesirable. In the Habsburg Empire, Yiddish was defined as German and thus denied status as an independent language. In the interwar years, the link to German persisted as reflected in the common word, including in Czech, for Yiddish žargon (jargon), a rather unflattering label that also implied a debased, hybrid character in addition to being a derivative of German rather than an autonomous language, thus compiling Yiddish’s problematic political optics for Zionists in the Bohemian Lands. Furthermore, as Yiddish was predominantly used among Jews in the eastern provinces, Jews in the west would disappear statistically into the communities of German and Czech-speakers.

The perceived lack of a national Jewish language thus complicated Jewish nationalists’ attempts to position Jews as a deserving national minority equally as entitled to public resources for national institutions such as schools as the country’s other national minorities. This lack created particular demands on Jews’ behaviour and served as ammunition for voices critical of Jewish nationalism.

**Imagining Czechoslovak Jewry**

Having secured Jews statistical visibility, Jewish nationalist experts now took on the task of using statistics and social science to make Jews legible as a distinct nation. Thus, while Jewish nationalist leaders assured the new authorities of Jews’ loyalty to the state, Jewish experts documented the Jewish minority’s potential to act as an integrative force in

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81 This perception of Yiddish was common among many educated and middle class Central European Jews, see Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-hatred: The Hidden Language of Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
Czechoslovakia. Jews were, they imagined, alongside the ‘Czechoslovaks,’ one of two cultural communities uniting the newly amalgamated territories.

However, as one might expect, the census results, rife as they were with evidence of Jews’ apparent divergent linguistic and national loyalties, did not play right into the hands of the Jewish nationalists. While Jews in Subcarpathian Ruthenia overwhelmingly chose Jewish nationality (87%), in Slovakia, Moravia, and Bohemia, the numbers were 54%, 47%, and 15% respectively. Thus, Jews continued to appear statistically among other nations in both the 1921 and 1930 census. Yet Zionist activists were not discouraged by what some might have interpreted as a setback, but rather took on the challenge of spinning the outcome in their favour. In fact, by using religion to trace the ‘real’ Jewish nation, the difference in the number of ethnic and national Jews in the country’s regions became evidence for Jews’ particular sociology. Indeed, Jewish experts took on the challenge of explaining that despite their apparent lack of not only a unifying national language, but also a Jewish national consciousness, the Jews in Czechoslovakia were indeed a nation. In their hands, statistics and social science was the vehicle through which the country’s Jews would be made legible as a distinct nation whose religious, cultural, and linguistic differences only momentarily obscured their collective sameness.

While Jewish experts launched their work as a defence against political opponents and antisemitism, it was through their preoccupation with statistics, historical documentation, and Jewish sociology that they came to imagine their Jewish nation. Jewish nationalists invented Czechoslovak Jewry both as a unique branch of the Jewish nation and as a natural part of Czechoslovakia’s ethnographical topography. By submitting all other loyalties and

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identities among Jews, past and present, to one overarching and clearly defined ethnicity, they created Czechoslovakia’s Jewish nation.

One of the central figures among Jewish experts in the Bohemian Lands was the Zionist activist and writer František Friedmann (who used the German Franz, when writing for a German-speaking audience). As a law student at Charles University, Friedmann, then in his early 20s, became involved in Prague Zionist circles in the immediate aftermath of World War I. Soon, he served as an editor and contributor to Židovské zprávy and as a member of the Jewish National Council. In the 1930s, Friedmann acted as a representative of the Jewish Party on Prague’s Municipal Council and was involved in the Jewish nationalist sports movement as the chair of the local club Hagibor. From the outset, Friedmann showed a keen interest in Jewish statistics and sociology and he gradually established himself as the local Jewish statistician par excellence. He wrote extensively on Jewish statistics in Czechoslovakia, and while he did not shy away from pointing his numerical guns at Jewish opponents and non-Jewish critics, he was particularly preoccupied with what he believed was the uniquely complex composition of Czechoslovak Jewry. Friedmann often directed his works at several different audiences simultaneously. At times, when he addressed the Jewish reading public, among whom there were both critics and supporters, Friedmann clearly crafted his text with an eye to the piece’s possible wider

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83 Friedmann became a member of Prague’s Municipal Council in 1931. He was the chair of Hagibor from 1933 to 1939, and he became the last chair of the Jewish nationalist sports organization Makabi in Czechoslovakia in 1938. For a short biography, see “Skvělý úspěch židovské kandidátky v pražských volbách,” Židovské zprávy October 2, 1931; for involvement in Jewish sport, see Archív hlavného města Prahy [AHMP] XIV/0367 Židovský sportovní klub Hagibor and AHMP XIV/0685 Svaz Makabi v ČSR.

84 For an example of his command of local statistical data as well as Jewish statistics, see František Friedmann, “Pražští Židé,” Židovský kalendář 1929/1930: 148-207; for his reputation as a statistician, see “Skvělý úspěch židovské kandidátky v pražských volbách,” Židovské zprávy October 2, 1931; and his essay on Bohemian Jewish statistics, František Friedmann, “Židé v Čechách,” in Židé a židovské obce v Čechách v minulosti a v přítomnosti, vol. 1, ed. Hugo Gold (Brno-Praha: Židovské nakladatelství, 1934), 729-735.
distribution among journalists and in political circles.\textsuperscript{85} He also lectured and wrote for non-Jewish audiences specifically in the form of both overtly polemical pamphlets and scholarly articles.\textsuperscript{86} However, in addition to his readership at home, Friedmann was also eager to establish himself as the authority on Czechoslovak Jewish statistics in the Jewish social scientific community. He sought to position his expertise as significant both by questioning the foremost authority on Jewish statistics, Arthur Ruppin, on this particular community and by emphasizing the wider importance of Czechoslovak Jewry for the advancement of Jewish statistics.\textsuperscript{87} Friedmann believed that due to its uniquely complex character, on the crossroads between East and West, the Jews of Czechoslovakia formed a microcosm through which scientists could study Diaspora Jewry as a whole. His studies of Czechoslovak Jewry led him to believe, in contrast to many other Zionist writers, that territorial relocation was not necessary for the future of the Jewish nation. In fact, to Friedmann, Czechoslovakia, with its bridging and blending of Eastern and Western Jewries, was the Promised Land. Even though

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\textsuperscript{85} This is especially true for his attacks on Czech-Jews and articles such as the ones challenging the efforts to institute a \textit{numerus clausus} in Czechoslovak universities as well as his articles on Jewish children and schools. For Czech-Jews, see František Friedmann, \textit{Mrvnost či Oportunita?}, for \textit{numerus clauses and schools, see for example, “Jak to ve skutečnosti vyhlíží s cizinci na vysokých školách českých,” Židovské zprávy December 6, 1929; “Vysoké školy české ve světle čislic,” Židovské zprávy December 13, 1929; “Židovské děti na národních školách,” Židovské zprávy April 20, 1932.}
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\textsuperscript{86} Friedmann published a defence against what he perceived as an antisemitic attack by the Czech social democrat Josef Hudec, František Friedmann, \textit{Na obranu židovství, Kritické poznámky k brožuře poslance Josefa Hudce}, (Praha: Židovské zprávy, 1920). For a lecture on the Jewish Party held as part of a lecture series on the political parties in Czechoslovakia organized by the Union of Czechoslovak Student Societies, see František Friedmann, \textit{Strana Židovská} (Praha: Kulturní odbor ústředního svazu českoslov. studentsva: Cyklus přednášek o ideologii českoslov. politických stran VII, 1931); for more scholarly endeavours, see the summary of his lecture held in November 1933 in the Society for the Study of the Minority Question, “Asimilace a sionismus u Židů v ČSR (Z přednášky dra F. Friedmannna dne 10. XI. 1933) in Národnostní Obzor 4, no. 2 (1934): 159-160. For his two-part article published in the Society’s journal, the only study on the Jewish national minority in the journal’s ten years, see František Friedmann, “Židovská národní menšina na Podkarpatské Rusi I,” Národnostní Obzor 4, no. 3 (1934): 185-192 and “Židovská národní menšina na Podkarpatské Rusi II,” Národnostní Obzor 4, no. 4 (1934): 269-277.
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Friedmann remained a committed Jewish nationalist, his relationship with the Zionist leadership became increasingly strained in the mid 1930s. Friedmann, however, remained a central figure in Prague Jewish society as the editor of the Jewish community’s bulletin, *Věstník pražské židovské náboženské obce*. During the German occupation, he continued his involvement although now under radically different conditions. In the summer of 1943, he became the head of Prague’s Council of Elders, the German-appointed Jewish leadership. Friedmann survived the war in Prague alongside a handful of other Jews “with Aryan family ties.”

In much of his work František Friedmann used statistics and social science both to further the Jewish nationalist cause within Jewish society and to shape the way in which Jews and non-Jews alike perceived Czechoslovakia’s Jewish Question. Friedmann’s 1927 polemical pamphlet, *Mravnost či Oportunita?*, is a case in point. In this piece, Friedmann intended to fight off the Czech-Jewish movement’s latest efforts to expand their activities in Moravia, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia by asserting that their program effectively amounted to denationalization, as for the majority of the country’s Jews their sense of ethnic national belonging had remained intact.

Drawing on the power of numbers, Friedmann used statistics derived from the 1921 census as well as recent elections to support his claim that the majority of the country’s Jews identified nationally as Jews and had thus remained loyal to their ancestral community. In charting the boundaries of the Jewish nation, Friedmann adopted the census makers’ use of

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88 Friedmann filled six legal complaints against the Zionist executive between 1935-1938 for misconstruction of his views or attempts to rid him of his position on Prague’s Municipal Council, see “Nelze už mlčet,” *Židovské zprávy* February 25, 1938.
89 Friedmann was most likely among the few thousand Jews married to non-Jews who survived the war in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. See Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 134.
religion as a marker of Jewish ethnicity. Thus, in Friedmann’s hands the census’ counting of 79,777 Jews in Bohemia, 45,306 in Moravia-Silesia, 135,918 in Slovakia, and 93,341 in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, recorded Jewish nationhood as a social fact.\textsuperscript{90} To Friedmann, the census’ question regarding nationality allowed him to measure the character of Jews’ national consciousness. In the eastern regions, Friedmann suggested, Jews had naturally chosen Jewish nationality having been spared the de-nationalization efforts of Czech-Jewish activists, who, in contrast to Zionist leaders, had not “dared” to travel there in the tumultuous postwar months.\textsuperscript{91} In the Bohemian Lands, however, where Czech-Jewish and German-Jewish assimilationists alike, according to Friedmann, had unleashed a “campaign of terror and propaganda,” intimidating Jews by suggesting that expressing their “real” national feelings would label them as “foreigners,” the situation was quite different.\textsuperscript{92} In Bohemia and Moravia, about 50\% of the region’s Jews opted for Czechoslovak nationality, while 35\% chose German national belonging.

The so-called terror campaign’s effect on Bohemian Jews and the subsequent statistical distortion of the real character of their national feelings caused by it, Friedmann argued, were evident when one compared census and electoral statistics. While 15\% of Bohemian Jews opted for Jewish nationality in the census, 52\% of Jewish voters in Bohemia, Friedmann claimed, choose a Jewish nationalist party on their ballot.\textsuperscript{93} This was a typical rhetorical strategy which Friedmann employed continuously in his writing. By simultaneously insisting upon and questioning the ability of statistics to capture social reality, Friedmann attempted to persuade his readers of his expertise and commitment to the

\textsuperscript{90} Friedmann, \textit{Mrvnost či Oportunita?}, 45.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 47-48.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 29.
truth. Thus, in the case of Bohemia, where a relatively small number of Jews opted for Jewish national belonging, he defined the census data as unreliable due to the politicization of the process and the lack of secrecy surrounding people’s answers to the census’ questions. The election results, however, assuming that each vote gained by a Jewish party was cast by a Jew, provided a much more accurate picture of Jews’ ethnic loyalty in Bohemia. Similarly, he insisted, while “50.97% of all Jewish citizens in Czechoslovakia declared Jewish nationality, 72% voted for a Jewish party.” However, although Jews demonstrated overwhelming support for the Jewish nationalist program and regardless of all the other objective signs of the existence of a Jewish national community in Czechoslovakia, Friedmann mocked the Czech-Jews, “you still insist that the Jewish nation was dissolved two thousand years ago?”

Friedmann’s statistical acrobatics aside, the fact remained that Jews in Czechoslovakia did not share a national language and thus he and other Jewish nationalist experts turned to other well-known markers of nationhood such as shared origins, historical continuity, and territorial unity in order to construct the country’s Jewish nation.

The ethnic nation

Like other minority nationalisms in the late Habsburg Empire, Jewish nationalists believed that their nation was a community of origin. By defining national belonging as inherent rather than chosen or adopted, minority nationalists envisioned themselves as restoring an

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94 Ibid., 29.
95 Ibid., 71.
96 Ibid., 72.
alleged natural order of distinct ethnic nations. This backward-looking notion of national belonging not only projected ethnic identities on to historical communities, but also legitimized these nationalists’ attempts to restore individuals and communities to their ‘real’ nation, thereby doing away with adopted and artificial identifications. To these activists, national identity was an inherited natural attribute rather than an adopted or chosen political or cultural identification.

In the Bohemian Lands, Jewish nationalists’ image of their community of origin was shaped by these broader ethno-nationalist discourses. As noted earlier, Czech statistical experts agreed on Jews’ ethnic distinctiveness, but differed on the question whether or not Jews were a nation. In making their case for the truth of Jews’ nationhood, Jewish experts cast Jews’ experience as similar to that of Czechs and Slovaks, thereby representing their community as one of the minority nations denied national self-expression and recognition by Austria. However, expert-activists like František Friedmann believed that Jews’ nationhood had not only been deliberately undermined by the authorities, but also by “renegades,” Jews acting as fervent and chauvinist Czech and German nationalists, and who renounced their “own blood.” Drawing on the Czech philosopher František Krejčí’s work on ethnic loyalty as an ethical obligation, Friedmann suggested that “they [assimilationist Jews] denied the existence of their own nation in order to ease their conscience and avoid being accused of immorality.” The Czechoslovak state’s recognition of Jews as one of its national

97 For the ethnification of national belonging, see Stourzh, “Ethnic Attribution in Late Imperial Austria;” Mills Kelly, “Last Best Chance or Last Gasp?”
99 Friedmann, Strana Židovská, 6-9.
100 Ibid., 6.
minorities, suggested Friedmann, both acknowledged and endorsed “the national awakening of [this] the oldest of the small nations.”

While Friedmann was eager to document Jews’ essential sameness, the census’ exposure of the divergence in Jews’ national identification begged explanation. While Jews opted overwhelmingly for Jewish nationality in the eastern regions, in the western ones, fewer Jews chose Jewish as their national belonging. Friedmann believed that the census results reflected the uniquely complex character of Czechoslovak Jewry consisting of both modernized western Jews as well as traditional eastern Jewish communities.

In Friedmann’s view, Bohemian Jewry constituted a typical Western Jewry characterized by secularization, assimilation, and a somewhat eroded sense of Jewish national consciousness. He identified Moravia and Slovakia as “transitional” types. While assimilation had undermined Jewish national culture and identity in some areas, the majority of communities here had withstood such pressures and retained a sense of Jewish national belonging. In contrast to the communities in the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia, however, Friedmann believed that the Jews of Subcarpathian Ruthenia constituted an authentic Jewish national community complete with a national language, and distinct Jewish customs, beliefs, and world view. The socio-economic backwardness and traditionalism of these Jews, and the region as such, Friedmann believed, had left their organic national life intact, as documented by the ‘fact’ that more than 85 percent of the region’s Jews declared

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101 Ibid., 3.
102 These distinctions accompanied almost all of Friedmann’s longer studies of Czechoslovak Jewry, see for example Friedmann, *Mravnost či Oportunita?*, 45-46; *Einige Zahlen*, 9.
103 Friedmann believed that the actual number of Jewish nationals in Bohemian was much higher than the census suggested as more Jews voted for Jewish parties here than opted for Jewish nationality, see Friedmann, *Mravnost či Oportunita?*, 29; *Einige Zahlen*, 24.
Jewish nationality “spontaneously and without any propaganda [campaigns]” in the country’s first census.107

In Friedmann’s view, the authentic Jewish national life found in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was not only a result of traditionalism and underdevelopment. The density of the community, comprising about 14 percent of the province’s population, created large and compact Jewish communities nurturing a vibrant and organic Jewish life. The notion of a correlation between the density of Jews’ ethnic community and their level of Jewish national consciousness was noted by Jewish and non-Jewish experts alike as a feature of Jews’ particular sociology.108 In Bohemia, Friedmann observed, the movement of Jews from the countryside to the region’s cities, first and foremost to Prague “has made it possible for Bohemian Jews to preserve their unique national character to a much greater degree than Jewish societies in other countries where Jews make up a similar percentage of the overall population.”109 Urbanization had not only sustained Jews’ nationhood, the concentration of Jews in the country’s capital and other major cities fuelled the Jewish national awakening. As Friedmann professed, “[n]ew Jewish centres have emerged, new urban communities that are more resistant to assimilation. The disappearing [village and small town] communities do not signal the dissolution of Jewry, but rather the possibility of new life.”110 Thus,

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107 Friedmann, Mravnost či Oportunita?, 46-50.
108 Gustav Fleischmann ‘documented’ this trend in his study of the 1921 census results for the Bohemian Lands, see for example Fleischmann, “Výsledky sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy May 5, 1922; “Výsledky sčítání lidu III,” Židovské zprávy June 30, 1922. For non-Jewish experts’ observations of this trend, see Antonín Boháč, “Hlavní město Praha: Studie statistická I. cast,” Československý statistický vestník 3 (1922): 353-480, here 415; Friedmann drew explicitly on Boháč’s study in his own work, see Mravnost či Oportunita?, 50-51.
110 Ibid.
Eastern and Western Jewries alike were governed by a particular sociology which albeit
different on the surface reflected an underlying sameness.\footnote{For an article making
a similar argument for all of Czechoslovak Jewry, see Friedmann, \textit{Einige Zahlen}, 6-7.}

Placing an emphasis on sociological laws was not, however, the only way in which
Friedmann sought to establish both Jews’ national distinctiveness and the superiority of
Jewish nationalism. He also coined a social scientific term “fluctuation” (\textit{fluktuace}) to
describe the process whereby Jews opportunistically adopt and switch national identities
different than their “real” one, thereby distinguishing this phenomenon from assimilation.\footnote{“Asimilace a sionismus u Židů v ČSR (Z přednášky dra F. Friedmanná dne 10. XI. 1933),” 159.}

In Czech nationalist discourse people who “switched sides” were known as, for example,
“hermaphrodites” or “renegades.”\footnote{Tara Zahra’s work deals extensively with the creation of hard national boundaries and the methods used to marginalize people who were perceived to evade or to be indifferent to ‘their’ nation. See Zahra, \textit{Kidnapped Souls}.} While Friedmann used “renegades” about Jews who adopted so-called foreign nationality, that is a national identity different than their real Jewish one, “fluctuation” described Jews’ exchanging one foreign nationality for another at opportune moments such as the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, when Magyar Jews became Slovak and German ones Czech.\footnote{Friedmann, \textit{Na obranu židovství}, 49; \textit{Strana Židovská}, 8-9.} In \textit{Mravnost či Oportunita?}, Friedmann denounced Czech-Jews’ efforts to expand their activities promoting Czech among Jews in Moravia as encouraging fluctuation. Claiming that Czech-Jews were making German Jews adopt Czech nationality in the wake of the new political order, Friedmann attacked the Czech-Jewish campaign for urging a superficial and insincere reorientation among Jews. These activities harmed Czech as well as Jewish interests by encouraging Jews to fake a Czech national commitment.\footnote{Friedmann, \textit{Mravnost či Oportunita?}, 43.}
The term fluctuation and its use embodied the way in which politics and social science were intertwined in Friedmann’s work. On the one hand, its reference to national side switching, indifference, and opportunism cast Czech-Jews as promoting immorality aside from causing antisemitism. Yet, Friedmann’s admission that fluctuation took place among Jews and his denunciation of such opportunism gave the impression that Jewish nationalists were both honest and ready to put an end to Jews’ deceptive behaviour. On the other hand, as a social scientific term Friedmann used it to neutralize the incriminating effects of perceptions of Jews’ opportunism and insincerity.116 When addressing scholarly audiences, Friedmann depicted “fluctuation” as the result of state policies which had encouraged Jews to abandon their ethnic nationality and adopt that of the state-nation.117 Thereby, Friedmann presented Jews’ changing national identifications as an outcome of their recent historical experience with de-nationalization rather than an enduring aspect of Jews’ collective character.118 Thus, the term’s scientific appearance both disguised its political origin and strengthened the position of Jewish nationalists like Friedmann by presenting their ideological stance as objectively moral in contrast to the deviance of fluctuation.

If the statistical exposure of a significant lack of overlap between the country’s ethnic and national Jewish communities was somewhat problematic for Jewish nationalists, then the collection and reproduction of statistical data about Jews, in contrast, facilitated the notion that Jews’ collectively constituted a distinct social body governed by a particular sociology. The typology of Eastern and Western Jewry, which Friedmann borrowed from Jewish sociology, in turn provided him with an interpretative framework that ordered and explained

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116 “Asimilace a sionismus u Židů v ČSR (Z přednášky dra F. Friedmanna dne 10. XI. 1933),” 159-160.
118 According to John Efron, the emphasis on historical experience over race in shaping Jews’ character was typical for Jewish race scientists in the early 1900s, see Efron, Defenders of the Race, 174.
the cultural variations among Jews, a temporary deviation from the natural state of ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic sameness which he imagined Jewish nationhood to be.

Like his colleagues among Czech and German experts, Friedmann was seeking order in the seeming chaos of divergent cultures, languages, and loyalties in the newly unified territories. By elevating ethnicity to the most important aspect of identity, Friedmann sought to unify the country’s Jewish communities through a process of internal homogenization and external differentiation. Thereby, Friedmann divested Jews discursively from their local environments, loyalties, and identifications and marginalized the importance of other categories of identification among Jews. What mattered to Friedmann was not the intense rivalry between different Hasidic dynasties or the profound divisions between Neolog and Orthodox communities, between Prague, Košice/Kassa/Kaschau/Kashoy/Koshutse, and Mukačevo Jews, nor was he interested in Jews’ other, overlapping, and at times conflicting, identifications defined by place, language, class, or gender. Friedmann sought a homogenous and legible ethnic whole, not the chaos of individuals’ identities and loyalties.

In Czechoslovakia, the ethnification of individuals and communities was forcefully expressed in the census design. Census makers explicitly prescribed a set of legitimate ethnic identities and forbade answers which stated multiple nationalities or spatial identities, thereby formally marginalizing and erasing the significance of other forms of identification. In this way, statistics produced ethnic groups. While Jews could formally choose nationality, the census categories and definitions prescribed Jews ethnic

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119 See, for example, Jeremy King’s work for this process, King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*.

120 An important example of this is the way in which the demand for one mother tongue erased the multilingualism of individuals and communities, see “Instrukce pro sčítacího komisaře a revisora,” *Československý statistický věstník* 2 (1921): 143-148, here 145. Statisticians at the forefront of the debate rejected national identities defined by space citing examples such as Carpathian-Rus, Moravian, South Slav or some other spatial rather than ethnic nationality, see Dobroslav Krejči, “Má se při našem příštím sčítání lidu zjišťovatí národnost nebo řeč mateřská?” *Československý statistický věstník* 1 (1920): 275-285, here 279-280.
distinctiveness. Not only did numbers and officially sanctioned categories make Jews visible as an ethnic and national community, but they also lent this image objectivity and truth. If statistics ‘revealed’ Jews’ sociological distinctiveness, characteristic of a real nation, as some argued, then the way in which Jewish nationalists made use of them was intended to inscribe Jews as one among other nations, thereby strengthening Jewish nationalists’ demand for recognition and equality.

The historical nation

The privileging of ethnic boundaries was not only a way in which experts and nationalist activists ordered and made sense of their present, but also shaped the way in which they imagined their nation’s past. Jewish nationalists justified their claims to nationhood by projecting ethnic boundaries and loyalties backward in time, presenting their current state as a loss of nationhood. In other words, Jewish nationalists built anachronistically uniform notions of Jewishness, casting them on to diverse Jewish societies and cultures. Doing so allowed them to imagine a narrative of the nation’s historical continuity.

In the interwar years, urbanization and perceived assimilation intensified efforts to preserve the Jewish past. Local museums had been established in Mladá Boleslav/Jungbunzlau and Prague in the early 1900s, and in the 1920s more museums and Judaica collections followed, in addition to scholarly journals and books devoted to the history of Jews in Czechoslovakia.121 As the long list of authors, both Jewish and non-

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Jewish, engaged in Jewish historical research attest, František Friedmann was part of a much broader community of scholars ‘uncovering’ Jews’ past. The multiplicity of agendas driving this scholarship such as local patriotism, Jewish nationalism, nostalgia, personal and professional ambitions, as well as resistance to antisemitism reflect that these endeavours were not limited to Zionist or Jewish nationalist circles. Rather, the search for a useable past was a way in which Jews imagined themselves at home in Czechoslovakia. In this context, Friedmann’s historical studies are particularly telling precisely because his work recast Jews’ past in ways that were both personally meaningful and politically useful.

In his 1929 study of the history of Prague Jewry, František Friedmann created a narrative of national survival and cultural adaptation which challenged the belief that Prague Jews were a bastion of Germaness in the country’s capital. He constructed an image of a Jewry that “since the earliest times was equally as conscious of its belonging to the Jewish nation as was the [city’s] non-Jewish population.”122 Thus, Jews perceived themselves as a nation and were identified as such by the peoples among whom they lived. Drawing on contemporary notions of the relationship between language and nationhood, Friedmann made the use of Hebrew as “a cultural and national language” the central marker of Jews’ nationhood. Only with the introduction of the Austrian state’s Germanization policies in the 1780s, he claimed, were Jews forced to adopt the German language collectively. However, because Jews continued to live socially and culturally separate from non-Jews, Friedmann argued, their “Germaness” was only a “veneer.”123 Indeed, contrary to popular belief, he insisted, Prague’s “German” schools were not vehicles for assimilation. Rather, because Jews were concentrated in a few areas of the city, the schools in these neighbourhoods had

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122 Friedmann, “Pražští Židé,” 192.
123 Ibid., 193-194.
an overwhelmingly Jewish student body. In such an environment, Friedmann maintained, "[t]hey could not lose their national consciousness, because in the schools, where they could have been re-nationalized, they found themselves among their own kind."\textsuperscript{124} Indeed, these ‘German’ schools strengthened social ties between Jews and nurtured rather than destroyed Jewish national consciousness.\textsuperscript{125} Friedmann’s teleological notion about the transmission of nationhood through early socialization and language privileged the primacy of national identities over other collective categories of identification. Friedmann invented Prague’s Jewish nation. Unable to locate the accepted objective marker of nationality, namely a Jewish national mother tongue, in contemporary Prague Jewry, Friedmann employed historical evidence and statistical material to paint an image of an organic Jewish national culture obscured for the uninformed by the community’s German language use, a result of state coercion.\textsuperscript{126}

Friedmann’s narrative painted an image of historical continuity, a pointed challenge to the voices which continued to question Jews’ nationhood precisely because they believed that Jews lacked a national tongue. Indeed, Friedmann’s work showed not only how Jews’ ethnic mother tongue was destroyed by state coercion, but also that the subsequent collective adoption of a foreign language had actually sustained Jews’ ethnic national cohesion. Thus, in the case of Jews, mother tongue did not denote membership of a national community as it did, Friedmann agreed, for other ethnic groups like Germans and Czechs. Even though census makers, as discussed earlier, chose to count national rather than linguistic

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 195.  
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 200-202.  
\textsuperscript{126} There was not consensus among social scientists as to what exactly constituted ‘mother tongue.’ Some defined it as the language a person learned first, linking the person to his or her ancestral community, others as the language which a person was most familiar with and in which he or she thought or spoke. For a discussion of the term and critique of mother tongue’s status as an objective marker, see Dobroslav Křejči, “Má se při našem přístím sčítani lidu zjišťovati národnost nebo řeč mateřská?” Československý statistický věstník 1 (1920): 275-285.
communities, the threat of statistical erasure moved Jewish nationalists to evoke Jews and Czechs’ shared memory of Austrian de-nationalization practices.

In an essay on Jewish statistics in Bohemia, Friedmann observed that until the late 1800s, Jews both self-identified as a nation and were perceived as such by the scientific community. “It is interesting to note,” he observed, that in 1851 “all Jews in the Bohemian Lands declared Jewish nationality. Indeed, in official works, published on the basis of this census, Jews are treated both as a religious group and a national community.”

Indeed, the foremost representative of nineteenth-century Austrian ethnography and statistics, Karl Freiherr von Czoernig, Friedmann argued, “dealt with Jews both historically and statistically as a nation.” By 1880, as the census became a political tool rather than a search for truth, the authorities deliberately erased the Jewish nation as a statistical fact. By counting language of use instead of nationality and by defining Yiddish as German, Jews across the empire were assigned a foreign nationality regardless of their origin and national feelings.

In his work, Friedmann challenged incriminating discourses about Jews by employing well known tropes from the Czech nationalist narrative revealing how the adoption of a foreign language and statistical manipulation obscured the social reality of a living Jewish nation. His use of sociology and statistics to explain Jewish society made the

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129 Friedmann, “Židé v Čechách,” 733; “Sčítaní lidu v duchu ústavy,” Židovské zprávy July 4, 1930. As Jews were not recognized as a Volksstamm (this category was defined by linguistic criteria, and Yiddish did not qualify as a legitimate language), they were, according to historians, often counted as belonging to other groups such as Germans and Poles. For Jewish activists’ response in Galicia, see Joshua Shanes, “Neither Germans nor Poles: Jewish Nationalism in Galicia before Herzl, 1883-1897,” Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003): 191-213, here 196-197. For the efforts of Jewish nationalist politicians to have Jews recognized as a national minority in the Austrian Reichsrat before the First World War, see Robert S. Wistrich, The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 416-417.
Jews legible to audiences unfamiliar with Jewish culture. The way in which he imagined the Jewish past enabled him not only to take pride in the Jewish nation’s cultural resilience withstanding attempts to erode its national unity, but also to cast Jews as victims of de-nationalization rather than opportunist ‘Germans’ and ‘Czechoslovaks.’ Indeed, this image of the historical continuity of the Jewish nation positioned the Jewish national awakening as a nation’s regeneration  not its invention as some critics claimed.

The territorial nation

In the same way that the narratives of shared origin and historical continuity bound the image of Czechoslovak Jewry, writers also constructed the territorial boundaries of the country’s Jewish nation. In their works, Friedmann and other authors chronicled well-established historical networks of scholarship and kinship between the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. They presented the Jewish community in the Bohemian Lands as a “historical reservoir” from which Jewish migrants ventured out strengthening Jewries in the neighbouring regions.130 Indeed, challenging the notion allegedly spread by “Magyar Jews” that Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia were “the descendants of Judaized Khazars who colonized Hungary with the Magyars,” Friedmann argued that Jewish settlement in this region was much more recent and of a different character. “There was not a substantial community here until the 18th Century,” Friedmann insisted, “[when] Northern Hungary became the destination for Jews from the Bohemian Lands. The community leaders, especially, originated in our region.”131 Thus,

131 Friedmann, “Židovská národní menšina I,” 190; this point was also made by Moravian Jewry’s statistician Theodor Haas, “Die Juden im Mähren nach den Ergebnissen der letzten Volkszählung,” Jüdische Volksstimme November 1, 1921.
Friedmann not only established cultural affinity and kinship between the newly amalgamated territories, but also claimed that these regions were in fact a historical entity whose boundaries and integrative networks Magyar nationalists had attempted to dismantle. Eager to distinguish Jews from “colonizers” like the Germans and Magyars, he suggested that the historical ties between the Jews in the country’s various regions attested to their integrative qualities. While the German and Hungarian national minorities ‘pulled’ Czechoslovakia apart, the Jewish and the Czechoslovak nations’ cultural and physical cohesion straddling the country from east to west attested to the authenticity and true character of Czechoslovakia’s borders.

In constructing this narrative, Friedmann created a Jewish version of the Czechoslovakist trope of the Great Moravian state as the first Czechoslovakia, in order to make Jews tribal unity and historical continuity legible to his readers. According to Czechoslovakist ideology, the historian Elisabeth Bakke shows, Czechs and Slovaks traced their shared origin and linguistic sameness to Great Moravia, a national and political unity which was destroyed by the more powerful Hungarian “invaders.” According to this discourse, the Czechoslovak nation’s unity was disrupted territorially, historically, and linguistically by external forces although the two tribes’ affinity was maintained by cultural exchanges in which the Czechs, as the allegedly more developed branch of the Czechoslovak nation, sustained the Slovaks. Similarly, Friedmann constructed a narrative in which Moravia was the place of origin of Czechoslovakia’s Jews. According to his view, the

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132 The notion that Germans gradually Germanized the Slav heartlands is discussed in Mark Cornwall’s “Struggle on the Czech-German Language Border, 1880-1940.”
affinity between western and eastern Jewries was sustained by a continuous influx of western cultural and intellectual elites to the east. Friedmann thereby employed familiar and legitimate narratives from the Czech context to document Jews’ territorial cohesion to a wider readership.135

While Jews’ constructed ethnic sameness created firm boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, the belief that Czechoslovak Jewry constituted a uniquely complex branch of the Jewish nation was an equally important part of the way in which Jewish nationalists imagined their nation. Local narratives of Jews’ cultural coherence and achievements, the longevity of the communities as well as their importance to the local environment formed a significant part of the scholarly endeavours and publishing projects of Jewish activists perhaps most prominently embodied in Hugo Gold’s multivolume book project published between 1929 and 1934.136 Hugo Gold, a Brno/Brünn-based Zionist in charge of the publishing house Jüdischer Buch- und Kunstverlag, edited and published these encyclopaedic volumes which he dedicated to its deceased founder Max Hickl, a prominent Zionist cultural engineer, and Gold’s uncle.

Written by a multiplicity of authors both Jewish and non-Jewish, these substantial books chronicled the histories of communities, listing their rabbis and dignitaries, depicting their synagogues, schools, and cemeteries, and continuously inscribing Jews as a nation

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135 Similarly, the Jewish National Council had called on Jews to choose Jewish national identity and vote for Jewish parties by employing the Czechoslovakist trope “strength through numbers,” see “Sčítání lidu,” Židovské zprávy January 21, 1921.
136 Hugo Gold, ed., Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart (Brünn: Jüdischer Buch-und Kunstverlag, 1929); Hugo Gold, ed., Die Juden und die Judengemeinde Bratislava in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart (Brünn: Jüdischer Buchverlag, 1932); Hugo Gold, ed., Židé a židovské obce v Čechách v minulosti a v přítomnosti, vol. 1 (Brno-Praha: Židovské nakladatelství, 1934). Hugo Gold saw this work as a step towards establishing a Jewish museum in Brünn encompassing both collections of artefacts and an archive, a process which needed to come under way “before it is too late,” see Gold, Juden Mährens, 3. While the Moravian volume was in German, the Bohemian one was in both Czech and German.
living alongside, but separate from, Czechs and Germans. Documenting both the history of vanishing rural communities and the growing urban ones, the volumes, Hugo Gold noted, were intended to “awaken in Jews love of their past which is closely linked with the history of their native country (vlast) in an effort to preserve it [the history] so that future generations won’t forget those roots from which their strength grows.” In addition to the alphabetically organized entries on individual communities, each volume contained essays concerned with Bohemian and Moravian Jewries’ particular history and characteristics, and of course, statistical essays. As Hugo Gold noted in the preface to the Moravian volume, this was a conscious attempt to preserve the memory of a vanishing culture uniquely its own both in its Moravian and Jewish contexts.

If Jews were to imagine themselves as Bohemian or Moravian Jews through these local narratives of ethnic, historical, and territorial unity, so were non-Jews to come to know Jews. In the preface to the Bohemian volume published in 1934, Gold professed, “I present this third volume of my life’s work to the public, at a time when a storm is tossing about the Jewish nation […] so that non-Jews (sic) can recognize the great contribution that the Jewish population has made and in order for the Jewish nation to draw new love, new strength, and new faith from a past so rich in honour and glory.”

Characteristically, these works constructed a “Moravian Jewry” and a “Bohemian Jewry” by projecting backwards notions of ethnic community, thereby simultaneously creating homogenous Jewish societies whose physical boundaries corresponded to those of Czechoslovakia’s regions and reinforcing the image of western and eastern Jews’ distinct

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137 See for example the entry for Boskowitz/Boskovice, in Gold, Juden Mährens, 123.
139 Gold, “Slovo úvodem.”
histories. Through these narratives of ethnic sameness, historical continuity, and territorial belonging, Jewish nationalists imagined their community as one whose physical boundaries coincided with those of Czechoslovakia. At the same time, however, the boundaries of the Jewish nation also extended well beyond Czechoslovakia. Jews were, after all, widely perceived as dispersed across the globe and, as Jewish nationalists were at pains to demonstrate, constituted one people regardless of the heterogeneity of their languages, customs, and physical appearance. While Friedmann adopted Zionist narratives of exile and crisis, imbedded in much of the Jewish statistical work, he employed the tropes of Western Jewry’s pending dissolution and Eastern Jewry’s authentic nationhood to construct Czechoslovakia as a Promised Land. Czechoslovakia, Friedmann suggested, constituted a Jewish laboratory contributing in important ways to Jewish social scientific knowledge. Its significance, he believed, was neither in its size nor its density, but in the unique circumstance that the community united an Eastern (Ostjudentum) and Western Jewry (Westjudentum). It thereby formed a microcosm “through which we can obtain an informative picture of the development trends within European Diaspora Jewry as such. On the basis of this [knowledge] we will be able to extract conclusions regarding the general nature of the Jewish problem and its possible solution.”

Friedmann’s emphasis on the unique complexity, however, contained a controversial subtext. He believed that the simultaneous trends of intense urbanization, creating large and vibrant Jewish communities, and westward migration, resulting in a physical and spiritual replenishing of the otherwise dwindling Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands, created the conditions for a sustainable Jewish national future in Czechoslovakia. Thus, by the mid

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140 Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 126.
1930s, as reflected in his social scientific work, Friedmann rejected the notion that territorial relocation was necessary for Jews’ national regeneration. Friedmann’s vision of his Jewish community at home in Czechoslovakia informed much of his work. While he returned to the biblical past to discover ‘authentic’ Jewish national traditions, he rejected the absolute dismissal of the exilic experience. Rather, Friedmann discovered Jews’ continuous national life hidden under the veneer of foreign appearance or assimilation. The problem to him was not territorial displacement, but Jews’ lack of ethnic pride. To him, Zionism’s main purpose was to restore Jews’ honour, “to give Jews a spine.”

**Conclusion**

While Friedmann’s rejection of territorial relocation problematized his relationship with the Zionist leadership, his and other Jewish experts’ work was central to Czechoslovak Zionism. As in neighbouring Germany, Jewish statistics and social science was both a political and tactical device as well as a significant mode of nation building. In the Bohemian Lands, Jewish nationalists employed statistics and science as a way of de-legitimizing the position of their opponents. By presenting Jewish ethnicity as a social fact, and their predictions and observations as objective and scientific, Jewish nationalists positioned their vision as inevitable and Jewish nationalism as the only solution to the ‘Jewish Problem,’ in this case co-existence and equality. The crisis in Jewish life, they believed, was partly caused by inept Jewish leaders. The Jewish national movement, in contrast, was committed to a rational program based on scientific and accurate knowledge about Jews.

142 For the biblical ethos as an expression of an authentic Jewish ethical tradition, see Friedmann, *Na obranu židovství*, 43-48.
143 Friedmann, *Mravnost či Oportunita?*, 82.
144 Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, 127.
Drawing on the authority and legitimacy of science, Jewish nationalist leaders attempted to bolster their position as the true representatives of the Jewish nation in the eyes of Jews and non-Jews alike. To them, the inclusion of Jewish nationality in the country’s census was necessary for their position of neutral loyalty, as it allowed Jews to withdraw statistically, in their minds, from the struggle between the country’s national groups. The statistical creation of an ethnic Jewish nationality allowed them to construct an image of Jews as distinct from the country’s other national minorities. Rather than a threat to Czechoslovakia, Jews were, Jewish nationalists imagined, an integrative force, whose historical and territorial boundaries attested to the truth of Czech and Slovak re-unification. On their map of Czechoslovakia, the Jews constituted the one nation which straddled the country’s westernmost regions to its easternmost ones; thus in their mind, Jews were the human material which held together Czechoslovakia. Jews were perhaps “the only real Czechoslovaks,” as a popular saying went.

In interwar Czechoslovakia, statistics paradoxically served both to prescribe Jews’ national belonging according to their perceived ethnic origin and to disseminate the notion that Jews had flexible national identities. On the one hand, the census and its interpreters represented Jews as a community of origin, a separate ethnic group fundamentally different from other ethnic communities such as the Czech and Germans. On the other, Jews’ perceived lack of a national language and their right to choose a nationality different than the one their ethnic origin would otherwise prescribe, formalized and disseminated the notion of Jews’ national flexibility. In the context of intense national rivalry, such national flexibility made Jews targets of competing demands for their loyalty, an impossible position which
perhaps furthered Jews’ isolation rather than ensured their integration, as Jewish nationalists hoped.

At the same time, statistics and social science also facilitated the imagining of Czechoslovak Jewry, thereby serving as an important instrument of nation building. To activists like František Friedmann, Jewish nationhood embodied both ethnic pride and patriotism, to him Jewish nationhood was a way of carving out for himself and his community a meaningful and legitimate place at home in Czechoslovakia.

Jewish activists’ visions of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry’s historical and cultural cohesion extended beyond the scientific articles, museum exhibits, and historical chronicles. As we shall see in the next chapter, during the interwar years, Jewish leaders worked to establish new communal institutions that sought to strengthen the cultural sameness of Jews in the Bohemian Lands and at the same time articulate these western communities’ distinct character vis-à-vis the Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.
Chapter 3

Crisis and Renewal

The Modernization of Jewish Communities in the Interwar Years

In the introduction to a 1933 booklet on Jewish heritage sites in Czechoslovakia, published by the Supreme Council of the Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia [SC], a Prague-based institution staffed by Jewish leaders and activists from across the Bohemian Lands, the well-known Zionist Norbert Adler noted:

At a time when communities that used to be the centers of Jewish life and Jewish culture are disappearing and with them the memory of the cultural life of our fathers is destroyed, the Heritage Committee has taken on the task of rescuing and collecting as much documentation as possible that reflects the thinking, feelings and work of the generations that lived fully in their Jewishness. They created moral and cultural values to which the sons of those who look down upon [these values] today will be returning [...] If the work of the Heritage Committee is going to be successful then it is necessary that the entire Jewish public support it. This requires that there be an interest in the Jewish past. Creating interest in the Jewish past can and surely will mean more to the current generation of Jews than just a curatorial interest. Our experience teaches us that interest in the past also awakens interest in the culture of the present and future [...] Jews have for the most part lost their ties to their own past. A healthy organic development of the Jewish whole and the moral integrity of the Jewish individual require knowledge of the past. In the last few decades, Jewry has gained a life strength that no one expected. From all sides we see attempts to awaken Jewish culture. In this context, it is surely appropriate to point to the significance of Palacký’s work for Czech culture. The Heritage Committee does not want to compare its modest work with the work of this Czech national genius, but would like to express the hope that its work will similarly contribute not only to the reawakening of interest in the Jewish past, but also nurture the desire for further Jewish cultural and artistic creativity.¹

The conservation project that the booklet presented, as well as the SC itself, emerged in response to a widespread sense of crisis and decay in Jewish life in the postwar years. In the

¹ Norbert Adler, “Úvod,” in O židovských památkách v Československé republice (Praha: Památková komise Nejvyšší rady Svazu židovských obcí náboženských v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezku, 1933), 3.
mid 1920s, Jewish activists as well as religious and secular leaders banded together, as Adler put it, in an effort not only to save what remained of Jewish life, but also to engineer a Jewish cultural renaissance. Focusing in particular on recasting Jewish communities as sites for cultural identification, they hoped to restore the community to the center of Jewish life.

In doing so, these activists invoked the memory of the pre-modern Jewish community, the *Kehillah*, a semi-autonomous institution representing the local Jewish population. In the nineteenth century, the *Kehillah*’s legal, political, social, cultural, and economic functions were reduced by government reforms that, along with social and cultural changes among central European Jews, transformed it into a religious community first and foremost, a *Kultusgemeinde*. While charitable and educational institutions continued to be a central part of the Jewish community, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Jewish activists across central Europe looked back, as Michael Brenner argues, to the *Kehillah* for a model for a new Jewish community; a community that was increasingly devoted to social welfare, cultural, and educational tasks. Lamenting the decline in Jewish communal life, Jewish activists in the Bohemian Lands, like their colleagues in Austria and Germany, imagined the ‘old’ *Kehillah* as a place of cultural authenticity and social cohesion. These were values that previous generations had sacrificed, in the minds of Jewish reformers, for social and economic gain. Jewish activists seeking to re-establish the *Kehillah* did so by

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2 In this chapter, when using “communal” or “community” I will be referring to this formal institution and its social, cultural, and religious infrastructure. For similar social and cultural modernization projects in Germany and Austria, see Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 49; Michael Brenner and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria, 1918-1933* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998). For the development of social welfare in Jewish Central Europe, see Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 174-222. Prague Jewish leaders looked to the Berlin community as a model for modernization. See the interview with the chair of the Jewish community in Berlin visiting Prague on invitation from the gymnastics club Makabi in Prague and the Zionist Youth Committee, “O poslání náboženské obce,” *Židovské zprávy* March 7, 1930.

creating new and modernizing existing institutions such as schools, hospitals, social welfare offices, and libraries, thereby laying the foundation for Jewish social and cultural renewal and continuity. Rather than a community based on religion, they imagined the new type as one centered on shared ethnicity. Indeed, while activists like Adler pointed their fingers at the current generation of fathers, as responsible for the crisis in Jewish life, they looked to a new generation of Jews as the source for a Jewish renaissance. This new generation, the activists on the SC imagined, were at the heart of a revival that would not only restore authenticity and vibrancy to Jewish communal life, but also integrate Jews into the cultural texture of Czechoslovakia. This was a process that, on the one hand, nurtured a collective memory of Jews as a distinct cultural community at home in the villages, towns, and cities of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia and, on the other, involved the modernization of Jewish communal institutions, a project that aimed at making them more Czech.

