The Holocaust on Post-War Battlefields

Genocide as Historical Culture

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& Ulf Zander (eds.)

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Schindler's List Comes to Schindler's Homeland

Oskar Schindler as a Problem of Czech Historical Culture

Schindler's List, one of the most influential but also most controversial films on the Holocaust, came to Europe in February 1994, two months after its first release in the United States. At the time of its first European showing in Vienna on February 16, this Steven Spielberg film was already known as a widely discussed and successful Hollywood project, awarded three Golden Globes in the United States. Only a few weeks later, *Schindler's List* also won seven Academy Awards. Soon after Vienna, the film came to Germany and Poland, two countries strongly connected to Oskar Schindler's life. In Germany, *Schindler's List* opened on March 1, 1994 in Frankfurt, the city where Oskar Schindler spent the last 16 years of his life.[1]

In the Czech Republic, the film had an official premiere on March 10 in Prague, with President Václav Havel as one of the prominent members of the audience. In this aspect, the importance of the Czech opening was similar to the German one in Frankfurt, where President Richard von Weiszäcker supported the event. In the Czech case, however, the film also had a preview showing in the little town of Svitavy one day earlier. The reason for this was the fact that it was just there, in Svitavy, German Zwittau, that Oskar Schindler was born on April 28, 1908.[2] At the time of his birth, Zwittau belonged to Austria-Hungary. In 1994, however, Svitavy was a part of the newly-created Czech Republic. Between the two dates, during Oskar Schindler's lifetime, the town was included into two other states – the Republic of Czechoslovakia (1918–1938 and later 1945–1992) and the Third Reich of Adolf Hitler (1938–1945). Thus, until the age of 37, Schindler already had Austrian, Czechoslovak and German citizenships.

Among more than three million Germans in Czechoslovakia between the wars, i.e. among those Germans who had never lived on German territory but who spoke German and not Czech or Slovak as their mother tongue and kept German culture as their priority, Oskar Schindler was by no means exceptional. Most of these Sudeten Germans[3] were forced to leave Czechoslovakia soon after the war. They were punished by Czechoslovak authorities and people for their earlier support of Adolf Hitler's Germany and its terror and violence against Czechoslovakia.

The great success of *Schindler's List*, however, made its main hero a "Good Nazi," symbolising German goodness that contrasted sharply with the image of collective guilt of all Germans for the Holocaust. Furthermore, it started a new and extensive discussion about this former public taboo. Suddenly, Oskar Schindler became the most famous Sudeten German in the world. Almost fifty years after the end of the Second World War, his war-time efforts provoked new and strong feelings in his homeland, the Czech Republic. As the film story approached the real world, the past once again approached the Czech present.

In the film, Schindler's real roots were never properly mentioned. Even though he was taking "his" Jews from Cracow to "Czechoslovakia," and his hometown Zwittau there, he identified himself in the simplest possible way in a single dialogue with his accountant during the very first meeting between the two men: First, the accountant says to Schindler: "By the law, I have to tell you, Sir, I am a Jew." "Well, I am a German," Schindler answers. In fact, not only Spielberg, but even a great majority of viewers and reviewers outside Czech borders, did not care about Schindler's real origin. *Schindler's List* was a story of the Holocaust. In this context, nothing else was important. In the Czech context, however, this ethnic dimension could not be avoided. As I am going to show, it became the main focus.

The task of this chapter is to analyse how *Schindler's List* and its Sudeten German hero fit into the Czech identity building of the 1990s. In Czech historical culture, Czech-German relations in the past were highlighted during most of this period. On the one hand, groups in the post-Communist Czech Republic indicated very soon after the Velvet Revolution that they wanted to clean its image and right the wrongs of the past. According to one very early initiative of President Václav Havel, the Czechs should even send their excuses to the Sudeten Germans for war crimes and unnecessary violence during the transfer of the Czech Germans in 1945 and 1946. While a general transfer[4] of German minorities from Central and Eastern Europe to Germany and Austria was approved by the Allied powers at Potsdam in 1945, the Czechs considered this officially agreed framework insufficient and too slow. Consequently, they organised a more radical and violent, so called wild, transfer of the ethnic Germans. Havel's main political ideas of "life in truth" and "victory of truth and love over lie and hatred" could not be harmonised with a continuous traditional picture of innocent Czechs, seen more or less implicitly as German victims. In this idea, the Czechs were supposed to humanize their future by uncovering and discussing unpleasant moments of their own history and seeking reconciliation with their victims. Here, thanks to Schindler and the Holocaust, one such opportunity had appeared.

On the other hand, there were voices both inside and outside the Czech Republic that feared a newly growing influence of the reunited Germany in Europe and in the world. For these voices, any "amnesty" for the Nazi crimes during the Second World War was unacceptable. In the Czech context, such an opinion, perceptible especially among the oldest generations, was combined with a fear that the once expelled Sudeten Germans could return and claim back their former properties. In such a context, even the "good German" Schindler, despite his help to the Jews, became a problematic and threatening figure. But who was Oskar Schindler? Who were the main protagonists in this dispute of Czech historical culture, and what role did the Holocaust actually play in this process?

Oskar Schindler Created by Steven Spielberg

Schindler's List begins as the story of an unimportant businessman, gambler and womanizer, who at the right time sees an opportunity that only war can offer. He forces some Jews to do business with him under for them very unfair terms. With the golden badge of the Nazi party NSDAP on a flap of his suit, he once says to his wife: "In every business I tried, I can see it was not me who failed. Something was missing…" That something was just the war.

Played by Liam Neeson, Oskar Schindler is far from the loser he

once used to be. He is a strong man, always under strict self-control. He calmly observes the drinking and killing Nazis as if he was not one of them. He quietly blackmails the Jews as if he did not desperately need them. Everybody seems to be just a part of his game and he likes to be the one who decides which move is going to follow. He conducts his plan and nothing seems to stop him; not even the otherwise strictly totalitarian and bureaucratically pedantic Nazi regime.

It takes almost four years of war to him to finally start to grow sober. A shock from witnessing the total devastation of the Cracow ghetto in March 1943 starts to turn his priorities upside down and makes the former Mr. Black into Mr. White. Suddenly, the war means "never the good, always the bad," as he once opens his heart to his accountant Icchak Stern. He keeps his mental strength, but becomes human. Oskar Schindler starts to act. Rumours about his goodness float quickly among the Jews when he creates a haven in his factory, Deutsche Emailwaren factory. And when he gets to know that his workers are in danger, he decides to save them by moving from Cracow to Brünnlitz (Brněnec) near his hometown of Zwittau. The romantic hero fears nothing: Neither kissing a Jewish woman in public at his own birthday party, nor spraying water to thirsty Jews in a train in front of SS guards. He is driven by a mighty force to save Jews. Oskar Schindler and Icchak Stern put together a list, Schindler's List, that contains about 1,200 names. The man who – five minutes ago – said he had so much money he would never be able to use it during his lifetime now spends a fortune to buy Jewish prisoners, who for other Germans in his surroundings are worthless. "The list is an absolute good," Icchak Stern concludes when they finish the writing job. "The list is life."

Schindler's new factory in Brünnlitz treats the workers even better than the one in Cracow. In order to keep the Jews in safety, the company fakes military production. Instead of producing the goods that the army desperately needs, Schindler buys the products of others and pretends he made them himself. The text on the screen confirms: "For the seven months it was fully operational, Schindler's Brinnlitz munitions factory was a model of non-production. During this same period he spent millions of Reichmarks to sustain his workers and bribe Reich officials."

The end of the war, however, must come anyway. Schindler goes bankrupt but manages to fulfil his mission. He is happy, though also self-critical: "I am a member of the Nazi party. I am an ammunition manufacturer. I am a profiteer of slave labour. I am a criminal," he admits in his final speech to "his" Jews. Finally, he takes off his golden badge of the NSDAP. If he had sold even this, he could have saved two more Jewish lives... Only then does he start thinking about himself again and leaves the stage to save his own skin.

