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# Jews in Divided Germany (1945–1990) and Beyond

## Scrutinized in Retrospect

Reconstruction of history is more than just adding more or less impressive stories. This is true of the history of Jews in post-War Germany, as well. Therefore, I prefer empirical facts instead of wishful thinking one way or the other. All subchapters presented here are based on my decade-long research on the issue.<sup>1</sup>

Jewish history after 1945 in the ‘Two Germanies’ is thrilling and touching. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that at least until 1990 Jews in Germany consisted of tiny, little communities. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) in East Germany had become almost “*judenrein*” – mainly for all-German (Nazi) historical reasons, but also due to self-inflicted anti-Jewish and even more so for anti-Israeli policies of the GDR. From 1945 to 1990, West German Jewry was the prime player, although this as well carries its own reservations: From a global Jewish and, of course, a global non-Jewish perspective, German Jewry after 1945 has been almost a non-entity in general, including West Germany. So is this “much ado about nothing” – or something? If the measure is not quantity but rather historical importance – Germany is still relevant. We are involved. Our story is being told. *Nostra res agitur* (‘It’s our case, it matters to us’).

## Political Geography

After the Second World War, West Germany had been the easternmost place in Western Europe. Thus, for geographical reasons, West Germany became the ‘number one haven’ for any refugee from Eastern Europe, including Jews. Most Jewish Holocaust survivors did not wish to stay in Eastern Europe, for two reasons: They wanted to flee its traditional, vehement, and often again deadly bourgeois-agrarian as well as newly Communist-led anti-Semitism. Thus Jews moved to West Germany, first and foremost to the American Zone and this for

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<sup>1</sup> See: Wolffsohn, *Eternal Guilt?*, 1993; Wolffsohn / Puschner, *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 1992; Wolffsohn, *Die Deutschland-Akte*, 1995; Wolffsohn, *Meine Juden – Eure Juden*, 1997; Wolffsohn / Brechenmacher, *Deutschland, jüdisch Heimatland*, 2008; Brenner (ed.), *Geschichte der Juden*, 2012.

good reason. The British Zone was not the most suitable place to go to; fearing that Zionist activists would immediately recruit these Jewish newcomers and turn them into either anti-British or anti-Arab fighters in Palestine, the influx of Jews was not welcomed in the British Zone. The French were even poorer than the British Zone; the small French Zone situated in the far west of West Germany was fundamentally unattractive to those who sought refuge, rescue, and revitalization.

West Germany's easternmost place was West Berlin which formally did not belong to West Germany, but 'the West' was present there, and even devastated Berlin was there – partly gruesome, sinister, partly metropolitan flair. Moreover, Berlin was the geographical center of a lucrative East-West black market economy attracting displaced persons without means.

Munich, the Bavarian capital in the relatively-flourishing American Zone was also a popular refuge for Jewish Holocaust survivors fleeing Eastern Europe. From a historical and moral perspective, both Berlin and Munich were odd choices. After all, it was Berlin, Germany's capital, where the Holocaust and the Second World War had been planned, and Munich had been the 'capital' of the Nazi movement, the so-called "*Hauptstadt der Bewegung*." The essentials for survival do not always conform with memories, or in this case – historical associations.

Another geographical point should be kept in mind. In keeping with a dominant Diaspora Jewish tradition, the Jewish influx to West Germany targeted cities – large urban centers, not only Berlin and Munich but also Frankfurt, Cologne, or Stuttgart. There was a distinct pattern in the way East European Jewish refugees went from Holocaust hell camps to "displaced persons" (DP's) camps in West Germany, then migrated finally towards urban centers.

Despite the fundamental rupture of German Jewish history caused by the Holocaust – the new, originally non-German Jews who populated post-Holocaust Germany, exhibited – consciously or unknowingly – yet another German-Jewish geographical-demographical pattern: They moved to the 'right side of the tracks.' In other words, they preferred middle- and upper-class areas and boroughs such as Olivaer Platz, Wilmersdorf, or Charlottenburg in Berlin and – later, as their economic situation improved – Grunewald, Zehlendorf, and Dahlem. By settling in these better-off areas, Jewish newcomers declared their upward mobility – whether consciously or unknowingly following the same geographical-demographical path taken by German Jews up until 1933. This was in sharp contrast to many non-Jewish immigrants – mostly Turks – who came to Germany since the 1960s. In post-war East Germany (the GDR), despite the differences in the regime and the state of the economic, here as well the Jewish pattern was identical: East Germany's Jews settled/resettled in urban centers, first and foremost Berlin, and also in the more desirable urban residential areas.

## Dissolution, “Final Solution”, and Resurrection

To properly understand what transpired among German Jewry between 1945 and 1990 it is important to step back and put things in a wider frame of reference of German-Jewish history, beginning with the age of Jewish Emancipation. To position our short time-span in the perspective of the nineteenth and twentieth century, I suggest dividing German-Jewish history into three periods that can be defined by keywords: *Auflösung* (‘dissolution’), *“Endlösung”* (‘Final Solution’) and *Auferstehung* (‘Resurrection’). The period of dissolution of traditional Jewish structures and gradual emancipation spanned the years 1800 to 1933. This was followed by the era leading up to and including the “Final Solution” during the years 1933 to 1945. Lastly, we witness a period of German-Jewish resurrection that began in 1945. The end of the war heralded a totally new chapter in German-Jewish history, which rightly should be divided into two stages: The first, the Displaced Persons period. The second stage (since 1948) was ushered in by the establishment of the State of Israel, and the advent of a German-Jewish-Israeli triangle, in lieu of the traditional bilateral German-Jewish relationship stretching from the nineteenth century up to 1948.