Norbert Adler’s comparison between the Heritage Committee’s efforts and those of the Czech nationalist hero František Palacký, a trope familiar in interwar Zionist rhetoric, might not have been surprising, had he not made it on behalf of the SC. The SC did after all represent Jews as a religious community and was thus considered a politically neutral institution. The Jewish activists involved in this governing body were, however, anything but politically uncommitted, representing, as they did, a range of ideological, regional, and national traditions and loyalties. Yet, they shared a desire for Jewish renewal that focused less on religious reform and revival and more on nurturing historical awareness and cultural familiarity among Jews. Their work centered on creating a meaningful secular Jewish culture centered in, what was in their minds, the most historically significant institution in

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4 For the ethnification of the Jewish community in Weimar Germany, see Brenner, *Renaissance of Jewish Culture*, 49-65.
Jewish life, namely the community. They did so by pursuing strategies of modernization intended to make the Jewish community relevant to Jews and worthy of the respect of Jews and non-Jews alike. Indeed, these Jewish leaders sought to create a community that suited their vision of an ideal Jewish citizenry—one that was loyal to the state, equally at home in German and Czech, and whose traditions and history were firmly rooted in its Czechoslovak homeland.

The postwar order had called into question Jews’ loyalties and communities in more than one way. Bohemian and Moravian Jewry’s place within the German Jewish cultural sphere, a characteristic particularly manifest in Jewish religious life, became both ideologically and practically awkward in the postwar years. Therefore, the SC’s attempt to make Jews more Czech went hand in hand with efforts to strengthen the ties between Jews and the state. From the outset, the SC sought to harness the authority and resources of the state for its efforts to modernize the Jewish communities. Significantly, these Jewish bureaucrats viewed individual communities’ historical autonomy as detrimental to the sustainability and vitality of Jewish life and they, rather than an interventionist state, promoted centralization of the Jewish communities in the interwar years.

In the postwar years, Zionists generally fashioned themselves as the leaders of a popular revolt against an assimilationist oligarchy in charge of the Jewish communities in Czechoslovakia. This chapter shows, however, that in the Bohemian Lands, Zionists pursued the modernization of Jewish communal life in cooperation with well-established so-called assimilationists and religious leaders equally committed to the creation of a new Jewish community. Indeed, while these activists might have disagreed on the question of Jews’ national identification, they shared a desire for cultural renewal. These lawyers, physicians,
and rabbis, united both by their Jewishness as well as by their education and class, constituted a bureaucracy whose legitimacy as leaders rested in their expertise and social status. Thus, while contemporary observers and historians alike have emphasized the conflicts between assimilationists and Zionists, this study, focusing on a point of cooperation, argues that these activists’ shared middle class cultural ideals and local patriotism transcended questions of national identification and enabled them to work together. By the late 1930s, Zionist activists’ efforts to transform Jewish communities from religious entities to national institutions bore fruit, although not as a result of the kind of popular conquest originally imagined by Jewish nationalist leaders.

This chapter opens with an exploration of the sense of crisis among Jewish activists and religious leaders in the Bohemian Lands in the years following World War I. Then I examine these activists’ response to the perceived crisis, namely the establishment of a central Jewish leadership institution committed to strengthening and modernizing the Jewish community. Seeking to establish itself as a legitimate leadership, the SC pursued a program of cultural reorientation aimed at making Jews more Czech. The chapter ends with an examination of the emergence of the Volksgemeinde—a communal organization that placed its members’ shared ethnic origins at the center of communal life and broadened its scope to encompass both social, cultural, and religious institutions—as the ideal for Jewish communal life in the Bohemian Lands in the late 1930s.

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The postwar crisis in the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands

The postwar order posed multiple challenges to Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands. The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire not only called into question Jews’ cultural orientations and national loyalties, but also undermined traditional cultural and religious networks. Thus, for Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, the new political boundaries cut them off from the German and Austrian Jewish religious and cultural institutions upon which they had relied. At the same time, the political changes exacerbated already existing problems within the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands. For decades, rural and small town Jewish communities had struggled to maintain their religious institutions in the face of a rapidly diminishing and secularizing Jewish population. Indeed, by the mid-1920s Jewish activists concerned with both the floundering Jewish religious life in both the old rural communities and the growing urban ones renewed the call for the establishment of a unified Jewish leadership equipped to ‘rescue’ Jewish life in the Bohemian Lands from complete collapse.

In postwar Czechoslovakia, one of the most contested political issues was the separation between church and state. While some Czech nationalists viewed the Catholic Church as a Habsburg institution used to assert Austrian dominance over the Czech nation, their Slovak counterparts perceived Catholicism as integral to Slovak nationhood. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the state’s first few years, the government passed legislation meant to undermine the Church’s legal and cultural dominance by, for example, introducing civil marriage and divorce, limiting religious instruction in public schools, and expropriating Church property. While the educational policies in particular became the stage for bitter

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confrontation between Catholics and anti-clerical factions, by the mid 1920s the radicals had lost out. Since the Catholic Church continued to enjoy considerable popular support in the Bohemian Lands, and as the issue threatened to damage relations between Czechs and Slovaks, the government backed off.7

It was, however, not only the Catholic Church that felt the effects of the drive for the separation of church and state. Other religious communities such as the Jews also saw that their religious infrastructure come under attack. The new legislation limiting religious instruction in public schools is a case in point. For decades, the majority of Jewish children in the Bohemian Lands received their formal Jewish education through the mandatory religious instruction in the public school system.8 Rather than maintaining separate Jewish educational institutions, Jewish teachers here worked predominantly within the general public system.9 The reduction in the number of hours for religious instruction in the public schools was thus set to have a significant impact on Jewish education. Rabbis and religious instructors warning of a complete collapse of Jewish education did not, however, stand by

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7 Jaroslav Šebek notes that following the electoral success of conservative and Catholic parties in the 1925 elections by 1926 the attempts at separating church and state were halted, Šebek, “Die tschechische Katholizismus,” 148.
9 According to Gustav Fleischmann, Jewish communities appointed the teachers, who were then supervised and paid by the school board. He comments that religious education in and beyond the public schools was one of the most important functions of the Jewish community in the interwar period, Gustav Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation, 1918-1938,” in Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, vol. 1, 267-329, here 290.
idle as their livelihoods and moral authority came under attack. Instead, they appealed to the state to consider Jewish educators as partners in making Jews into good citizens.

In late August of 1920, rabbis from the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia gathered in Prague to establish an organization for rabbis in Czechoslovakia. In their public memorandum to the Ministry of Education, the rabbis warned of the dire effects of the new educational policies making religious instruction in public middle schools voluntary.\(^\text{10}\) The authors were particularly concerned with the erosion of the authority and stature of teachers, who now depended financially on the whims of Jewish children and their parents, and pointed to the potential social risks caused by the weakening of traditional moral authority. “In this postwar era where wicked violence, moral decline, and chaos is the order of the day,” they argued, it was in the state’s interest to strengthen rather than weaken religious education and authority, as “a rational and correct teaching of religion is an important pillar of an orderly state and civil society.” They warned, “we are convinced that the removal of religious education will not only revenge itself in the future, but also be a mistake that the state will not be able to correct.”\(^\text{11}\) At a time when the state was perceived as suspicious of religious authorities, the authors made their case for the importance of religious leadership and education. They did so by recasting Jewish religious educators as partners rather than enemies of the state, indeed, as patriotic leaders with an important role to play in raising a moral and loyal citizenry. Religion was, they argued, “the only subject where a child is

\(^{10}\) Letter d. September 10, 1920 signed by Dr. Isidor Hirsch (Karlin), Dr. Ignaz Ziegler (Karlovy Vary), and Dr. Leopold Goldschmied (Prostějov) on behalf of the Federation of Rabbis in Czechoslovakia (Svaz rabínů v Československé Republice) to Ministry of Education NA-Mš karton 3917 sign. 47/VIII [Svaz rabínů September 10, 1920]; the public memorandum was published in the Jewish press, “Organisace rabínů v Československé republice,” Židovské zprávy September 10, 1920.

\(^{11}\) Ibid..
taught to choose love, justice, and morality over brutal violence,” and thus essential “for youth so susceptible to radicalism.”  

The authors were, however, not looking for a status quo with regards to the state’s involvement in Jewish education. Rather, they were turning to the Ministry of Education asking for the authorities’ assistance in strengthening Jewish religious leadership and authority. As a bulwark against moral decline and disorder, the assembly pleaded with the Ministry for support for the establishment of a rabbinical seminary in Prague. It was their hope that a new generation of well-educated Czech-speaking teachers and rabbis would bestow new political and cultural prestige on Jewish education, a crucial step, in their minds, in creating upright Jewish citizens. However, unsure whether their moral appeal would resonate with the Ministry, the rabbis invoked the newly passed Czechoslovak Constitution’s guarantees of equality for its minorities. Indeed, if the state supported some religious educational institutions, such as the new Protestant theological seminary in Prague, then, the assembly demanded, it had to consider the needs of its Jews, as “the 400,000 citizens of the Jewish faith deserve the state’s attention, participation, and support.”

While the rabbi’s memorandum was a response to an immediate threat to Jewish education, it also reflected the fact that the new political boundaries had disrupted cultural and educational networks upon which the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands depended. Communities here had traditionally recruited rabbis from the Jewish theological seminaries in Breslau, Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest. In the postwar period, however, such

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.; for the government supporting the establishment of a state-sponsored Protestant theological seminary in 1919, see Šebek, “Der tschechische Katholizismus,” 146.
institutional ties became problematic.\textsuperscript{14} Few graduates from these institutions met the new requirements for religious clergy of Czechoslovak citizenship and proficiency in the Czech state language, making it difficult for community boards to find suitable rabbis, teachers, and other religious functionaries for their communities. Furthermore, Jewish observers worried, the continued ‘import’ of clergy from abroad made it appear to outsiders as if Jews recruited their spiritual leaders from the German and Hungarian cultural sphere. While this might not have been a problem in the German-speaking areas, in mixed and predominantly Czech-speaking communities the image of ‘Germanizing’ rabbis was “impossible.”\textsuperscript{15} A new state-sponsored rabbinical seminary in Prague would thus not only create a Czechoslovak rabbinate considered loyal and reliable by the authorities, but also, Jewish activists hoped, enable communities to provide their congregants with suitable spiritual leaders.

After World War I, this disruption in the practice of recruiting rabbis from Austria and Germany exacerbated the so-called “deficit of rabbis” that communities in the Bohemian Lands had faced for some time. In the mid 1920s, 40% of the Jewish communities in Bohemia did not have a rabbi, while another 40% employed rabbis who were between 65 and 80 years old.\textsuperscript{16} Similarly, more than half of Moravia’s 50 communities did not have an ordained rabbi.\textsuperscript{17} To Jewish activists, the many vacant positions were more than just a result

\textsuperscript{14} Stransky, “The Religious Life,” 345. He also notes that the German-speaking communities had access to plenty of well-qualified rabbis.

\textsuperscript{15} For comment on German-speaking communities not facing the same problems as the Czech-speaking ones, see Richard Feder, “Otázka svazu českých israelských náboženských obcí,” \textit{Rozvoj} September 15, 1924.

\textsuperscript{16} Richard Feder, “Svaz českých israelských náboženských obcí,” \textit{Rozvoj} March 28, 1924.

\textsuperscript{17} Letter d. June 11, 1924 Rabbi Jindřich Schwenger to Zemská správa politická v Brně, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917. These numbers are confirmed in an overview authored by the SC a few years later. According to this report, concerned both with the absence and qualifications of rabbis, in 1928, 104 communities in Bohemia had no rabbi at all. Of the 95 rabbis active in the region, 33 had a university education, 7 had not studied beyond high school, and 34 only had an elementary school education behind them. In Moravia, there were only 20 so-called fully qualified, meaning formally ordained, rabbis. In Silesia, 4 out of 8 communities had an ordained rabbi, see reform proposal d. March 26, 1928, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47 karton 3921.
of recent government legislation.18 Rather, the lack of religious leaders was a sign of the material and spiritual erosion of Jewish life. To them, the new political order had exposed rather than caused the profound structural crisis plaguing communal Jewish life in the Bohemian Lands.19

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Jewish societies in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia had been governed by distinct provincial laws as well as state legislation. While the communities continued to have somewhat separate historical experiences, after the Empire’s collapse, Jewish activists from these regions increasingly came to see themselves as part of one Jewish community. On the one hand, this integrative process was facilitated by Bohemian and Moravian Jewish activists’ efforts to distance themselves from the perceived culturally backward and Orthodox Jews in Czechoslovakia’s East. On the other, however, their sense of common fate was also strengthened by their belief that the communities in the Bohemian Lands, despite their distinct traditions, faced similar challenges in the postwar years.

In Moravia, Jewish communities had historically formed compact and urban settlements. In some Moravian towns, Jewish communities constituted both religious and political entities where Jews maintained a municipality separate from the general municipality in which they resided, a system that was introduced in 1862, when towns gained political representation in the provincial Moravian Diet.20 This was a structure that formally

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18 See, for example, Gustav Sicher, “Náboženské reformy,” Židovské zprávy March 2, 1921.
19 See, for example, Feder, “Svaz českých israelských náboženských obcí.”
20 Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein describes how larger Jewish municipalities had their own constable, fire brigade, and German-language Jewish school. They played, according to Kestenberg-Gladstein, a key political role in sustaining German numbers in the Moravian Provincial Diet. The religious community and the Jewish municipality were not overlapping as the latter was made up of home-owners and taxpayers within a certain district, while the former encompassed all Jews living within the territorial boundaries of the community, see Ruth Kestenberg-Gladstein, “The Jews between Czechs and Germans in the Historic Lands, 1848-1918,” in Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, vol. 1, 21-71, here 46-49. For Moravian Jewry in the
remained in place until after World War I, although at the time of its abolition in 1919, only two such Jewish municipalities remained in Moravia. Indeed, between 1890 and 1921, Moravian Jewry’s traditional political and religious institutions were weakened as Jews moved from small towns to the region’s growing industrial centers in Brno/Brünn, Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, and Prostějov/Prossnitz. While the number of Jews in Moravia remained relatively stable around 45,000 in this period, their relocation challenged the economic, social and religious viability of many of its 50 communities.

In contrast to the compact Jewish communities in Moravia, Jews in Bohemia had historically lived in hundreds of villages and small towns forming a network of numerous small communities with Prague as the major center. In 1921, the province’s 79,777 Jews comprised 203 communities. By the turn of the twentieth century, as in Moravia, most Jews lived in the urban centers. Prague alone claimed 40% of Bohemian Jewry (31,751 in 1921), while another 30% lived in the region’s other large cities such as Teplice-Šanov/Teplitz-Schönau, Plzeň/Pilsen, and Karlovy Vary/Carlsbad. Historians agree that the Bohemian communities were more divided and estranged from each other than their nineteenth century, see Michael L. Miller, “Rabbis and Revolution: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Moravian Jewry,” (diss. Columbia University, 2004).

26 If, in 1880, 50% (47,510) of Bohemian Jews lived in rural communities with a total population of less than 5000, by 1921 only 23% (18,108) did so, Friedmann, “Jak se změnilo rozsídlení Židů v Čechách za posledních 50 let,” Židovské zprávy December 2, 1927.
Moravian counterparts due both to the tradition of small autonomous communities as well as to the significant social and cultural differences between urban and rural Jewries. By the late 1800s, Hillel Kieval notes, the influx of Czech-speaking rural Jews to Bohemia’s industrial and urban centers challenged the hegemony of the German-speaking Jewish establishments. In Bohemia’s Jewish communities, activist Jews played out bitter battles over the question of whether Czech or German should serve as their communal and public language, conflicts that mirrored the broader nationalist struggle taking place around them.

The last of the three former Austrian Crown lands that now constituted Czechoslovakia’s western half, the province of Silesia, had a relatively small Jewish population. In 1921, Silesia’s 7,317 Jews lived in 9 communities. The geographical proximity of and connections to Moravian Jewry facilitated close cooperation between Jewish leaders in the two provinces and meant that in practice state authorities and Jewish observers alike perceived the two regions as one socio-cultural entity. Thus, despite their communities’ distinct historical experiences, after World War I, Jewish communal leaders and activists in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia faced similar socio-cultural and institutional challenges.

The Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands were governed by the Law of March 21, 1890 (Gesetz der äusseren Rechtsverhältnisse der israelitischen Religionsgemeinschaft), which defined the communities’ territorial boundaries, degree of autonomy, and responsibilities vis-à-vis both its members and the state authorities. After World War I, the

Czechoslovak state, now in charge of territories governed by both Austrian and Hungarian legal code, left the existing legislation that governed Jews’ religious communities in place. The Law of 1890 defined the Jewish community as a territorial entity in line with previous legislation. Hence, while there could be multiple synagogues and prayer rooms within a certain area, they all belonged to the same community whose leaderships were, according to the law, required to respect “different ritual directions” in their midst. Similarly, all Jews, who had not formally given up their membership, belonged to the Jewish community in which they resided. While members were obligated to pay ‘church’ taxes, an obligation that could be enforced by the local state authorities, the community was responsible for meeting its congregants’ religious needs. Thus, each community was required to employ a rabbi, and expected to maintain institutions such as a synagogue or prayer room, a cemetery, a ritual bath, a ritual butcher and to provide their congregants with religious education.

With the establishment of Czechoslovakia, new citizenship requirements were placed on communal leaders. Indeed, while all Jews regardless of citizenship belonged to the community in which they resided, only Czechoslovak citizens were eligible to hold positions of authority within it. Now, religious functionaries, including rabbis, were also required to have Czechoslovak citizenship in addition “to a flawless moral and civic character (mravní a státoobčanskou bezzávadnost).”

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31 Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 29, the Law of March 21, 1890 no. 57.
32 For the changing legislation governing the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands until 1890, see Kieval, Languages of Community, 10-27.
33 Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 35; there was a similar preference for such unified congregations (Einheitsgemeinden) in most communities in Weimar Germany, see Brenner and Penslar, In Search of Jewish Community, x.
35 Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 32.
In contrast to the Bohemian Lands, the Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia had been organized along denominational lines—Neolog, Status Quo, and Orthodox—since the mid nineteenth century. While in the western provinces each locality had one unified community that accommodated different types of observance, in Slovakia, there were parallel communities within one jurisdiction. In 1920, the Orthodox communities in Slovakia organized a regional association which expanded a few years later to include communities from Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Organisace autonomních ortodoxních židovských obcí). By the mid 1920s, the association Jeschurun emerged as the representative of the region’s Neolog and Status Quo communities. The vast majority of the communities in the east were, however, Orthodox. In 1930, Slovakia had an estimated 217 communities of which 165 were Orthodox, and 52 Neolog and Status Quo. In Subcarpathian Ruthenia, there were 21 Orthodox, but only one Neolog.

Furthermore, in contrast to the former Austrian regions, the Jewish communities in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia had received state subsidies for their clergy and for religious education since 1895, a right which the Czechoslovak state upheld although funds

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37 Neolog and Status Quo Judaism were particular to Jews in the Hungarian territories, the former being a reformed Judaism, the latter a position between Neolog and Orthodoxy, for the history of these denominations, see Howard Lupovitch, “Between Orthodox Judaism and Neology: The Origins of the Status Quo Movement,” *Jewish Social Studies* 9, no. 2 (2003): 123-153. For Slovakia, see Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 40. For more on Slovakia, see also Klein-Pešová, “Among the Nationalities.”


were withheld for some time in the postwar years. Indeed, the old Hungarian legal code remained in place in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia through the interwar period, much in the same way that the Austrian one with regards to the Jewish communities was left fairly intact in the western provinces.

Jewish observers in the Bohemian Lands viewed the steadfast and traditional religious communities in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia as evidence of the backwardness of eastern Jews. On the other, however, these Jewish activists held up images of empty synagogues and dilapidated cemeteries in villages and small towns across Bohemia as the embodiment of the profound material and spiritual crisis of Jewish society in the Bohemian Lands. For decades, they argued, the old communities had floundered, unable or neglecting to maintain the most basic religious institutions and services for their diminishing and increasingly secularized congregations. In the cities, where most Jews now lived, most were ignorant of and indifferent to their religious tradition and cultural heritage. To activists committed to Jewish religious and communal life, the postwar crisis in the Jewish communities was an outcome of decades of neglect by incompetent leaderships and indifferent congregations, a state of affairs, they warned, that threatened the future of Jewish communal life in many parts of the Bohemian Lands.

In early 1924, Židovské zprávy initiated a survey “asking important Jewish activists how to halt the further decline of Jewish life in Bohemia.” Among the few responses published, one anonymous respondent, claiming to represent a rural Jewish perspective, “a

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42 See the report from the discussion at a meeting of Jewish leaders from Bohemia, “Svaz českých židovských náboženských obcí v Čechách,” Rozvoj April 18, 1924.
44 “Jak zastavit další úpadek židovství v Čechách?” Židovské zprávy January 25, 1924.
voice in the desert,” pointed to the undemocratic nature of the communities. Here, the largest taxpayers had the most influence, despite the fact, the author argued, that they were more invested in their businesses and professions than in communal work.\textsuperscript{45} Indifferent to Judaism and to their congregants’ needs, many boards refused to hire rabbis or even religious teachers, thereby eroding religious life in their communities, the author maintained.\textsuperscript{46} The solution, the respondent proposed, was not only democratic reform empowering a new generation of leaders, but also the return of rabbis and teachers to the center of Jewish life now as transmitters of the Jewish religious and cultural tradition through courses on Judaism, Jewish history, and literature.\textsuperscript{47} Other respondents concurred on the importance of education. Salomon H. Lieben, a prominent Orthodox voice from Prague and head of the Jewish Museum there, not surprisingly saw Jews’ abandonment of their moral and religious tradition as the core problem and called for “religious regeneration.”\textsuperscript{48} Ignaz Ziegler, rabbi in Karlovy Vary/Carlsbad and one of the signatories of the rabbinical assembly’s 1920 memorandum, pointed to the fragmented nature of rural Jewish communities in Bohemia. These small dispersed communities were not equipped, he argued, to withstand the decline caused both by lack of religious leadership and education as well as assimilation and secularization generally.\textsuperscript{49}

At the same time, but at the other end of the Jewish political spectrum, the Czech-Jewish weekly \textit{Rozvoj} also called its readers’ attention to the so-called chaos prevailing in

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\textsuperscript{45} The call for democratic reforms in the election of communal leaderships was an important issue in interwar Jewish politics in other parts of Central Europe. For Germany, see Michael Brenner, “The Jüdische Volkspartei: National-Jewish Communal Politics during the Weimar Republic,” \textit{Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook} 35 (1990): 219-243; for Poland, see Ezra Mendelssohn, \textit{Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 49-50.

\textsuperscript{46} “Jak zastavit další úpadek židovství v Čechách?” \textit{Židovské zprávy} February 2, 1924.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} “K naší anketě o úpadku židovství v Čechách,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} April 4, 1924.

\textsuperscript{49} “K naší anketě o úpadku židovství v Čechách,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} April 4, 1924.
rural and small-town communities. In a series of articles entitled, “The Crisis of the Rabbinical Profession,” rabbi Isaac Eisenberg painted an image of disorder, ignorance, and stagnation in Bohemia’s rural communities. He too described how community boards looking to save money chose not to employ rabbis or religious teachers in blatant disregard of the law which indeed required communities to have a rabbi.  

50 These lay leaders thriving on the local authorities’ indifference to or ignorance of Jewish affairs, claimed Eisenberg, instead hired rabbis from neighbouring communities on an ad-hoc basis to perform specific tasks. Thus, preying on the desperate financial situation of the small town and village rabbis, these lay leaderships allegedly lacked both social responsibility and respect for Jewish and state laws.  

51 However, while Eisenberg placed much of the responsibility for the decline in Jewish life on the secular leaders, he also noted the devastating effects of the postwar land reforms on rural Jewish life. These new government policies had, albeit unintentionally, he argued, eroded the material basis for Jewish life outside Bohemia’s urban centers.  

52 The land reforms divided large estates among local users, thereby forcing the previous owners or tenants off the land, depriving rural Jewish communities of their major tax payers: the Jewish owners, renters, or managers of large agricultural estates.  

53 Once the latter lost their livelihoods, Eisenberg noted, they moved to the cities leaving behind community boards unable to make ends meet.  

54 “While the law is not directed against Jews, even though Jewish families have been the renters and managers of such estates for generations,” Eisenberg

50 J. Eisenberg, “Krise rabínského stavu I,” Rozvoj February 15, 1924.
52 J. Eisenberg, “Krise rabínského stavu II,” Rozvoj March 28, 1924.
53 In 1921, about 3.5% of the Jewish heads of households in Bohemia were owners, renters, or managers of large estates. By 1930, this number had dropped to 2.6%, see “Zanikají Židé v Čechách?” Židovské zprávy August 27, 1934.
54 J. Eisenberg, “Krise rabínského stavu II,” Rozvoj March 28, 1924.
claimed, “in the end the Jews are the victims of this law.” Thus, while leaderships indifferent to Judaism were to blame for much of the decline in Jewish life, urbanization exacerbated by the postwar land reforms was, according to Eisenberg, the nail in the coffin for rural Jewish life in Bohemia.

While Eisenberg and other observers had much to say about the ill effects of Jews’ indifference to Judaism, they were well aware that the increasing urbanization among Jews posed the greatest challenge to the old Jewish way of life in the Bohemian Lands. The statistician František Friedmann, always a keen observer of social change, depicted a community near his hometown Sedlčany/Seltschan as emblematic of the transformation of Jewish life in the region. “[In 1871], the largest community [in the region] was Kosová Hora with 400 members (185 men and 215 women), one rabbi, two teachers, its own synagogue and a school with 100 students. In 1921, this community had only about 50 souls left and out of all the institutions, the only one remaining is the cemetery.” While Jews’ move to the cities eroded the existence of traditional communities, new Jewish centers were emerging in large towns and cities in the Bohemian Lands. In the minds of Jewish activists, however, these urban communities were ill-equipped to become centers for Jewish life, as they lacked cultural and educational institutions that would appeal to a new generation of Jews.

In the postwar years, images of an educational revolution among Jews were held up by a variety of Jewish activists and leaders as the key to a regeneration of Jewish communities across the Bohemian Lands. The centrality of education rested to some degree on these observers’ shared belief that their community was extraordinarily indifferent to and ignorant of its religious and cultural heritage. One such critic was the Zionist rabbi Gustav

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55 Ibid.
Sicher. Sicher, a member of Mizrachi (at the time, the most prominent religious Zionist organization), became the rabbi for Prague’s large Vinohrady/Weinberge community in 1928 and the city’s chief rabbi in the early 1930s. According to Kateřina Čapková, Sicher was the public face of Judaism in Prague, and as a Czech-speaker and talented orator, made occasional appearances on the radio. Sicher believed strongly in the importance of making Judaism Czech and was instrumental in the translation of the Torah into Czech, a project he began in the mid 1920s together with his colleague Isidor Hirsch from Prague’s Karlin/Karolinenthal community. As an editor and contributor to Židovské Zprávy, Sicher commented extensively, and mostly critically, on religious life. In 1921, for example, he noted about Bohemia’s Jewish communities:

> When it comes to religion Jews in Bohemia – even more so than anywhere else in Western Europe – are done with. There is no question about it. The synagogues are empty and religious institutions are rotting away [...] what is happening in the countryside [i.e. in the rural communities] on a small scale, is happening in Prague on a larger one. Today, in Prague, the city of ancient Jewish life, Jewish monuments serve only as a testament to the vibrant religious life of the past.57

Indeed in Sicher’s mind, Bohemian Jews held the dubious honour of being the most de-Judaized Jewry among its cultural peers in the West.58 The disregard for the Jewish tradition in his community was particularly apparent, in Sicher’s mind, in the lack of religious texts in Czech. In a favourable review of his colleague Richard Feder’s Jewish stories in Czech, Sicher noted that “except for the first volume of Jewish Stories [Židovské besídky: pro

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58 Gustav Sicher, “Náboženské reformy,” Židovské zprávy March 2, 1921. It is difficult to say whether Jews in the Bohemian Lands were more or less observant or ignorant of Judaism than similar communities in Germany and Austria, as few social or cultural historians have studied Jewish religious practice in this area in late Habsburg Austria and interwar Czechoslovakia.
zábavu a poučení dospěléjší mládeže židovské published in 1912-1913], we do not have any other books from which a child who knows only Czech can learn something about Jews and Judaism (Židovstvo) and thus escape the complete ignorance that prevails among us to a much greater degree than among other European Jewries.”

Indeed, to Sicher the solution to Jews’ indifference to Judaism was not religious reform, as was being suggested from some quarters, but the creation of a new Jewish awareness founded on religious traditions as well as a historical consciousness and sense of cultural belonging.

Richard Feder, a rabbi in Kolín/Kolin (about 50 km east of Prague) and a well-known representative of the Czech-Jewish movement, also believed that the future of religious life in the Bohemia Lands depended on a collective recommitment to Jewish education. Like Sicher, who did his rabbinical training in Vienna, Feder studied at the Czech Charles University in addition to his rabbinical training, which he pursued at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau. In debates on Jewish education among secular and religious Jewish leaders in the mid-1920s, Feder advocated the establishment of a new kind of Talmud-Torah, the traditional Jewish religious school, in the form of a modern institution with well-qualified teachers that would provide both children and adults with a sound Jewish education. The needs of Jews living in small communities could be served, Feder proposed, by mobile

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60 After World War II and until his death in 1970, Feder lived in Brno and served first as Brno’s and later (after Gustav Sicher’s death) as Prague’s chief rabbi, Rozkošná and Jakubec, Židovské památky, 448.

61 “Sjezd českých izraelských náboženských obcí,” Židovské zprávy April 11, 1924. Feder’s ideas bore a great deal of similarity to the reformed heder (a traditional Jewish elementary school) in Russia in the early twentieth century that, according to Steven Zipperstein, were to strengthen Jews’ national awareness, see Steven J. Zipperstein, Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1999), 41-62, here 48.
Jewish educators, travelling lecturers covering a wide range of topics in Jewish history and culture.

Despite their Jewish political differences, the Czech-Jew Richard Feder and the Zionist Gustav Sicher alike believed that the creation of a Czech Judaism, a Jewish liturgy and religious literature in the Czech language, constituted a crucial step in making Judaism meaningful to Jews. However, for both men this Czechification went hand in hand with, in Feder’s words, “a re-acquisition of Hebrew, which would bring Jews closer to their Jewishness.”


63 For a similar ‘return’ to Hebrew among liberal Jews in Weimar Germany, see Brenner, Renaissance of Jewish Culture, 49-50.

The Jewish renaissance, as imagined by these non-Zionist and Zionist activists alike, was thus defined by the co-existence of Czech and Hebrew as tools through which the Jewish tradition could be re-acquired as well as maintained for future generations. As Richard Feder continued to expand and develop his Hebrew language textbooks for use by both Czech and German-speaking Jewish children, Sicher and his colleagues embarked on the translation of the Torah into Czech.

By the mid 1920s, the sense of crisis and decay strengthened the voices coming from different corners of the Jewish political spectrum that called for Jewish unity and, in particular, for the establishment of a centralized leadership that could act as a representative of Jews to the outside world. This call for unification was, however, not just a postwar phenomenon. In the late 1890s, Jewish communal leaders in the Austrian provinces had attempted to establish a central leadership that would be the public representative of...
Austria’s Jews, an initiative that failed allegedly due to internal Jewish differences. In the Bohemian Lands in the decades that followed, some Jewish communities succeeded in establishing voluntary federations along national and regional lines such as the Federation of Czech Israelite Communities (Svaz českých israelských náboženských obcí) in 1909 and, during World War I, an organization for the Jewish communities in Moravia (Der Landesverband der israelitischen Kultusgemeinden in Mähren).

After the war, proponents of unity, who were aware of the profound socio-cultural divisions among Czechoslovakia’s Jews but convinced of the importance of centralization, turned to the state for support in establishing a central leadership for the country’s Jews. The Jewish National Council’s public demands for unity in 1918 and 1919 were seconded by the assembly of rabbis convening in the late summer of 1920, yet nothing came of these proclamations in practice. Only in the mid 1920s did the efforts to establish some degree of cooperation between the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands succeed. While federations for communities in Moravia and Silesia had existed since the end of the World War I, the Bohemian communities remained deeply divided. Indeed, unable to overcome social, cultural, and national differences, in Bohemia three federations emerged. Jewish communities in and on the outskirts of Prague established an organization for Greater Prague that were joined by some of Bohemia’s other large urban communities, namely Plzeň/Pilsen

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64 Edvard Lederer, “Kongruový zákon a naši rabíni,” Rozvoj September 24, 1926.

65 For the Czech federation, see Richard Feder, “Svaz českých israelských náboženských obcí,” Rozvoj March 28, 1924. For the Moravian federation, see Alois Hilf, “Der Landesverband der israelitischen Kultusgemeinden in Mähren,” in Gold, Die Juden und Judengemeinden Mährens, 72-74, here 72-73. For perceptions of Moravian unity as a model for the Bohemian communities, see Feder as listed above.

66 Zemský svaz israelských náboženských obcí na Moravě/Der Landesverband der israelitischen Kultusgemeinden in Mähren, formally established July 24, 1924 although existed in practice since 1917, see Hilf, “Der Landesverband,” 72; Svaz židovských náboženských obcí ve Šlezku/Der Landesverband der jüdischen Kultusgemeinden in Schlesien, formally recognized March 11, 1925, even though the federation had existed longer, see Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 37.

67 For Prague’s withdrawal from the Czech federation in 1924, as its board opted for bilingualism, see Richard Feder, “Svaz českých israelských náboženských obcí,” Rozvoj March 28, 1924; see also Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 297.
and České Budějovice/Budweis. This federation consisted of communities committed to bilingualism and was flanked by ‘German’ and ‘Czech’ federations representing German-speaking and Czech-speaking communities in Bohemia respectively. Even though the Prague Federation represented some of Bohemia’s major Jewish centers, Prague being the most significant one, the ‘German’ federation also included important communities such as Teplice-Šanov/Teplitz-Schönau, the largest Bohemian community outside Prague. While the Moravian and Silesian federations represented all the Jewish communities within their regions, some of Bohemia’s more than two-hundred communities remained unaffiliated, the most significant one being Hradec Králové/Königgratz.

As Jewish leaders and activists struggled to navigate the postwar challenges to Jewish religious institutions and their cultural traditions and networks, they fell back on well-known strategies for religious and cultural continuity, namely a simultaneous strengthening of Jewish education and a cultural-linguistic transformation of Judaism and its institutions designed to signal Jews’ suitability as citizens, indeed, as culturally and politically at home in the state. This was an effort that, in the minds of activist Jewish secular and religious

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68 Svaz Pražských židovských náboženských obcí/Verband der jüdischen Kultusgemeinden in Prag, established November 26, 1925, Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 37. The Prague federation’s official language was Czech, but anyone was allowed to participate and contribute in German, see letter d. October 29, 1925 from the Prague Federation to the Ministry of Education, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.

69 Svaz českých náboženských obcí židovských v Čechách, recognized by the authorities on February 18, 1927, and Svaz israelských náboženských obcí s německým jednacím jazykem/Verband der Kultusgemeinden mit deutscher Geschäftssprache, similarly on February 18, 1927, Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 37.

70 Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 297. Significantly, Emil Marguelies, the prominent Zionist leader and the chair of the Litoměřice/Leitmeritz community, was initially opposed to the creation of federations. While this could have opened another rift among Zionists in the Bohemian Lands, Marguelies soon joined the Prague Jewish nationalists in the work on the SC.

71 The communities’ membership in the federations was voluntary and their boards could choose to withdraw any time. It is not clear how many communities remained outside the federations. Fleischmann notes that the Moravian federation established in 1918, but not ratified until 1924 had “most of the communities” within its fold, in Bohemia, he claims, “only a few congregations […] mostly small ones, declined to enter any of the federations, Fleischman, “The Religious Congregation,” 296-298. Václav Müller stated in a 1934 article that all communities had joined, see “Náboženství a národnost v naší republice,” Národnostní obzor 5, no. 4 (1934): 241-247, here 246.
leaders, required the education of both ordinary Jews as well as a new generation of Czech-speaking and well-educated rabbis and other spiritual leaders, an effort, they believed, that could only be solved in unison and in close cooperation with the state authorities.

**The creation of a central Jewish authority**

From the outset of their postwar work, Zionists in the Bohemian Lands had envisioned a central place for the Jewish community within the texture of a new national Jewish society. Indeed, they wished to restore the community to the center of Jews’ lives by modernizing its institutions and services. The community, defined in strictly religious terms, had lost its appeal to most Jews, Zionists believed, and thus a new modern institution, serving Jews as a people, should take on broader educational, cultural, and social welfare tasks. Furthermore, as had become clear during and immediately after the war, some situations, in this case the refugee crisis, made cooperation between Jewish communities necessary. Some communities like Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, one of Moravia’s largest communities, adopted this broader agenda already in 1920. In others, however, Jewish nationalists would meet more resistance.

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72 The plans for a state-wide central organization of the Jewish communities were embodied in a resolution approved at the first Czechoslovak Zionist meeting in July 1919, see VIII. Zionistentag Brünn 30.-31.7.1928: Rehenschaft über die Vergangenheit – Programm für die Zukunft (Mährisch Ostrau: Zionistischer Zentralverband für die čsl. Republik, 1928), 7.

73 Josef Pollak, “Reforma náboženských obcí,” Židovské zprávy July 30, 1921. See also the October 28, 1918 memorandum issues by the Jewish National Council.

74 See for example Hugo Bergmann’s statement about the importance of the congregations “as living cells of the Jewish community,” at the January 1919 Jewish National Congress in Prague, see the comprehensive program for communal renewal as quoted in Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 270.

75 In 1921, various Jewish factions came together to establish a social welfare organization, *Jüdische Fürsorgezentrale für die Tschechoslowakei*, in order to deal with the refugee crisis in the Bohemian Lands and the more general desperate conditions among Jews in the country’s east, see “Programm der Jüdischen Fürsorgezentrale für die Tschechoslowakei” (Prag, 1921).

Yet, even though Zionist writers rallied against entrenched oligarchs and assimilationists, as Zionist activists gained seats on community boards, they negotiated and cooperated with existing leaderships regardless of their ideological differences. The SC, for example, was the result of successful and sustained partnership between a group of Jewish activists and leaders committed to establishing a central Jewish authority. However, if Jewish activists saw the need for a new organizational structure for Bohemian and Moravian Jewry, so did the state authorities overseeing the country’s religious communities.

Since the early 1920s, the Ministry of Education had pondered the establishment of a Czechoslovak Jewish institution that would unite the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. This was an organization that was supposed to bridge the newly amalgamated territories by breaking down the legal, administrative, and cultural differences that challenged the authority of the central government. In early 1921 in a substantial internal report, the Ministry’s civil servants investigated the French and German experiences for a model for a Jewish leadership with state-wide authority. The issue, however, remained unresolved. Then, in the summer of 1926 as Jewish communities became eligible for state subsidies, the question of creating a Czechoslovak Jewish organization re-emerged in the Ministry of Education.

In an internal report, a civil servant recommended that a central Jewish administration be established, an institution similar to those representing other religious societies such as the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. It would then receive state subsidies on behalf of its congregation. A Jewish central administration was thus crucial, the author noted, in order

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“for Jews not to be left behind everybody else again.” Subsequently, the Ministry of Education in Prague solicited the opinions of the regional authorities regarding the question of a Czechoslovak Jewish organization. While the authorities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia unanimously favoured centralization and a state-wide organization, the ones in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia deemed such plans wholly unrealistic or unfeasible.

The office in Mukačevo noted:

> Considering the mentality of the Jews here and the conditions among them, it is safe to say that orthodox Jewry under no circumstances is going to consider joining a federation where they will be represented by religious congregations who are not orthodox. Therefore, for the time being unifying all communities or creating a supra-committee is out of the question.

Similarly, the Slovak office replied that the divisions between east and west were fierce and that Jews in Slovakia were unlikely to even consider a proposal prepared by the Prague federation. The idea was shelved, but the desire for state-wide unification among civil servants remained, a pressure that the SC, looking only to unite the communities in the Bohemian Lands, was determined to resist.

From the outset, the SC did not discourage the belief, circulating among the Ministry’s civil servants, that unification of the eastern and western Jewish communities in a Czechoslovak institution was impossible due to the vast religious and cultural differences

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79 For response from the authorities in the Bohemian Lands, see letter d. September 30, 1926 from Zemská správa politická v Brně; letter d. September 11, 1926 from Zemská správa politická v Opavě; and letter d. September 16, 1926 from Zemská správa politická v Praze, in NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
80 From the authorities in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, see letter d. August 15, 1926 from Presidium politické správy Podkarpatské Rusi.
81 From Slovakia, see letter d. August 26, 1926 from Presidium ministerstva pro správy.
82 See recommendations made in Ministry of Education’s internal report d. February 17, 1921; internal notes d. January 8, 1934, NA-Mš 47/VIII karton 3917.
among the country’s Jews. While the SC was concerned about the Ministry creating a dysfunctional, but Czechoslovak Jewish authority, powerful yet unable to address any of the challenges facing Jews in the Bohemian Lands, its reservations perhaps also reflected unease about the political consequences of state-wide Jewish unity. Not only were the eastern Jewish populations significantly larger than the western ones, but they also had a historical tradition of unity and cooperation across communal boundaries that added to their political strength vis-à-vis the Jews in the Bohemian Lands, thereby leaving the western communities weakened if unity was enforced by the state.

Despite their reservations about state intervention in Jewish communal affairs, once the legislation that made the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands eligible for state subsidies was on the table, Jewish activists believed that they were being offered an opportunity to reinvigorate Jewish religious life that they could not afford to pass up. As the new legislation passed through the legislative and administrative offices of the state in early 1926, representatives of the five community federations worked to appoint a leadership that would act as a public representative of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands. Established in November 1926, this institution was known as the Superior Council of the Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia (Nejvyšší Rada svazů židovských náboženských obcí v Čechách, na Moravě, a ve Slezku/Oberster Rat der

83 Ministerial notes d. August 1926, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921. For SC encouraging this belief, see report of meeting between members of SC and the Ministry of Education in January 1934 during which the Jewish representatives explained their desire to remain a regional federation allegedly claming that the Jews in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia were “too different,” making unity impossible. Internal notes d. January 8, 1934, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917.
84 The legislation extending the subsidy was passed on June 25, 1926. August Stein was already corresponding with the Ministry of Education regarding the establishment of a central Jewish administration in early May 1926, see letter d. May 3, 1926 from August Stein to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
By the end of that year, the Ministry of Education had granted the SC status as a provisional representative of the regions’ Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{86}

The SC’s board members included both lay and religious leaders, some of whom remained part of the SC until its gradual dissolution in the fall and winter of 1938-1939. The composition of this first board illustrates the way in which this institution brought together a cross section of activists with complex political, cultural, and regional allegiances.\textsuperscript{87} The SC’s chairmanship was assumed by August Stein, a prominent Czech-Jewish activist from Prague. By then already in his 70s, Stein, a lawyer by training, had had a long career in the Prague Municipality and had played a central role in the so-called ghetto clearing in Prague’s old Jewish quarter Josefov/Josephstadt at the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{88} In the 1920s, he acted as chair of Prague’s Jewish community. Stein was deeply involved with the city’s Jewish Museum and had been committed to the creation of a ‘Czech’ Judaism for decades, a project which included the compilation of an influential Czech-Hebrew prayer book in 1884.\textsuperscript{89} Stein remained at the head of SC until 1931, when the physician Josef Popper took over. Popper, like Stein, had been with the SC from its beginning and was one of the four members from Prague on the SC’s nine-member board. However, in contrast to Stein, Popper was, according to historian Kateřina Čapková, a Zionist sympathizer and considered a

\textsuperscript{85} Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 308.
\textsuperscript{86} Internal ministerial notes d. December 16, 1926; the SC submitted its statutes on December 3, 1926, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
\textsuperscript{87} The positions on the first board were distributed as follows: chair Dr. August Stein, vice-chairs Dr. Leopold Goldschmied, Dr. Alois Hilf, Dr. Emil Margulies, and Dr. Josef Popper, secretary Dr. Norbert Adler, assistant secretary Hugo Rindler, accountant Karel Schablin, and suppleant Ignaz Wolf, “Ústavení Nejvyšší Rady,” \v{Z}idovské zprávy November 12, 1926.
\textsuperscript{88} Magda Veselská, \textit{Bestii navzdory: Židovské museum v Praze 1906-1940} (Praha: Židovské muzeum v Praze, 2006), 6; Rozkošná and Jakubec, \textit{Židovské památky}, 475.
\textsuperscript{89} Kieval, \textit{Languages of Community}, 164-165.
representative of German-speaking Jews in Prague.\(^{90}\) Popper, who also chaired the
Czechoslovak Bnai Brith and represented Czechoslovakia in the Jewish Agency, remained at
the helm of the SC until 1938.\(^{91}\) Another well-known Prague Zionist activist was Norbert
Adler, who acted as the SC’s executive director while pursuing a career in municipal
politics.\(^{92}\)

Bohemia’s ‘Czech’ and ‘German’ communities were represented by Hugo Rindler
(Benešov/Beneschau) and Emil Margulies (Litoměřice/Leitmeritz) respectively.\(^{93}\)
Margulies, a Zionist leader and chair of the Jewish Party from 1931 to 1935, was also, as we
have seen, an outspoken defender of the rights of German-speaking Jews in
Czechoslovakia.\(^{94}\) While the Bohemian communities had six seats on the board, the
Moravian and Silesian communities held two and one respectively. Alois Hilf, the long-time
chair of the community in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, and Leopold Goldschmied, a
rabbi from Prostějov/Prossnitz, represented Moravia. Known for their Jewish nationalist
sympathies, Hilf and Goldschmied had both been instrumental in transforming their
communities from religious to national institutions.\(^{95}\)

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\(^{90}\) The Bnai Brith was a Jewish fraternal organization first established in the mid nineteenth century in the
United States. Popper had been the chair since 1921. In Czechoslovakia, the Bnai Brith was, according to
Kateřina Čapková, decidedly pro-Zionist in the interwar years, see Čapková, Česí, Němci, Židé?, 91.
Fleischmann, in contrast, insists, albeit not very convincingly, that Popper was a “non-Zionist,” Fleischmann,

\(^{91}\) Čapková, Česí, Němci, Židé?, 91. Popper was also the chair of Jewish Committee for Aid to Refugees from
Germany established in 1934, see Livia Rothkirchen, The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust
(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 53.

