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Post-war surname changes among Jews in Czechoslovakia*

1. Introduction

After the end of World War II, the surviving Czech and Moravian Jews were faced with the question of where to rebuild their existence, and how to relate to their surroundings and their own Jewish identity. For many, the removal of their original name and the adoption of a new one became part of this process of finding themselves.

In my paper, I have focused on these post-war name changes. I built on materials stored in the Czech National Archive (see below). To understand the motivations of the applicants, I relied on the memories of witnesses and their family members. I also consider it crucial to place this phenomenon in the social and political context of the time, which played an important role in the decision-making process.

2. Sources

The Czech National Archive holds Fund No. 167 entitled *Registers of Jewish Religious Communities in the Czech Regions* (Matriky židovských náboženských obcí v českých zemích). It includes four carton boxes marked in the archival aid No 1646 as *Processed (by names A–Z) and pending applications for name changes*. In total, they contain more than 3,000 pages of documents, which are the basis for this study. These are mainly correspondence between the various offices concerning the entry of permitted name changes in the registry books and the issue of new documents; there are also copies of decisions to permit changes addressed directly to the applicants, and occasionally, I find birth certificates or copies of them.[1]

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[1] Cf. also the research of MATÚŠOVÁ (2015: 39–45), who analysed the changes in German surnames in Prague in 1940–1946. She used 45 carton boxes stored in the Prague City Archives (MHMP fund, reference IV descriptive, signature O, period 1940–1949). Unfortunately, the case files were shredded in 1985. The issue of changes in German surnames in the Czech Republic has been addressed in other studies as well – see MATÚŠOVÁ (2003a, 2003b, 2007a, 2007b, 2017). On post-war surname changes see also BENEŠ (1946), BONDYOVÁ (2006: 159–164), VEJRYCHOVÁ (2011), etc.

From these sources from the Czech National Archive, I have managed to extract data concerning 2,172 specific persons registered in the registry books kept by Jewish religious communities at the time of their birth (or marriage). As shown in Figure 1, surnames were most frequently changed (1,965 persons), less frequently given/first names (66) or both (130). For another 27 persons, it was not a change of the given name but a choice of the "main given name",[2] for 11 of them, the choice of the main given name was accompanied by a change of the surname.
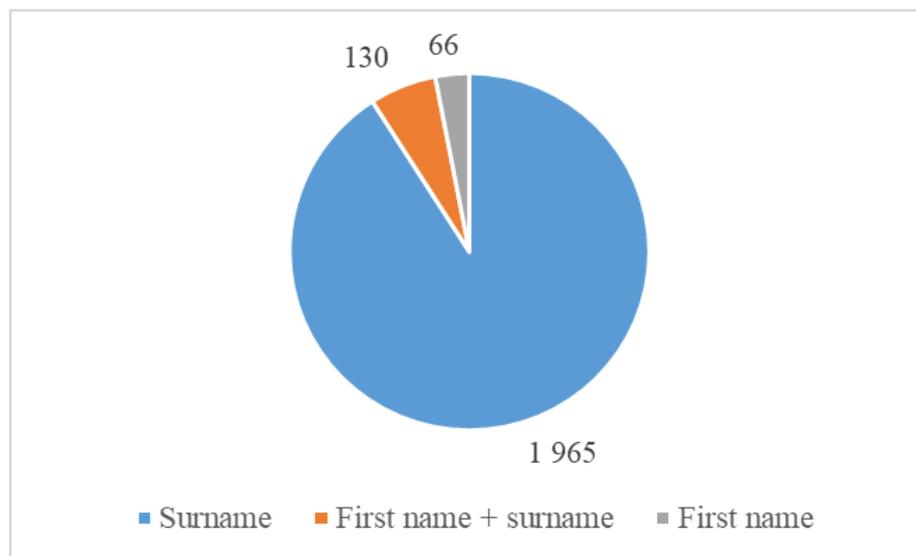

Figure 1. *Changes in personal names by type.*

Among the archival materials were also decisions on the registration of names that had already been changed before the war but were not properly entered in the registry at that time, which was discovered after the war in connection with applications for new birth certificates. After the war, changes that occurred during the war abroad, in exile, were additionally recorded in the registers. I do not take these entries into account in my analysis.

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[2] Decree of the Ministry of the Interior No. 1225/1949 Ú.l.I, stipulated that only one given name could be registered. In the case of persons who had more than one registered name in the past, Decree No. 479/1950 Coll. of the Ministry of the Interior provided in Article 5, paragraph 1: "If more than one name is registered in the civil registry, the name given first shall, as a matter of principle, apply in official relations. If, however, one of these names is indicated in the register book as the main name, the name so indicated shall be the name in official use."

The examined archival materials cover the period from 1945 to 1977, while territorially they are limited to the present-day Czech Republic. The distribution of individual changes on the timeline is shown in Figure 2.[3] Most people changed their names in the first three years after the end of World War II, i.e. from 1945 to 1947.
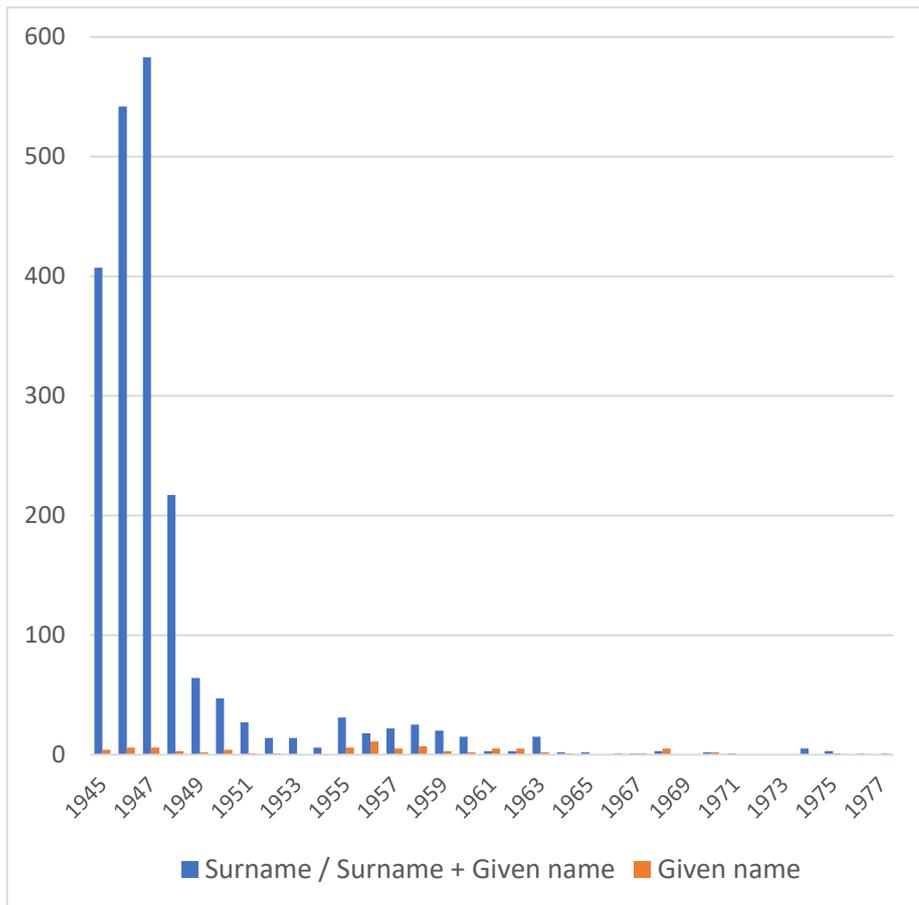