Schindler's Identity According to Thomas Keneally

Steven Spielberg based his film on a novel, *Schindler's Ark*, written by the Australian writer Thomas Keneally and first published in 1982. Unlike Spielberg, Keneally indeed dealt with Schindler's Sudeten German origin. Furthermore, according to Keneally's version, "there were signs that he wasn't *right thinking*, though he paid well, was a good source of scarce commodities, could hold his drink and had a slow and sometimes rowdy sense of humour."[5] He also suggested that Schindler was "disaffected with National Socialism."[6] Though he mentioned that he, indeed, "was wearing the Hakenkreuz, the swastika emblem of Konrad Henlein's Sudeten-German Party," he also claimed that

> they did not take it too seriously; it was something young Czech Germans were wearing that season. Only the Social Democrats and the Communists did not sport the badge or subscribe to Heinlein's party, and, God knew, Oskar was neither a Communist nor a Social Democrat. Oskar was a salesman. All things being equal, when you went into a German company manager's office wearing the badge, you got the order.[7]

Already by the beginning of the war, in Keneally's understanding, Schindler took a political position that could be understood as morally right or at least morally almost non-controversial: "Whatever his motives for running with Henlein, it seems that as soon as the military divisions entered Moravia he suffered an instant disillusionment with National Socialism." And more:

> he seems to have expected that the invading power would allow some brotherly Sudeten Republic to be founded. In a later statement he argued the new regime's bullying of the Czech population and the sei-

zure of Czech property appalled him. His documented acts of rebellion would occur very early in the coming world conflict, and there is no need to doubt that the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, proclaimed by Hitler from Hradschin Castle in March 1939, surprised him with its tyranny.[8]

While trying to understand the motive for Schindler's rescue of almost 1,200 Jewish lives during the Second World War, Keneally began with a look at the history of Schindler's family. Here, he found more about the national identity of the Schindlers as well as their religious background, but could not in Oskar's family history find any key to his rescuing impulse:

> Hans Schindler, Oskar's father, approved of the imperial management, considered himself culturally an Austrian, and spoke German at the table, on the telephone, in business, in moments of tenderness. Yet when in 1918 Herr Schindler and the members of his family found themselves citizens of the Czechoslovak republic of Masaryk and Beneš, it did not seem to cause any fundamental distress to the father, and still less to his ten-year-old son. The child Hitler, according to the man Hitler, was tormented even as a boy by the gulf between the mystical unity of Austria and Germany and their political separation. No such neurosis of disinheritance soured Oskar Schindler's childhood. Czechoslovakia was such a bosky, unravished little dumpling of a republic that the German-speakers took their minority stature with some grace, even if the Depression and some minor governmental follies would later put a certain strain on the relationship. […] The family Schindler was Catholic."[9]

Last, but not least, we can learn more about the environment in Svitavy during Schindler's childhood from the following sentences: "Oskar had a few middle-class Jewish friends, whose parents also sent them to the German grammar school. These children were not village Ashkenazim – quirky, Yiddish-speaking, orthodox – but multilingual and not-so-ritual sons of Jewish businessmen."[10] In these lines, there is no mention of Schindler's relationships with his Czech neighbours in Svitavy during the earliest periods of his life. We just learn a little about his depersonalised attitude to the Czechoslovak state. In his book, and in contrast to Spielberg's film, Keneally lets Oskar Schindler's personality undergo great changes towards humanity, turning against the goals of the Nazi regime, already before the outbreak of the Second World War II.

Early Returns to Czechoslovakia

Neither this information about Oskar Schindler, nor a later idea to commemorate his act of saving 1,200 Jewish lives during the Holocaust by building a memorial to him, came to the Czechoslovak and later Czech public as a result of an internal activity. Keneally's book was as little noticed in Communist Czechoslovakia as Schindler himself. There were only two exceptions to the rule. The first was when Israel in the 1960s started to celebrate Schindler as one of "the Righteous," and the Czechoslovak secret police showed some activity in order to learn more about the man who had Czech Sudeten-German roots, a Nazi past, and who received awards from both West Germany and Israel.[11] The second event took place two decades later, in 1986, four years after Thomas Keneally´s book was published and well-received by Western critics. The only Czechoslovak newspaper or periodical that noticed the book was the literary magazine *Světová literatura* ('World Literature'). This not very influential, but especially among Czech intellectuals very respected magazine, published a review that – while still written under a Communist regime hostile to both Jews, Sudeten Germans and West Germany – was surprisingly positive to Keneally's book and to Oskar Schindler. The article presented Oskar Schindler's identity in the following way: "You must not forget," the writer quoted one of the so-called Schindler's Jews, "that Oskar had not only a German face, but also a Czech one. He was similar to the Good Soldier Schwejk. He loved making fun of the regime."[12] The writer, Eva Oliveriusová, admitted that even for her, Oskar Schindler was a totally unknown man, but after receiving a letter from the regional archive in Svitavy, she finished her review with a note, confirming that a certain Oskar Schindler really did come to Brněnec at the end of the Second World War and established a sham concentration camp. By this act, she maintained, he saved the lives of "about 1,200 Polish citizens, mostly of Jewish origin."

The lack of Czechoslovak public reactions to the book and everything else about Schindler before the end of the Cold War could first of all be interpreted as a sign that the Czechoslovak Communist re-

gime never found a reason for considering Oskar Schindler so important – and therefore even so dangerous – that it would have to focus its propaganda on his personality. Not even the success of *Schindler's Ark*, awarded with the prestigious Booker Prize Award for fiction in 1982, made the then Czechoslovak regime take notice of Schindler.

After the fall of Communism in 1989, the first initiatives to celebrate Schindler came to Czechoslovakia from Germany and Israel. In 1991, three years before the Czech opening of *Schindler's List*, the German Munich-based organisation "Ackermann-Gemeinde" (AG) wrote a letter to the Svitavy town councillors and asked whether it could place a memorial plaque to the honour of Oskar Schindler in his hometown. The AG was already established in 1946 as a Catholic organisation uniting primarily those Germans who were forced to leave Czechoslovakia soon after the Second World War. Within the Sudeten-German movement, the group is considered moderate, defining itself as seeking understanding, not revenge. Soon after the letter from Germany, another letter came to Svitavy from one of "Schindler's Jews," now living in Israel. This man, a long-time member of the Israeli Supreme Court, had a similar question on whether it would be possible to erect a Schindler memorial.[13] Although both ideas came to Svitavy almost two years before Steven Spielberg completed his film, no memorial to Oskar Schindler was officially approved by the City Council in Svitavy before the success of the film *Schindler's List*, that is before the spring of 1994.

"Drive Schindler Out!"

Finally, not only one but two monuments of Oskar Schindler were established in his hometown. The first, official Czech one was financed by the City of Svitavy and was made of stone and iron, while the second one, a memorial plaque, was financed by AG. The first memorial was commemorated on the same day that *Schinder's List* was previewed in Svitavy on March 9, 1994. It was not placed on the house where Schindler was born as was originally planned, but in a park on the other side of the street. According to the press, the current owners of the house would not allow any memory dedicated to Schindler to be placed directly on the house, since Schindler, in their eyes, "was a fascist."[14]

The fact that an identical text in Czech and German is written on both these memorials, no matter if originating from the Czech or Sudeten-German side, is very interesting. It goes: "Oskar Schindler. To an unforgettable rescuer of 1,200 fated Jewish lives."[15] The timing of the decision by the local authorities indicates that Schindler's memorial was approved even before the citizens of Svitavy had a chance to see the film and make up their minds about it, and before the discussion about Oskar Schindler actually started both in Svitavy and the Czech Republic as a whole.

