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Doing "Being Jewish": Constitution of "Normality" in Families of Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany

> A kind of remarkable thing is how, in ordinary conversation, people, in reporting on some event, report what we might see to be, not what happened, but the ordinariness of what happened. (...) Whatever you may think about what it is to be an ordinary person in the world, an initial shift is not to think of "an ordinary person" as some person, but as somebody as having as one's job, as one's constant preoccupation, doing "being ordinary" (Sacks 1984: 414).

Doing "Being Ordinary"

The Polish-Jewish movie director Wanda Jakubowska was interviewed on the occasion of her eightieth birthday in November, 1987. She described how she began imagining the movie she later made about Auschwitz, *The Last Stage*, the very moment she was driven through the camp's gate. The creaking of the heavy gate, she thought, would provide a good sound effect in the movie.

During the war against the Soviet Union, German soldiers filmed "everyday life" at the front with their cine-cameras brought from home; their commanders approved. Six of these former soldiers were interviewed by the German filmmakers Harriet Eder and Thomas Kufus in their movie *My War* (1989/90). From the front line footage as well as in the interviews it was apparent that the former soldiers had for the most part maintained their view of taking part in ordinary activities of "everyday life" at the war front. What was seen as extraordinary about the "experience" was the break from the routine of life at home. Speaking as tourists, for example, they appreciated having seen a number of countries at the Eastern front, and regretted not getting to the Western front as well. With their cameras they had filmed before, during, and after the war: making movies remained the same kind of activity, and there was no need to change perspectives. From working in a photography studio or store to being a soldier and then returning home to their work, it was "business as usual".

The former commander of Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, wrote a diary while awaiting his court sentence and execution in a Polish prison after the war. He described mass extermination as a demanding task and a professional challenge. In maintaining the normality of his actions, he implicitly claims that what he had done need not be questioned. In

an analysis of Höss' diary, his claim of normality has been described as a "construction of ordinariness" (Czyżewski 1995; Czyżewski and Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1989).

In fact, the utterly different actions and motives of these three cases can be taken as examples of normalizing the extraordinary events one was involved in. In all three cases, an "ordinary cast of mind" is assumed in describing the events as manageable affairs dealt with competently. In other words, in presenting what happened as "storyable", they were all "doing 'being ordinary'" (Sacks 1984). Harvey Sacks, the ethnomethodologist and founder of conversation analysis, refers to an example similar to Wanda Jakubowska's in explaining how terrifying incidents are being presented as matters of everyday life dealt with competently.[1] But how can "doing 'being ordinary'" describe both the filming soldiers, and at the same time Höss? An impassive view of people acting as ordinary persons under ordinary circumstances, under *all* circumstances, suspends preliminary distinctions and classifications. This allows a closer look at exactly what people are doing when they continue acting and presenting themselves as ordinary persons; in other words, which position they take for granted or consider legitimate in describing what happened.

We may imagine that the filmmaker Wanda Jakubowska was reacting to the monstrosity of the place when she imagined turning the creaking of the gate into a sound effect. She tapped her professional interest and experience as a source of normality, and perhaps thanks to her imagination the murderous reality of the concentration camp appeared less overwhelming for the moment.

Likewise in the examples of soldiers filming at the Eastern front and of Höss's diary account, reference was made to forms of professional practice, to continuing doing what was considered normal. In these cases, however, the actors made such references in proclaiming their actions as ordinary and their perspective as legitimate. Their normalizing activities carried the inherent claim that there was nothing unusual about what was taking place, and that they were not responsible for inflicting suffering and death. The need to reflect on personal and collective actions is also denied in retrospect by imposing "objective" conditions of action in place of the speaker's own agency. This is manifested in such statements as, "Well, there was a war going on", or "I was doing my duty".

In the case of Wanda Jakubowska, an as-if construction of relative normality is clutched against a situation experienced as deeply unjust and inhu-

1 Sacks refers to the book *An Ordinary Camp* by Micheline Morel (1958), in which she reports the first day in a concentration camp, its horror, and then a certain lull: "Little by little conversation sprang up from the bunks. The rumors were already beginning to circulate. Luckily, the news is good. We'll be home soon. We'll have an unusual experience to talk about" (Sacks 1984: 417).

man. In the defenseless and powerless position of the camp inmate, holding on to normality is a fiction, but may nonetheless be of consequence. In "playing out" the symbolic character of action, reflexivity can be set into motion. By subverting rather than legitimating the situation, one refuses to take one's perspective on what happened for granted. Another important example of insisting on the symbolic character of action has been offered in Roberto Benigni's movie *Life is Beautiful.* The basic normality of reciprocity and care and of enjoying life is magically played out against their brutal denial in the concentration camp. Deprived of normality, Guido, Giosuè's father, grandfather, and mother continue acting according to basic expectations of human interaction in everyday life, which continue to operate as a normative force. This force is explored both comically and tragically. A momentum is created and a child's life is saved. It takes a magician such as the father played by Benigni, however, to work such wonders.[2]

In everyday life too, as in the movies, there can be unexpected and surprising ways of "doing 'being ordinary'". When something happens that destroys the routine organization of everyday life, talking represents an effort to carry on. In the case of a complete and drastic break, however, what can be said? For those who escaped the Nazi persecution, not only was everyday life destroyed, but normality was totally fractured. How is life possible when close family and relatives have been murdered, and so have friends, acquaintances, the collectives one belonged to? And *where* is life possible, if there is no place to return to?