### West Germany (FRG)

As noted above, the years 1945 to 1948 were dominated by the displaced persons experience, and most DP camps were located in the American Zone, especially in Bavaria. Like many non-Jews, many desperate Jewish Holocaust survivors eked out a living in post-war Germany by engaging in illegal black-market activities – however in the case of the Jews this fueled old prejudices of ‘sly Jews.’ At the same time, one witnesses the first signs of re-establishment of local German-Jewish communities – a resurrection of Jewish life, although most members of the community had no intrinsic links – cultural or ancestral – to Germany’s past German-Jewish legacy.

In 1950, the Jewish Agency confronted German Jews with an ultimatum: They should leave Germany – the country of their people’s murderers – within six months, otherwise they could expect to be ostracized by Israel and Diaspora Jewry. Heinz Galinski, the President of West Berlin’s Jewish community boldly rejected the Jewish Agency initiative. Not only was the community not ostracized; the reconstruction of Jewish institutional life was accelerated. Nevertheless, forging coherent and vibrant communities ‘from within’ was a great challenge. Post-war German Jewry was typified more by material growth than spiritual

growth – to use a Jewish idiom: more *kemach* ('flour') than *torah* (Jewish education or other spiritual and intellectual pursuits). This trend, of course, is not limited to German Jewry alone.

The early 1950s were dominated by German restitutions to Jewish victims inside and outside Germany – including *shilumim* ('reparations') to the State of Israel for those who had been murdered. This made it easier for Jews in Germany to accept German bids for atonement through monetary compensation and made it easier to ease any guilt for being in Germany at all. Gradually, daily routine began to push aside the past, at least outwardly, among both Jews and non-Jews. Yet, events 'intruded' in this process: The capture, trial, and execution of Adolf Eichmann, one of the inner circle of Holocaust perpetrators, strongly affected historical minds in Germany during the early 1960s, returning shadows of the past. Public and Jewish awareness of the Holocaust continued to be re-awakened time and again by other events. First there was the 1963 Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt, followed by the 1964 debate on the statute of limitation with regard to crimes against humanity. While 1964/65 deliberations over diplomatic relations between West Germany and Israel enveloped German-Jewish inhabitants, this remained mainly a bilateral affair between Bonn and Jerusalem, less so an inner German-Jewish issue. On the eve of the June 1967 Six-Days War, the military build-up towards war was perceived as an existential threat to Israel's very existence, greatly alarming Germany's Jewry who viewed the Jewish state as a safe haven should they ever need one. Anxiety was even more marked during the Yom Kippur War. Jewishly, things went from bad to worse in October 1973, and not only on an emotional level; German-Jewish confidence in its traditional ideological beacon – the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) was shattered by Willy Brandt's (Social Democrat) and Walter Scheel's (liberal Free Democrat) coalition seeking to prevent American arms being re-supplies to Israel from German soil.

In essence, the Six Day War was a watershed that signaled the beginnings of tensions and estrangement for the German-Jewish community: Many younger members of the SPD began actively to support the increasingly anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli New Left. By the early 1970s, the boundary between the democratic Left and the terrorist Left had been blurred, marked by the Leftist plot to blow up West Berlin's main Jewish community center on 9 November 1969 (which at the time was holding an event commemorating the thirtyfirst anniversary of Kristallnacht, with all the 'moves and shakers' of the Jewish community in attendance) – a terrorist attack foiled by a defective detonator.

However, even in the German political mainstream attitudes were changing. Since 1969 Willy Brandt's new *Geschichtspolitik* ('history as politics') orientation introduced two new dimensions to German-Jewish-Israeli relations. The first was a more relaxed SPD-German approach to the Third Reich in general and the

Jewish world in particular. (Given the fact that the SPD as a party and Brandt personally had fought Hitler, such ‘shaking off of culpability’ was viewed by many as logical and gained popularity in Germany’s political marketplace of ideas, since it liberated the SPD’s German supports of guilt.) This change of attitude was coupled by Brandt’s repositioning of West Germany in the Cold War to take a more independent, East-leading politic (*Ostpolitik*) which jeopardized Bonn’s traditionally pro-Israel Near East (*Nahost*) political orientation. (The catalyst for ‘distancing from Israel’ was Bonn’s need to cozy-up to Moscow, which supported the Arabs.) German-Jewish representatives were soured by another ‘encounter’ with the Brandt-Scheel administration; when Brandt came to Warsaw in December 1970, he impressed the enlightened world by kneeling down at the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial, however, the German-Jewish community felt slighted that Brandt refused to include any prominent Jew in his delegation.<sup>2</sup>

The German-Jewish relationship (with Israeli as an ever-present third arm) did not improve under Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (SPD), Brandt’s successor (1974–1982). The tough-lipped Schmidt provoked more than one incident with Israel, often using this or that prominent Diaspora Jew as a ‘sidekick’ (to legitimize his positions) – his absolute favorite being embracing and quoting Nahum Goldmann (the head of the World Jewish Congress between 1948 and 1977 and president of the World Zionist Organization between 1956 to 1968, David Ben-Gurion’s personal nemesis).