\(^{92}\) For Adler and his role, see Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 309.

\(^{93}\) Hugo Rindler was the chair of the Czech federation through much of the 1930s, Hugo Rindler, “Neudržitelné
poměry v naších českých náboženských obcí,” Rozvoj May 18, 1933.

\(^{94}\) Kateřina Čapková, “Specific features of Zionism in the Czech Lands in the interwar period,” Judaica

\(^{95}\) Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrava was the first large community where Zionists obtained a majority on the
community board. Early on it was viewed as a model for transforming the Jewish community into a national
institution by supporting youth groups, sports clubs, and projects in Palestine, see Hugo Gold, Gedenkbuch der
untergegangenen Judengemeinden Mährens (Tel Aviv: Olamenu, 1974), 83. Leopold Goldschmied
collaborated with Hugo Gold on the histories of the Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia and was
The list of important actors is, however, not yet complete. As a career Jewish bureaucrat, Gustav Fleischmann, the SC’s secretary from 1926 to 1939 played a key role in the institution’s work and activities. Fleischmann, then in his early 30s, was, like Margulies, Adler, and Stein, a lawyer and at the time working as the top bureaucrat (secretary, tajemník) for the Prague Jewish community, a position he held from 1922 until he left for Palestine in 1939. He began his Zionist ‘career’ on the Jewish National Council and continued as a contributor to Židovské zprávy in the 20s and 30s. With the SC headquartered in the offices of Prague’s Jewish community in the Jewish Town Hall in Maisel Street, Fleischmann was an indispensable part of the everyday affairs of the SC for whom he authored statistical surveys, minutes of meetings, and correspondence.

The SC’s leadership thus consisted of several generations of well-educated, politically and administratively experienced, and Jewishly committed activists. If many of them shared Jewish nationalist sympathies or commitments, then they still had to overcome their different regional, linguistic, and ideological loyalties. The predominance of Zionists appointed to the SC indicated, however, that by the mid 1920s, Jewish nationalists were considered respectable Jewish leaders in communities across the Bohemian Lands. Even if they did not dominate the community boards on the local level to the same extent as they did

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96 Hilf and Popper were physicians, Stein, Adler, Rindler, Schablin, and Margulies were attorneys. At times, Fleischmann delivered funding applications and reports in person to the Ministry of Education, see for example, the two-volume report on the proposed reform of communal boundaries Gustav Fleischmann, “Sídla Židů v Čechách.” Fleischmann’s mapping of Jewish communities was well-received among the civil servants in the Ministry of Education, see notes d. December 22, 1927 in “Úprava obvodů židovských náboženských obcí v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku, seznamy obsahující sídla židů podle sčítání lidu z 15. II. 1921,” NA-Mš inv.č. 2987 sign. 47/VIII karton 3922. After the war, Gustav Fleischmann wrote the only analysis of the work of the SC in his article on the religious congregation in the first volume of The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys.

98 Fleischmann and Adler were among the SC’s younger members born in the 1890s. Popper and Margulies were about 20 years older. Stein was born in 1854 and thus 72 at the time of the SC’s establishment. Rudolf M. Wlaschek, Biographia Judaica Bohemiae, vol. 1-2 (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa, 1997).
the SC, Zionists were nevertheless considered competent and trustworthy representatives of
the regions’ Jews, even by a grand-old man of the Czech-Jewish movement like August
Stein.

While the so-called conquest of the Jewish communal structures was a priority for the
Zionist movement in the interwar years, Jewish nationalist activists’ influence in Jewish
communal politics is testimony not only to their commitment to Jewish renewal, but also to
the pragmatism that these activists adhered to. During the election of a chair for the SC, for
example, Leopold Goldschmied and other Zionist activists had voted against the candidate
endorsed by the Zionist Organization. Goldschmied, who represented his Prostějov/Prossnitz
community and Moravian Jewry at the vote, stated that he did not feel bound by the Zionist
leadership’s recommendation as the latter had not consulted with the Zionist representatives
about the candidacy. Instead, he endorsed a Czech-Jewish candidate, no doubt a move that
helped consolidate the SC’s legitimacy as a Jewish rather than a Zionist institution.99

While the Prague communities dominated the board, each federation, regardless of its
size, sent five representatives to the SC’s assembly. In addition to these lay delegates, the
associations for rabbis and religious functionaries were also represented by six members.100
Perhaps as a reflection of the secular activists’ self-confidence vis-à-vis the regions’ religious
leaders, the SC awarded the latter an advisory role in an effort both to restore to traditional

99 This was, according to one writer, an embarrassing display of disunity that prompted the Zionist leadership
to issue a decree making its future decision binding and thus overriding its members’ other institutional
interests, Zionistentag 1928, 33-34.
100 The organization representing rabbis in Bohemia got two seats, the Moravian and Silesian associations had
one each, and the organization for religious functionaries had two representatives on the assembly, “Ústavení
Nejvyšší Rady,” Židovské zprávy November 12, 1926.
Jewish leaders a degree of respectability as well as to soothe the Orthodox ‘pockets’ in the Bohemian Lands.\textsuperscript{101}

A few days after its inaugural assembly in early November 1926, the SC appealed to the Ministry of Education to recognize its authority as a representative of the Jewish communities. “As the authorized spokesman for the Jewish religious societies in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia,” the SC pledged in return “to place our efforts and our influence at the disposition of the honourable Ministry and other government offices in matters regarding the Jews of these regions.”\textsuperscript{102} As an officially recognized leadership, the SC was now eligible to apply for state subsidies for its administrative expenses, the education of Jewish clergy, and the maintenance of buildings and other communal sites.\textsuperscript{103}

The state and its Jews

As a voluntary association with no legal basis or any formal power, the legitimacy of SC’s claim that it was the representative of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, and hence eligible for state support, depended, in the minds of the Jewish activists, on the Ministry of Education recognizing it as a useful partner.\textsuperscript{104} Uncertain of its support among

\textsuperscript{101} The SC established a rabbinical committee (\textit{Rabínská zkušební komise}) already in 1926. Its members were primarily engaged in testing the qualifications of teachers and rabbis, see Hugo Rindler, “Organisace náboženské společnosti židovské a její další vybudování,” \textit{Bnai Brith} 2 (1934): 58-62, here 59. For Orthodox pockets in the Bohemian Lands, see Stransky, “Religious Life,” 331-332.

\textsuperscript{102} Letter d. November 8, 1926 August Stein to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921. The SC’s statutes submitted on December 3, 1926, and the recognition of its legitimacy by the regional authorities arrived in the Ministry’s office within a few weeks, see for example letter d. December 16, 1926 Zemská správa politická v Brně to Ministry of Education.

\textsuperscript{103} Müller, “Náboženství a národnost,” 246.

\textsuperscript{104} The SC never submitted an overview that listed the communities affiliated with the SC. The Ministry of Education, in turn, never appears to have asked. However, somewhere in the Ministry’s offices there must have been a list, as the SC received the state subsidies for Jewish clergy on behalf of its member communities only between 1931 and 1937. In any case, in the funding applications, the SC always described itself as “the representative of Jewish communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia,” see for example, letter d. June 25, 1931 SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
Jewish community boards and other leaderships, the SC looked to mobilize the authority and the resources of the state for its modernization program.

Headed by experienced administrators and lawyers, the SC presented itself as well-equipped to form a Jewish central administration committed to correcting the “terrible state of affairs” in Jewish communities through rational and centralizing management practices. While the Ministry of Education was eager to pass on the supervision of the Jewish communities, including the oversight of the annual state subsidies, to a trusted Jewish leadership, it needed assurances that this leadership prioritized “the state before all else! (Stat nade vše!).”

From the Ministry’s perspective, a central Jewish administration would not only ease the pressure on its own resources, but also play an important role in shaping Jews into loyal and Czech-speaking citizens. Among the Ministry’s civil servants there was a perception that Jews in the Bohemian Lands were not Czech enough, a perception both nurtured by the so-called lack of a ‘native’ Czech rabbinate and the absence of a Czech translation of the Torah. It was a belief perhaps also encouraged by their colleague Edvard Lederer, a prominent Czech-Jewish writer, journalist, and political activist employed at the Ministry from 1919 to 1926. While it is unclear to what extent Lederer was involved in preparing reports and policies on Jewish affairs, he did undertake travels on behalf of the Ministry of Education to Slovakia’s Jewish communities in the summer of 1920. Lederer strongly favoured centralization and his support for the establishment of a central Jewish authority

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106 Vaclav Müller argued that the state authorities respected the autonomy of religious communities in their internal affairs as long as they respected the principle that the state comes before all else, Müller, “Náboženství a národnost,” 247.
107 See the lengthy internal report d. February 17, 1921 NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917.
was echoed in the appeals made over the years by various Jewish lobby groups.108

Responding to the aforementioned assembly of rabbis’ request for a state-sponsored rabbinical seminary in Prague, one civil servant recommended that the Ministry extend funds for such an institution so that “[rabbinical] candidates would no longer be forced to attend seminaries abroad from where they would bring foreign beliefs to life here (odkud by přinášeli do života názory cizí).”109 Ten years later, the ‘import’ of foreign Jewish clergy remained a concern among the bureaucrats overseeing the work of the SC:

It is in the interest of the state and its administration of religious communities to support activities that seek to do away with the current unhealthy state of affairs where, because of the well-known lack of native functionaries, Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands are forced to rely on rabbis as well as other employees from abroad. On the one hand, this is in breach of the law. On the other, however, these communities are required to fill these positions. Thus, from the state administration’s point of view the need for this [seminary] is evident.110

As we shall see, the plans for a rabbinical seminary did not materialize, but the SC’s efforts to create a Czech rabbinate, a program that sponsored Czechoslovak students studying at the rabbinical seminaries in Breslau and Berlin, did meet with the Ministry’s approval and financial support.111 Furthermore, while the authorities had insisted that the basic funds for

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108 For Lederer’s travels to Slovakia as reported in Židovské zprávy (the report from his trip was originally printed in the newsletter Službě (‘In the Service,’ issues 6-7)), see “Židovstvo na Slovensku,” Židovské zprávy July 11, 1920 and August 11, 1920; see also Mš internal report d. February 17, 1921. For support of SC and centralization, see Edvard Lederer, “Kongruový zákon a naši rabíni,” Rozvoj September 24, 1926. For more on Edvard Lederer, see Kieval, Languages of Community, 168-169, 175-176; Alexej Mikulášek et al, Literatura s hvězdou Davídovou: Slovníková příručka k dějinám česko-židovských a česko-židovsko-německých literárních vztahů 19. a 20. století, vol. 1 (Praha: Votobia, 1998), 224-229, here especially 225.
109 Mš internal report February 17, 1921.
111 The number of students at the seminaries abroad ranged from 5 (1931) to 12 (1937). In the early 1930s, the stipends were reported to be about Kč 8,000 per student, by the late 1930s, the stipends were just about half of that, see funding applications from SC to Ministry of Education 1927-1938, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
the seminary be raised privately among Jews, it tolerated that the SC, year after year, included donations to a “seminary fund” in its list of expenses.  

While the so-called import of foreign rabbis was one concern, another issue which resonated with the authorities was the notion that Judaism in the Bohemian Lands was too German, an image particularly powerfully embodied by the lack of a Czech translation of the Five Books of Moses, the Torah. In commending the SC on its efforts to translate Jewish religious texts into Czech and create new textbooks for religious instruction in public schools, one civil servant noted these projects’ wide-ranging effects:

The translation of the Bible (*bible*) is significant both for the state administration and for the Jewish communities in our lands that until now have not had correct and suitable text books in the state language on hand. This, of course, seriously obstructs the efforts of the SC to educate the Jewish youth in the state language and in the spirit of the Czechoslovak nation. The translation of the Bible into Czech, which the SC has already set in motion, is an important task for their central office not only for literary and philological purposes, but also to an even greater extent for religious and patriotic reasons (*státotvorné*).  

Thus, to the Ministry the SC had demonstrated its worthiness as a partner of the state through its commitment to shape Jews into respectable citizens, a process that involved making them more Czech.

The SC’s vision for Jewish communal life and its own role in it, however, involved more than a cultural transformation. Responding to the sense of a crisis and decay, the SC appealed to the state for support for its plans to modernize the structure of the Jewish communities in the region. As this process involved the restructuring of communal

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112 The Ministry’s subsidy was never enough to cover all of the SC’s expenses. The SC was funded mainly by the federations. The “Seminary Fund” appeared on the list of expenses beginning in 1931. Amounts ranged from Kč 15,000 to 25,000, see funding applications NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47 karton 3921.

113 While the SC referred to the “Bible” in their letters to the Ministry of Education, the translation project was limited to the Torah.

boundaries, and thus constituted a challenge to individual communities’ autonomy, the SC looked to the Ministry for the legal authority to assume power over all Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands. By depicting scenes of mismanagement and corruption, this Jewish leadership, not the state, engineered the gradual erosion of the tradition of communal autonomy in the Bohemian Lands in the course of the 1930s.

The SC launched its first major attempt to implement a plan for modernization in January 1928.115 Presenting a plan to restructure the Jewish communities in Bohemia, the SC suggested that the small, allegedly unsustainable communities be dismantled and either attached to nearby larger communities or merged with other similar congregations into one new entity. According to this plan, the number of communities in Bohemia would drop from 198 to 79.116 With a sense of urgency the SC pleaded with the Ministry of Education to enforce the reform without any further consultation with individual communities:

The only way to correct the terrible state affairs is through the merger of communities into units capable of independent existence and of the fulfillment of their duties stipulated by both religious and state law. We [the SC] are aware that the enforcement of this proposal will be difficult, that it will be necessary to overcome the resistance of various officials who will be unwilling to give up their misunderstood autonomy and their positions of power. However, the conditions have deteriorated to such a degree that it won’t be possible to correct them with less radical measures than the ones proposed here.117

116 The reform proposed to create larger communities, citing 400 congregants as a minimum number for a viable community, establishing 14 communities with more than 1000 Jews (up from 11), 34 with populations between 400-1000 (up from 23), 31 between 100-400 (down from 164 (69 of which had less than 100 people)), Ibid.
117 Ibid.
The authorities, however, concerned about the lawfulness of such an intervention did not enforce the structural reform, nor did they award the SC authority over the communities.\footnote{The Ministry of Education held off approving such an intervention until the SC had legal standing, see “Židovský organizační zákon v kulturním výboru poslanecké sněmovny,” Židovské zprávy November 13, 1936.}

Despite the SC’s thinly veiled disdain for what they considered cultural backwardness in the eastern provinces, these leaders’ plans for modernization of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands resembled the Slovak structure of large so-called mother communities in the center of a network of affiliated communities.\footnote{Reform proposal d. January 24, 1928.} Theoretically, the mother communities not only employed rabbis, teachers, and ritual butchers, but also maintained institutions such as ritual baths and elementary religious schools. This system allowed communities to pool resources and provide ‘subordinate’ communities with access to a wide-range of religious services and institutions.\footnote{Paleček, “Izraelská náboženská společnost,” 40-44.} In the 1928 reform proposal, the SC similarly envisioned the creation of so-called district rabbinates that would act as religious and cultural centers for a series of smaller communities, thereby preserving the individual communities yet improving their access to especially education and public worship. By 1937, there were five such district rabbinates in Bohemia and more underway in Moravia.\footnote{“Deset let Nejvyšší Rady,” Židovské zprávy March 5, 1937.}

While the Ministry hesitated to formally endorse the SC as a central authority, it did, however, in practice recognize the SC as a Jewish central administration for the Bohemian Lands. While SC relied primarily on funding from its federations, the Ministry did extend grants on an annual basis.\footnote{The SC’s budget as reflected in the reports submitted to the Ministry of Education listed total annual expenses ranging from Kč 71,375 (1929) to Kč 324,000 (1937). Not surprisingly, the SC’s expenses grew steadily between 1927 and 1938. The state subsidy only covered a fraction of the SC’s expenses ranging from Kč 20,000 (1929), Kč 100,000 (1930 (a sum that greatly increased the SC’s expectations for future grants)), Kč 85,000 (1931), Kč 20,000 (1932), and Kč 50,000 (1934-1937), see funding applications in NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921. Thus, for much of the 1930s, the state subsidy covered less than 20% of the SC’s}
distributed the state subsidies for rabbis on behalf of its member communities. Thus, while the Ministry did not act to limit the traditional autonomy of Jewish communities, it did nevertheless recognize the SC as a legitimate and trusted Jewish leadership.

However, the lack of authority remained a sore point for the SC, undercutting its prestige and ability to restore order, something its leaders drew the Ministry of Education’s attention to over and over again. Indeed, while the SC cast itself as the representative of all Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, its authority remained contested. Not only did communities insist on preserving their boundaries and autonomy, but some, like Hradec Králové/Königgrätz, a community of almost 600 in central Bohemia, refused to join all together, an independence it retained until the late 1930s.

In the early 1930s, Alois Hilf and Gustav Fleischmann began working on a formal proposal for an amendment of the Law of 1890 that would create a central Jewish authority in the Bohemian Lands. Ushered through Prague’s bureaucratic and political offices and corridors by the two Jewish nationalist parliamentarians, Chaim Kugel and Angelo Goldstein, in the summer and fall of 1936, the bill arrived on the National Assembly’s official expenses. The Ministry of Education did, however, treat the SC quite leniently. For example, when the Ministry’s accountants recommended that promised subsidies for a rabbinical seminary be withheld in 1931, noting that the SC had in fact not established the planned seminary, the Ministry rejected their recommendation claiming that stipends for rabbinical students served the same purpose as would a seminary. See internal notes on decision d. December 31, 1930. Furthermore, the Ministry’s civil servants did not question the substantial deficit that the SC carried over from year to year.

125 Internal notes d. January 8, 1934 Ministry of Education, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917. In the internal notes, the civil servant that received Fleischmann stated that the latter had informed him that Alois Hilf was working on a similar overview of the communities in Moravia and Silesia, see notes d. December 22, 1927, in NA-Mš inv.č. 2987 sign. 47/VIII karton 3922.
agenda in late January 1937. By then the political climate had changed and local autonomy had become synonymous with disloyalty. This was an opportunity to cast a strong central Jewish authority as part of the defence of Czechoslovakia’s political and territorial integrity that Angelo Goldstein was not going to miss. At a time of increasing tension over separatism in Slovakia and the German borderlands, Goldstein called on the state to grant the new Jewish authority far-reaching executive powers, enabling it “to carry out its tasks and break the resistance that has emerged out of a misunderstood will to autonomy and unhealthy local patriotism.”

The proposed bill created a new central institution with authority over all Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands. While individual communities retained some autonomy, the central office was to be responsible for meeting Jews’ collective religious needs and for distributing state subsidies for Jewish clergy. Furthermore, the institution was to act as an advisor to the state requiring public offices to consult it in matters concerning the Jewish communities.

As the legislation only laid out the framework for this new institution, the SC was entrusted with working out the details of the relationship between its ‘successor’ and the regions’ Jewish communities. The SC was, however, appointed to act immediately as the central Jewish authority, thus confirming the belief that the SC, as noted earlier by one of its members, “had gained much weight in political and administrative circles so much so that

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127 Goldstein referred to “separatism and local patriotism” no less than four times in his initial presentation, Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
128 Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
129 Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
130 Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
they will not intervene in Jewish matters without first asking for the wishes and point of view of the SC.” However, while the authorities subsequently continued to drag their feet in negotiating the details of the reform, the SC did indeed succeed in not only establishing itself as a central Jewish authority, but also in further eroding the long-standing tradition of Jewish communal autonomy and self-governance in the Bohemian Lands.

While Angelo Goldstein had shepherded the 1937 reform bill through the legislature, in his speech and in the subsequent debate, he expressed disappointment in what he saw as the reform’s weakness, namely that it did not create a central Jewish authority for all of Czechoslovakia. Goldstein agreed with other MPs that such a bold move would indeed have strengthened the country’s territorial and political integrity, a weapon against “the separatism and revisionism that is fed by the persistence of legal dualism.” What was in Goldstein’s opinion an unnecessarily cautious reform reflected, however, that the Ministry of Education in negotiating the framework for this new institution had accepted the position of the SC over their own preferences for a state-wide institution.

The SC’s resistance to a Czechoslovak organization was, however, guided by a concern about upholding a positive image of Jews and their communities in the Bohemian Lands, one that, in their mind, had very little to gain politically and culturally from being associated with the eastern Jews. In Moravia, religious leaders were worried that community boards, desperate for rabbis and eager to save money, would jump at the opportunity to hire Slovak ‘rabbis.’ They informed the state authorities that despite their Czechoslovak

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133 Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
134 Goldstein in exchange with MPs Dormin and Ivák, Goldstein NSČ January 21, 1937.
135 For persistent pressure from the SC not to create a Czechoslovak organization, see internal ministerial notes d. Jan 8, 1934 and ditto d. May 3, 1934, in NA-Mš 47/VIII karton 3917.
citizenship “graduates from the seminary in Bratislava lack the kind of general education and knowledge required in Moravian communities.”

In the early 1920s, the Jewish community in Hodonín/Göding, a town with less than 1,000 Jews in southern Moravia, for example, requested that prospective candidates hold Czechoslovak citizenship along with a doctorate and could demonstrate proficiency in German and Czech. In particular, the advertisement for the position stressed, the candidate should be able to both speak and write Czech as religious education in the state language was especially important to the local community.

More than a decade later, the character of rabbis’ education was still more important to the SC’s rabbinical committee than the candidates’ citizenship. Insisting that formal rabbinical ordination along with a completed high school degree constituted a minimum requirement for rabbis in the west, the SC sough to guard their community’s image of Bildung against a potential influx of eastern Jews equipped with Czechoslovak citizenship, but not with the social and cultural prestige so important to middle class Jewish culture in Central Europe. While the SC did recruit graduates from the Hebrew High School in Mukačevo for positions as religious functionaries and teachers in the Bohemian Lands, the fact that this institution was shunned, to say the least, by the traditional religious

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137 “Konkurs,” Jüdische Volksstimme October 21, 1921.
138 One member of the rabbinical committee, Samuel Arje, asked the state authorities to show leniency in enforcing the citizenship requirements for rabbis due to these internal cultural differences between the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia, see letter d. May 23, 1937 from Rabinská zkušební komise to the Ministry of Education. The latter concurred and recommended that the Ministry of Social Welfare, responsible for the work permits, issue permits for German and Austrian rabbis applying to work in Bohemia and Moravia, see letter d. December 6, 1937, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917; for Arje, see Stransky, “Religious Life,” 339.
establishments in the east perhaps confirmed its suitability in the eyes of the western Jewish activists.140

Through the 1930s, the Ministry of Education did indeed accept the SC’s insistence that only candidates ordained at reputable theological seminaries, mainly the ones Berlin, and Breslau, were acceptable as rabbis in the Bohemian Lands.141 Not only did the Ministry support the SC’s sponsorship of students receiving the majority of their training abroad, but it also supported some of the SC’s pleas for leniency in the enforcement of the citizenship requirements for the rabbis applying for positions in the Bohemian Lands. Indeed, the SC would rather negotiate hard with the authorities for work permits for so-called foreign rabbis, who “due to internal and external political conditions [...] were unwanted,” than having traditional orthodox Jews arrive as spiritual leaders of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands.142

Making Jews Czech

The question of what kind of rabbis to ‘import’ highlighted one of the central concerns of the SC, namely the way in which the foreignness of the rabbis reflected on Jewish society more broadly. Indeed, one of the key preoccupations of the SC in the interwar years was to make Jews and their communities more Czech. While this was partly an effort to improve Jews’ image, it also reflected a desire on behalf of these Jewish leaders to become a fully integrated, yet culturally distinct, community of worthy citizens. Beginning in the late 1920s, the SC embarked on a program for cultural and religious renewal among Jews, a

140 Jelinek, Carpathian Diaspora, 220.
program that was undertaken both with the financial and, more importantly, with the political support of the state.

The SC’s work centered on creating a new rabbinate steeped in the progressive and Czech spirit of the times, a generation of leaders that would play a central role in the Jewish renaissance as transmitters of the Jewish religious, ethical, and cultural tradition. The creation of a Czech rabbinate was part and parcel of the SC’s broader effort to recast the image of Judaism and Jews as a Czech cultural community rather than a vestige of German culture. Similarly, a Czech Torah translation and the documentation and conservation of Jewish heritage sites across the Bohemian Lands sponsored by the SC were forceful statements about Jews’ belonging in Czechoslovakia.143

Among the foremost priorities for the SC was the creation of a home-grown rabbinate. In response to the so-called deficit of rabbis, and hence years of inadequate moral and religious leadership among Jews, the SC crafted a proposal for the establishment of a state-sponsored Czechoslovak rabbinical seminary in Prague. In the proposal submitted to the Ministry of Education in March 1928, the SC presented the future seminary as an expression of Jews’ civic virtues:

From a religious stand point, our congregations would be satisfied with rabbis who have studied abroad. However, from a common point of view, it is necessary that a rabbi not be a foreign element in the community and that he be familiar with the environment in which he is supposed to function. It is here that the interest of the state

143 In some ways, the attempt to make Judaism Czech was similar to Catholic activists’ efforts to distance themselves from ‘Austrian’ Catholicism and infuse Catholicism with Czech national themes in the postwar years. Some of these activists founded the Czechoslovak Church (Československá církev) that became the second largest religious community in Czechoslovakia within a few years (it had just under 1 mill. members). The Czech Protestant churches had an easier time incorporating Czech nationalism, as the Czech nationalist narrative celebrated Protestant and anti-Catholic heroes of the nation’s past, see Martin Schulze Wessel, “Vyznání a národ v českých zemích,” in Češi a Němci: Dějiny – kultura – politika, eds. Walter Koschmal et al (Praha: Nakladatelství Paseka, 2002), 126-131, here 130. See also Martin Schulze Wessel, “Tschechische Nation und Katholische Konfession vor und nach der Gründung des Tschechoslowakischen Nationalstaats,” Bohemia 39 (1997): 311-237.
and that of the communities meet. For the state authorities, it is important that future rabbis have studied here, that they know the state language, and that they have grown up and become part of the country in which they will serve. Therefore, the seminary should be located in Prague. In no other city would the candidates have a more perfect opportunity to become familiar with the state language […] Indeed, it is quite possible that if this progressive institution was to be founded in Bratislava, then the local orthodox Jewish population there would oppose its establishment. The most important reason, however, is that in Prague, more so than anywhere else, the city’s atmosphere will contribute to the education of rabbis in the spirit of patriotism (státotvorném) [lit. state-building].

Thus, on the one hand, the proposal for a Prague seminary bore evidence of Jewish leaders’ commitment to Czechoslovakia. On the other, it also promised to be an institution that would ensure a favourable civic and cultural image for a new generation of rabbis, teachers, and other Jewish clergy. Furthermore, the SC argued, the founding a rabbinical seminary in Prague in many ways resumed a historical tradition of Jewish learning in the Bohemian Lands. Evoking the memory of Prague’s famed rabbis, such as the legendary Rabbi Löw, and the days of the influential Moravian Landesrabbiner, the Council professed that if the state extended its support, then the seminary would no doubt reach “a high rabbinical and scientific level that will once again make this country’s Jews the leaders of world Jewry as were the chief rabbis of Prague and Moravia in the past.”

The SC was not, however, asking for the state authorities to take pity on Jews. They insisted that Jews as citizens were entitled to a state-sponsored Jewish theological seminary. The SC demanded equality for Jews. “May we remind the Ministry,” the SC noted, “that we are the only religious group that still has not received any state support for the training of its

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144 Application for the establishment of a rabbinical seminary in Prague, d. March 26, 1928, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3917.
145 Application for the establishment of a rabbinical seminary in Prague, d. March 26, 1928. For the memory of Rabbi Löw and the Golem, see Kieval, Languages of Community, 95-113; for the Landesrabbiner, see Michael L. Miller, “Crisis of Rabbinical Authority: Nehemias Trebitsch as Moravian Chief Rabbi, 1832-1842,” Judaica Bohemiae 43 (2007-2008): 65-92.
spiritual leaders despite the demands placed on them by the state [...] if Jewish taxpayers’ money is being spent on the seminaries of other religious communities, then it would only be just that the state commit itself to the establishment and maintenance of a [rabbinical] seminary.” However, while the SC had intended to strengthen its proposal using the language of minority rights, it was precisely the possibility of setting a precedent for other religious groups that the Ministry cited internally in its decision to reject it. The Ministry did not, however, close the door to state sponsorship completely, asking the SC to raise the basic funds first and then apply for the Ministry to reconsider its position.

As the plans for a Prague seminary based on the prestigious Breslau model had to be scrapped, in the following year, the SC nevertheless devised a program that would produce somewhat home-grown rabbis and teachers. Through the late 1920s and 1930s, the SC sponsored between five and twelve rabbinical candidates who undertook studies at the seminaries in Breslau and Berlin. Over time, the SC’s wards did part of their training at institutions in Czechoslovakia before they went to Germany to complete their studies and receive their ordinations. This was a measure that not only saved the SC money, but also limited the problematic ‘foreign’ influence on these young men.

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146 Application for the establishment of a rabbinical seminary in Prague, d. March 26, 1928.
147 Ministerial notes d. May 21, 1928; in their seminary application, the SC pointed out that while Jews made up 3% of the country’s population, they only received (Bohemian Lands, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Ruthenia combined) 1.3% of the Ministry’s budget for religious communities (Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia accounted for Kč 840,000 and the Bohemian Lands for Kč 665,000). By 1934, the funding had not improved significantly. According to Václav Müller, in 1934, Jewish communities received almost Kč 1.8 mill (in comparison the Czechoslovak Church, whose congregation was double the size (about 800,000) of the Jewish one, received Kč 5.4 mill), Müller, “Náboženství a národnost,” 247. In the statement attached to the application, the SC’s assembly stated: “Except for the seminary in Budapest, most Jewish seminaries were established using private funds and subsequently the state would begin subsidizing them or, as is the case in Paris, take over the administration completely. We do not want this institution in our state to be established with private funds, as citizens we ask that it be established using state funds […] since our state acts in its own interest, when in acts in ours,” declaration from meeting d. January 22, 1928.
149 For financial concerns, see Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 314.
seminary (Pedagogia pro výchovu učitelů náboženství a prosemínáře v Praze) had been established in Prague where the rabbinical students completed their first two years of studies and where the much-needed teachers were trained. Furthermore, in advance of their studies abroad or during summer holidays, the SC shepherded the students through Czech-language courses meant to ensure they had a suitable command of the state language. In return for their stipends, these young men committed themselves to serve communities in the Bohemian Lands for at least ten years following their ordination, placements that would be made at the discretion of the SC. Yet, the continued reliance on foreign rabbinical seminaries remained a sore point for the SC and, as mentioned earlier, beginning in 1931 it started allocating resources for a seminary fund. Not until the end of 1937 did the government commit to the establishment and support of a Jewish theological seminary in Prague, which was to open its doors for the first time in the fall semester of 1938.

However, in response to the perception of a much broader crisis in Jewish education, the SC also devised programs that were to have a more immediate impact on Jewish education in the Bohemian Lands. As the public elementary and high schools remained the main sites for Jewish education, the Council focused on creating a pool of Jewish teachers with adequate Jewish knowledge, modern pedagogical skills, and equipped with both a

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152 On the lack of a seminary as a “painful gap” for the SC, see letter d. May 20, 1931 NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
153 The SC as well as the Slovak federation Jeschurun donated funds for this project in addition to the state funds committed by the government, “Rabínský seminář v Československu,” Židovské zprávy November 12, 1937.
command of Czech language and Czechoslovak citizenship.\textsuperscript{154} For this purpose, the SC sponsored long and short-term courses for teachers at the Jewish high school in Brno/Brünn and the Hebrew high school in Mukačevo, summer seminars in various locations in Bohemia, and later more extensive training at the provisional seminary in Prague.\textsuperscript{155} As part of these efforts to strengthen Jewish education in the broadest sense, the SC also funded Richard Feder’s work preparing suitable textbooks for instruction in Hebrew and Judaism for use in both Czech and German-language schools.\textsuperscript{156}

Similarly, in an effort to address the lack of religious leadership in the majority of the regions’ communities, the SC arranged and funded a program to train religious functionaries, especially cantors. Like the teachers and rabbis, these functionaries had to be Czechoslovak citizens and the SC recruited graduates from the Hebrew High School as they possessed a modern education, and were “already fluent in the state language and with the basic Hebrew training necessary for this profession.”\textsuperscript{157} The SC’s focus on educating minor Jewish clergy was partly a response to the lack of any religious leadership in many places and the need to train clergy who could serve smaller and less resourceful communities. One such community in Moravia was, according to a critical article in Židovské zprávy, looking for a

\textsuperscript{154} In 1937, the expenses for teachers’ training and rabbinical students’ education was Kč 47,000 and Kč 60,000 respectively, letter d. November 10, 1937, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47 karton 3921.

\textsuperscript{155} The Mukačevo programs for teachers were generally two years long, but the SC also ran summer courses for teachers in Bohemia and Moravia. In 1936, the teacher training was transferred to the ‘provisional’ seminary in Prague, see Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 314; “Deset let Nejvyšší Rady,” Židovské zprávy March 3, 1937.

\textsuperscript{156} For reference to Feder in budget, see letter d. May 31, 1935, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.

\textsuperscript{157} The cooperation between the SC and the explicitly Zionist Hebrew High School in Mukačevo is yet another example of the pragmatism that characterized the work of these so-called assimilationist and Zionist activists. The SC had originally envisioned establishing a permanent educational institution (at the cost of Kč 80,000/year) for religious functionaries in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, but had to scrap the idea due to lack of funds, see letter d. December 18, 1930, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921. Letter d. May 20, 1931, from SC to Ministry of Education, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
cantor who “was musically educated, able to conduct a service with organ and choir, read from the Torah, acts as Shohet (ritual butcher), teach lessons in religion in the elementary school, would be authorized to keep the community’s registry, as well as be under the age of forty and unmarried.” While lamenting the community board’s disregard for Jewish traditional values by refusing to provide for the cantor’s family, the author did acknowledge the need in communities like this one for religious leaders that could perform a broad range of tasks.

The focus on minor clergy, however, was also an attempt to stem the stream of Slovak Jews seeking employment as religious functionaries in the west. As communities here struggled to find and afford suitable clergy, Hugo Stransky argues, their boards employed Jews from Slovakia with some degree of religious studies behind them to provide a wide-range of religious services for their congregations, a practice resented by rabbis in the west.158 Like ordained rabbis and well-qualified teachers, the new professionalized communal clergy was to reinvigorate religious life and the community as a cultural institution.

Another major priority for the SC in the interwar years was the creation of a modern religious canon in Czech. While it funded new textbooks and August Stein’s translation of the High Holiday prayer book into Czech, it was the creation of a Czech Torah that carried particular importance.159 Indeed, the SC presented the translation of the Five Books of Moses into Czech as a step as momentous as Moses Mendelssohn’s translation of the Torah

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158 Hugo Stransky was educated at the seminary in Berlin and served as a rabbi in he interwar years in both the Bohemian Lands and Slovakia (Žilina/Zsolna/Sillein), *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 2, 560; Stransky, “Religious Life,” 345.
159 For earlier attempts at making Judaism Czech through translations and change of liturgical language, see Kieval, “Jan Hus and the Prophets: Fashioning Czech Judaism at the Turn of the Century,” in *Languages of Community*, 159-180.
into German. Mendelssohn’s translation and commentary was considered by contemporary observers, and later by historians, as a major step in the modernization of Jewish culture and religion and hence Jews’ integration into society more broadly.\textsuperscript{160} To the SC, Torah translations were part and parcel of Jews’ historical experience:

Ancient as well as more recent history has shown that where Jews live among other nations, the door into the culture of the other nations is only opened up completely when the [Jewish] Bible is translated into the language of the nations [among whom Jews live]. From the Bible’s Greek translation to Mendelssohn’s German one, it was only with the translation of this Holy Book that Jews adopted the Bible’s language as a language of Judaism that resonates with its followers. Thus, only with this translation of the Bible into Czech will the Czech language become Jews’ language of worship.\textsuperscript{161}

While the SC pointed to the importance of Torah translations in Jewish history, it also evoked a more local and familiar trope. In the dominant Czech nationalist narrative, the translation of the Christian Bible into Czech and Jan Hus’ use of the Czech vernacular in his sermons were considered significant moral achievements central to the Czech national awakening, a moral weight that the SC now sought to bestow on its own translation project.\textsuperscript{162}

The translation of the Torah, like the creation of a Czech-speaking rabbinate, was central to the SC’s efforts to modernize Jewish religious life in the Bohemian Lands. On the one hand, these priorities were a response to political changes that demanded that Jewish


clergy and teachers adopt the language of the state. On the other, however, the SC’s focus on educating new spiritual leaders and on making Judaism Czech was also a response to the widespread perception among Jewish activists that Jewish religious culture in the Bohemian Lands had become stagnant, a decaying relic with little appeal to current and future generations of Jews. Only a new spiritual leadership would be able to re-establish the connection between modern Jews and the Jewish religious tradition, a desirable moral pursuit from both a Jewish and civic standpoint. Concerned with the image of Judaism as inherently German, Jewish activists pursued the Czechification of the Jews’ spiritual leadership and religious canon, thereby making Jews and their communities into social and cultural entities rightfully at home in the Bohemian Lands.

The SC’s commitment to Czech was, however, not one that severed the ties to German language and culture. Rather, it embraced a bilingualism in which Czech was the official, but not the only, language of use, a policy similar to the one adopted by the Prague Federation of Jewish Communities, which refused to choose sides in the ‘language struggle.’ In practice, German continued to play an important role in Jewish religious and cultural life. This commitment to bilingualism, however, also constituted part of the image of Jews as an integral part of the Bohemian and Moravian cultural landscape that the SC was eager to display.

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163 On Masaryk and his emphasis on religion and moral regeneration for the character of individuals and societies, see Kieval, *Languages of Community*, 174, 203.
164 Letter d. October 10, 1925 from the board of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Prague to Ministry of Education submitting its statutes, NA-Mš sign. 47/VIII karton 3921.
165 The 1933 booklet on Jewish heritage sites was, for example, published in 1000 Czech copies and 2000 German ones, *O židovských památkách v Československé republice* (Praga: Památková komise Nejvýšší rady Svažu židovských obcí náboženských v Čechách, na Moravě a Slezku, 1933) and *Die jüdischen Denkmaler in der Tschechoslowakei* (Prag: Veröffentlichungen der Denkmalkommission des Obersten Rates der jüdischen Kultusgemeinden in Böhmen, Mähren, und Schlesien, 1933). For number of copies, see “Nejvyšší Rada náboženských obcí v posledním roce,” *Židovské zprávy* January 5, 1934.
If Jew’ multiple languages were to acts as ‘evidence’ of their history in the region, so were the many remnants of Jewish life that dotted the countryside in the Bohemian Lands. Indeed, precisely at the time that Jewish society became decidedly urban, Jewish activists looked to the rural past as a site for cultural identification. As centuries-old communities were abandoned for the city, they were reinvested with meaning as sites of organic and authentic Jewish life. Indeed, the image of the old Jewish way of life in the Bohemian Lands was fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, the small communities were associated, in the minds of Jewish critics, with neglect, decay, and dysfunction. On the other, however, the ‘old’ kehillah bore testimony to a particular Jewish cultural tradition and history and documented the longevity of Jewish life in the area.

From the outset, the SC fashioned itself as the custodian of the Jewish cultural heritage in the Bohemian Lands. While it supported initiatives already under way such as the Jewish Museum in Prague or the newly established Society for the History of Jews in Czechoslovakia (Společnost pro dějiny židů v Československé republike/Gesellschaft für Geschichte der Juden in der Čechoslovakische Republik), it established its own Heritage Committee (památková komise/Denkmalkommission) in 1928. The SC’s chair, August

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167 Jewish activists remained invested in the particularity of regional Jewish history as reflected in the establishment of separate Jewish museums Moravia (1936) and Slovakia (1928) in addition to the existing Prague one (1906), for the Moravian museum in Mikulov/Nikolsburg, see Magda Veselská, “Židovské ústřední museum pro Moravsko-Slezko v Mikulově,” RegioM: *Sborník Regionálního muzea v Mikulově* (2005): 80-87.

168 The SC’s budget included ‘conservation’ as a category listing expenses for the upkeep of heritage sites, support for the Jewish museum, and for the historical societies. According to the budgets submitted to the Ministry of Education, the amount ranged from Kč 10,000 to 40,000 annually from 1929 to 1933, and from 1934 to 1937 between Kč 200 and 10,000. These budgets only included the SC’s expenses, not what individual federations and communities might have been spending on conservation and museum work. For SC’s involvement with the Society for the History of Jewish in Czechoslovakia, see Samuel Steinherz, “Vorwort,” in
Stein, was a veteran supporter of the efforts to preserve the Jewish past and was joined on the Committee by other museum experts and activists, such as Salomon H. Lieben and Isidor Hirsch, who were already engaged in documenting, collecting, and displaying the material culture of the regions’ past and present Jewish societies.169

The urgency of the SC’s efforts to create a collection of sources “that attests to the artistic, historical, and cultural contribution of the Jewish culture that emerged in this area and was preserved in communities here” was brought on by fear of actual physical dissolution or dispersion of the Jewish heritage due to mismanagement and financial difficulties among rural Jews.170 Indeed, stories of synagogues being sold off and turned into cinemas and dance halls highlighted the urgency of the Heritage Committee’s work to members of the SC.171 At the same time, however, as Norbert Adler argued, the Jewish cultural heritage was central to the Jewish renaissance that the SC hoped to engineer. The documentation and display of the Jews’ unique cultural heritage, a heritage shaped by and imbedded in the physical landscape, was a key step in Adler’s mind in cultivating Jews’ historical consciousness and hence in their Jewish awakening. A useable past, one distinctively Jewish yet at home among non-Jews, one of belonging and cultural creativity rather than alienation and persecution, was to Adler essential in fostering a new generation of self-aware and respectable Jews. Indeed, the memory of the Kehillah, of the old Jewish life, was a way in which Jewish activists recast the Jewish community as a site for cultural

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169 For the establishment of the Heritage Committee, see Michal Bušek, ed., “Naděje je na další stránce:” 100 let knihovny Židovského muzea v Praze (Praha: Židovské muzeum v Praze, 2007), 10.
170 In the reform proposal submitted in January 1928, the SC asked the government to intervene to prevent any community boards affected by the reform from selling communal property off, see reform proposal d. January 24, 1928.
171 See discussion at meeting May 31, 1931 as reported in Židovské zprávy, “Nejvyšší rada židovských obcí,” Židovské zprávy June 8, 1931.
identification. In much the same way as new rabbis and teachers were to act as transmitters of Jewish knowledge and traditions, synagogues, cemeteries, and Torah-scrolls were to become sites for cultural identification rather than religious observance allowing the Jewish community to re-emerge as the center for Jewish life in the Bohemian Lands.172

Cooperation or conquest? The twisted road from Kultus- to Volksgemeinde

The SC’s work to modernize the Jewish communities ran parallel to Jewish nationalists’ efforts to transform the communities from religious institutions, Kultusgemeinden, to national ones, Volksgemeinden. As Michael Brenner has shown for Weimar Jewry, Jewish nationalists focused in particular on expanding their communities’ social welfare and educational institutions, thereby, they believed, strengthening Jews’ sense of belonging to a national Jewish community.173 In the Bohemian Lands, Moravian activists took the lead in transforming their communities into Volksgemeinden. Already in the fall of 1919, Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau’s community board adopted new statutes that not only outlined the community’s religious obligations, but also its commitment “to foster Jewish peoplehood (Pflege des jüdischen Volkstums),” a task that involved establishing and maintaining Jewish educational and cultural institutions, providing Hebrew language education, and arranging for public lectures on Hebrew literature and Jewish history.174 Furthermore, according to the statutes, the community was also responsible for defending “Jewish honour” as well as Jews’

172 “O významu Nejvyšší rady svazu náboženských obcí,” (an interview with Norbert Adler) Židovské zprávy November 5, 1926, see also Edvard Lederer, “Kongruový zákon a naší rabíni,” Rozvoj September 24, 1926.
174 The statutes were adopted on September 16, 1919, Statut der israelitischen Kultusgemeinde Mährisch Ostrau (Mährisch Ostrau: Verlag des Jüdischen Volksblattes, 1920), 3-4. Significantly, the statutes also required the community’s rabbi to be qualified to lecture on Jewish literature and history and willing to do so in the winter months.
rights and interests, a new political role for the community board no doubt made urgent by the anti-Jewish agitation and violence that flared up over and over in the volatile postwar period. About a year later, the Jewish community in Brno/Brünn adopted similar statutes.\textsuperscript{175} However, if this important Moravian community moved quickly to redefine the community, in Bohemia similar efforts were met with more resistance. While the \textit{Volksgemeinde} eventually became the norm in the Bohemian Lands, a transformation Zionists depicted as a reflection of the democratization of the communities, it was hardly a process undertaken using democratic means. Instead, it was an ideal imposed on the communities in Bohemia and Moravia by the recently empowered central Jewish authority in the late 1930s.