In asking Jewish "displaced persons", their children and grandchildren for biographical interviews, I began by explaining my interest in what had changed and what had continued from one generation to another in their families. This seemed to capture a concern of my interview partners, too. They were concerned—in ways specific to the different generations—about remaining Jewish, about maintaining some kind of connection with other Jews, and about making sense of being Jewish, in religious, traditional, intellectual, and/or social terms. I interviewed mostly women and girls, since my focus was on continuity and changes in traditional practices at home in relation to interactions between the generations.[3] The women of the middle generation were actively concerned about their children remaining Jewish, and they expressed a wish that their children would choose Jewish partners. In some families, this went together with keeping certain traditions; in other families, with religious observance. All families and their members had social relations with other Jews, although to varying degrees, and the meaning of being Jewish was an issue for all.

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2 For a very thoughtful analysis of this movie, including the child's perspective, see Bathrick (2000).

3 I started interviewing in the late 1980s and have continued since. On interviewing the three generations, see Inowlocki (1993).

Importance was attributed to Jewish education, and in many cases the women of the middle generation were engaged in bringing about learning opportunities. Here differences came up between the communities. I interviewed families in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Amstadt (a town in Western Germany: the name of the town has been changed here for the sake of anonymity, since only a small number of Jewish families live there). Antwerp has the largest Jewish community of the three cities, with a growing trend toward orthodoxy since the 1970s. There is a range of Jewish schools differing in religious observance which are attended by over 90% of the children from Jewish families (Abicht 1993). In Amsterdam, a small orthodox high school was established by parents who wanted an observant and intensive Jewish education;[4] there is also a liberal Jewish high school. In the smallest community of the three, in Amstadt, there is only a grade school and no more advanced Jewish education. In all three communities, the older family members I interviewed—and sometimes those of the middle generation—were born in Eastern Europe, mostly in Poland.

Since medieval times, Jews had settled in Poland, which became the center of Ashkenazi Jews in the 17th and 18th century (Dawidowicz 1966). This situation was ended by the Nazi occupation. After the end of the war, about 50,000 Polish Jews who had survived the camps, survived in hiding, or fought as partisans left Poland immediately and went West. In 1946, Jews who had considered resettling in Poland, or who were preparing there to immigrate to Palestine fled to the Western Allied zones because of anti-Jewish pogroms. Polish Jews returning from the Soviet Union followed, so that between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews came to stay in camps which had been established in the British and the U.S. zones. The conditions in these camps were terrible in the beginning, and policy on dealing with the refugees was uncertain. The term refugee for the Jews was avoided, as if they could eventually return to their homeland, and their status was defined in 1947 as "displaced persons" (or "DPs"), the same as that of the millions of Germans who were fleeing their places of settlement in Eastern Europe (Wasserstein 1996). Most of the Jewish DPs struggled to leave for the U.S.A., Latin American countries, or the British Mandate of Palestine, or to any other country which would accept a certain quota of them, for example, Sweden or France.

There were still Jews living in DP camps when the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949. Their projects for emigration had not been realizable, or they had just stayed on. The last camp was closed down in 1955. Meanwhile, small Jewish communities of a few hundred up to a few thousand were establishing themselves in West German cities. They were thought of as temporary, and until the 1970s there was a constant debate

4 Dutch legislation provides for schools of religious communities, and a number of Muslim and Hindu schools have been established since the late 1980s, as well as a few very small Jewish schools.

within the communities as to whether Jews should be living in Germany at all. Two generations have grown up since, and with the arrival of Russian Jewish immigrants since the early 1990s, the membership of Jewish communities in Germany has multiplied. But even for the large majority who do not consider leaving Germany for another country, their relations to Germany and Germans, both historically and at present, remain subject to ongoing debate and interpretation.[5]

In the discussion of an interview with a woman of the middle generation in Amstadt,[6] some of the ambivalence of living in Germany becomes apparent through the unexpected and paradoxical solutions she found. Analyzing "practical solutions" can generate an understanding of what kinds of problems there are and how specific problems are solved, without presuppositions on the part of the researcher (Becker 1998). Structures of social praxis can be discovered through biographical interviewing and comparative analysis of single cases and specific situations of crisis resolution (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000).

A Case of "Indoctrination"

Sonia Wieder, as she is called here, was born in the early 1950s and lives in Amstadt with her husband, their eleven-year-old daughter and their fourteen-year-old son. Her parents met in a Jewish DP camp, after surviving the ghetto and concentration camp. After a failed attempt to settle in Israel, they returned to Amstadt in the mid-1950s to obtain medical treatment, to apply for restitution payments, and to try to make a living.

Sonia Wieder responded to my request to tell me her life story as follows:

"Well, when I hear the story of my husband, who grew up in Israel, I have the feeling that in Amstadt my youth was really taken away from me. Right, well, I grew up in Amstadt in a so-called, in quotation marks, 'ghetto.' My parents come from Poland as you know and have been here since the war." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 1)

With this beginning, a better youth in a different place, such as her husband's growing up in Israel, is set against her own experience of growing up in what she calls a "ghetto" in Amstadt. Her husband is also the child of Polish Jews.