Figure 2. *Number of Jews who changed their personal name(s) in individual years.*

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[3] The situation can be confronted with the results of previous research on pre-war surname changes (DVOŘÁKOVÁ 2023; 2024) based on the source material from Prague Jewish birth registers, as this was the most populous Jewish community of the region. More than 17,000 Jewish children were born in Prague during the period of Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867–1918), and only 350 of them changed their surname until the start of the German occupation in 1939.

Unfortunately, the original change requests are not part of the analysed archival materials (with a few rare exceptions). I can only assume that the reasons for the change were similar to those of the Jews in neighbouring countries (cf. e.g. the situation in Hungary described by KARÁDY – KOZMA 2002; FARKAS 2009). To understand the applicants' motivations, I analysed the memories of witnesses captured, for example, in the archives of the Czech *Memory of the Nation* (Paměť národa) or the *USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive*. I also contacted 20 selected families in which the post-war change had occurred, asking for their responses regarding the reasons for the renaming and the choice of the new name.

3. Jews in Czechoslovakia after 1945

Before the outbreak of World War II, about 120,000 Jews were living in the Czech Lands. During the occupation, 78,000 died (VYKOUKAL 2016: 55).[4] Immediately after the end of the war, the Jewish community consisted of three groups of people. The first group consisted of Jews who had been in hiding during the war or had been active in the resistance. In the second group were survivors of the concentration camps and ghettos. The third group consisted of those returning from exile, often as soldiers in foreign units (NEPALOVÁ 1999: 211; MORAVSKÁ 2016: 75). Ideologically, according to BROD (1997: 153), the surviving Jews were divided into Zionists who preferred to emigrate, assimilationists, and activists who expected the end of anti-Semitism from the communist society.

The post-war social climate (especially the persistent anti-Semitism and the revival of the stereotype of the Jew as a German, the problems with the return of property, the reluctance of those around them to listen about the conditions in the camps, etc.), political changes (communist takeover of power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948, the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948) and purely personal reasons (the disruption of families and communities) certainly played a role in the decision to stay in Czechoslovakia or to leave.

The largest migration waves took place in 1948–1950 after the rise of communism in Czechoslovakia (WIENEROVÁ 2017: 38–39). HEITLINGEROVÁ (2007: 30) states that half of all Holocaust survivors, i.e. 22,000–24,000 people,[5] migrated to Israel by 1950, and another 3,000–5,000 to other countries.

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[4] In 1930, there were about 354,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia, of whom 137,000 lived in Slovakia and about 97,000 in Transcarpathia (VYKOUKAL 2016: 55).

[5] One third of them were so-called optants, i.e. Czechoslovak citizens from the region of Transcarpathia which fell to the Soviet Union after the war. Today it is part of Ukraine (Zakarpattia Oblast) (ROTHKIRCHENOVÁ 1993: 113; VYKOUKAL 2016: 54–55).

Thus, only 15,000–18,000 Czech and Slovak Jews remained in the country, i.e. less than a tenth of the pre-war number.[6] In 1950, the Czechoslovak borders were closed. At the same time, a wave of anti-Semitism along the Soviet model began to spread – anti-Semitism was disguised as anti-Zionism (Zionism was considered bourgeois nationalism and cosmopolitanism) and the State of Israel was portrayed as an American base in the Middle East, and later as a war aggressor and occupier (SOUKUPOVÁ 2020: 205). In this atmosphere, staged political trials of "Zionist conspirators" took place – in Czechoslovakia, it was the trial with Rudolf Slánský in 1952, and in the USSR the so-called "White Coat Trial" in 1953.

In the 1960s, at a time of political loosening, the public began to take an increased interest in Jewish culture, art, and important personalities (especially Franz Kafka), but also in the Holocaust. The atmosphere of that time was also reflected in the rehabilitation of those convicted in political trials.[7] In August 1968, however, the armies of the Warsaw Pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia. A major new wave of emigration took place, in which another 6,000 Jews left the country. This was followed by the period of so-called "normalisation" in Czechoslovakia. The Jewish community was again hit by repression and cadre purges. In the 1980s, all persons of Jewish origin in Czechoslovakia were registered as part of a state security operation codenamed "Spider" (Pavouk). Only the Velvet Revolution in November 1989 brought change.

According to the estimates of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, 15,000–20,000 Jews currently live in the Czech Republic but most of them are not registered as members of Jewish religious communities.

4. Reasons for name change

Immediately after the war, the German population was expelled, and it must be said that even "Jews who declared their German nationality in the 1930 census were considered Germans in the post-war period. They therefore had to prove

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[6] Other numbers are given by YEGAR (1997: 77): "Between 1948 and 1950, a total of about 19,000 Jews immigrated from the Czechoslovakia to Israel. About 7,000 Jews emigrated to other countries (USA, Canada, England, Australia, Venezuela). The number of Jews who remained in the Czechoslovakia was about 18,000." "The total number of 52 Jewish religious communities from 1945 thus logically decreased, and by 1950 only nine remained. The Czech Lands also acted as a transit territory in the first post-war years, and after the end of World War II, about 150,000 Jewish migrants passed through Czechoslovak territory." (WIENEROVÁ 2017: 38–39).

