Introduction

In his introduction to *Comparing Jewish Societies*, Todd Endelman wrote:

> With few exceptions they [historians of the Jews] have shown little enthusiasm for comparing Jewish communities across time and/or space . . . or comparing Jews with non-Jews either in the same place or in different national contexts. . . . [M]ost contributions to Jewish historical writing either focus on Jews alone, usually within narrow geographical and chronological limits, or, at the other extreme, survey broad expanses of Jewish history, collapsing differences among communities and subcommunities in order to force their varied experiences into a uniform model or framework.[1]

Why are we so reluctant to employ a comparative perspective? As Raymond Grew has noted, "few historians are willing to abandon the benefits of specialization" as it seems that for a historical comparison to work well, a historian needs intimate knowledge of at least two, if not more, societies.[2] As Endelman stated, "no historian . . . wants to see his or her work dismissed as superficial or dilettantish."[3] He further argued that to understand this particular reluctance among historians of the Jews, one must also understand the particular political and cultural underpinnings of Jewish historical writing, thinking, and training during the last two centuries or so.

Moreover, as Grew noted, "to call for comparison, . . . says almost nothing about how to do any of this well" since there is no comprehensive theory of historical comparison or "comparative method."[4] The pitfalls are manifold: a comparison may end up being too narrow or too broad; too superficial or uneven; false due to forced or arbitrary analogies; or based on poorly defined criteria. Comparison may lead to

[1] Todd M. Endelman, "Introduction: Comparing Jewish Societies," in Todd M. Endelman (ed.), *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 2.
[2] Raymond Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories," in Aram A. Yengoyan (ed.), *Modes of Comparison: Theory and Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).
[3] Endelman, "Introduction: Comparing Jewish Societies," 2.
[4] Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories."

conclusions which neither broaden our knowledge nor open intellectually engaging questions. Is, then, a comparison in Polish-Jewish history worthwhile, especially after the "cultural turn" that has called national master narratives into question?

I believe that comparative study, even if subject to the risk of failure, is a worthy enterprise in Jewish history, in general, and in post-Holocaust Jewish history, in particular, for a number of reasons. In general terms, as Grew argued in his influential 1980 essay "The Case for Comparing Histories":

> To call for comparison is to call for a kind of attitude – open, questioning, searching – and to suggest some practices that may nourish it, to ask historians to think in terms of problems and dare to define those problems independently, and to assert that even the narrowest research should be conceived in terms of the larger quests of many scholars in many fields . . . For historians to think comparatively, to compare histories, is to do what we already do – a little more consciously and on a somewhat broader plane.[5]

The edited volume *Comparison and History* presents a comprehensive list of the benefits of historical comparison. First, according to Peter Baldwin, a comparative approach allows us to "separate the important from the incidental and thus to point the way towards causal explanations."[6] Second, comparison reveals which experiences are common and which are uniquely national or, to use Susan Grayzel's words, "comparative cultural history sets itself the task of identifying elements of culture that are wider than the nation."[7] Third, a comparative analysis illuminates aspects of specific events and the circumstances surrounding them, which remain obscure or ambiguous when examined in the context of a single nation-state.[8] Last but not least, what Susan Pedersen calls "de-normalizing" and Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor call the "unsettling of the perceived naturalness" of historical developments is one of the most significant contributions of a comparative approach in history.[9]

[5] *Ibid.*
[6] Peter Baldwin, "Comparing and Generalizing: Why All History is Comparative, Yet No History is Sociology," in Deborah Cohen and Maura Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
[7] Susan Grayzel, "Across Battle Fronts: Gender and the Comparative Cultural History of Modern European War," in Cohen and Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History*.
[8] Marta Petrusewicz, "The Modernization of the European Periphery; Ireland, Poland, and the Two Sicilies; 1820–1870: Parallel and Connected, Distinct and Comparable," in Cohen and Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History*.
[9] Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, "Introduction: Comparative History, Cross-National History, Transnational History – Definitions," in Cohen and Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History*; Susan Pedersen, "Comparative History and Women's History: Explaining Convergence and Divergence," in Cohen and Connor (eds.), *Comparison and History*.