Thus, the first strong refusals were related to the memorial at least as much as to the film. The strongest refusal in the discussion that followed came from the circles that frequently made ideological use of history. In August 1994, the extremist nationalist party, The Assembly for the Republic-Czechoslovak Republican Party (SPR-RSC), represented in the Czech parliament in Prague, brought charges against those who had built the Schindler memorial plaque in Svitavy. The SPR-RSC accused them of the criminal act of supporting movements suppressing civil rights and freedoms. "The Republicans," in the words of their party secretary Jan Vik, considered Svitavy's native Schindler not "a venerable Nazi who had to pay for the Jews to redeem them" or "a good Nazi with a human face" but "a well-known Nazi hangman." While in some contexts, the SPR-RSC stood very close to neo-Nazis and called for actions especially against the Czech Republic's Romani population, this time, according to Vik, the party considered the unveiling of the memorial plaque to be "a celebration of Nazi bestialities" which must receive an immediate and well-deserved punishment so that the Nazi and Fascist evil can be "rooted out."[16]

While *Schindler's List* turned the Czech extreme right against German Nazism, it did not provoke any strong and open antisemitic feelings. One of very few exceptions was an article "History falsified by the Oscars" in the newspaper *Republika*, published just by the SPR-RSC:

> I am not going to discuss the fact that the Oscars can hardly be won by non-Jewish film directors today. I will not question the opinion of the Jews about this version of the Holocaust. It is their problem. May-

> be they will one day even believe that Eichmann too was a humanist, that gas chambers were just a fabrication of the Pan-Slavic movement and that Theresienstadt was just a peaceful camp for the scouts.

"Why is a war criminal presented as a fearless saviour of the Jews?" the author further asked. "Why not build a monument even to Himmler, best of all directly in Prague Castle?… To make Schindler a famous philanthropist was easy. It was enough to put the story into the hands of Mr. Spielberg, himself a Jew."[17]

Unlike "the Republicans," those labelled "Communists" in their relation to Oskar Schindler were not so strongly connected to the existing Czech Communist Party that considered itself the successor of the pre-1989 Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The top official representatives of this party, in fact, did not show any public activities related to *Schindler's List* at all. While the SPR-RSC was a political party with a rather clear political ideology and a political platform, "the Communists" in this context were in fact first of all the people who shared a view of Oskar Schindler and of history; one that corresponded with the ideological frame of the former Czechoslovak regime between 1948 and 1989.

The first of the two basic standpoints of "the Communists" was the radical resistance against any "revision" of the facts that the Sudeten Germans, including Oskar Schindler, were guilty of treason to the Czechoslovak state and Czech people during the late 1930s and the whole period of the Second World War. According to this version, the treason against Czechoslovakia excluded a chance that Schindler could have even a good side, or that his pro-Nazi view from the beginning of the war could change as he gained better knowledge about the Nazi policy against the Jews. The Czech Germans as a whole were said to deserve to be sent to Germany, including those from Svitavy, where they comprised an overwhelming majority before the Second World War. Moreover, in the "communist" arguments both Thomas Keneally and Steven Spielberg were blamed for "ignorance of the facts" about Schindler and for "uncritically spreading the false Schindler myth." Also Israel was criticised for the same thing, while the entire process of the Holocaust and its memory after 1945 were left aside.

One example of this kind can be found in articles by Jiří Frajdl from the National Council of an organisation called *Klub českého pohraničí* ('The Club of the Czech Borderland'); a kind of Czech attempt at counterbalancing the "Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft." Although the organisation defines itself as a "non-party patriotic movement," the ideological undertone in Frajdl's articles was obvious when he wrote: "Nobody in the world would stoop so low as to celebrate his enemy, a representative of the Nazi regime and Germanic pride." According to the author, "in order to please the mighty rulers of today's Czech Republic," the Czech liberal press spread Schindler's "fairy tale-ish legend," looking for an exemplary Sudeten German they could use for a Czech-German mutual coming-together.[18] In the openly left-wing newspaper *Nový zítřek*, the same author wrote with irony: "Why shouldn't this criminal, swindler, liar and Nazi have his own memorial? It is sure that the right-wing politicians need some positive examples even among the members of the Henlein party."[19]

In some basic features, "republican" and "communist" attitudes were very similar. First, there was a radical attitude without any will to compromise, based on a black and white ethnic division between a good – Czech – and a bad – German – side. In this scheme, there was no place for a possible Czech self-reflection. Besides this, there was also a very unbalanced attitude to the Jews and to Israel. When suitable, the Jews were used as an argument against Germany and Germans, but when such a use had fulfilled its role, Jews and their memory of the Holocaust were refused or criticised without any deeper analysis. This, too, was the case of the only organisation of the war veterans that wanted to participate in the debate. *Český svaz bojovníků za svobodu* (The Czech Union of Freedom Fighters), known under the Communist period as The Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, issued a special declaration. Protesting against the memorial plaque to Oskar Schindler, the members wrote in March 1994:

> Schindler took part in the occupation of our territory in 1938, in the occupation of the rest of our country by military troops on March 15, 1939, in terror against our citizens and at the beginning of the Second World War, when 360,000 of our best citizens gave their lives on the battlefields, in the resistance movement and in the Nazi concentration camps […] During the whole war, he led a luxurious life, profit-

> ing from the exploitation of the Jews... Today, we cannot study what led Oskar Schindler to his activity. If Israel honoured his act, let his memory stay alive in Israel and among the Jews who are spread elsewhere in the world. But why should a Czech town celebrate a German, a Nazi, an agent of the German secret service?[20]

On the one hand, Jewish victims were here included in the number of victims as "our best citizens." On the other hand, however, only "Jews in Israel and elsewhere in the world" were recommended to honour Schindler's act, while Czech Jews and other Czech sympathizers with Schindler were completely missing in this declaration.

Schindler's Shadow in the Czech Parliament?

Jitka Gruntová, a history teacher and historian of the City Museum in Svitavy, shared a categorical anti-Schindler view. She declared herself "a fighter against the Schindler myth" already in a very early period of the debate. As she once admitted, she had not seen *Schindler's List* until 1999 at the earliest, but was fighting the Schindler myth already long before. Thus, her main targets became Keneally's book and those who "spread the legend" and supported Schindler's memorial. Nevertheless, she too paid very little attention to the fact that *Schindler's Ark* was a novel and not a scholarly work on Oskar Schindler. While often calling for the maintenance of "professional standards" in history as a scholarly discipline, she never recognised the dual role of history. Gruntová thus never separated history as a scholarly discipline from history as historical consciousness, used by the whole of society and supposed to satisfy many more needs than just scholarly standards. She nevertheless became the foremost Czech expert on Schindler's life, more exactly on the two periods of his life on Czech territory; that is, from the time of his birth until the late 1930s, and the period 1944–1945 when Schindler brought "his" Jews from Plaszow to Brněnec, near Svitavy. In addition, from a political point of view she was the most important among all those who reacted to the film, since she was a member of the Czech Parliament and used history connected to the "Sudeten German question" even there on some other occasions.

