



The Jew Is to Be Burned: A Turning Point in the Communist Approach to the “Jewish Question” on the Eve of Catastrophe

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Abstract Otto Heller, the Austrian-Czech-German communist intellectual of Jewish origin, was known almost exclusively for his 1931 orthodox Marxist book, *Der Untergang des Judentums* (*The Decline of Judaism*). A recently rediscovered unpublished manuscript of a second book on the “Jewish Question,” written by Heller in 1939 and entitled *Der Jude wird verbrannt* (*The Jew Is to Be Burned*), sheds new light on the man and his work. Furthermore, the unknown manuscript, as one of the longest communist accounts of the Jewish Question and antisemitism from that period, reveals a substantial turning point in the history of the communist discussion on those issues. Existing scholarship has identified novel political stances among communists, such as recognizing the Jews as a nation and as unique victims of Nazism only from 1942 onwards. Although Heller did not express such far-reaching political views in this lost manuscript, he did introduce an original theoretical approach to the Jewish Question. This article analyzes Heller’s theoretical innovations as early intellectual precursors of later dramatic developments in the communist political discourse.

Keywords Otto Heller · Marxism · Communism · The Jewish Question · Antisemitism

On August 20, 1939, during his exile in Paris, the Austrian-Czech-German Jewish communist writer, Otto Heller, finished revising the manuscript of his second book on the Jewish Question. The subtitle was already typed: *Studien zur Juden- und Rassenfrage* (*Studies on the Jewish and Racial Question*). He had left the main title undetermined until the very last moment and only then, twelve days before the outbreak of World War Two, handwrote the heading: *Der Jude wird verbrannt* (*The Jew Is to Be Burned*). As the Holocaust unfolded this title became tragically prophetic, both in a general sense and for Heller himself as he was murdered in a concentration camp only a month before liberation. Considering the circumstances of war, his manuscript could not be published and subsequently had a peculiar history of its own. It was lost during the war and was found only in 1967 in the *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes* (DÖW; The Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance) in Vienna.¹ Several years ago, the

¹Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes, Vienna (DÖW), 3652: Otto Heller, *Der Jude wird verbrannt* [typescript]; 3834: Emma Heller, “Biographie d’Otto Heller,” 3.

document mysteriously disappeared again, and only after a protracted search I succeeded in discovering a photocopy in the archives of the *Akademie der Künste* (Academy of Arts) in Berlin, thus making this research possible.²

Der Jude wird verbrannt (hereafter *Der Jude*) is of special interest as its author was already well known for his 1931 book, *Der Untergang des Judentums* (*The Decline of Judaism*), in which he portrayed the Jews as a merchant caste and hence predicted their complete assimilation into capitalist society.³ *Der Untergang des Judentums* (hereafter *Der Untergang*) established Heller as the preeminent authority on Jewish issues among German-speaking communists. Heller's second manuscript on the same topic, written eight years later, sheds light not only on the author's unresearched biography but also on the broader intellectual, political, and historical arena. *Der Jude*, one of the longest accounts (271 pages) on the Jewish Question by a communist writer, was written at a critical moment in history. Heller's virtually unknown manuscript appears to be a missing piece, crucial for reconstructing the history of the Marxist and especially the communist discussion of Judaism, Jewish history, and antisemitism.

The main argument of this article is that *Der Jude* represents a substantial shift in the history of the communist framing of the Jewish Question during the period of the Third Reich. Existing scholarship on this matter, primarily by Jeffery Herf and David Bankier, identified a shift in the communist approach, toward recognition of the Jews as a nation and as unique victims of Nazism only from 1942 against the backdrop of the mass murder of Jews.⁴ The rediscovery of Heller's lost manuscript shows that key features of this shift emerged among communists earlier than hitherto assumed, albeit in a more latent manner. *Der Jude* appears to be a transitional text, a precursor of a most dramatic transition.

²Akademie der Künste, Berlin (AdK), Schlenstedt 94.1: Otto Heller, *Der Jude wird verbrannt*. I would like to thank the archivists in both the DÖW and AdK archives for their efforts in searching for the manuscript, and especially to historian John Bunzl and journalist Edgar Schütz for their help.

³Otto Heller, *Der Untergang des Judentums: Die Judenfrage, ihre Kritik, ihre Lösung durch den Sozialismus* (Vienna/Berlin, 1931). A second edition, revised and extended, was published in 1933. References are to the first edition unless specified otherwise. *Judentum* in German may refer to either Judaism or Jewry. Since the book does not refer to the end of the Jews themselves, but of Judaism as an "historical category" (ibid., 17), I translated it as *The Decline of Judaism*.

⁴Jeffrey Herf, "German Communism, the Discourse of 'Antifascist Resistance,' and the Jewish Catastrophe," in *Resistance against the Third Reich*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago, 1994), 257–24; David Bankier, "'Ha-Germanim ha-Ḥofshiyim' ve-ha-Kehila ha-Yehudit be-Mexico: Le-Reshit ha-Maga'im beyn ha-Komunizm ve-ha-Ṣionut be-Shnot ha-Arba'im," in *Hitler, the Holocaust and German Society: Allied and Aware*, ed. David Bankier (Jerusalem, 2007), 271–90.

In his introduction, Heller expressed an understanding that he was witnessing a historical “crossroad”:

The Jewish Question is an organic component of the general abnormality of our society. Above all it affects the great majority of Jews themselves through distress, misery and grievance. On the crossroad between barbarism and the advancement toward higher forms of social order, it arises anew with unprecedented sharpness.⁵

Besides the explicit notion of a “crossroad,” these sentences illustrate a mixture of old and new discourses. On the one hand, the text continues what historian Enzo Traverso called the “traditional Marxist conception”⁶ of the Jewish Question as only one of many manifestations of the general social question and of antisemitism as a mere primitive reminiscence of the so-called “barbarism.” On the other hand, it acknowledges the uniqueness of Jewish suffering and subsequently identifies “antisemitism, and especially its most gruesome, despicable and dangerous form of National Socialist race-antisemitism” as “an assault on all of humanity.”⁷

How did those two opposite voices exist side by side within one text, one person, and one movement? This article addresses this question through analyzing *Der Jude* as the textual embodiment of a historical ramification of two opposite positions toward the Jewish Question within communism during the Nazi era. *Der Jude* provides evidence that the two roads already diverged during “The Catastrophe before the Catastrophe” (the aggressive persecution of Austrian and German Jews in 1938–1939),⁸ and not only during “the catastrophe,” the Holocaust. Based on *Der Jude*, this article fills a gap in the current knowledge of the communist discussion on the Jewish Question and suggests new insights regarding the complex nature of its development.

The article begins by setting the scene of the Marxist and communist discussions on the Jewish Question and antisemitism from the late nineteenth century until the 1930s. Subsequently, Heller is positioned in that scene through a biographical sketch focusing on his two major works on Jewish topics: *Der Untergang* as an expression of the erstwhile communist approach and *Der Jude* as a precursor to the new trends. The core of the article reveals the novelties introduced by *Der Jude* through comparing it to the earlier *Der Untergang*.

⁵Heller, *Der Jude*, 4.

⁶Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question: The History of a Debate, 1843–1943*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (New Jersey, 1994), 58–69, 76–87, 129–46, 195. The quotation is from 195.

⁷Heller, *Der Jude*, 6.

⁸Dan Diner, “The Catastrophe before the Catastrophe,” in *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Diner (Berkeley, CA, 2000), 78–94.

The comparison focuses on two interconnected questions that both texts deal with: (1) What was the relationship between capitalism and the Jews, and how should the Jews be categorized in terms of class?; and (2) What were the driving forces of antisemitism? Heller's treatment of these questions is analyzed against the background of influential contemporary views beyond the boundaries of the Marxist discourse—the Sombart-Weber controversy over the relation between capitalism and the Jews and the Zionist interpretation of antisemitism, respectively. The tensions and contradictions revealed within *Der Jude* are then interpreted through the text's enigmatic and unexplained title: *The Jew Is to Be Burned*. Last, *Der Jude* is examined in the context of the new trends that emerged in the communist discussion of the Jewish Question during the 1940s.

Prologue: Marxists and Communists on the “Jewish Question” until the 1930s

Karl Marx did not bequeath to his disciples an unequivocal conception of the Jewish Question. His early article, “Zur Judenfrage” (“On the Jewish Question”),⁹ became highly controversial among Marxists, due to the antisemitic whiff equating the Jews with the bourgeoisie.¹⁰ Moreover, some of his later scattered statements on the subject paved the way for an opposite interpretation, identifying a contrast between the Jews and the bourgeoisie.¹¹ During the period of the Second International (1889–1914), the Marxist discussion on the Jewish Question intensified against the backdrop of emerging modern antisemitism, both in the German-speaking sphere and in Czarist Russia with its large Jewish population.

Scholars from the Cold War period, such as Edmund Silberner, Julius Carlebach, and Robert Wistrich, tended to portray a more or less monolithic image of Marxism as inclined to anti-Jewish stances.¹² Since the 1990s, however, historians such as Jack Jacobs, Enzo Traverso, and Lars

⁹Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” [1844], in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York, 1978), 26–46.