A few works in Jewish history effectively use the comparative perspective, including Nancy Green's work on Jewish immigrants in Paris and New York and Maud Mandel's study of Armenians and Jews in France after the First and Second World Wars.[10] Endelman's comparative work on German and English Jews' paths to integration illuminated the benefits of comparison most profoundly when he concluded that European Jews confronted modernity " . . . in a variety of ways. They did not enter the modern world like a well-disciplined army, tramping faithfully in the footsteps of Mendelssohn and the maskilim."[11] Endelman's study unsettled the "naturalness" of the German or Mendelssohn model of acculturation and thus significantly revised our understanding of Jewish modernity.

This book is an attempt to compare the experiences of Jewish survivors upon their return to Poland and Slovakia after the Holocaust.[12] I chose Slovakia as a point of comparison for a number of reasons. First, anti-Jewish violence, so prevalent in postwar Poland, also occurred in postwar Slovakia.[13] Second, Slovakia had a different prewar and wartime history and a different political makeup hence its comparison with Poland could illuminate what mechanisms generated similar phenomena in differing political and social milieus. In short, the distinctiveness of the Polish and Slovak settings and the similarity in the dynamics of ethnic relations, offered an attractive material for comparison.

When I started this project in 2003, in contrast to the current state of affairs, the historiography of postwar Jewish life was either limited (Slovakia) or skewed toward violence (Poland). The postwar Slovak Jewish historiography rested on the shoulders of just a few scholars in Israel and Slovakia, such as Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, Ivan Kamenec, Peter Salner, and Robert Y. Büchler.[14] They covered a broad array of

[10] Nancy L. Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 83. Michael Meng's recent publication *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Harvard University Press, 2011) is another example of excellent comparative work.

[11] Todd M. Endelman, *Broadening Jewish History: Towards a Social History of Ordinary Jews* (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2011).

[12] Slovakia was a part of Czechoslovakia before (until 1939) and after the war (until 1993). In March 1939, the independent Slovak State was created. Although Slovakia was reunited with the Czech lands after the war, it retained a large degree of autonomy until 1949. In this book, I use "Slovakia" when speaking of issues relevant only to this region and "Czechoslovakia" when discussing the entire country after the war.

[13] Anti-Jewish violence also occurred in Hungary (Kunmadaras and Miskolc) and Ukraine (Lvov and Kiev).

[14] Robert Y. Büchler, "Znovuoživenie židovskej komunity na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne," *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, no. 4 (1998); Robert Y. Büchler, "Reconstruction Efforts in Hostile Surroundings: Slovaks and Jews After World War II," in David Bankier (ed.),

topics including postwar Jewish property restitution, communal rebuilding, assimilation and emigration, postwar Slovak and Jewish politics within Czechoslovakia, and, last but not least, anti-Jewish violence. The historiography of postwar Polish Jewish life was larger in size but, in contrast to its Slovak counterpart, skewed toward two topics: violence and emigration. To be sure, by the early 2000s, there had been a few important studies surveying Jewish life in postwar Poland as well as a few brilliant monographs with a focus other than violence and emigration.[15] But

The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to Their Countries of Origin After World War Two (Jerusalem: Berghahn Books, 2005); Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "The Communist Party of Slovakia and the Jews: Ten Years 1938–48," *East Central Europe* 5, no. 2 (1978); Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "The Jews in Slovakia, 1945–1949," *Soviet Jewish Affairs: A Journal on Jewish Problems in the USSR and Eastern Europe* 8, no. 2 (1978); Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, "Zachráň sa, kto môžeš! Židia na Slovensku v rokoch 1944–1950," *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, no. 4 (1998); Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopach tragedie* (Bratislava: Archa, 1991); Ivan Kamenec, "Protižidovský pogrom v Topoľčanoch v septembri 1945," *Studia Historica Nitriensia* 8 (2000); Peter Salner, *Prežili Holokaust* (Bratislava: Veda, 1997); Peter Salner, "'Viditeľni' a 'neviditeľni' Židia v slovenskej spoločnosti po roku 1945," *Acta Judaica Slovaca*, no. 4 (1998); Peter Salner, *Židovská komunita po roku 1945* (Bratislava: Ústav etnológie SAV, 2006).