There were a series of incidents signaling the change of orientation and distancing from Germany’s Holocaust legacy towards a ‘let bygones be bygones’ attitude, perhaps the most unforgettable the 1985 “Bitburg controversy” sparked by Chancellor Kohl’s visit to the German military cemetery in Bitburg together with American President Ronald Reagan – a cemetery where Waffen SS soldiers, among others, were buried. The visit sparked an acrimonious confrontation between the Reagan Administration and the American Jewish community, and protests to the Kohl government by the Jewish community in Germany – both to no avail. The visit was a landmark event on the slippery slope down to moral equivalency that lumped together Holocaust victims and SS soldiers (and more and more, Germans as a whole) as victims of Nazism (“the human wreckage of totalitarianism,” to quote Reagan).

One year later, the “singularity” of the Holocaust became a bone of contention in what became known as the *Historikerstreit* (‘historians dispute’) provoked by German historian Ernst Nolte, who framed the Holocaust as merely a part of totalitarianism and mass murder in the twentieth century, arguing the Holocaust

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<sup>2</sup> For details and documentary evidence see Wolffsohn/Brechenmacher, *Denkmalsturz? Brandts Kniefall*, 2005.

was not German-specific and that Hitler and Stalin were part of a continuum of this phenomenon. This dispute was far more than an internal academic controversy. It also radiated on the relations of the German and Israeli government and the German Jewry in general.

When in the night of the 9 November 1989 the Berlin Wall fell, followed by German reunification, this became another turning point. Old fears were sparked anew: Would a reunified Germany become *judenrein*? Would reunification mark the beginning of a Fourth Reich...or an “open society” in Karl Popper’s sense? History has already given the answer. The Jews gave their own answer, as well: More than 200,000 Jews from the Former Soviet Union optimistic to make a new beginning elsewhere ‘invaded’ Germany since the early 1990s – and have happily stayed, throwing their lot with Germany’s future.

## East Germany (GDR)

The majority of Germany’s pre-1933 Jewry had traditionally been liberal, a significant minority with strong socialist or even communist leanings. Thus, it is no wonder that the “first socialist state on German soil” attracted prominent, intellectual ‘old fellows’ among Holocaust survivors, such as the poets Anna Seghers, Stefan Heym, and Stephan Hermlin.<sup>3</sup> The GDR-Jewish (and Israeli) honeymoon ended like the Soviet-Israeli one, in late 1948 only to be followed by an unbridled anti-Zionist campaign that lasted until Stalin’s death in March 1953. Compared to other East Bloc countries where anti-Zionism had undeniable anti-Semitic undertones (and overtones), the GDR’s was tamer – but anti-Semitism’s presence was strong enough to lead to an exodus of the vast majority of GDR-Jews to West Berlin or West Germany. After all, *Judenlisten* (lists of Jews) of dissidents targeted as ‘enemies of the regime’ due to suspected Jewish or Zionist leanings or for merely being Jewish, had been prepared by the authorities in 1953 and 1967. We know this from other East Bloc countries, as well. These lists were by no means a “Schindler’s List”; on the contrary. As a result, the GDR became almost “*judenrein*”, except for tiny local enclaves. Their leadership (if Jewish at all) and its rank-and-file were systematically undercut by the East German secret service (the *Stasi*) right up until the dismantling of the GDR. Simultaneously, East Germany played a vanguard role in supporting Palestinian and other anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic terrorist organizations – from the Palestinian PLO and PFLP to the arch-terrorist Carlos and the West German “Red Army Fraction” (RAF).

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<sup>3</sup> For details, documents and references see: Wolffsohn, 1995.

By the mid-1980s, when GDR state leadership realized that their country was or would soon go bankrupt, they became prone to an old anti-Semitic myth – Jews were not only perceived as tremendous wealthy, but also wielded tremendous ‘political clout’ and Jews, in essence, “ran Washington.” Thus, East Berlin’s leaders claimed East Germany was ‘the only truly antifascist German state’ and sent their Jewish comrades to convince American Jews – and through them Capitol Hill and the White House, to extend Most Favored Nation status to the GDR. In the end they failed, however, some leading American Jews were sucked into the narrative of the possible resurgence of fascism in Germany. Edgar Bronfman, then President of the World Jewish Congress, aligned himself against unification despite the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and threw his support behind preservation of ‘Two Germanies.’ Jewish anxieties, not just German-Jewish ones about German unification were understandable for a host of reasons, but support behind preservation of an anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist state like the GDR was politically absurd and blind. Finally it failed, because it was a minority position.<sup>4</sup>