In her book *Legendy a fakta o Oskaru Schindlerovi* ('Legends and Facts about Oskar Schindler'), published in two editions in 1997 and 2002, Jitka Gruntová presented new evidence about Schindler's personality and drew four main conclusions. Firstly, Oskar Schindler was not a man who sympathised with the Nazi regime mainly as part of a business strategy. Rather, his sympathy was genuine. In the late 1930s he worked for Germany as an agent against both the Czechoslovak Republic and Poland. Gruntová brought new evidence about how the Czechoslovak police investigated Schindler's spy activities and how Schindler himself confessed them already before the beginning of the Second World War. The occupation of Czechoslovakia and the outbreak of the war saved him from all possible punishments from the Czechoslovak authorities.[21]

Secondly, in her research Gruntová also studied the activities of Schindler's factory that, in fact, was a concentration camp in Brünnlitz/Brněnec (an affiliated camp to the main one in Gross-Rosen) during the period 1944–1945, when "Schindler's Jews" were working there. She came to the conclusion that life there was by no means better than in other similar concentration camps on Czech territory. The death rate was even among the highest. She additionally showed that the opening of this concentration camp had been planned even before Schindler's decision to transport the prisoners there from Poland, and thus cannot be explained as an individual step in order to transfer a private business from one place to another. In that case, Gruntová concluded, the decision did not emanate from Schindler's good will. Schindler was not an initiator of it; he just wanted only to make the best of the situation while the Red Army was approaching Plaszow.[22]

Thirdly, Gruntová also refused to admit that war production in Brněnec was only fictitious and that Schindler, in fact, let the prisoners fake the war production. According to her, referring to some Czech witnesses from the area, Schindler's factory in Brněnec produced normal weapons for the Third Reich until the very end of the Second World War II.[23]

Last, but not least, taking the famous document called "Schindler's List," Gruntová analysed no less than eight different versions of it that all had a direct connection to "Schindler's" concentration camp in Brněnec. The very first one, dated October 21, 1944, was made on the basis of the number of prisoners and contained 700

names. The numbers started with 68,854 and ended with 74,695. This, according to Gruntová, did not show any special selection of the prisoners. A similar case was another list, made on November 12, 1944. All the other lists were written in the following year of 1945 with two exceptions, which were undated.[24] On the basis of these lists, Gruntová defined several groups of prisoners, reaching a conclusion that only a minority of them were chosen personally by Schindler. In such cases, they were people he needed for his various interests, while others had been chosen for humane reasons.

Combining her ideological standpoint with her research, once, commenting the Schindler monument in Svitavy, she stated: "It is a great shame that this Nazi has a monument in Svitavy." In the same interview, she added a comment about the fact that Oskar Schindler became one of "the Righteous" in Israel, suggesting a kind of conspiracy behind his appraisal: "In the same year, there was an Eichmann trial in Israel. It was very diplomatic to present a contradictory, i.e. good German to the world."[25] Schindler, however, was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in Israel in 1967,[26] while the Eichmann trial took place in the same country six years earlier. Paying no attention to that, and presenting no evidence at all on the subject, she repeated this statement several times, even in the programme "Fakta" on Czech Television in 1999.[27]

Thanks to her research, Gruntová indeed brought some quite new facts to light, but even gave the Czech resistance against Schindler a "scientific ground." Presenting herself and presented by others as a "professional historian," she became "the Schindler expert" of the Czech Republic. That helped her to get a lot of attention in various media – she was asked and quoted in most instances that named the Schindler case, in both the daily press and television.[28] As takes the problems of the "Schindler myth," as it was presented by Thomas Keneally and Steven Spielberg, Gruntová in fact came to a similar conclusion as American historian David Crowe, the author of the first (and so far the only) complete scholarly biography of Oskar Schindler that included all periods and places of his life. In fact, David Crowe partly used Gruntová's research in his work, too. Paradoxically, however, the two came to quite different conclusions on the question of whether Schindler saved Jewish lives or not and whether he deserved any respect at all. Crowe indeed considers Schindler to be a hero who saved more than 1,000 Jewish prisoners' lives. This heroism was not earned by his direct participation with the list, but by his will to risk his own life and fortune in order to get permission to bring the Jewish prisoners from Plaszow to Brněnec. His decisive act took place outside Czech territory (i.e. outside the then Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia) in 1944, and had nothing to do with his Czech-German background.

Formally, Gruntová was not a member of any political party, but agreed to became a candidate for the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, a successor to the former totalitarian party from the Communist period, in various elections on various levels. In 2002, still officially politically independent, she even became a Communist deputy in the Czech parliament in Prague. In her political opposition against the Sudeten-German "Landsmannschaft," Jitka Gruntová even became one of the three deputies who in 2003 initiated a new controversial Czech law praising former Czechoslovak president Edvard Beneš and his contribution to the Czechoslovak state. Even though the law does not explicitely thank Beneš for the "transfer" of Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia, its proposal was presented at a time when the Czech campaign against new activities and demands of the Sudeten-German organisation reached its peak in the post-Cold War Czech Republic. During the pre-election campaign to Czech parliamentary elections in 2002, the anti-Sudeten arguments played an important role, and in the 2003 presidential elections the new Czech president Václav Klaus, who replaced outgoing Václav Havel, was partly elected due to his intensive anti-Sudeten propaganda. In this way Klaus, as a conservative candidate representing Czech post-communist capitalist thinking, was even able to get votes from the deputies of the Communist Party, including Jitka Gruntová. The law about Beneš was widely understood and discussed as just another demonstration of the Czech official non-compromise attitude and refusal of self-reflexion on the Sudeten-German question.

In several dozen articles, published during the whole first decade after 1993 and written either directly by her, or at least containing her quotes and comments, Jitka Gruntová never placed Schindler in other contexts than the Czech-German one; never used testimonies

of other witnesses but the Czech ones, and never analysed him within a Holocaust narrative. She also admitted that her attitude to Schindler included even very personal, existential aspects. As interviewed for the TV documentary film *Zatykač na Oskara Schindlera* (Arrest Warrant for Oskar Schindler), she compared the story of her own family to Schindler's, saying:

> My father was arrested by the Gestapo on September 1, 1939. He was kept prisoned in a concentration camp. Thanks to a skilful lawyer, it was possible to ransom my father for a lot of money. My dad had to give two houses to the Third Reich, the family had to sell a car and a collection of coins. All that went to one Gestapo official that helped my father to get back his freedom. Thanks to that, I could be born. When I once told this story to my daughter a long time ago, she told me a naive infant sentence: Mom, you have to be grateful to this Gestapo-man for your very existence. I have never felt any gratitude to that man, never had any such idea. It is not about saving human lives when a man does something like this for money. What did Schindler do? He did not save people. He traded with human lives.

Jitka Gruntová's categorical rejection of the "Schindler legend" found the support of another Czech historian, Jaroslav Valenta. In the periodical *Soudobé dějiny* ('Contemporary History'), published by the Institute of Contemporary History in Prague,[29] Valenta praised Gruntová's work. At the same time, he criticised the attention given to Gruntova´s book from the side of the Sudeten Germans.[30] Their attention, according to Valenta, was "incompetent" and "pseudo-historical."[31] Gruntová, on the other hand, "did not use her sources selectively." Showing very clearly that even his viewpoint was primarily based on a Czech-German ethnic dimension, and that even for him the Holocaust was actually not the most important point of the Schindler story, Valenta added another criticism against a Czech historian and author of a smaller book about Oskar Schindler, Radoslav Fikejz. Pointing at Fikejz's rather liberal evaluation of Schindler´s activity during the early stages of the Second World War, Valenta wrote: "I would not expect such a hyper-tolerant attitude of declared treason from a Czech historian."[32]

Invisible Schindler Histories – Fear, Hesitation and Compromise

With regard to Czech scholars, it might seem surprising that all "heavyweights" among the historians were completely absent from the discussion. While there were very few of them who could be described as Holocaust researchers, many specialised in Czech-German relations. There was, for example, a special commission of Czechoslovak and German historians, established before Czechoslovakia's breakdown in the early 1990s by the ministers for foreign affairs, and later continuing its work, divided into Czech-German and Slovak-German commissions. However, none of its Czech members found it worthwhile to present their opinion in connection with *Schindler's List* in the Czech media, even though many of the discussed subjects obviously would have been relevant even for these historians. None of the historians who in 2002 wrote the widely discussed book *Rozumět dějinám* ('To Understand History') about the Czech-Germans in Czechoslovakia (actually written as an order from the Czech government in its campaign against Jörg Haider in Austria and the Sudeten-German "Landsmannschaft" in Bayern, Germany) showed any activity. Due to this absence, any broader scholarly perspective than the one suggested by Jitka Gruntová was missing. The reason may be that the main task for historians, according to Czech standards at that time, was to write "real history" based on archive materials and source criticism, and not participate in media discussions. For a long time, it was only Gruntová who was dealing with primary sources about Schindler. In 1999, she was accompanied by historian Mečislav Borák, who, however, wrote only a script for a TV documentary on Schindler. Here, too, Borák dealt with some primary sources and witness testimonies describing a limited part of Schindler's life and his activities in the Ostrava region near the Czech-Polish border during the late 1930s and the rest of the war. Even Borák confirmed the fact that Schindler worked as an agent for Germany against Czechoslovakia and Poland, but he did not reach any further conclusion regarding Schindler's activities within the context of the Holocaust. Nor did he question or condemn Schindler generally, as Gruntová had.