Through the 1920s and 1930s, Zionists faced opposition to their efforts to broaden the communities’ social welfare, cultural, and educational commitments from Czech-Jews and other community activists. They were wary that Zionists were seeking to take control of communal institutions and resources in order to harness them to their political agenda. In Prague, for example, Czech-Jewish activists policed the use of communal resources, ensuring that the board only funded so-called religious activities. Thus, while the community board supported religious education, it did not generally fund Prague’s Jewish national school. Similarly, while Czech-Jewish activists supported the Jewish hospital’s use of communal grounds near the new Jewish cemetery in the Strašnice neighbourhood, they fought long and hard to expel the Jewish nationalist sports club Hagibor from this property.\textsuperscript{176} The Czech-Jewish activists might very well have had reasons to be suspicious of the Zionist board

\textsuperscript{175} The Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau community’s statutes, authored by Alois Hilf, became the model for other Moravian Jewish communities such as Brno/Brünn, for Hilf’s model statutes, see Theodor Haas, “Die Reform der Brünner Kultusgemeinde Statuten,” \textit{Jüdische Volksstimme} January 23, 1921.

\textsuperscript{176} For struggle between Hagibor and Prague’s Jewish community, see Tatjana Lichtenstein, “‘Heja, Heja, Hagibor!’– Jewish Sports, Politics, and Nationalism in Czechoslovakia, 1923-1930,” \textit{Leipziger Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur} 2 (2004): 191-208.
members’ political intentions. In Brno/Brünn, where the community was committed to this broader social and cultural agenda, the board extended subsidies not only to the local Jewish national schools, but also to Zionist political organization’s such as Mizrachi and Poale Zion (Workers of Zion, a socialist-Zionist party). One author, writing on the eve of the community elections in the Czech-Jewish bastion of Hradec Králové/Königgrätz, claimed that “in those places where they [the Zionists] are in charge, they have introduced into the community regulations, against very clear laws, care for the ‘Jewish nation’ or ‘the Jewish national whole’.” Accusing Zionists of using “totalitarian methods,” the writer pointed to Jewish nationalist activists as the cause of Jewish disunity, warning:

[I]n communities, where Zionists are in the majority the goal of Zionist policies is obvious. These communities take on activities that are completely beyond their original purpose, which is to care for the religious needs of its members. Regardless of Czech-Jewish protests, they donate exorbitant amount of money not only to projects in Palestine, but also to a series of institutions that are obviously Jewish nationalist (for example, Makabi, Hechaluz Hamizrachi, Techeleth Lavan, Haoved, Hapoel, the Hebrew high schools etc.).

However, while these local struggles between Czech-Jews and Zionists were not unusual, the mandatory unification of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands added to this familiar battle a new, stronger player, one that Czech-Jews suspected of having a Jewish nationalist agenda.

The union of Jewish communities enforced by the 1937 bill adopted by the Czechoslovak National Assembly was, not surprisingly, welcomed in Zionist circles. Not only did writers take pride in the Jewish nationalist parliamentarians’ role in making “the first Jewish law in the republic,” but they also saw it as the first step in overcoming “the

177 For Brno/Brünn community budget, see Zionistische Organisation Brünn Berichtet (Brünn: Verlag der Zionistischen Organisation in Brünn 1932), 10.
179 Ibid.
chaotic fragmentation in favour of Jewish unity.”¹⁸⁰ In an article discussing the new Constitution for the Society of Jewish Religious Communities in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, prepared by none other than Gustav Fleischmann, the editor of Židovské zprávy, Zdeněk Landes, noted with satisfaction that it stipulated not only the democratization of communal elections, but also opened up for communities expanding into new areas such as social welfare and cultural activities, a proposal that no doubt caused alarm among Czech-Jewish activists.¹⁸¹

Furthermore, while the SC’s power depended on the authority of the state, the SC made use of its constitution to strengthen Jewish religious authorities vis-à-vis the community boards by establishing a new rabbinical court that would act as the supreme religious authority in the Bohemian Lands. Thus, in contrast to Zionist tactics in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where they were primarily battling rabbinical authorities, and where their rhetoric had a distinct anti-clerical tone, in the west Jewish nationalists sang another tune.¹⁸² Here cooperation with rabbis and so-called orthodox circles was not only a sign of Zionists’ commitment to the Jewish tradition, but also served to bring the ever hesitant observant circles, still influential in some communities in the late 30s, in line with the unification efforts.¹⁸³

¹⁸² See for example the complaints of corruption and oppression allegedly committed by rabbis in the east, “Poražení,” Židovské zprávy November 20, 1925. Jewish leaders in the East also courted the central state authorities for recognition of their leadership, thereby resisting Zionist attempts to represent all of Czechoslovakia’s Jews through the Jewish National Council, see letter d. September 29, 1921 from the board of the Jewish Conservative Party in Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Židovská Konservativní strana v Podkarpatské Rusi) to Ministry of Interior, NA-Mš inv.č. 2086 sign. 47/VIII karton 3921. For attitudes towards Zionism among eastern traditional leaders, see Jelinek, Carpathian Diaspora, 146-147.
¹⁸³ Fleischmann argues that some Moravian and a few Orthodox communities were at first hesitant about giving up their autonomy, but came around, he states, “in the interest of Jewry as a whole.” Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 319; for more on cooperation between Zionists and Orthodox circles in the Bohemian Lands, see also Čapková, Češi, Němci, Židé, 206-212.
While the SC had mobilized support among religious leaders and in traditionalist, Jewish nationalist, and Zionist circles, the response to the proposed reform in the Czech-Jewish weekly *Rozvoj* was at first surprised and apprehensive.\(^{184}\) Caught unaware that a proposal had been readied for the senate committee in the summer of 1936, Czech-Jewish activists first sought to mobilize political opposition to the bill.\(^{185}\) When that failed, they called for extensive community consultation once the details for the role of the SC were to be negotiated.\(^{186}\) However, before long the negotiations of a constitution for the SC sparked yet another confrontation between Czech-Jewish activists and Zionists in the Jewish community in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, a Zionist stronghold, the outcome of which would become a turning point in Jewish communal politics in the Bohemian Lands.\(^{187}\)

In March 1936, the Czech-Jewish activist Julius Bondy, a member of the Jewish community in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, complained to the regional authorities that the community board was overstepping its obligations by supporting Jewish social and cultural institutions, activities that, according to the complainant, did not qualify as care for Jews’ religious needs.\(^{188}\) After months of intense and public verbal clashes between Czech-Jewish and Zionist activists, the authorities in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau ruled in

\(^{184}\) “K osnově nové právní úpravy náboženské společnosti židovské,” *Rozvoj* July 24, 1936.

\(^{185}\) The influential Czech-Jew Maximilian Reiner, who was chair of the Prague Jewish community at the time, was allegedly unaware of the Senate’s deliberations, see “Zpráva o mimořádné schůzi,” *Rozvoj* June 6, 1936; Lev Kohn, “K osnově nové právní úpravy náboženské společnosti židovské,” *Rozvoj* July 24, 1936; Dr. S., “Osnova organisaci náboženské společnosti židovské,” *Rozvoj* November 28, 1936.

\(^{186}\) Dr. S., “Osnova organisaci náboženské společnosti židovské,” *Rozvoj* November 28, 1936.

\(^{187}\) Fleischmann claims that Czech-Jews “were anything but delighted at the prospects of a new code […] for [they] knew that eventually such an organization would be bound to stand in the way of assimilation,” Fleischmann, “The Religious Congregation,” 319.

\(^{188}\) “Asimilanti proti obcích,” *Židovské zprávy* December 24, 1937.
favour of the Czech-Jews in mid December 1937. While Zionists were outraged over the
decision, the battle was not yet lost, as the SC decided to issue an expert opinion.189

The SC, annoyed for having been bypassed as an advisor to the state on matters
concerning the Jewish community, a role it had been formally awarded a few months earlier
by the National Assembly, handed the case to its rabbinical court for an authoritative
decision.190 It concluded “that social and cultural activities are and can be the responsibility
of religious communities […] indeed the rabbinical court considers social and cultural
activities an important part of our religion and therefore a religious need which the
communities are obligated to care for.” Furthermore, the SC’s rabbinical committee declared
that “no disgruntled individual or state office” could decide what constituted religious
obligations—this was the prerogative of the SC and its rabbinical authorities only.191

Thus, by the late 1930s, after two decades of both political struggle and sustained
cooperation between Zionists and other Jewish activists on the communal political stage,
Jewish nationalists’ efforts to transform the Jewish community from a *Kultusgemeinde* to a
*Volksgemeinde*, a community centered on shared ethnicity, bore fruit. If their attempt to
conquer the regions’ Jewish communities had been less swift than perhaps initially imagined
by Zionist leaders, by the end of the 30s, there was consensus among some of the most
influential secular and religious leaders in the Bohemian Lands that the modern Jewish
community did indeed constitute a *Volksgemeinde*, an ethno-national community with
religious, social, and cultural needs.

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189 Matters become so heated in the spring of 1938 that Josef Popper, the chair of the SC, felt compelled to issue
a public statement calling for restraint. He urged the opposing parties to consider the damaging effects on
Jewry as a whole of the display of these bitter internal divisions and urged them “to use dignified language and
manners in public and […] avoid topics that could fuel anti-Jewish attitudes,” Josef Popper, “Provolání
Nejvyšší rady,” Židovské zprávy March 4, 1938
190 “Svědectví Nejvyšší rady,” Židovské zprávy March 11, 1938.
191 Ibid.; Fleischmann also discusses this case in some detail, “The Religious Congregation,” 321.
Conclusion

The case of the SC, a closely knit group of Jewish leaders with differing political and national loyalties and religious commitments, challenges the image of Jewish activists in the interwar years as so divided by ideological conflicts that they were unable to find common ground. In response to a widespread sense of crisis in Jewish life in the postwar years, these Jewish activists cooperated on a plan for the regeneration of the Jewish communities, transforming them into centers for a new vibrant Jewish culture. Indeed, in the name of Jewish continuity and Jews’ social and cultural respectability, these activists turned to education as the key to a Jewish renewal. On the one hand, they invested much effort and money into both the education of a new Czech rabbinate, a cultural elite that could act as spiritual leaders, as well as the training of highly qualified teachers ready to fan out and reinvigorate Jewish education in the country’s public schools. On the other, the SC also looked to nurture Jews and non-Jews’ awareness of Jewish history and culture, especially the memory of long-established and flourishing Jewish communities in Bohemia and Moravia. Much like Jews in neighbouring Germany, Jews in the Bohemian Lands turned to their past as a way of making a claim of belonging in the present.192 Indeed, old synagogues and cemeteries dotting the countryside in every corner of the Bohemian Lands served to reassure Jews of their place within society in Czechoslovakia, their rightful belonging documented in the cultural landscape.

However, while Jewish activists searched for respectability and belonging by nurturing the memory of a harmonious and organic past, they also shared the belief that Jews’ future depended on the modernization of their communities as well as a deepening of

192 Roemer, “The City of Worms,” 78-84.
the relationship between Jews and the state. Convinced that the fragmentation of Jewish communities, embodied by the historical tradition of communal autonomy, was a source of decay and stagnation, these Jewish leaders sought to establish a modern central administration for the Jewish communities harnessing the authority of the state for a program of modernization. Presenting itself as an agent for the state, the SC worked to centralize the governance of Jewish life, rightfully, in their minds, now in the hands of experienced bureaucrats, to regulate and control the affairs of individual communities, and to impose among Jews in the Bohemian Lands a cultural and political orientation in sync with that of the state’s ethos. Jewish activists thus actively sought to both strengthen their own leadership position within Jewish society and build a partnership with the state in their pursuit of Jewish continuity and integration.

The case of the SC also shows that Zionists seeking to revolutionize Jewish life, to “conquer the Jewish communities,” did so not through the revolt of a new generation of Jews, but through sustained and pragmatic cooperation with established leadership and political opponents. While Zionists were committed to creating Jewish national institutions, they found common ground with other Jewish activists convinced that Jewish continuity depended on the transformation of the community from a site of religious observance to one for cultural identification. They shared a longing for an authentic Jewish culture, for remaining faithful to their ‘fathers,’ for assuring themselves of their worth as citizens, that transcended their ideological differences. However, in the interwar years, Zionists nevertheless persistently pursued their goal of transforming the Jewish community from a religious institution to a national one, a process that entailed both cooperation and strife. By the late 1930s, a consensus had emerged among the leaders on the SC that Jewish continuity
depended on the communities’ ability to care for Jews’ collective religious, social, and cultural needs, a view no doubt strengthened by the worsening social and political conditions for Jews in Central Europe, which were keenly felt in communities across Czechoslovakia.

While the efforts of the SC to make Jews more Czech were rewarded by the state authorities, another Zionist project, the Jewish national schools, intended to accomplish similar goals of transforming Jews into respectable citizens by strengthening their commitment to Jewish culture, met with resistance from state bureaucrats. The next chapter, which focuses on Zionist activists’ struggle to create a Jewish national school system, explores the tension inherent within Zionists’ strategy of integration through national distinctiveness and the resistance of the central administration to efforts that appeared to weaken Czech cultural and linguistic hegemony in interwar Czechoslovakia.
Chapter 4

Josefov or Zion?

Zionism as Diaspora nationalism

In mid June 1921, as Czech, German, and Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands were getting ready for the annual campaigns to recruit children for their nation’s schools, František Friedmann reported on his recent visit to Prague’s new Jewish school. Impressed with what he found, Friedmann noted that if only Jewish parents could see the happiness of these children, at ease with each other and their teachers, learning Hebrew through song and play, they “would no doubt care much more about Jewish schools.” At the end of his tour, the teacher invited little Frischmann and little Winternitzová to the class podium. From up there, Friedmann reported, they recited “proudly and straight from the heart:”

Born in Bohemia, I speak Czech
And I take pride in my Czechness
I am a Jew and I will remain a Jew
I shall not forget my nation
The one who is ashamed of his own nation
deserves to be scorned by all people
I will not be silent about my nation,
I am proud of belonging to the Jewish nation.
Our nation is a glorious one
With an ancient life
I want to love it faithfully,
Never to renounce it

Friedmann’s depiction of the Jewish schools as a place where Jewish children frolicked among their peers and teachers, where there was harmony between their Hebrew song and Czech poetry, where they could be Jews and at home in Bohemia, embodied the utopian

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1 Iš Šalom (František Friedmann), “Návštěvou v pražské židovské škole,” Židovské zprávy June 13, 1921.
image of the Jewish school that Zionist activists in the Bohemian Lands harboured in the interwar years. Jewish nationalists shared with many politicians, educators, social workers, and professional child experts among others, a concern about the physical, moral, and spiritual state of the postwar generation of youth. Jewish activists believed, however, that due to Jews’ historical experience of dispersion, their youth was particularly affected by feelings of alienation and moral disorientation. In their minds, the Jewish national school promised to restore Jewish children’s emotional, psychological, physical, and moral health by creating a close-knit national community. They believed that this miniature Volksgemeinschaft was the space in which a new generation of Jews would emerge, committed simultaneously to their Jewish nation and the broader community of loyal Czechoslovak citizens.

In the interwar years, the Zionist movement in the Bohemian Lands developed a substantial infrastructure of social, cultural, and political institutions that balanced an attachment to Palestine with a commitment to the regeneration of Jewish national life in the Diaspora. As an acculturated and relatively comfortable Jewry in a stable and prosperous society, one wonders, as did historian Michael Berkowitz for western and central European Jews more broadly, why Jews bothered with Zionism?² This chapter suggests that Jews bothered because their Zionism was an ideology and a form of political, social, and cultural activism that offered to secure for them and their community respect, equality, cultural renewal, and integration. It offered to do so in ways that were familiar and legitimate to Jews and non-Jews alike in the Bohemian Lands. While the project in Palestine was central to these Zionist activists, who worked tirelessly on one fundraising campaign after the other,

and whose efforts resulted in still larger sums of money flowing from Czechoslovakia to Palestine, the Land of Israel remained an imagery place for most and a destination for even fewer until 1938.

In the interwar years, Jewish activists, like their Czech and German nationalist colleagues, looked to education, and in particular to national schools and the children who attended them, as the key to national regeneration and reconstitution. Through the 1920s and 1930s, Zionists politicians and activists worked to establish and secure a Jewish national school system in Czechoslovakia. Encouraged by what they believed to be Czech leaders’ commitment to national minority rights for Jews, Zionists expected that the state would provide funding for Jewish social welfare and cultural institutions, in particular for Jewish schools. While Czech leaders paid lip service to the Jewish nationalist cause, acknowledging as sincere Zionists’ pledges of loyalty and patriotism, state authorities rejected Jewish nationalists’ requests for state-supported Jewish schools. However, even if the Jewish schools remained modest private institutions attended by a minority of Jewish children, they were central as symbols of the Jewish national revival, as evidence of Jewish nationhood, and as institutions that, Jewish leaders hoped, would turn out a new generation of teachers, rabbis, and community leaders. Indeed, in the course of the interwar years, Jewish leaders in the Bohemian Lands looked to this Jewish nationalist project as an institution that would secure the continuity of Jewish life in Czechoslovakia.

The chapter opens by examining the character of Zionism in the Bohemian Lands. Then, I explore the new Jewish schools and their significance to Jewish nationalist activists, pedagogues and politicians, and the institutions’ importance as an instrument of Jewish renewal and as a symbol of Jewish nationhood. The success of Jewish national education
depended on Jewish nationalists’ ability to mobilize Jewish parents to entrust their children to the Jewish schools. I then turn to the strategies they employed. I investigate Jewish nationalists’ efforts to secure state support for the Jewish schools and show that their work was shaped in important ways by prewar modes of minority nationalist activism in the Bohemian Lands. Despite their efforts to rally Jewish parents for the Jewish schools, most Jewish children in the interwar years attended public Czech and Slovak language elementary schools, a development both welcomed and encouraged by the state. This last section highlights the challenges Zionists faced in seeking to sustain in practice the duality of national distinctiveness and Czechoslovak patriotism to which they were committed.

Zionism in the Bohemian Lands

The title of the Czech national anthem ‘Where is my home?’ embodies, although unintentionally of course, an important tension within Zionism, one that was there from the outset and which to some extent remains today. While Zionist ideologues rejected Jewish life in the Exile as degenerate, passive, and parasitic and looked to Palestine for physical, cultural, and moral redemption, the reality was that the majority of Zionist activists, supporters, and sympathizers continued to live in the Diaspora and many appear to have had no intention of leaving for Palestine until the onset of World War II. Even though Zionism essentially maintained that the Jewish Question, the problem of the Jews however defined, could only be solved by establishing a Jewish national homeland, this project depended

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3 For pre-state Zionist ideology and the dichotomy between Exile and Zion, see Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3-36. For an understanding of how Zionism functioned among Western Jews, the ones least likely to head for Palestine although they mobilized significant resources, see Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project*. Joshua Shanes has shown that the Zionist movement in late Habsburg Galicia focused on securing national minority rights in the Diaspora, Joshua Shanes, “National Regeneration in the Diaspora: Zionism, Politics, and Jewish Identity in Late Habsburg Galicia, 1883-1907,” (diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002).
politically, financially, and physically on the Jewish communities in the Diaspora. As the historian Matityahu Mintz has argued, by the early 1900s, Zionist leaders accepted that they needed to prioritize equally the Palestine project and the efforts to secure Jews’ civil and minority rights in the Diaspora. Soon, all Jewish interests were defined as Zionist interests and, Mintz maintains, Zionism developed into an all-inclusive ideology engaged in every aspect of Diaspora Jewish life. The more Zionist activists became integrated into and invested in the existing Jewish societies, the more Zionism became, according to Mintz, committed to and dependent upon the continuity of life in the Diaspora. Indeed, he argues “Zionism was transformed into an effective instrumentality for the preservation of Jewish life and culture in the diaspora.”

In Czechoslovakia, where the political parties functioned along axes of nation, religion, and class, the Jewish nationalist movement was able to compete for political power on the local and national level with other political parties. While this was a common phenomenon in Eastern Europe, where various Jewish religious, socialist, liberal, and nationalist parties participated in both internal Jewish and general political processes, in western and central European countries, such as Britain and Germany, Jewish party politics took place within the framework of the Jewish community only.6

The combination of a political landscape organized around national and other collectives and a viable parliamentary system provided Jewish nationalists with an opportunity to advance their agendas on a national level, pursuing Jewish collective interests

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as they defined them. Indeed, while Zionists in many cases had difficulties establishing themselves as a political force within the Jewish communities’ political system, something they ascribed to the resistance of religious and secular “oligarchs” to democratic and electoral reform, Jewish nationalist representatives were part of municipal governing bodies throughout the interwar years and held two seats in the country’s national assembly in the 1930s. Thus, Jewish nationalists’ “work in the present,” the mobilization of Jews for the Zionist movement, was tied in closely with efforts to consolidate and secure Jews’ position as a national minority in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, Jewish nationalist activists trusted that political representation was the ticket to transform the country’s Jewish societies into a national minority community complete with state-funded social, cultural, economic, and political institutions existing harmoniously as a distinct entity alongside the county’s other national groups.

In the 1920s, Jewish nationalist leaders’ faith in these political opportunities combined with the relatively economic prosperity and social and political stability in the west made the need for a Jewish homeland elsewhere less urgent, except as a refuge for Jews living in Czechoslovakia’s impoverished east and for the less fortunate Jews in neighbouring countries. Nevertheless, the Zionist project in Palestine played a central role for the Jewish nationalist movement in the Bohemian Lands. Zionists not only expanded and strengthened the fund raising institutions for land acquisition, emigration, and settlement such as the

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7 For the history of the Jewish Party in Czechoslovakia, see Marie Crhová, “Modern Jewish Politics in Central Europe: The Jewish Party of Interwar Czechoslovakia, 1918-1938,” (diss. Central European University, 2007). Zionists worked throughout the interwar years for democratization of the country’s Jewish communities. The conditions in the East were considered to be particularly appalling by Zionists, who faced stiff opposition from local communal authorities, see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, The Carpathian Diaspora: The Jews of Subcarpathian Rus’ and Mukachevo (New York: East European Monographs, 2007), 152-158.
8 It is not clear how many people were formally members of Zionist organizations in the Bohemian Lands. In Czechoslovakia, the number of people paying membership fees (the Shekel) was 18,693 in 1931. However, this number does not include everyone involved in the Zionist movement. For Shekel-payers, see Židovský Kalendář 1932/1933, 40.
Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael) and the Palestine Foundation Fund (Keren Heyesod), but also stated and re-stated their commitment to recruiting and training young Jews for emigration to Palestine.  

These efforts were, however, complicated by difficulties in recruiting young people for emigration, raising sufficient funds to sustain the training centers in the Bohemian Lands and in Slovakia, and by the increasing tensions between Jews and Arabs in Palestine that not only resulted in limitations on Jewish immigration, but might also have strengthened an existing uncertainty about the viability of the Palestine project among Jewish observers, Zionist activists, and supporters.  

While the number of Jews leaving Czechoslovakia for Palestine appears to have been negligible in the 1920s and early 1930s, the number of emigrants did pick up later in the 1930s.  

While some Jews from the Bohemian Lands left for Palestine, most emigrants were from Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.  

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9 The Jewish National Fund was established in 1901 and was primarily engaged in land acquisition, while the Palestine Foundation Fund, established in 1920, was a organization funding the activities of the World Zionist Organization that brought together Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish activists. For a history of these organizations in Britain, the United States, and Germany, see Michael Berkowitz, *Western Jewry and the Zionist Project*. The Jewish National Fund was established in Czechoslovakia in 1919/1920 and the Palestine Foundation Fund in 1921, see Oskar K. Rabinowitz, “Czechoslovak Zionism: Analecta to a History,” in *Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 2, 19-136, here 36, 38.  

10 For the lack of interest among youth, see the letter from Emil Margulies to A. Engländer d. September 9, 1924, NA-Fond Emil Margulies, Hechalutz: zemský svaz pro ČSR 1920-1931 karton 10 inv.č. 51. For the lack of interest among the Zionist and Jewish public for funding pioneers and the Palestine project, see Viktor Fischl, “Sionismus každodenní,” *Židovské zprávy* January 10, 1936. For complaints about Czechoslovakia’s Zionist organization not being allocated sufficient entry-certificates resulting in pioneers lingering and eventually abandoning training camps and farms, see the central committee resolution from meeting in Brno/Brünn July, 1926, as quoted in *Zionistische Organisation in Brünn Berichtet* (Brünn: Verlag der Zionistischen Organisation Brünn, 1932) [Bericht 1932], 22. On young Jews abandoning the training camps, see Bericht 1932, 67; “Resoluce přijaté v plenární schůzi ústředního výboru,” *Židovské zprávy* July 24, 1925; “Resoluce XII. Sjezd čsl. sionistů,” *Židovské zprávy* July 23, 1926; and Jelinek, *Carpathian Diaspora*, 207. For the decline of Hechalutz (the Pioneer), the organization that supported agricultural training for Jewish youths and their subsequent emigration to Palestine, and for demoralized groups of pioneers, see the letter from the Zionist Executive Committee for Czechoslovakia to the Jewish National Fund d. May 30, 1927, CZA–KKL 5/1772.  

11 The increase in emigration was part of a broader trend of increased emigration to Palestine from Eastern and Central Europe, see Alex Bein, *The Return to the Soil: A History of Jewish Settlement in Israel* (Jerusalem: The Youth and Hechalutz Department of the Zionist Organization, 1952), 443.  

12 In 1934, for example, out of 159 people (90 men and 69 women) who received visas, 11 were from Bohemia, 15 from Moravia-Silesia, 44 from Slovakia, and 89 from Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The author made a point out
and contemporaries estimate that about 4,000 to 6,000 Jews from Czechoslovakia immigrated to Palestine before 1938.\(^\text{13}\) It is unclear how many returned although there is evidence that the ‘returnee’ was not an unfamiliar figure to the Jewish and non-Jewish public in the Bohemian Lands.\(^\text{14}\)

Even if Bohemian and Moravian Jews’ desire for *aliyah* (emigration to Palestine) was negligible, they were very willing to contribute money for other Jews’ emigration to and settlement in Palestine. Between 1918 and 1938, the Jewish National Fund, for example, collected almost Kč 31 million. In comparison, the Palestine Foundation Fund, which appealed to the non-Zionist public especially, collected Kč 3,246,716 in 1929/30.\(^\text{15}\) While the annual sums collected grew consistently throughout the interwar years (the collected sums increased from Kč 955,564 in 1920/21, Kč 2,057,307 in 1929/30, to Kč 3,686,696 in 1937/38), Jews appear to have been particularly generous in times of crisis in Palestine or

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\(^{13}\) For estimation of 6,000 emigrants in 1937, see Simha-Manor-Mandelik, “Naši v Palestíně,” *Židovský kalendář* 1937/1938, 80-84, here 80; for 4,000, see Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, “Czechoslovak Jews in Israel,” in *New Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel*, vol. 2, ed. Geoffrey Wigoder (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), 311-312; Jelinek also reminds us that some of the emigrants were Jews who went to Palestine for religious reasons rather than Zionist ones, Jelinek, *Carpathian Diaspora*, 207. In comparison, 3,306 Jews left Weimar Germany for Palestine in the years 1920 to 1932. While German Jewry was significantly larger (568,000 in 1925) than the Jewish population in neighbouring Czechoslovakia (365,000 in 1930), the latter had more ‘eastern type’ communities, which supplied the majority of emigrants to Palestine until the mid 1930s. For German Jewry, see Hagit Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe: The Distinctive Path of German Zionism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 34, 104.

\(^{14}\) For complaints about the demoralizing effects of ‘returnees’ on pioneers preparing for emigration, see *Berichtet* 1932, 67. For statement that re-emigration to Czechoslovakia was much lower than elsewhere in the west, see “Dvě statistiky,” *Židovské zprávy* July 19, 1935. The Communist and Jewish writer Jiří Weil had his main female protagonist, in his 1937 novel and critique of Stalinism *Moskva-hranice* (Moscow to the border), leave her middle class home in Brno/Brünn and emigrate to Palestine, only to become disillusioned with the Zionist project and return home to Czechoslovakia. Soon hereafter, she leaves for the Soviet Union, Jiří Weil, *Moskva-hranice* (Prague, 1937). According to Alex Bein’s study, re-emigration from Palestine was quite significant in the late 1920s even exceeding immigration in some years. In 1926, for example, 13,081 Jews came to Palestine, while 7,365 left. In 1927, 2,313 entered Palestine, but 5,000 left the Yishuv, see Bein, *Return to the Soil*, 338.

\(^{15}\) For the Palestine Foundation Fund 1929/30 collection, see *Židovský Kalendář* 1932/1933, 40.
Thus, in 1929-1930, a time of serious conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, and the period from 1933 to 1938, when the persecution of German Jews were felt keenly in the Bohemian Lands as Jewish immigrants and refugees streamed across Czechoslovakia’s western borders.17

Zionists also engaged with the Jewish homeland in Palestine through lectures, films, art exhibitions, and the Zionist press, which brought news and stories from the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish society in Palestine) to both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences in the Bohemian Lands.18 Furthermore, for the Zionist youth movement, images and narratives from Palestine formed the basis for war games and other activities that were intended to provide children and youngsters with psychological and practical skills.19 In other words, while Palestine was not a physical destination for many Jews in Bohemia and Moravia, it

16 For overview of the Jewish National Fund numbers, see “Der Abschuss des Kontingentjahre 5698,” d. November 27, 1938, CZA–KKL 5/9317. In comparison, in 1922, the Jewish National Council applied for Kč 300,000 from the state to support the country’s Jewish schools, Gustav Fleischmann, “Státní rozpočet a židovské školství národní,” Židovské zprávy January 13, 1922. In 1931, the school association in Moravia’s budget was Kč 520,000, Berichtet 1932, 18. In 1934, the state’s support for the country’s Jewish religious communities amounted to Kč 1.8 mill., see Václav Müller, “Náboženství a národnost v naší republice,” in Národnostní obzor 5, no. 4 (1934): 241-247, here 247. The increase in donations in times of crisis was not unique to Czechoslovakia. Alex Bein notes that Jews in the Diaspora expressed their solidarity with the Yishuv by giving more money, setting fundraising records in 1929, see Bein, Return to the Soil, 428.

17 The Jewish National Fund also ran local patriotic Czechoslovak campaigns such as the fundraiser to establish the Masaryk Forest and the settlement Kfar Masaryk, launched in 1930 and 1935 respectively. Zionist leaders hoped that such ‘Czechoslovak’ Palestine projects would increase donations—and they did. For the launch of the Kfar Masaryk campaign, see Eretz Israel: Zprávy židovského národního fondu/Mitteilungen des jüdischen Nationalfonds January 10, 1935 CZA–KKL 5/6509, and “Der Abschuss des Kontingentjahre 5698.”

18 For an example of propaganda material for the Jewish National Fund distributed in the Zionist press, see “Obzory – příloha Židovských zpráv,” Židovské zprávy September 23, 1938. For images of ‘Czechoslovak’ life in Palestine distributed as part of fundraising campaign, see, for example, the pamphlet distributed as part of the campaign honouring Haim Arlosoroff, a Zionist leader killed in Palestine in 1933, Arlosoroffová akce – půda a kolonisace (Keren Kayemet LeIsrael, n.d.) CZA–DD 710. For a report discussing the showings of the film “The Promised Land” in Czechoslovakia, see the letter KKL Prague to KKL Jerusalem d. July 29, 1937, CZA–KKL 5/7835. The well-known Jewish painter Friedrich Feigl traveled to Palestine in the late 1920s and exhibited his work depicting its life and landscape in Prague on several occasions, see Friedrich Feigl: Paintings, Drawings, and Graphic Art (Prague: The Jewish Museum in Prague, 2007).

19 See, for example, Makabi Handbuch (Praha: Tschechoslowakischen Makabikreis im Makkabi Weltverband, 1931); for war games with Palestine themes, see “Makabi Hatzair Materialsammlung no. 2 5696/1936,” 36, CZA–DD 709. See also Berkowitz, Western Jewry and the Zionist Project, 147-174.
was nevertheless a project, an imaginary space, that many Jews, both Zionists and non-Zionists, encountered and engaged with in different ways.

While the Zionist movement thus in some ways resembled its cousins in western and central Europe, the tradition of minority nationalist activism in the Bohemian Lands offered Zionist activists opportunities to pursue the creation of Jewish national life at home. Indeed in the interwar years, this tradition became an important model for Zionist activists in their efforts both to mobilize Jews for the Jewish nationalist program and to muster support among Jews and non-Jews alike for their most important project, the Jewish national schools.

Zionists and the Jewish national schools in interwar Czechoslovakia

In the turbulent months after the end of World War I, Jewish nationalist activists optimistically embarked on the creation of the foundation for a Jewish national society in the new multinational state. Encouraged by the Czech government’s forthcoming attitude towards the Jewish nationalist movement and confident that Jews would be recognized as a national minority, Jewish activists set out to lay the groundwork for, what was in their view, the most important national institution, the school. By 1920, new Jewish national elementary schools emerged in the three largest cities in the Bohemian Lands, Prague, Brno/Brünn, and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau. Brno/Brünn also boasted a high school, and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau had a Jewish trade school. These five institutions constituted the Jewish national school ‘system’ in the Bohemian Lands until the end of the

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There is evidence that the Jewish school association tried to hold on to the already established religious Jewish schools, but the documentation on this handful of communal schools is very scarce. There was one such school in Bohemia and six in Moravia in 1920, České kalendář 1921/1922, 120. See also “Stav sionistické práce a příští úkoly naší organisace v Českoslov. republice,” České zprávy, November 17, 1922.

In the Bohemian Lands, elementary schools (národní školy) encompassed the students’ first four to five years. Then they could go on to four-year middle schools (měšťanky) or eight-year high schools (střední školy/Gymnasium).
1930s. Indeed, while Jewish urban communities in neighbouring Germany experienced a clear revival of Jewish schools in the 1920s, in the Bohemian Lands the numbers of students attending these schools remained more modest. In Prague, where the Jewish population grew from 31,751 in 1921 to 35,425 in 1930, the Czech-language Jewish elementary school had 17 students in 1922, 121 by 1928 (in that year, only about 7% of the city’s Jewish children in elementary school attended the Jewish one), and 200 by 1934. In Brno/Brünn, where there were 10,866 Jews in 1921 and 11,003 in 1930 the German-language Jewish elementary school had 110 students in 1928 and 158 in 1933 (about 7% of the Jewish children in elementary schools in Moravia). The Jewish high school, which primarily attracted local students with diverse Jewish backgrounds (many, although not the majority, were born in other parts of the former Habsburg Empire), became the most significant Jewish educational institution in the Bohemian Lands. In 1922, the high school had 55 students. This number had grown to 155 in 1928, 228 by 1934, and 244 by 1937. In Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, where there were 6,872 Jews in 1921 and 7,482 in 1930, the German-language Jewish elementary school had 131 students in 1922, 172 in 1928, and 235

22 There were also kindergartens attached to the elementary schools in Prague and Brno/Brünn, but it is unclear, if they remained continuously open during the interwar years, VIII. Zionistentag Brunn 30.-31.7.1928 – Rehenschaft über die Vergangenheit – Programm für die Zukunft [Zionistentag 1928] (Mährisch Ostrau: Zionistische Zentralverband für die čsl. Republik, 1928), 59. Forenrolment in the elementary school and kindergarten in Brno/Brünn in the early 1930s, see Berichtet 1932, 19.
24 For Prague numbers, see František Friedmann, “Jak se změnilo rozsídlení Židů v Čechách za posledních 50 let,” Židovské zprávy December 2, 1927; Zionistentag 1928, 59; and “Židovská škola v Praze,” Židovské zprávy April 16, 1937. By 1938, there were three elementary schools in Prague, “Židovská matice školská pro Čechy v Praze,” Židovské zprávy June 10, 1938. For population statistics for 1930, see Gustav Fleischmann, “Rozsídlení židovského obyvatelstva v Československu,” Židovské zprávy June 3, 1938; for percentage of the city’s children in Jewish schools, see František Friedmann, “Židovské děti na pražských školách,” Židovské zprávy June 15, 1933.
in 1934 (in 1934, about 10% of Moravia’s Jewish children attended this school). Thus, less than 20% of Moravia’s Jewish children attended Jewish elementary schools.

While the school in Prague was created through cooperation between Zionist and so-called Orthodox activists, the latter hoping to strengthen elementary Jewish religious education, it only received funding from the Prague Jewish community (the formal religious congregation) occasionally in the 1920s. In Brno/Brünn and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, however, the Jewish community boards supported the schools from the outset, as did the Moravian Federation of Jewish Religious Communities. Both were communities that were less divided than the Prague congregation by Czech, German, and Jewish nationalist loyalties in the 1920s. Furthermore, the school in Brno/Brünn also received substantial support from the municipal council, which had several Jewish members. One author claimed that it was only thanks to these Jewish representatives that the schools received regular and undiminished subsidies from the local municipality.

As private institutions, the Jewish schools also relied on tuition fees. In Brno/Brünn, however, more than 20% of the students attending the Gymnasium had their fees waived. In some years, this number increased to more than 30% (in 1923/1924 it was 34%, in 1932/1933, it was 32%, up from 23% the previous school year), but most students between

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27 Early recruitment adds emphasized the good quality religious instruction along with a solid general education, see also “Hovor o židovské škole,” Židovské zprávy June 18, 1937. The school received a small contribution from the Prague community (Kč 3,000) in 1927, see ŽMP–Protokoly ŽNO Budgets 1927; “Židovská matice školská,” Židovské zprávy December 16, 1927. In Brno/Brünn and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, support for the Jewish schools appears to have been a regular item on the communities’ budgets. In Prague, in the 1930s, the school received community support as it absorbed some of the children of Jewish refugees and immigrants from Germany, Věstíník židovské náboženské obce 1934, 3.
28 In the early 1930s, one source claimed, the Brno/Brünn Jewish community allocated Kč 50,000 annually to the Jewish schools, see Berichtet 1932, 10. In 1928, the community provided Kč 60,000, the Moravian Federation of Jewish Religious Communities donated Kč 3,500, see Zionistentag 1928, 59.
29 The city of Brno/Brünn donated Kč 165,000 to the schools in 1927, Zionistentag 1928, 59, by far the largest single subsidy that year.
While Jewish activists were keen to remove obstacles to Jewish children’s enrolment in Jewish national schools, the funds generated through tuition fees appear to have made up a significant part of the institutions’ budgets. At the Brno/Brünn high school, for example, in 1928, tuition fees brought in to Kč 48,650 to the gymnasium’s coffers. As mentioned earlier, in 1928, the local Jewish community donated Kč 60,000 to the elementary and the high school, while the previous year, the city council had awarded them Kč 165,000. Thus, while waiving fees might have increased enrolment, it was hardly something the school boards could afford to do on a broad scale.

The significance of the Jewish national schools in the Bohemian Lands did not rest in the numbers of students they attracted. In 1934, for example, the Brno/Brünn high school, which had the largest student body, attracted less than 20% of Moravia’s Jewish middle school students. The schools were, however, public manifestations of Jewish nationalists’ will to ‘reclaim’ Jewish children for the Jewish schools, a tangible representation of Jewish nationhood and a familiar first step in the process of national revival in the Bohemian Lands.

The majority of Czechoslovakia’s Jewish children and youths, however, did not live in the Bohemian Lands, but in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Throughout the interwar years, Jewish nationalists in the west were intensely focused on the Hebrew-
language schools that emerged in Subcarpathian Ruthenia just after the war. Here, the Hebrew school association had managed to establish eight elementary schools by 1922. Three years later it opened a Hebrew high school in Mukačevo, a city that had a Jewish population of 11,313 in 1930. While the number (between seven and nine) of Hebrew elementary schools remained relatively stable through the 1920s, the number of students enrolled appears to have fluctuated considerably. Thus, in 1924 about 1,000 students attended the Hebrew elementary schools, 286 did so by 1928, and about 775 by 1930. The Mukačevo high school had 130 students in 1928 and 372 by 1934. By 1935, a second high school was being planned in Užhorod, the region’s administrative center. As we shall see, through the 1920s and 1930s, the Jewish nationalist leadership pursued the transformation of these private Hebrew schools into a public and thus state-funded Jewish minority school system. They, however, remained private institutions throughout the interwar years, as did the Jewish schools in the Bohemian Lands, and, similarly to the situation there, only a minority of the region’s Jewish children attended the Jewish national schools.

While the Jewish nationalist press regularly ran full articles and substantial editorial pieces dealing with the question of Jewish schools in Czechoslovakia, Jewish nationalist activists were unusually silent on the question of Jewish schools in Slovakia, the region with

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33 In neighbouring Poland, there were several parallel Jewish school systems. Aside from the different religious educational institutions, there were the Hebrew Tarbut system and the Yiddish TsYShO (Tsentrane Yidishe Shul Organizatsye) schools, as well as bilingual schools that taught in either Hebrew and Polish or Hebrew and Yiddish. For a short overview of schools in interwar Poland, see Miriam Eisenstein, *Jewish Schools in Poland, 1919-1939: Their Philosophy and Development* (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1950); for more on the TsYShO schools, see David E. Fishman, *The Rise of Modern Yiddish Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005) and Dan Kupfert-Heller, “‘To a Higher Spiritual Level’: Socialism, Judaism, and the Jewish Past in Interwar Poland’s TsYShO School Network,” (unpublished manus).


the largest Jewish population (136,737 in 1930). As discussed in chapter three, in Slovakia, the Hungarian legislation, which provided annual state subsidies for religious communities including education, remained in place in Czechoslovakia, thereby retaining among other institutions the so-called Jewish confessional schools. In 1931, there were 61 such schools in Slovakia; most used Slovak as the language of instruction while others used Hungarian and German. That year, 6,571 Jewish children attended the confessional schools, almost half (45%) of the region’s school-age Jewish youth (as defined by religion).\(^3\) Ironically, while Zionist activists did not pay much attention to the Slovak Jewish schools, which they considered to be Hungarian, German, or Slovak assimilationist institutions, they were the closest Jews came to state-funded minority schools in interwar Czechoslovakia.

Regardless of the modest number of Jewish children enrolled in the Jewish schools in the Bohemian Lands and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Jewish nationalist activists considered the Jewish school to be the life blood of the Jewish national renaissance. In preparation for the summer campaigns to mobilize Jewish parents for the Jewish schools, one activist reminded his audience of their responsibility to the nation: “The school is the most valuable [institution] that a people can be given and at the same time a most reliable weapon that no nation relinquishes voluntarily—without a school, no youth, without a youth, no nation and no future.”\(^3\)

\(^3\) František Friedmann, “Židovské konfesní školy na Slovensku,” Židovské zprávy February 10, 1933.
\(^3\) “Zur Schuleinschreibung,” Jüdische Volksstimme June 23, 1921. For the days of school registration as a battle ground “in all areas where languages mix,” see Ladislav Meyer, “Starý boj,” Rozvoj June 22, 1923; see also Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*. 
Like other adherents of nationalist movements, Zionists invested the education of the nation’s youth with particular importance for the broader nationalist project.\textsuperscript{39} Imagining that a national community had been lost in the process of modernization, nationalist activists looked to the schools as a space in which a past purity of language and culture could be restored. Jewish school activists imagined the nation’s school as an ideal, protected environment in which children could be raised in an authentic national community. For Jewish nationalists’ the school was thus a utopian space where Jewish youths were protected from the polluting effects of the mixing of peoples and cultures, the temptations of opportunism and assimilation, and the psychological damage caused by antisemitism, all dangers that lured on the outside.