## Demographic trends and shifts

The exact figure of Holocaust survivors in Germany is not known. We depend on more or less informed estimates that hold that in 1945 there may have been about 3,000 survivors in all four Allied Zones. This small number swelled within a short time due to the huge post-1945 East-West migration: Those “displaced persons” (DPs), roughly 500,000 to 600,000, who had escaped murderous post-Holocaust anti-Semitism in countries of Eastern Europe such as Poland. After the establishment of the State of Israel, the number of DPs dwindled. Only a small portion, some 30,000, remained on German soil. For them, future relations with the non-Jewish population appeared difficult. Obviously, the Germans did not want or were afraid of having Jews in their country,<sup>5</sup> and the remaining Jews remained reluctantly. In addition to their “survivor guilt,” of having lived while others perished, they felt guilty for staying in Germany. They remained for two reasons. One, they felt guilty towards the rest of the Jewish world which, in turn, frowned upon their decision to live in the “country of the perpetrators,” and for decades, Germany’s post-1945 Jewry was stigmatized by Israel and the rest of the Jewish world. Besides a antagonistic Jewish world, Germany’s ‘new Jews’ also felt guilty towards themselves – for remaining Jews lived a kind of schizophrenic life torn

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<sup>4</sup> Again see Wolffsohn, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Wolffsohn, 1997.

between growing economic wealth and the dissonance between governmental pampering and increasing social gentile openness, parallel to persistent and resistant clusters of anti-Semites. The burden of this hardly happy mental state was passed from Holocaust survivors to the second and third generation. Yes, there were post-1945 Jews born in Germany, but not that many. By 1989, the 'New German-Jewish' community had grayed and seemed doomed to gradually die out – physically or biologically on its own, not by liquidation. About 28,000 Jews lived in Federal Germany on the eve of the downfall of the Iron Curtain.

But then a sort of 'miracle' followed. The Israeli-American Jewish campaign "Let my people go!" gradually pried open the gates of the Soviet Union for Jews from the mid-1970s to 1989. Most went to the United States, some went to Israel but a minority chose West Berlin and West Germany. Reacting to Israeli pressure, the United States introduced quotas for these immigrants in 1989, after peaceful revolutions in Eastern Europe succeeded in bringing down the Communist regimes. Thus, US officials did not consider Eastern Europeans as political refugees anymore. Like it or not, many of those former Soviet Jews who could no longer gain entry into the Land of Golden Opportunities and did not want to go to the Promised Land – Israel – as a default headed for reunified Germany.

Leaving ethical debates aside,<sup>6</sup> the fact is approximately 220,000 former Soviet Jews came to United Germany between 1991 and 2013. Only half of them joined Jewish institutions (i.e. congregations, communities). These figures are indicative of the numeric revolution that has taken place since Germany's reunification, but the statistics are also indicative of the emergence of a second, new and now dominant Jewish stratum in Germany: Upon the remnants of German-German Jewry (almost totally extinguished by 1945, by death or by taking flight) and the thin stratum of the influx of post-Holocaust Polish-Jewish into West Germany and West Berlin, there is now a second, dominant stratum comprised of immigrants raised in an atheist Soviet milieu, largely ignorant of any Jewish tradition. These 'New-New' German Jews were – in many cases Halachically-Jewish but Jewishly they were culturally and spiritually illiterate and distanced from any expression of their Jewishness.

The implications were obvious, if there was to be any Jewish continuity: Such 'formally Jewish' newcomers had to be molded into 'spiritual Jews' by virtue of their association with Jewish communities, which half of them did not even join.

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<sup>6</sup> Historically, this may be as absurd (or even abominable considering they were given exit visas based on requests to 'repatriate to their Jewish homeland') but who has the right to put them in the docket and what entitles others to judge them? Do collective priorities (Rousseau's 'general will' or Kant's philosophy) take precedence over individual's rights to pursuit of happiness ('individual will' and freedom of choice)?



This nominally-Jewish half did not care about its Jewishness at all, at least not institutionally. The other half did join, but most had no affinity for the religious facets of Jewish communal life. They viewed the community instrumentally – for its welfare benefits and social opportunities.

This state of affairs presented new challenges: On the one hand, this new German Jewish demographic significantly bolstered German Jewry numerically, but in terms of Jewish identity it poses a new problem rather than the solution to the unanswered question of how to save post-Holocaust German Jewry. Contrary to the new Polish-German Jews, these New-New German Jews from the former Soviet Union have come to Germany voluntarily but they need to absorb *Jüdischkeit* ('Jewishness') as well as Germanness. *Jüdischkeit* it may be possible to 'teach,' but their *Deutschheit* ('Germaness') they have to develop themselves. Their Jewish predecessors, however, have for the most part been unable and unwilling to serve as mentors. Thus, the new demographic seemed to be left to determine its own German-Jewish identity – which has yet to develop. What shape will it take? Will they be Germans? Jews? Russians? A combination or all three? Nothing? Or nothing new? Jewish historians are not prophets, and only time will tell.