5 This would be in contrast to the younger generation in immigrant families, who insist on the normality of their status by refusing to distinguish between their "being German" and their "being Turkish", for example. This reaction constitutes a critique of the prevalent discourse on immigrants which emphasizes their "difference". The majority discourse on Jews rather emphasizes their "sameness", with a tendency to gloss over or deny the history of their "difference".

6 This interview was conducted in 1990 and has also been discussed in another context (Inowlocki 1997).

His parents went to Palestine after the war, and stayed there. Her husband likes to recall his carefree childhood with his brothers and sisters, as Sonia Wieder tells later on in the interview. In her own youth there was no place to experience and enjoy life freely. Relations outside the "ghetto" were restricted:

"Contact with other children I had, that is, contact with Jewish *children, we had the youth center on Hill Street as you know*

L.I.: mhm

S.W.: with ((slowly:)) German children really less, well that was somewhat of a taboo at home, to bring German friends to the house or to visit German friends, that was somehow frowned upon, not that my parents had said that explicitly, you just somehow got the message, right." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 1)

In her childhood, Sonia Wieder made friends only among Jewish children, just as her parents expected her to. The children all came from similar backgrounds of experiencing the aftermath of persecution. Her parents imposed the socially restrictive and depressing atmosphere of her childhood, which she experienced as a "ghetto", on her, on the one hand. On the other hand, she cannot blame them, since it had not been possible for them to live in a different place and under less depressing circumstances. Life was overshadowed by the Nazi persecution.

In this passage and throughout the interview, Sonia Wieder emphasizes that I, the interviewer, know the places she is referring to, invoking a strong sense of a shared experience of time and place. As a part of the "ghetto" experience, she sees a collective fate of those whose families were persecuted and settled down, in Germany of all places, after DP camps and unsuccessful emigration projects. My acknowledgment of the shared background and context knowledge represents an acceptance of the fact that living in Germany is how things went, as against reproachful questions by Jews living in other countries.

After the description of her youth, Ms. Wieder does not continue with her own life story. Instead she tells about her daughter, who is eleven years old, and how "self assured" she became from attending a Jewish school:

"Well, my daughter, for example, she went to a Jewish school, and I have sent her there very deliberately so that she knows where she comes from, because she is living here in Germany, right, because we are living here in Germany. And I don't have this either, for example, I believe if you already live in Germany you would somehow have to give the children a Jewish consciousness, but I cannot reproach my parents either because they were much too preoccupied with building up a new life for themselves, you understand? And I believe that—and I admire my parents, that they even had the courage after Auschwitz, at all, a new life, well that they had the courage at all to put children into the world and, and start a new life. Yes, and that is why I cannot blame them, either." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 3)

Being Jewish was identical in her youth with growing up in the "ghetto" of a group of people marked by persecution. In her view, the restrictions and suffering blocked her own personal development. Yet for her daughter, who grew up in a much larger and more varied peer group and could attend Jewish grade school, she sees a positive meaning in being Jewish. Ms. Wieder herself had been one of the very few Jewish children in a German school during the 1950s and 60s, in a situation that was often difficult yet did not receive special attention.

Ms. Wieder's parents had great difficulties in starting a new life. Their emigration to Israel in the early 1950s failed and they felt bad about trying to make a living in Germany. As Sonia Wieder tells her own story, it is characterized by her parents' trajectory of suffering (Riemann and Schütze 1991), of being overwhelmed by the aftermath of persecution, and by their difficulties in making a living. Even after many years, her parents' persecution in the ghetto and concentration camp weigh heavily on them, and hence on herself. Her father's long illness and recent death are seen as resulting from the hardship inflicted on him. As another consequence, she sees her own unhappy childhood and youth. The fact that she is still living in Germany, and now with a family of her own, is also seen by her as a consequence of how things went, as something she feels powerless to change. She knows that her parents were exposed to a constant threat of death, and that their feeling of normality of life was compromised forever. She traces her own lack of a sense of control of her life to her parents, whom she cannot blame for not finding a self-determined "new beginning".

There are only partial areas in the family history which Ms. Wieder can set against the dominant experience of a trajectory of suffering and hardship. As a counter-reality, they contrast with the dominant trajectory, inserting pockets of hope and happiness. In Sonia Wieder's account, the time when her parents met in the DP camp seems like a short but intensively lived period, a golden past when her parents were still young and could enjoy life. In transmitting "Jewish consciousness" to her children, as well as in accepting friendships of her children with non-Jewish children, she is trying to create another counter-reality. Both changes are intended to enable her daughter to grow up without the restrictive and isolating conditions she herself experienced. She is sure that her children know about her reservations about non-Jewish Germans, but she lets them have their own experiences with social encounters. In contrast to her parents, she does not mind her children's friendships with non-Jewish German children. They are invited to eat at her house and to sleep over. However, she adds immediately, she is not sure how she would react if one of her children wanted to marry a non-Jewish German:

"Maybe then it is—I mean you can never be completely on the safe side, anywhere. In Israel it can happen to you that your daughter marries an Arab, or if you go to America she'll bring home a colored man. I don't know how I would react then, whether I would

accept him rather than a German because there is still a difference between a German, or a Christian, or whatever, right? But then I think, well, this is the price I'm paying for living here in the Federal Republic