[15] Józef Adelson, "W Polsce zwanej Ludową," in Jerzy Tomaszewski (ed.), *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce w zarysie do 1950 roku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993); Natalia Aleksiun, *Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce 1944–1950* (Warsaw: Trio, 2002); Natalia Aleksiun, "Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Poland, 1944–1947," in Joshua D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Szyja Bronsztejn, *Z dziejów ludności żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku po II wojnie światowej*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, 1542 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1993); David Engel, *Ben shiḥrur li-veriḥah: nitsole ha-Sho'ah be-Polin veha-ma'avak al hanhagatam, 1944–1946* (Between Liberation and Flight: Holocaust Survivors in Poland and the Struggle for Leadership, 1944–1946) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers Ltd, 1996); August Grabski, *Działalność Komunistów wśród Żydów w Polsce 1944–1949* (Warsaw: Trio, 2004); Michał Grynberg, *Żydowska spółdzielczość pracy w Polsce w latach 1945–1949* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986); Irena Hurwic-Nowakowska, *A Social Analysis of Postwar Polish Jewry* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1986); Israel Gutman, *ha-Yehudim be-Polin aḥare Milḥemet ha-olam ha-shniyah* (The Jews in Poland After World War II) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1985); Israel Gutman and Avital Saf (eds.), *She'erit hapletah, 1944–1948: Rehabilitation and Political Struggle. Proceedings of the Sixth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, October 1985* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990); Julian Kwiek, *Żydzi, Łemkowie, Słowacy w województwie krakowskim w latach 1945–1949/50* (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 1998); Janusz Mieczkowski, *Żydzi, Niemcy i Ukraińcy na Pomorzu Zachodnim w latach 1945–1956: liczba, położenie i działalność polityczna*, Rozprawy i Studia, 175 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 1994); Janusz Mieczkowski, "Życie religijne mniejszości narodowych na Pomorzu Zachodnim w latach 1945–1956," *Przegląd Zachodniopomorski* 10, no. 1 (1995); Bożena Szaynok, *Ludność żydowska na Dolnym Śląsku, 1945–1950*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, 2257 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2000); Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja wyznania mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej 1945–1968*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, 2171 (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999). More recently, a few important works have been

even these works largely agreed with the prevailing narrative – that as Jewish survivors returned to Poland after the war the local population "greeted" them with antisemitism and violence. As a result, rebuilding of Jewish life in Poland was impossible and emigration was inevitable. Titles such as *Le Massacre des Survivants: En Pologne après l'Holocauste, 1945–1947* (The Massacre of Survivors) and *Żydzi w Polsce po II wojnie światowej: akcja kalumni i zabójstw* (Jews in Poland after the Second World War: The Operation of Slanders and Murders) reflected this understanding of postwar Polish-Jewish history.[16]

By far the most influential in the long series of books adopting this approach has been *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz* by Jan Tomasz Gross.[17] With this book, published in 2006, Gross has defined the field of postwar Polish-Jewish history in the US (less so in Poland) and

published such as Andrzej Rykała, *Przemiany sytuacji społeczno-politycznej mniejszości żydowskiej w Polsce po drugiej wojnie światowej* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007); Shimon Redlich, *Life in Transit: Jews in Postwar Lodz, 1945–1950* (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010); Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Następstwa zagłady Żydów: Polska 1944–2010* (Wydawnictwo Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. Emanuela Ringelbluma, 2011). No historian can write postwar Jewish history in Poland without Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka trwoga: Polska 1944–1947: ludowa reakcja na kryzys* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012).

16 Yisrael Gutman, "Żydzi w Polsce po II wojnie światowej: akcja kalumni i zabójstw," *Przegląd Prasy Zagranicznej* 2, nos. 3–4 (1986); Marc Hillel, *Le Massacre des Survivants: En Pologne après l'Holocauste, 1945–1947* (Paris: Plon, 1985). Other works on antisemitism in postwar Poland include Anna Cichopek, *Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie: 11 sierpnia 1945* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2000); Anna Cichopek, "The Cracow Pogrom of August 1945: A Narrative Reconstruction," in Joshua D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*; Jerzy Daniel, *Żyd w zielonym kapeluszu: rzecz o kieleckim pogromie 4 lipca 1946* (Kielce: Scriptum, 1996); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Upiorna dekada: trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i Komunistów, 1939–1948* (Kraków: Universitas, 1998); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz: An Essay in Historical Interpretation* (New York: Random House, 2006); Krystyna Kersten, "Kielce: 4 lipca 1946," *Tygodnik Solidarność* 36 (1981); Krystyna Kersten and Jerzy Szapiro, "The Contexts of So-Called Jewish Question in Poland After World War II," *Polin* 4 (1990); Krystyna Kersten, *Polacy, Żydzi, komunizm: anatomia półprawd, 1939–68* (Warsaw: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1992); Paul Lendvai, *Anti-Semitism Without Jews: Communist Eastern Europe* (New York Doubleday, 1971); Stanisław Meducki and Zenon Wrona (eds.), *Antyżydowskie wydarzenia kieleckie 4 lipca 1946 roku: dokumenty i materiały* (Kielce: Urząd Miasta Kielce, 1992); Marian Mushkat, *Philo-Semitic and Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Post-Holocaust Poland* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Warsaw: Bellona, 1992); Tadeusz Wiącek, *Zabić Żyda: kulisy i tajemnice pogromu kieleckiego 1946* (Kielce: Wydawnictwo DCF, 1996); Joshua D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews During the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*; Andrzej Żbikowski, "Morderstwa popełniane na Żydach w pierwszych latach po wojnie," in Feliks Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Następstwa zagłady Żydów*.