¹⁰Lars Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (New York, 2007), 56–102. The question of whether Marx's “On the Jewish Question” should be read as an antisemitic text has been exhaustively discussed. For a recent discussion, see Robert Fine and Philip Spencer, *Antisemitism and the Left: On the Return of the Jewish Question* (Manchester, 2017), 31–40.

¹¹Chad Goldberg, *Modernity and the Jews in Western Social Thought* (Chicago, 2017), 48–54.

¹²Edmund Silberner, *The Anti-Semitic Tradition in Modern Socialism* (Jerusalem, 1953); Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London, 1978); Robert S. Wistrich, *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (London, 1976).

Fischer, showed the diverse spectrum of Marxist approaches to the Jewish Question—from assimilationism (e.g., Karl Kautsky) to Jewish nationalism (e.g., Ber Borochov), including neutralist stances on the question of Jewish nationalism (e.g., Vladimir Medem). They also showed the diversity of approaches in Marxist attitudes toward antisemitism: from anti-Jewish implications (e.g., Viktor Adler), through overt neutrality between antisemitism and philosemitism (e.g., Franz Mehring), to a fervent anti-antisemitism (e.g., Eduard Bernstein).¹³

Following the Bolshevik revolution and the split between the communist and socialist parties, the communist branch of Marxist discourse on the Jewish Question became much more homogeneous. As with many other issues, a selective set of statements regarding the Jewish Question by certain Marxist theoreticians and leaders became acknowledged as the “orthodox” Marxist view. Kautsky, who was a pivotal actor in shaping orthodox Marxism, although not a communist, characterized historical Jewry as a merchant “caste,” and thus predicted its complete assimilation into capitalist societies.¹⁴

According to the Bolshevik leader Joseph Stalin, the Jews could not be considered a nation since they did not fit his theoretical definition of a nation as a social group that shares common history, language, territory, economic life, and culture.¹⁵ Friedrich Engels, probably the initiator of the orthodox approach to the legacy of his friend Marx, saw antisemitism as a mere “reaction of declining medieval social strata against a modern society.”¹⁶ Vladimir Lenin, the dominant thinker of Bolshevik Marxism, added that reactionary regimes merely used the Jews as an instrument “to incite ignorant workers and peasants” through antisemitism.¹⁷ Lenin’s view conformed with the prediction of August Bebel, the founder of the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany, that antisemitism “will end immediately with the decline of bourgeois society.”¹⁸

¹³Jack L. Jacobs, *On Socialists and “The Jewish Question” after Marx* (New York, 1992); Traverso, *The Marxists*; see also his second, revised edition, Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Leiden, 2018); Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism*.

¹⁴Karl Kautsky, *Nationalität und Internationalität* (Ergänzungshefte zur Neuen Zeit, 1, January 18, 1908), 7. See Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 76–80.

¹⁵J. V. Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question” [1913], *Works*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1953), 2:300–81, esp. 307–10.

¹⁶Friedrich Engels, “Über den Antisemitismus,” *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, no. 19 (May 9, 1890).

¹⁷V. I. Lenin, “Anti-Jewish Pogroms” [1919], *Collected Works*, 4th Eng. ed., 45 vols. (Moscow, 1972), 29:252–53.

¹⁸August Bebel, *Sozialdemokratie und Antisemitismus* [1893] (Berlin, 1906). See Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 59–60.

These orthodox Marxist conventions, denying Jewish nationalism and disregarding antisemitism, prevailed at the Third International (or Communist International, Comintern, 1919–1943). They became especially bold during the “Third Period” that was introduced by the Comintern at its sixth world congress in 1928 and was intact until 1935.¹⁹ Those years were characterized by a fervent rejection of nationalism in general, both in the Soviet Union (USSR) and by communist parties in other countries.

The German Communist Party (KPD), from its very inception in the first days of the Weimar Republic, did not show any special interest in the Jewish Question. It had very few Jewish members (0.7 percent of the overall membership), albeit they were highly overrepresented in the party apparatus (about 10%).²⁰ Most of the communist functionaries of Jewish origin, Heller amongst them, tended not to highlight their Jewishness and fitted perfectly into Isaac Deutscher’s concept of “the non-Jewish Jew.”²¹ Nevertheless, in response to growing antisemitism during the Great Depression the party moved many of them behind the scenes.

Amongst the rank and file of the party, antisemitic overtones could be heard from time to time, but even Silberner, who usually highlighted antisemitism among socialists, maintained that these voices were never decisive.²² The Nazi rise to power put the Jewish Question higher up on the public agenda and hence also in communist literature, yet most of the time it remained a side issue.²³

The rather limited German communist literature on the Jewish Question produced during the Nazi era has been examined by both Herf and Bankier.²⁴

¹⁹The “First Period” (1917–1924) in the policy of the Comintern was characterized by revolutionary attempts throughout Europe; the “Second Period” (1924–1928) by the stabilization of “Socialism in one country”; the third (1928–1935) was aimed especially against social democracy under the catchphrase “social-fascism.” On the “Fourth Period” of “Popular Front,” see below.

²⁰Hans-Helmuth Knütter, *Die Juden und die deutsche Linke in der Weimarer Republik 1918–1933* (Düsseldorf, 1971), 203–4.

²¹Isaac Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. Isaac Deutscher and Tamara Deutscher (London, 1968), 25–41.

²²Edmund Silberner, *Kommunisten zur Judenfrage: Zur Geschichte von Theorie und Praxis des Kommunismus* (Opladen, 1983), 265–74. See also Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 145–50; George L. Mosse, “German Socialists and the Jewish Question in the Weimar Republic,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16 (1971): 123–51, esp. 123, 136–37; Conan Fischer, *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (London, 1991), esp. 59–63.

²³In two comprehensive studies of the KPD in the Third Reich period, the Jewish Question is not even mentioned: Horst Duhnke, *Die KPD von 1933 bis 1945* (Cologne, 1972); Allan Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany* (London, 1985).

²⁴Jeffrey Herf, “German Communism”; David Bankier, “The German Communist Party and Nazi Antisemitism, 1933–1938,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 32 (1987): 325–40.

They maintained that the orthodox concept of antisemitism as a deceptive instrument was still intact during the 1930s, at least until the pogrom of November 1938 (a.k.a. *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass). According to the communist argument, the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses on April 1, 1933 did not hurt big Jewish companies, but only small businesses as part of a policy that served big capital, Jewish and “Aryan” alike, at the expense of the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Thus, antisemitic propaganda was aimed at disguising the true nature of this campaign from the eyes of the German petty bourgeoisie, whom the Nazis pretended to protect against Jewish competition.

In 1935, at the seventh congress of the Comintern, the “Third Period” was replaced by the “Popular Front” policy, calling on communists in each country to join hands with other parties and classes against fascism. Nonetheless, this new policy did not alter the communist attitude to the Jews around the world. Their nationality was still denied, and hence they were not supposed to form a “Popular Front” of their own; rather they were expected to join the fronts of the respective peoples among whom they were living. In this period, therefore, the effort of German communists to appear as German patriots, as part of the “Popular Front,” did not allow them to show any special empathy toward Jewish suffering under Nazi persecution.²⁵

The November Pogrom of 1938, after which the large Jewish-owned corporations were confiscated as well, refuted the earlier communist interpretation of the persecutions against Jews as a mere mask. This, in turn, provoked both moral and theoretical responses by communists. The moral reaction can be observed in a brief wave of publications condemning the pogrom. One of them expressed a statement of solidarity that, according to Herf, was unique in the history of German communism: “*Help our tortured Jewish fellow citizens by all means!*”²⁶ The theoretical response was to explain the expropriation of Jewish big capital as a robbery of the Jewish sector of the haute bourgeoisie by its German counterpart.²⁷ The timing was explained by the impact of the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland, which allegedly imposed a great financial burden upon the Nazi regime. Bankier noted that this argument had contradicted the traditional communist logic of the “primacy of economy” by assuming the “primacy of politics.”²⁸ He explained this unusual wave—both quantitatively and qualitatively—of communist publications that

²⁵Bankier, “The German Communist Party,” 327–28; Herf, “German Communism,” 262–63.

²⁶*Die Rote Fahne* (November 1938), cited by Herf, “German Communism,” 264 (emphasis in original). See also Bankier, “The German Communist Party,” 338.

²⁷See, e.g., Hans Behrend [Albert Norden], *The Real Rulers of Germany* (London, 1939), 105–16.

²⁸Bankier, “The German Communist Party,” 338.

focused on the Jewish Question as follows: “This line was adopted because of the erosion of ideology in the working class, which was exposed to the flood of antisemitic propaganda and integrated into the ruling Nazi party.”²⁹

Bankier elaborated on one distinguished essay, “Die Judenfrage und der Antisemitismus” (“The Jewish Question and Antisemitism”), written by the Austrian communist, Siegfried “Friedel” Fürnberg.³⁰ Although published shortly before the November Pogrom, according to Bankier this essay reflected an atmosphere that had already emerged after a series of smaller and lesser-known pogroms in the summer of 1938.³¹ Fürnberg’s article begins with a Marxist survey of Jewish history, which was justly identified by Bankier as based on Heller’s famous *Der Untergang*. Nevertheless, there are several meaningful differences between Heller’s and Fürnberg’s Jewish historiographies. First, Fürnberg omitted Heller’s key definition of the Jews as a “caste.” Second, Fürnberg emphasized positive contributions by Jews to German and European culture. Last, the latter paid much more attention to class differences within Jewish society and to Jewish participation in revolutionary movements.³²

As I will show, the third difference is clearly evidenced in Heller’s *Der Jude*, and it is plausible that *Der Untergang*’s influence on Fürnberg was no less than Fürnberg’s influence on *Der Jude*. Bankier’s depiction of Fürnberg as “unlike others of his time, and certainly unlike official Communist interpretation,”³³ calls for special attention to *Der Jude*, a text written by another German communist about a year later that was unknown to Bankier. While Fürnberg’s text, despite its distinguished pro-Jewish attitude, should still be understood as part of the short wave of untypical communist publications focusing on the Jewish Question in late 1938, *Der Jude* transcended this wave, both in time and scope. Thus, Heller’s manuscript deserves a separate discussion in its relevant context.