[7] On this period, see in detail e.g. ROTHKIRCHENOVÁ (1993), KREJČOVÁ (1995), SOUKUPOVÁ (2011), etc.

their behaviour and fate during the war so that they would not be treated in the same way as Germans, Hungarians, collaborators, and traitors. Their applications for Czechoslovak citizenship were then processed lengthily and not always in their favour. Some Jews were deported together with the Germans because of their alleged German affiliation" (WIENEROVÁ 2017: 42; cf. ČAPKOVÁ 2013; SOUKUPOVÁ 2008). It is not surprising that many surviving Jews tried to get rid of their German surnames.[8] As J. Osers, for example, recalled: "On every occasion I was told: 'You are not Czech. And you have such a strange German name!'" (cited in NOVOTNÁ 2006: 39).[9] This was done in the general anti-German atmosphere prevailing in Czech society at the time and as a part of the state-sponsored campaign for the de-Germanization and de-Hungarianization of personal and place names.[10] As MATÚŠOVÁ (2015: 46) states: "The first post-war requests for changes in German surnames were probably spontaneous. The need to change surnames was said to have been felt especially by persons who had surnames identical to the nazi leaders (*Frank*, *Hess*, *Henlein*) and by members of certain professional groups, such as doctors, lawyers, and, of course, Czech Jews (*Breitenfeld – Beneš*, *Katz – Kocourek*)." According to DUŠEK (1945), Jews made up half of the applicants for a change of surname in Prague in 1945.[11]

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[8] Cf. e.g. the situation in the United States: "Many individuals who possessed Jewish-sounding names claimed in their petitions to fear anti-German, rather than anti-Semitic, sentiment. It is certainly possible that individuals such as *Biegelman* did experience anti-German discrimination. Many Jewish names did have German origins, and of course, the United States was at war with Germany. One reporter in 1947 suggested that both Germans and Jews changed their names in large numbers during the war […]." (FERMAGLICH 2018: 51)

[9] Respondents to my survey expressed similar views, e.g., "I just know from the stories that they didn't want to have a German name." (PP, e-mail, 2 May 2024), "They just didn't want to have a German name anymore […]. Sometimes I heard sentences like: 'We live in Czechoslovakia, so we should have a Czech name.'" (ZV, e-mail, 18 April 2024)

[10] In neighbouring Poland, after the end of the war, a similar campaign calling for the change of "non-Polish-sounding" names and their Polonisation was carried out, based on the Decree of 10 November 1945 "o zmianie i ustalaniu imion i nazwisk". According to WALKOWIAK (2016: 238–241), the original intention of the decree was to bring order to the registration of the population, as many people (especially those active in the resistance) began to use a pseudonym during the war for their own safety, which they retained even after the end of the war. However, there was very strong pressure on people to change their names (at work, at school, at the authorities). Retaining a German name was considered a sign of lack of patriotism. As a result, by mid-1948, 265,000 people had changed their surname in the Silesian Voivodeship alone. As stated by BUBAK (1982: 105): "Immediately after the war, Polish Jews often changed surnames of German origin, characteristic of the Jewish population, into Polish surnames. This was connected with the full assimilation of these people in Poland." Cf. situation in Hungary (FARKAS 2012: 39).

[11] We can compare this situation with other countries. For example, in France, according to LAPIERRE (2006: 136), 2,150 Jews changed their surnames between 1945 and 1957, i.e. 6 times

The campaign, conducted under the slogan "Let's clean up our surnames",[12] is also mentioned by P. Oliva: "At that time my name was *Ohrenstein. Pavel Ohrenstein*. But I didn't like that name anymore. And in my poetic attempts, youthful ones, which of course were never published, I signed myself as *Oliva*. *Oliva*, because I liked the word olive very much because the olive was the tree that the goddess Athena dedicated to the city of Athens. I have been very interested in ancient Greece since I was young, when I was twelve or thirteen. And that is why after the war – also when there was the movement to change German names – I took the name *Oliva*."[13]

Naturally, not everyone was in favour of such a campaign. As F. Bergmann, for example, recalls: "I was received there by a Minister Councillor, I won't name him, and his biggest concern… First, he asked me how to address me, because I was still in my English uniform. So, I told him: 'Captain'. He said: 'Captain, have you ever thought of changing your name?' He didn't like my name. And I said: 'What would you suggest, Mr. Minister Councillor?' He said: 'Well, something like *Havíř* or *Horník* [i.e. 'miner'].' So, I said, I'll pull him around for a while. So, I said to him: 'Have you ever heard of *Tyrš* and *Fügner* [i.e. founders of the patriotic gymnastics association Sokol], I think *Fügner* even had two commas over the U? And as far as I know, they were excellent Czechs, patriots and members of the Sokol movement. Let me tell you something, Mr. Minister Councillor, when some Mr. *Gottwald* and *Fierlinger* [i.e. politicians] and others have their names changed, then Mr. *František Bergman* might start thinking about it. But Daddy gave his life for that name, it was enough for him, and it is enough for me. I am leaving.' And I was never seen there again, I didn't stay there a week, under those circumstances." (cited in ŠMOK 2017: 203).

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more than during the previous long period between 1809 and 1939. After the war, Jews made up half of all applicants for a name change, and in 1950 even 64%. The changes concerned mainly surnames originating from Eastern Europe and affected approximately 8,000–10,000 people, i.e. about 5% of the Jewish population of France. After that, the wave of renaming subsided.

[12] The campaign was also supported legislatively by Act No. 165/1945 Coll., on fee and benefit concessions for name changes, of 11 December 1945, which directly applied to "permission to change a non-Slavic or non-Slavic-sounding name to a Slavic one". Later amendments were governed by Ministry of the Interior Decree No. 479/1950 Coll. of 26 July 1950, which provided in section 6 that "The authorized municipal authority may, upon request, authorize, in particular, the change of a derogatory, eccentric, ridiculous, foreign-language name or surname or the change of the surname of a woman divorced or separated before 1 January 1950 to her former surname."

[13] Paměť národa, Pavel Oliva, https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/oliva-pavel-1923 (time 1:23–1:58).