Jewish nationalist teachers and child experts believed that they played an extraordinarily important and difficult role in the national renaissance. Josef Freund, a frequent contributor to Židovské zprávy on pedagogical questions, noted: “In the Galut (Exile), the Jewish teacher has a special mission. The teacher must fill the absence of a homeland with a spiritual world and a spiritual homeland.”\textsuperscript{40} Eduard Drachmann, teacher and later principal of the Brno/Brünn Gymnasium as well as a leading school activist, described the so-called absence of Jewish national life, of a living nation, as the greatest challenge for Jewish pedagogues.\textsuperscript{41} “Everything a Jewish teacher teaches seems unreal,” Drachmann argued, “it comes from the past and passes into the future through an empty space of the present.”\textsuperscript{42} It was up to the teacher, Drachmann noted, to create “a national present.” Indeed, to these activists the school was an opportunity for students to experience

\textsuperscript{39} For nationalists and youth, see George L. Mosse, \textit{The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
\textsuperscript{40} Josef Freund, “K židovské obecné škole II,” Židovské zprávy October 30, 1925.
\textsuperscript{41} Eduard Drachmann, \textit{K otázkám židovského školství} (Brno: Špolek Židovská škola v Brně, 1936), 11.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
what it meant to be part of a true national community, a *Volksgemeinschaft*. The non-Jewish schools, the first principal of the Brno/Brünn high school Joseph Lamm argued, “cannot offer them [Jewish children] the Jewish spirit and the feeling of unity and love that is created through a shared rhythm of the blood, this is what the Jewish teacher can provide.”[^43] Here, they will learn, he continued, “that it is good to be a Jew [...] in our school, they will find their intellectual and spiritual homeland (*Heimat*).”[^44]

In their pedagogical musings, Jewish nationalist activists claimed that creating a national community was not to be achieved through isolation or self-confinement, by restricting children physically and spiritually to a Jewish world. Rather, their pedagogy was one that taught children how to engage the world as Jews. Lamm described how in the Jewish schools’ curriculum there were no special Jewish subjects aside from instruction in Judaism and the voluntary study of Hebrew. Instead, the teachers infused the general curriculum with a distinct Jewish world view, with Jewish values, and a Jewish spirit.[^45] In Brno/Brünn, for example, the high school curriculum listed one book on a Jewish subject and only did so in the first three grades of the eight-year high school.[^46] In the lists of new acquisition to the *Gymnasium*’s library, however, there were plenty of materials on Jewish subjects alongside Czech and German classics of every sort. By learning in a Jewish environment, from Jewish teachers, among Jewish fellow students, so the argument went, the child would acquire an understanding and familiarity with Jewish culture and a strong Jewish self-awareness, “a deep, true, and responsible understanding of one’s own position that will

[^43]: *Jahresbericht Gymnasium 1920/1921*, 3-4.
[^45]: Ibid., 3.
replace opportunism as the basis for our children’s relationship to other nations and above all
to the state.” 47 Indeed, in the Jewish schools, children would become not only better Jews,
but also better citizens. 48

While a Jewish education, according to its proponents, had the potential of creating
good Jews and even better citizens, the project relied in every way on Jewish parents. Not
only did the school activists’ work depend on parents sending their children to the private
Jewish school, but their pedagogical vision demanded that parents cooperate with teachers to
reinforce the Jewish atmosphere of the school at home. Only within a close-knit circle of
home and school, Eduard Drachmann argued, could teachers, children, and parents together
create a national community. In the absence of a living Hebrew language and a real Jewish
national life, he claimed, “Jewish customs and manners, Jewish books and the Jewish
language (Hebrew) [sic], Jewish religious ideas and Jewish ethics must come alive
everywhere in the child’s surroundings […] as in the past, the studious father and the wise
and modest mother must be living examples and supporters of the efforts to preserve [our]
cultural heritage.” 49

In the minds of Jewish school activists, the current crisis facing Jewish youth was in
no small way brought on by irresponsible Jewish fathers and mothers. 50 While the Austrian
state’s so-called assimilation efforts, such as the mandatory German-Jewish elementary

47 Drachmann, K otázkám židovského školství, 5.
48 For statement about better Jews and better citizens, see “Menšinová práce svazu Čechů-židů,” Židovské
zprávy September 7, 1926. While the school leaders presented their institution’s dual loyalties, to the state and
to the Jewish nation, as smooth, one wonders how the history teacher conducted the session on Romania—a
country that Zionist writers routinely held up as the epitome of state antisemitism—on May 10, 1930, the
official day celebrating “Czechoslovak-Romanian partnership,” Jahresbericht Gymnasium 1929/1930, 10.
49 Drachmann, K otázkám židovského školství, 11.
50 For perceptions of Jewish youth among educators and child experts, see Sharon Gillerman, “The Crisis of the
Jewish Family in Weimar Germany: Social Conditions and Cultural Representations,” 176-199 and Claudia
Prestel, ‘‘Youth in Need’: Correctional Education and Family Breakdown in German Jewish Families,” 200-222, both in In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish Identities in Germany and Austria, 1918-1933, ed.
school, was in part responsible for the so-called dejudaization (Entjudung) of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, Joseph Lamm also pointed his finger at the failures of Jewish parents:

Whatever the [German-Jewish] schools could not destroy in our children, the Western Jewish home lusting for assimilation (assimilationslüsterne) has thoroughly taken care of. What has been left over for our children? We older ones are connected to the Jewish past by the memories of our parents and grandparents’ Sabbath table, in many cases we cannot even give these [memories] to our children. It is here that the work of the Jewish school begins.  

Indeed, if Jewish children were learning to be Jews in the new Jewish school, their parents were also summoned to the school bench. At the Gymnasium, Lamm announced, informal evening events would not only allow parents to consult with educational experts on “questions on upbringing,” but also offer them an opportunity to engage contemporary Jewish issues through popular lectures. The task at hand, Josef Freund agreed, required “harmony between school and home.” He left little doubt though about who was going to be in charge in “bringing down the walls separating school from the family and spreading the atmosphere of the school to the private sphere.” Disciplining Jewish parents, however proved to be harder than perhaps first imagined. In the mid 1930s, Eduard Drachmann complained that despite years of work he and his colleagues had failed in convincing parents to create homes supportive of students’ national education.

While the Jewish schools served an internal purpose reconstituting a Jewish national community, they were also a visible embodiment of Jewish nationhood, one that reflected the nation’s moral values and cultural and political loyalties, and here the Jewish activists needed

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51 Joseph Lamm, “Rede anlässlich der Eröffnung des Jüdischen Reformrealgymnasiums in Brünn,” 5.
52 Ibid., 5.
53 Josef Freund, “K židovské obecné škole II,” Židovské zprávy October 30, 1925.
54 Drachmann, K otázkám židovského školství 12.
to tread carefully. While they assumed that most parents would want to educate their children in German, they were also keenly aware of the risk this entailed for their public image as a loyal minority. In the immediate postwar period, state loyalty was perhaps most convincingly expressed in the adoption of the Czech language. As it was understood in the social scientific community that Jews in Bohemia and Moravia had lost their national language, the schools adopted languages of instruction according to the children’s registered mother tongue. Drawing on the accepted and now legal pedagogical norm developed by Czech nationalists in late Habsburg Austria that dictated that children should be educated exclusively in their mother tongue, Jewish school activists legitimized the use of German as the language of instruction in the Brno/Brünn and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau schools.\(^{55}\) Furthermore, they modified the pedagogical position, also referred to as the Komenský principle, which presumed that elementary education in the mother tongue was a precondition for children’s harmonious intellectual, spiritual, and emotional development to make the case for the moral value of Jewish education.\(^ {56}\) By divesting this principle from language, they made the case for educating Jewish children “among their own kind.” If Czech children belonged in Czech schools, as a well-known slogan went, then Jewish children belonged in the Jewish school.\(^ {57}\)

In Brno/Brünn, where the language of instruction in the Jewish schools’ was German until the late 1920s, the school activists were, however, careful to distinguish their German-language schools from ‘German’ schools by emphasizing the tripartite –Czech, German, and

\(^{55}\) For the legal norm, see Emil Svoboda, “Čtvrt století Perkova zákona,” *Národnostní obzor* 2, no. 2 (1931): 88-98, here 91. In 1937, an article in *Národnostní obzor* boasted that “98.5% of school children are now attending schools of their own language,” reflecting that the Komenský principle was believed to be guiding educational practices, “Národnostní školy v ČSR a národnostní poměry,” *Národnostní Obzor* 7, no. 3 (1937): 119-120, here 119. For more on the Komenský principle, see Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls*, 23, 127.


\(^{57}\) “Židovská škola,” *Židovské zprávy* June 11, 1925.
Hebrew—linguistic and cultural identification of the Jewish nationalist movement in the Bohemian Lands. In Brno/Brünn, for example, the authors of high school’s yearbook highlighted that the teachers ensured that the students were immersed equally in Czech, German, and Jewish culture and language noting that students visited Czech, Jewish, and German events and art exhibitions during the school year. Similarly, the sign on the school’s façade prominently displayed its name in all three languages to the Brno/Brünn public.

While Jewish nationalists recognized that Hebrew could not be the language of instruction in the Jewish schools in Moravia and Bohemia, modern Hebrew was an important part of the Jewish school curricula in the Bohemian Lands, although only as a “voluntary subject” in accordance with government regulations. Conscious of the weakness that lacking a national language constituted in the early 1920s, Czechoslovak Zionists contemplated ways in which they could strengthen Hebrew in Czechoslovakia. They committed themselves to work to make Hebrew a mandatory subject for Jewish children in schools that had more than 50 Jewish students, to introduce mandatory Hebrew in the country’s Jewish schools, and, to create public schools with Hebrew as the language of instruction. They were, however, unsuccessful in convincing the state authorities of the merits of Hebrew language instruction. If Hebrew played an important, albeit largely symbolic and decorative role in the west, Jewish activists here believed that in the east, in

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59 The Jewish schools complied with the state curriculum and had state accreditation, something activists considered important for recruitment as this allowed students to continue on in public middle schools and higher education.
60 For an overview of the different resolutions made by the Czechoslovak Zionist Organization in the 1920s, see *Zionistentag 1928*, 6-30, here 6-10, 19.
61 *Bericht 1932*, 18. For the request to make Hebrew mandatory in Jewish schools, “in order for students to take it seriously as a subject,” see Drachmann, *K otázkám židovského školství*, 12.
Subcarpathian Ruthenia, new Hebrew-speaking communities were emerging thanks to the Jewish national schools.

Zionist activists in Bohemia and Moravia encountered the eastern Hebrew schools primarily in the pages of the Jewish press, where they were depicted as part civilizing, part nationalizing institutions. They, like most outside western observers, viewed the region and its population, Jews and non-Jews alike, as backward, primitive, and chaotic.62 Irma Pollaková, one of the leading members of the Tarbut office in Prague (a Zionist organization promoting Hebrew among Jews in the Diaspora), described, in a retrospective on Hebrew education in Czechoslovakia, the Hebrew schools’ impact on Jewish life there:

[In Subcarpathian Ruthenia] Jews were, and for the most part still are, incredibly culturally backward and ruled by miracle rabbis [Hasidic spiritual leaders believed to perform miracles] […] the Jewish street is like the darkest middle ages and 40% of the Jews were illiterate (1920) […] all efforts to improve their level of culture had to happen in a language that they considered separate from the modern world or any civilization, but that for them was a living one and through which their trust could be gained […] thanks to the Hebrew schools entire towns and villages are today Hebraized in part or in whole and the number of Hebrew speakers is about 4,000.63

Activist Chaim Weisz, reporting on “life in the Hebrew schools,” described the students as pioneers spreading the light of modern education to their families and communities: “In many families parents are learning Hebrew from the children […] in a number of places, the children have taken the initiative to establish Hebrew libraries, they want to be able to read Hebrew books outside of school.”64 While the stories of a Hebrew revival in the east served as inspiration and documentation of a Jewish national renaissance to Jewish nationalists, and significantly as evidence that Jews indeed had a mother tongue and hence were a ‘real’ nation, by the early 1930s, the Hebrew high school in Mukačevo, the crown jewel of the

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62 For some of these sentiments, see Jelinek, Carpathian Diaspora, 144-145, 151.
64 Chaim Weisz, “Ze života hebrejských škol na Podkarpatské Rusi,” Židovské zprávy February 26, 1926.
Hebrew school association, assumed a central role in the modernization of Jewish religious communities in the Bohemian Lands.

In June 1928, Alfred Engel, a leading Jewish nationalist pedagogue and activist, reminded the Brno/Brünn high school’s first graduating class that they had a responsibility to become “chalutzim of the Galut” (pioneers in the Exile). In gratitude to the ones who made their education possible, Engel argued, these graduates had to become teachers themselves. While other Jews could go to Palestine if they wished, the elite of the nation’s youth had a task to fulfill at home. Engel’s speech echoed a 1920 article by none other than Hugo Bergmann, one of the most famous early Palestine-bound pioneers from Prague, who appealed to Jewish youth in the Bohemian Lands to write their chapter in the Zionist story by becoming teachers in the Diaspora. Beginning in the mid 1920s, the leadership of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands, the Superior Council, looked first to the Brno/Brünn high school and later to Mukačev for graduates who would form a new generation of Jewish teachers and rabbis. Thus, in the course of the interwar years, the Jewish national schools were transformed from Jewish nationalist projects to cornerstones in Jewish leaders’ efforts to modernize the Jewish communities and thereby secure the continuity of Jewish life in the Bohemian Lands. The Jewish schools might have attracted a minority of Jewish children and youth, but Jewish leaders hoped that these youths would take the lead in the renewal of Jewish life.

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65 “První maturita na židovském gymnasiu v Brně,” Židovské zprávy June 22, 1928.
67 In their efforts to secure state-funding, Jewish parliamentarians also emphasized the role that the Jewish schools played in supplying candidates for a homegrown rabbinate, as we have seen, another key concern to Jewish and non-Jewish authorities alike. See, for example, Angelo Goldstein, “Požadavky židovské menšiny,” Židovské zprávy January 27, 1933.
“In which school does a Jewish child belong?”68

While the Jewish school association launched its schools as Jewish national institutions, activists seeking to mobilize parents for the schools were careful to focus on questions of Jewish cultural continuity rather than potentially divisive political sympathies. In Prague, Jewish nationalists and religious activists cooperated closely in establishing the first school and in Brno/Brünn and Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau the Jewish community boards supported the local Jewish schools.69 While activists emphasized that the new Jewish school was a national not a religious institution, there was an emphasis on students acquiring Jewish religious knowledge and celebrating Jewish holidays.70 Furthermore, considering the political turmoil in general and within the Zionist movement in particular in the interwar period, the Jewish school association in Prague was compelled to reiterate that “our Jewish elementary school […] is a cultural institution not a political one, it is open to Jewish children from all circles regardless of the party affiliation of their parents, it does not predispose students to one political party, but seeks to raise conscious Jews, honest people and loyal citizens, aware of Judaism’s past and future, because they value and know its language, history, and teachings.”71

However, Jewish parents’ enthusiasm for the Jewish school association left, judged by the laments of Jewish activists, much to be desired. Commenting on the development of the Jewish school association in Bohemia, activist Oskar Lieben complained “that if only we Jews would show even a fraction of the interest that German and Czechs do, our longing for

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68 “Do které školy patří židovské dítě?” Židovské zprávy July 4, 1921.
69 For Prague, see “Židovská matice školská pro Čechy v Praze,” Židovské zprávy June 10, 1938.
70 The schools in Prague were not open on Saturdays and Sundays, respecting both Jewish and state law, see “Naším rodičům!” Židovské zprávy June 17, 1931.
71 “Naším rodičům!” Židovské zprávy June 17, 1931. For the factionalism within the Zionist movement in the interwar years, see Kateřina Čapkova, Češi, Němci, Židé?: Národní identita Židů v Čechách, 1918-1938 (Praha: Paseka, 2005), 212-246. See also the overview in Oskar K. Rabinowicz and Yeshayahu Jelinek, “Zionism in Czechoslovakia,” in New Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel, 304-310.
a quick development [of national schools] would be fulfilled much quicker.”72 Indeed, the number of members in the Bohemian Lands was small. In Bohemia, the association had about 1,000 members in 1928, 560 in Prague alone.73 Ten years later, in 1937, the number had grown to 1,125, with 547 in Prague.74 In Moravia, the association had about 350 members.75 In the late 1930s, Josef Pollak, then the association’s chair, complained that the majority of the Jewish public was unaware of the work undertaken by the Jewish school association.76 However, while mobilizing parents collectively was one part of Jewish school activists’ mission, another was to convince them individually to enrol their children in the Jewish school.

Every summer, Jewish school activists campaigned to mobilize Jewish parents to sign-up their children in the Jewish schools, an effort that ran parallel to similar campaigns conducted by Czech and Germans nationalists seeking to influence and police parents’ school choices.77 Assuming that Jewish parents would be resistant to enrolling their children in a Jewish institution, school activists offered up horrifying stories of the alienation and humiliation Jewish children suffered in non-Jewish schools, formative experiences that threatened to derail their psychological, emotional, and moral development from an early age. In their campaigns, Jewish school activists portrayed ‘resistant’ parents as misguided, ignorant, and outright cruel. Joseph Lamm recounted his ‘conversations’ with parents opposed to Jewish schools:

72 “Židovská škola v Praze,” Židovské zprávy October 26, 1928.
73 For Bohemian membership, see Zionistentag 1928, 58 (the Jewish population in Bohemia was 76,301 in 1930, Mendelssohn, The Jews of East Central Europe, 142).
74 “Židovská škola v Praze,” Židovské zprávy April 16, 1937.
75 For Moravian membership, see Berichter 1932, 19 (the Jewish population in Moravia was 41,250 in 1930, Mendelssohn, The Jews of East Central Europe, 142).
76 “Židovská matice školská pro Čechy v Praze,” Židovské zprávy June 10, 1938
77 Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 106-141.
“Isolation is not good, one must have contact with Christian students,” says a father who wants his son to become a prosperous businessman [...] one lady honestly believed that “it is never too early for a Jewish child to be beaten up by others, this way the child learns to live with antisemitism from an early age and can adapt accordingly” [...] “The Jewish school is a betrayal of the Germans,” says a man who engages a Czech teacher for his children [...] “I will not let my child be taught in Yiddish” says another and “I don’t believe in confessional schools,” says a father who sends his son to a Protestant school.  

While Lamm depicted some of these parents as hypocritical, others, he noted, did simply not understand the consequences of their ignorance. School activists dismissed the belief that Jewish children benefited from going to school with non-Jews arguing that in contrast to parents’ wishful thinking Jewish students remained profoundly isolated within these ‘foreign’ environments, an isolation that had far-reaching psychological, social, and moral consequences. Lamm called on parents to remember what it felt like “in high school when the class was reading The Merchant of Venice and the Aryan students’ eyes glared with an outright malicious pleasure.” Tapping into what they believed to be shared experiences of embarrassment and isolation, school activists appealed to parents to protect their “unsuspecting and innocent” children from antisemitism by sending them to a Jewish school “where they would come to know the word ‘Jews’ as something else than a swear word.”

This early exposure to antisemitism, Jewish activists argued, left behind more than just unpleasant memories. Indeed, the Jewish child’s experiences of shame and alienation had profound effects on their psychological and moral constitution as well as their familial and social relationships. By sending the Jewish child to a foreign nation’s school, warned one author writing on behalf of the Jewish school association in Moravia, parents violated the child’s trust and set in motion a process of estrangement and isolation. “The child learns

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80 “Našim rodičům!” Židovské zprávy June 17, 1931.
that belonging to Judaism (Judentum) is a stigma [...] and only feels a sense of ostracism and contempt for Judaism,” the author stated and continued, “in conflict with its emotions our child cannot find its place and wavers between indifference towards and contempt for its background, family, Judaism, without a clear firm direction [...] this evil can only be uprooted if we let our child grow in soil that is suited for its own emotional world –and that is the Jewish school!”

The internal turmoil in the Jewish child, activists claimed, affected children’s character and behaviour. Eduard Drachmann argued that problems like nervousness and exaggerated zealosity “are often found among Jewish children who have been among other children and is caused first and foremost by a sense of degradation.” In a Jewish school, however, Drachmann argued, “this presumed need to hide oneself and to pretend disappears, and they are no longer driven to be on constant guard [...] once they are free of these other pressures they are more susceptible to the moral guidance by our teachers.”

Assuring parents of the advantages for their children’s moral education and respect for authority, Jewish school activists insisted that only among their own kind would Jewish children learn “to love both their father’s house and their fellow citizens.”

If Jewish school activists employed an emotional strategy focused on parents’ anxiety about antisemitism and their children’s psychological and moral wellbeing, they also catered to more pragmatic concerns for academic standards and qualifications. Working to dispel what they believed to be Jewish parents’ presumptions that the Jewish school offered a substandard education and that Jewish teachers were academically unqualified and pedagogically inept, Jewish activists assured parents of the schools’ “very good academic

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82 Drachmann, K otázkám židovského školství, 10-11.
83 For languages, see “Židovským rodičům!” Židovské zprávy June 18, 1926; for love, see “Židovským rodičům!” Židovské zprávy August 29, 1924.
standards,” confirmed year after year by favourable state inspections.\(^8^4\) Similarly, Jewish teachers’ external credentials were upheld as proof of their respectable qualifications. Thus, in the 1920s, the yearbooks for the Brno/Brünn high school listed along side each teacher’s name the public educational institution that served as his main employer. Eduard Drachmann, for example, also taught at the German high school in Brno/Brünn (Deutsches Staatsrealgymnasium in Brünn).\(^8^5\)

Furthermore, activists battled what they believed was a widespread perception of Jewish teachers as pedagogically incompetent. According to Joseph Lamm, one woman recalling her own education in a Jewish school claimed, “the Jewish child has no respect for Jewish teachers.”\(^8^6\) Admiring the modern educational methods employed by the Hebrew teacher in Prague’s Jewish school, where Hebrew was taught in accordance with modern pedagogical methods using the so-called natural Hebrew language system (*ivrit beivrit*), František Friedmann recalled his own experience with Jewish teachers: “the rabbi came in, we had to read some kind of prayer, he underlined certain words and wrote what they meant next to them, dull routine work, uninteresting, after all we did not understand the meaning of these philosophical sentences that we were reading. Here it is different.”\(^8^7\) Thus, paradoxically, in the minds of Jewish activists, the image of the *heder* (the traditional Jewish elementary school) as a place of ignorance, a common trope among Jewish reformers in

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\(^8^4\) “Našim rodičům!” Židovské zprávy June 17, 1931.
\(^8^5\) Jahresbericht Gymnasium 1922/1923, 5.
\(^8^6\) Joseph Lamm, “Unsere jüdische Schule,” Jüdische Volksstimme June 9, 1921.
\(^8^7\) Iš Šalom, “Návštěvou v pražské židovské škole,” Židovské zprávy June 13, 1920. For use of *Ivrit beivrit* (a system that dictated that all communication in the class room should be in Hebrew), see Steven J. Zipperstein, *Imaging Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 49.
Eastern Europe, coexisted with the idealization of the Jewish school as pure nationally regenerating environment.88

While the teaching of Hebrew was an important symbolic and practical element in the Jewish schools in the Bohemian Lands, this was not the language question that appears to have preoccupied Jewish parents. In their recruitment adds, Jewish nationalist school activists assured parents that their children, regardless of the particular language of instruction used in the Jewish school, would be well-versed in both Czech and German. Indeed, even the Czech-Jewish campaigners, while insisting that Jewish children belonged in Czech schools, thought it necessary to assure parents that they would still learn German.89 In Prague, where the Jewish school’s language of instruction was Czech, parents were promised that German would not be neglected.90 Similarly, in Moravia where the Jewish schools’ used German, Joseph Lamm stated that “German, Czech, and Hebrew will get equal attention.”91 However, while children were supposed to attend schools where their mother tongue was the language of instruction, there was, historian Blažena Przybylová argues, significant pressure from the state authorities on the Jewish school boards to introduce Czech as the language of instruction.92 Thus, in the late 1920s, the Jewish schools in Moravia gradually introduced Czech as a language of instruction. The Jewish high school, for example, started up its first class in Czech in the fall 1929.93 By 1937, German had been phased out as a language of instruction in Brno/Brünn.

88 Images of the heder run by a poor, ignorant, and often mean teacher (melamed), where children remained ignorant, but exposed to an unhealthy environment in “class rooms filled with death,” was common in these reform circles, see Steven Zipperstein’s discussion in Imagining Russian Jewry, 41-62, here 42.
89 “Židovstí souvěrcí!” Rozvoj August 27, 1924.
90 “Židovská škola,” Židovské zprávy June 11, 1925.
92 Przybylová, “Židovská škola v Moravské Ostravě,” 394.
93 In Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, the first class with Czech as a language of instruction began in 1927, Ibid.
In Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau, where Jewish education, according to Przybylová, had a multilingual tradition dating back to the 1860s, the school board resisted the pressures by pointing to practical obstacles such as the lack of Czech text books for Jewish schools and the difficulties in finding qualified Jewish teachers who could teach in Czech. In 1928, parents at the school shot back at the local authorities’ provincialism in making their case for a multilingual school:

For those who want to educate children for the small country of the Czechoslovak republic only, it would be enough to raise them in Czech (v duchu českém), we, however, want to educate and bring up [children] for the world and for that an education in Czech will not do. We consider it unwise to educate our children in Czech only, the same way that it would not be right if they were taught exclusively in German.

Jewish parents, however, were not alone in demanding bilingual education for their children. In the mid 1920s, Czech school activists called for a strengthening of the German-language education in Czech schools in the borderlands. They warned that Czech parents, concerned that their children might be at a disadvantage in the German environment, were sending their children to German schools in order for them to become bilingual. Indeed, as Tara Zahra shows, in the interwar years parents continued to resist the efforts of nationalists and state authorities to eradicate formal and informal bilingual educational practices.

In the Bohemian Lands, some Jewish parents might have pursued a bilingual strategy by sending their children to Czech elementary schools only subsequently to enrol them in German middle schools. In Bohemia, 62% of Jewish children (as defined by religion) went

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94 Ibid.; Czech-Jews did not consider such bilingual schools “really Czech.” They claimed that German would inevitably become the dominant language, František Polák, “Zdatnost či národnost?” Rozvoj July 17, 1920.
97 Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 126-127.
to Czech-language elementary schools, while 38% attended German ones in 1930.98 In Moravia, the numbers were similar with 61% attending Czech and 39% German schools. The distribution shifted, however, for Jewish children enrolled in middle school with 57% attending German schools in Bohemia and 56% in Moravia. In both regions, Jewish students made up about 10% of the student body in the German middle schools. While more Jewish children attended Czech schools in the interwar years, German education continued, as did the German language, to play an important role among Jews in the Bohemian Lands, something that did not go unnoticed by Czech nationalists.

In the spring of 1933, the rightwing newspaper *Venkov* reported from Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau on local Jews’ response to the political developments in Germany. Recounting how the Jewish community, seeking to rid itself of German, was turning to Czech institutions for help in arranging Czech-language courses for children and adults as well as teacher training programs, the reporter gleefully remarked:

> No one is as flexible with regards to their [national] orientation as the Jews and thus to everybody’s surprise Jews (židovstvo) came out united in front of the Ostrava public and expressed clearly that they will exchange their German language and cultural orientation for the patriotic Czech language […] at this time groups are being formed seeking to discourage Jews from speaking German in the streets and in public places.99

A few months later, in Bohemia, Czech-Jews and Zionists alike encouraged Jews to stop using German in public calling on them to affirm both their Czechness and Jewishness.

Calling out from his pulpit, Richard Feder implored: “Brother and sisters! If you live in Czech towns and villages or in areas with a Czech majority – speak Czech! If you don’t

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98 There were 6,116 Jewish children in elementary schools in the Bohemian Lands; 3,875 in Bohemia (2,390 in Czech schools/1,485 in German ones) and 2,241 in Moravia (1,361/880). In 1930, there were 3,782 in middle schools, 2,266 in Bohemia (977/1,289) and 1,516 (669/874), Flusser, “Jüdische Kinder im Čechoslovakischen Schulwesen,” 191-192.

99 “Židé v Moravské Ostravě,” *Venkov* April 19, 1933.
know it well, learn it.” “Our Czech neighbours are provoked by every German word,” he warned, “and you depend on their friendship and goodwill, so don’t speak German in public or at home and see to it that your children learn Czech well and are familiar with Czech culture.”

It was time, Feder impassionedly pleaded, for all Jews to return to their ancestral community and defend Jewish honour. While Feder’s appeal was a rare meeting of minds between Czech-Jews and Zionists, both groups made Jews’ adoption of Czech central in their work to secure the state authorities’ support for their respective positions on the question of Jews’ education.

“A sad chapter” – the state and the Jewish schools

Following the Paris Peace Conference and the recognition of Jewish nationality in the Czechoslovak Constitution, Zionists anticipated that the state authorities would be forthcoming with support for Jewish national schools. They were, however, bitterly disappointed. Indeed, through the 1920s and 1930s, Zionists lamented the Czechoslovak state authorities’ lack of support for Jewish national schools in the country’s eastern and western regions as not only a betrayal of the trust upon which the alliance between Jews and Czech was based, but also a breach of Jews’ rights as a national minority.

While the Jewish national schools received some public subsidies in the interwar years, they were

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100 Židovské zprávy reprinted Feder’s speech noting that while they did not agree with his Czech-Jewish politics, they agreed with his remarks about using Czech, “Český rabín mluví k Židům,” Židovské zprávy June 9, 1933. For a similar appeal asking rabbis to make their congregants speak Czech or at least not use German in public, see also “Slovo k rabinům,” Židovské zprávy September 21, 1933.
101 Quote from speech in National Assembly by Chaim Kugel, “Naše stárosti a požadávky,” Židovské zprávy December 4, 1936.
102 While Thomas Masaryk made a one time pledge of Kč 10,000 to the Hebrew schools in 1921, this only reflected his personal goodwill towards the work of the Hebrew school association, and such occasional donations were not what the Jewish school activists were looking for. Indeed, it disguised the much more significant resistance to the creation of public Hebrew schools in the Ministry of Education. For resistance, see Sole, “Modern Hebrew education in Subcarpathian Ruthenia,” 409.
largely maintained by private Jewish funds. Jewish nationalist activists, however, lobbied the government relentlessly to recognize the Jewish schools in the Bohemian Lands and Subcarpathian Ruthenia as public minority schools. In the 1920s and 1930s, their expectations and strategies were shaped in important ways by the broader prewar battles over children, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, which continued unabated in Czechoslovakia.

At the opening ceremony for the Jewish high school in Brno/Brünn in 1920, Joseph Lamm thanked the assembled parents and supporters for having stood by the project in face of opposition and ridicule from its “enemies.”103 These critics deplored the “return to the heder,” associated with ignorance and isolation. At the same time, Czech-Jewish activists and Czech nationalists also suspected that the new Jewish schools were simply a resurrection of the German-Jewish confessional schools, a symbol of Jews’ Germaness and hostility to Czech culture in the eyes of many a Czech nationalist.

The German-Jewish elementary schools in Bohemia and Moravia were established by the Austrian state in the 1780s.104 The schools were supervised by the state, but funded by the Jewish communities, a situation that bore some resemblance, one might add, to the Jewish schools in Bohemia and Moravia in the interwar years.105 Even though Jewish children were admitted to public schools in 1868, these Jewish schools remained a feature of many communities. As the numbers of Jewish children dropped and as German nationalists looked to retain German schools in areas where German speakers were in the minority, Jewish schools were in some places transformed into German elementary minority

103 Lamm, “Rede anlässlich der Eröffnung des Jüdischen Reformrealgymnasiums in Brünn,” 3-4. Lamm felt the need to make this distinction even though the high school was in and of itself a first, as there had historically not been Jewish middle or high schools in the Bohemian Lands.
104 For the history of German-Jewish schools, see Hillel Kieval, Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 135-158.
105 Ibid., 142.
schools. Reforms opening the door to public education for Jews, the increasing urbanization among Jews, as well as Czech and German nationalists’ campaigns aimed to convince Jewish parents to sign their children up for either Czech or German schools contributed to the decline of the Jewish schools in the late 1800s. However, it was the Czech-Jewish movement, argues Hillel Kieval, that delivered the death blow. In a decade-long campaign against the Jewish schools between 1894 and 1907, Czech-Jewish activists, in an effort to distance Jews from German, facilitated the closure of almost all the remaining Jewish schools in Bohemia.

By then, however, the German-Jewish school had become a symbol to Czech nationalists of Jews’ German loyalties. This belief was further strengthened by claims that Jewish parents preferred German schools over Czech ones, even in areas that were predominantly Czech, such as Prague. In the minds of Czech nationalists, Jews thus maintained German institutions in otherwise Czech communities. In the last decades of the Habsburg Empire, Czech and German nationalists alike sought to claim Jewish children for their respective schools, fuelling a perception that Jewish parents’ educational choices were not only flexible, but also reflected Jews’ political and national loyalties.

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106 Ibid., 142-143.
107 Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 21-22.
108 Kieval, Languages of Community, 151. Tara Zahra notes that by 1885 only a third of Bohemia’s Jewish children attended the Jewish schools, Tara Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 22.
109 In Bohemia, according to Kieval, there were 113 German-Jewish schools in 1885, 90 in 1895, and 5 in 1910, Kieval, Languages of Community, 151, 153-154.
111 In Prague, the center of Czech nationalism, 97% of Jewish children went to German schools in 1890, Kieval, Languages of Community, 144, 147.
To the postwar Jewish National Council, the creation of Jewish schools was an important step in their efforts to “withdraw” Jews from the national conflict. In their reading of the national minority rights imbedded in the Czechoslovak Constitution, Jewish nationalists expected to receive state funding for their educational, cultural, and social institutions on par with other national minorities in Czechoslovakia. The recognition of Jews as a national minority raised Jewish nationalists’ hopes that Jews would now be entitled to publicly funded minority schools in Czechoslovakia. However, in Czechoslovakia as in Habsburg Austria, Jews’ perceived lack of a shared national language turned out to pose a significant obstacle for Jewish nationalists’ ability to obtain equal minority rights.

Since 1869, the Austrian state had recognized the right of a national community to “the means for an education in its language.” By the mid 1880s, this commitment guaranteed linguistic minorities the right to state-funded elementary schools in their language. Thus, if the parents of more than forty children (living within four kilometres) signed a request for a school in one of the Empire’s recognized languages, according to Austrian law the local municipality had to provide it. From 1880 onwards, as Pieter Judson and Tara Zahra has shown, in the Bohemian Lands, German and Czech nationalists mobilized tremendous financial and popular support for their respective minority schools that were established in communities where German and Czech-speakers mixed. Beginning in the 1880s, the German and Czech school associations (Deutsche Schulverein and Česká matice školská) mobilized hundreds of thousands of activists and supporters and successfully

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113 As quoted in Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 14.
114 Ibid.
established and helped maintain minority schools in mixed communities and in the border regions of the Bohemian Lands.115

Drawing on this historical experience, Jewish school activists established Jewish school associations (Židovská matice školská/Jüdischer Schulverein) in Bohemia and Moravia seeking to mobilize Jewish parents for Jewish schools in the immediate postwar period.116 As mentioned earlier, they called on Jewish parents “to make their voices heard” and by joining the school association demand that the government support Jewish national schools.117 “It is the responsibility of every nationally conscious Jews,” they argued, “to support this important institution by becoming a member and recruiting new members and students.”118 Jewish schools would ensure, claimed Jewish nationalists, “that the Jewish child will never become an object in the national battle again.”119

However, to Zionist activists’ dismay, the Czechoslovak government adopted the Austrian model with regards to minority schools in 1919, thereby maintaining that the right to claim schools under this legislation applied to linguistic minorities alone –and this time there was no exception for Jews.120 While Jewish nationalists at first interpreted the authorities’ refusal to extend funding to Jewish schools as a reflection of widespread antisemitism in the state administration, they eventually conceded that the Jewish schools in the Bohemian Lands, where the language of instruction was either Czech or German, would

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115 For school associations in Habsburg Austria, see Pieter M. Judson, Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), especially chapter 2. According to Tara Zahra, the German and Czech school associations constituted some of the largest voluntary associations in Central and Eastern Europe, Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 14-16.
116 While the Bohemian and Moravian branches cooperated closely, they maintained somewhat separate identities. In the East, the activists organized in the Hebrew School Association (Hebrejská matice školská).
118 “Do které školy patří židovské dítě?” Židovské zprávy July 4, 1921.
not qualify for state support under the minority school legislation. They insisted, however, that the Jewish schools using Hebrew as their language of instruction in Subcarpathian Ruthenia did.

To Zionist ideologues Hebrew was the language of Antiquity, an era of Jewish sovereignty and imagined cultural purity. By the interwar years it had also become the official language of the Yishuv. Zionist activists in the Bohemian Lands and elsewhere could thus point to the ‘living’ Hebrew language in Palestine as evidence for the legitimacy of Jews’ demand for national minority rights. However, while Hebrew was indeed recognized as a Jewish language by the state authorities, sympathetic Jewish and non-Jewish observers alike understood that the claim that Hebrew constituted a mother tongue among Jews in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was a stretch. Regardless, it was a claim they legitimized by pointing to, what they perceived, as the unusually backward cultural conditions among the region’s population. The Czech writer František Svojše noted that in the “chaos of languages and nationalities” that governed the region it was justified to suspend the usual commitment to mother tongue. In the case of the Jews, whose mother tongues were Yiddish and Hungarian, Svojše explained, Jewish nationalists understood that “these languages were not desirable” to the new authorities and therefore chose Hebrew as the language of instruction for their schools. Through Hebrew, Svojše claimed, Jewish school activists had brought

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121 Ludvík Singer, “Opávněnost hebrejského školství,” Židovské zprávy December 5, 1924; Czech-Jews maintained from the outset that Jews did not qualify for funding under the minority school legislation, see Dr. Kleiner, “Židovské školství,” Rozvoj July 17, 1920.
122 For claims of antisemitism, see Gustav Fleischmann, “Státní rozpočet a židovské školství národní,” Židovské zprávy January 13, 1922; for minority legislation, see Ludvík Singer, “Před deseti lety,” Židovské zprávy October 26, 1928.
123 For the construction of Hebrew as the nation’s language, see Zerubavel, Recovered Roots, 28-32.
124 For Czech-Jews’ rejection of the claim that Hebrew is a Jewish mother tongue and hence that the schools are in violation of the Komenský principle, see “Židovské školy,” Rozvoj March 23, 1923.
about no less “than the miracle of detaching Jews from Hungarian.”¹²⁶ Indeed, the moral significance of the Hebrew school association was reflected, he noted, in “the spirit of the Hebrew schools which is completely loyal, there the children do not hear any attacks on the state or unfriendliness towards Czechs, something that is unfortunately the case elsewhere.”¹²⁷ Similarly, Jaromír Nečas, a Czechoslovak social democratic parliamentarian who worked and traveled in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in the early 1920s, reminded the government as it contemplated blocking the creation of the Hebrew high school in Mukačevo in 1924:

> there are almost 100,000 Jews in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, a region the Jewish public abroad is increasingly taking an interest in. The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party welcomes the efforts of Jews working under the banner of a Jewish national renaissance to liberate Subcarpathian Jewry from an atmosphere of superstition and alcohol through enlightenment and productive work and therefore opposes any attempt to halt the creation of Hebrew schools in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.¹²⁸

However, while Jewish and non-Jewish activists highlighted the Hebrew schools’ moral and social significance, especially their potential in directing the “Jewish masses” towards so-called productive occupations, the state authorities insisted that the schools did not qualify as minority schools and rejected Jewish nationalists’ efforts to consolidate the Hebrew schools using state funds in the interwar years.

While Jewish nationalists believed that Subcarpathian Jews, in their minds a Jewish national society still untouched by assimilation and modernity, had a right to Hebrew language minority schools, the proponents of Hebrew education appear to have had difficulties mobilizing sufficient numbers of parents demanding the establishment of such

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¹²⁸ Nečas’ statement was quoted in Židovské zprávy with the reservation that it was unfortunate that he had associated all Jews with alcohol, “Proti kulturním útlaku židovsko-národní menšiny,” Židovské zprávy December 5, 1924.
schools. Indeed, Zionists conceded that Jewish parents were requesting Czech-language schools rather than Hebrew ones, but blamed the calls for such schools on local Jews’ ignorance and subjugation by local rabbis. The Hebrew schools were indeed met with significant resistance by the local traditionalist religious authorities. Żidovské zprávy brimmed with stories of rabbis’ “terror campaigns” and excommunications of Jewish parents whose children attended the Hebrew schools. Others were allegedly denied religious honours, such as being called upon at services to read a portion of the Torah, subject to economic boycotts, and refused the right to sell kosher products in their stores and stalls. Thus, if parents were not coming out demanding Hebrew schools, Zionist writers implied, it was because they were being prevented from doing so by powerful religious authorities or simply because they did not know any better. By the mid 1930s, however, the evidence of Jewish parents’ requesting Czech-language schools had become so abundant, that even Chaim Kugel, the principal of the Hebrew high school and member of the National Assembly for the Jewish Party since 1935, could no longer dismiss it and demanded Hebrew schools in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in “places where the parents want them.” In stark contrast to the images of Jewish parents terrorized by traditionalist rabbis and their supporters into sending their children to Czech schools in the east, Zionist activists did not

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129 For ignorance, see Chaim Kugel, “Podkarpatsko žaluje,” Żidovské zprávy December 13, 1935 and Zdeněk Landes, “Požadavky židovské menšiny,” Żidovské zprávy March 5, 1937. For the opposition of rabbis, see, for example, Emil Waldstein, “Boj o hebrejské školství v čs. republice,” Żidovské zprávy February 16, 1923 and “Židovská obec žádá uzavření hebrejských škol,” Żidovské zprávy October 12, 1934 (the Jewish community in question was Mukačevo.
130 For more examples, see Jelinek, Carpathian Diaspora, 223.
132 Chaim Kugel, “Naše stárosti a požadávky,” Żidovské zprávy December 4, 1936 and “Podkarpatoruští poslanci u presidenta republiky a ministerského předsedy,” Żidovské zprávy March 6, 1936.
dwell on the reasons why the majority of Jewish parents, even ones claiming Jewish
nationality, in the west chose to do so as well.

By the late 1920s, after almost a decade of failed efforts to secure state support under
the minority legislation, the financial difficulties facing the Hebrew schools were so
significant that local Zionists were ready to employ measures other than the usual lobbying
and fundraising to keep them afloat. In June 1928, the central political committee of the
Czechoslovak Zionist organization met in Prague to discuss a proposal submitted by Chaim
Kugel and Zeev Sternbach, the latter a Zionist activist and editor of the Yiddish-language
Zionist weekly *Yiddishe Stimme* in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The plan would, they proposed,
solve the material difficulties of the Hebrew schools once and for all.133 The proposal, the
outcome of negotiations between Jewish activists and representatives of an unnamed political
party in the region, suggested a deal whereby the Jewish Party withdrew from participating
in the Subcarpathian regional elections in exchange for public funds for the Hebrew schools.
The committee consisting of Angelo Goldstein, Emil Margulies, Ludvík Singer, and
František Friedmann, all Bohemia-based activists, dismissed the idea noting:

Buying the preservation of the school system at the price of giving up independent
political activity is politically and morally impossible. It would constitute an
abandonment of all the principles upon which the existing school system is built,
thereby it looses its significance as a moral institution and instead becomes a source
of corruption. Our demand for funding for these schools is legally justified based on
the character of the Jews as a minority population –by forfeiting this right now, its
permanent fulfillment can never be ensured. The methods proposed by some
Subcarpathian Zionists are unsuitable and doomed to failure.134

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133 For Sternbach, see *Jews in Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, vol. 1, 529, Jelinek, *Carpathian Diaspora*, 213.
134 Minutes from meeting of the Central Political Committee (*Politische Reichskommission*) of the
Czechoslovak Zionist organization d. June 11, 1928 in Prague, NA-Fond Emil Margulies karton 9 inv.č. 94-100-104.
Instead, the committee suggested that their colleagues in the east step up their political campaigns, reiterating that the only acceptable and sustainable way to secure funding for the Hebrew schools was by having Jewish nationalist representatives taking part in the political process in the local and national legislative assemblies. This was an answer that was likely to confirm some eastern activists’ belief that their western brethren had little understanding for the dire socio-economic conditions in which they worked to keep the private Hebrew schools staffed and open. While the Hebrew school association had secured an annual state subsidy of Kč 30,000 by 1924, in 1926 its budget for the region’s eight elementary schools and one high school amounted to Kč 500,000. Every year, the difference had to be made up by private Jewish funds.

A year later, in 1929, the Jewish Party won two seats in the National Assembly, a major step, Jewish nationalists believed, in moving forward on establishing public Jewish schools. However, despite Jewish nationalist parliamentarians’ numerous meetings with ministers and even President Eduard Beneš over the next decade, their requests for state-funded Hebrew minority schools were rebuffed by the Ministry of Education. In an internal report following one of these meetings, the officials rejected the Jewish activists’ petition for the establishment of a public Hebrew school system or, alternatively, a

135 Minutes from meeting of the Central Political Committee (Politische Reichskommission) of the Czechoslovak Zionist organization d. June 11, 1928 in Prague.
136 For funding in 1924, see František Svojše, “Hebrejské školství na Podkarpatské Rusi,” Židovské zprávy August 29, 1924; for 1926, see Chaim Weisz, “Ze života hebrejských škol na Podkarpatské Rusi,” Židovské zprávy February 26, 1926. By 1936, the annual subsidy had gone up to Kč 60,000, see the internal report dated March 30, 1936 and March 31, 1936. Letter to the government dated April 3, 1936 NA-Mš inv.Č. 37.798 karton 3917 sign. 47/VIII. Jelinek argues that by 1927, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a major philanthropic organization active in most of Jewish Eastern Europe, offered to cover 12% of the Hebrew school system’s expenses. The Joint’s contribution along with donations from private Jewish individuals, according to Jellinek, made up the majority of the schools’ income, Jelinek, Carpathian Diaspora, 218-219.
137 Such meetings where not the only avenues for action: In spring 1933, for example, Emil Margulies gave a lecture in the ‘Society for the Study of the Nationality Question’ where he replayed the familiar complaints about the lack of funding for Jewish schools in the east, see “Emil Margulies Stenographisches Protokoll des Vortrages ‘Über die gegenwärtigen politischen Strömungen und Programme unserer Mitbürger jüdischer Nationalität,’” d. March 21, 1933, CZA–A299/9.
significant increase in the annual state subsidy for the existing Hebrew schools.138 The
officials dismissed the request noting “that these schools do not serve a nationality, but rather
a specific religious group and hence if they were granted public status would amount to more
privileges than those awarded other religious communities.” Furthermore, the official argued, “it is also necessary to consider that teaching children Hebrew is not in the state’s interest, it is a language that is not of general use and that is only known to some members of
a particular religious group.” Due to the lack of school inspectors familiar with Hebrew, the
author continued, it would be impossible for the Ministry of Education to undertake the
necessary oversight of the Hebrew schools. With regards to the Hebrew high schools in
Mukačevo and Užhorod, the official noted that in both cities there already were Czech and
Rusyn-language high schools and hence no need for a third public institution. In addition,
the author concluded “the state does not usually create schools according to students’
religion […] and does not support private middle schools, an exception cannot be made for
the Hebrew ones.”139 Thus, after more than seventeen years of lobbying and campaigning
for the Hebrew schools neither the Hebrew school association nor the Jewish nationalist
activists and politicians in Prague had managed to convince the state authorities that the
Jewish national schools with Hebrew as their language of instruction, so often held up since
as evidence of the Czechoslovak state’s recognition of Jewish nationhood, constituted
anything but a heder.

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138 Internal report dated March 30, 1936 and March 31, 1936. Letter to the government dated April 3, 1936
NA-Mš inv.č. 37.798 karton 3917 sign. 47/VIII.
139 For more evidence that social scientists and administrators did not consider Jews a national minority or at
least not one that could be readily included in their studies alongside other national minorities, see Rudolf
Stránský, “Účast naší státní péče na ochraně menšin v oboru školském,” Národnostní obzor 2, no. 3 (1932):
161-167 and E. Čapek, “Střední školství národnostních menšin v českých zemích,” Národnostní obzor 7, no. 3
When do Jewish children belong in Czech schools?