Otto Heller: *The Decline of Judaism and The Jew Is to Be Burned*

Very little is known about Otto Heller’s life (1897–1945).³⁴ The son of a Jewish Viennese merchant, he began his political activity in the German Division

²⁹Ibid., 340.

³⁰Siegfried Fürnberg, “Die Judenfrage und der Antisemitismus,” *Die Kommunistische Internationale* 9 (1938): 905–19.

³¹Bankier, “The German Communist Party,” 336–37.

³²Fürnberg, “Die Judenfrage,” 906–13.

³³Bankier, “The German Communist Party,” 338.

³⁴The following biographical sketch is based upon DÖW, 3834: Emma Heller, “Biographie d’Otto Heller”; Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History Moscow (RGASPI), 495-187-2896, 33–35: Otto Heller, “Otto Heller (Rudolf Kern): Biografie” [autobiography].

of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. In 1926, after a visit to the Soviet Union (USSR), he lost his residence permit in Czechoslovakia and moved to Berlin. In Germany, Heller became a prominent journalist in communist newspapers and was much appreciated by the patron of the communist press, Willi Münzenberg. Certain disagreements between Heller and the Central Committee of the German Communist Party (KPD) led party leader Ernst Thälmann to demand his expulsion. As a compromise, Münzenberg suggested sending Heller on a journalistic journey to the USSR, which is how *Der Untergang* eventually came to be.³⁵

In scholarship, Heller is almost exclusively known and discussed as the author of *Der Untergang*, which is regarded as a classic manifestation of the orthodox Marxist-Stalinist view on the Jewish Question.³⁶ Heller's main argument in the first part of the book clarifies its title, *The Decline of Judaism*. According to this argument, the Jews, throughout their history, have been a caste of traders, existing as a distinct group due to their economic function. Judaism has been a religious superstructure reflecting the economic position of the Jews, but also serves to preserve this position by isolating them from their social environment. In capitalist societies, which were altogether commercialized, where commerce no longer constituted a separate segment of society, the Jews were to lose their special role. In the most developed capitalist countries of Western Europe, Judaism was thus doomed to disappear, with the Jews being assimilated into the bourgeoisie.³⁷ Heller's adoption of Kautsky's term "caste,"³⁸ as well as the latter's "paradigm of assimilation,"³⁹ makes the historical part of the book a classic example of the orthodox Marxist conception of the Jewish Question.

³⁵Babette Gross, *Willi Münzenberg: Eine politische Biografie* (Leipzig, 1991), 255.

³⁶Besides the references mentioned later on there are also Knütter, *Die Juden und die deutsche Linke*, 175; Bruno Frei, *Socialismus und Antisemitismus* (Vienna, 1978), 11–13; Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 206–9; Silberner, *Kommunisten zur Judenfrage*, 274–79; Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York, 1989), 427–29; Arno Lustiger, "German and Austrian Jews in the International Brigade," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 35 (1990): 297–320, esp. 310–11; Mario Kessler, "Sozialismus und Zionismus in Deutschland 1897–1933," in *Juden und deutsche Arbeiterbewegung bis 1933: Soziale Utopien und religios-kulturelle Traditionen*, ed. Ludger Heid and Arnold Paucker (Tübingen, 1992), 91–102, esp. 100–101; Mario Kessler, "Die KPD und der Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik," *Utopie Kreativ* 173 (2005): 223–32, esp. 230–31; Konstantin Baehrens, "Antisemitismus als "Fetischisierung," in *Judentum und Arbeiterbewegung: Das Ringen um Emanzipation in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Markus Börner, Anja Jungfer, and Jakob Stürmann (Berlin, 2018), 318–36, esp. 324–28.

³⁷Heller, *Der Untergang*, 5–110.

³⁸Bruno Frei, "Marxist Interpretations of the Jewish Question," *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 35–36, no. 28 (1975): 2–8, esp. 3.

³⁹Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 76–80.

However, as Erich Fromm noted in his review of *Der Untergang*, the title was not compatible with the rest of the book, which advocated Jewish revival in the newly declared region that had been allocated for Jewish settlement in Birobidzhan in the far Soviet east.⁴⁰ Heller had to reconcile Stalin's former theoretical denial of Jewish nationhood with the leader's new policy granting the Soviet Jews a national autonomous region. For that purpose, Heller maintained that in the densely populated centers of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, in countries that were only partly capitalized and still "half feudal,"⁴¹ the mainly commercial role of the Jews was to some extent still intact.

Regarding Eastern Europe, Heller held on to Stalin's own reservation laid out in his 1913 article, that the Jews still bore "certain relics of national character."⁴² Heller clarified Stalin's new Jewish policy by explaining that the Jewish problem was being solved in the USSR by bestowing upon the Jews the most important criterion that Jewish nationality lacked, according to Stalin's definition—a national territory.⁴³ In that manner, Heller provided a Marxist theoretical justification for the changing Soviet policy.

The final part of *Der Untergang* is a report of Heller's journey through the USSR to Birobidzhan, in which he glorified the Soviet solution of the Jewish Question.⁴⁴ In contrast, Zionism was depicted as an attempted solution doomed to failure as it was ensconced within the framework of capitalist society as a proxy of British imperialism.⁴⁵

Der Untergang was published in October 1931. A little more than a year later, with Heller back in Germany, Hitler's ascent to power radically changed political conditions. Together with his wife Emma (1903–1980) and their daughter Lily (b. 1924), Heller first fled to Switzerland and from there to Moscow. In the USSR he became the foreign news editor of the *Deutsche Zentral-Zeitung* (Central German Newspaper), the main German-language organ of the Communist International. A secretary in the editorial department testified years later that, as in Berlin, Heller did not always toe the party line even whilst situated in the Soviet capital. Inter alia, he dared to criticize Stalin's cult of personality in front of his comrades.⁴⁶

As purges began in 1936, Heller concluded that he should leave the USSR and subsequently volunteered for the International Brigades in the Spanish

⁴⁰Erich Fromm, "Otto Heller: Der Untergang des Judentums," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1 (1932): 438.

⁴¹Heller, *Der Untergang*, 77, 85.

⁴²Ibid., 13, 204–5; Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question," 307–10; quotation from 310.

⁴³Heller, *Der Untergang*, 185–288.

⁴⁴Ibid., 289–376.

⁴⁵Ibid., 151–74.

⁴⁶DÖW, 3834: Bericht von Lily Jergitsch [1975].

Civil War. After a short stay in Madrid, he was appointed a propagandist for the International Brigades in Paris, where he became active in the circles of Austrian communist exiles. A friend who knew him in Paris reported that there too he showed a tendency to raise controversial issues in political debates with his comrades.⁴⁷ It was in Paris that Heller wrote *Der Jude*, expressing both his political commitment to communism and his willingness to adopt politically incorrect opinions. In Paris existed a rare example of a separate “Jewish Popular Front,” which was responsible for the Jewish company within the International Brigades.⁴⁸ Heller might have drawn inspiration from that atmosphere whilst writing *Der Jude*. Such an influence could explain the expressions of Jewish solidarity in that manuscript that were absent in *Der Untergang*.

Heller’s novel approach in *Der Jude* is evident from the different structure of that work, allocating much more space for confrontation with the growing threat of race-antisemitism. The unpublished manuscript encompasses eighteen chapters that can be divided into three main sections. The first chapters constitute a Marxist interpretation of Jewish history, arranged chronologically from “The Origins of Judaism” (Antiquity), via “The Way through One and Half Millennia” (Middle Ages) up until the role of the Jews in modern national and social revolutions: “1776–1789–1871.” A special chapter is devoted to the image of the “*Talmudjude*” (the Talmud Jew), attempting to dispel this antisemitic myth through engaging with the historical reality of the Talmud.

The second and largest part of the book is a sociological, historical, and political analysis of antisemitism in Eastern and Central Europe. The discussion on Eastern Europe begins with the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and continues with a chapter on the contemporary “Burning Questions” concerning the Jews in Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Hungary.⁴⁹ The discussion on German antisemitism begins with the “Predecessors of National Socialism” in the nineteenth century and reaches the “*Deutsche Pogrom*” (the “German pogrom,” November 1938). Various aspects of racism are also discussed, such as “what is race?,” the “history of racism,” and more. The final three chapters constitute a contemporary political discussion on the different

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Freundlich, *The Traveling Years*, trans. Elizabeth Pennebaker (Riverside, CA, 1999), 68–69.