I.: *yes, mhm*

S.W.: *I mean, I am trying to ((emphatically:)) indoctrinate her, that's clear*

L.I.: *((laughs))" (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 12)*

The paradoxes and moral dilemmas Ms. Wieder refers to characterize her own life story and the lives of her family members. While she is attempting to change for her children the restrictive situation that she compares with a "ghetto", at the same time she fears that her daughter could marry a non-Jewish German. She seems more concerned about her young daughter's future choice of partner than about her son's. The idea of a German, non-Jewish son-in-law might be especially painful because men are seen as less willing to adapt, and thus as more representative of their national identity than women. There are no precautions she can take but, as she adds surprisingly, she is doing what she can to "indoctrinate" her daughter. What could this mean? Against the worst-case scenario of her daughter marrying a German Christian, the "indoctrination" attempt is based on the following suppositions:

1. A preventive strategy would bring about such conditions that her daughter would not only be obliged to follow rules, but would herself want to observe norms.
2. A normative conviction can only result if her daughter learns about and experiences being Jewish not as a restrictive condition, but in a positive way.
3. A basis of experience and knowledge has to be created to counter the conditions and constraints of everyday life in Amstadt.
4. This basis of Judaism must be such that it can become significant for her daughter's actions, counteracting the influence of mainstream everyday life in Amstadt.

"Indoctrination" does not appear to be an exaggerated term for these objectives. It is still surprising that Ms. Wieder would use this term not in a general discussion about cultural matters, but in reference to her own daughter. The "inappropriate" use of the term is marked by inserting it unexpectedly, without an introductory explanation and by creating a dramatic effect through emphasis. Its oddity is further highlighted by asserting its apparent self-evidence ("that's clear"). My laughing at this point reflects my surprise as well as my response to the dramatic presentation.

By calling her attempt to control her daughter's future "indoctrination", Ms. Wieder has qualified her effort as a strategy which is usually considered out of place in an open and loving relationship. In a post-war Jewish community in Germany, there is hardly any normal way to maintain and transmit Judaism, either as knowledge of its habitual practices, or as awareness of its

content and meaning. Forms of transmission have to be deliberately inserted into an environment of everyday life which has no connection with anything Jewish. Transmission and learning efforts thus have to be intensified to create their own context of meaning, in the absence of established social and institutional settings. In calling this effort "indoctrination", Ms. Wieder dramatizes the effort and the paradoxes involved in transmitting her knowledge. Her reflexivity is not exceptional: many of the other women of the middle generation who were interviewed talk about "indoctrinating" or "brainwashing" their children. In all of these cases, the abnormality of the conditions of learning and of knowledge transmission is acknowledged in presenting what seems like an ordinary account of bringing up children.

The segment continues as follows:

S.W.: "I mean, I am trying to ((emphatically:)) indoctrinate *her, that's clear,*

L.I.: ((laughs))

S.W.: very consciously, I send her to Ganzmann, Ganzmann is a very religious Jew as you know, right, and the only one whose religiousness I buy, because with the others I have the feeling that all of that is just so superficial; but Ganzmann is an anachronism, right, and for me it symbolizes the shtetl, *right, and in a few more years from now there won't be any of that anymore, maybe in Israel, in those areas where many religious Jews live,* very *religious, orthodox, but here in Germany, right, I believe that the children should get this, too, that they know where they come from. I have not consciously—because my parents haven't pushed me to it, and I think that's very important. Ganzmann tells for example—yesterday my son came back and Ganzmann had told him some fables, Jewish fables or legends I don't know at all, right? Well I wouldn't be able to pass on anything like that to him, right? And I believe it's quite a good thing that I send him there. And my daughter goes to Ms. Ganzmann who is also very religious, who also tries to indoctrinate her, even more than I do, right, and sometimes there are problems. I mean not with my son, because he is already fourteen and there's nothing they can do anymore. My daughter then comes back and says, why aren't we kosher, why? ((breathes audibly)) and things like that, but I think, that is so important to me that I send them there in spite of everything, right, and I think that—look, when I go to synagogue and I sit there, I can barely read, I feel like an illiterate, yes, and I would like my children when they go to synagogue to be able to read, not to sit there like illiterates but to know what they* daven[7]*, and that is very important to me." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 12–13)*

Here Ms. Wieder explains why her children should be "indoctrinated", and also describes the ambivalent consequences. Her decision to send her children to study with Mr. and Ms. Ganzmann is a very conscious one. In contrast to her own parents, who didn't "push" her, she positively wants her children to "know where they come from".

While this may seem an obvious motive, it still needs explanation. Why would it be so important for children to know where they come from? Such knowledge could be a memorial to the past, it could stand in the place of what is gone. It could also imply a sense of what one has been deprived of and

7 Yiddish *davnen*: to recite prayers

compensate for what the present lacks. While this is very comprehensible, it is important to keep in mind that there are other "strategies" for determining the meaning of the past. There are families, for example, which would rather "never look back".[8] It is interesting therefore to look at the conditions which make the past seem so important, as in Sonia Wieder's case.

First of all, there are kinds of knowledge she misses herself and would want her children to have: religious knowledge as well as familiarity with pre-war Polish Jewish culture in practice, as expressed through Yiddish and through a certain style of social communication and interaction. Religious practice was "domesticated" in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries through models of a bourgeois family with women as wives and at the same time as mediators to the non-Jewish majority.[9] The ideal of *Bildung*, of character formation through education, was a central domain and the responsibility of women and mothers. Sonia Wieder like other women in this study is picking up fragments of this tradition of modernity in her efforts toward continuity.