None of these scholars recognised the problem with Schindler's legacy as primarily one of collective memory, historical consciousness and a clash of historical cultures. There were very few – if any – interdisciplinary studies related to history and no research studying history from just these points of view, even though Jan Křen, a prominent Czech historian dealing with Czech-German relations, already in 1990 published a whole book about "white spots in Czech history."[33] However, even Křen´s book became primarily an appeal to historians to make a complete critical reconstruction of some crucial periods of the controversial Czech recent past, rather than an attempt to look at history from any other than just a chronological perspective.[34]

Another unexpectedly "invisible" group in the Schindler discussion were leading Czech politicians, including the president Václav Havel. While the US president Bill Clinton urged people to watch *Schindler's List*, Havel, who became one of the greatest symbols of freedom-fighting and against dictatorship in the post-communist world, did not make any comment on the film at all in order to mark his own standpoint, or to use the Holocaust lesson for education leading to democracy and tolerance. Thus, the only public reaction from the highest political leadership of the country came in 1994 from Prime Minister Václav Klaus, the leader of the Conservative Party ODS. He did not make a voluntary choice to speak but was forced to react to the scandal provoked by the right-extremist protests of the "Republicans" against Schindler's Svitavy memorial in parliament. In response to a SPR-RSC:s deputy in the Czech Parliament, Klaus stated that it was for the courts to assess the view that the unveiling of a plaque to Oskar Schindler meant a criminal act of support and dissemination of a movement striving to suppress the rights of citizens. It was solely up to the local people to assess this specific activity of the local government, Klaus said, presenting the whole problem as clearly only a judicial matter. Thus, even though the SPR-RSC did not achieve any success with its activity against Oskar Schindler after all, it was impossible to see what human, political and other possible values might be connected to *Schindler's List* in the heads of those responsible for building the new Czech democratic system.

There were other groups that could be considered as likely participants in the debate but instead remained silent. Those Czech-Germans who remained in Czechoslovakia during the whole post-war period stood close to Schindler's story and could be expected to at least try to express their own view. With regard to the post-war historical context, however, the Czech-German silence was in fact not surprising at all. Even the onset of the 1990s did not mean any rapid change in this aspect. Reactions that could be classified as "Czech-German" were not only missing in Schindler's case, but even in such important moments as when Václav Havel, just elected as President in the end of 1989, very surprisingly suggested for the first time that the Czechs should apologise to the Sudeten Germans for their "wild expulsion" right after the war.[35]

The situation of the Czech-Germans in the early 1990s can be illustrated by the following facts and figures: In 1921, there were more than 3.2 million Czech Germans in Czechoslovakia; three million of them in the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia.[36] After the Munich Treaty and the occupation of Czech lands by Germany, the "Sudeten Germans" became citizens of the Third Reich. When the transfer of the Germans was officially declared completed by the restored Czechoslovakia in the first two years after the Second World War, only 240,000 Czech-Germans were allowed to stay. This does not mean, however, that these people were seen as non-problematic by the Czechoslovak authorities and citizens. The Czech government wished to send more Germans "home" to Germany but was not allowed to do so by the Allies.[37] Despite that, some more Germans were forced to leave anyway during the late 1940s. As historians have reminded us, among those driven out of Czechoslovakia were also German anti-Nazis and even German Jews returning from the concentration camps.[38] Official statistics from 1950 spoke about 165,000 Germans remaining in Czechoslovakia, i.e. 1.3 per cent of the population.[39] Even though Czechoslovakia gave a kind of "amnesty" to at least part of Germany – the Eastern, Communist-led one – the ideology demonising the "revanchist threat" from West Germany, as well as continuous distrust, made the position of remaining Czech-Germans continuously complicated during Communist rule! The number of remaining Czech-Germans decreased further during the late 1960s when many people emigrated. By the early 1990s, the Ger-

man minority consisted of less than 50,000. Sociologist Eva Stehlíková has observed that this remaining German minority is very heterogeneous. There is no typical "German region" or even political and cultural agenda in the country. Perhaps more surprisingly, the Czech-Germans can hardly be described as generally pro-German. To a large extent, they have been assimilated in Czech society, and some were not even fluent in German.[40] The Czech public debate about *Schindler's List* does not seem to have had any visual effect on the life and image of the German minority in the Republic at all.

Another important minority, the Czech-Jewish one, was in some respects in a similar situation. There were not many reactions to *Schindler's List* from the side of the Czech-Jews. A possible reason might be that Jewish organisations were not very strong and influential in Bohemia and Moravia at that time, and that open manifestations of collective Jewish identity were not welcome during a long period of Communist rule until 1989. Furthermore, Czech-Jews were isolated from the international debate about the Holocaust during most of the Communist period and were occupied by different problems than Jews in the West. It is therefore difficult to estimate the priority given to the memory of the Holocaust among Czech-Jews right after the collapse of the Communist system, and whether the silence might be motivated by their fear of possible counter-reaction and repression.

The generational aspect is moreover relevant, too, since it is very difficult to analyse the level of the younger Jewish generations' knowledge of the Jewish genocide during the Second World War. The young Jews got their formal education in the same official schools as their non-Jewish counterparts, i.e. within the framework of communist ideology, and had no free and independent space in which they could express their thoughts, beliefs and feelings before 1989.[41] It is likely that the Jewish generations of the children of Holocaust survivors were better educated about the Nazi genocide of the Jews than other non-Jewish children in Czechoslovakia, due particularly to the histories communicated within their own families. However, such a private education was not quite automatic for all the Jews either, as the case of the Czech-born US secretary of state Madeleine Albright might suggest. Those families who could convert or manage to hide their Jewish identity during the Nazi period might have chosen to continue to do so even in the post-war era. If Madeleine Albright's Czech parents could do so during their US exile, it is even more plausible that this was the case for similar families in Communist Czechoslovakia, especially after the anti-Jewish wave of the early 1950s.[42] Even the official Czech-Jewish periodical *Roš Chodeš* dedicated very little space to the film. The only exception to this rule was an interview with the distinguished historian of the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg, in which he expressed his understanding for the success of the film. The interview was not originally carried out by the Czech-Jewish periodical, but by French journalists, and translated into Czech after being published in the French press.[43]

In this situation, the Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon from Prague became, in fact, the only active spokesman of a Jewish opinion about Schindler in the Czech media. The Rabbi did not, however, stress only the "Jewish matter" in his speeches, but primarily emphasised respect for humanity instead, and praised the fact that – even in such very difficult times – an individual was able to save other people's lives. "He proved that it was possible. Everybody who did a similar thing deserves a memorial because he or she would show that is possible to save the others," Sidon said during an opening ceremony when the memorial to Schindler was uncovered in early 1994.[44] Sidon held the same line more or less consistently during the forthcoming years. In 1999, for example, when Czech Television made the already mentioned documentary programme about Oskar Schindler, he said: "He [Schindler] saved a thousand human lives and every life is very precious. It does not matter what he was like in private, no matter where he grew up or where he came from. The human lives were the only thing that mattered."[45]