In the Bohemian Lands, the battle over Jewish children that had been part of the late Habsburg era continued in the interwar years, in particular among Jewish activists.\textsuperscript{140} Armed with statistical evidence, Jewish nationalists and Czech-Jewish activists alike cast themselves as promoting Czech among Jews and their opponents as clinging to Germaness.\textsuperscript{141} While Jewish activists were preoccupied with fundraising campaigns, petitions, and battles in the pages of the Jewish press over the question in which schools Jewish children belonged, in the course of the 1920s most Jewish children found their way into the public Czech and Slovak-language elementary schools. In 1921, 32% of the country’s Jewish children attended ‘Czechoslovak’ schools, 26% Rusyn schools, 14% German, 21% Hungarian, and 7% ‘other’ (a category that included Polish and Romanian language schools as well as schools with multiple languages).\textsuperscript{142} By 1930, 60% were enrolled in ‘Czechoslovak’ schools, 11% in Rusyn ones, 9% in German, 10% in Hungarian, 2.5% in Hebrew schools, and 8% went to Polish and multi-language schools.\textsuperscript{143}

As Jewish children were funnelled into the ‘Czechoslovak’ schools, a development encouraged and welcomed by the state authorities, Jewish nationalists struggled to articulate a response. In the Bohemian Lands, Zionists cast themselves as promoters of Czech among Jews. Interpreting Czech antisemitism primarily as a reaction to Jews’ perceived Germaness,

\textsuperscript{140} For prewar surveillance and campaigning, see letter from the Association of Czech Progressive Jews in Bohemia and Moravia to Czech National Council requesting list of Jewish parents and announcing that they will publicize the names of Jewish parents who enroll their children in German schools, letter d. September 3, 1912 Svaz pokrokových židů v Čechách to Národní rada česká, NA–NRČ karton 509/2; see also Zahra, \textit{Kidnapped Souls}, 21-22 for an earlier example. For non-Jews’ claiming that Jews continue to attend German schools, “Školská debata v sboru obecních starších,” \textit{Rozvoj} December 30, 1920; for interwar surveillance, see “Zpráva o veřejně řádné schůzi,” \textit{Rozvoj} October 25, 1935.

\textsuperscript{141} For statistics and denunciation, see Zahra, \textit{Kidnapped Souls}, 30; for Zionists’ commitment to Czech, “Sionisté a český jazyk,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} April 14, 1933.

\textsuperscript{142} Numbers for elementary schools are based on František Friedmann’s “Židovské děti na národních školách,” \textit{Židovské zprávy} April 20, 1932.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
Zionists believed that Jews could best show their loyalty to the state by adopting Czech language and culture. This was, however, a position on the Czech political stage already ‘inhabited’ by the Czech-Jewish movement and through the 1920s and early 1930s, Zionists and Czech-Jews competed to take the credit for Jews’ so-called reorientation from German to Czech in the Bohemian Lands, a precondition, although not necessarily a guarantee, for their inclusion in the fold of equal citizens.

As German functioned as a lingua franca for Zionists in Czechoslovakia and Central Europe, Czech-Jews insisted that Jewish nationalism was a disguise for Jewish nationalists’ continued adherence to German language and culture, a claim that Zionists had to take seriously in the climate of the 1920s. They responded by bringing out the well-known statistical guns. In his 1927 pamphlet *Mravnost či Oportunita?*, František Friedmann retaliated by revealing that despite the assimilationists’ claims of Czech loyalty, they continued to send their children to German-language schools. Indeed, contrary to Czech-Jews’ misconception, Friedmann argued, the Jewish nationalist movement had been successful in re-orienting Jews from German to Czech schools. Drawing on statistics generated in the country’s elementary schools at the start of every school year, Friedmann demonstrated that in Moravia, 48.1% of children of Jewish nationality went to Czech schools. In contrast, he suggested, only 20% of Jewish children of “assimilationist parents”

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144 “K této školské akci,” *Židovské zprávy* September 7, 1926; Angelo Goldstein, “Projev posl. dra Goldsteina v parlamentě,” *Židovské zprávy* April 28, 1933. Zionists also held the view that Jews should speak the language of their surroundings and thus not strengthen linguistic (and dominant) minorities.

145 In the immediate postwar period, Czech-Jews feared that Jews would be forced into Jewish schools with Czech language of instruction due to their perceived Germaness, Dr. Kleiner, “Židovské národní školství,” *Rozvoj* July 10, 1920.

attended Moravia’s Czech schools, while 80% went to German schools.\textsuperscript{147} Even in Bohemia, where Czech-Jews had long been active, there was little evidence, Friedmann argued, that Czech-Jewish assimilationism ensured that Jews enrolled in Czech schools. In the early 1920s, a third of Jewish parents of Czech nationality continued to send their children to German schools, a public embarrassment, Friedmann noted, even the Czech-Jewish leaders had not been able to deny.\textsuperscript{148} Similarly, in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where Friedmann claimed “Zionists had been in charge,” 74% and 80% respectively of Jewish national children attended Czech, Slovak, or Rusyn-language schools.\textsuperscript{149} Thus, rather than allowing Jews to cling to their old ways, he concluded, the Jewish nationalist movement was at the forefront of the efforts to transform Jewish youths and their parents into loyal Czech-speaking citizens of Czechoslovakia.

However, by the early 1930s Zionists no longer readily celebrated the advent of Czech education among Jews in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. By then, about 60% of the school-age Jewish children in the region attended Czech language schools. At a time when the controversial private Hebrew schools were struggling to stay afloat in the impoverished Jewish societies, the government was establishing new Czech schools and, according to Zionists, filling them up with Jewish children since there were not enough Czechoslovak children around to fill the classrooms.\textsuperscript{150} Already in the mid 1920s, one author claimed, in order to ‘Czechify’ the region, the state authorities established Czech schools in areas with no Czech children and lured Jewish children into the otherwise empty schools, a process that

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{147} Friedmann, \textit{Mravnost}, 39. Here Friedmann grouped Jewish parents of German and Czech nationality into one assimilationist category.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 27-28.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{150} This was a development that Zionists were convinced was engineered by Czech-Jews and local rabbis who had worked together in the mid 1920s to establish Czech-language Jewish schools, “Ortodoxové v Podkarpatské Rusi pro židovské školství české, sionisté pro židovské školství hebrejské,” \textit{Rozvoj} May 15, 1924; “Po zápisu do škol,” \textit{Rozvoj} September 6, 1923.
\end{footnotes}
allegedly was turning the region’s Rusyn majority against both Czechs and Jews. This “cultural assault on Rusyns and Jews,” the author warned, “will bear bitter fruit.”151

By the mid 1930s, Jewish nationalists were convinced that the Czech authorities were engaging in a full-scale de-nationalization process in their efforts to modernize and Czechify the east.152 In an article on the Jewish national minority in Subcarpathian Ruthenia published in the prestigious state-sponsored Národnostní Obzor, František Friedmann invoked the trope of Czechs and Jews’ shared experience of de-nationalization in Habsburg Austria to highlight the harmful effects of the Czechoslovak state’s policies. Friedmann presented data that showed that children of Jewish nationality constituted 80 to 90% of the students in the province’s Czech schools.153 While welcoming the increased number of Jewish children receiving a modern education, he argued that the government was using Jews to enhance the ‘Czech’ character of the region much as Austria had used the Jewish minority to Germanize otherwise Slav regions. The de-nationalization and ‘Czechification’ of children of Jewish nationality, Friedmann warned,

[w]ill deepen the abyss between the Jewish minority and the Rusyn majority population. The outcome of this development could be that the Czech minority in Subcarpathian Ruthenia will consist predominantly of Jews which, considering the economic and cultural conditions in the region, will not endear ‘Czechs’ to the local population. It is likely that as time goes by, thousands of ‘Czech’ Jews will migrate to the capital, Prague, where the Jewish minority will grow rapidly, as it did in Budapest, multiplying its current size many times. The appearance of these representatives of ‘Czechness,’ in journalism and generally in society, could lead to a significant increase in antisemitism of a kind which we have so far been spared.154

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152 One author argued that an alliance made up by the governing coalition parties and local rabbis conspired to fill Czech schools with Jewish children, Leo Strauss, “Školská politika,” Židovské zprávy January 24, 1936.
Thus, not only was de-nationalization immoral, but it was also undermining Czech authority in the province. It threatened, Friedmann argued, to increase inter-ethnic tension with destabilizing effects across Czechoslovakia.

If Jewish nationalists believed that Czechness among Jews in the Bohemian Lands made them better citizens, in the east it was a sign of moral corruption and government hypocrisy. “These [Czech] schools are in deep conflict with the Komenský tradition,” argued Zdeněk Landes, “the [Jewish] child is raised to become a cultural Levantine (levantínec) who has a thin varnish of Czechness, but lacks a sense of his own traditional values.” Pointing to the short-sightedness of the authorities’ position denying Jews’ public Hebrew schools in favour a policy of Czech cultural colonization, Landes concluded, “it is impossible that such human material can become a solid component of Czech or any other culture.”

Thus, in the interwar years Zionists promoted and applauded the Czechification of Jewish society in the west, the only acceptable response were they to uphold the image of an alliance between Czechs and Jews. Meanwhile in the east, where Czech cultural and political domination was contested, Zionist writers employing well-known tropes from Czech nationalist discourse deplored Czech education for Jewish children as a process of moral and cultural degeneration for Jews and Czechs alike.

Conclusion

To Jewish nationalists, the state authorities’ refusal to concede that Jews had either a legal or moral entitlement to public Jewish national schools was a bitter disappointment. Already in the mid 1920s, Ludvík Singer accused the government of betraying the trust upon which the

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155 For complaints that Czechs were colonizing German areas using schools, see Zahra, Kidnapped Souls, 115-116.
alliance between Jews and Czechs was founded. While Jewish activists had been optimistic that the ‘liberated’ Czech nation would honour its leaders’ promises to the country’s Jewish nation, they soon learned that Czechs did not act on noble principles alone. Thus, as Jewish nationalists discovered, the state leaders were only willing to give concessions to Jews when it did not involve circumscribing Czech dominance. Furthermore, Jewish nationalists were frustrated by the indifference and laxness of Jewish children and parents, challenged by internal ideological and social divisions, and faced stiff and sustained opposition from the religious communities in the East—a resistance they never managed to overcome.

As in other parts of East Central Europe, Jewish parents in Czechoslovakia preferred to send their children to non-Jewish public schools. Regardless of nationalists’ efforts to paint ‘foreign’ schools as harmful to Jewish children, without government support there was little Jewish activists could do to compete with the state-funded public schools. In some ways, the failure of the Jewish national school project reflected that in Czechoslovakia, the public educational system remained open and attractive to Jewish parents. Unlike Jews in neighbouring states, Jews here were not subject to formal quotas and restrictions. In this country, the dominant elite did not see Jews as a threat. Rather Czech leaders, acting on the notion of Jews’ malleable loyalties and potential for respectability, appear to have encouraged Jews’ ‘Czechification’ in the public schools as a means to consolidate Czech linguistic and cultural hegemony in all of Czechoslovakia.

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156 Ludvík Singer, “Oprávněnost hebrejského školství,” Židovské zprávy December 5, 1924. Jewish activists expressed this sense of betrayal on many occasions, see, for example, Angelo Goldstein, “Požadavky židovské menšiny,” Židovské zprávy January 27, 1933 and Zdeněk Landes, “Požadavky židovské menšiny,” Židovské zprávy March 5, 1937.

157 For an overview of the success of these schools in East Central Europe, especially in Czechoslovakia and Poland, see Mendelsohn, The Jews of East Central Europe, 160-161.
However, regardless of the challenges facing Jewish nationalists in securing this most important institution, the Jewish schools played an important role in the modernization and renewal of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands. Zionists’ deep integration into the institutional, cultural, and political framework of the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands as well as their active participation in the broader political process, deepened their investment in and commitment to the continuity of Jewish life in the Diaspora. While disappointed in Czechoslovakia’s failure to correct the “wrongs” committed by Habsburg Austria, by the late 1930s, Jewish nationalists were well aware that they had few other options than to trust that their loyalty would eventually be rewarded.

In East Central Europe minority nationalists did not view national schools as the only institutions that could facilitate collective awakening. Indeed, through the nineteenth century gymnastic organizations had served as significant vehicles for mass mobilization. By the early twentieth century, as nationalists invested children and youths with increasing importance in securing the nation’s future, youth groups, gymnastic societies, and sports clubs assumed growing prestige as valuable national institutions. Thus, in spite of the importance Zionists placed on schools, they did develop other organizations through which they sought to mobilize the nation’s youth. The next chapter examines the Zionist alternative to Jewish schools, the Jewish nationalist sports movement.
Chapter 5

Makabi in Czechoslovakia

Sport as a Rite of Citizenship in Interwar Central Europe

In late July 1936, the sports writers of some of Czechoslovakia’s prominent newspapers were preoccupied with the upcoming national swimming championship in Prague. They were particularly concerned with the curious circumstance that neither the reigning champion, Hagibor Praha/Prag, nor its tipped successor, Bar Kochba Bratislava, would be competing for the title. The Czechoslovak Amateur Swimming Association (Československý amaterský plavecký svaz (ČsAPS) had barred both these Jewish clubs along with Bar Kochba Brno/Brünn from attending. The association had taken this step because of the clubs’ collective refusal to make their athletes available for the Czechoslovak Olympic team poised to leave for Berlin shortly thereafter.1 While the observers collectively lamented the loss to the championship competition, most agreed on the fairness of the Swimming Association’s decision. Writers in the rightwing Venkov and České Slovo scolded the Jewish clubs for their open defiance of the national swimming body’s authority, their conscious weakening of the

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1 The Czechoslovak Olympic Committee, in accordance with the International Olympic Committee, had agreed not to put pressure on Jewish athletes to go to Berlin if they did not wish to do so. The Jewish clubs were members of the Jewish nationalist sports organization Makabi ČSR (ČSR was a common Czech and local German (Čechoslováčskis) abbreviation for the Czechoslovak Republic) whose leadership demanded that its athletes abstain from joining the national teams headed for Berlin. However, as the Jewish clubs happened to be among the dominant teams in water sports at the time, the Czechoslovak Amateur Swimming Association worried it would have a much weaker team if the Jewish athletes withdrew. While other disciplines might not have had much to lose by making Jewish participation voluntary, in the eyes of the Swimming Association, the absence of the athletes from the two Bar Kochba clubs and from Hagibor obstructed the national teams’ chances of success in Berlin. For the controversy internally, and the Ministry of Health’s mediation, see documents pertaining to Svaz Makabi v ČSR and ČsAPS d. December 1935 to November 1936 in NA-Ministerstvo veřejného zdravotnictví a télesné výchovy (Ministry of Health and Physical Education) [Mzd] Svaz Makabi v ČSR inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
Olympic teams, and essentially their lack of loyalty to the state. One article likened the Jewish clubs’ decision to mutiny noting, “the interest of the nation, the state, the collective must always trump that of individuals.” Playing on the military analogy, the writer continued, “for these amateur athletes there is an unwritten law which demands that Czechoslovak athletes regardless of their nationality or conviction defend the Czechoslovak flag on the international playing field.” One observer writing in *Lidové noviny* similarly agreed that Jews’ responsibility to Czechoslovakia superseded their so-called partisan political interests. While the writer showed understanding for the individual athletes’ hesitation in defying their clubs’ authority, he pointed his finger at the Jewish nationalist clubs’ divided loyalties. The three clubs’ act was after all part of international efforts by major Jewish organizations to boycott the Berlin Games. Czechoslovakia, the writer noted, had decided to participate and thus, it was the Jewish clubs’ duty to do their part to ensure that the country’s teams were as strong as possible.

In response, Zdeněk Landes, who was a member of Makabi ČSR’s executive, refuted the notion that the boycott was a sign of Jews’ disloyalty or the incompatibility of Jews’ particularistic interests with their duties as citizens. At a time when there was open war between Jews and the Third Reich, he argued, it would be a disgrace for any honourable Jew to attend the Games. The clubs’ refusal to participate in the Olympics in Germany, a place where Jews were being wronged and humiliated, was not a question of politics, Landes stressed, it was a question of honour. Evoking this revered masculine ideal, Landes suggested that Jews’ participation in Berlin would be decidedly unmanly. As a sign of their

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4 “Nejde jen o Olympiádu,” *Lidové noviny* July 16, 1936.
5 “O neúčasti čs. Židovských plavců na Olympiádě,” *Lidové Noviny* July 18, 1936.
manliness, Jews were determined and united in refusing to submit to the pressure from outside forces in defence of their own and their nation’s honour. Thus, while critics depicted Jews as wanting in manly virtues such as loyalty, discipline, and fighting spirit, Jews insisted that the boycott was the only honourable course of action, indeed, a sign of their respectability as citizens.

The 1936 controversy reveals how gendered discourses shaped the boundaries of community in interwar Czechoslovakia. While Jewish nationalists sought to end Jews’ marginalization and position them as model citizens by making Jewish men manly, critics questioned Jews’ aptness as citizens by evoking images of their lack of masculine virtues. These activists’ willingness to risk a public campaign smearing their patriotism in defence of Jews’ honour reflects how central masculinity was to their sense of respectability.

In interwar Czechoslovakia, gymnastics and sports was a social and symbolic space where the discourses on citizenship, nationhood, and masculinity intersected. Probing the significance of Jewish sport and gymnastics, this chapter investigates the Jewish nationalist gymnastics and sports organization Makabi ČSR. Given the particular nature of Jewish nation building in Czechoslovakia, I argue, the significance of Makabi ČSR is best understood when viewed as a rite of citizenship. As a rite, sports served to delineate the boundaries of the Jewish nation and constituted a performance of its values and ideals. By adopting the masculine ideal for the nation’s self-representation, Makabi activists both

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6 The organization’s name appeared officially, according to Zionist practice, in three languages simultaneously: Svaz Makabi v ČSR/Čechoslovakischer Makkabikreis/Histradut lehitamlut u-le-sport Makabi čechoslovakia, see statutes 1924 in AHP–PŘ–SK Svaz Makabi v ČSR XIV-685. The organization was generally referred to as Makabi ČSR or just Makabi. By the mid 1930s, Makabi leaders made little use of the German name publicly. Up until then all three names had adorned, for example, the organization’s letterhead.

asserted Jewish nationhood as legitimate and insisted on their worthiness as citizens. While the image of new masculine Jews was central to these nationalists’ efforts to assert Jews’ respectability as citizens, they also created institutional structures supporting their bid for inclusion and equality.

This study of Makabi ČSR brings together the central themes explored in the previous chapters. As we shall see, to Zionists the sports movement was a vehicle for Jews to become respectable citizens and as such assert their demand for equality and inclusion. Like the national schools, Zionists viewed the sports movement as particularly important both due to its potential for mass mobilization and its legibility as a national institution. It was also through Makabi ČSR that Zionists demonstrated Jewish nationalism’s potential as an integrative force in Czechoslovakia as well as affirmed their commitment to the alliance between Jews and Czechs. In contrast to the Jewish schools, the Jewish nationalist sports movement found greater support both among the country’s Jews as well as among state bureaucrats and politicians. Thus, the story of Makabi ČSR not only reveals the complex ways in which Zionists sought to make Jews at home in Czechoslovakia, but also allows us to gauge the extent to which they succeeded in doing so.

The chapter opens with a discussion of Jews, masculinity, and marginalization as a way of situating the specific case of Makabi ČSR in the broader cultural context of interwar Central Europe. Then, I examine the ways in which Makabi ČSR activists sought to assert the ‘Czechoslovakness’ of the Jewish nationalist gymnastic and sports organization. They did so by casting the organization as an integrative force uniting Jews across the country, by emphasizing its similarity to the prestigious Sokol-movement, and by insisting on Makabi ČSR’s apolitical and ethnic character, thereby positioning it as a legitimate representative of
one of the country’s deserving minority nationalities. While the notion of regeneration, the creation of ‘new Jews,’ was central to Jewish nationalists’ self-fashioning, they did differ on questions as to how this ideal was best achieved. Facing the increased popularity of sports, nationalists sought to co-opt its mobilizing potential while constraining sports’ perceived immorality. Gymnastics and sports were intrinsically connected to military traditions, the health and discipline of soldiers a constant subtext for the emphasis on physical education. As tension mounted in Czechoslovakia in the 1930s, Makabi ČSR turned to militarism as yet another expression of Jews’ loyalty to the state and desire for inclusion—a demand for equality that had to be continuously stated and re-stated.

**Jews, masculinity, and marginalization**

Traditionally, historians of modern Jewry and the Zionist movement in Central Europe have paid little attention to the role of sports and gymnastics in Jewish societies. While references to gymnastic clubs and sport teams were included as piquant illustrations or curious anecdotes, until recently few scholars paid serious attention to these often large and certainly widespread Jewish institutions. Along with an increased interest in social and cultural history and issues of race, class, and gender, however, recent scholarship has brought Jews and sport under serious investigation adding to the understanding of issues such as integration, acculturation, self-assertion, and responses to antisemitism.

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9 In 1999, several articles examining Jews and sport in Europe and North America appeared in the *Journal of Sport History* 26, no. 2 (1999) and a few years later an edited volume on Jews in soccer, Dietrich Schulze-Marmeling, ed., *Davidstern und Lederball: Die Geschichte der Juden im Deutschen und Internationlen Fussball* (Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt, 2003). More recently two interesting edited volumes have appeared,
While middle class male Jews joined in the general involvement in gymnastics and physical education in the nineteenth century, it was not until the fin-de-siècle that exclusively Jewish clubs emerged in Central Europe. Most famously, the Berlin Bar Kochba was established in 1898 and was soon followed by numerous other clubs in Germany and Habsburg Austria, including the Bohemian Lands. These institutions, scholars suggest, emerged as a response to both antisemitism and Zionism. The Jewish clubs were founded by male Jews eager to participate in gymnastics (physical and mental discipline was, after all, key to the masculine ideal) but who found themselves excluded from the general increasingly nationalist associations. While some scholars emphasize the push-factor, others have argued for more of a pull-effect. With the emergence of Zionist ideas, they argue, Jews created their own clubs as an expression of their sense of national belonging and commitment to Jews’ national regeneration. However, if Zionist ideology motivated many pioneers of Jewish gymnastics and sports, in some parts of Central Europe, the clubs they helped establish kept a cautious distance from Zionist institutions. Wary of the divisive and unappealing nature of Zionism to many potential members, these sports and gymnastic clubs

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13 The proliferation of these clubs is often read as Zionists heeding Max Nordau’s critique of Jews’ physical and moral degeneration and call for a *Muskeljudentum*. For a discussion of the New Jew, the Jewish gymnastics movement, and Nordau’s work on degeneration, see Todd S. Presner, “‘Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles:’ Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration,” *Modernism/modernity* 10, no. 2 (2003): 269-296, here 207.
focused on Jewish renewal and regeneration, thus emphasizing physical reform and ethnic unity rather than nationalistic goals.\textsuperscript{14}

The emergence of Jewish gymnastics and sports clubs was, however, more than a process of push and pull. Jewish gymnastics was, for example, not only a Zionist and Jewish nationalist endeavour, as evidenced by the German nationalist, socialist, and so-called neutral Jewish clubs dotting the central European landscape.\textsuperscript{15} Joshua Shanes has shown that in Galicia the Jewish nationalist gymnasts were driven by both opposition to religious authorities and an impulse to invigorate and discipline the body of their nation inspired by similar efforts among their Polish and Ruthenian peers.\textsuperscript{16} In the German context, Jacob Borut has examined German nationalist, Zionist, and neutral Jewish clubs, showing the multiplicity of social and cultural motivations which led Jews to these environments.\textsuperscript{17} These studies suggest that one of the central impulses behind the emergence of Jewish sports and gymnastic clubs was a search for respectability and integration.\textsuperscript{18} Whether Jews insisted on performing rites of manhood such as fencing and gymnastics, seeking out an environment

\textsuperscript{14} In Germany, Austria, and some of the successor states, this trend persisted among clubs inspired by various forms of Jewish nationalism in the interwar period. In Poland, however, where Jewish politics were very divisive, Jewish sports and gymnastic clubs were strongly affiliated with political organizations such as the Bund, Poale Zion, and the Communist Party. See Jack Jacobs, “The Politics of Jewish Sports Movements in Interwar Poland,” in \textit{Emancipation through Muscles}, ed. Brenner and Reuveni, 93-105.


\textsuperscript{16} Shanes shows that the Galician Jewish gymnastics movement was largely a Zionist endeavour. It was, however, shaped by the particular character of Galician Zionism as a Diaspora nationalist movement focusing on gaining national right for Jews in Galicia. It thus resembled parallel movements among the region’s other national groups, Joshua Shanes, “National Regeneration in the Ghetto: The Jewish Turnbewegung in Galicia,” in \textit{Rites of Citizenship}, ed. Kugelmass, 75-94, here 78-84.

\textsuperscript{17} Jacob Borut, “‘Verjudung des Judentums:’ Was there a Zionist Subculture in Weimar Germany?” in \textit{In Search of Jewish Community: Jewish identities in Germany and Austria, 1918-1933}, ed. Michael Brenner and Derek J. Penslar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1998), 92-114, here 100-102.

free of antisemitic slurs and intimidation, or pursuing the Jewish nation’s rebirth, their involvement was in many cases acts of resistance against perceived attacks on Jewish honour. Insisting that Jews already were or could become honourable men, Jewish men turned to gymnastics, an institution at the heart of the manly movement, to assert their respectability.19

In his work on modern masculinity, George Mosse shows that at the turn of the 20th century, the masculine ideal was at the core of societies’ self-definition.20 Drawing primarily on examples from Central and Western Europe, Mosse suggests that men’s bodies became sites for utopian longings; the male ideal symbolized social and moral order.21 The manly stereotype fused virtues such as discipline, honour, and will power with ideals of bodily health and beauty, making the male body a sign of moral respectability.22 However, the emergence of the normative masculine stereotype, Mosse contends, went hand in hand with the construction of its countertype, the symbol of physical and moral disorder.23 Social outsiders, Jews and homosexuals in particular, were marginalized through narratives which cast them as unmanly, even incapable of becoming men.24 Mosse shows how negative

19 For the discussion of gymnastics, Jews, and masculinity, I draw on George L. Mosse’s The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity (New York: Oxford University Press 1996). For more on Jews’ adoption of these ideals, see Caplan, “Germanizing the Jewish Male.”
20 Mosse, Image of Man, 3.
21 Ibid., 6.
22 For the link between a healthy body and soul where outward appearance reflects inward virtue and the establishment of ‘Greek’ bodies as the manly ideal, see Mosse, Image of Man, 17-39. The prevalence of this bodily ideal in interwar Czechoslovakia is reflected in, for example, a government propaganda publication celebrating physical education and bursting with images of such ‘Greek’ male and female bodies, smooth, steeled, muscular or long limbed. The photo montage even refers to Greek figures as the ideals for physical education in Czechoslovakia, see A. Očenáška, P. Bureš, and V. Rýpar, ed., Tělesná výchova v Československu (Praha: Ministerstvo veřejného zdravotnictví a tělesné výchovy, 1933)
23 Mosse, Image of Man, 57.
24 The use of gendered visual language went beyond the realm of social outsiders and was also used to ridicule or demonize nationalist or political opponents. For the use of the masculine heroes and their unmanly opponents in nationalist discourse, see for example, the analysis of the imagery produced by German and Czech nationalists in the Bohemian Lands, see the articles and images in Peter Becher and Jozo Džambo, ed., Gleiche Bilder, gleiche Worte: Deutsche, Österreicher und Tschechen in der Karikatur (1848-1948) / Stejné obrazy, stejná slova. Němci, Rakušané a Češi v karikatuře (1848-1948) (München: Adalbert-Stifter-Verein, 1997).
Jewish stereotypes were infused with gendered meanings that cast Jewish men as weak willed, cowardly, and passive, their bodies effeminate and unpleasing contrasts to the normative ideals of manly beauty.\textsuperscript{25} Practices and discourses enforcing and popularizing the image of unmanly Jews denied Jewish men honour, a virtue at the heart of manhood.\textsuperscript{26}

Having internalized the manly ideal and its counter type and seeking to restore their respectability, Jews responded, as did male homosexuals, Mosse argues, by co-opting the dominant ideals of manliness.\textsuperscript{27} The impetus behind the efforts to create a ‘new Jew,’ an embodiment of the masculine ideas and a vision shared by Jewish reformers of different ideological colours, was an attempt to resist these marginalizing narratives by ‘restoring’ Jews’ honour and assert their respectability. The emergence and spread of Jewish gymnastics and sports clubs was one instance of Jews’ co-optation of the masculine ideal. Gymnastics, at the heart of the manly project both cultivating physical rigour, beauty, and skill and instilling manly virtues such as will power, restraint, and courage, was central to the efforts by Zionists, nationalists, socialists and others to create ‘new Jews’ in the decades before and after World War I.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} Mosse, \textit{Image of Man}, 63; for a classic discussion of difference, antisemitism, and the Jewish body, see Sander Gilman, \textit{The Jew’s Body} (New York: Routledge, 1991). While the focus in Mosse’s work is the male body, Jewish women’s bodies were also depicted as opposite to the feminine ideal in antisemitic discourse. For examples from the Czech context, see Alexej Mikulášek, \textit{Antisemitismus v české literatuře 19. a 20. století} (Praha: Votobia, 2000), 168, 213.

\textsuperscript{26} Mosse uses the example of Jews’ being denied the opportunity to defend their honour in dueling on the grounds that as Jews they did not have honour, Mosse, \textit{Image of Man}, 63.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 151.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 152. In their efforts to create new men, nationalist and socialist activists shared the masculine ideal although their utopias were different. Jewish efforts were thus part of these broader discourses on social reform even though they addressed particular Jewish anxieties and desires. See, for example, Morgnshtern’s ideals and iconography in interwar Poland in Gechtman, “Socialist Mass Politics,” 327, 323-335. For Mosse’s discussion of socialism and masculinity, see \textit{Image of Man}, 123-132.
Among the Jewish political movements, masculinity was particularly important to Zionists.\(^{29}\) With its emphasis on manly values such as virility and power, embodied in the celebration of idealized heroes like Bar Kochba and the Maccabees, Zionism sought to ‘restore’ Jews’ honour.\(^{30}\) Zionists sought to solve the problem of Jews’ perceived lack of honour and social respectability by making Jewish men manly.\(^{31}\)

Even though gymnastics and sports were indispensable for the physical and mental regeneration of Jews, Zionists, Bundists, and other Jewish reformers also recognized the utility of these popular pastimes in mobilizing men and women politically. Individuals, otherwise indifferent to and unaware of their social, national, or political interests, in the eyes of activists, could be won for the cause through their gymnastics and sports activities, admiration for certain teams, and exposure to the movements’ ideology through public spectacles.\(^{32}\)

While non-governmental groups’ interest in utilizing sports and gymnastics to mobilize their perceived constituents went hand in hand with democratization, state authorities had long recognized the importance of physical education in disciplining and managing their populations.\(^{33}\) After World War I, in a climate of widespread anxiety over the state of the postwar generation in Europe, state involvement in the funding and


\(^{31}\) Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, 281.

\(^{32}\) For the discussion of gymnastics and sports as mobilization, see Gechtman, “Socialist Mass Politics.” For similar ideas among other groups, see Claire E. Nolte, “‘Every Czech a Sokol!’ Feminism and Nationalism in the Czech Sokol Movement,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 24 (1993): 79-100; and Eisen, *The Maccabiah*, 265.

\(^{33}\) See Mosse’s discussion of the institutionalization of physical education in schools and armies, in *Image of Man*, 40-55, 133-146.
organization of physical education increased. Funds for athletic facilities, institutes of physical education, and for sports and gymnastics movements increased across Europe in an effort to promote physical and moral health in the aftermath of the war. Mass spectacles and spectator sports, soccer in particular, became enormously popular in the interwar years, and national and international sports institutions, governing bodies, and competitions were consolidated in this period. Indeed, the popularity of sports in the postwar era, scholars argue, was a result of the militarization of societies. Sport arenas became settings for national and ideological rivalries and states invested considerable prestige in national sports teams, viewing their performances as a reflection of the virility of the nation.

In Central Europe, gymnastics was a social and symbolic space intimately connected to the nation building experience of stateless peoples. According to the interwar chroniclers of the history of Jewish gymnastics in the Bohemian Lands, the pioneers establishing the region’s first Jewish club in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau in 1899 were staunch Zionists. They were, in the narrative constructed by these historians, keen observers of the important role that the Czech nationalist Sokol-movement had played in awakening and empowering the Czech nation. In the decade before World War I, Jewish clubs with names such as Bar Kochba, Makabi, and Maccanea sprung up in towns across Moravia including in

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34 See Mark Mazower’s chapter “Healthy Bodies, Sick Bodies” in *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 1998), 76-103, here 77, 92-96.
36 In Czechoslovakia, when dispensing funds in support of sports teams travelling to international competitions, the authorities and applicants alike placed great emphasis on the question of Czechoslovakia’s prestige. See, for example, the funding applications from Makabi ČSR to the Ministry of Health d. May 22, 1930 asking for funds in support of Jewish athletes trip to the Makkabi Weltverband Congress in Antwerp in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
38 For inspiration from Sokol early on, see Ernst Fuchs, “Die Sokolbewegung; eine Parallele zum Makkabi,” *Židovský sport* June 1929: 17-19.
the regional centre Brno/Brünn in 1908.\textsuperscript{39} That same year, Makabi was established in Prague.\textsuperscript{40} These clubs were remembered in the interwar years as ideologically united around a Zionist platform and as important players in the international Jewish gymnastics movement, the Jüdische Turnerschaft (JT).\textsuperscript{41}

The reconstitution of the international Jewish nationalist sports and gymnastics movement in the aftermath of World War I mirrored the changes which had taken place in the political landscape in East Central Europe. In August 1921, at the 12th Zionist Congress in Karlovy Vary/Karlsbad, the Jüdische Turnerschaft transformed itself into the Makkabi-Weltverband, thereby signalling a timely restructuring. The JT’s regional networks, whose boundaries had trailed the imperial ones, were replaced by new organizations representing Jewish clubs within particular states. Disagreement over the relationship to Zionism, however, left the organization with only four member federations initially.\textsuperscript{42} Over time, more national federations joined. While the Weltverband met at gymnastics and sports festivals separate from the Zionist movement, it maintained a strong connection to the Zionist project in Palestine, engaging in fundraising and organizing the so-called Jewish Olympics, the Maccabiah, beginning in 1932.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Out of fourteen clubs in Czechoslovakia in 1919, at least nine were in Moravia, see Ernst Fuchs, “Jak jsme začínali...” in Slávnostný spis 3. slet čs. Svazu Makabi, ed. Beda Brüll (Praha: Svaz Makabi v ČSR, 1937), 40-45, here 42.
\textsuperscript{40} Fuchs, “Jak jsme začínali...” 40-41.
\textsuperscript{41} JT was established in Basel in 1903 with close links to Zionism, but remained independent from the Zionist movement as a national Jewish association working for the physical regeneration of Jews. It had its headquarters in Berlin, and published the journal, Jüdischer Turnzeitung, making Berlin, according to Daniel Wildmann, the centre of the Jewish gymnastics movement in Europe. See Daniel Wildmann, “Jewish Gymnasts and their Corporeal Utopias in Imperial Germany,“ in Emancipation through Muscles, ed. Brenner and Reuveni, 27-43, here 27. For claims of Bohemian and Moravian Jewry’s heavy involvement in JT, see Beda Brüll, “Československý Makabi,” 98; Ernst Fuchs, “Jak jsme začínali...” 40.
\textsuperscript{42} Eisen, The Maccabiah, 72. The members were Austria, Czechoslovakia, Palestine, and Germany. The JT had adopted more explicit Zionist leanings shortly before the war (1913) with greater focus on the Zionist project in Palestine as a Jewish homeland and the adoption of Hebrew commands, Friedler, Makkabi Chai, 29-32.
\textsuperscript{43} For the history of the Makkabi Weltverband and the Maccabiah, see Eisen, The Maccabiah.
The creation of international federations such as the Makkabi Weltverband was not a unique phenomenon in interwar Europe. The international Socialist Sports Movement and the Slav Sokol were similar transnational federations established to represent and strengthen particular nationalist or political movements. Mass spectacles such as the Slav Olympics, the Workers’ Olympics, and other mass rallies were put on by political organizations in order to display the might and virility of a class or nation. Thus, Jews like other Europeans were looking to the nation’s body for redemption.

**Makabi ČSR and the quest for hegemony**

In the early months of 1919, as Jewish activists were deliberating the future for the country’s Jews, Zionists led an initiative to establish a Council for Jewish Youth (Židovský výbor mládeže pro tělesnou péči). Concerned about the lack of physical education among Jews in general, and Jewish youths in particular, Oskar Kaminsky proposed that the Council look to the new state for support, observing that “the education of healthy and vigorous [Jewish] citizens is also in the interest of the Czechoslovak state.”

This notion of the connection between healthy Jews and good citizens was at the heart of the Jewish gymnastics and sports movement in Czechoslovakia in the interwar years. However, while Jewish leaders were convinced that gymnastics and sports would transform Jews into model citizens, they were concerned that they lacked the means to implement the program. They were particularly concerned about the state of affairs in the country’s eastern regions. In the 1920s, several different factions of Jewish sports and gymnastics activists

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44 Oskar Kaminsky, “Tělesná výchova naší mládeže,” Židovské zprávy March 2, 1919. In late 1920, Oskar Kaminsky was instrumental in organizing Jewish sport and gymnastics and joined Robert Heller and Egon Štern in their meetings with the Czechoslovak Sport Society where they pursued precisely this agenda, a process I will return to shortly.
were engaged in creating a country-wide network of Jewish clubs. However, in the course of this first decade, the Zionist-oriented Makabi ČSR established its hegemony as the only country-wide Jewish sports and gymnastics organization. While Makabi activists sought to present Zionism as the most authentic form of Jewish nationalism, soon their quest for hegemony among Jewish clubs required them to downplay Makabi ČSR’s Zionist leanings. Coveting the role as a representative of the country’s Jewish nation, Makabi ČSR embraced a more ‘neutral’ ethnic Jewish nationalist position. While this sort of political neutrality was a trait some Makabi activists had deplored among other Jewish sports and gymnastics organizations, by the late 1920s, Makabi ČSR’s leadership employed this more pragmatic strategy in order to maintain the fragile unity of Jewish gymnastics and sports clubs across Czechoslovakia.

In the summer of 1919, Jewish gymnastic and sport activists, members of pre-war Makabi units in the Bohemian Lands, met in Brno/Brünn to discuss the establishment of a Czechoslovak Makabi. While the plans for the creation of such a network of clubs and districts were presented and preparations begun at that meeting, a national federation, Makabi ČSR, was not established until 1924 under the leadership of Arthur Herzog, a long time member of Makabi Prag/Praha.45 Perhaps as a testimony to Zionists’ uncertainty with regards to their position among Jews in the Bohemian Lands in the immediate postwar years, members of local Makabi clubs, such as Robert Heller from Makabi Chomutov/Komotau, were also involved in the establishment of a politically non-partisan Jewish Sports and

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45 According to Egon Štern, Makabi ČSR was established in Prague around 1919 by Richard Pacovsky, then moved to Brno/Brünn where Karel Sonnenfeld acted as chair in 1922. The subsequent chair was Robert Heller, and by 1924 Makabi ČSR was back in Prague with Arthur Herzog as chairman. Egon Stern, “Svaz Makabi v Československu,” Židovské zprávy September 2, 1927. Arthur Herzog was subsequently elected chair for life and remained in that position until he immigrated to Palestine in 1939, see affidavit given in Tel Aviv during Maccabi World Union’s efforts to get restitution from Germany for property lost in the Sudeten area, Maccabi Archives box 146 4-37-12 affidavit by Arthur Herzog d. July 20, 1964.
Gymnastics Society in Czechoslovakia (Židovská tělocvičná a sportovní obec v ČSR (JSGS)).

While the JSGS was Jewish nationalist in its outlook, it was not exclusively Zionist. Thus, the society’s purpose, according to its statutes, was “to unify all Jewish sports and gymnastics organizations, meaning clubs and communities in the Czechoslovak Republic, in order to promote systematic physical education among the Jewish people and to awaken their national consciousness.” The founders imagined that the society would work as a unifying force and protect and represent the Jewish sports and gymnastics movements’ shared interests. Like their peers among Jewish nationalist politicians, these Jewish sports and gymnastics activists consciously moved to create an umbrella organization which emphasized Jews’ ethnic-national character rather than an allegiance to a particular political movement. Using a strategy employed by the country’s other national minority politicians, Jewish activists sought to establish the existence of their nation as an ethnographical fact rather than a political position. Furthermore, the Society’s leaders sought to strengthen their influence by tying their goals in with those of the new state. Indeed, unsure of JSGS’s appeal to Jews in the East and limited by a lack of resources, Jewish gymnastic and sports activists portrayed their efforts to establish new clubs in the east as an important part of the process to establish Czechoslovak hegemony across the country.

46 The society was formally established in 1921 and its name appeared in Hebrew (Aguda lehitamlut v lesport bčechoslovakia), Czech (Židovská tělocvičná a sportovní obec v ČSR), German (Jüdische Turn- und Sportgemeinde in der ČSR), thus signalling its commitment to act as a nationally unifying force among the Jews of Czechoslovakia. Letter from Karel Friedmann and Oskar Kaminsky to Ministry of Interior d. June 29, 1921 announcing the establishment of the society, in NA–Ministerstvo vnitra [Mv]-SR Židovská tělocvičná a sportovní obec v ČSR inv.č. 6/59/20 karton 1040.

47 The statutes were dated July 18, 1921 and were authorized by the Ministry of Interior on September 13, 1921, in NA-Mv-SR Židovská tělocvičná a sportovní obec v ČSR inv.č. 6/59/20 karton 1040.

48 Statutes JSGS July 18, 1921.

49 Der Deutsche Turnverband in der Tschechoslowakei was established in November 1919. Andreas Luh also makes reference to one of the Hungarian organizations, which was known in Czech as Madarský tělovýchovný svaz, see Andreas Luh, Der Deutsche Turnverband in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik: Vom völkischen Vereinsbetrieb zur volkspolitischen Bewegung (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), 31, 80.
Beginning in November 1920, Jewish activists participated in several meetings of the newly established Czechoslovak Sports Society (Československá sportovní obec (CSS)). The organization’s leaders were considering ways in which sports clubs and leagues in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia could be enticed to organize themselves within a state federation in accordance with the new political reality. According to the view from Prague, physical education was particularly underdeveloped in Slovakia. While communities lacked gymnastics and sports facilities and infrastructure, observers in the capital also deemed the population there insufficiently aware of the importance of physical education. During these deliberations, Jewish sport activists depicted Jews in Slovakia as a loyal national minority. Jews, they argued, could be relied on in CSS’ efforts to replace the existing, and allegedly Hungarian-dominated leagues with a Czechoslovak sports infrastructure.

In one meeting, during which the alleged stiff resistance by Hungarian and German federations to the CSS’s efforts to create a state-wide federation was on the agenda, Robert Heller and Egon Štern, the chair of the Jewish Soccer League (Židovský svaz footballový), noted that in contrast to these irredentist minorities, Jews and the existing Jewish sport clubs in Slovakia were ready to organize themselves within a Czechoslovak framework. Their good will was, however, thwarted by Hungarian obstruction. Egon Štern recounted how on a recent trip to Košice/Kassa/Kaschau/Kashoy/Koshutse aimed at establishing a regional organization for the Jewish clubs in Eastern Slovakia, his efforts had been obstructed by

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50 See the minutes from meetings taking place between November 9, 1920 and January 11, 1921, where Slovakia and Jewish clubs were on the agenda, NA–Fond Československá sportovní obec, 1918-1928 inv.č. 1 karton 1.
51 As the Czechs viewed the Slovaks as culturally backward and somewhat nationally indifferent, they were eager to take the lead in the area’s social and cultural transformation. While the fear of continued Hungarian and German dominance in Czechoslovakia fuelled land reforms and administrative and political changes, the effort to establish sports leagues and clubs was an attempt to redirect social life in Slovakia towards the new centre in Prague. For land reforms see Daniel E. Miller, “Colonizing the Hungarian and German Border Areas during the Czechoslovak Land Reform, 1918-1938,” Austrian History Yearbook 34 (2003): 303-317.
52 Minutes from meeting on January 11, 1921, 2 in NA-Fond ČsSO, 1918-1928 inv.č. 1 karton 1.
Hungarian sports activists. The latter had threatened to exclude the Jewish clubs from the Hungarian league, and thus, Štern argued, from every sports competition in this region which was completely dominated by the Hungarian sports federation. While the Jewish sports clubs were ready to organize themselves along Jewish national lines and join the CSS, Štern contended, their hands were tied by the Hungarian clubs’ persistent power in the region as demonstrated by “a letter in Hungarian from the Magyar federation forbidding these [Jewish] clubs to participate in the establishment of a Jewish organization.” Jews, like Slovaks, Štern asserted, were being forced to renounce their ‘true’ national belonging and appear under a Hungarian banner. In order to present Jews as loyal and powerless in the face of Hungarian oppression, Štern employed the trope of denationalization at the hands of the dominant Hungarians, a trope familiar to the Czech and Slovak nationalist imagination. By painting an image of Jews’ loyalty to the new state silenced by Hungarians, Štern thus suggested that support for his and other Jewish activists’ efforts to organize Jewish clubs on a national basis furthered the cause of Czechoslovak hegemony in the region.

At stake for the Jewish sports activists were both prestige and money. As chapter one showed, in the turbulent period after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, when fighting erupted between Hungarian and Czechoslovak forces in the south, Jewish leaders in the Bohemian Lands were concerned about the antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence that accompanied the unrest in Slovakia. By casting Jews and Slovaks as equally socially and nationally downtrodden by the Hungarians, Štern sought to assure Czechs of Jews’ loyalty to the new order. In contrast to the damaging image of Jews’ as Hungarian patriots, these Jewish sports activists depicted Jews in Slovakia as a community only recently liberated

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 2.
from national oppression. In order to strengthen Jewish clubs’ efforts to establish their independence in Slovakia, however, they needed not only political, but also financial support from Prague.