⁴⁸ David H. Weinberg, *A Community on Trial: The Jews of Paris in the 1930s* (Chicago, 1977), 121–36; Gerben Zaagsma, *Jewish Volunteers, the International Brigades and the Spanish Civil War* (London, 2017), 34–35.

⁴⁹ The chapter’s typed title, “Burning Question,” was changed by hand to “The *Ostjuden* [East European Jews] – Yesterday and Today.” Other corrections within this chapter imply that Heller tried (perhaps at the behest of the publisher) to emphasize the different living conditions of the Jews in the USSR and in other East European countries.

suggested solutions for the Jewish Question, focusing mainly on the debate between Zionism and Soviet policy toward the Jews.

The very existence of the manuscript of *Der Jude* was reported by historian John Bunzl⁵⁰ and journalist Edgar Schütz.⁵¹ However, unlike Heller's published book *Der Untergang*, the *Der Jude* manuscript hardly received any scholarly attention. Literary scholar Silvia Schlenstedt was the only one who devoted a brief discussion to *Der Jude*.⁵² In a comparison of Heller's two works, she made two important distinctions. On the one hand, Heller's political stances toward Zionism and Soviet Jewish policy remained unchanged in the second work. On the other hand, Schlenstedt detected a significant change in Heller's historiographic approach.

Schlenstedt, to some extent, underestimated the consistency of the political views expressed in both books, as in *Der Jude* Heller's political agenda became even sharper. The chapter in *Der Jude* dealing with the solution for the Jewish Question in the USSR is essentially adopted from *Der Untergang*, albeit with one meaningful exception: in *Der Untergang*, Heller described the process in the present tense: "The solution to the Jewish Question in the Soviet Union *is* [my emphasis] not a Jewish problem. It is an issue for the Soviet regime, a problem of the dictatorship of the proletariat."⁵³ In *Der Jude*, he converted the same sentence into the past tense: "The solution to the Jewish Question in the Soviet Union *was* [my emphasis] not a Jewish problem. (We speak here with full emphasis on the past tense. For today, there is no longer a Jewish Question in the Soviet Union, neither social nor national)."⁵⁴ According to Heller, by 1939 the Jewish Question had already been resolved in the USSR. This was accomplished in two parallel ways: assimilation in the big cities and national territorialization in agricultural settlements, chiefly in Birobidzhan.⁵⁵ Heller did not express a preference for either of these solutions:

⁵⁰John Bunzl, *Klassenkampf in der Diaspora* (Vienna, 1975), 18 n. 7; 22 n. 24.

⁵¹Edgar Schütz, *Österreichische JournalistInnen und PublizistInnen im Spanischen Bürgerkrieg 1936–1939: Medienpolitik und Presse der Internationalen Brigaden* (Vienna, 2016), 280.

⁵²Silvia Schlenstedt, "Versteckte Unglücke und Freisetzen von Erinnerung Zeichen des Selbstverständnisses sozialistischer Autoren jüdischer Herkunft in der deutschen Literatur nach 1945," in *The Jewish Self-Portrait in European and American Literature*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Schrader, Elliott M. Simon, and Charlotte Wardi (Berlin, 1996), 171–86, esp. 174–76. *Der Jude* was preserved thanks to the photocopy that was left in Schlenstedt's estate in the AdK archives (94.1).

⁵³Heller, *Der Untergang*, 177.

⁵⁴Heller, *Der Jude*, 263.

⁵⁵Heller, *Der Untergang*, 177–98; Heller, *Der Jude*, 261–71.

Free social and cultural development of one's own nationality in its own territory [in the Jewish case—Birobidzhan, TN], among other fraternal peoples in full equality and freedom; assimilation according to the individual's free will, without any coercion: this is how the national solution of the Jewish problem takes place, which, socially, has been definitively solved.⁵⁶

Heller's dual stance resembles the theoretical agenda developed by the Bundist Vladimir Medem in 1904—"neutralism": "We are not nationalists . . . We are not assimilationists. . . . We are not against assimilation, but against the *aspiration* for assimilation, against assimilation as a purpose."⁵⁷ The "neutralist" stance on the Jewish Question served the Bund effectively as an ad hoc solution for its dilemma between the de jure internationalism of the Russian Social-Democratic Party and the de facto national character of the Yiddish-speaking working class in Eastern Europe.⁵⁸ In the 1930s, the concepts again became useful for Heller in his own quandary over the de jure rejection of Jewish nationalism by orthodox Marxism and its de facto recognition through the new Soviet policy regarding Birobidzhan.

Together with his admiration for Soviet policy, Heller's condemnation of Zionism also hardened in the years between the publication of *Der Untergang* and the writing of *Der Jude*.⁵⁹ Even though he expressed some empathy—or rather, compassion—in both books toward Jewish workers in the socialist colonies in Palestine, he eventually condemned them too as tools in the hands of the reactionary bourgeois World Zionist Organization and British imperialism.⁶⁰ For Heller, historical development would necessarily bring about "deadly strikes," one after another, against Zionism. In *Der Untergang*, it was the British White Paper of 1930.⁶¹ In *Der Jude*, notwithstanding the large wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine that had taken place in

⁵⁶Heller, *Der Jude*, 270.

⁵⁷Vladimir Medem, "Di sotsialdemokratye un di natsyonal frage" [1904], in idem, *Tsum tsavntsiksten Yortsayt* (New York, 1943), 173–219, quotation from 189 (emphasis in the original). Heller, of course, did not mention Medem on this matter, but the fact that he knew his work is evidenced in a different context: Heller, *Der Untergang*, 201.

⁵⁸Henry Tobias, "The Reassessment of the National Question," in *Essential Papers on Jews and the Left*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York, 1997), 101–21, esp. 109–10; Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale* (London, 1989), 58–61; Moshe Mishkinsky, "Vladimir Medem – ha-Ish be-Tnu'ato," in *Yehudim be-Tnu'ot Mahapchaniot*, ed. Eli Shaltiel (Jerusalem, 1983), 67–74, esp. 71–72; Roni Gechtman, "National-Cultural Autonomy and 'Neutralism': Vladimir Medem's Marxist Analysis of the National Question, 1903-1920," *Socialist Studies* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 69–92.

⁵⁹Heller, *Der Untergang*, 151–74; Heller, *Der Jude*, 247–60.

⁶⁰Heller, *Der Untergang*, 167–68; Heller, *Der Jude*, 252.

⁶¹Heller, *Der Untergang*, 163.

the meantime, which Heller did not see as nationally motivated, “Zionism was dealt the deadly strike between 1933 and 1939.”⁶² One of those supposed “deadly strikes” was the Zionists’ defeat by the Bund in the municipal elections in Warsaw in 1938. Heller concluded that his “prognosis for Zionism” was “even darker than it was six or seven years ago.”⁶³

Schlenstedt’s second observation regarding the historiographical shift from *Der Untergang* to *Der Jude*, both in content and methodology, is meaningful. As for the content, she referred to the increased attention Heller had given to antisemitism in *Der Jude*.⁶⁴ Methodologically, according to Schlenstedt, “historical materialism . . . gives way to a differentiated sociological description (influenced by Max Weber).”⁶⁵ The phrase “gives way (*weicht*)” seems exaggerated, since Heller maintained the basic Marxist approach from *Der Untergang* in *Der Jude*. Despite Schlenstedt’s correct identification of Weber’s influence on the latter text, she did not fully appreciate its significance. One should recall that Weber’s work was banned as “reactionary” in the communist world, especially in the Stalinist era.⁶⁶

Thus, Heller’s political consistency shows his “unconditional alliance with Stalinism,” as described by Nathan Weinstock.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Heller made significant changes in the field of theory. How could his unquestionable political loyalty coexist with his heterodox theoretical inclination? How could it persist given the evidence of Heller’s criticism toward the communist establishment and his flight from the threat of purges? In order to get a better perspective on these questions, I have analyzed Heller’s two major theoretical novelties in *Der Jude*: the relation between capitalism and the Jews and the interpretation of antisemitism.

The Jews: Forerunners or Victims of Capitalism?

One important theoretical innovation in *Der Jude*, already identified by Schlenstedt, was Heller’s use of Weber’s conception of Jewish history. This raises the question of why Heller chose to incorporate Weber’s so-called “reactionary” theory into his own Marxist interpretation of the Jewish Question. In order to address this question, a brief introduction to Weber’s polemic with

⁶²Heller, *Der Jude*, 259.

⁶³Ibid., 260.

⁶⁴Ibid., 96–238.

⁶⁵Schlenstedt, “Versteckte Unglücke,” 175.

⁶⁶Johannes Weiss, *Weber and the Marxist World*, trans. Elizabeth King-Utz and Michael J. King (London, 1986), 16.

⁶⁷Nathan Weinstock, “Introduction,” in Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (New York, 1970), 27–63, quotation from 33.