In the same documentary, however, recalling the events from 1994, Sidon even disclosed some previously unknown details from the opening of the Schindler memorial in Svitavy five years earlier. He admitted that he was more or less forced to make a speech and uncover the memorial, since all other Czech guests present at the ceremony were afraid and lacked the courage to do so. "If Schindler had not been a German but a Czech and if he had done the same thing, he would probably have been much more accepted," the Rabbi added. When, for Sidon himself, the ethnicity of Oskar Schindler was not a decisive factor, the

same could be said about his presentation of the ethnicity of victims, i.e. the Jewish prisoners. Sidon did not speak about the importance of saving Jewish lives during the Holocaust, but about the importance of saving human lives during the war. Thus, he did not even stress a special place for the Jews among other victims of the Nazi regime. The all-human aspect of Schindler's act was the most important for him, which made his words acceptable in all parts of Czech society and led to no criticism and no strong reaction from other participants in the debate, including even the most extreme ones.

The last group I want to mention here as "uncertain" or perhaps "careful" in its interpretation of Schindler is a small group of witnesses who personally remembered Oskar Schindler or his relatives, his factory in Brněnec, and "his" Jews from the time of the Second World War. There were some local voices that appeared in the debate with their testimonies. All of them were searched out by either journalists or researchers, which meant that their testimonies were in all cases interpreted and used by others. The messages from the testimonies, however, were not easy to decipher at all. In the most paradoxical case, one witness testimony was used both to give credit to Oskar Schindler and to disprove "the Schindler legend."

During the last years of the Second World War, Cecilia Niederlová lived next to Schindler's factory in Brněnec. While interviewed by the German daily newspaper *Berliner Morgenpost* in March 1994, she remembered the prisoners speaking very nicely about Schindler. They were grateful to him for their lives," she said.[46] Also Jitka Gruntová met Cecilia Niederlová and used her words to prove that "the Schindler legend" was not based on real facts. In her book, published in 2002, Gruntová wrote: "Cecilie Niederlová says that she used to see Schindler in his office, wearing the uniform of the SS [...] In 1994, she related it to many journalists, but this important testimony – confirmed even by her husband – was refused by them and considered as impossible."[47] Niederlová's memories are further used to prove that Schindler stole "a huge, huge amount of Jewish goods" from the Jews and stored it in his Brněnec factory.[48] There are, however, no details as to how and where the Jewish prisoners, who after "aryanisations" of their properties and three years of the ongoing process of the "Final Solution" came in the end of the war in very poor condition from Cracow to Brněnec by goods trains, got this "huge, huge amount of Jewish goods" that was so evident even for an outsider. No matter, Niederlová is said to also question the good conditions of the Schindler Jews in the factory: When Niederlová once tried to throw an apple to a Jewish prisoner, an SS officer immediately ran to her and forbade her to do it."[49]

Cecilia Niederlová was not the only "problematic" source among the direct witnesses and survivors in the Czech Republic.[50] The atmosphere of the public discussions about Schindler influenced and even scared other Czech witnesses. Some journalists wrote that people who remembered Schindler were afraid of their neighbours. "I have not found a single witness who was not afraid of speaking about Schindler as a good man. Somebody always threatens them afterwards," the liberal daily *Mladá Fronta* wrote soon after *Schindler's List*'s first Czech appearance.[51] Another liberal periodical, *Reflex*, mentioned one woman who was the only Czech survivor of Schindler's concentration camp in Brněnec[52]: "A former prisoner No. 76408 does not want to let the others in the small city of Svitavy know too much about her." His article was illustrated by a photo where "Mrs. 76408" could not be recognised. Her face was digitally masked by a computer, as was the face of her husband. Nevertheless, the readers got to know that the last name of the lady was Mrs. Reicherová. In the article, she did not speak about Schindler at all.

Since Gruntová, too, met the same survivor in person, I could later learn that Mrs. Bluma Reichertová (spelled differently than in *Reflex*) changed her name a long time ago, after her marriage. Thus the name Reichertová was in fact her maiden name. Anyway, from Gruntová's work, the reader can never learn what Mrs. Reichertová thought about Schindler, either. Once Mrs. Rechertová mentioned with a kind of sympathy "a man in civilian clothes" who tried to help the prisoners in Brněnec, without specifying whether it really was Schindler. Two pages later in the book, Reichertová was quoted as just saying that "some liked Schindler, some did not."[53]

All these indications suggest that none of the minorities or groups standing closest to Schindler's time and life on Czech territory have found it worthwhile to profile themselves clearly in the Czech Schindler debate. Neither the Jews nor the German-Czechs found the

Schindler debate crucial for sharpening their own historical consciousness and collective identity. Thus, with the exception of Chief Rabbi Karol Sidon, they remained almost unnoticed.

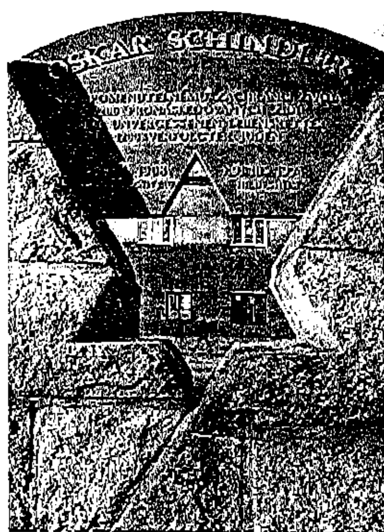
Schindler? Allow Him In!

In a chronological order, most positive Czech reactions to Oskar Schindler came in the beginning of the whole discussion. The first of this kind focused more on the success of *Schindler's List* than on the authenticity and moral standard of Schindler's personality or other factors. For authors of these articles – mostly reviewers of the film – *Schindler's List* was taken as a work of art based on a real story.[54] Some reactions, however, were almost immediately suggesting that the film should be used as a "bridge over troubled waters" between Czechs and Germans. Only some days after the opening in Svitavy and Prague, the daily *Český deník* understood the film as well as Schindler's memorial as a "step on a way to rapprochement":

> The Town of Svitavy lacks historical memory, since 90 per cent of its inhabitants have lived here only since 1945. The discussion about the act will not end by uncovering the memorial plaque. This is the moment of necessary self-reflection about new forms of relations between people speaking different languages. It is also an impulse to thinking about our own identity, about our place in the democratic community of advanced European countries,"

the newspaper quoted the Svitavy mayor Jiří Brídl.[55] Some authors even wanted to see the film in a broader context as a pedagogic lesson for the prevention of genocide: "It is important for us, because Schindler was a Sudeten German, it is important for the whole world because it is important to realise right now, at the time of the Serbian rage, what genocide is all about," the liberal daily *Reflex* wrote early in 1994.[56] In the summer of 1994, the daily *Mladá Fronta Dnes* even saw the film as the end of the old Czech perception of the ethnic Czech-German conflict and the old communist view of the problem:

> The case of a Nazi and Jew saviour Oskar Schindler could teach us to be more critical towards our past... It is obvious that the general condemnations of the Sudeten Germans cannot last forever, even though far from everybody will be – just because of Schindler – willing to revise the simplifying indoctrinations brought to us by the Communist regime.[57]



Oskar Schindler's monument in the Czech town Svitavy, with a front section of the house where Schindler was born on April 24, 1908. Photo: Tomas Sniegon.