17 Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz*.

given it such power, detail, and authority that mainstream Polish-Jewish historiography has had to contend with it. Gross attributed anti-Jewish violence in postwar Poland to what he saw as the general corruption of the moral economy of Polish society after the war.[18] He claimed that since Poles as a whole failed to help their Jewish neighbors and even actively collaborated with the Germans, they "could not bear the Jewish presence after the war because it called forth their own feeling of shame and of contempt in which they were held by their victims."[19] Further, Gross argued, "Wherever Jews had been plundered, denounced, betrayed, or killed by their neighbors, their reappearance after the war evoked this dual sense of shame and contempt, which could be overcome only by mourning. And as long as Polish society was unable to mourn its Jewish neighbors' death, it had either to purge them or to live in infamy."[20]

Gross' book attracted criticism, especially from scholars in Poland.[21] They attacked his historical method, interpretation, and selection of sources.[22] Indeed, his generalized notions of "Polish society" and societal feelings of "shame and contempt" (notoriously impossible to prove in historical terms) remain problematic (more on this in my chapter on violence).[23] Yet, I believe that Gross' *Fear* is a brilliant book of engaged and passionate scholarship. Not many historians and not many books open up such deep-reaching intellectual debates as Gross does.[24] Having said that, I also believe that *Fear* remains within the limits of the earlier

[18] *Ibid.*, 252.

[19] *Ibid.*, 256. Gross' "guilt" argument is not new. Michael Steinlauf made a similar point about "the guilt driven hostility and violence" in his influential: Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Also argued by: John J. Hartman and Jacek Krochmal, *I Remember Every Day: The Fates of the Jews of Przemyśl During World War II* (Przemyśl: Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, 2002).

[20] Gross, *Fear: Antisemitism in Poland After Auschwitz,* 258.

[21] Jan Żaryn, Łukasz Kamiński, Leszek Bukowski, Andrzej Jankowski (eds.), *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006); Mariusz Gądek (ed.), *Wokół strachu: dyskusja o książce Jana T. Grossa* (Kraków: Znak, 2008). Historians associated with the political right launched a particularly vicious campaign against Gross. Their reviews and critique are collected in Robert Jankowski (ed.), *Cena "Strachu": Gross w oczach historyków: wybór publicystyki* (Warsaw: "Fronda," 2008).

[22] Gądek (ed.), *Wokół strachu*.

[23] Maciej Kozłowski, "Fakty i uprzedzenia czyli stracona szansa na dialog," in Gądek (ed.), *Wokół strachu*.

[24] The Polish edition of Gross' *Neighbors* inspired the first national debate in 2000–1. Jan Tomasz Gross, *Sąsiedzi: historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000); Jan Tomasz Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (London: Arrow Books, 2001); Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak (eds.), *Wokół Jedwabnego*, 2 vols. (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2002); Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (eds.), *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

described historiography. It perpetuates the understanding of postwar Jewish history in Poland as a story of violence and emigration.

This study is a response to such a narrative. Certainly there was violence against Jews and, indeed, a mass emigration followed. But although 120,000 Jews left Poland after the most notorious pogrom in Kielce in July 1946, another 100,000 stayed. These numbers are our first indication that an approach that focuses on violence and emigration restricts our understanding of the period as much as it contributes to it. I believe this approach is problematic in at least three ways. First, it reduces the diversity and multiplicity of Jewish experiences in postwar Poland to one aspect – antisemitism. There is no doubt that analysis of postwar antisemitism and violence is of primary importance – and the research of the last three decades has reflected this. Now, however, when we have a number of excellent studies on the subject, it behooves us to go "beyond violence" in order to fully grasp the complexity of the postwar period.[25] Otherwise, we, historians of postwar Polish-Jewish history fall into the trap of simplifying and homogenizing postwar history. We reduce the postwar period to a meta-tragedy – a uniformly gloomy picture which silences all experiences that do not conform.[26]