Now it seems that the social style will be known and recognized as such even when many of its elements are missing or have become obsolete. There might be a feeling that something is missing, in the way it is said that a lost limb can still be "felt", but the *Gestalt* is completed by a few references. In the sense of knowledge of social style, Sonia Wieder wants to fill in the gaps. Ordinarily, the family and the larger social group with common origins would provide experience and familiarity, but now the world for her children to participate in, represented by the Ganzmanns, is all but lost.

Since the 1970s, a new orthodoxy has created multiple references to Eastern European Jewish life in Western Europe, especially in Antwerp and in London. There are large families; Yiddish is spoken; there are a variety of religious schools and community institutions. These changes have not come to Amstadt, however. There Eastern European Jewish life exists only as a symbolic memory, as hints of a past about which knowledge is not transmitted in any fixed way: neither within families, where this memory is connected with too much pain, nor institutionally. Ms. Wieder has to find her own way for her children to learn. She has found the elderly couple, the Ganzmanns, who represent the social world of the *shtetl* in ways that seem as authentic as

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8 One example would be an irreconcilable social surrounding and ideology, as in the case of the German Jews who settled in the German Democratic Republic after the end of the war (Voelter 1997, Honigmann 1999). Another example would be when survival is attributed to sheer luck, and "gambling" remains the motto for the future, with no past to weigh you down (a case communicated by Gabrielle Varro).

9 As Marion A. Kaplan noted for imperial Germany, "Women coupled faith with domesticity. They helped families look, act and feel like Germans by promoting a culture of domesticity recognizable to other bourgeois Germans" (Kaplan 1994; see also Volkov 2000). While the situation of Polish Jews was very different from that of German Jews, a comparable project of modernity was undertaken through domesticizing religion there as well.

they are anachronistic. Her children now learn more about traditional subjects than she has, even though ordinarily she should be closer to this knowledge. But such commonplace transmission has been disrupted.

What her children learn is not "traditional" in any ordinary sense; "Jewish fables or legends" are one substitute for the oral transmission which was broken off. Understanding prayers in the synagogue, on the other hand, as Sonia Wieder would also want for herself, is not "traditional" either. Religious studies for girls and women were institutionalized rather recently.[10] In most cases, the younger generation in the families I interviewed is the first one to be instructed in Hebrew and Jewish studies at school. The ordinary way for girls to learn was from their mothers and grandmothers at home, which is how "domestic religion" (Myerhoff 1978) was instilled.

After 1939, all the differences between the styles of life of the more assimilated and the more orthodox Jewish families in Poland disappeared abruptly along with the ordinary way of becoming familiar with one's background. Today few are aware of the very different milieus which were oriented toward Polish urban culture or toward socialist or communist political organization, toward deeply religious ways of life, or toward Zionist convictions, to name some extremes. After their destruction, and with the passage of time, the different Jewish milieus in Eastern Europe were replaced by and subsumed in "Fiddler on the Roof" imagery and re-invented with *klezmer* music. It has been argued that such images of a commercialized pop-culture and a nostalgic connection to Jewish things, bereft of vitality for the present (Wasserstein 1996), are all that is left now among Jews in Europe. But this view overlooks the interest and efforts at finding out what Jewish culture is about. The interviews in my study show, for example, that "packaged" cultural imagery is not all there is. A closer examination of the acquisition and transmission of knowledge about the people's origins reveals that energy is not merely directed at an image of the past, but has an impact on the present. There is no way to foretell which elements of this knowledge will regain significance, and in what way.

Sonia Wieder herself grew up in a Yiddish-speaking environment. The way she pronounces "kosher" is more Yiddish than German; it is probably how she learned the word in the home. While her parents did not keep a kosher household—for reasons she goes into later—"kosher" was nonetheless an important category, indicative of a consciousness of how things used to be, how they would be under other circumstances, and maybe how they should be. These symbolic concerns are what she wants her children to know. She

10 With advancing Enlightenment and the relative emancipation of the Jews, Jewish girls in Poland in the early 19th century attended public high schools, studying Polish, Russian, and foreign languages, while boys continued to go to religious schools. To counter the estrangement of girls from Yiddish and from Jewish traditions, *Beit Ya'akov* schools for girls were founded in 1917 (see El-Or 1994).

does not want her children to keep the laws strictly and introduce orthodox practice. Yet that is what the elderly couple of teachers have in mind. When Ms. Ganzmann attempts to "indoctrinate" Sonia Wieder's daughter, this creates a conflict for her, since in her life eating kosher is a thing of the past. She is thinking rather about the future, hoping her children will retain their interest in being Jewish, especially by choosing Jewish partners. Ms. Wieder wants to initiate a positive identification with being Jewish, to counter the negativity of persecution. This minimal program relies on indoctrination, or rather on counter-indoctrination against the dominant non-Jewish environment in which her children are growing up. Mr. and Ms. Ganzmann are intended to represent a Yiddish milieu for her children to experience and participate in, but the teachers see their task as changing the style of life of the whole Wieder family. Pressure and tension are created through the paradoxes of sending the daughter to Ms. Ganzmann and then being asked why she does not keep kosher at home. Ms. Wieder tries to keep "indoctrination" going in a limited way as long as possible. She has to insist on these lessons against her children's inclination; they would rather not go but respect the expectations placed on them. Sonia Wieder has to deal with her children's reluctance, and she also has to react to the Ganzmanns' ambition of turning her children into orthodox Jews.