In addition to the effort to get rid of German surnames, there is also an effort to change the names stereotypically associated with Jewish ethnicity (e.g. *Kohn*, *Löwy*, *Bondy*, *Katz*, *Popper*, etc.; see Table 1).[14] A potential reason to the high number of changes of these names could not be only their "Jewishness" but also their frequency among Jewish population. As Volfová (1994: 48−49) calculated in her diploma thesis, 20 most common surnames of Jews in Prague between 1900 and 1945 were: *Kohn*, *Pick*, *Pollak*, *Kraus*, *Fischer*, *Taussig*, *Stein*, *Steiner*, *Neumann*, *Heller*, *Popper*, *Freund*, *Klein*, *Fuchs*, *Löwy*, *Adler*, *Lederer*, *Bondy*, *Katz* and *Fischl*. For example, H. Bor recalled: "My father's original Jewish surname was *Edelstein*. On one hand, it is a pity that we lost it by his own decision because Edelstein is 'a gem' in German, which would not have been a bad thing. But *Hanuš Edelstein*, that already sounds very Jewish and very German, and I think […] that was the reason why my father and one of his brothers changed the surname to the Czech *Bor* after the war. I don't know how they came up with that. I guess they wanted a short surname." [15] The trauma caused by the Holocaust manifested itself among other things in the survivors' fear of revealing their Jewish ancestry and their descendants were often forbidden to speak about it outside the family; changing their name was part of the effort to hide their origins.[16] This became a taboo topic in many families too, as can be seen from the answers of my respondents, e.g. "It was never really talked about in our family" (ZV, e-mail, 18 April 2024), "I don't know much about this event at home, because these people are no longer with us, and even when they were, it was not talked about much" (LC, e-mail, 18 April 2024), "We never talked about the name change at home" (VRK, e-mail, 2 May 2024), etc.

Apart from fears, there may have been purely pragmatic reasons behind the change of name. An inconvenient name (whether German or Jewish) could have been a hindrance to a career in post-war Czech society. Some public figures also resorted to it (e.g. *Vojtěch Eckstein*, a member of the National Assembly, changed his surname to *Erban*; *Norbert Fried*, a writer*,* changed his surname to *Frýd*; *Lothar Chitz*, an actor and director*,* became *Petr Lotar*, etc.).

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[14] Cf. also Bukovská–Mlynář (2019). On post-war anti-Semitism, see e.g. Krejčová (1993).

[15] Paměť národa, Hanuš Bor, https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/bor-hanus-20200909-0 (time 0:00–1:17).

[16] Related to this is the fact that Jewish children born after the war were given first names common in the majority society (cf. Dvořáková 2021), etc.
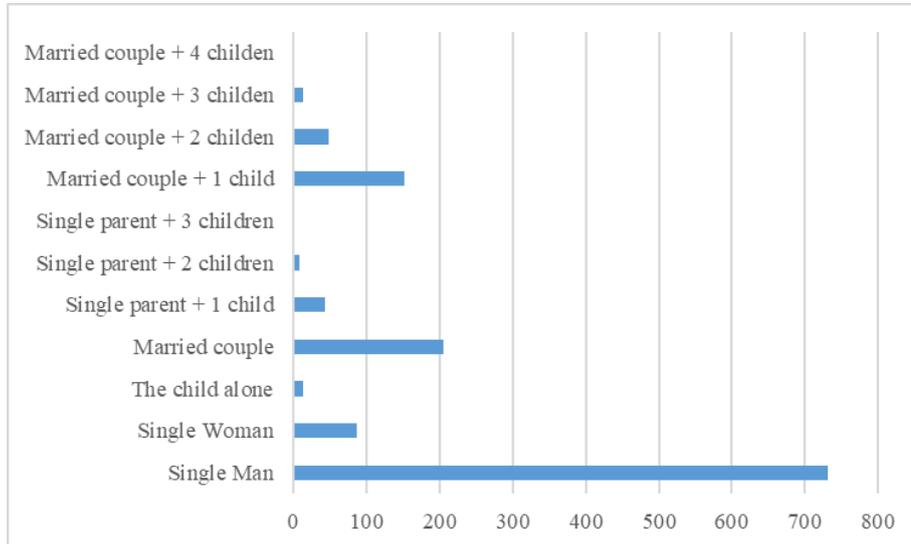
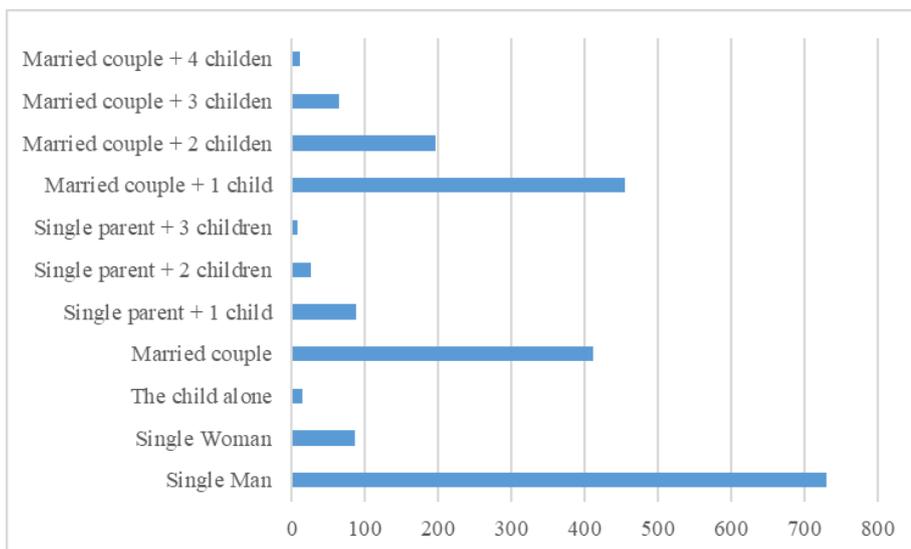**Figure 3.** *Applicants for surname changes (number of changes).*

Figure 4. *Applicants for surname changes (number of persons).*

5. Applicants

Who were the applicants for the change of surname? I have extracted 1,173 surname changes from the materials stored in the Czech National Archive, affecting a total of 1,933 people. Figure 3 shows that the main applicants for surname changes were single men and married couples without children or with one child.[17] Figure 4 shows these changes in terms of the number of people affected by each change.

Adult siblings or parents and their adult offsprings also resorted to surname changes.[18] They had to apply for the change separately, as it did not apply to them automatically, as it did to minors. However, they chose different strategies. For example, the twin brothers *Grossmann* both changed their surname to *Girsa* at the turn of 1945/46. This was the most common approach. The *Goliath* brothers, on the other hand, each chose a different but only slightly modified surname in 1946, one becoming *Goliáš* and the other *Goliát*. Completely broken links are then seen in the example of the *Aschermann* brothers, who chose completely different new surnames – *Aleš* and *Beran* (which was their mother's maiden surname).

