



April 15, 2024

Eva Kalousová, Mgr.  
“Život a Šoa. Zkušenost první a druhé generace českých přeživších”  
**Oponentský posudek**

I am a historian of Central Europe with a focus on the Bohemian Lands. I have published on retribution trials, questions of wartime collaboration, and the experience of Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. I served as the inaugural director of the Holocaust Educational Foundation at Northwestern University and have been an active scholar in the field of Holocaust Studies for two decades. I am familiar with the literature on the Shoah more generally, and in the Protectorate, in particular. I have also worked extensively with firsthand survivor testimony, including interviews collected by the Jewish Museum of Prague (JMP), the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA), and the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies. As a result, I believe that I am qualified to assess Mgr. Eva Kalousová’s dissertation and its contribution to the fields of Holocaust Studies and Czech history.

It was a great pleasure to read the Mgr. Eva Kalousová’s dissertation, “Life after the Shoah: Experiences of First and Second Generations of Czech Holocaust Survivors.” From the opening pages it is clear that Kalousová has mastered the relevant literature in memory studies and oral history seeks to apply that knowledge in innovative ways to her original research among survivors with connections to the town of Uherský Brod. Kalousová’s focus on Uherský Brod offers a valuable counterpoint to the overwhelming dominance of Prague in the memory of the Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia. Whereas the JMP and VHA have a substantial collection of testimonies that offer us a complex picture of the Jews of Prague, the near total destruction of many smaller communities has left a void in our understanding of life in the Bohemian and Moravian hinterlands.

For that reason Kalousová’s intrepid pursuit of subjects to interview, across multiple continents, through the difficult times of the pandemic, is especially impressive and valuable. In one case she indefatigably returned time and time again to a survivor who at first proved reluctant to speak about his experiences, but eventually opened up and provided especially valuable testimony. One of the many insights of the dissertation is that survivors are often more willing to talk about the darkest moments in their lives with strangers than with their own kin. In other cases (e.g., Max Mannheimer) children only learn their parents’ personal narratives after they have been published or made available through recordings.

The dissertation demonstrates how survivors drew lessons from the Shoah that guided their decisions in subsequent decades and how they raised their children. In two cases survivors chose

to flee Czechoslovakia (before the February coup and after the crushing of the Prague Spring) so as not to repeat what they viewed as their fathers' failure to recognize the Nazi threat in time. The dissertation shows, however, that in child-rearing the lessons that survivors drew were hardly consistent: some parents were strict in the belief that children should be prepared to tough out the worst, while others indulged children to give them what the parents had been denied. In many of the testimonies food plays a prominent role and one that survivors of the Shoah share with those who survived starvation in other places and times.

Kalousová rightfully pushes back on the lachrymose perspective that dominates most narratives of postwar survivors. The interview sample reinforces what I have seen in my own work: Although many survivors faced hostility and an unwillingness of non-Jews to return property supposed held for safekeeping, many other Jews returned to find support from non-Jews and were able to recover much of what they had been forced to leave behind. Similarly, Kalousová illustrates that the emphasis on trauma in the second generation, while certainly true in many cases, was by no means universal. Despite the undeniable trauma that parents endured and that children witnessed – as evidenced by the testimony that Kalousová collected about nightmares, sharp responses, and deep existential concerns – many children of survivors do not feel defined nor permanently scarred by their parents' wartime suffering. Trauma marked survivors' lives, but did not immobilize them.

Or, at least, it did not immobilize those survivors who had children after the war. The dissertation's focus on the second generation means, by definition, that we do not learn about survivors who were too old or too broken to start new families. Most of those survivors did not live long enough, in any case, to be alive to be interviewed once the major testimonial projects started in the 1980s and 1990s. Those caveats do not, by any means, invalidate the dissertation's valuable conclusions about survivors who built families, but it is important not to forget those who could not.

Finally, the focus on testimony from Uherský Brod is one of the strengths of the dissertation, but there could be a more thorough explanation of why the town is particularly valuable as a site to study the Holocaust. Kalousová importantly notes that Uherský Brod was a traditional center of Jewish life and that during the occupation local Jews had to move from their homes to the old ghetto, where they were joined by Jews forcibly resettled from the surrounding region. In its discussion of relations between local Jews and Czechs, however, the dissertation could have explored more deeply the question of language and the extent to which the preponderance of German speakers among Uherský Brod's Jews may have contributed to the hostility that some survivors encountered upon their postwar return and to their decision to leave ethnically cleansed Czechoslovakia altogether. Overall, it would be interesting to learn more about the extent to which the experience of life in Uherský Brod before, during and after the war produced different multigenerational relationships than in families that came from other parts of the Bohemian Lands.

The dissertation's concluding discussion about the suitability of the "second generation" as a category is a provocative and productive challenge to the dominant view in the literature. What emerges from the rich evidence and skillful analysis presented here is the heterogeneity of the postwar experience of survivors and especially of their children in subsequent decades. The consequences of diaspora – from Czechoslovakia – condition how families processed and lived with the legacy of the war. Fascinatingly, despite those divergent postwar paths, the survivors

have maintained, and passed onto the next generation, a Czech identity that speaks to the depth of their belonging prior to the Shoah.

In conclusion, I strongly believe that “Život a Šoa. Zkušenost první a druhé generace českých přeživších” represents an original and significant contribution to the study of intergenerational relations and trauma among Holocaust survivors and their children. I highly recommend its approval and look forward to its eventual publication.

Sincerely,



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