Werner Sombart is required. Sombart and Weber represent contradictory approaches to the relationship between Jews and capitalism.⁶⁸ Sombart emphasized the commercial aspect of capitalism, characterizing the Jews as bearers of racial commercial traits originating in their nomadic ancient past. Capitalist commerce, which was foreign to mediaeval North-Western Europe, was introduced in this region by the Jews. Thus, according to Sombart, the Jews were the forerunners of modern capitalism.⁶⁹

In contrast, Weber saw the rational organization of labor as the main feature of modern capitalism, and thus attributed its rise to the Protestant ethos. He saw the Jews as a “Pariah capitalist” element, typical of precapitalist societies, where Jews had fulfilled a primitive commercial role, alien to the rational organization of modern capitalism. For Weber, the Jewish inclination toward commerce was not a racial trait, rather a product of a gradual historical process.⁷⁰ Those two different theoretical frameworks had already been anticipated in Marx’s writings.⁷¹ Sombart’s attitude is compatible with Marx’s early work “Zur Judenfrage” in which he equated Judaism with the bourgeois commercial spirit.⁷² Weber’s attitude matches Marx’s later writings in which he described the Jews as an ancient or medieval “trading people” (*Handelsvolk*).⁷³

Some scholars identified a “Sombartian” tendency in Heller’s earlier book, *Der Untergang*.⁷⁴ This became evident where he wrote: “The Western Jews were at the very center of the formation of the modern bourgeoisie. Socially and economically they are the first bourgeois.”⁷⁵ Where Heller emphasized the nomadic element of ancient Israel as a source of Jewish pri-

⁶⁸Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, new ed. (Princeton, 2019), 53–57; Jerry Muller, *Capitalism and the Jews* (Princeton, 2010), 46–61.

⁶⁹Werner Sombart, *The Jews and Modern Capitalism* [1911], trans. M. Epstein (Glencoe, IL, 1951), esp. 323.

⁷⁰Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904–1905], trans. Talcott Parsons (New York, 1958), esp. 165–66; Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* [1917–1919], trans. Hans Gerth and Don Martindale (Glencoe, 1952), 345; Max Weber, *General Economic History* [1923], trans. F. H. Knight (New York, 1927), 196.

⁷¹Goldberg, *Modernity and the Jews*, 64, 72, 104–6; Daniel Gutwein, “Beyn ha-Yehudim ve-ha-Kapitalizm be-Tfisato shel Marx: Me-Zombart le-Weber,” *Zion* 55 (1990): 419–48. On Sombart and early Marx, see Jonathan Karp, “Kopf ohne Körper? Wirtschaftsgeschichte jüdischen Lebenswelten,” in *Kapitalismusdebatten um 1900: Über antisemitisierende Semantiken des Jüdischen*, ed. Nicolas Berg (Leipzig, 2011), 49–69, esp. 63.

⁷²Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 26–46.

⁷³Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* [1857–1858], trans. Martin Nicolaus (London, 1973), 253, 486; Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 [1867], in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 35 (New York, 1996), 90.

⁷⁴Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 188; Carlebach, *Karl Marx*, 209.

⁷⁵Heller, *Der Untergang*, 74.

mordial commerce also reminds us of Sombart.⁷⁶ Nonetheless, it should be noted that at the explicit level Heller rejected Sombart's logic in *Der Untergang*: Sombart's "discovery that the Jews are the true creators of modern capitalism" was "based on a confusion of cause and effect."⁷⁷ As opposed to Sombart, Heller saw the Jews' integration into Western Europe as a result of the emergence of modern capitalism and not as its cause. And yet his pronounced primordial identification of Jews with commerce in *Der Untergang* leaves the reader with the impression of Sombart's influence, even though Heller repudiated it.

Unlike *Der Untergang*'s implicit Sombartian tone, *Der Jude* relied explicitly on Weber's *Ancient Judaism* (1923). Here, Heller categorically criticized Sombart's concept of the Jews as a "nomadic people" with a "unique nature," and asks rhetorically: "which people did not wander in its ancient past?"⁷⁸ In line with Weber, *Der Jude* depicts the process that transformed the Jews from an agricultural people into a trading caste as a gradual process.⁷⁹ In contrast to the almost essentialist depiction in *Der Untergang*, Heller historicized the commercial role of the Jews as having developed during antiquity and was therefore subject to change in modernity. Whereas in *Der Untergang* Heller presented historical Jewry as a proto-bourgeois commercial people, in *Der Jude* he adopted the unmistakably Weberian terms of "plebian people" and "pariah people," which emphasized the premodern, though not primordial, character of the Jews' economic function.⁸⁰

As for the relationship between Jews and capitalism, Heller's criticism of Sombart became even bolder: "Sombart, who probably knew only capitalist Jews, acknowledged them as inventors of capitalism. But they established it as much as Norwegian fishermen and sailors invented the herring."⁸¹ Thus, Jewish history cannot explain the development of capitalism. It is the development of capitalism that explains Jewish history.

The purpose of this shift, from an implicitly Sombartian argument to an explicitly Weberian one, was explained by Schlenstedt as "supplying material and arguments against the acute threat the race-antisemitism of the Nazi Reich posed for society."⁸² Sombart's support of the Nazi regime since 1934 retrospectively made clear the antisemitic nature of his earlier writings, which

⁷⁶Ibid., 27; Sombart, *The Jews*, 326–30.

⁷⁷Heller, *Der Untergang*, 19. Some other critical remarks on Sombart: *ibid.*, 58, 74, 103.

⁷⁸Heller, *Der Jude*, 12.

⁷⁹Ibid., 12–13, 20, 27–28.

⁸⁰Ibid., 17, 19, 31; Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 3, 364.

⁸¹Heller, *Der Jude*, 7.

⁸²Schlenstedt, "Versteckte Unglücke," 175.

had previously been cherished even by Jews and Zionists in particular (especially for a booklet in which he had advocated Jewish emigration to Palestine).⁸³ Weber's view of capitalism as contradicting the historical economic function of the Jews allowed Heller to explain the attack on the Jews as part of the capitalist nature of Nazism. Heller's relation to Marx's different attitudes toward the Jews also changed in accordance with his new Weberian approach. If in 1931 Heller cited "Zur Judenfrage" frequently, while dismissing the antisemitic interpretation of that article,⁸⁴ in 1939 he tried to avoid this complication by refraining from referencing the text.⁸⁵ In *Der Jude*, Weber's theoretical framework complied better with Marx's late concept of "trading peoples," which was already applied in *Der Untergang*.

The rejection of equating the Jews with the bourgeoisie raised the question of how they should be categorized in terms of class. In his foreword to the 1933 second and revised edition of *Der Untergang*, Heller wrote that in response to comments he had received regarding the lack of attention paid to Jewish inner class differentiation, he would address this matter in the second edition.⁸⁶ A thorough comparison of the two editions reveals no significant change in this regard and, in fact, in no other matter either. In both editions of *Der Untergang* historical Jews are portrayed as a homogenous social stratum. However, Heller fulfilled his promise in *Der Jude*: "One should also remember that there are rich and poor Jews, Jewish exploiters and exploited Jews, for whom the Jewish Question does not appear in the same form."⁸⁷ Here, Heller made use of the Weberian differentiation between "pebs" and "patriciate" among ancient Israel, as well as of his identification of the origins of Diaspora Judaism with a "plebian" heritage. These distinctions allowed Heller not to abandon the urban character that he had already attributed to historical Jewry in *Der Untergang*, while adding to it a laborious and productive aspect.⁸⁸

In *Der Jude* he also stressed elements of social justice in the legislation regarding slavery and landed property in the Book of Deuteronomy as barriers to exploitation.⁸⁹ The strongest expression of this new orientation in *Der Jude* can be found in the chapter on the Talmud, a topic completely ignored in *Der Untergang*. Notwithstanding his general portrayal of the Talmud as a conservative legal codex, designed to preserve an isolated caste of traders,

⁸³Werner Sombart, *Die Zukunft der Juden* (Leipzig, 1912).

⁸⁴Heller, *Der Untergang*, 5, 15–16, 18–19, 77, 120.

⁸⁵Except for two accidental references: Heller, *Der Jude*, 39, 58.

⁸⁶Heller, *Der Untergang*, 2nd ed., 7.

⁸⁷Heller, *Der Jude*, 4.

⁸⁸Ibid., 27–28; Weber, *Ancient Judaism*, 21–23.

⁸⁹Heller, *Der Jude*, 20–21.

Heller praised its “efforts for social balance and for protecting the economically weak against the rich.”⁹⁰ He emphasized the productiveness of many rabbinic sages of the Talmud who had been craftsmen and identified elements of class struggle within talmudic legislation.⁹¹

Likewise, writing about later periods Heller paid increased attention to class differentiation within Jewish society: “The Jews were never a socially unified, amorphous mass. They too were split, within their ghettos, into classes, they too had conservative and progressive currents among them.”⁹² In all modern revolutions, Jews had stood on both sides of the barricades: in the French Revolution, in the Spring of Nations, and in the Paris Commune. Many Jews had fought for the sake of freedom, first in the bourgeois liberal camp and later as socialists.⁹³ Heller employed a motto of the French socialist Jean Jaurès, praising the passion for justice embedded in Judaism in order to depict a progressive image of Jewry.⁹⁴ “Burning Questions”—the title given by Heller to the chapter on the proletarianization of the Jewish masses in modern Eastern Europe—reveals his evaluation of the condition of the Jewish proletariat in Poland, Lithuania, Romania, and Hungary as desperate.⁹⁵

The rejection of Sombart’s capitalist image of the Jews, the adoption of Weber’s conception of a contradiction between capitalism and the Jews, identification of internal class differentiation in Jewish society, and the emphasis on Jewish proletarian elements allowed Heller to express much more empathy toward the Jews. His new empathic approach, in contrast to the critical tone of *Der Untergang*, was pronounced right from *Der Jude*’s introduction in which Heller characterized Jewish history as a “history of three thousand years of wars, exile, persecution, impoverishment (*Verkümmerung*), but also of power, wealth, ascension to the highest spirituality, profound abundance of ideas and spiritual fruitfulness (*geistiger Befruchtung*).”⁹⁶

Antisemitism: The End or the Beginning?