I have no documented case of someone being renamed more than once.[19] However, in a few cases, the person changed his or her surname and given name gradually, not all at once. For example, *Isaac Thieberger* first "got rid" of his ethnically indicative given name (he became *Evžen* in 1945) and only two years later changed his surname to *Horák*. The reverse approach was taken, for example, by *Elfrieda Wittenbergová*, who, together with her husband, changed her surname to *Vitková* in 1945 and her given name from *Elfrieda* to *Viera* only a year later. However, the delay could have been much longer, e.g. *Margita Vogelhutová* changed her family name to *Valešová* together with her husband as early as 1945, but her given name was changed to *Maria* only in 1968, i.e. after 23 years.

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[17] It cannot be completely ruled out that in some cases the change concerned several persons (e.g. the whole family), but the documentation was kept only for the person of the applicant.

[18] Until the end of 1950 the age of adulthood was 21 (according to Law No. 447/1919, § 1). On 1 January 1951, the new Civil Code came into force, which lowered the age of adulthood to 18 years (Act No. 141/1950 Coll., § 10, para. 1).

[19] In an interview, Věra Landová (Paměť národa, Věra Landová, https://www.pametnaroda.cz/cs/landova-vera-20131213-0, time 57:19–58:58) recalled that both of her uncles changed their surnames from *Wolf* to *Vlček* on the grounds "that it would be quiet, so as not to provoke", but after years they decided to go back to their original surnames – but with the fear "that we might get you and no one in the family into trouble". However, neither of these changes is documented in the material examined from the Czech National Archive. Nor is there evidence in the archives of her parents' renaming from *Weil* to *Válek*. This naturally raises the question of how complete the archival file is.

For 628 persons, I do not have information on their age at the time of the change, most of them being the wives of the applicants. I was therefore only able to determine the age of 1,544 persons, of whom 1,224 were men and boys and only 320 were women and girls (see Figure 5). The youngest were babies born shortly before the whole family changed its surname (and it is perhaps reasonable to assume that the birth of the child may have been one of the impulses that led to the decision to rename). The oldest person who changed his surname was *Rudolf Sinek* (born 1872), who, together with his wife *Klára,* changed the spelling of their surname in 1948, at the age of 76, and became *Synek*. However, I believe that age did not play a significant role in the decision to change the name; I consider the time when the change took place to be more important.[20]
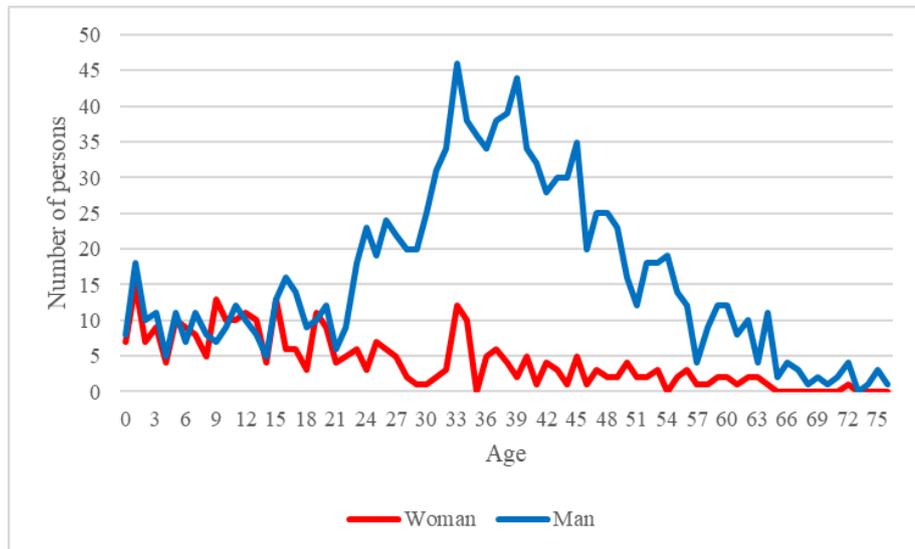

Figure 5. *Surname changes by age and sex.*

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[20] Before the war, "most surname changes took place among men between the ages of 22 and 29, with a peak at the age of 25, i.e., the period when they finished their education, were looking for employment on the labor market and were starting to build a career and have their own family" (DVOŘÁKOVÁ 2023: 5).

Original surname	Number of changes	Number of people affected by the change	New surname
Kohn	36	64	*Burián* (1), *Dolanský* (1), *Kadlec* (1), *Kalenský* (3), *Kalina* (1), *Karen* (3), *Kareš* (1), *Karný* (1), *Kinský* (1), *Kliment* (1), *Knotek* (1), *Kohen* (1), *Koldovský* (1), *Kolský* (2), *Kopecký* (1), *Korda* (2), *Kordáč* (1), *Kosta* (2), *Kotek* (2), *Kovář* (1), *Kozák* (1), *Kožík* (1), *Král* (1), *Kučera* (1), *Oliva* (1), *Trávníček* (1), *Valta* (1)
Pollak/ Pollák	28/4	42/6	*Podlipský* (1), *Polák* (31)
Löwy/ Löwi/ Lövi	19/1/1	28/1/2	*Beran* (1), *Holub* (1), *Lánský* (3), *Lenský* (2), *Lamač* (1), *Levý* (9), *Lípa* (1), *Lom* (1), *Lukáš* (1), *Vilém* (1)
Pick	19	35	*Gschiel* (1), *Novák* (1), *Palivec* (1), *Parma* (1), *Pavlát* (1), *Pavlík* (3), *Peka* (1), *Pešek* (1), *Peška* (1), *Picek* (1), *Pícha* (1), *Pika* (2), *Pilný* (1), *Pokorný* (1), *Pražák* (2)
Fischl/ Fischel/ Fišl	15/2/1	24/2/2	*Farský* (1), *Fedor* (1), *Fiala* (2), *Finský* (1) *Fiša* (1), *Fišl* (2), *Forman* (1), *Fučík* (1), *Holan* (1), *Jiří* (1), *Kotrba* (1), *Novák* (1), *Pavlán* (1), *Ročovský* (1), *Rybář* (1), *Vltavský* (1)
Klein	20	36	*Hron* (1), *Kalina* (3), *Karas* (1), *Kavan* (1), *Klán* (4), *Klen* (2), *Klenka* (3), *Klíma* (3), *Klimeš* (1), *Malý* (1)
Stein	13	24	*Beneš* (1), *Kamenický* (1), *Skála* (2), *Skalický* (1), *Stach* (3), *Stárek* (2), *Suk* (1), *Štěpánek* (1), *Valenta* (1)
Lustig	11	18	*Horák* (1), *Landa* (1), *Lenda* (2), *Lenský* (1), *Lipský* (1), *Lukáš* (2), *Lukavský* (2), *Lukeš* (1)
Neumann	11	16	*Doležal* (1), *Najman* (1), *Nor* (1), *Novák* (1), *Novan* (1), *Novohradský* (1), *Nový* (5)
Weisskopf	11	14	*Bělský* (1), *Jánský* (1), *Jonáš* (1), *Kafka* (1), *Kohout* (2), *Marek* (1), *Vítek* (3), *Vrána* (1)
Bondy	10	18	*Adámek* (1), *Bárta* (1), *Benda* (2), *Beneš* (1), *Bočan* (1), *Borský* (4)
Grünhut	10	11	*Bělský* (4), *Galaš* (1), *Gardavský* (1), *Grégr* (1), *Grůn* (1), *Havel* (1), *Nový* (1)
Katz	10	14	*Bořický* (1), *Kac* (1), *Kác* (2), *Karas* (1), *Karlovský* (1), *Kaz* (2), *Kazda* (1), *Kolský* (1)
Popper	10	19	*Blanický* (1), *Hájek* (1), *Pavel* (3), *Petera* (1), *Pojar* (1), *Prokop* (1), *Táborský* (1), *Thum* (1)
Stern	10	20	*Melan* (1), *Sklenář* (1), *Stánek* (1), *Sterec* (1), *Suk* (1), *Štěrba* (1), *Štern* (4)
Winternitz	10	16	*Lubojacký* (1), *Tříska* (2), *Valenta* (1), *Velímský* (1), *Vihan* (1), *Vilím* (2), *Vít* (1), *Vranský* (1)