I asked where the lessons took place.

L.I.: "Is that at the synagogue, for the children, several times per week?

S.W.: That is, yes a few times per w—he takes no money for it. He does it—well, we donate something, for poor people, and he is always sending us all kinds of people, we always give because—and that is just like the kheder[11]*, he goes there, he has to wear long pants, and put on a* kapel[12]*, and sits there and learns.*

L.I.: And they both want that, too.

S.W.: They don't *want that ((laughs))*

L.I.: ((laughs))

S.W.: they have to. Because I think he is—to us he is radical but I think if he weren't that way I wouldn't send them there at all, because he is the only one I take it from. He is a person like what is written in the Talmud about how a person should be, right? Modest, all of what we are not, yes, modest, and he always tells the truth, yes, and he is always collecting for poor people, yes, and luxury is not important at all, and he lives in an apartment, well, all that's missing is the goat ((laughs)), you know,

L.I.: ((laughs))

S.W.: just like in Poyln.[13] *And she always takes my daughter every time when—and they also do—look, for years my son went to Gross, he couldn't read. Afterwards I sent him to Ganzmann, and within a week he could read, not that he always understands*

11 Hebrew school (literally "room"): formerly, primary Hebrew instruction for three to five-year-old boys in Polish Jewish communities.

12 Yiddish: yarmulke, skullcap.

13 Yiddish: Poland.

him to Ganzmann, and within a week he could read, not that he always understands what he reads, but he could read, yes, well they seem to have some old kind of method to teach the children, but it works, yes, and when they come there, they get a tea first of all, and a shtikl kikhn[14]*, you know, it is well, done with love, with sympathy, it's not* just *studying, yes, and then they come back and Ms. Ganzmann has packed up packages, a* lekakh, *((laughs lightly)), a honey* kikhl, *you know, things like that.*

L.I.: ((laughs lightly))

S.W.: I mean, he gets on your nerves; too, he also gets on my nerves sometimes, because sometimes he demands too much from my son. You know, he wants to make a very religious Jew out of him and of course that is a conflict, yes that's a conflict and I don't know how long it can go on. But as long as it is possible, as long as I can still push my son like this, I think that whatever he has learned, well, he won't lose it, and afterwards he will always remember him, yes and that is like in the stories of Bashevis Singer, yes, like that, and I can't pass that on to him because I have not gotten any of that here in Germany." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 13–14)

No money is charged for these lessons. They are part of a complex economy of reciprocity and obligation, and are also a fulfillment of the religious obligations of teaching, learning, and charity. They represent what a whole community would ordinarily be involved in, and here is performed by a few. The teachers, their religious and simple lifestyle, and their old-fashioned method of instruction are described as the antithesis of Sonia Wieder's family life and of what her children are accustomed to from their schools, even the Jewish primary school in Amstadt. Her son has to cover his legs and the top of his head; her daughter might be obliged to wear a skirt instead of pants. These modes of clothing mark the transition to another sphere. The children are reluctant to undergo such normative restrictions, which run counter to the freedom of expression they otherwise enjoy. The ordeal is sweetened with tea, cakes and cookies. More than just an *amuse-gueule*, eating honey cake before the recitation of the lessons represents a long history of initiating children to religious learning (Marcus 1984). Sonia Wieder wants her children to learn, and she wants them to taste and develop a sense of the atmosphere associated with such learning. Clearly, she herself is participating in a life-world which she feels she has been deprived of knowing. Obviously, she would never want herself or her family to "go back" to this kind of life. But giving up an attachment to it is different and more difficult when it has been disrupted and destroyed, and only loss and deprivation remain in its place.

In other Western European Jewish communities, the new orthodoxy seems at first glance to have created a *trompe-l'oeil* of Eastern European prewar Jewish life. Of course it is a completely different picture, but there is a sense of compensation in it. Or rather, as another woman interviewed in Amstadt, who has relations in London, put it, in the middle of the large families and their discussions about what one rabbi said and what another one said, it may seem as if the Shoah had never happened.

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14 *Shtikl kikhn*: piece of cake; *lekakh, kikhl*: cakes, cookies.

Mr. Ganzmann challenges the limits of Sonia Wieder's patience with his demands for religious observance. She is not sure how long the conflict between religious instruction and non-practicing family life can go on. But she wants her children and herself to partake in what she perceives as the last authentic heritage from *Poyln*, as she imagines it from the novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer.

The constant references to the lost world that Sonia Wieder grew up with were overburdened with loss and mourning. Fleeting images did not turn into stories. There was no way the experiences of survivors could be told and heard in terms of an ordinariness of what happened. Instead, not only for Sonia Wieder, Singer's novels have filled out the gaps and re-created a world of romantic realism. The Ganzmanns seem to have stepped right out of this world; they have reproduced everything but the goat. They support the longing for family and group history, and provide it with a nostalgic substitution.