With the Jewish Sport and Gymnastic Society in Czechoslovakia only in the making, Štern and Heller sought to secure funds or other forms of support from CCS’ to bolster their effort to gain territory for a Jewish nationalist federation in Slovakia. Convinced that “it is in Slovakia that the future lies [for a Jewish federation],” Štern suggested that the CSS provide subsidies for Jewish clubs to rent public sports facilities so they would not have to depend on Hungarian ones as well as sponsor games between visiting Czech and local Jewish teams. The Jewish activists’ motions were, it appears, well received by the CSS’ leaders. One board member, Josef Fikl, remarking on the tension between the national federations, concluded, “[w]ith regards to the proliferation of sport among the Jewish clubs in Slovakia, we welcome these guarantees of Jewish and Czechoslovak cooperation. The Jews in Slovakia are valuable material for us and the federation should acknowledge this clearly. The Jewish federation [the budding JSGS] should not encounter any obstacles [in its efforts to organize Jewish clubs in Slovakia].” The meeting of minds which took place at this encounter between Czech and Jewish sports activists was founded in their shared perception of the eastern territories and their populations as somewhat backward and nationally indifferent or downtrodden. Both parties were eager to promote sport as a means of social and cultural transformation through which old power structures could be undone. Unsure of their ability to make a breakthrough in the Jewish communities in the East, Jewish activists sought to

55 Ibid., 3.
56 Ibid., 4. Josef Fikl was also a member of the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee in 1919 and wrote about his experience and change of heart regarding minority athletes as a result of Jews’ example, Josef Fikl, “Poměr Židů k celostátnímu sportu,” Židovský sport January-February 1930: 7.
align themselves with the broader civilizing efforts of the state authorities. Presenting the goals of Jewish nationalism as furthering those of the state was a strategy which Jewish activists employed throughout the interwar years. However, as we shall see, to Jewish nationalists this connection was equally strategy and ideology.

While the founders of the JSGS imagined that the institution could bring together different Jewish political and cultural factions, by the mid 1920s, the Zionist-oriented Makabi ČSR managed to dissolve the JSGS and position itself to assume its place. Although most of its member clubs were in Moravia, Makabi ČSR had established itself with headquarters in Prague in 1924, perhaps an early sign of the leadership’s intention of becoming the center for Jewish sports and gymnastics in Czechoslovakia. 57

The JSGS was dissolved by its member organizations, which included Makabi ČSR, in October 1927. Soon thereafter, Makabi activists from across the country met in Brno/Brünn to discuss Makabi ČSR’s new role within the Jewish sports and gymnastics movement. 58 Reporting from the meeting in an article in Židovský sport - Hamakkabi, Erwin Goldschmid noted Makabi ČSR’s goal of “becoming analogous to the other gymnastics and sports federations in the republic,” and thus establishing itself as a public representative of the Jewish nationality rather than a political faction. 59 Pointing to the loose structure and ideologically neutral position of the JSGS as the cause of its alleged “ineffectiveness,”

57 Fuchs, “Jak jsme začínali…” 40-45.
59 Erwin Goldschmid, “Zur Kreistagung des Makabi in der ČSR,” Židovský sport November 1927: 10-11. In early 1927, Makabi ČSR and the sports club Hagibor Praha/Prag reached an agreement to co-publish the existing monthly Hagibor Židovský sport as Hagibor Židovský sport – Hamakkabi (hereafter Židovský sport). The first half of the magazine was in Czech, while the Makabi section was in German, see announcements in Hagibor Židovský sport February 1927. The first co-published issue followed in March 1927. The monthly was co-published until 1931, when it appeared as Židovský sport – Hamakkabi. It was discontinued all together in 1933. Hamakkabi continued as a supplement in Židovské zprávy.
Goldschmid announced that the Makabi ČSR executive would strive to create a uniform organizational structure within each regional district and enforce uniformity among member clubs by demanding both the adoption of a standard set of statutes as well as the name Makabi.\textsuperscript{60} The authority of the central leadership over individual clubs had been strengthened, he noted, giving the Prague executive the right to exclude member clubs.\textsuperscript{61} In addition, Goldschmid reported, Makabi leaders had committed themselves to do more for the creation of a \textit{Turngemeinschaft}. Recognizing that more had to be done to strengthen ties between Makabi clubs and between districts, the executive intended to renew efforts to organize camps, local, regional, and national events, as well as more informal outings where Jews, especially young Jews, cultivated and strengthened personal bonds.\textsuperscript{62}

While the JSGS was intended to accommodate all Jewish factions and clubs when it assumed the role as the main representative of Jewish sports and gymnastics, Makabi ČSR formulated a more controlled and centralized program with a focus on uniformity, community, and visibility, aspects of Jewish nation building which Makabi activists like Erwin Goldschmid believed had been neglected by the ‘deceased’ neutral Jewish sports body.\textsuperscript{63}

Through the interwar years, Makabi ČSR experienced a steady increase in member clubs. From the late 1920s and through the 1930s, the organization expanded its network of gymnastics and sports clubs in all parts of the country, becoming one of the largest Jewish non-communal institutions in Czechoslovakia. In 1919, there were 14 Makabi clubs, by

\textsuperscript{60} Member clubs, however, preserved and continued to choose other names such as Makkabea established in Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg/Presburg in 1912, Hagibor Praha/Prag founded in 1914, Hagibor Plzeň/Pilsen (1923), and Bar Kochba Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg/Presburg (1929).


\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 11.
1921 this number had more than doubled to 31. In 1928, Makabi ČSR oversaw 44 clubs, and by 1933, 83. The number of clubs settled around 80 and some clubs expanded their membership base substantially as the number of actual members continued to grow through the 1930s. In 1921, it had about 2000 members, in 1928, 4,000, and by 1933, 8,000. This number had grown to 10,000 in 1936 and by 1937 to 11,000.

As had their predecessors in JSGS, the leaders of Makabi ČSR were well aware of the importance of mobilizing the Jews in the eastern provinces for the Zionist project in Czechoslovakia. After all, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia contained the bulk of the country’s Jewish population. Furthermore, like other ‘western’ observers, Jewish leaders from the Bohemian Lands believed that Jews in the east where in dire need of socio-cultural modernization; a process that Jewish nationalist activists hoped to take charge of. However, the task was a challenging one, fraught with social tension. Yet Slovakia remained an important territory both practically and symbolically for Makabi ČSR. If the focus in the late 1920s and early 1930s was on modernization, by the mid 1930s, it shifted to include an assertion of Jews’ commitment to the integrity of Czechoslovakia. Thus, Makabi ČSR’s leaders continuously used Jewish Slovakia as way to position their organization as a respectable and deserving institution in the eyes of the state authorities.

64 Interestingly the number of clubs ‘jumped’ from 45 to 83 in two years between 1931 and 1933. This proliferation of clubs could be explained by an increase in antisemitism in German clubs in Czechoslovakia, by the newly arrived Jews from Germany establishing new clubs, as well as by the support extended to new clubs in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia alleviating them from membership fees in the first year. For documents suggesting the latter, see funding application from Makabi ČSR to Ministry of Health d. December 27, 1934. The numbers of clubs and members are the ones provided by Makabi itself to the Ministry of Health in their funding applications in the period from 1928 to 1938. The Ministry of Health apparently trusted the information provided by Makabi as it formed the basis for their internal memos and notes. See, for example, recommendations from the Municipality of Prague to the Ministry of Health d. March 9, 1929 and Ministry of Health internal memo recommending funding d. January 15, 1931, all in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR 1928-1952 inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.

As Makabi ČSR positioned itself to assume a hegemonic role in Jewish sports in Czechoslovakia, Adolf Jellinek, a prominent Zionists activist and youth leader working in Slovakia, challenged the Makabi leaders in an article depicting the dismal state of the movement in Slovakia.66 While a regional Makabi organization for Slovakia (Landesverband) had been established two years earlier, it had had little success in helping to maintain the existing dozen Makabi units and in gaining new member clubs. In fact, Jellinek predicted, it stood to lose the existing Makabi units. Pointing to the lack of resources both in the regional office and among the region’s clubs, Jellinek placed the blame squarely at the Makabi ČSR leadership in Prague. “The Makabi executive has not granted the Slovakian organization a single one of their requests which would have made possible their difficult initial work,” Jellinek claimed.67 Thus, with no financial or even material assistance to offer new and existing Jewish clubs, they, Jellinek maintained, had no reason to join the Makabi-movement, which after all demanded a membership fee. Accusing his Turnbrüder in the Bohemian Lands of ignorance of conditions in the east, Jellinek pointed to tireless enthusiasts from Makabi in Bratislava as responsible for any ground Makabi ČSR might have held on to in the region.68

Jellinek’s rant received a somewhat annoyed response from Arthur Herzog, who noted that the Slovakian office had failed to properly inform Prague of their problems. Even so the kind of financial and material support which Jellinek was demanding was wholly unrealistic.69 “As in Slovakia, there are plenty of clubs in Bohemia and Moravia that need financial support, and where are we supposed to get the money from,” Herzog asked

67 Jellinek, “Die Organisation des Makkabi in der Slowakei,” 12
69 Herzog’s response was included immediately after Jellinek’s account, Židovský sport November 1927: 13.
rhetorically, “when our budget is so small[.]”\textsuperscript{70} The difficult economic conditions in Slovakia and the limited resources of Makabi ČSR were obstacles thwarting the organization’s effort to gain a secure foothold in the east. Through the late 1920s and 1930s, Makabi leaders continued to look to the state for support for their work in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. As concerns about socio-economic conditions and the region’s loyalty to the state became more pronounced, Makabi ČSR’s leaders presented their organization as a useful player in the region.

Beginning in 1928, Makabi ČSR submitted annual applications for financial support to the Ministry of Health and Physical Education.\textsuperscript{71} In these appeals for state funds, Makabi ČSR activists consistently presented the organization’s work as “aimed at securing the well being of the Czechoslovak state.”\textsuperscript{72} Efforts to develop Jewish sport in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia were presented as evidence of Makabi ČSR’s deserving nature. Indeed, reporting on the successful establishment of new units in Slovakia and the dispatching of educators and representatives from Prague to these units on annual visits, Makabi ČSR’s leaders cast themselves as overseeing a conscientious program to improve the Jewish population in the East.\textsuperscript{73} In one application, for example, Arthur Herzog and the vice chair Isidor Brand writing in application for funds noted that although that Makabi ČSR depended solely on membership fees and donations as a source of income, “our organization has succeeded in establishing units and clubs in areas where Jewish youths hitherto had no

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Ministry of Health’s file for Makabi ČSR begins in 1928, when Makabi ČSR took over from JSGS and announced its status as the only Jewish organization working for Jews across the country. See application from Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. December 24, 1928 in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR 1928-1952 inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} In some applications, the executive included letters of appreciation from clubs in Slovakia thanking the Prague executive for financial support. See, for example, letter from Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. may 31, 1937 and June 30, 1937 in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR 1928-1952 inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
exposure what so ever to physical education [...] recently we have established new units in Mukačevo and Užhorod. Thus, regardless of the major obstacles which Jewish reformers faced in these regions, they were, in Makabi ČSR’s narrative, unrelenting.

Carefully aligning Makabi ČSR with the perceived concerns of the state, its spokesmen argued that the impetus for their perseverance rested in the belief that in the country’s poorest and most densely populated Jewish areas physical education furthered desirable social changes among Jews. Their work was thus of crucial importance to the state. In a letter to the then Minister of Health, Ludwig Czech, a German Social Democrat and known to be of Jewish origin, Makabi’s leadership explained the importance of state subsidies in effecting social change through Makabi ČSR:

Even though there are many successful sports clubs and athletes within our organization, our work is not only focused on achieving trophies. We strive to raise a disciplined Jewish individual who will be a conscious citizen of the Czechoslovak state. The majority of our members are poor, but [within Makabi] they have an opportunity to engage in systematic physical education in addition to well-thought-out moral and civic education. In particular, we prepare our poor members for physical work primarily as agricultural labourers. This will facilitate the transfer (převrstvení) [of Jews] from commerce and intellectual occupations to productive ones. Thus, by preparing youths for occupations to which they have access, we seek to ease the immense destitution among Jews in the eastern parts of the republic [...] our extensive range of activities has unfortunately been inhibited by a lack of financial means, as our organization has depended almost exclusively on members’ contributions for several years.

Thus, as socio-economic and political tension increased within Czechoslovakia, Makabi ČSR’s leaders cast the Jewish nationalist sport and gymnastics movement as a force working to secure the integrity of the state, easing social tension and ensuring the loyalty of its Jewish citizens.

As Makabi ČSR gained a more secure foothold in Slovakia, boasting several large clubs with access to sports facilities, the organization’s leadership put on display their role as an integrative force by staging high profile events in cities and towns across the region. These events served to cast both Jews as a Czechoslovak element in Slovakia and the region itself as a Czechoslovak space. In 1934, the Slovakian division of Makabi ČSR held a regional gathering in Bratislava featuring local military units, the commander of the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia, along with the Makabi gymnasts and athletes from across the country.\textsuperscript{76} Two years later, in February 1936, the international Maccabi World Winter Games took place in Banská Bystrica/Besztercebánya/Bistrits/Neusohl. The following year, Makabim gathered for gymnastic performances, sports competitions, and parades at Makabi ČSR’s third national meeting in Žilina in north western Slovakia. All these events served as public displays of the Czechoslovak identity and civic loyalty of Makabi, precisely at a time when Slovak separatist nationalism and Hungarian irredentism was on the rise.\textsuperscript{77}

Makabi ČSR’s work in Slovakia was in part intended to strengthen the image of the organization’s Czechoslovakness. This search for political respectability in the eyes of state authorities and the Czech public was also at the heart of Jewish gymnastics leaders’ admiration for and cooperation with Sokol, the Czech(oslovak) nationalist gymnastics movement.

As we have seen, Jewish nationalist leaders in the Bohemian Lands often invoked the trope of the similarities between the Czech and the Jewish national revival. While this was a strategy employed by Jewish nationalists to add familiarity and prestige to their own cause, it also reflected a genuine admiration among these activists of Sokol’s projection of virility,

\textsuperscript{76} See an account from the event, “Armáda na naší půdě,” Židovské zprávy July 27, 1934.
\textsuperscript{77} Joseph Rothschild, East Central Europe between the Two World Wars (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 117-121.
perhaps expressed most prominently in its celebrated role in Czech nation-building.

Uniformed, disciplined, and manly, Sokol was known as the “Czech national army” prior to World War I. After the war, Sokol was celebrated for its alleged role in the fight for Czech ‘liberation’ and independence securing the German and Slovak borderlands. Like the pre-state Sokol, Makabi ČSR, its most prominent ideologue and the editor of Hamakkabi, Ernst Fuchs imagined, was on the frontline in the struggle to awaken the nation, instilling vigour, discipline, and self-reliance necessary for the nation’s rebirth.

This parallelism between Makabi and Sokol was expressed not only through ideological similarities, but also in Makabi ČSR’s adoption of forms and traditions associated with Sokol such as Sokol’s gymnastics festivals known as slets. While these had been major events in Sokol’s pre-state period, as a performance of Czechoslovak nationhood, in Czechoslovakia, the slets became spectacular public performances complete with participation of the army, the president, and the ‘nation’ represented by gymnasts from across Czechoslovakia, from the Czech Diaspora, and from other Slavic countries. Makabi ČSR held three slets in the interwar years, the first in Brno/Brünn in 1921, then in Moravská Ostrava/Mährisch Ostrau in 1929, and the last in Žilina in 1937.

While the adoption of this Sokol-tradition made the event legible as a performance of nationhood, the slets’ tradition for emphasizing both Czechness and pan-Slavism was particularly important as it legitimized the international character of the Makabi-movement. This precedent facilitated Makabi ČSR’s ability to perform both its distinct Czechoslovak

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78 Nolte, “‘Every Czech a Sokol!’,” 82.
80 Ernst Fuchs, “Die Sokolbewegung; eine Parallele zum Makkabi,” 18.
81 For origin of the word, see Claire E. Nolte, The Sokol in the Czech Lands: Training for the Nation (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 180.
82 See the photographs of the 1932 slet in Prague in the booklet IX. slet všesokolský 1932 (no publication data in Maccabi Archives Box 147 4-37-27).
identity as well as its belonging within a broader Jewish national community, a connection particularly important at the 1929 slet which combined a Makabi ČSR event with the congress of the Makkabi Weltverband. Thus, the hoisting of the Czechoslovak and the Zionist flag, the performance of the state anthem and Hatikvah, and the presence of Makabim from Czechoslovakia and from across Central Europe was a play on familiar pan-nationalist traditions in Czechoslovakia.

The relationship between Makabi ČSR and Sokol did not, however, remain merely symbolic and rhetorical. The Makabi leadership and the gymnastic director (náčelník) Pavel Hirsch from Brno/Brünn cooperated closely with prominent gymnastics experts from Sokol like František Trnka. Trnka was a well known high school teacher and gymnastics expert who ran seminars and courses for gymnastics instructors from his home town in Prešov/Eperjes/Preschau/ Preshov/Priashiv in eastern Slovakia. From the early 1930s on, aspiring instructors from Makabi ČSR attended Trnka’s courses and seminars, and Trnka himself occasionally contributed articles on Jews and physical education to Židovské zprávy and the newsletter of the Makabi instructors, Doar Meamlenu (lit. ‘News from our toil’).

While Makabi ČSR’s cooperation with Trnka in professionalizing Jewish gymnastics reflected an ideological affinity, the relationship was perhaps also informed by more pragmatic concerns. As a semi-public body, Sokol received significant state funds for its educational program and facilities, resources which Makabi activists could draw on, if only indirectly. Furthermore, as national tensions increased in Czechoslovakia and gymnastics and sports clubs were suspected of irredentist activities, Makabi ČSR’s leaders flagged their collaboration with František Trnka as evidence that their gymnastics instructors were

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83 For significant state investments in Sokol, see Luh, Deutsche Turnverband, 85.
competent and loyal. Trnka’s involvement, they perhaps hoped, would add weight to Makabi ČSR’s stated commitment to professionalize their activities through tight control of the education of instructors, a development which went hand in hand with the Prague executive’s attempts at still closer surveillance of local clubs in the late 1930s. Thus, throughout the interwar years, Makabi activists’ played up the similarities between Sokol and Makabi ČSR and collaborated with Sokol-experts in order to secure the political respectability of the Jewish nationalist movement. However, despite Makabi ČSR’s leaders’ efforts to project an image of national unity and discipline, the rank and file were more difficult to rein in than perhaps first imagined.

In the fall of 1926, Židovský Sport, then the monthly magazine of Hagibor Praha/Prag, published the response of leading members of the Prague Jewish sports world to the prospects of a possible merger between the two Jewish Prague clubs, Makabi and Hagibor. Some favoured a fusion as a way of strengthening Jewish unity, while others opposed such a move, pointing in particular to the clubs’ different attitudes to youth education (Kulturarbeit) and Zionism. In the eyes of representatives from Makabi, their club’s focus was on gymnastics, Zionist education, and internal national mobilization. Hagibor, in their view, neglected this important work, focusing solely on achieving the respect of non-Jews through sports. However, despite the strong Zionist identity of these and other Makabi activists, in the interwar years, Makabi ČSR had to play down its Zionism and efforts to instil ideological discipline. Convinced that the Jewish ‘masses’ were national

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84 See, for example, report submitted to Mzd from Makabi ČSR on its annual activities and future goals d. April 4, 1932 in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR 1928-1952 inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
86 “Naše anketa II: Považujete sloučení Hagiboru a Makabi v Praze za možné a účelné?” Židovský sport September 1926: 1.
87 Arthur Herzog, the chair of Makabi ČSR was among the opponents to the merger.
opportunists or at best nationally indifferent, Makabi activists feared that a strong Zionist profile would repel Jews. The organization remained formally independent from any Zionist body throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, at the same time as Makabi leaders attempted to strengthen Jewish nationalist and Zionist education within the clubs, they guarded the status of the institution as non-partisan and non-political. Emphasizing the primacy of national unity over ideological differences and insisting on the organization’s national rather than political character, Makabi activists sought to strengthen their bid for hegemony among Jewish athletes and gymnasts in Czechoslovakia.

In interwar Czechoslovakia, the state authorities restricted the access of non-governmental organizations to the country’s children and youth. Concerned with the young’s vulnerability to irredentist German and Hungarian nationalists, Communists and other perceived destabilizing elements, the state restricted school age children and youths’ right both to membership in associations other than ones promoting physical education and barred them from participating in political demonstrations and parades. While some Makabi activists were keen to promote the Jewish nationalist movement as apolitical in order

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88 In an article in the German Makkabi’s monthly Der Makkabi: Organ der deutscher Makkabi Kreises, which also acted as the organ of the Makkabi Weltverband, Arthur Herzog explained that the Czechoslovak Makabi was not affiliated with ay Zionist institutions. Considering he made a special point out of mentioning this, one wonders if this was perhaps an anomaly among the Makabi federations, Arthur Herzog, “Der tschechoslowakische Makabikreis,” Der Makkabi May 1929: 8-9, here 9. Haim Kaufman argues that the Makkabi Weltverband was openly Zionist in order to fight the Bund in the interwar years. However, Makabi ČSR did not follow this pattern, as there was not any major Jewish opponent in Czechoslovakia comparable to the Bund in Poland, Haim Kaufman, “Jewish Sports in the Diaspora,” 155. For evidence that Makabi ČSR was indeed perceived as a non-Zionist organization by the leadership of the Czechoslovak Zionist Organization and denied funding because of it, see VIII. Zionistentag in Brünn 30.-31.7.1928 Rehenschaft über die Vergangenheit – Programm für die Zukunft (Mährisch Ostrau: Zionistischer Zentralverband für die čsl. Republik, 1928), 32.

89 While the authorities were keen to promote physical education, they reserved the right to restrict children and youths’ involvement in organizations which appeared to “promote religious, national, or political intolerance and hatred.” In early August 1935, Makabi ČSR filed a complaint with the Ministry of Health asking them to reiterate to a German school board that Makabi ČSR was not a political organization and thus had the right to organize Jewish youths. According to Makabi ČSR, the German school board was barring Jewish children’s access on the grounds that Makabi ČSR was a political organization. See letter from Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. August 1, 1935, and the positive response from Mzd d. August 5, 1935 quoting the directive from the Ministry of Education d. May 26, 1922 restricting activities of certain organizations in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR 1928-1952 inv.č. 3424/8/5 karton 913.
to strengthen the legitimacy of Jewish nationhood as an objective ethnographical fact, this legislation regarding the country’s children and youth further strengthened the factions within Makabi ČSR who believed that the organization should remain independent from the Zionist movement. From its establishment in 1924, Makabi ČSR was defined as “non-political,” a label which, as the Ministry of Interior emphasized in its letter approving the organization’s first statutes, “barred the organization from conducting political activities and from participating in political events.”

However, while Makabi ČSR refrained from formal affiliation with the World Zionist Organization in the interest of gaining access to the nation’s future generations, its founding members incorporated Zionist priorities dressed up in the guise of neutral Jewish nationalism. According to its statutes, Makabi ČSR’s purpose was “to strengthen the physical vigour (zdatnost) of Jews and elevate their moral standards (mravní úroven) whereby it aspires to build and maintain the Jewish nation and its homeland.” While Makabi ČSR’s statutes stated that these goals were to be achieved through physical education as well as cultural activities such as seminars, lectures, and theatre performances, Makabi ČSR also promoted and organized fundraisers for Zionist institutions like the Jewish National Fund as well as so-called Shekel-campaigns.

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90 For Makabi ČSR statutes, see Isidor Brandt to Ministry of Interior d. November 3, 1924 submitting the final version of the statutes on behalf of the three founding gymnastic clubs, Židovská tělocvičná a sportovní jednota Makabi v Praze, Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein Makkabi Teplitz-Schöna, Jüdischer Turn- und Sportverein Makkabi, Komotau. The statutes were first submitted on June 11, 1924. For barring from political activities, see response to Makabi ČSR from Zemská správa politická v Praze d. November 21, 1924 in AHP–PŘ–SK XIV/685, Svaz Makabi v ČSR, 1924-1952.

91 Svaz Makabi v ČSR statutes November 3, 1924 (as above), the notion of Jewish nation and its homeland (domovina) was ambiguous, on the one hand it refers to the broader Jewish nation and its homeland in Palestine. On the other, it could also read as a more local statement referring to Czechoslovakia’s Jewish nation and its homeland, namely Czechoslovakia.

92 Statutes November 3, 1924; and for fundraising and monetary commitment to Zionist causes, see Prokop Bureš, Sport a tělesná kultura v R.Č.S (Praha: Alamanach sportu, 1931), 373; see also Arthur Herzog, “Der tschechoslowakische Makkabikreis,” Der Makkabi May 1929: 9.
Makabi ČSR’s formal status as a non-political and independent institution gained increasing importance in the 1930s.⁹³ In their applications for funding to the Ministry of Health, Makabi ČSR’s leaders emphasized how the organization’s independence and apolitical character contributed to its persistent financial needs.⁹⁴ Relying on membership fees and private donations as its main source of income, these activists cast their need for state support as a virtue. Considering that their work was primarily among poorer segments of the Jewish population in the East, Makabi activists spun these communities’ lack of resources as evidence for Makabi ČSR’s deserving nature. Pointing implicitly to the authorities’ perceived concern about the outside funding supporting activities of, for example, the German gymnastics organization (*Deutsche Turnverband in der Tschechoslowakei*), Makabi ČSR’s leaders attested that their institution was free from outside influences and their potentially subversive agendas.⁹⁵

While Makabi ČSR’s leaders’ emphasis on the organization’s independence was motivated by political developments in the 1930s, in the late 1920s other concerns also shaped the decision to remain unaffiliated with the World Zionist Organization. In March 1927, as Makabi activists were positioning themselves to replace the JSGS, Ernst Fuchs outlined his position in support of Makabi ČSR remaining separate from the World Zionist Organization. He believed that a Zionist institutional identity would be detrimental to

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⁹³ In 1933, the Ministry of Education began restricting and at times banning students’ participation in gymnastics associations. According to Tara Zahra, the Ministry did so in response to the *Sudeten deutsche Partei* (SdP) emergence out of the German nationalist gymnastics association. Tara Zahra, “Your Child Belongs to the Nation: Nationalization, Germanization, and Democracy in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1945” (diss. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 2005), 381.


Makabi ČSR’s work among Jewish youths in Czechoslovakia. “Physical education is in and of itself non-political,” Fuchs argued, “the Makabi organization is a testament to Jews’ [feeling] of ethnic belonging (Volkszugehörigkeit).”96 While he believed that Zionism was the natural outcome of Jews’ national feelings, he cautioned that “the crisis within postwar Jewish youth” had made the union between Makabi and Zionism unattainable. Due to the perceived “spiritual disorientation” and general disunity among the country’s Jews, a Zionist commitment would, Fuchs believed, “be little more than an empty gesture [and] as a result there would be a far reaching reduction in the number of members.”97 While he noted that Makabi ČSR needed the support of Zionist agencies, he recommended that, for now, the movement focus on national unity first and foremost, a direction which would, in his mind, eventually pave the way to Zionism.

Fuchs’ call for non-partisanship and national unity was seconded by two prominent Makabi activists a few months later. In the aftermath of the Makkabi Weltverband Congress in Brno/Brünn in late August that year, Arthur Herzog criticized Zionist leaders whom he accused of placing undue demands on Makabi ČSR and its fellow federations in other countries.98 Although many Makabi clubs were struggling, Herzog noted, “the Zionist executive still expects them to do fundraising for all kinds of Zionist causes.”99 Praising the German and Czechoslovak Makabi organizations as particularly active in doing so, he was critical of the lack of reciprocity, noting that “the support of Zionists for the Makabi organizations have so far been only platonic.”100 A few months later, Adolf Jellinek

97 Ibid.
followed suit, noting that Makabi ČSR should remain open to all Jews by “caring for all things Jewish” and take care not to repel anyone by demanding an ideological commitment.  

Makabi ČSR leaders were, however, not only considering the risk of “repelling” indecisive Jewish youths, but also of alienating already committed Zionists. In his speech at the 1931 meeting of Makabi ČSR, Arthur Herzog reiterated the organization’s commitment to non-partisanship. “In Makabi as well as in Makabi Hacair no socialist, no revisionist, or any other ideas should be promoted,” Herzog declared, “each individual should decide their own political conviction. Makabi is only Makabi and will only remain so if we keep far away from party politics [...] in Makabi there is room for everybody, regardless of his (sic) convictions.” Like their counterparts on the Jewish National Council and the Zionist Organization of Czechoslovakia, as Jewish nationalists Makabi ČSR’s leaders saw themselves as the natural spokesmen for the country’s Jews, many of whom were yet to be guided towards their ‘true’ national belonging.  

While Makabi ČSR activists cultivated an image of neutrality and non-partisanship, the organization retained close ties to Zionist institutions in Czechoslovakia throughout the interwar years. The Zionist press, Židovské zprávy, Selbstwehr, and Jüdische Volksstimme, devoted either sections or entire supplements to news about Jewish nationalist gymnastics and sports and the Makabi movement. The annual Židovský Kalendář published by the Jewish National Fund and Židovské zprávy also included articles on Jews and sports in general and Makabi ČSR in particular. Furthermore, in the mid 1930s, the long time editor
of Židovské zprávy, Zdeněk Landes, joined the Makabi executive. Pavel März, member of the Zionist executive and of the Jewish nationalist political elite from its early days, chaired Makabi’s winter sport section (Židovský svaz zimních sportů) from 1933 onwards. The Jewish Party parliamentarian Angelo Goldstein acted as a representative of Makabi ČSR in the 1920s, routinely appeared at Makabi’s gymnastics and sports events as a representative of the Zionist movement and travelled with the Czechoslovak team to the Maccabiah in Tel Aviv in 1932 and 1935. Despite the continuous complaints of lack of funds for local clubs, Makabi ČSR encouraged its members to buy the Shekel, the certificate of membership in the World Zionist Organization, and, as mentioned earlier, participated in fund raising campaigns for the Jewish National Fund.

While Makabi activists warned against emphasizing Zionism in the interest of inclusiveness, efforts were made to provide members with a Jewish national education with significant Zionist content. Claiming non-partisanship, Makabi ČSR’s leaders nevertheless served up the Zionist movement as the agent of the Jewish national rebirth. Knowing to tread lightly on matters of politics and ideological convictions, Makabi activists designed a

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104 Landes was the editor of Židovské zprávy from 1925 to 1939 and a member of the Makabi executive from September 1936 although he did write on behalf of the executive, as shown earlier, prior to that. For engagement with Židovské zprávy, see Avigdor Dagan, “The Press,” in The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 523-532, here 526. On the executive, see letter from Makabi ČSR to police authorities in Prague d. September 16, 1936 announcing election of new board AHP PŘ-SK Svaz Makabi v ČSR XIV/685.

105 The winter sport association was established in 1931 as a response, in the words of the founders, to the increasing antisemitism in other associations as well as the need for Jewish national unity, see “Židovským zimním sportovcům!” Židovský sport September-October 1931: 7. For more on antisemitism in the Deutsch-östereichischer Alpenverein active in Germany, Austrian, and the Sudeten-land, see Jacob Borut, “Jews in German Sports during the Weimar Republic,” Emancipation through Muscles, eds. Brenner and Reuveni, 77-92, here 79.

106 Before gaining prominence within Zionist politics, Goldstein served on the boards of both Makabi Prag/Praha and Hagibor Praha/Prag. For examples of Goldstein’s appearance at various sports events, see Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg/Presburg/Prešporok event in 1934 in “Armáda na naší půdě,” Židovské zprávy July 27, 1934. Goldstein became honorary vice president of Makabi ČSR in 1932 according to Arthur Herzog, “Erinnerungen und Eindrücke von der I. Makkabiah in Tel-Aviv im Jahre 1932,” Zeitschrift für jüdische Geschichte (1964): 143-145, here 144.

two tier membership system which allowed for the co-existence of different nationalist commitments. This system was institutionalized by allowing studious and committed members to obtain the Gymnastics and Sports Badge (*Turn- und Sportsabzeichen*), a rite of passage making them full fledged members of Makabi ČSR. To obtain the badge, individuals had to demonstrate their physical skills and mastery of Zionist and Jewish knowledge, the culmination “of a period of systematic exercises and studies, a physical and spiritual development.” Indeed, Makabi leaders intended the badge to serve as evidence of members’ commitment to national regeneration, noting that “only those who express the will to develop their entire personality can become full-fledged Makabim.” Thus, as way of compromise between the Makkabi Weltverband’s calls for intensification of national education (*Kulturarbeit*) in the federations and the local leaders’ warning about the dangers of emphasizing Zionism, Makabi ČSR sought to strike a balance between the ideologues and pragmatists.

In the early 1930s, Makabi ČSR stepped up its efforts both to institutionalize national education and to homogenize and centralize the Makabi community. This effort was reflected not only in the publication of the manual *Makkabi Handbuch*, but also in the dispatching of representatives to oversee the work being done in local clubs across the country. The *Makkabi Handbuch* was intended in part as a manual for people seeking to establish a club providing them with basic guidelines for physical education, uniforms, parading, and management.

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108 This had been a requirement for full membership of Makabi since 1925, see *Makabi Handbuch* (Praha: Tschechoslowakischen Makabikreis im Makkabi Weltverband, 1931), 115.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 The manual contained practical information such as what belonged in a club pharmacy, pedagogy, and a Makabi address book.
It was also meant to serve as a study guide for members preparing to test for the badge. The manual’s content broke down in three parts: knowledge of the Makabi-movement and Zionist institutions, Jewish knowledge, and general gymnastics guidelines. The authors situated Makabi ČSR on the frontline of Jews’ national regeneration. If individual Makabi units and members played a key role in facilitating this process, their efforts were focused by the Zionist project in Palestine, the destination for Makabi ČSR’s most committed members. Essays dealt with the history of the Zionist movement, the Jewish National Fund, the Keren Heyesod, and the history and geography of Palestine (Palästinakunde). The editors included ‘Jewish’ topics such as Judaism, the Jewish people’s holidays, Jewish statistics and history, and hygiene. Makabi ČSR’s history and ideology was also discussed at length and was, along with a list of Hebrew gymnastics commands, a central part of the curriculum. The manual’s only map depicted Palestine. Interestingly, the Handbuch was entirely in German, the assumed lingua franca of Jews in Czechoslovakia, except for the lyrics for Hatikvah printed in Hebrew transliteration with a German translation. Makabi ČSR’s leaders hoped that the availability of this manual would further the quality of national and physical education and provide standards for appearance, cleanliness, and behaviour enhancing the movement’s respectability and internal homogeneity.

As reflected in the Makabi Handbuch, the leadership might allow for some flexibility in the commitment to national education, but their goal was to create a disciplined and centralized institution. Collective obedience and discipline were idealized as signs of national commitment on the individual and local level – a sign of national unity and maturity. The attention that the overseers dispatched from the centre paid to the dress of gymnasts and
athletes is a case in point. In advance of the Brno/Brünn summer slet in 1928, Ervin
Goldschmid emphasized the importance of strict adherence to the dress code, noting that
“[e]very Makabi embodies a disciplined member of our great community and this is
expressed through uniform clothing, unduly independence with regards to dress reflects lack
of order and discipline.”112 Similarly Richard Pacovsky on his inspection tour of Slovakian
units in late 1931 reported a “surprising unfamiliarity with the content of the Makabi
Handbuch.” He was particularly concerned with the fact that members showed up in the
gymnasium in their street clothes and shoes. Aside from the affront to hygiene, he noted,
“the lack of uniform dress signals disorder, disunity, and heterogeneity.”113 Uniformity in
dress was not only a way of creating sameness in appearance, in the eyes of nationalist
leaders, but also a way of teaching collective discipline and obedience, thereby shaping a
unified national community. While physical education thrived within the clubs, Makabi
leaders, like Beda Brüll, continued to lament “our members’ lack of focus” with regards to
ideological work.114

Makabi ČSR’s work was not only inhibited by internal laxness, but also by Jewish
clubs and individual Jews who in the eyes of Makabi activists, refused to sign up in their
‘own’ movement. In laments similar to those of their colleagues involved with the Jewish
schools, Zionist activists complained about Jews’ resistance to joining Jewish clubs choosing
to do sports among “other nationalities.”115 Indeed, Jewish nationalist activists believed that
their cause was particularly difficult precisely because non-Jewish clubs remained open to

114 Beda Brüll, “Československý Makabi,” 104-105. Brüll was the secretary of Makabi ČSR from 1934 to
1939, editor of the Hamakkabi supplement in Židovské zprávy, see Yehuda Brüll to Arthur Hanak (director of
the Maccabi Archives at the time) d. March 24, 1985, Maccabi Archives Box 147 4-37-19.
115 For laments regarding Jews in other clubs, see, for example, Mc Loy, “Lehká atletika,” Židovský sport April
1926: 5; Kurt Bloch, “Židé a sport,” Židovský kalendář 1933/1934: 81-84, here 84; and Evžen Justic, “Evropští
Jews, thereby diminishing the pool of athletes from which the Jewish institutions could draw.\textsuperscript{116} In an article on Jews and sports, Kurt Bloch lamented that “Makabi is not a united front of Jewish athletes, as many continue to fight for the colours of other nations, even though they are often only tolerated.”\textsuperscript{117} Considering that Makabi ČSR at its height counted less than four percent of the country’s Jews, this appears to have remained an issue throughout the interwar years.\textsuperscript{118} Furthermore, there were also Jewish clubs that remained outside of Makabi ČSR. In Northern Bohemia, for example, there were several Jewish clubs, which, according to Egon Štern, were not Jewish nationalist and therefore remained outside Makabi ČSR. In Prague, Hakoah maintained an antagonistic albeit brief relationship to the city’s other Jewish clubs.\textsuperscript{119} In Slovakia, as Adolf Jellinek implied, some clubs were unwilling or unable to meet the financial demands of Makabi ČSR and thus remained unaffiliated.\textsuperscript{120}

Makabi ČSR thus maintained a pragmatic attitude towards both ideological diversity and laxness among its members as a way of strengthening its bid for a hegemonic position in the world of Jewish gymnastics and sports in interwar Czechoslovakia. This pragmatism reflects that it was perhaps more difficult than first imagined to mobilize Jewish youths around an ethno-nationalist agenda. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a multiplicity of social circles and institutions remained open to Jews and allowed individuals to prioritize other communities than ethnic and national ones; a state of affairs that Jewish nationalists could only lament.

\textsuperscript{116} Mc Loy, “Lehká atletika,” 5.
\textsuperscript{117} Bloch, “Židé a sport,” 84.
\textsuperscript{118} For Jewish statistics in Czechoslovakia, see chapter two.
\textsuperscript{119} Egon Štern, “Makabi v Československu,” Židovské zprávy September 2, 1927. For Hakoah, see “Konec smutné historie,” Židovský sport July 1927: 5-6.
\textsuperscript{120} Jellinek, “Die Organisation des Makkabi in der Slowakei,” Židovský sport November 1927: 12.
Making ‘new Jews’

In his welcome address to Makabi athletes assembling in Banská Bystrica/Besztercebánya/Bistrits/Neusohl for the 1936 Makkabi World Winter Games, Angelo Goldstein described the importance of Makabi for the Jewish nationalist movement. It was, he noted, as a result of the education which youth received within Makabi that “a new Jew who is vigorous and has become aware of his national heritage” had emerged.121 “The Games,” he noted, “will demonstrate the vigour of our athletes […] the struggle on the slopes, an opportunity for us to demonstrate our improvement [...]” Makabi ČSR activists believed that their institution was key to the Jewish nationalist project in Czechoslovakia. Like other nationalists in Bohemian Lands, Zionists believed that national regeneration necessitated both a physical and mental transformation reshaping slumbering individuals into national collectives.122

From within the ranks of Makabi ČSR a generation of new Jews would emerge, a generation with healthy bodies and minds, conscious of their national belonging, yet also respectable citizens. Rejecting the stereotype of the weak willed and scrawny Jewish male, Makabi leaders imagined the new Jew as the embodiment of the bourgeois male ideal. As for other bourgeois nationalists, the male body became a site for national utopias. To Makabi activists, Jewish honour, empowerment, and respectability came in the form of disciplined, physically capable, and morally upright men.123 Fit Jews embodied the fundamental search

122 See, for example, the comparison between the pre-state Czech Sokol and the interwar Zionist movement in Fuchs, “Die Sokolbewegung,” 18.
123 Like many other languages Czech and German use the masculine gendering of words as the default gender. This ‘habit’ is just one of many ways in which masculine forms and communities take precedence over feminine ones. Makabi activists would only occasionally refer to women directly in their writings.
for respectability and inclusion at the heart of Zionism in Czechoslovakia in the interwar years.\textsuperscript{124}

The role of the gymnastics and sports movement as a nation building institution was, in the minds of Makabi activists and other Jewish nationalists, particularly significant because of the absence of a Jewish national education system in Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{125} Viewing the dispersal of Jewish children and youths in Czech, German, Slovak, and Hungarian schools as undermining Zionist efforts to nurture the rebirth of the Jewish nation, Makabi activists imagined themselves on the frontline in the battle for Jewish children’s souls. As Ernst Fuchs professed, “[i]n Exile, Makabi must act as a school, [an institution] at the disposal of people from other nations from childhood on. At evening gatherings, through courses, on the exercise grounds, playing fields, and in the tests to acquire the gymnastics- and sports badge we must carry out this program [of regeneration].”\textsuperscript{126}

Within Makabi ČSR, Ernst Fuchs undertook most of the programmatic writing on the making of new Jews. He believed firmly in Makabi as an educational and socializing institution creating the foundation for a new Jewish national community, much as Jewish school activists and pedagogues saw the Jewish school as such a nationalizing space. In an essay in the *Makabi Handbuch*, Fuchs defined a normative male self, the new Jew, whose commitment to self-education (*Selbsterziehung*) and to community embodied and spearheaded the quest for the Jewish people’s regeneration. According to Fuchs, self-education was to be achieved through continuous self-criticism and self-restraint. This constant perfection of the self involved physical exercises and discipline as well as the

\textsuperscript{124} Daniel Boyarin argues that honour and acceptance were the fundamental goals of Zionism not cultural preservation, *Unheroic Conduct*, 281-282.

\textsuperscript{125} For examples of these statements, see Goldstein, “Cesta k uskutečnění,” 31 and Fuchs, “Die Sokolbewegung,” 18.

\textsuperscript{126} Ernst Fuchs, “Vom Wesen des Makabis,” in *Makabi Handbuch*: 10-12, here 12.
cultivation of virtues such as honesty, helpfulness, trustworthiness, courage, and willingness to sacrifice.\textsuperscript{127} Individuals’ commitment to self-improvement “upon which rested the nation’s survival” had to permeate every aspect of life. As Fuchs noted, “[w]e are not only Makabim on the exercise ground or the playing field, but everywhere and all the time in life. If Makabi means the ‘hammer,’ the ‘fighter,’ then that means to us a determined hammering out of our own fate and the struggle for a better I.”\textsuperscript{128}

This personal autonomy, however, had to be balanced with the individual’s commitment to community. The individual, Fuchs noted, must fit into and be subordinate to the national community.\textsuperscript{129} The \textit{Turngemeinschaft} in the making within Makabi ČSR, Fuchs believed, served as a trailblazer for a broader Jewish regeneration movement, one which depended, however, on the leadership of the Makabim.\textsuperscript{130} In order to foster community, Fuchs argued, Makabi activists needed to nurture both national awareness and personal bonds and friendships between Makabi members, thereby creating “community – a group of people who seek the same in life.”\textsuperscript{131} Thus, Fuchs professed, Makabi leaders could not neglect the activities fostering these personal ties such as summer camps, excursions, social evenings, and larger local and regional gatherings. The national community had to become tangible in order for youths to sign on, Fuchs believed. A precondition, however, for the creation of community was, in Fuchs’ view, the dismantling of social hierarchies. He advocated making the tone within Makabi units familiar, substituting the formal with

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\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 10. For George Mosse’s examination of masculinity as embodying outward appearance and inward virtue – body and soul of one piece, one harmonious whole, \textit{Image of Man}, 24-39.
\textsuperscript{128} Fuchs, “Vom Wesen,” 10.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{130} Ernst Fuchs, “Schritte zur Turngemeinschaft,” \textit{Židovský sport} September 1927: 1-2.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 2.
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informal address, in an attempt to bridge age and social divisions within the organization.\textsuperscript{132} Only then could Makabi become a close knit “friendship circle, a real \textit{Volksgemeinschaft}.”\textsuperscript{133} The importance of social ties, of ‘reconstituting’ community, was shared widely among Jewish nationalist activists. In their view, youth, the future of the nation, was engulfed by spiritual disorientation. As Evžen Justic, a long-time Jewish sports activist, noted, sport did not require “a decision, conviction, or consciousness,” but invited young Jews to participate in sports “here, among equals, among friends.”\textsuperscript{134} In short, Justic maintained, through Jewish sports “a boy becomes a Jew.”

The Makabi \textit{Turngemeinschaft} served Fuchs and other Makabi activists as a site for utopian longings. Here they could guide and foster the nucleus of a Jewish nation, populated by beautiful young men, working in disciplined unison for their nation, the health of their bodies and minds, a symbol of Jews’ regeneration. The ‘restoration’ of Jews’ honour and respectability depended in every way, Fuchs imagined, on the daily work undertaken in gymnasiums and playing fields.