Table 1. *Most frequently changed surnames.*

Further information about the applicants, e.g. their education, profession, etc., is available only in rare cases if it was included in the address to which the name change decision was sent (e.g. "Ing. *Ota Altmann*, Staff Captain in Moravská Ostrava"), or if they were public figures (e.g. the director and playwright *Otto Ohrenstein* and his brother, the actor *Zdeněk Ohrenstein,* both changed their surnames to *Ornest* because of their careers). Therefore, no conclusions can be drawn about the social status of the applicants from this fragmentary information.[21]

6. Surnames old and new

Table 1 shows the most frequently changed surnames together with the surnames newly adopted.

As mentioned above, I have obtained information on a total of 1,308 surname changes from archival materials.[22] For 997 new surnames, the initial of the original surname was retained, which is 76.22% of all cases. Although, according to DUŠEK (1945), "the applicant may choose a new name at his discretion and this name need not begin with the initial letter of his old one", this was the dominant tendency.

As BONDYOVÁ (2006: 154) writes: "In the transport lists, one can find names common to both the Jews of Bohemia and Moravia and the Nazi grandees: *Himmler* – SS commander and Minister of the Interior, *Hess* – Hitler's deputy, *Rosenberg* – Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, *Müller* – Gestapo commander, *Pohl* – head of the Ministry of Economy and Administration, *Todt* – commander of the labor units, *Frank* – head of the General Gouvernement,

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[21] According to data from the Records Department of the Council of Jewish Religious Communities from September 1947, at that time "Of the 19,000 persons of the Jewish faith, nearly 3,000 were working as labourers, 2,500 as employees, more than 4,300 women were housewives, and over 1,600 required social care. There were 906 independent merchants and tradesmen, and 789 persons were active in the liberal professions (doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.)." (NEPALOVÁ 1999: 326).

[22] The situation in Czech part of Czechoslovakia can be compared with Poland. Newly chosen surnames there mostly ended in *-ski*, *-cki* or *-owicz* and often, according to BUBAK (1982), were somehow related to the original names (e.g. *Berliner > Berliński*). Either they were "translations" (*Grünbaum > Zieliński*) or preservation of the same initials or syllables (e.g. *Sara Goldbergowa > Sabina Godlewska*). This is also confirmed by ŁOBODZIŃSKA (1991) on post-war material from Wrocław, she also adds the Polonisation of German surnames (e.g. *Horowitz > Horowicz, Katz > Kac, Fischer > Fiszer*) and gives examples of changes of given names (e.g. male *Aron > Henryk, Leib > Leon, Szmul > Stanislav*, female *Hadosa > Helena, Chana > Anna, Pesla > Apolonia*). Changes in surnames immediately after the war have been further discussed in Poland by, e.g., MINIAK (1995), JANICKA (2010), ZARĘBSKI (2014), CHOROŚ (2019) and others, but Jewish surnames are mentioned only marginally in their studies.

Funk – president of the Reichsbank, and *Koch* – commander of the Majdanek extermination camp." The surnames that were so ideologically loaded were among the first that people changed after the war, as DUŠEK (1945) shows: "We have many good, honest Czechs who are called *Franks*, *Hesses*, *Rosenbergs*, *Henleins*, *Keitels* etc. like German war criminals. Of course, our people have asked or will ask to change their names."[23] From my corpus, this includes the changes *Frank > Farník* and *Himmler > Hála*. Jews also got rid of surnames referring to Germany such as *Deutsch*, *Deutscher*, and *Reich*.

Many changes were made in the spelling of Czech surnames originally written in German – which was related to the fact that Jewish register books were compulsorily kept in German during the Austro-Hungarian period – and therefore the spelling was reversed. The German graphemes were replaced by Czech ones (e.g. *Hayek > Hájek*, *Wessely > Veselý*), especially the German *sch > š*, *tsch > č*, *tz > c* (e.g. *Schalek > Šálek*, *Hlawatsch > Hlaváč*, *Moravetz > Moravec*), simplification of double consonant writing was made (e.g. *Fialla > Fiala*, *Hannak > Hanák*), writing *ck > k* (e.g. *Brock > Brok*), etc. Linguistic correctness was argued, e.g. in the application from 1963: "According to the attached birth certificate, my name should be Jaroslav *Jellinek*. In fact, I have always signed my name as Jaroslav *Jelínek*, although my Czech surname was distorted during the Austrian rule in an attempt to Germanise it. I am interested in having a Czech surname and spelling it correctly even in official documents. For this reason, I request that I am allowed to change my surname from *Jellinek* to *Jelínek*." In some cases, the Czech origin was confirmed by an expert opinion issued by the Czech Language Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, e.g. the decision on the surname *Platschek* in 1958 states: "Reasons for the decision: it is a surname of Czech origin, and you are therefore legally entitled to have it changed following the rules of the Czech language."[24]

It is interesting that the paragraph on orthographic correctness was also applied in the case of surnames that originated from non-literal forms of the Czech national language (e.g. *Vohryzek*). Newly chosen surnames that retained the older spelling were also recorded (e.g. *Girsa* instead of *Jirsa*). However, spelling errors were also left in the new surnames, as we can see in the example of the German surname *Bischitzky*, which was spelled *Bišický*, although etymologically the proper form would be *Byšický*, since it is a surname derived

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[23] Cf. also RENNICK (1969), who wrote about the changes of the surname *Hitler* in the United States.