A second closely related limitation of the prevailing approach is that it disregards any identity other than that of a victim, an emigrant, or a perpetrator. In other words, it obscures the multiple ways in which Jews and non-Jews encountered each other. Daily experiences between 1944 and 1948 did not consist solely of violence. Pogroms occurred only sporadically in both Poland and Slovakia. Further, the majority of the population was not personally involved in the violent interaction of jails, interrogations, execution chambers, or guerilla warfare. Instead they interacted on multiple non-violent levels and in multiple social roles – as employers and employees, as business partners and co-workers, as members of the same cooperative, as petitioners and clerks in offices, and as spouses and friends. All these roles and the nuances they reveal are lost in the prevailing meta-tragedy. Thus one of the aims of this book is to uncover the heterogeneity of Jewish experiences in the postwar period. In order to do so, I seek to go "beyond violence," as the title suggests. I seek to show postwar Jewish history in Poland and Slovakia not as the short, harsh prelude to an "inevitable" emigration, but rather as a time of complex encounters wherein an exodus was not presupposed. By

[25] More and more scholars are doing exactly this. For example, see recently published edited volume: Tych and Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Następstwa zagłady Żydów*.
[26] Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

"complex encounters" I mean the broad range of experiences generated through the interactions between Jewish survivors, the state, and the majority population. These experiences included traveling back home, fighting to repossess property and retain citizenship, rebuilding "normal" lives by marrying, having children, finding a job, engaging in political, social, and cultural life, and, yes, experiencing violence. I believe that an analysis of these daily interactions not only uncovers the historical heterogeneity but also provides social contextualization of postwar Jewish experiences.

It is not my intention, however, to present a story of private life. Instead, I analyze the borderline between the private and the public, and there, in the middle ground, I pin down the most revealing moments of ethnic relations. I define the "borderline" as the space where public and private lives intersect. The Polish *na ulicy*, Slovak *na ulici*, or Yiddish אויף רעד גאס (oyf der gas) – which loosely translate to "on the street" in English – fit this concept particularly well. The word *ulica* (Polish and Slovak) or *gas* (Yiddish) denotes an urban space between the intimacy of the home and the formality of the public where people's political and social lives unfold. In my analysis, I also go beyond this urban space to include ethnic interactions on roads, on village paths, at railway stations, on trains, and others.

I enter public offices, courts, city halls, and the headquarters of Jewish and non-Jewish organizations in order to illuminate the complex negotiations between Jewish survivors and the state. State representatives were the primary agents of political change, a change to which returning Jewish survivors had to adjust. For example, after liberation, the Polish and Czechoslovak (and Slovak) governments formulated new requirements for entry into their national communities by redefining the criteria for citizenship. I explore how municipalities in the two countries implemented these changes, what effect this had on Jewish survivors, and how they negotiated the changes. Another example is the involvement of the state in property restitution. Analyzing restitution reveals, on one hand, the ambivalence of the two states toward "the Jewish issue," and, on the other, the Jewish survivors' tenacious struggle for agency, their willingness to improve their economic and social standing despite legal and administrative obstacles. In such a narrative, Jewish survivors no longer appear exclusively as objects of someone else's will but as subjects who negotiated their position in the national and the local community, who addressed social and political circumstances and acted accordingly.

The very category of "Jewish survivors" requires rethinking. Atina Grossman has already pointed out the importance of distinguishing

between survivors from occupied Eastern Europe and those from the Soviet Union. She argued that putting all returning Jews into the simple category of "Jewish survivors" obscures the diversity of their experiences.[27] The categories of "Jews" (*Żydzi* in Polish or *Židia* in Slovak), "Poles" (*Polacy*), and "Slovaks" (*Slováci*) are equally problematic. They imply impregnable identities. They imply that "Jews" could not have been "Poles" or "Slovaks" at the same time, thus obliterating the complex experiences of assimilated Jews.[28] For this reason, I use the phrase "Jewish – non-Jewish," instead of "Polish-Jewish" or "Slovak-Jewish," when describing ethnic relations in postwar Poland and Slovakia.