In *Der Untergang*, Heller relied on the above-cited statements by Engels, Bebel, and Lenin, who had interpreted antisemitism as a medieval remnant which persisted mostly in declining feudal social strata and in semifeudal

⁹⁰Ibid., 81.

⁹¹Ibid., 73.

⁹²Ibid., 60.

⁹³Ibid., 61–67.

⁹⁴Ibid., 58.

⁹⁵Ibid., 100–126.

⁹⁶Ibid., 5.

countries, and which was artificially revived for reactionary political purposes.⁹⁷ Traverso notes that in *Der Untergang* Heller “employed the traditional Marxist conception of antisemitism as a tool of the dominant class to divide the workers and mobilize the petty bourgeois masses against the proletariat.”⁹⁸ In *Der Jude*, Heller coped with the challenge posed by Nazi economic policy—which, since November 1938, was clearly aimed against Jews of all classes—in the same way that Bankier had identified in the wider post-*Kristallnacht* communist literature.

Heller depicted the anti-Jewish economic policy as part of a process of “concentration of big capital” and “liquidation of the “little man.”⁹⁹ He subsequently presented a far-reaching optimistic prognosis: now that “the Jews have disappeared from the economy” one “cannot blame them any longer for the worsening conditions of life in Germany... It [the pogrom] arouses doubts regarding the antisemitic arguments and encourages a rethinking of the political and social purposes connected to the antisemitic incitement, which eventually leads to overt protest.”¹⁰⁰ These arguments in *Der Jude* resembled the common communist accounts of Nazi anti-Jewish politics. Nevertheless, several pages earlier Heller presented a different approach, a sociological analysis of the reception of antisemitism in German society.

Traverso compared Heller’s “traditional Marxist conception of antisemitism” in *Der Untergang* with another communist publication, published anonymously in 1932, as the KPD’s contribution to a volume of collected essays entitled *Der Jud’ ist schuld...? (The Jew is Guilty...?)*. The anonymous text, entitled “Kommunismus und Judenfrage” (“Communism and the Jewish Question”) was valued by Traverso as “a precise typology of German antisemitism” and as a more “profound” study.¹⁰¹ The significant difference between *Der Untergang* and “Kommunismus und Judenfrage” was also emphasized by Kessler, who identified each one of them as having a different approach within the KPD toward Nazi antisemitic propaganda in the early 30s: the first dismissing it as fraud and the second starting to take it seriously.¹⁰² John Bunzl suggested that the author of the latter text was also Otto Heller.¹⁰³ The rediscovery of *Der Jude* provides an opportunity to examine this hypothesis.

⁹⁷Heller, *Der Untergang*, 128–34; Traverso, *The Jewish Question*, 54–64.

⁹⁸Traverso, *The Marxists*, 195.

⁹⁹Heller, *Der Jude*, 157–68.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 167–68.

¹⁰¹Traverso, *The Marxists*, 195. For some reason, this part was omitted in the 2018 edition of Traverso’s *The Jewish Question*.

¹⁰²Mario Keßler, *Die SED und die Juden – zwischen Repression und Toleranz: Politische Entwicklungen bis 1967* (Berlin, 1995), 22.

¹⁰³Bunzl, *Klassenkampf*, 24 n. 35.

“Kommunismus und Judenfrage” presents a typology of six social groups that were drawn to antisemitism: (1) artisans and small traders hurt by the competition of modern industry and wholesale commerce; (2) liberal professions suffering from a tightening labor market in which Jews were over-represented; (3) civil servants, who identified Jews with the Republic that had reduced their privileged status; (4) employees of private companies, often employed by Jewish entrepreneurs or managers and threatened by unemployment; (5) peasants, who traditionally saw the Jew as a usurer; and (6) university students, who anticipated a future of unemployment.¹⁰⁴ *Der Jude* supports Bunzl’s hypothesis regarding Heller’s authorship of “Kommunismus und Judenfrage,” for the text contained an almost identical typology of six groups.¹⁰⁵ But even if Heller was not the author of “Kommunismus und Judenfrage,” the fact that he chose to incorporate this approach into *Der Jude* is also of significance.

This social diagnosis of antisemitism in “Kommunismus und Judenfrage” was novel in the communist discourse, but it was neither original nor new. Quite surprisingly, it resembles Theodor Herzl’s Zionist interpretation of antisemitism. As early as 1892, in what is considered his “first article on the Jewish Question,”¹⁰⁶ Herzl characterized modern French antisemitism as “a meeting place of the dissatisfied, a saloon of the rejected” elements of society deprived by modernization.¹⁰⁷ In *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State/The State of the Jews), Herzl differentiated modern antisemitism from the old religious hatred toward Jews and saw it as a byproduct of emancipation. According to Herzl, the traditional middle-class occupations characteristic of Jews stood in growing competition with the emerging Christian middle-class. Therefore, modern antisemitism “increases day by day and hour by hour among the nations.”¹⁰⁸

Not all Zionist thinkers shared Herzl’s understanding of antisemitism. Arthur Ruppin, for example, identified antisemitism with the “hatred of the Jews” that had existed “ever since the beginning of Diaspora.”¹⁰⁹ Referencing Ruppin, Heller saw “Zionist propaganda” as based upon “the eternity of

¹⁰⁴“Kommunismus und Judenfrage,” in *Der Jud’ ist schuld...? Diskussionsbuch zur Judenfrage*, ed. Hermann Bahr (Basel, 1932), 274–76. See also Traverso, *The Marxists*, 195–96.

¹⁰⁵Heller, *Der Jude*, 149–56.

¹⁰⁶Alex Bein, “Ma’amaro ha-Rishon shel Herzl be-She’elat ha-Yehudim,” in *Im Herzl u-ve-Ikvotav*, ed. Alex Bein (Tel Aviv, 1954), 14–18.

¹⁰⁷Theodor Herzl, “Französische Antisemiten” [August 31, 1892], *Neue Freie Presse*, no. 10067 (September 3, 1892): 1–2, quotation from 2.

¹⁰⁸Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* [1896] (New York, 1988), 90. Herzl’s *Judenstaat* is usually translated as *The Jewish State*, but it should be noted that the literal translation is “The State of the Jews.”

¹⁰⁹Arthur Ruppin, *The Jews in the Modern World* (London, 1934), 243. In earlier editions, Ruppin still held with the same interpretation as Herzl: “Antisemitism is as old as emanci-

antisemitism.”¹¹⁰ As shown, this generalization could not include Herzl or other Zionists who sought a socio-economic analysis of the Jewish Question, such as Marxist-Zionist Ber Borochov, who predicted that “progress” would worsen the state of the Jews.¹¹¹

The orthodox Marxist analysis of antisemitism, being based on the belief in progress and subsequently in assimilation as a solution to the Jewish Question, hindered an understanding of the modern nature of antisemitism. Zionists, and among them Marxist-Zionists who denied the possibility of solving the Jewish Question within European society, were freed from this obstacle and could foresee the worsening of antisemitism. In Shulamit Volkov’s terms, the orthodox Marxist concept of antisemitism can be categorized as “continuity” of the old religious hatred for Jews, while Herzl’s concept was that of a “break” between the two phenomena.¹¹²

Whether Heller or another communist wrote “Kommunismus und Judenfrage,” this text testifies to a much earlier shift in the communist analysis of antisemitism than that presented in *Der Jude*. The 1932 article signified a turn from the concept of “continuity” of antisemitism to the concept of a “break,” conceiving antisemitism as a new, severe, and escalating threat. This novel, more “precise” and “profound”—in Traverso’s words—social analysis of antisemitism was not inspired by Herzl or Zionism, but by the rapid worsening of the same tendency that Herzl identified in its very initial stages. This new analysis of antisemitism was shaped by the impact of the severe deepening of the economic crisis and unemployment from 1931 to 1932, which drew more and more “dissatisfied” Germans, including proletarians, to supporting the Nazi party.

Now that antisemitism began to threaten communists directly, they had to acknowledge its aggregative tendency and to analyze it, just as Zionists had been doing for half a century. This acknowledgment did not prevent Heller from continuing to simultaneously view antisemitism as a distraction from class struggle in *Der Jude*.¹¹³ But he now complemented the “traditional Marxist conception” of the political use of antisemitism with a sociological explication of the reasons for its efficiency. In the years before writing *Der Jude*, this new approach was affirmed by the Nazi rise to power as well as by six years of persecution of German Jews, which caused Heller to devote a substantial part of the manuscript to antisemitism.

pation”: See Arthur Ruppin, *Die Juden der Gegenwart: Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Studie* (Berlin, 1920), 175. The change in his views might be understood against the background of the escalation of antisemitism.

¹¹⁰Heller, *Der Untergang*, 157.

¹¹¹Ber Borochov, “Le-She’elat Zion ve-Terityora” [1905], *Ktavim* 1 (1955): 18–153, esp. 37.