[24] The linguistic aspect of the name was also considered in other cases, e.g. in the decision on the change *Kleinmann > Kent* from 1965 it is stated: "Reasons for the decision: it was taken into account that the use of the existing surname does not suit you, as it is long, difficult to pronounce and is often garbled." Similarly for the change *Steinitz > Skála* in 1962: "This is a non-Czech surname which has caused you difficulties in social and public life."

from the place name of the village of Byšice. Similarly, the new surname *Dolynský* should be *Dolinský* because it is from the toponym Dolina, or the common noun dolina 'valley'.

There were many cases of Czechization of surnames of German origin. Mostly it was a phonetic transcription according to the pronunciation in Czech (e.g. *Greger > Grégr, Hahn > Hána, Fried > Frýd, Reiner > Rajner, Herz > Herc*) and replacing graphemes typical of German with graphemes common in Czech (e.g. *Fischer > Fišer, Hübsch > Hybš, Müller > Miler, Schick > Šik, Schnitzer > Šnicer*).[25] Thus, only the graphic aspect of the surnames was changed, not their German character (e.g., in the surname *Brzeziner* only the German spelling of *rz > ř* was modified but the German suffix *-er* remained, which is used to form surnames from place names, i.e., *Brzeziner > Březiner*).[26]

Since the original requests for change have not survived, I do not know what led the applicants to choose specific new names. Nevertheless, I can trace some tendencies:

    a) keeping the same initials of the old and new surname (e.g. *Silberstern > Suk, Taussig > Tomek, Zweigenthal > Zeman*);

    b) spelling similarity of old and new surnames (e.g. *Löwy > Levý, Neurad > Nerad, Glas > Klas*);

    c) the new surname was formed from a part of the old one by mechanical shortening (e.g. *Abeles > Les, Landau > Landa, Rybaczewski > Ryba*), or decomposition of compound surnames and subsequent suffixation (e.g. *Sinaiberger > Sinaiský, Ornstein > Orný*);

    d) translation of an etymologically transparent German surname into Czech (e.g. *Fisch* 'fish' *> Ryba* 'fish', *Goldschmidt* 'goldsmith' *> Zlatník* 'goldsmith', *Grün* 'green' *> Zelený* 'green'), or translation of only one part of a compound German surname (e.g. *Goldhammer* 'golden hammer' *> Zlatý* 'golden', *Silberfeld* 'silver field' *> Stříbrný* 'silver', *Schulhof* 'schoolyard' *> Dvorský* from *dvůr* 'yard' *+ -ský*), including mistranslations based on folk etymology (e.g. *Süssland* 'sweet land' *> Sládek* – the surname is from common noun *sládek* meaning 'brewer', not from adjective *sladký* 'sweet');

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[25] Cf. MATÚŠOVÁ (2015: 51–52).

[26] Other German surnames derived from place names of villages in Bohemia and Moravia were translated (e.g. *Prager > Pražák, Radnitzer > Radnický, Taussig > Domažlický*).

e) old and new surnames from the same semantic circle (e.g. *Vogel* 'bird' > *Vorel* 'eagle', *Wassermann* 'waterman' > *Vodička* diminutive of *voda* 'water');

f) taking the maiden name of the wife (e.g. *Fuchs > Zeman*, *Einhorn > Buzek*, *Nefeles > Sovák*) or the mother (e.g. *Tannenbaum > Simon*), or returning the wife to her maiden name (e.g. *Winter*, née *Hájková > Hájková*);[27]

g) surnames derived from toponyms denoting places to which the person had some relation (e.g. *Fischl > Ročovský* according to the fact that he was born in Horní Ročov, *Metzger > Brodský* lived in Český Brod, *Fleischmann > Hanák* came from Olomouc, i.e. the metropolis of Haná region);

h) surnames derived from the given name (e.g. *Vilém Hanuš Löwy > Hanuš Vilém*, *Michal Fürchgott > Tomáš Michal*, *Lothar Chitz > Petr Lotar*).

i) the adoption of a false "Aryan" surname under which the applicant hid during the war or which he otherwise adopted as his own (e.g. *Tüberger > Radvanský*) (cf. WALKOWIAK 2016: 239).

DUŠEK (1945) said about the changes in surnames in Prague in 1945: "In this respect, perhaps the image of the times is reflected. Many individuals would like to bear the name *Svoboda* ['freedom'] in their next life and thus put the long-awaited freedom of the nation on their shield in eternal memory. Others ask for a name change to *Květen* ['May'], certainly symbolic of the May Uprising. Similarly with the name: *Mír* ['Peace']. Another source of new names are generally statesmen, people who have contributed to the country. And it is certainly no coincidence that many applicants like to adopt the names of our great poets, such as *Bezruč*, *Hora*, *Nezval*, etc. And quite a few men certainly thought of the tragedies of two villages [massacred by the Nazis in 1942] when they would like to be called *Lidický* or *Ležácký*." However, I do not observe similar tendencies among Jews, e.g. the new surname *Svoboda* appears only 3 times in my corpus. As for the surnames of famous Czech poets, I have recorded *Erben* 5 times, but I believe that the main motivation for choosing this surname was probably the initial, since it was taken as a new surname by applicants with the original surnames *Ehrenfreund*, *Eisenberg, Ekstein*, *Epstein*, and *Erdélyi*.

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[27] I have no information about taking names from other relatives. Cf. BENEŠ (1946: 128): "I think that in recent years many Czech Jewish names have become extinct, e.g. *Vohryzek*, *Penízek*, *Samek*, *Kodíček* and so on. It is a pity that the relatives of these families do not choose these nice surnames when changing their names."