Who then were the "Jews" in postwar Poland and Slovakia? What did it mean to be Jewish there and then? Until roughly the seventeenth century, Jews were defined as a community of faith. However, in the course of modern transformations, the meanings of Jewishness changed and expanded beyond Judaism. In the twentieth century, Jewishness meant a common biblical ancestry, history and memory, a national sense of belonging, devotion to one of the different strands of Judaism, as well as a secular cultural or communal identity. As Jacqueline Goldberg stated, "Jewish identity [or any national identity, including Polish and Slovak] is not static or fixed in time, but instead can be more usefully regarded as being in a constant state of flux; it is a process rather than a product."[29] Thinking of ethnic or national identities as flexible can be particularly useful when applied to periods following a cataclysmic event.[30] After all, the Second World War not only shattered physical buildings and old political structures but also national and ethnic perceptions of self and others. Depending on their personal experiences

[27] I will discuss this at length in Chapter 1. Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2007). Shimon Redlich, in his recent book on postwar Łódź, uses "survivors" versus "repatriates" to distinguish the two groups. See Redlich, *Life in Transit*.

[28] The Polish language reflects and reproduces these static identities. For example, the common term *Polski Żyd* (Polish Jew) does not imply that a person is at the same time a Pole (*Polak*) and a Jew (*Żyd*). The terms that make such implication – *Polak-Żyd* or *Polak żydowskiego pochodzenia* (Pole of Jewish origin) – are rarely used and "sound artificial," thus reflecting culturally embedded discomfort with flexible Polish Jewish identities.

[29] Jacqueline Goldberg, "Social Identity in British and South African Jewry," in Zvi Y. Gitelman, Barry A. Kosmin, and Andras Kovacs (eds.), *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2003), 19.

[30] See Jeremy King's definition of ethnicity as "a web of vague and multivalent relationships, as a seemingly permanent but actually plastic set of social attributes, and as a populist and thus modern mode of political cognition," in Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

before, during, and after the war, people revised their ideas of what it meant to be Jewish, Polish, or Slovak (I will return to this subject in the chapters on "Return to normality").

These personal experiences were most often shaped by local or regional conditions explored in this study. Focus on the local plays a similar role to a comparative analysis, namely it illuminates phenomena which not only remain obscure in broad national narratives but also have the power if not to undermine, then at least to complicate the narratives themselves. For example, the existence of Jewish farming in the newly annexed western territories of postwar Poland was contingent upon a unique local setting and was not possible anywhere else in the country (for more detail, see Chapter 6). Yet, its very existence undermines the notion that Jewish life in postwar Poland was impossible. Although limited and contingent, Jewish farming made up an integral part of the history of postwar Jewish returns, in general, and the history of Poland in the late 1940s, in particular.

Since the past shapes political and social conditions on both local and national levels, postwar Jewish experiences in Poland and Slovakia are incomprehensible without their prewar and wartime context. In the interwar period, the Jewish population in Poland was the second largest (after the Soviet Union) in Europe. In the census of 1921, there were 2,855,318 and, in the census of 1931, 3,113,933 Jews in Poland, or 10.5 and 9.8 percent of the total population respectively.[31] In the cities of Warsaw, Łódź, Lwów (now L'viv), Kraków, Wilno (now Vilnius), and Lublin, Jews constituted between 20 and 30 percent of the total population. In eastern towns such as Grodno, Brześć on Bug, Równe, Łuck, or Pińsk, the percentages were even higher, reaching 50 to 60 percent of the total population. In prewar Slovakia, according to the census of 1921, there were 130,843 "Czechoslovak citizens of the Jewish religion (Israelite confession)" or 4.3 percent of the total population.[32] In the

[31] Albert Stankowski and Piotr Weiser, "Demograficzne skutki Holokaustu," in Tych and Adamczyk-Garbowska (eds.), *Następstwa zagłady Żydów*, 15. More about the prewar Jewish population in Poland in Celia S. Heller, *On the Edge of Destruction: Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (Wayne State University Press, 1994); Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews of Poland Between Two World Wars* (Brandeis University Press, 1989); Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe Between the World Wars* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), 24; Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 3 vols. (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010).

[32] Rebekah Klein-Pejšová, "Among the Nationalities: Jewish Refugees, Jewish Nationality, and Czechoslovak Statebuilding" (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 2007), 195–207, 60. Until 1919, there was no category of "Jewish nationality" and Jewishness was marked as a religious or linguistic affiliation. Also see Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918–1938: Education and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Boulder and Columbia