

Examiner's Report

PhD Thesis

Title: Transformation of Jewish identity in post-war Czech and Luxembourg generation

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This thesis examines and compares the Jewish identity of post-WWII generations in the Czech Republic and in Luxembourg. It focuses on the so-called second and third generation of Jews. By looking at their attitudes towards Israel, the concept of "home," antisemitism, and Jewish identity, the thesis examines the positions and transformation of those two generations. The main contribution of the thesis is empirical. The thesis is based mainly on primary sources: surveys and interviews. The literature on the identity of the second and third generations of Jews in the Czech Republic and Luxembourg is rather scarce and, therefore, this thesis fills an important gap in the academic literature.

Major queries

First, the thesis offers a very extensive theoretical framework (pp. 30-161). However, the title of the second theoretical chapter "History: The Theoretical Framework" (pp. 93-161) is confusing because rather than a theoretical discussion, this chapter offers a short history of Jews in Czechoslovakia and Luxembourg.

Theoretical chapter "Sociological Theoretical Framework" (pp. 30-93) presents various definitions of terms like diaspora, home, prejudices, stereotypes, antisemitism, and identity. These are major concepts and to include so many of them in one thesis raises the question of feasibility. How does the author plan to employ them in his empirical chapter(s)? Furthermore, by looking at those concepts from sociological, anthropological, and philosophical bodies of literature, this theoretical chapter offers a rich literature review. At the same time, however, this huge span obscures author's academic background.

What is lacking is a conceptual framework. After reading more than 60 pages of theoretical discussion on various concepts, it was still unclear to me how these concepts would be linked to and used in the empirical research.

Second, I was very much confused about chapters that dealt with the topic of teaching Jewish history/the Holocaust. This topic is unrelated to the title of the thesis. I believe that it should be examined in another thesis, and I was not sure why it was included in this text. Therefore, I am not going to comment on chapters related to that topic.

Third, I was not exactly sure about the purpose of the chapter "History: The Theoretical Framework" (pp. 93-161). Combining "history" and "theory" to one title is from a historian's perspective or a social scientist's perspective rather tricky. But more importantly, given that the thesis is not about the history of Jews in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic and Luxembourg, I am not sure why we need such a lengthy

introduction to the history of Jews in those two countries. Instead, the chapter could be thematized around topics like "communist antisemitism," "new antisemitism," etc., to provide a better sense of the backdrop against which the Jewish identities have been developed.

Fourth, together with interviews and surveys, another source the author uses is the media (p. 145-147, p. 188, p. 190). However, the author does not explain which methodology he uses in analyzing the press. And yet, he comes to rather strong conclusions ("Based on my research in the media, however, I have not noticed any significant manifestation of antisemitism and antizionism." p. 145). Furthermore, in his analysis of the press, it is unclear why he focuses on presented historical events and not other events, which could be deemed relevant to the topic.

Fifth, in the methodology, the term "historical methodology of oral history" is not properly explained.

On p. 162, the author lists various methods that examine "a political situation and its impact on a particular social group." However, he does not explain which method, if any, he is going to employ.

I am also not sure how archival research (p. 190) could help the author to examine the identity of Jews in the Czech Republic and Luxemburg. What kind of data from the Archive of the Capital City of Prague, or the National Archive in Prague, did he expect to get to enrich his dataset?

Sixth, the empirical chapter (pp. 193-353) is the most original and it offers a very robust dataset, composed of both interviews and surveys. What I missed in this chapter is a discussion about antisemitism in post-Communist Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic. The second generation lived a large part of their lives in post-communist times; the third generation remembers communism only vaguely. Yes, most of the quotes about antisemitisms are related to the communist era. Why? If the respondents did not encounter any antisemitism following 1989 (highly unlikely), that would be an interesting fact which should have been mentioned.

The author mentions prevailing "philosemitism" at Czech universities. However, there is no data presented in the text supporting this claim.

Moreover, I was not sure why did the author add to this chapter a quote by Moshe Dayan (p. 197), another historical overview and literature review (p. 197), and a discussion on concepts (pp. 280-281, 283, 329). There is also a discussion on the position of women in Judaism... (p. 325). These should be included in theoretical and historical chapters.

Seventh, in Summary (pp. 353-168), the author summarizes the main empirical conclusions. However, what is lacking is a discussion that would link the empirical results to theoretical discussions and concepts presented in the theory chapter. Based on the theories and concepts discussed, were any of the findings surprising? Contrafactual? What is the theoretical contribution of the thesis?

Further comments:

I was a little bit confused about the marking of chapters. Rather than using traditional marking, e.g. Chapter 1, Subchapters 1.1, 1.2, etc., the author calls subchapters "a chapter," some of which are just one paragraph long, e.g. in "History: Theoretical Framework" (p. 94)

In the introduction, both "I" and "We" are used when talking about the author. Since it is obviously a work by one author, "I" should be just fine.

pp. 48-49: How is a discussion about the need for human beings to live in a community related to "Prejudice" – a term discussed in this subchapter?

p. 55: How is a discussion about a singularity of the Holocaust, as presented here, related to a definition of antisemitism and new antisemitism and, more importantly, to a topic of this thesis?

The author often provides examples from various European countries when discussing Czechoslovakia/The Czech Republic and Luxemburg. He should probably explain better why he chose to compare them with, e.g. the Netherlands (p. 135 and p. 256), Austria (p. 146), Poland (p. 269, p. 305), France (281). How can this comparison help the reader to better understand the situation of Jews and their identities in the Czech Republic and Luxemburg? Is the situation in these countries similar to the situation of Jews in the Czech Republic and Luxemburg?

In some cases, paragraphs do not follow logically, e.g. a subchapter "Historical excursion to the period of 1960s-90s: The Eichmann Trial" (pp. 135-138) - It would make more sense to separate an overview of the life of the Jewish community in Luxemburg from its response to the trial.

In the chapter "Conclusion: Slightly positive expectations and results of the IWalk experiment on university students" (p. 357), the text on pages (pp. 357-364) does not correspond to the title of the chapter.

Small corrections:

p. 53 Wilhelm Marr, not Marra

p. 90 Frankl, not Frank

p. 109 Chatam Sofer, not Šofér

p. 141 Jews and "pagans"? Probably Jews and gentiles?

p. 198 Charles Jordan, not Jordano

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