New surname	Number of changes	Number of people affected by the change	Original surname
Rohan	14	21	*Eckstein* (3), *Friedmann* (1), *Gelbkopf* (1), *Reinisch* (1), *Reichard* (1), *Ritter* (1), *Rosenberg* (2), *Rosengarten* (1), *Roth* (1), *Rothbaum* (2)
Fiala	12	19	*Feuerlicht* (1), *Färber* (1), *Fialla* (2), *Fischl* (2), *Fleischer* (1), *Fränkl* (1), *Freund* (1), *Fried* (1), *Friedmann* (1), *Petz* (1)
Bělský	11	12	*Bleichfeld* (1), *Beck* (1), *Feuereisen* (1), *Geduldiger* (1), *Grünhut* (4), *Reichmann* (1), *Weiskopf* (1), *Weisskopf* (1)
Klíma	11	14	*Kaufmann* (1), *Kien* (1), *Klein* (3), *Kleinzeller* (1), *Klinger* (2), *Knöpfelmacher* (1), *Kraus* (1), *Kürti* (1)
Skála	11	15	*Eckstein* (1), *Epstein* (1), *Schönhauser* (1), *Schrecker* (1), *Spitz* (3), *Stein* (2), *Steiner* (1), *Steinitz* (1)
Horák	10	14	*Bäuml* (1), *Goldberger* (1), *Grossmann* (1), *Herz* (1), *Hirschfeld* (3), *Lustig* (1), *Neu* (1), *Thieberger* (1)
Lánský	10	15	*Langfelder* (4), *Lauterstein* (1), *Lövi* (1), *Löwenbein* (1), *Löwner* (1), *Löwy* (2)
Novák	10	13	*Fischl* (1), *Gelbkopf* (1), *Kalb* (1), *Neufeld* (1), *Neumann* (1), *Nowak* (1), *Pick* (1), *Rufeisen* (1), *Spitzer* (2)
Borský	9	19	*Biheller* (1), *Beck* (1), *Bergman* (1), *Blumenfeld* (1), *Bondy* (4), *Bornfreund* (1)
Farský	9	12	*Feuerstein* (1), *Feig* (1), *Feldblum* (1), *Fischl* (1), *Fluss* (2), *Frankenbusch* (1), *Freudenberg* (1), *Frischmann* (1)
Hájek	9	13	*Frischmann* (1), *Heim* (1), *Hayek* (2), *Hirsch* (1), *Karpeles* (1), *Ohrenstein* (1), *Popper* (1), *Winter* (1)
Levý	9	14	*Löwy* (9)
Nový	9	15	*Grün* (1), *Grünhut* (1), *Neuer* (1), *Neumann* (5), *Neustadtl* (1)
Gregor/ Gregora	7/2	15	*Gans* (1), *Goldwasser* (1), *Grauer* (1), *Gröger* (1), *Gross* (1), *Grosslicht* (1), *Grünbaum* (1), *Grünfeld* (1), *Löwenbein* (1)

Table 2. *Most frequently chosen new surnames.*

The most frequent new surnames are shown in Table 2. I omit the purely spelling change *Pollak > Polák* (31). Other frequently chosen surnames include *Kalina (*8), *Karas* (8), *Lenský (*8), *Toman* (8), *Aleš* (7), *Horský* (7), *Lom* (7), *Suk* (7), *Valenta* (7), etc. These are surnames that were already in existence in

the Czech language, so the applicants most often chose names from the existing repertoire of Czech surnames,[28] as some respondents attest: "He went to the office, and they offered him various names combining the letters of his former surname [*Feuerstein*]. They offered him *Fortýn* and *Foltýn*, among others, and he chose the latter in case his children have rhotacism." (TV, e-mail, 19 April 2024), "They changed their surname from *Braunstein* to *Bart* after the war. My grandfather took the yellow pages and looked for a common surname starting with B, as he wanted the same initials." (AŠ, e-mail, 18 April 2024)

New surnames were created rather sporadically. This happened especially in the case of translations of German surnames (or parts of them). It was popular to use Czech suffixes (especially *-ský*). Since the suffix *-ský* in Czech is mainly associated with surnames derived from toponyms, in some cases this gives the wrong impression that this type of surname is based on the place of origin (cf. *Stein* > *Skalický*, *Kamenický*),[29] but in some cases, it was attached to arbitrary common nouns (e.g. *Adler* 'eagle' > *Orlický* from *orel* 'eagle'; *Hirsch* 'deer' > *Jelenský* from *jelen* 'deer'; *Sonnenschein* 'sunshine' > *Slunský* from *slunce* 'sun').

Some of the newly adopted surnames are no longer found in the repertoire of surnames in the Czech Republic (according to data from the Ministry of the Interior from 2017), e.g. *Herlinger* > *Helín*, *Kummermann* > *Kumeš*, *Ornstein* > *Oneš*. They disappeared either due to the death of the last bearer of the surname or due to emigration.

7. Summary

From the materials stored in the Czech National Archive, I obtained information on 2,172 people who changed their names between 1945 and 1977. Most often they chose a new surname. Changes were more frequent among men than among women. The largest number of renaming occurred in the first three years after the end of World War II, i.e. 1945–1947. This was due to the uncertain political situation, the anti-German and anti-Semitic atmosphere in society, and fears of possible further persecution. Czech and Moravian Jews therefore got rid of mainly Jewish and German surnames after the war.

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[28] The selection of Polish surnames is unique, but they were written in Czech form (e.g. *Grünhut* > *Gardavský* from Polish *Gardawski*, *Gans* > *Garský* from Polish *Garski*).

[29] Cf. also MATÚŠOVÁ (2015: 53–54).

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Abstract

The study is focused on surname changes of Czech and Moravian Jews who survived the Holocaust and decided to rename directly after the end of WWII. The source material comprises the Fund No. 167 stored in the Czech National Archive. I analysed which surnames were most often changed, what relationship was between the original name and the new one, and what the breakdown of the applicants was by age and gender. The results of this study can be compared with the pre-war situation in the country, as well as with renaming abroad (especially in the surrounding countries which, like Czechoslovakia, have become part of the "Eastern Bloc"). In the first years after the war, a massive wave of renaming could be observed among Czechs bearing German or German-sounding surnames, too. Considering that many Jewish surnames were also of German origin, their changes fit into the overall situation in the majority society at the time. After the rise of the communist regime (1948), fear, a new wave of state anti-Semitism, and political processes in the 1950s were certainly reasons for surname change. The main goal was the effort to remove names perceived as ethnically stereotypical, which could stigmatise their bearers.

Keywords: surnames, renaming, Jews, identity, stereotype