For a long time, a 'Jewish future' in East Germany seemed to be a complete illusion. Between 1946 and 1949 about a thousand long-time Communists, most intellectuals, had returned to what they perceived and believed to be 'the better Germany.' By 1953, however, most of the other East German Jews had already left. The "better Germany" went from bad to worse and, together with other Soviet Stalin-dominated states, persecuted Jews as Jews between late 1948 and Stalin's death in March 1953. The 17 June 1953 uprising crushed brutally by the GDR authorities and the Red Army did not encourage anyone to remain in what was heralded to be "Germany's first workers and farmers state." By the fall of the Berlin Wall, only approximately 400 Jews remained in the GDR, roughly 300 in East Berlin. The local Jewish communities outside of East Berlin consisted of a few dozens members, many elderly. The Russian Jewish influx up from the early 1990s prevented structural collapse.

Today, compared to the overall population in Germany, Jews remain a very small minority, although they are visible, vocal, and enjoy an audience among some Germans. They are not listened to because they have much to say or to contribute. They are listened to because of the six million of their brethren who are silent or have been silenced by German hands. Thus today's German officialdom wants to 'make amends by listening,' even if German-Jewish officialdom's messages have little to contribute. Yet, this is waning – particularly as the 'voice' of Germany's and Western Europe's Muslim population amplifies, driven by both demographic growth and growth in confidence to be heard.

## Leaders and Biographies

In the context of this discussion, it is insightful to note some of the most prominent and influential personalities who have left an imprint on the Jewish community. Such leadership qualities are present particularly in the biographies of Jewish leaders in the post-War period, no matter how difficult it was (and maybe still is) to find a ‘center of gravity’ Jewishly-speaking – stability, balance, and orientation in a country so overshadowed by the Holocaust. The following is an unflinching attempt to put their legacies in retrospect – their leadership styles and their outlooks, their strong points and their weak points, their successes and their failures.

### Heinz Galinski

Judged historically and strategically, Heinz Galinski was the pivotal German Jewish leader after 1945. From 1949 to his death in 1992 he served as President of (West) Berlin’s local Jewish community. From 1954 to 1963 he headed the Jewish-German community’s roof organization – the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*) retaking the helm again between 1988 and 1992.

He was an autocratic personality – authoritarian, a difficult individual, a bitter man. Critics who chafed under his arrogant and high-handed leadership called him “Galle Galinski” due to his vexing personality. Others branded him “liverish Galinski” for his temperament. And there were a host of other tags Galinski earned in the course of a career. Like so many politicians (Jewish and gentile alike) he was egocentric and a man of action who had to be at the center of things at all times – be it strategic planning and action on behalf of the community, or punching tickets for an event or serving as master of ceremonies at a Hanukkah ball. He ‘ruled’ the community with a strong hand but was a democratically-elected leader. A running joke during his lengthy tenure at the helm asked rhetorically: “Whose rule lasted longer: Emperor Hirohito of Japan or Heinz Galinski?” He was not a well-liked individual – neither within the *Zentralrat*, nor among his gentile interlocutors and the German public-at-large. Openly, German officials flattered Galinski; behind his back they complained and moaned and disliked him.

Criticism and jokes at his expense aside, it should be underscored (very important and unfortunately not recognized as a matter of course): Heinz Galinski was ‘lily-clean’ as a public servant. No graft. No corruption, whatsoever. Not the slightest manifestation of underhanded conduct. One might say, with hindsight, that he was the switchman of postwar German Jewry.

Nevertheless, his moral fiber had been contested. A rumor spread shortly after German Unification that Galinski may have worked for the *Stasi* – the GDR state security apparatus. Even his purported codename circulated: “IM Reb” (“Reb” – short for rabbi). No journalist, political scientist, politician, or historian wanted to investigate the rumor, and risk being labeled ‘anti-Semitic’ if evidence was found. Thus, the rumor has hung in abeyance ever since. I hesitated to delve into the matter myself – not because of charges of self-hatred that would no doubt be fired at me by Jews and gentiles as a descendant of Holocaust survivors and IDF veteran for ‘laundering dirty laundry in public’ should the charges turn out to be true. I hesitated because of the love-hate-relationship which typified my longstanding personal relationship with Galinski. Finally and reluctantly I did the documentary archival research. The outcome (much to my relief): “Much ado about nothing.”<sup>7</sup> Yes, “IM Reb” did exist but IM Reb was not Heinz Galinski. IM Reb was one of East Berlin’s former rabbis who had come from Hungary and like most other GDR rabbis worked for the *Stasi*. Galinski’s record was unmarred.

Heinz Galinski can be credited with two fundamentally-important, effective, strategic achievements as a community leader: One may like them or not, but the importance of their outcome cannot be overestimated. When in 1950, the Jewish Agency demanded and the Israeli government aligned itself with the ultimatum that all Jews in Germany leave the country within six months, most local Jews were intimidated and silent. The demand only exacerbated their already bad conscience: Yes, indeed – How could they remain in Germany ‘of all places’ and ‘after all that’ or ‘despite all that’? Heinz Galinski retorted loud and clear with an Obama-like message of “Yes, we can.” This was the gist of the German-Jewish leader’s response: Galinski said that like other Jews in Germany, he had not survived Auschwitz only to be told by fellow-Jews or others where to live or where not to live. It was none of the Jewish Agency’s business or that of other institutions’ or persons’ to interfere with individual self-determination. No ostracizing of Jews in Germany followed. Year-by-year, the German-Jewish community became more a matter of fact. Unpopular, disputed... but undeniable, immovably a matter of fact that was ultimately accepted, uncontested, as an integral, and by now pivotal player in the mosaic of Diaspora Jewry.