Only a few anecdotes of what happened in the family can be talked about:

S.W.: "My parents were—my father comes from a very religious family, an orthodox religious family, very well known in K., yes, and when my grandmother got married they say the streets were so crowded that she had to be carried in through the window. Such a well-known, famous family. And when I got married in Israel I went to the rabbinate and they were wondering what an "N." (((her maiden name))) is doing in Germany, right... ((laughs))

L.I.: ((laughs))

S.W.: yes but all of that was—then my father was not religious, and my mother came from a very different kind of family and was not religious anyway and didn't know anything about it, how could she have, I mean she couldn't have been taught anything, she went to the ghetto when she was twelve or ten years old and then into the camp, her whole youth therefore—how could she have been taught? And then her parents died, too. And she didn't have the time or the state of mind to somehow—and not the consciousness in a way, I think, to see that this is important, right? And it was just let go. And then I had a very precocious girlfriend who didn't think much of that at all, and I thought that was great and ((laughs lightly)) then I didn't think much of it either anymore. And that is why I got so little yidishkayt[15]*, in quotation marks, and I think* that *is really important, that the children get that, yes." (Sonja Wieder, 1990:14–15)*

Ms. Wieder cannot even tell the anecdote about her grandmother's wedding and mention the well-known family she came from with pleasure or pride. In the same breath she recalls how, on the occasion of her own wedding, respect and recognition of the family name was turned against her by the Israeli rabbinate. By rhetorically asking her how she could be living in Germany, it was implied that she was not living up to her grandmother's name, and even canceling out its significance.

The religious background of her father's family has come to represent Jewishness, or *yidishkayt*, as more prestigious, characteristic, and recogniz-

15 Yiddish: Jewishness, Jewish culture.

able than the non-religious milieu on her mother's side. In retrospect, after extermination politics and the destruction of life-worlds, non-religious ways of being Jewish can seem nondescript, or as lacking something essential which should not have been given up. Looking back, assimilation no longer seems voluntary, not even to a certain extent, but rather a regrettable course which should be reversed as much as possible.[16] The attempt to salvage practice and knowledge is made as a symbolic appropriation in this case, in contrast to neo-orthodoxy which sometimes discounts the difference between then and now. Here, certain elements of traditional learning and religious knowledge are intended to become a part of one's life, establishing an otherwise lost connection to traditions of the past which can figure as a resource. An underlying wish might be that *yidishkayt* should be conserved, passed on, or abandoned voluntarily, or be transformed just as any other cultural tradition: in a normal way, so to speak.

Doing "Being Jewish"

Defending "indoctrination" is not new in a German-Jewish context, the use of this term has a history of its own. In 1948, the American educator Marie Syrkin came to visit a DP camp and criticized the schools' one-sided focus on the Jewish settlement in Palestine as "Zionist indoctrination". The teachers replied:

"Maybe it is not a good education if you only present one side (...) but we cannot afford such luxury. The children have nothing, nothing at all. What should we tell them—about the blessings of Poland? They know them. Or talk about visas to the USA? They won't get any. The map of eretz[17] is their only chance for deliverance (...) Indoctrination may be bad for normal children in a normal environment. But what is normal about our situation? (...) Oyf a krumn fus passt a krumer shukh."[18] (Syrkin 1948; quoted by Giere 1993: 438)

In this case too, there is no denial that "indoctrination" is taking place, and that it poses ethical problems. Like Sonia Wieder, the teachers argue that "indoctrination" is the only solution in a situation which is "not normal". From the perspective of the educator Marie Syrkin, "indoctrination" was contrary to good education. Sonia Wieder's ambivalence is evidence of a similar concern.

16 A woman of the older generation interviewed in Amstadt regretted in retrospect how "Polish" she had looked, acted, and felt before the war. Even though this had helped her to pass for a non-Jew when she escaped from the ghetto, in looking back it seemed to her that she had sided with anti-Semitic prejudice.

17 Hebrew: the promised land.

18 Yiddish: On a lame foot, a crooked shoe fits.

What has been described here as "indoctrination" is a particular way of "doing 'being Jewish'". Obviously there are many other ways of working out questions of membership or belonging, or of tradition and its practice. The reference to "indoctrination" is not as idiosyncratic as it may seem, however. In many of the other interviews as well, especially among women of the middle generation, this term comes up in reference to "immunizing" the children against losing interest in finding out about Judaism and maintaining some kind of adherence. In Amsterdam and Antwerp, "brainwashing" is spoken of rather than "indoctrination" where religious rather than primarily traditional knowledge is concerned.[19] While "indoctrination" is used in reference to the general importance of being and remaining Jewish as a member of a very small minority, the term "brainwashing" is used for intensive religious studies in neo-orthodox settings within larger Jewish communities. Both terms are used similarly in denoting paradoxical situations of transmitting and maintaining tradition. Clearly, neither the social situation of minority status, nor the institutionalization of neo-orthodoxy is perceived as "normal". Distinct traditions are generally questioned, if not directly opposed, within Western European majority societies. Jewish and Islamic holidays are not noted in German calendars, for example, and thus have to be negotiated for schoolchildren when examinations or excursions are scheduled for these dates. Neo-orthodox settings are paradoxical in the sense that they stretch the meaning of "traditional", since the younger generation turns out to be more strictly observant than their parents, and religious studies for girls emphasize different kinds of practices and knowledge than their mothers and grandmothers are accustomed to.