On a scholarly level, two local historians from Svitavy with a partly similar professional background to Jitka Gruntová showed a rather liberal attitude to Oskar Schindler and wanted to use his act, not for Holocaust research or memory, but for the purposes of improving Czech-German relations. The first of these two men was Radoslav Fikejz, whom I have already mentioned as a criticised "non-patriot" by historian Jaroslav Valenta. The second was Milan Štrych. Both of them worked during some time as historians of the Svitavy town museum, where even Gruntová once used to work. Both Fikejz and Štrych, however, took much less part in the debate than Gruntová. In an interview from 1994, published in *Týdeník*, Radoslav Fikejz, then only a student of history, said:

> There are still many people in our country who understand history in terms of collective guilt [...] It is important to draw a line between the past and the present, to start a new chapter and forget national animosities. I think that Schindler especially could be the one who brings reconciliation between the Czechs and the Germans.[58]

Fikejz wrote a study about Schindler, first as a thesis at the Masaryk University in Brno. For this work, he was given an award by the Czech Minister of Education as the "talent of the year 1997." Later, the study was published by the Museum in Svitavy,[59] but did not get as much attention as Gruntová's book in the Czech press. Nor was it available nationwide but only in the Svitavy Museum. Nevertheless, even Fikejz formulated his studies on some archive materials and interviews with the survivors, but on a much smaller scale than Jitka Gruntová. He leaned heavily on an unpublished study by the English researcher Robin O'Neil and came to some quite opposite conclusions to Gruntová: Although both Keneally and Spielberg distorted the story, the core of it – that Schindler intended to save and in fact saved the Jewish prisoners – was real. While saving Jewish lives, Schindler did not act only as a businessman, but also as a man of honour. Fikejz also pointed out that Schindler did not need to "re-write" his own history by the end of the Second World War in order to save his own skin, as Gruntová claimed, because he had had a chance to save his own life earlier in 1944, through emigration to Switzerland, but he had refused.[60]

Fikejz, contrary to Gruntová, was generally very enthusiastic about Schindler in his conclusions: "Oskar Schindler became a great personality just at the same time as he managed to take over the responsibility not only for himself, but also for others. His action balanced out all the negative sides of his life."[61] Thus Schindler's courage in relation to his prisoners overshadowed the negative sides shown during the eve and subsequent first years of the war. At the end of his work, Fikejz even touched upon one more sensitive point when he wrote: "Not only can Oskar Schindler himself get credit for the people in Brněnec. The local population in Brněnec, too, supported the prisoners – no matter whether they were Czechs or Germans." Schindler's life, according to Fikejz, "overcame a presumption about the badness of the whole German nation." Schindler's act, not Schindler's life, becomes an appeal to future generations, Fikejz concluded, combining a scholarly and a pedagogic use of history.[62]

Milan Štrych was quoted by the national liberal daily *Lidové noviny* as giving the same message: "Schindler – it is our opportunity to reach reconciliation."[63] This article was even published before the opening of *Schindler's List* in the Czech Republic. The two journalists who wrote the text finished it with the following words:

> Together with the most important thing – that human lives were saved – the case of Schindler, although still open, brought together all elements into one theme: demarcation lines are drawn neither between nations and political parties, nor between religions. There are not even clear lines in our own minds. Black or white, negative or positive, everybody can in his or her life do something that matters.

A general problem with all these positive reactions to *Schindler's List* was their temporary character. As the enthusiasm from the film soon decreased, so did calls to use the film for the "democratic education" of Czech society and for a new self-reflection in terms of Czech national identity. The opponents, headed by Gruntová, were on the contrary much more consistent in the long run. With new evidence about Schindler's guilt in his relation to the Czech nation emerging, it made the initial effort to use Spielberg's film for self-reflective purposes look like a temporary effort of incompletely informed enthusiasts.

During most of the period of my study, which means between 1994 and 2003, the problem of the Holocaust was pictured as secondary in the Czech debate about *Schindler's List*, if it was recognised at all. I cannot say that Schindler was condemned entirely for who he was and not what he did, since he was condemned to a large extent for his own Nazi activities. Nevertheless, his ethnic origin played a very important role in all discussions and helped in the end rather to widen the gap than to bridge it. Besides, *Schindler's List* never led to crucial discussions about such questions as the behaviour of "ordinary Czechs" during the Holocaust or the tragic history of the Czech (or former Czechoslovak) Jews, in order to prevent antisemitism.

Thus, the debate about *Schindler's List*, which in fact was the first extensive debate in the new-born Czech Republic initiated entirely by the Holocaust and its memory, has never become a turning point for Czech self-reflection, neither regarding the Holocaust nor the Sudeten Germans. During the first decade after the "Velvet Divorce," the arguments against Schindler proved to be much "heavier" than some attempts to use Schindler in order to influence Czech historical culture.

I found the need to confirm the understanding of the Czech na-

tion as a collective victim of the much bigger and stronger German neighbour prevailing in the debate. It was accompanied by silent approval or at least absent opposition from most of the new post-communist elites and from the main groups involved. Old stereotypes, valid during the whole post-war period, seemed to be too stable in comparison to attempts to challenge them. Put differently, *Schindler's List* as a history-cultural impulse was not strong enough to successfully challenge old perceptions of history.