Heinz Galinski’s second strategic achievement was that he masterminded and oversaw Soviet-Jewish immigration to Germany since 1991. Again, he was at odds with other Diaspora Jewish communities and Israeli institutions over this – but ‘on the ground’ he won the day and without him postwar German Jewry would have been lost.

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<sup>7</sup> Wolffsohn, 1995.

### **Werner Nachmann**

Werner Nachmann, Galinski's predecessor, led the Central Council between 1969 and 1988. His term was unspectacular and not worth mentioning in historical perspective; however, revelation after his death of what transpired 'below the radar' of the Jewish community, changed this picture and created a huge problem for the community.

Against the backdrop of German-Jewish history up until 1945, there was a fixation in considering any German-Jewish representative as a moral beacon – above scrutiny, certainly by Germans, ignoring the frailties real collectives of real human beings, Jewish or gentile, can harbor. Thus, doubts about human virtue were unthinkable when it came to the remnants of German Jewry. In May 1988, four months after Werner Nachmann's death the truth became known: Nachmann, who had been put on a pedestal, came crashing to the ground, tarnishing the collective image of the Jewish community with him. Held up as a paragon of virtue, no one – neither the Jews nor the Germans – 'thought the unthinkable,' that Jewish politicians are as human and fallible as gentile ones. Lamentably, Werner Nachmann had gotten confused with the boundaries between private and public money. For whatever reason, he kept German restitution transfers to Holocaust survivors for himself. Maybe he thought that any German-Jewish money belonged to the most-senior German-Jewish representative. Whatever his reasons, Nachmann had kept about 33 million Deutschmarks in restitution for himself. Unfortunately and quite ironically, expectations of 'paragon of virtue status' status-behavior remains an unhealthy premise underlying German-Jewish existence – a Werner Nachmann legacy.

### **Ignatz Bubis**

Ignatz Bubis, the long-time President of the Frankfurt Community, succeeded Galinski in 1992 and stood at the helm of the *Zentralrat* until his death in 1999. He was the best Jewish communicator in postwar Germany. In fact, he was something like a German-Jewish Ronald Reagan in this sense. Contrary to the vexing "Galle Galinski" Bubis was perceived as grand 'charmer.' This was a welcome change that relaxed German-Jewish nerves. Bubis repeatedly pointed out that he was a 'German citizen of Jewish religion' (*deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*). The gentile German world reacted enthusiastically – as if they had found the Holy Grail or at least that this was a German-Jewish 'first' after 1945. It was not, of course. What Bubis said, others had declared many times before. So had Karl Marx, the long-time editor of the Jewish weekly *Allgemeine*, and so had Hendrik van Dam who had worked as General Secretary of the *Zentralrat* from 1950 to this death in 1973. So had Werner Nachmann and many others, prominent

and less prominent German Jews, not to mention the pre-1933 Jews who defined themselves as ‘Germans of the Mosaic Persuasion.’ The overwhelming applause Bubis received for his declarations was important not because it was a real first; but because it was perceived as one – indicative of the German-Jewish relationship as well as of the human comedy in general: What matters is perception not plausible facts. So, yes, the Bubis era was an era perceived as the era of German-Jewish détente – with some clouds that did not disturb this sunny picture.

The first cloud appeared before Bubis’ *Zentralrat* presidency. His role as a businessman and real estate speculator was, to put it mildly, somewhat disputed, but Bubis’ reputation took an unexpected turn in 1985 when Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the famous film-producer, wrote a play whose protagonist did not remind just a lunatic fringe of Ignatz Bubis and his commercial practices. The problem was that Fassbinder’s text in *Der Müll, die Stadt, und der Tod* (‘Garbage, the City, and Death’) was so shallow, superficial, and openly and aggressively anti-Semitic that rehabilitated Bubis by turning him into a kind of martyr.

Another cloud was linked to ‘other times and other places’ – the GDR in 1951. At the time, Bubis had been convicted for black-marketeering during the early post-War years.<sup>8</sup> Such a verdict in an openly anti-Semitic trial on exaggerated or trumped-up charges, with an almost openly anti-Semitic jury, with clearly anti-Semitic witnesses – such a conviction was worthy of something close to knighthood. Consequently, Bubis, like many other GDR convicts, asked to be rehabilitated following German unification. Most applications were no more than a formality, and the same was expected with regard to Bubis. Bubis, however, was not rehabilitated.<sup>9</sup> Legal as well as political officials were upset and wanted to keep this fact secret or at least keep it low-profile. They could not keep it completely secret but they were largely successful in burying the embarrassing incident since it remained unknown to the public-at-large, both Jewish and gentile. The refusal to clear him also remained beyond the interests of historians, journalists, and politicians who may have been happy ‘not to know’ so as not to be troubled with some darker spots on the beaming light of the moral beacon – a paragon of virtue that Orthodox Jews would label *mita’am* – best translated as clean ‘by virtue of his office, not by merit.’