In the introductory discussion of different situations of "doing 'being ordinary'", asserting the legitimacy of an "ordinary cast of mind" was contrasted with reflexivity as a way of coping with a deprivation of normality. The reference to "indoctrination" can be understood as a reflexive case. Given the sort of shock and ambivalence that the term evokes, it seems to be used as the reflection of a situation which is not normal. By suspending "normal" expectations for what can be communicated in an interview dealing with traditional knowledge and religious studies, it permits the generation of questions such as: am I/is she doing the right thing by sending the children to lessons which are in stark contrast and even in contradiction to their everyday concerns and experiences? The dilemma is admitted, yet the action is not precluded.

Sonia Wieder tells about the loss and deprivation of *yidishkayt* because of the persecution and then, in its aftermath, because of her parents' helplessness to instill traditional knowledge in her. She would like to compensate for her parents' disability by picking up the stray leads to a continuity which she

19 See for example the case of a mother talking about the "brainwashing" of her daughters in a neo-orthodox school, although she strongly supports this school (Inowlocki 1995).

herself has to help create. In this sense, being "pushed" to learn about being Jewish opposes action to the endurance of deprivation.

Two conclusions can be drawn here, in a preliminary way, concerning the social praxis of doing "being Jewish". First of all, it is important to note that *yidishkayt* is not identified with ethnic origin, nor with ethnicity. There exist, of course, claims to a Jewish ethnicity in political or in politicized religious terms, especially as part of the social and political conflicts in Israel and the Middle East. Such claims from within different groups of Jews also coincide with a dominant outside view on minorities, in which an interest in one's family background, in group history and traditions is quickly identified as "culturally specific" or "ethnic" behavior. Comparable interests of members of the dominant social majority are considered as given, and are not explained in cultural or ethnic terms. A close reading of cases can reveal that other things are at stake where "ethnicity" seems to be concerned. Thus Ms. Wieder does not sit back and say, "well, but I *am* Jewish", nor does she tell her children that. Basic definitions of being Jewish are fulfilled by being born to a Jewish mother or having converted to Judaism, but these definitions may not be comprehensive. Depending on one's background and social ties, it may not be sufficient to identify oneself as "being Jewish" and to obtain recognition within one's social networks. Depending on the social networks one belongs to, being Jewish can also require an awareness of taking part in a tradition and a history, an acquaintance with customary ways of life and religious knowledge.[20]

Significant social ties can also be imaginary. For Sonia Wieder, her grandparents and the social world of which they were a part represent an important and valuable connection in understanding her own and her children's involvement with "being Jewish". Since the ordinary way of transmission between the generations was broken off, she is attempting to create a sort of substitute connection, *as if* this tradition and transmission were still accessible. She is not fooling herself about the likelihood of success, since the only teachers she can find for this task have very different aims. She is hoping, however, that her children and to some extent she herself can partake of what the teachers know and represent, despite their attempts to turn her children into religious Jews.

As the reference to Harvey Sacks suggests, the "initial shift" is not to consider a person as "ordinary", as "Jewish", as "Turkish", or as "German", but to understand the ways in which this person is *doing* "being ordinary", "being Jewish", "being Turkish", or "being German". Understanding how a person is practically and reflexively dealing with the history and traditions she is involved with is very different from assuming an "ethnic identity". Presup-

20 Thus in the neo-orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp, a young woman found that her liberal upbringing was not sufficient for her to be recognized as Jewish, and she opted for a "brainwashing" by the Habad-Lubavitch sect (Inowlocki 1999).

posing ethnicity commits the fallacy of begging the question, of taking for granted what is continuously being worked out, i.e. asserted, questioned, studied, dismissed, postulated, and so on.

The second conclusion is drawn from the ways in which forms of belonging or membership are worked out. When a connection is established to the history with which a person is involved—which in the case discussed is a history of utmost destruction and disruption—this connection is certainly symbolic in nature. Symbolic practices, however, can have very real consequences. What is transmitted and learned through "brainwashing" and "indoctrination" can be objected to and criticized, but these cannot be said to be "empty" forms and acts. Since meaning is generated through practice, it is not foreseeable what the consequences of symbolic practice will be and what dynamics will ensue. What ways of being Jewish will be worked out by the son and the daughter of Sonia Wieder, and by the children of parents who follow other paths?

It is one thing to indulge in predictions of finality, such as the thesis of a "Vanishing Diaspora" (Wasserstein 1996), for example. But such an epic view is different from, and possibly precludes, an understanding of how people live and continue to live with a cultural and religious history. In what ways is this history made livable, what kinds of knowledge are (unconsciously) relied on and referred to in this process? What does it mean to maintain, forget, remember, abandon, reclaim, change traditional practice and knowledge, and how are these affected or transformed in the process?

One way to address this question is to analyze "practical solutions" (Becker 1998), as specific cases of crisis resolution, to understand social praxis as a process in which the participants' cultural knowledge and practice becomes manifest and transformed. The social praxis of tradition is complex, and it is unpredictable how traditions are and will be practiced and communicated. Through the interpretative shift of looking at "doing 'being ordinary'", as the point of departure of this paper, the extraordinary adoption of the "traditional" has emerged as a case of crisis resolution. Odd practices, such as the ambivalent necessity of "traditional" learning in the case discussed, can thus turn out to be a part of an effort to live with a difficult history, not by concealing the rupture but by making it a part of what is learned.

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