Notes

1. Schindler died on October 8, 1974 in Hildesheim, Germany, but according to his own wish, he was buried in Jerusalem.
2. Among those who were present in Svitavy during this preview showing were the local politicians, the chief-rabbi in the Czech Republic, Karol Sidon, the ambassadors from Germany and Israel and some representatives of the US Embassy in Prague. None of the creators of *Schindler's List* took part in the Svitavy ceremony.
3. The terms "Sudetenland" and "Sudeten German" were created by the nationalist German politicians, who after 1918 appeared on Czechoslovak territory as a part of Czechoslovakia but actively opposed such a development. The expressions were supposed to stress the unity of Czechoslovakia´s German population. During the following years, the terms got many political undertones: some authors distinguish between "Sudeten Germans" and "Czech Germans" where Czech Germans are those Germans who lived in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia outside the "Sudetenland," i. e. the border areas near Germany and Austria. During the Second World War, when Bohemia and Moravia became an occupied Protectorate, the official "Sudeten district" covered only the regions in the western and northern parts. After the war, when most of the Germans were forced to leave for Germany and Austria, "Sudeten German" became mostly a synonym for all Germans driven out from Czechoslovakia.
4. "Transfer" is a rather neutral expression used in official documents. Many authors, however, speak about "expulsion." Since the same word became an organic part of the vocabulary of the Sudeten German activists, many Czech sources consequently refuse it and continue to speak and write about "odsun," meaning "transfer" or "displacement."
5. Thomas Keneally, *Schindler´s Ark*, 1982, p. 19.
6. Ibid, p. 35.
7. Ibid., pp. 42–43.
8. Ibid., pp. 42–43.
9. Ibid, pp. 35–36.
10. Ibid. p. 37.
11. In fact, even the West German government was taken by surprise in the middle of 1960s. As Liliane Weissberg has noted, politicians there first noticed Oskar Schindler when they learned about the MGM plan to make a film about him. See Liliane Weissberg, "The Tale of a Good German: Reflections on the German Reception of *Schindler's List*," in Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg's Holocaust. Critical Perspectives on* Schindler's List, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press 1997, p. 179.
12. Eva Oliveriusová, "Úspěšný pokus o fúzi mýtu a literatury faktu," *Světová literature* 1986:1, p. 241.
13. Stanislav Motl, "Schindlerův rok," *Reflex* 1994:12.
14. *Reflex* 1999:10, p. 30. This information even appeared in several other newspapers.
15. Oskar Schindler, Nezapomenutelnému zachránci života 1200 pronásledovaných židů.
16. Czech News Agency ČTK, August 9, 1994.
17. –jok–, "Historie falšovaná Oscary," *Politické noviny Republika*.
18. Jiří Frajdl, "Jak si svitavští radní ušili z ostudy kabát," *Hraničář*, January 1998.
19. Jiří Frajdl, "Schindlerovské mýty ukončeny," *Nový zítřek-Levicové noviny* 1997:12. The Henlein Party was a party uniting the Sudeten Germans against the Czechoslovak State in the 1930s.
20. Quoted according to *Týdeník*, the local newspaper in Svitavy, March 9, 1994, p.2. This declaration was published and quoted in several newspapers.
21. Jitka Gruntová, *Legendy a fakta o Oskaru Schindlerovi*, Praha: Naše Vojsko 2002, pp. 14–19 (first published by Barrister & Principal in Brno in 1997).
22. Ibid., pp. 86–130.
23. Ibid., pp. 87–91.
24. Ibid., pp. 63–64.
25. "K pravdě o Schindlerovi se přiblíží až příští generace, míní historička," *MFDnes*, March 30, 1999
26. http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous/bycountry/germany/oskar_schindler.html.
27. In 1961, Oskar Schindler visited Israel for the first time. For more about the circumstances of this visit and its relation to the Eichmann trial, see David Crowe, *Oskar Schindler. The Untold Account of His Life, Wartime Activities, and the True Story Behind the List*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 2004, pp. 493–539.
28. In the preface of the second edition of her book, however, Gruntová described the situation during the first three years after the premiere of the film in quite different terms. According to her, "many our newspapers refused to publish my articles" and "it took a long time for me to find a publishing house that had the courage to help me in my fight against windmills." See Jitka Gruntová 2002, p. 6.
29. Jaroslav Valenta, "Kauza Oskara Schindlera v dvojím pohledux," *Soudobé dějiny*, 1998:2–3, pp. 328–343.
30. Valenta refers to an article by F. Seebauer with the title "Sowjetische Weltsicht konserviert" in *Sudetendeutsche Zeitung*, March 6, 1998, p. 2.
31. Jaroslav Valenta 1998, p. 331.
32. Jaroslav Valenta 1998, p. 337.
33. Jan Křen, "Bílá místa v našich dějinách," *Lidové noviny*, Praha 1990.
34. For an analysis of this state of scholarly historiography, see Jan Stříbrný, "Rezistence a válka v paměti současné české společnosti," in Július Lipták (ed.), *SNP v pamäti národa. Materiály z vedeckej konferencie k 50. výročiu SNP*, Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP 1994, pp. 45–46.
35. Václav Havel was elected as Czech President on December 29, 1989 and made his suggestion repeatedly at the same time, both inside the Czech Republic and during his very first presidential visit abroad that – symbolically – led just to Germany. Havel's idea met great scepticism among most Czech citizens.
36. *Rozumět dějinám*, Praha: Gallery 2002, p. 56.
37. Karel Kaplan, *Pravda o Československu 1945–48*, Praha: Panorama 1990.
38. For more about the situation of the German Jews, see, for example Tomáš Staněk,

"Němečtí židé v Československu 1945–1948," in *Dějiny a současnost* 1991:5, pp. 42–46.
39. Karel Kaplan, *Pravda o Ceskoslovensku 1945–48*, pp. 153–158.
40. Eva Stehlíková, "Aktuální kontexty obrazu Němce a Německa v české společnosti," in Němců Obraz (ed), *Rakouska a Německa v české společnosti 19. a 20. století*, Praha: Karolinum 1998, pp. 253–267.
41. For further discussion about the Holocaust as a part of Czech(oslovak) school education, see Michal Frankl, "Holocaust Education in the Czech Republic, 1989–2002," *Intercultural Education* 2003:2. However, I was unable to find any facts about how much Jews born during the period 1948–1989 actually knew about the Holocaust already during the communist system.
42. Albright discovered her Jewish roots first when she became the US Secretary of State in 1997, and thanks to information brought by an Arab newspaper. Interestingly, her father Joseph Korbel did not mention the Holocaust at all when he wrote a book about the history of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s; see Josef Korbel, *Twentieth Century Czechoslovakia: The Meanings of Its History*, New York, 1997. For more information about the whole Albright affair, see Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary*, New York: Miramax Books 2003, pp. 235–249.
43. *Roš Chodeš*, May 1994, pp. 8–9.
44. Quoted according to the *Daily Express* from March 14, 1994.
45. *Zatykač na Oskara Schindlera*, Czech TV, 1999.
46. Czech News Agency ČTK, March 4, 1994.
47. Jitka Gruntová, "Legendy a fakta o Oskaru Schindlerovi," Naše Vojsko, Prague 2002, p. 121, this quotation translated from Czech by the author.
48. Ibid., p. 93.
49. Ibid., p. 118.
50. In this analysis, I am not studying witnesses from other countries, for example those who helped Keneally and Spielberg in making the film. Writing his novel during the Cold War, Keneally either could not or did not wish to interview Czech/Czechoslovak sources. As far as I know, Spielberg did not attempt to do so either, even if he started filming already after the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia.
51. Štěpánka Králová, "Jeden ze šestatřiceti spravedlivých," *Mladá fronta Dnes*, March 12, 1994.
52. Stanislav Motl, "Schindlerův rok," *Reflex* 1994:12.
53. Jitka Gruntová, "Oskar Schindler, Legendy a fakta," *Naše vojsko*, Praha 2002, pp. 128, 130.
54. See, for example, "Neuvěřitelný a fascinující Schindlerův seznam," *Mladá Fronta*, December 18, 1993.
55. *Český deník*, March 12, 1994, p. 10.
56. "Schindlerův seznam," *Reflex* 1994:13.
57. Martin Schmarz, "Bez Schindlerů bychom to měli jednodušší," *MF Dnes*, August 24, 1994.
58. "Nemyslím si, že Schindler židy zvlášť miloval," Radoslav Fikejz in an interview with *Týdeník*, 1994.
59. Radoslav Fikejz, *Oskar Schindler (1908–1974)*, Svitavy: Městské Muzeum a galerie Svitavy 1998.
60. Ibid., p. 89.
61. Ibid., p. 151.
62. Ibid., p. 153.
63. "Každý svého Schindlera," *Lidové noviny*, February 26, 1994.

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa

The Tale of Szydlowiec

Memory and Oblivion in a Former Shtetl in Poland

Since the fall of Communism, Poland has been shaken by a series of scandals and violent debates which put into question truths and authorities hitherto taken for granted. In view of all the current delicate issues the country has to handle, it is remarkable that the most important debate so far in post-Communist Poland has not been concerned with current affairs but with events that took place about sixty years ago. This debate, known as the Jedwabne affair, was launched in 2000 by the publication of the book *Sąsiedzi, Neighbors*, by the scholar Jan Gross. By documenting a mass-murder committed by Poles on their Jewish neighbours in the small town of Jedwabne on July 10, 1941, Gross confronted Polish society with facts which had not had any place in its collective memory. The author questioned the image that Poles had of themselves as merely passive, helpless witnesses to the Holocaust. He wanted the Poles to discuss antisemitism and their way to remember the Holocaust. The victims of the Holocaust had never been mourned in Poland, he claimed.[1]

Was Gross correct in his statement? The past fifteen years have seen steadily growing research into the memory of the Holocaust in Poland. Most researchers into the subject would probably now agree with the argument put by Michael Steinlauf, among others, that the Poles had during the post-war years "Polonised" the Holocaust. What occurred was that the emphasis was soon placed on the Poles' own suffering during the war. Auschwitz became a symbol of Polish martyrdom, and the majority of Poles until recently believed that Auschwitz was first and foremost a place where Poles had been killed.[2] Steinlauf demonstrated how the memory of Jewish life and annihilation in Poland was pushed aside in the public discourse,