¹¹²Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemitism: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge, 2006), 67–82.

¹¹³Heller, *Der Jude*, 146–49.

The Title: Between Theory and Politics

The differences between *Der Untergang* and *Der Jude* show a significant transformation in Heller's theoretical view on the Jewish Question. This shift can be explained through the dramatic historical developments that occurred during the eight crucial years between his two texts: the Nazi rise to power and escalating persecution of Jews in Germany; growing antisemitism in Poland and other Eastern European countries; the oppression of Jewish culture in the Soviet Union; and the Arab riots in Palestine. All these factors raised the so-called "Jewish Problem" to a new, far more acute and dangerous level than ever before. Against this backdrop, Heller adopted the Weberian concept as a more effective response to racist antisemitism, emphasized the impoverishment of the Jewish proletariat, and acknowledged antisemitism as a severe and worsening danger (the latter already in the anonymous 1932 article).

Considering this theoretical transformation, Heller's political stubbornness seems peculiar. His assimilationist prognosis from *Der Untergang* had reached its climax in *Der Jude*, as if six years of Nazi rule had not changed anything: "Since the Jews' bourgeois emancipation, assimilation is a decisive fact in Western Europe, which even the interlude of fascist racism will not change."¹¹⁴ This prognostic insistence corresponds with Heller's consistency in criticizing Zionism and praising the USSR. How can this dichotomy between the rigidity of Heller's political stances and his apparent theoretical flexibility be explained? If Heller was heterodox enough to openly use Weber's name, and thus risk condemnation, why did he not express a similar flexibility in the political field? Did he still believe in Stalin and the USSR in 1939 with the same enthusiasm as he did in 1931?

In 1931 Birobidzhan was still a new and promising project. By 1937, according to the statistics Heller himself provided, there were only 25,000 Jews living in the autonomous district,¹¹⁵ whereas the government's plan had been to reach 150,000 by that time.¹¹⁶ Already in 1936, Joseph Leftwich, a Jewish territorialist living in London, described Heller's optimistic 1931 prognosis of Birobidzhan as an "auto-suggestive psychological state."¹¹⁷ Schlenstedt indeed identified signs of disappointment in Heller's stronger emphasis on

¹¹⁴Ibid., 269.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 268.

¹¹⁶Walter Laqueur, "Zionism, the Marxist Critique and the Left," in *Israel, the Arabs and the Middle East*, ed. Irving Howe and Carl Gershman (New York, 1972), 16–44, esp. 31–33.

¹¹⁷Joseph Leftwich, *What Will Happen to the Jews?* (London, 1936), 137. The manipulative character of the Birobidjan project is well documented in many studies, e.g., Zvi Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton, 1972), 426–33; Chimen Abramsky, "The Biro-Bidzhan Project, 1927–1959," in *The Jews*

assimilation than on Birobizhan in *Der Jude* compared to his approach in *Der Untergang*.¹¹⁸

This can only be a partial explanation because Heller had far more compelling reasons for being disappointed in the USSR. In 1931 Stalin's dictatorship was still new and not yet completely overt and aggressive. By 1939 the regime's repression against the Soviet population in general and Jewish life in particular had become clearer. During the 1930s most Jewish cultural institutions in the Soviet Union were closed by the regime. The Great Purges were carried out in the years 1936–1937, and among their victims were many of Jewish origin, including Jewish leaders in Birobidzhan.¹¹⁹ Of course, Heller was not the only Jewish communist who kept faith with the USSR despite all this. True, some of the information was obscured or hidden behind masks of propaganda, but as a prominent journalist in Moscow in 1936 Heller must have been aware at least of some of the actual occurrences. He himself eventually had to flee from Moscow due to the threat of purges.

Since Heller did not reveal his thinking regarding the contradiction between his political consent and his theoretical dissent in *Der Jude*, an interpretation is required. It is reasonable to assume that while writing *Der Untergang*, Heller was still a true believer in the Soviet cause. Indeed, as Kessler convincingly maintained, in *Der Untergang* Heller deliberately tried to cover up the fact that antisemitism was still very common in the Soviet Union as revealed in a 1929 Russian report written by Yuri Larin, who was active in the *Yevseksiya* (the Jewish Section of the Communist Party of the USSR).¹²⁰ It is unlikely that Heller was ignorant of the situation. However, this was not a matter of Soviet policy, rather a social reality against which Heller believed the regime to be genuinely fighting.

By 1939 state antisemitism was already an evident factor in the purges. Then Soviet state antisemitism, although not yet as bold as it would become in the early 1950s, was like “distant rolls of thunder warning of a storm to come” that “a very sensitive ear” could have heard.¹²¹ Heller's ear was undoubtedly sensitive to antisemitism, as well as to Soviet politics, and yet he remained loyal. It would be hard to assume that in *Der Jude* this loyalty was

in *Soviet Russia since 1917*, ed. Lionel Kochan (Oxford, 1978), 64–77, esp. 70–71; Antje Kuchenbecker, *Zionismus ohne Zion: Idee und Geschichte eines jüdischen Staates in Sowjet-Fernost* (Berlin, 2000), 240–42.

¹¹⁸Schlenstedt, “Versteckte Unglücke,” 174.

¹¹⁹William Orbach, “A Periodization of Soviet Policy towards the Jews,” *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 12, no. 3 (1982): 45–62.

¹²⁰Mario Kessler, “The Russian Revolution and the Jewish Workers' Movement,” in *On Anti-Semitism and Socialism: Selected Essays*, ed. Mario Kessler (Berlin, 2005), 47–64, esp. 57–58.

¹²¹Arkady Vaksberg, *Stalin against the Jews*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York, 1994), 82–83.

still naïve. Did he continue to defend communism because he thought that it was still the optimal political option, despite everything (“where trees are felled, chips will fly”)? Was it because the party was his social milieu and source of his livelihood—crucial factors, especially in exile? His undeniable discontent, which could not bear a political expression, was instead channeled into the theoretical aspects of *Der Jude*.

My hypothesis is that the contradiction between the political field, ruled by dogma, and the theoretical field, guided by a genuine pursuit of truth, could be explained through the manuscript’s enigmatic title, *The Jew Is to Be Burned*. This title has neither reference nor explanation within the book itself. Nowhere in the manuscript does Heller predict the extermination of Jews. On the contrary, he saw fascism as a mere “pause” in the process of assimilation. The November Pogrom had indeed been the climax of antisemitism, but it also signaled an end to Jewish persecutions for it unmasked the true nature of Nazi antisemitism as a tool for class oppression, claimed Heller. From those optimistic statements, the reader could understand that a communist revolution was just around the corner. Why then the title *The Jew Is to Be Burned*?

This title did not stem from the manuscript’s political aspect, but rather from its theoretical aspect. Through Weberian theory, Heller’s awareness of the collision between capitalism and the traditional Jewish economic role in Europe had become much clearer. His enhanced understanding of class differentiation in Jewish society sharpened his acknowledgment of the “Burning Questions” concerning the vast Jewish proletariat in Eastern Europe. The Nazi persecutions led him to recognize the desperate situation even of his fellow German “bourgeois” Jews. From all this, the conclusion must have been that the future held a horrible tragedy for European Jewry: “The Jew is to be burned!”

The sentence “The Jew is to be burned” was taken from Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s famous 1779 play, *Nathan the Wise*. The play is set in medieval Jerusalem after the Christians had lost the city to the Muslim conqueror Saladin. The plot presents a conflict between Christians, Muslims, and Jews. During this conflict, the narrow-minded, anti-Jewish patriarch of Jerusalem repeatedly demands the execution of the main Jewish protagonist, Nathan, refuting all pleas and arguments: “No matter! The Jew is to be burned.”¹²² Eventually, the patriarch’s wish is not fulfilled. The play ends with a scene of fraternity between the main characters of all three religions, excluding the patriarch, emphasizing Lessing’s enlightened message of interreligious tolerance. Heller particularly chose the patriarch’s demand, which proved to be

¹²²Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan der Weise* [1779] (Munich, 1960), 98. I followed the English translation by Guenther Reinhardt, *Nathan the Wise* (New York, 1950), 86.

vain in the play, as if to say: The patriarch's ghost is now conjured up, casting a shadow over 150 years of German enlightenment. In the equilibrium between political fidelity and theoretical deviance in *Der Jude*, the title tips the scales to the side of the latter.

A comparison between the titles Heller gave his two works on the Jewish Question reveals another dimension to the theoretical shift he underwent. *The Decline of Judaism* presents an impersonal process of "decline," attributed to a deterministic force: "The iron march of history."¹²³ Contrarily, "the Jew is to be burned" is a phrase attributed to a person, be it the patriarch of Jerusalem, a French antisemite, or Hitler. That title was compatible with the different philosophy of history that Heller introduced in *Der Jude*: "there is no historical law for the development of peoples."¹²⁴ While in *Der Untergang* Heller held on to Stalin's deterministic interpretation of Historical Materialism, in *Der Jude* he ascribed a much bigger role to human agency. Even if the supposed result of the "decline" and the "burning" is the same—the disappearance of the Jews—the contrasting interpretations of the process leading to that result reflect opposing evaluations.