If this was not enough, there was another dark spot in Bubis’ record, pointed out by one of Germany’s top investigative journalists, Hans Leyendecker from *Süd-*

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<sup>8</sup> Zatlin, The Bubis Trial in Dresden, Boston University 1951, unpublished paper, presented at a Conference on German Jews since 1945, Munich University, Historisches Kolleg, December 2009, Courtesy of the author.

<sup>9</sup> Personal information to the author by then-acting Saxonian Minister of Justice, Steffen Heitmann, and the leader of the CDU parliamentary group in the Hesse legislature, Dr. Christian Wagner.

*deutsche Zeitung* formerly with *Der Spiegel*: allegations that Bubis had (perhaps linked to his general black-market activities) illegally sold gold for the Degussa gold handling firm, alluding that the gold had been taken from Holocaust victims.<sup>10</sup> To make his investigation iron-clad, Leyendecker asked to see the relevant Degussa files in the firm's archives. Access was denied. It was also denied to me: First, I was told that such files do not exist, later I was informed that these files did, in fact, exist but that the Bubis family denied access.<sup>11</sup>

## Problems with Leadership

Whatever the merits and demerits of Galinski and Bubis, their paler predecessors or successors and Nachmann's moral as well as material flaws, all these individuals chosen to lead not only suffered from drawbacks that flawed their political leadership; they also lacked an intellectual dimension or Jewish spiritual side to guide the community, let alone vision. Heinz Galinski was the only German-Jewish leader who indeed had a vision, although a political one: the renewal of a Jewish community in Germany – “despite all Nazi megacrimes.” All the other Jewish leaders, except for the unfortunately low-key Salomon Korn (Frankfurt am Main) did not have or offer any vision – neither political nor spiritual. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that consequently and contrary to German-Jewish tradition up until 1933 and general Jewish values reflected in the *Am HaSefer* ('People of the Book') tradition, the general milieu within Germany's Jewish communities has remained, at best, a-intellectual if not anti-intellectual. No vision. No visionaries. From where can German-Jewish draw guidance? So far, it has not come from Jewish persons in leadership positions or communal institutions. Up to now, lamentably, most German-Jewish leaders have been ridiculed behind their backs by most German and Jewish intellectuals. Why? Because, in the long run, you cannot play the intellectual if you are not intellectual. Time will tell if relatively new Jewish academic and religious institutions such as the liberal Abraham Geiger Kolleg and the conservative Zacharias Frankel College (both at Potsdam University) or the neo-Orthodox Rabbinical College of Berlin, the latter supported by the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, can reverse this long-lasting negative trend.

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<sup>10</sup> Hans Leyendecker, in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 13, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> This correspondence is accessible to the academic public, the media, or any other interested person at the archives of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History), Munich, Michael Wolffsohn Papers.

This raises an interesting question: Can there be German Jewish existence with no ‘Jewish’ substance? It is highly questionable whether independent Jewish intellectuals in Germany who have not joined any Jewish community in the past, will begin to do so. Such free spirits, Jewish or not, are by definition independent personalities and do not join institutions which by nature demand discipline and obedience. You cannot square the circle. Germany does not lack Jewish intellectuals. But, Jewish intellectuals such as Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Richard Löwenthal, Ernst Fraenkel, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Edgar Hilsenrath and others of their caliber do not join congregations. At best they may visit, but they do not join them.

No serious autobiography nor any scholarly biography has been published to date on any of the previous leaders of post-War German Jewry. This comes to no surprise. Career-wise, especially for newcomers, it would be suicidal to publish a serious work that would include the darker side of this or that German-Jewish leader. Paying attention to historical rather than day-to-day issues, their respective so-called ‘autobiographies’ (and other publications) carry little intrinsic value – positive reviews in certain prestigious dailies notwithstanding. Suffice it to say, dailies have their own standards and agendas; spiritual and intellectual leaders of the People of the Book have to live up to more ambitious intellectual – even ‘theological’ standards.

In general, serious research on post-1945 German Jewry started much later than general historiography of the FRG. On the other hand research on pre-1945 Germany as well as non-German Jewry has boomed. The reason is self-evident: Until 1945 the boundaries between black and white are clear. Moreover, most potential researchers have been at a loss how to evaluate the contempt for Germany’s new Jewry of the Jewish world and Israel. While this contempt has been overcome gradually, its documentation and interpretation constitutes a mine field for researchers who want to get a job or keep it. True, avoiding unsavory or unpopular topics is not singular to the study of German-Jewish topics, but to date, perceptions and studies on Jewish issues have often succumbed to overstatement, often swinging between either adoration or distortion. Distortion dominated until 1945, adoration thereafter. Complex realities have not been sought. German-Jewish issues and studies are still *à la recherche du temps perdu* (‘In Search of lost Time’). Beyond career considerations, archival access is a major barrier to serious examination of the historiography. Degussa is a case in point that reflects the scope of the problem for any serious historian.