The centrality of masculine ideals in shaping Makabi activists’ utopian national community, however, created new potential divisions. Within a discourse centered on masculinity as the key to national and social redemption, Jewish women were largely marginalized. Indeed, there was a curious silence on women’s issues within Makabi ČSR in the interwar years.\textsuperscript{135} While women had proved themselves capable in leadership roles during World War I and made up a significant part of the membership, in the interwar years,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Fuchs, “Vom Wesen,” 11; this was a symbol of egalitarianism adopted from Sokol where it was implemented the familiar ‘thou’ in the 1860s, Nolte, “‘Every Czech a Sokol!'”, 81.
\item Fuchs, “Vom Wesen,” 11.
\item Justic, “Evropští Zidé,” 81.
\item Here, I am referring to the attention paid to women’s issues or questions of women’s participation in the club management. While women were involved in the executive, they did not hold prominent positions and the main leaders were all male. For overview of executive 1924-1939, see AHP PŘ-SK Svaz Makabi v ČSR XIV/685.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Makabi ČSR was dominated by male activists and infused with a decidedly masculine ethos.136

At the first meeting of Makabi Prag/Praha’s executive following the end of World War I, a writer reporting from the event noted that “it was clear that the sisters of our unit have taken on great responsibilities in the absence of many of our brothers, […] our sisters have managed not only to preserve the club, but also made Makabi bloom.”137 During World War I, women across the Bohemian Lands, much like the women in Makabi Prag/Praha, took charge of organizations in which they had been awarded membership, but excluded from prominent leadership roles.138 However, once men returned from the front, they resumed their leadership position and relegated women in whole or in part to their prewar roles. At this meeting in Prague, Makabi members elected six men and three women to the new board, placing the most important positions in the hands of men.139 Thus, as part of the normalization of life in the wake of the war, the reins held by Makabi’s women were promptly handed over to men and remained in their hands throughout the interwar years.140

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136 For a discussion of Jewish women in the gymnastics and sports movement in Germany, see Gertrud Pfister and Toni Niewerth, “Jewish Women in Gymnastics and Sports in Germany, 1898-1938,” *Journal of Sport History* 26, no. 2 (1999): 287-325. In Weimar Jewish women made up 38% of the membership (1924) in the German Makkabi, 298.

137 “Valná hromada těl. jednoty Makabi v Praze,” *Židovské zprávy* December 18, 1918.

138 Despite “protests from younger members,” women had been allowed to serve on the board of Makabi Prag/Praha in 1914, Lise Tutsch, “Der Prager Makabi während des Krieges,” *Židovský sport* April 1931: 6. For similar developments within Sokol in the Bohemian Lands during World War I, see Nolte, “Every Czech a Sokol!”, 100.

139 The board members were: chair Richard Pacovsky, vice-chair Josef Schick, secretary Emil Bondy, 2nd secretary Ottila Popperová, gymnastic director Viktor Mauthner, treasurer Max Hoffmann, 2nd treasurer Olga Lederová, suppleants Elsa Singerová and Felix Kornfeld. “Valná hromada těl. jednoty Makabi v Praze,” *Židovské zprávy* December 18, 1918.

140 For Makabi Prag/Praha, see list of board members for the interwar period in AHP–PŘ-SK Židovská tělocvičná jednota Makabi Praha XIII 54. The board of Makabi ČSR was very similar in its gender distribution. Usually, on a ten person board, two of the members would be women, for lists of board members between 1925 and 1939, see AHP Svaz Makabi v ČSR.
While women most likely constituted half or more of the actual Makabim, the leaders of Makabi ČSR hardly ever made direct reference to female members. On the rare occasion that an article on women and women’s issues was published in the Jewish sports press, the writers concerned themselves with general women’s issues rather than matters of concern to the new Jewish women. One writer, for example, discussed the appropriate exercises for women from childhood through youth, noting the importance of physical education in preparing young women for motherhood. Thus, according to this author, the purpose of physical education for women was to “create strong and robust mothers” in order to secure a healthy Jewish youth. While women participated in Makabi ČSR both as gymnasts, competitive athletes, and instructors, writers and other activists depicted women as mothers first and foremost, their bodies facilitating the rebirth of the Jewish nation. The central character in the performance of the new Jew, however, was the new Jewish man. It was the new Jewish man, transformed from an effeminate, victimized weakling into a manly agent of his own and his nation’s fate, who embodied the utopian longings of Jewish nationalist activists. Women were marginalized because the Jewish nationalist project was meant to establish Jews’ manliness. On both a discursive and a practical level, women were relegated to supporting roles as Jewish men handled the masculinizing task of making new

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141 The monthly reports on members’ attendance, which unfortunately exist in only very limited numbers, is one way of getting at the gender distribution in the individual units. For example, in April 1937, sixty five women and thirty men attended exercises in Makabi Brno/Brünn. In Prague, an almost equal number of men (56) and women (52) partook in exercises that month. The total for Makabi ČSR was 599 men and 672 women; see Doar Meamleu June 1937: 5.
143 Ibid., 17. In Weimar Germany, the discourse was, not surprisingly, very similar, see Pfister and Niewerth, “Jewish Women,” 295.
Jews. As we shall see, the militarization of Makabi ČSR in the 1930s only exacerbated this process.

While Makabi ČSR leaders agreed on the manly ideal, they disagreed on how to best transform Jews, a tension that was perhaps most prominently exposed in the interwar years by the conflicts fuelled by Makabi ČSR’s dual identity as a gymnastics and sports movement. Even though the debates over whether sports trivialized and debased the movement, or whether gymnastics repelled Jewish youths, appear at first glance to reflect a generational clash between ideological traditionalists and youthful sports enthusiasts, they were in fact the site of a minor Kulturkampf within Makabi ČSR. While both factions celebrated the masculine ideal, they disagreed on the importance of image, publicity, and elitism. The gymnastics faction insisted on prioritizing internal regeneration and Jewish national unity. The sports proponents viewed the transformation of the image of Jews through athletic achievement and performance as indispensable for both mass mobilization and equality. Despite their differences both factions sought to discipline young Jews into ideal men, symbols of respectability, restraint, and honour, by holding up the so-called “prima donnas” as countertypes to the new manly Jews.

In the spring of 1937, a series of articles discussing the balance between gymnastics and sports within Makabi appeared in Doar Meamlehu, the magazine for Jewish gymnastics

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145 The tension between gymnastic defenders and sports proponents was evident in many ideological organizations such as Sokol and the socialist movement. Gymnastic clubs had integrated some sports such as swimming, ball games, and track and field into their programs, a move that was often presented as a utilization of the health benefits of sports. It was, however, as Gechtman shows, also a response to pressure from below. Thus, the line was not clear cut between gymnastics and sports and the balance between the two were contested among activists. For Sokol and the socialist DTJ (Dělnická Tělovýchovná Jednota) in interwar Czechoslovakia, see Marek Waic, “Dělnická tělovýchovna v prvním desetiletí Československé republiky, 1918-1928,” Moderní dějiny 4 (1996): 131-158, here 141. For Bundist groups, see Gechtman, “Socialist Mass Politics,” 343-344.

146 For the link between ideal and countertype, see Mosse’s discussion of Jews and homosexuals in Image of Man, 56-76.
František Trnka expressed his disappointment that the international Makabi-executive was favouring sport over gymnastics. Noting the changes made to the plans for the 1938 Maccabiah, Trnka argued that emphasizing sports rather than gymnastics was a major and unfortunate step away from the organization’s basic goals and values. In his view, Makabi had always had a focus on discipline and ideological commitment as it “cared for the physical education of Jewry.” The Maccabiah, in the tradition of gymnastics festivals, was, according to Trnka, to be a demonstration of the internal work, the systematic physical and mental discipline exercised everyday, to improve Jews’ physical condition. In contrast, sports had only one focus, namely records and trophies. By making the Maccabiah an Olympics, the Maccabi World Union chose to celebrate the work of sports organizations where physical fitness was not driven by an ideological and national commitment, according to Trnka, but by individual ambition. While recognizing the utility of sport for its physical benefits, he lamented the prevalence of the non-ideological ethos of sports.

Trnka’s lament reflected the views of some gymnastic leaders within Makabi ČSR. To them, gymnastics as a discipline and as a social institution was the only form of physical education which fostered nation building. Focusing on the need for unity and physical and mental discipline, writers noted how gymnastics erased social differences between members and created a sense of community. Ervin Kovač argued that in the gymnasium there were no differences between rich and poor, between the educated and the uneducated. In here, the focus on the national collective obliterated social divisions. Similarly, Kovač asserted, the

147 It was published by Svaz Makabi v ČSR and edited by the organization’s gymnastics director Pavel Hirsch in Brno/Brünn in the late 1930s.
148 František Trnka, “Ist der Makabi eine Turn oder Sportorganisation?” Doar Meamlenu April 1937: 3-4.
149 Ibid., 4.
individual’s submission to the group during exercises taught gymnasts voluntary obedience which in turn was translated into a sense of responsibility for the whole outside of the gymnasium. Thus, as did Ernst Fuchs, these gymnastic teachers believed that there were a direct connection between the practices and values taught and exercised in the gymnasium and gymnasts’ respectability as Jews and citizens. Within the Makabi Turnhalle Jews learned to identify nationally above else by relinquishing the importance of all other differences, most prominently those of social hierarchy.\footnote{Kovač, “Niektore hodnoty,” 12.} The emphasis on daily physical and mental discipline, devoid of competitiveness and hierarchies, was, in the minds of gymnastic teachers and activists, what would ensure both Jews’ national unity and their capacity to become good citizens. While sport clubs tended both to narrow their focus to one or at most a few disciplines and to celebrate individuals rather than the whole, Trnka and other gymnastic leaders emphasized how gymnastics not only sculpted harmonious and beautiful bodies, but also levelled social hierarchies thus creating a Volksgemeinschaft.

These gymnastic activists were responding to what they believed was a widespread tendency within Makabi ČSR to favour sport over gymnastics. This development was a sign, in their view, that Makabi leaders and members alike were not taking seriously the national goals of Makabi. One critic wrote about his colleagues’ lack of commitment that, “only among us [Jews] is national education through the gymnastics clubs considered unimportant, [at times] even completely neglected.”\footnote{Reply to Trnka’s “Ist der Makabi, Doar Meamlenu July 1937: 12.} Pointing to Germany’s recent athletic triumphs at the Berlin Olympics, the author pointed to Germany as an example of the broader athletic benefits reaped from a serious effort to infuse physical education with nationalism. In the eyes of these activists, the increasing popularity of sports challenged precisely the most
central values upheld by the gymnastic movement. While gymnastic programs sought to unify individuals into one harmonious whole, sports emphasized and celebrated the achievements of individuals or a select few. Similarly, while gymnastics focused on the needs of the whole over those of individuals, sport, in the eyes of these critics, emphasized individualism and personal ambitions. Furthermore, gymnastics activists observed with little disguised distaste the entertainment and celebrity culture which was part and parcel of the sports world. Rather than creating fit, disciplined, and committed young people, the sport clubs pursued athletic goals only, thereby neglecting Makabi ČSR’s most fundamental task, namely of raising nationally conscious Jews and good citizens.

Sport and gymnastic enthusiasts had clashed over the respective merits of their clubs’ work since Makabi ČSR’s early days, when critics admonished the sport clubs for not prioritizing national education in their programs and for an overall lack of commitment to the Jewish nationalist cause. Zdeněk Landes, for example, noted that in contrast to the work of prewar Zionist gymnasts “who wanted to defend the colours of their own nation,” many clubs had lost touch with their origins.\textsuperscript{153} Indeed, so much had been forgotten, he lamented, that “the blue and white flag has just become a symbol of the club, not of the nation!”\textsuperscript{154} Landes was particularly critical of many sports clubs’ “neutral” or “all-Jewish” profile, a non-national stance, he believed, that Jews could not afford.\textsuperscript{155} Many sports clubs’ previously strong Zionist commitment had, Landes continued, deteriorated into a foggy, nationally uncommitted, all-Jewish identity. He warned,

\begin{flushright}
In most cases this is the path that our sport clubs have taken, and my voice warning of the dangers is neither the first nor the only one. Jewish sport has a great responsibility especially since it has managed to attract a significant part of
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 2.
\textsuperscript{155} For the question of ‘neutral’ clubs in Germany, see the studies by Jacob Borut cited earlier.
Jewish youth. Thus, the leaders of true Jewish sport cannot ignore the questions whether our youth grow up to become indifferent (indifferenty) or people with a firm national consciousness. This is not the time to neglect serious cultural work. Much time has already been wasted. More than ever before, the club leaderships need to realize that it is necessary to make cultural work part of their program.156

Critics like Zdeněk Landes insisted that sport, by ignoring Zionist education and gymnastics, was diverting youth away from the project of national regeneration in favour of an opportunist ‘neutral’ Jewish position and fashionable athletic disciplines. However, despite the discomfort among Makabi leaders with the ideologically undisciplined sport clubs, by the early 1930s, it was clear that sport in and of itself had become indispensable to the Jewish nationalist project.

In the eyes of sports activists, however, the performances where the Jewish nation’s athletes battled other teams and clubs on the playing field were vital to Makabi ČSR’s mission to ‘restore’ Jews’ honour. What mattered most to these activists were not the victories, although they were always welcomed, but the fact that by competing against other men Jews asserted their honour and respectability, and thus their demand for inclusion and social equality. These performances, they argued, was what attracted young Jews to Makabi ČSR’s clubs. More than anything they believed it was the feelings of pride and honour evoked by Jewish athletes such as the champion diver Julius Balasz, Hagibor Praha-Prag’s water polo team and top swimmers, Bar Kochba Bratislava’s legendary Dr. Steiner and other celebrities which paved the way for many young Jews to the Jewish nationalist movement. These spectacular performances, demonstrations of the merits of Jewish nationalism, were, however, only made possible, sports enthusiasts argued, by the intense and focused work undertaken by the sports clubs. As Beda Brüll noted, “sports games and victories have a

significant effect on the national self-confidence of our youth. At a time when sport is not only a means to health and strength, it is rather useful in the promotion of the Jewish regeneration movement."¹⁵⁷ While some Makabi leaders scoffed sports activists’ focus on changing Jews’ image, Brüll believed that precisely this dynamic had a profound effect on Jewish youth’s sense of a national self and pride. “From a Zionist point of view,” he noted, “the publicity produced by sports has gained us many new friends and members.”¹⁵⁸ Similarly, a story in the Brno/Brünn-based Makkabi Sport celebrating the achievements of Jewish swimmers noted,

They have dutifully pursued their goal on behalf of us all […] it is long time since we stopped being these weaklings portrayed in Humor News (Humoristické listy). It is the obligation of all individuals – at a time when athletic vigour seems to be the most persuasive form of publicity in the eyes of the world – to perfect ourselves, to invest all our strength in the education of an even better, even stronger, even healthier, and more self-aware Jewish youth.¹⁵⁹

Sport had captured the imagination of Jewish youth and thus had the potential of transforming Makabi ČSR into a mass movement, sports enthusiasts believed. The performances of Jewish athletes had successfully reconstituted Jews’ image, and, in their leaders’ view, thereby both mobilized Jewish society and asserted Jews’ respectability as men and as a nation more broadly.

However, while the sports enthusiasts challenged the voices questioning the merits of sport, they shared the distaste for individualism and celebrity culture expressed by their critics. Athletes who did not submit to the discipline of the collective and who seemed to favour personal ambitions and success over that of the team and club were mockingly ridiculed as “prima donnas,” an emasculated contrast to the disciplined and respectable

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 106.
Jewish man. One writer pointed to the prima donna’s dependence on the admiration of the fans before whom he “always appears carefully dolled up.”\textsuperscript{160} Pointing to these athletes damaging lack of team spirit, the writer noted, “the soccer prima donna always arrives late on the playing field (if at all), with new soccer shoes, in shorts pulled up high, and in snow white kneepads [...] he loves exposing his prima donna figure to camera lenses.”\textsuperscript{161} This type of athlete disregards, the author continued, the value of the voluntary work to regenerate body and soul, the democratic nature of sport, and basic values of modesty and courage inherent in true sportsmanship. On the one hand, the sports writers’ depictions of the overly individualistic athletes as unmanly, embodied by their lack of modesty, narcissism, and flamboyance, were intended to uphold the respectability of sports by distancing it from its low elements, the money grabbing celebrity culture, and the rowdy crowds in the stands.\textsuperscript{162} On the other, they sought to restrain individual ambition and interests, upon which excellence in practice also depended, by ridiculing individualism and reminding the broader community of athletes of the priority of the team, the clubs, and the nation over that of personal ambition.\textsuperscript{163}

Within Makabi ČSR, the prima donna served as a disciplining countertype for gymnastics and sports proponents alike. The discourses depicting individualism and lack of collective and national commitment as unmanly served to stigmatize individuals who did not submit to the primacy of the nation. While gymnastic proponents feared that sport would facilitate Jewish youth’s moral descent, sports activists guarded their respectability by

\textsuperscript{160} Karvin, “Primadonství,” Židovský sport June 1927: 3.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 3; see also Arne Vínarský, “Sportsman a gentleman,” Židovský sport February 1927: 1.
\textsuperscript{162} For a discussion of the distaste for professionalism and business in sports among middle class sports activists in interwar Central Europe, a distaste that was accompanied in some circles by an antisemitic bias, see Rudolf Oswald, “Nazi Ideology and the End of Central European Soccer Professionalism, 1938-1941,” in Emancipation through Muscles, ed. Brenner and Reuveni, 156-168.
\textsuperscript{163} For the need to rid Hagibor of prima donnas, see Ginz, “Naše primadony,” Židovský sport December 1927: 4.
depicting athletes whom they considered overly individualistic, undisciplined, and nationally indifferent, as unmanly men.

Despite the distaste for sport among some Makabi leaders, Jews’ individual and collective athletic achievements took on increased importance in Makabi ČSR’s public self-representation in the course of the interwar years. Considering the prominence of Jews in water sports in particular, Makabi ČSR’s executive did not squander the opportunity to present these athletes’ contribution to Czechoslovakia’s national teams as evidence of a model citizenry. Casting athletic performances as a civic duty, Makabi leaders used sport to document the effectiveness and broader significance of the work undertaken within Makabi ČSR.

The reports accompanying Makabi ČSR’s funding application to the Ministry of Health from 1928 onwards is a case in point. While the first couple of annual reports stressed the organization’s role as a gymnastics movement, from 1932 onwards, the authors increasingly focused on the achievements of Makabi ČSR’s swimmers, tennis players, and track and field athletes.\(^{164}\) The reports presented the prominence of Makabi’s athletes in Czechoslovak sport as a sign of the thorough transformation Jews were undergoing within the clubs. Careful not to overplay the superiority of the Jewish athletes, the reports’ authors emphasized the significance of Makabi ČSR’s participation in international events and competitions as a representative of Czechoslovakia.\(^{165}\) The achievements of Jewish athletes, the authors noted, heightened Czechoslovakia’s prestige on the international stage, as “in swimming in particular our athletes are first class and their names well known abroad […]"

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\(^{164}\) See letter Svaz Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. April 4, 1932, ditto d. December 28, 1934, and ditto d. April 22, 1936, all in NA-Mzd Svaz Makabi v ČSR.

\(^{165}\) See for example Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. December 30, 1931.
they have always defended the Czechoslovak republic with dignity and honour.” These Jews, emerging from the ranks of Makabi ČSR, were physically fit, reliable, ready and able to defend their country. In short, these Jews were model citizens.

In the Ministry of Health, bureaucrats reviewing the applications seemed responsive to this depiction of Makabi ČSR’s as serving Czechoslovak interests. During the 1930s, the Ministry did extend subsidies to Makabi ČSR. When writing a memo in support of funding for Makabi ČSR’s participation in the 1935 Maccabiah, one official noted that the preparation of Jewish athletes for this event should, due to the prominent place of Jewish swimmers in Czechoslovakia, be considered part of these athletes’ training for the Czechoslovak national team set to attend the Berlin Olympics in 1936. As we know, the road to Berlin was to be more twisted than first imagined.

**Testing the waters: militarism and Makabi ČSR**

In the interwar years, Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands tirelessly declared their loyalty to Czechoslovakia. The alleged shared reverence of Czechs and Jews for democracy and justice was upheld by Jewish nationalists as evidence of their ‘natural’ partnership in a struggle against common enemies. As tension mounted within Czechoslovakia in the 1930s and the state became more and more suspicious of the loyalties and agendas of national minority groups, Jewish nationalists worked hard to make unambiguous loyalty to the state prominent in their public image. In the name of democracy and patriotism, Makabi ČSR adopted an increasingly militaristic stance in the course of the 1930s. By making military

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166 See Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. May 22, 1933, and ditto d. December 27, 1934 for a similar statement.
167 While support was awarded repeatedly, the funding did not get a permanent character. Rather, Makabi ČSR’s executive submitted funding applications twice a year and the Ministry did not award amounts over 10,000 Kč at a time to Makabi ČSR.
parading and exercises part of public events, integrating civil defence exercises into the
everyday activities within the units, and by cultivating a relationship between the clubs and
military institutions and personalities, Makabi ČSR’s leaders cast Jewish gymnasts and
athletes as loyal citizens. While these manoeuvres were shaped by Makabi activists’ loyalty
to Czechoslovakia, they were also driven by that masculine ideal so central to these
nationalists’ self-perception. If called upon, they declared, Jews would respond as men in
the name of democracy and homeland. However, while Makabi activists began preparing
Jews for military service and civil defence tasks, they also stepped up their efforts to
convince the Czechs that unlike the scheming German, Slovak, and Hungarian nationalists,
Jews were committed to the territorial integrity of the state.

In Central Europe, gymnastics and sports were intimately linked with the military
tradition. With the convergence of discourses on masculinity and nationalism in the early
nineteenth century, the gymnastics movement and the army emerged as the manly
as alleviating the wanting fitness and fighting abilities of men destined for army service, a
function of physical education which was heightened in the minds of civil and military
authorities either denied armies, as was Weimar Germany, or, like the successor states,
building new ones in the 1920s.\footnote{In Czechoslovakia, the Ministry of National Defence owned sports facilities such as pools and playing fields
which could at times be used by civilian clubs, especially during larger tournaments. The Ministry also
produced physical education material on for example swimming which were distributed among civilian clubs,
see the reference to films on swimming on loan from the Ministry of Defence in Hagibor Praha/Prag
“Propagační den plávecké sekce ŽSK Hagiboru v Praze,” \textit{Židovský sport} February 1926: 4.} At the same time, sports, especially team sports became
sites where men watched and performed their masculinity celebrating strength, sacrifice,
courage, and other manly virtues.\textsuperscript{171} In the 1930s, the Czechoslovak government increasingly feared that institutions such as the German gymnastics movement and other nationally ‘suspicious’ organizations might be promoting subversive agendas and activities.\textsuperscript{172} As the Ministry of Interior stepped up their surveillance of minority nationalist organizations, Makabi ČSR sought to position itself as a respectable entity.

In the summer of 1937, Makabi ČSR held its third national convention in the town of Žilina in western Slovakia. For a few days in early July, local military and municipal dignitaries, representatives of the local Sokol-units, Zionist leaders from across Czechoslovakia and abroad, along with more than 1500 active participants gathered in this small tourist town located on the cross roads between the country’s eastern and western provinces.\textsuperscript{173} This was only the third time Makabi ČSR had held a slet and the first time that the event took place in Slovakia.

The 1937 convention was infused with militaristic themes. One observer described how the event opened with marching members of the youth movement Makabi Hatzair raising the Czechoslovak flag while singing the state anthem followed by a performance of civil defence exercises by members of Makabi Bratislava.\textsuperscript{174} This was followed by a demonstration of military gymnastics by a unit from the local garrison. The opening ceremony culminated, according to the author, in the gymnastic performances of female and male athletes, Hebrew song, and the entrance of women and children dressed in blue and white into the stadium. If the Makabim’s performance in the stadium attested to the military

\textsuperscript{171} For more on this discourse, see Reuveni, “Sport and Militarization,” 45.
\textsuperscript{172} Even if the Deutsche Turnverband in der Tschechoslowakei was officially Staatstreu until 1938, the Czechoslovak state authorities were increasingly suspicious and uncertain of its agenda. In 1934, they brought Sokol back in as a militia, Waic, “Sokol,” 85, 93.
\textsuperscript{174} “Velký slet čsl. Makabi,” Židovské zprávy July 16, 1937.
fitness of the country’s living Jews, the contribution of fallen Jewish soldiers to the Czechoslovak cause was not forgotten. An entourage consisting of the local Neolog rabbi Hugo Stransky, various Jewish and non-Jewish dignitaries, representatives of the military, the Czech legionaries, the national guard, and Slovak volunteers paid tribute to the war dead in the town’s Jewish cemetery. This ceremony was followed by the placing of a wreath by Arthur Herzog at the memorial for the fallen soldiers of World War I in the adjacent military cemetery. In this way, the reporter noted, “the Makabi movement gave thanks to those who prepared the way for Czechoslovak independence.”

That summer, the Makabi gathering in Žilina was envisioned and performed as a demonstration of Jews’ vigour, military preparedness, and loyalty to Czechoslovakia. Post-World War I accusations of Jews’ disloyalty and Czech and Slovak hostility towards Jews in the months following the collapse of Austria-Hungary were conveniently forgotten as Jews and Czechs alike looked to assert their readiness to defend the republic.

Makabi ČSR began shaping its image as an institution preparing young men for military service more explicitly in the early 1930s, an effort shaped by both a sense of threat to Czechoslovakia and the still louder voices questioning the loyalty of the country’s national minorities. In the late 1920s, Jewish gymnastic and sport activists pointed implicitly to the importance of their work in preparing young men for military service by emphasizing athletics’ promotion of discipline and moral and physical health. These healthy men were evidence of the Jewish nationalist movement’s commitment to making Jews into loyal and

175 Ibid.
176 Žilina/Zsolna/Sillein had a distinct place in Czechoslovak mythology as the seat of the Slovak authority that remained loyal to Czechoslovakia during the post-World War I fighting in the region, see Peter Bugge, “The Making of Slovak City: The Czechoslovak Renaming of Pressburg/Pozsony/Prešporok, 1918-19,” Austrian History Yearbook 35 (2004): 205-227, here 224.
useful citizens. Thus, while military readiness was part of the discourse on Jews’ regeneration, the public display of Jews’ military fitness and readiness only appeared in the mid 1930s. By 1934, larger Makabi events featured both political and military dignitaries. While military drills and performances by local army units were incorporated into the program of events, Makabi units participated in civil defence exercises organized by local military authorities.

At the Slovak Makabi slet in Bratislava in the summer of 1934, one observer reported proudly that “the tight circle of unity between Jews and Czechoslovakia was not only demonstrated through the usual speeches and raising of the state flag, but in the active participation of the Czechoslovak army in the Makabi festivities.” Challenging accusations of militarism within Makabi, the author painted the defence of Czechoslovakia’s territorial integrity as a struggle for the freedom of humanity. “As the Jewish member of parliament Angelo Goldstein stands next to a general from the Czechoslovak Army in Bratislava and announces that Czechoslovak Jewry is opposed to a revision of the borders,” the author noted, “that is an event which demonstrates our belief that the Czechoslovak Army is the weapon of a free republic.” Depicting the army as the embodiment of a strong state determined to defend freedom, the author concluded that the army’s decision to participate “in a festive manner alongside young men and scouts from Makabi” at several recent events in Slovakia reflected the firm alliance between Jews and the state. The latter,

177 See for example letter Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. December 24, 1928 and ditto d. December 30, 1931. For more explicit references see ditto d. December 27, 1934.
179 Ibid.
the writer concluded, “can trust with the utmost certainty that its Jewish nation will defend it against its enemies.”

However, if public displays of allegiance and preparedness were one thing, then formalizing a relationship between Makabi ČSR and the country’s military was another. While Makabi ČSR’s leaders incorporated civil defence training seriously into the organization’s program in 1936, their attempt to formalize para-military training of Jewish youths met with resistance from the state authorities.

In mid-December 1935, Makabi ČSR submitted an application to the Ministry of Interior proposing an amendment to the organization’s statutes of 1924. Makabi ČSR’s leadership wanted to expand the movement’s paragraph two stating its purpose of physical and moral improvement to include, “the purpose of the organization is also para-military training of Jewish youths according to the directives of the Ministry of National Defence.”

The Ministry of Interior promptly rejected Makabi’s bid to assume this new responsibility stating that the inclusion of para-military training “is not acceptable as the para-military training of youth which is a part of the defence is the sovereign right of the state and can only be carried out with the explicit permission of the appropriate military authorities.”

However, if the bid to become an institution involved in military exercises failed, then Makabi ČSR pursued the further expansion of civil defence training within its units.

In January 1936, František Trnka presented a programme for incorporating civil defence training into the regular activities of gymnastics clubs in a series of articles in

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180 Ibid.
181 Interestingly, according to Marek Waic, the Deutsche Turnverband came under increasing scrutiny in 1934 partly because they attempted to step up the military content of their activities, see Waic, “Turnerské hnutí,” 249.
182 Makabi ČSR to Ministry of Interior December 14, 1935, the proposed changes are included in the response from the Ministry of Interior to Makabi ČSR d. January 10, 1936 in NA-Zemský Úřad-spolkové oddělení Svaz Makabi v ČSR inv.č. 431-1936 karton 1098.
Perhaps in light of Makabi ČSR’s recently submitted bid to pursue paramilitary training, Trnka carefully distinguished between civil defence training (branná výchova) and civil defence exercises (branný výcvik). While the latter were formal military exercises under the auspices of the army, civil defence training was, according to Trnka, aimed more generally at “strengthening an individual’s ability to defend himself.” The program Trnka outlined focused on building character, improving physical abilities and endurance, and teaching technical skills necessary to undertake civil defence tasks. The latter included the use and maintenance of weapons, maps, and compasses, as well as first aid, food emergency preparedness, and an understanding of the structure of the army and its various units. In addition to teaching technical skills and strengthening individuals’ physical and mental abilities, civil defence training, in Trnka’s mind, also sought to strengthen “national and civic feelings” by emphasizing reverence for state symbols, the rights and duties of citizens, and the meaning of the state and democracy. In short, the training plan was designed to produce loyal and skilled citizens, ready and able to defend their country.

Addressing concerns that deemed these plans impractical, Trnka emphasized that the integration of this program into the gymnastic clubs’ regular activities ought to be seamless given that general gymnastics exercises already targeted mental and physical discipline. The instructor, Trnka suggested, only needed to push the gymnasts harder in every activity, thereby improving their endurance and hardening their self-discipline. He noted “exercising in groups is very important in defence training. It teaches [gymnasts] a sense of team spirit, to submit individual interests to those of the whole, [the importance of] mutual support and

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185 Trnka, Branná výchova v tělovýchovných organisacích I.
186 Ibid.
defence, to join forces in the pursuit of a shared goal.” \footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} Instructors could make civil defence training part of their daily activities throughout the year, Trnka argued, through significant, but smooth adjustments. An excursion or camping trip, for example, could easily include long strenuous hikes through different terrain, teaching youths day and night-orienteering skills and familiarizing them with a range of weather conditions. By always pushing the groups through challenging and surprising exercises, Trnka claimed, “we will be strengthening both endurance and toughness.” \footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} It is important, Trnka noted, to create an atmosphere of struggle and danger in order to cultivate readiness and determination. He even conceded that short sport games were useful in cultivating individuals’ aggression, courage, and endurance, important to the desired tough character. “This tone,” he argued, “would bring an element of danger to the exercises and teach the individuals to defend themselves by being able to make decisions in such [challenging] situations.” \footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

Makabi ČSR’s adoption of civil defence training was designed to instil a militaristic ethos into every aspect of the clubs’ activities. Instructors and gymnasts were encouraged to nurture behaviour and skills, such as obedience, courage, endurance, and discipline, readying them for what seemed an inevitable future struggle. If Makabi ČSR’s leaders were driven by loyalty to Czechoslovakia, then their efforts were also informed by a desire to prove Jews’ respectability. Unsure of the state’s intentions vis-à-vis its minorities, Jewish nationalists stepped up efforts to demonstrate Jews’ capabilities, their worthiness as insiders, allies of the

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} These games and drills were already part and parcel of the culture of youth organizations in much of central Europe where educators promoted war games as a way of readying youth for military service. For this youth culture in Imperial and Weimar Germany, see Jeffrey Bowersox, “Living Empire,” (unpublished manus).
Czechs, by infusing Makabi ČSR with militarism and thus adopting an even more pronounced masculine ethos.  

Not surprisingly, Makabi ČSR’s leadership did not fail to align their organization’s need for funds with the shifting priorities of state authorities, namely preparing the population for war, in their funding applications to the Ministry of Health and Physical Education. In an application filed in October 1936, Makabi’s representatives asked for funds to assist with the slet in Žilina, education of instructors, and the expansion of civil defence training to all units within Makabi ČSR. The next summer, in their address to the participants and guests in Žilina, Makabi ČSR leaders emphasized the organization’s long time commitment to the state and its need for loyal and able citizens:

We have always been mindful that the Jewish youth devoting itself to physical training and spiritual education should become familiar with Czechoslovak culture and the idea from which our state was born […] our members must at all times in both word and deed demonstrate their belonging to the Czechoslovak republic. Therefore, as a natural outcome of the Makabi spirit, civil defence training became a command (příkaz). We are raising disciplined citizens and recruits for the Czechoslovak state, who are prepared to defend the independence of Czechoslovakia and its democratic and just foundation at all times […] our parade (přehlídka) is a test before the Czechoslovak public and before ourselves. Parades and gymnastics competitions are nothing but a preparation of disciplined, ready, and steadfast individuals[.]

Similarly, Angelo Goldstein noted the strong connection between physical fitness and civic duties in Makabi ČSR’s work, which “prepared Jews to contribute to the improvement of the

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190 See speeches from Žilina/Zsolna/Sillein slet on Czech and Jewish unity defending the republic, “Velký slet čsl. Makabi,” Židovské zprávy July 16, 1937. Makabi ČSR was admitted into a group of organizations entrusted with the civil defence training of youths, “Přípravy branné výchovy Makabi,” Židovské zprávy August 6, 1937. For courses for Makabi ČSR instructors in civil defence training, “Čs. Makabi připraven,” Židovské zprávy November 5, 1937. For a Jewish conscript ‘reporting’ on the importance of civil defence training as Makabi members’ fitness and skills shattered army authorities’ preconceptions about Jews and their military capabilities. Jews as now able to fulfil their civic responsibilities and bestow honour upon Jewry as such, see M.J. “Makabi na vojné,” Židovské zprávy April 1, 1938.
191 Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. October 10, 1936.
192 Slávnostný spis 3. slet Čs. Makabi v Žilině 4.-6.VII 1937, 8-9
military capability of the republic.” A task Makabi units had undertaken so successfully, he beamed, that they had “received special recognition by the Czechoslovak Army.”

If Makabi ČSR’s bid to assert its importance as a loyal partner of the state was brought on by the increasing uncertainty in the German borderlands, where the Sudeten German Party (SdP) was gaining support, and in Slovakia, where Slovak separatism was growing, the Ministry of Interior’s negative response was most likely shaped by these same concerns. Allowing minority nationalities to undertake para-military training systematically at a time of increased international and national tension was inconceivable from the perspective of a state unsure of its subjects’ loyalties and aims. However, in the spring and summer of 1938, the Ministry of Defence did include a representative from Makabi ČSR in its consultation with civilian institutions, a move which suggested to Jewish observers that the Czechoslovak authorities did count Makabi ČSR among their allies.

Conclusion

Makabi ČSR’s bid to establish itself as a representative of the Jewish national minority went hand in hand with its attempt to position itself as a partner of the state. On the one hand, Makabi activists employed the discourses of minority rights to cast Makabi ČSR as a legitimate and deserving institution. On the other, however, Jewish activists sought to set

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193 Slávnostný spis 3. slet Čs. Makabi v Žilině 4.-6.VII 1937, 21. In the following year, the authors topped off their account of Makabi ČSR’s accomplishments in the area of civil defence by citing letters from civil defence unit and army commanders thanking Makabi for their participation. In one, the officer in charge of civil defence in Žilina/Zsolna/Sillein, A. Andrášek, thanked Makabi for their contribution to a successful drill “especially in serious times like these” while noting that he would be counting on Makabi in the years to come. Likewise, Miloš Žák, head of the Army’s 9th division in Bratislava/Pozsony/Pressburg/Presburg/Prešporok, thanked the local Makabi club for its members’ participation in a military parade overseen by the Minister of Defence in April 1938 (the letters were reproduced by Makabi leaders in a subsequent letter to the Mzd), Makabi ČSR to Mzd d. June 28, 1938.
194 Imrich Rosenberg was involved in these consultations for Makabi ČSR, see Imrich Rosenberg, *A Jew in Deed* (Ottawa: Penumbria Press, 2004), 14-15.
themselves apart from other minority nationalists coveting state funds by casting Makabi ČSR as an institution committed to strengthening Czechoslovak hegemony in the country. Makabi activists emphasized their Czechoslovakness by developing a country-wide network of Jewish clubs, extending from and guided by its centre in Prague. In addition, they presented this Jewish movement as an apprentice of the legendary Sokol, hoping that some of the prestige enjoyed by this Czech institution would rub off on the fledgling Makabi ČSR. As a self-declared partner of the state and apprentice of Sokol, these Jewish activists thus sought to strengthen both the legitimacy of Jewish nationhood and the respectability of the Jewish nationalist movement.

However, in order to adopt the role as a national minority representative, and ease their access to public funds, Makabi activists insisted on their organization’s apolitical and non-partisan character by remaining independent from Zionist institutions and adopting a neutral image, a position also shaped by the widespread belief among Makabi leaders that the country’s Jewish youth was not interested in Zionism’s message.

In interwar Czechoslovakia, Makabi activists envisioned their project as one that would transform the Jewish national minority into a unified, autonomous, and respectable community, a process which depended first and foremost, in their minds, on internal regeneration. Makabi ČSR’s masculine ethos reflects that in the imagination of Jewish activists restoring Jews’ honour and respectability depended on the creation of manly Jewish men. The masculine ideal served both as the impetus for these Jewish nationalists’ efforts, acting as they did according to their own sense of manliness, and as the symbol of Jews’ transformation from marginalized and despised outsiders to respectable citizens and men. As a rite of citizenship, sports and gymnastics allowed Jews to assert their individual and
collective respectability – a rite, however, which had to be performed over and over again in response to the persistent voices questioning Jews’ worthiness and aptness for inclusion.

Makabi ČSR’s quest for hegemony among Jews is one example of the attempts by political activists to nationalize the social realm in the interwar years. In Czechoslovakia, nationalist activists of all colours sought to erect distinct national spheres by creating separate schools, gymnastics and sports clubs, scouting groups, kindergartens, social welfare institutions, and political parties - each nation to its own, so to speak. The co-existing discourses of national self-determination and minority rights facilitated the establishment of political and social institutions claiming to represent national communities and seeking to assert their authority as semi-public bodies over their nations. In the case of the Jewish nationalist project, this nationalizing process was fraught with challenges not least from Jews themselves who resisted nationalists’ demands for the primacy of ethnicity in determining individuals’ community. Like their Czech and German nationalist peers, Jewish activists were frustrated by obstructions to their efforts caused, in their minds, by the opportunism, indifference, and narrow individualism rampant among their nation’s youth. On the one hand, their lament reflect that in the interwar years Jews searched for community in a variety of social spaces guided by personal interests and relationships, class, locale, political conviction, and national and ethnic identity. On the other, however, the often repeated claim that young Jews were streaming into “foreign” clubs in great numbers, suggests that these young Jews were nurtured in environments perpetuating gender ideals similar to those of Makabi ČSR. Thus, one wonders to what extent the links between manliness and respectability, the image of the new Jew, did not resonate as much with these ‘vagrant’ youngsters as they did with the Makabi core.
The search for respectability through the cultivation of a masculine ethos guided Makabi activists’ response to the increased political tension within Czechoslovakia in the 1930s. The militarization of Makabi ČSR in reaction to a perceived imminent stand off with revisionist German and Hungarian agents suggests that, as elsewhere, even in Central Europe’s only democracy civil society was becoming increasingly militarized in the mid and late 1930s.
Conclusion

In his article “Zionist Success and Zionist Failure: The Case of East Central Europe between the Wars,” the historian Ezra Mendelsohn argues that despite the ideal conditions for Zionism in interwar East Central Europe, the movement failed to meet its political, cultural, and ideological goals. Working from an ideal type modelled on Polish Zionism, Mendelsohn contends that the Jewish nationalist movement was unsuccessful in its attempt to conquer Jewish society politically and culturally and to secure national rights for Jews. Indeed, while Zionists emerged from World War I as the strongest party on the Jewish political street, by the 1930s their hold on Jewish voters and Jewish youth was challenged both by internal fragmentation and by competing ideological movements, most significantly Jewish socialism and communism. Furthermore, he maintains, while Zionist activists sought to displace Yiddish and other languages used by Jews and replace them with Hebrew, Jews’ adoption of the state language and the persistence of Yiddish undermined their efforts to Hebraize Jewish society in the interwar years. Last, Zionists failed to make emigration to Palestine an option for the so-called Jewish masses. This was, according to Mendelsohn, “the greatest of all Zionist failures.” Indeed, to him, Zionists’ inability to realize the Palestine-solution reflects the powerlessness of Jews in the face of increasing social, economic, and political adversity and hence the failure of Jewish political activism more broadly in interwar East Central Europe.

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2 Ibid., 175.
3 Ibid., 185.
4 Ibid., 188.
However, while Mendelsohn’s focus on Polish Zionism provides insight into the largest Zionist movement in East Central Europe, the assumption that its goals corresponded to those of Jewish nationalists in the region as such deserves scrutiny. In some ways, this present study of Zionism in the Bohemian Lands confirms Mendelsohn’s conclusions: Zionists here failed to achieve national rights for Jews; they never overcame the opposition of religious leaders in the eastern provinces; they did not manage to displace the appeal of socialism and communism to young Jews; and they were continuously frustrated by the resistance of so-called indifferent and assimilating Jews to Jewish nationalism. Regardless, of these failures, however, Zionists in the Bohemian Lands did accomplish, I argue, some of their political and cultural goals—if not in whole, then in part.

As this study has shown, Zionist activists played a central role in transforming the Jewish communities in the Bohemian Lands from religious institutions to ones centered on shared ethnicity. This was a process in which Zionist and other Jewish leaders pursued a well-established Jewish political tradition, whereby Jewish activists fostered state support for a program of Jewish cultural renewal and institutional reform by presenting it as a vehicle for making Jews better citizens. Similarly, in their efforts to transform Jewish youths into so-called new Jews, Zionists convinced the state authorities that Jewish nationalism was the key to Jews’ moral and physical regeneration, a prerequisite for their inclusion into the community of citizens. Hence, while Zionists did not manage to mobilize most Jews in the Bohemian Lands for Jewish nationalism, their program for Jewish renewal did succeed in making Jews’ ethnicity a legitimate site for political and cultural identification.

Furthermore, unlike Zionists in Poland, Jewish nationalists in the Bohemian Lands promoted Jews’ adoption of both Hebrew and the state language, in this case Czech. While
Hebrew played an important role as a symbol of Jews’ nationhood and as the basis for these activists’ demand for state-funded minority schools, Jews’ adoption of Czech was a priority for Zionists in Czechoslovakia in the interwar years. In a context in which the alliance between Jews and the state authorities was most forcefully expressed through Jews’ public adoption of the Czech language, Jews’ acculturation to Czech was a Zionist goal. Thus, while Hebraization was unsuccessful in Czechoslovakia, the linguistic acculturation of Jews to Czech and Slovak did not necessarily represent a Zionist failure. By the same token, the fact that only a modest number of Jews left Czechoslovakia for Palestine constitutes an ambiguous piece of evidence in a discussion of Zionist successes or failures. Indeed, when the Zionism under investigation is one that aimed to make Jews at home, what could be read as a failure elsewhere might very well constitute a success in the context of interwar Czechoslovakia.

The significance of this study does not necessarily rest in its utility in measuring the successes or failures of Zionism in the Bohemian Lands vis-à-vis the Polish ideal type. Rather, by investigating the process of nationalization engineered by Zionists, the study historicizes Jewish nationhood. In doing so, it reveals the ways in which nationalists constructed, maintained, and naturalized the nation. The Jewish nation did not exist as a social fact. Jewish nationalists had to make Jews legible as a nation—a community of ethnic sameness—whose perceived racial difference established their distinctiveness from other communities. Indeed, Jews’ so-called lack of a shared national language heightened the importance of establishing Jews’ ethnic sameness. As we have seen, in the hands of Jewish nationalists, social science and statistics shaped the image of Jews as a nation in powerful and tenacious ways. By historicizing the nation and the process of nation building, this study
thus attempts to understand the significance of the generalizing and homogenizing practices employed by the modern state as well as by nationalist movements in their attempt to assert their authority over individuals and groups. This was a form of governance that imposed racial, national, and other collective identities—and in many ways continues to do so—with varying degrees of force and with more or less success, on individuals and communities.

My research also points to the ways in which Jewish nationalism was shaped institutionally and discursively by its local political and historical experience and points to the broader continuities in the transition from empire to nation state. Like other nationalist movements, Zionists drew on well-established narratives of national oppression, awakening, and regeneration that legitimized their claim of Jews’ nationhood. This study has, for example, highlighted the role of the census, the nation’s schools, and sports for Zionists’ efforts to nationalize the country’s Jewish societies. While Jewish nationalists hoped to employ these institutions to strengthen their bid for minority rights and public resources, their efforts to link the nation’s statistical visibility and public representations to national rights were much less successful than those of their German and Czech colleagues.

As in Imperial Austria, in interwar Czechoslovakia, the state authorities regarded Jews as a religious minority first and foremost. Hence Jewish nationalists’ demands for national rights were only met, when they were perceived to be in the interest of the state and its Czech elite. Thus, while bureaucrats dismissed Jewish nationalists’ insistence on Jews’ right to national schools, they rewarded with state funds and political respectability the efforts of Zionist sport activists to create healthy, loyal, and militarily fit Jews.

Regardless of the challenges faced by these Jewish nation builders in the interwar years, Zionism constituted an opportunity for self-representation that allowed these activists
to recast Jews’ perceived difference as a source for positive self-identification. Jewish
nationalists created and maintained institutions and narratives intended to present Jews and
non-Jews alike with legible demands for respect, equality, and inclusion.
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