Probably by coincidence, albeit a striking one, Heller chose the exact phrase used by Herzl forty-seven years earlier in the very same Paris. Immediately following his conceptualization of antisemitism as the "saloon of the dissatisfied," Herzl put into the mouths of the "dissatisfied" the exclamation: "No matter! The Jew is to be burned."¹²⁵ Heller was probably unfamiliar with Herzl's journalistic report of 1892, but exactly for that reason this coincidence is symptomatic of Heller's theoretical shift to a pessimistic view of antisemitism. If in 1931 Judaism could still be seen by Heller as peacefully "declining" through assimilation, by 1939 "Burning Questions" were threatening to burn the Jews themselves. The same atmosphere of a national emergency that was expressed in 1938 in the famous Yiddish song by the Polish Bundist poet Mordechai Gebirtig, "*Undzer shtetl brent!*" (Our town is burning), was also echoed in Heller's title, *Der Jude wird verbrannt*.

Epilogue: Communist Legitimizations of Jewish Nationalism during the 1940s

The importance of Heller's manuscript was emphasized by the following developments in the communist discourse on the Jewish Question, which moved further and further away from the orthodox line. The changes in

¹²³Heller, *Der Untergang*, 91.

¹²⁴Heller, *Der Jude*, 12.

¹²⁵Herzl, "Französische Antisemiten," 2; Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, 86.

Heller's attitude toward the Jews and antisemitism, albeit significant, were limited to the theoretical sphere and not translated into political applications. Parallel significant changes in the communist political discussion were postponed by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact (signed three days after *Der Jude's* manuscript was completed), which had placed communists all around the globe in an uncomfortable position in general and with regard to the Jewish Question in particular.

New political attitudes among communists are documented only after the German attack on the Soviet Union and the beginning of the mass murder of Jews from late 1941 onwards. The new political line was prescribed neither by the USSR nor by the KPD's formal leadership based in Moscow, but rather by several groups of German-speaking communist exiles. The first manifestations of the new trend, in the form of calls of alarm against the Nazi scheme to annihilate European Jewry, came from the Jewish Austrian communist Jakob Rosner (known by his pseudonym G. Hausner), exiled in Sweden, and from communists from the Sudetenland, exiled in London.¹²⁶ The formation of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee by the Soviet leadership in 1942 further encouraged these trends, for it was understood by many Jews within and outside the USSR as Soviet recognition of a worldwide Jewish nationalism. Nonetheless, for the Soviet government it was merely an instrument of war propaganda, which was tightly supervised not to exceed its formal purposes.¹²⁷

The most salient representative of a new communist attitude to the Jewish Question was Paul Merker (1894–1969), the leader of *Freies Deutschland* (Free Germany), a group of German communist exiles in Mexico. Merker was defined by Herf as “an unusual German Communist,” for his intense writings about the Holocaust in real time (since 1942), his recognition of the uniqueness of Jewish suffering, and for his support for Jewish national rights and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine, as well as his demand for automatic compensation for every Jewish victim of the Nazis at the expense of the future German state.¹²⁸

Since Merker was a leading figure in the German communist underground in France from 1939 until his escape to Mexico in 1942,¹²⁹ contacts between him and Heller are plausible. Moreover, Heller and his wife received visas to Mexico in 1941 thanks to the help from friends who had already emigrated

¹²⁶Bankier, “Ha-Germanim ha-Hofshiyim,” 271–73.

¹²⁷Shimon Redlich, *Propaganda and Nationalism in Wartime Russia: The Jewish Antifascist Committee in the USSR, 1941–1948* (Boulder, CO, 1982).

¹²⁸Herf, “German Communism,” 270–81, quotation from 277. See also Bankier, “Ha-Germanim ha-Hofshiyim,” 279–81.

¹²⁹Herf, “German Communism,” 276.

there, which may imply a connection to Merker's group. In the event, the Hellers did not leave for Mexico as the visa for their daughter was delayed and they refused to leave her behind.¹³⁰ Heller's new approach to the Jewish Question, as expressed in *Der Jude*, might have been discussed with Merker during their common stay in France.

Further examples of the tendency to lend support for Jewish nationalism were evident also outside German-speaking communist circles, though only in later years. In 1944, Earl Browder, the leader of the Communist Party of the USA, called for the establishment of a Jewish nation-state after the war.¹³¹ Under his influence, a group of Jewish communists seceded from the bi-national Communist Party of Palestine and formed a "Hebrew Communist" movement in 1945.¹³² Sympathy toward Jewish nationalism from the communist world was enunciated for the last time in the speech by the Soviet ambassador to the UN in 1947 Andrei Gromyko in favor of establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine. This short moment of support was followed by an aggressive antisemitic policy within the Soviet Bloc during "the Black Years" of 1948–1952.¹³³ Symbolically, during "the Black Years" Merker, now back in communist-ruled East Germany, paid a heavy price for his wartime pro-Jewish and pro-Zionist statements. He was accused of being an agent in the service of the US and the Zionist movement, faced trial, and was sentenced to prison.¹³⁴

Retrospectively, Heller's *Der Jude* signifies a point of departure for "the road not taken" (using Robert Frost's metaphor) by communist Marxism regarding the Jewish Question. In comparison to orthodox Marxism, which was still the mainstream in the communist world during the 1940s, this road was "the one less traveled by." Heller can be seen as a theoretical predecessor of the political trend represented by Merker. Following the publication of *Der Untergang*, Heller declared that the Jewish Question did not interest him from a Jewish standpoint.¹³⁵ This claim sounds less credible after having written a second book on the topic within less than a decade in what seems to be an almost obsessive preoccupation with his denied Jewish "standpoint."

¹³⁰Freundlich, *The Traveling Years*, 70.

¹³¹James G. Ryan, *Earl Browder: The Failure of American Communism* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1997), 225.

¹³²Carmit Gai, *Standing Alone: The Story of the Hebrew Communists, 1943–1949* [in Hebrew] (Ben Shemen, 2019).

¹³³Alfred D. Low, *Soviet Jewry and Soviet Policy* (New York, 1980), 81–87; Zvi Gitelman, *Anti-Semitism in the USSR: Sources, Types, Consequences* (New York, 1974), 18.

¹³⁴Mario Kessler, "Anti-Semitism Against a Non-Jew: The Case of Paul Merker 1952–1953," in idem, *On Anti-Semitism*, 149–66.

¹³⁵*Jüdische Rundschau* 37, no. 9 (February 2, 1932), 41; cited by Mosse, "German Socialists," 141.

But even in *Der Jude*, after he had certainly read Fürnberg, Heller tried not to wave Jewish apologetic flags too high and refrained from any sign of support for Zionism, which Merker did express in the years to come. Was Heller, as a communist of Jewish origin, less open to nonconventional approaches than non-Jewish communists such as Fürnberg and Merker? Did he feel he had to be “more Catholic than the pope” and therefore did not allow himself even the slightest deviation from the party’s formal political line?¹³⁶ While Merker expressed his stance only from his remote Mexican exile, far away from the party’s leadership, and only when *the catastrophe* had already begun in Europe, Heller wrote *Der Jude* on European soil during “the catastrophe before the catastrophe.” And yet he entitled his manuscript prophetically: *The Jew Is to Be Burned*.

I do not argue that Otto Heller predicted the Nazi crematoriums. Nevertheless, he did have a strong pessimistic feeling of a coming disaster that was not expressed openly in the text, likely due to his political obligation to revolutionary optimism. His pessimism was exposed in the theoretical field as well as in the title, chosen at the last moment, perhaps in such haste that he abandoned his usual caution. Or perhaps it was the other way around, as a thoroughly thought-out, sophisticated hint to the sensitive reader who, alas, did not have the opportunity to read it.

Heller’s pessimism was proven to be tragically justified, not only for “the Jew” but also for the individual Jew—or, rather, “the non-Jewish Jew”¹³⁷—Otto Heller himself. While serving as an undercover Résistance agent in a Wehrmacht unit in France, he was caught by the Gestapo and deported to Auschwitz. His wife and daughter, also active in the Résistance, were captured as well and deported to Ravensbrück women’s camp; both survived and returned to Paris after the war. In Auschwitz, Heller took part in the international underground as an editor of its information bulletin.¹³⁸ After surviving the Death March, he was brought to Mauthausen and from there to one of its sub-camps, in Ebensee, Upper Austria. There he perished, according to the formal report on his death register card issued by the camp’s hospital, on March 26, 1945 due to an infection in his toe.¹³⁹ There were

¹³⁶For socialist Jews in France who rejected the idea of turning back to their Jewishness (“return to the ghetto”), see Guy Miron, *The Waning of Emancipation: Jewish History, Memory and the Rise of Fascism in Germany, France and Hungary* (Detroit, 2011), 135–36.

¹³⁷Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew.”

¹³⁸Bruno Baum, *Widerstand in Auschwitz* (Berlin, 1961), 87–88.

¹³⁹Yad Vashem Archive, 0.41-139: Card file of Jews who perished in the Ebensee camp hospital, 1944–1945.

also rumors that the SS shot Heller in Ebensee.¹⁴⁰ His body must have been burned in the camp's crematorium.

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¹⁴⁰Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, *Erinnerungen aus dem Widerstand: Das kämpferische Leben eine Architektin von 1938–1945* (Vienna, 2014), 25. I thank Sophie Hochhäusel for bringing this memoir to my attention.