## Searching for New Identity

Inside the Jewish community of a reunified Germany, the pursuit of a new collective identity circles around questions such as: Can Jewish religion function as a common denominator for Germany's Jews? Are there competing ideas and 'alternatives'?

According to surveys, roughly fifty percent of FRG-Jewry has not been outspokenly Jewish-oriented, to put it mildly. This is one side of the coin. The other is that most of the communities are run or maintained according to Orthodox rites and rituals. True, Progressive (Reform) and Conservative Judaism have been able to make some inroads, but in quantitative as well qualitative terms, the inroads of streams such as 'Chabad Orthodoxy' have been far more spectacular.

This institutional dominance by Jewish orthodoxy in a mostly secular, religiously indifferent, and even ignorant Jewish community will inevitably lead to internal polarization with an insurmountable institutional advantage for the Orthodox line. Why? Uncommitted Jews will no longer remain in or join Orthodox communities. We will, therefore, see increasingly Orthodox German-Jewish congregations or institutions with small liberal pockets and an un- or rather de-institutionalized and, in the long-run, 'de-judaized' Jewish collective. A Jewish collective characterized solely by its Jewish roots or origins will arise. It will not be defined by Jewish substance, nor by Jewish religion, nor history or the sense of togetherness – unless the anti-Semitism of the outside world pushes them back into their religious or secular Jewishness. Such an anti-Semitic rise, however, is highly unlikely. Islamist anti-Jewish terror may be another force for renewed 'Jewishness' – a more likely scenario, whose emergence can already be felt. But this too is no positive Jewish self-determination or autonomy. It is negative heteronomy.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude: Germany's new Jewry has become and will increasingly be a community of Jews without Judaism, with a vocal and growing Orthodox minority, and a much smaller but also very active liberal mini-minority. There just may be another Jewish 'lifebelt' left: Israelism instead of Jewish religion. But 'Israelism' in and of a Diaspora community is somewhat odd, if not absurd. It is nice to wave the Israeli flag, say *Shalom* or even *Hag Sameh* and sing *Hevenu shalom alehem* plus *Hava nagila*. But such 'Israelisms' culminate in a farce, not an Israeli reality. It is an absurdity, and an absurdity cannot be the ingredients for strengthening identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Heteronomy: in philosophy, an action that is influenced by a force outside the individual that lacks moral free choice or self-determination.



## Research and Outlook

The state of empirical research on the Jews in today's Germany and recent decades is clearly inadequate. The most recent handbook on post-1945 German Jewry is a summary of 'statements' on the social and economic situation of FRG-Jewry – not the results of empirical research! Moreover, its content is suboptimal, having ignored the 1970s as well as the 1980s, or the earlier decades for that matter.<sup>13</sup> An unconvincing explanation is given: After the Holocaust, gentiles and Jews had been reluctant to collect separate statistical data on Jews. This is a methodological absurdity: Almost every Jewish community has had its social divisions and every division has had its own organizational framework and officialdom who kept records. Moreover, this 'excuse' seems blind to the fact that a central social agency of, by and for FRG-Jewry does exist, namely the Central Welfare Institute for Jews in Germany.

We realize that while passing over this fact, some post-1945 academic publications on Germany Jewry pretend to be real research rather than impressionism presented by academics. Much is said and published about FRG-Jewry, less is researched. I add the sad fact that this also holds true for statements and publications on Israel. Academic tools are available, but they are not applied by all academics.

Nevertheless even without detailed data and studies, it is safe to state (based on the appraisals of longtime informed participant-observations, one of anthropology's best tools) that various generational and geographical groups since 1945 have witnessed clear upward mobility. This generalization is also valid with regard to the influx of Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union who have arrived since the 1970s and, much more so, since 1991. To put it unequivocally: The longer they have lived in Federal Germany the better off they are. The chronological summary is linked to the generational one: Upward mobility on the macro-level is evident from first generation of immigrants to second-generation offspring and so forth. True, at the beginning, the majority of former Soviet Jews faced huge economic and social problems, not just the challenge of acculturation. Welfare authorities and social workers within their respective communities have had a hard time responding to these challenges, yet, on the whole, they have succeeded. This success, however, turned out to be a mixed blessing: Individually, for needy persons, it was a definite success. These perspectives – material wealth and comfort – are not a very encouraging harbinger for any future growth and blossoming of German-Jewish life. There is yet another challenge: Intermarriage.

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<sup>13</sup> Goschler / Kauders, Dritter Teil: 1968–1989 Positionierungen. In: Brenner (ed.). *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 2012, p. 295.

Since the late 1940s FRG-Jewry has held the Jewish “world record” with mostly 70 to 80 percent intermarriage.<sup>14</sup> Intermarriage has usually been considered as the beginning-of-the “end of the road,” a kind of self-inflicted liquidation process. Is this so in German Jewry today, or not? Only time will tell. But in fact, the existential question remains: How will FRG-Jewry – and modern contemporary Jewry elsewhere in the Diaspora, cope with new open societies? Will they prevail?

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<sup>14</sup> Wolffsohn / Puschner, 1992, p. 210 with data from 1951 to 1988. For more recent data see Statistisches Jahrbuch Deutschland (Statistical Abstract Germany).