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Saving the German-Jewish Legacy?

On Jewish and Non-Jewish Attempts of Reconstructing a Lost World

Germany's Jews and their numerous subgroups until the early 1930s had a comparatively clear idea about their own roots, their own tradition, and their own place in the center of Europe. This had a lot to do with a self-confidence that had matured over the centuries, and a minority history, which was closely interconnected, to the development of the German nation and its culture since the Enlightenment.¹ In other words: at least to a certain degree, Jews felt at home between the Baltic Sea and the Alps, between the Rhine valley and River Elbe.

Before 1933, German Jews derived their self-image from their own religion and traditions on the one hand, and from the language and culture of the German majority society on the other. Many felt such a close connection to their surroundings that they frequently named their children after former German emperors, mythical figures, and heroes of the time, especially in the Wilhelminian era.² A German Jew, to put it succinctly, was someone who stood by their Jewish heritage, while at the same time being at home in the German language and literature, someone who 'thought German' and was not significantly different in behavior and appearance from others in surrounding society. If a survey had been taken amongst the German Jews before 1933 asking them how they define themselves, as a group, such a question would have been met with uncomprehending shrugs. It is also likely that several names of German-Jewish role models would have been mentioned, certain to include Enlightenment philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, as well as politicians such as Gabriel Riesser and Johann Jacoby, writers of the stature of Ludwig Börne and Heinrich Heine, and most likely renowned composers such as Giacomo Meyerbeer and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, as well.

1 Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 2004.

2 Wolffsohn / Brechenmacher, *Deutschland, jüdisch Heimatland*, 2008.

The German-Jewish Legacy as a Legitimate Part of German Heritage

As we know, the German Nazis destroyed in the most brutal way possible the former dream of the “German-Jewish symbiosis.” Although a few small Jewish communities formed shortly after the end of the war in 1945, ones which represented some German Jews, as well, once flourishing German Jewry associated with names such as Liebermann, Einstein, and Buber had been irretrievably erased from German soil. After the remarkable growth in the Jewish communities in Germany during the 1990s, as an outcome of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union, the question as to what exactly German Jewry was, once again becomes relevant. What cultural and traditional remains of this Jewry, so unmistakable and rich, and what should be documented, preserved – even refreshed?

Some of the new immigrants from the CIS who today make up 90 percent of the membership in Germany’s local Jewish communities, are indeed interested in the German-Jewish legacy, yet this does not necessarily have anything to do with their own sense of identity. Many Eastern European Jews are familiar with great German minds such as Goethe, Heine, and Kant, but this is not necessarily the case with German-Jewish greats such as Börne, Einstein, Meyerbeer, and Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

This is easy to understand: Why should the ‘new Jews’ in Germany be forced to identify with a legacy that is even farther from their experience than that of Sholem Aleichem, Joseph Brodsky, or Pasternak? *Cultural* Jewish continuity in Germany cannot be artificially reconstructed even 70 years after the Holocaust. One decisive question remains, however: Whether the German-Jewish legacy will remain of *historical* interest for future generations. This, in turn, will only be possible if the Jewish legacy proves able to be integrated into the *common German* cultural legacy.

Will it be possible to have writers such as Börne, composers such as Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and philosophers such as Horkheimer incorporated into the German cultural legacy and the public consciousness in the same way their non-Jewish counterparts are? Only when this legacy is not seen as ‘something foreign,’ when it will be recognized as something integral to ‘Germanity’ will there be a chance for the German-Jewish cultural tradition to continue to survive in Germany in at least a rudimentary form and be given its due respect.

A sober accounting quickly leads to the conclusion that in the future as well, the nurturing of the German-Jewish legacy will remain reliant on the German-speaking cultural sphere. It is illusory to suggest this could happen some-

where else. Things had, admittedly, seemed different, at least during the 1930s when approximately 240,000 Jews fled Nazi Germany and settled all over the world – particularly in Palestine and in the United States, where at least for a while, in certain places, they were able to maintain something similar to a German-Jewish milieu. At this point in time people were still convinced that the German-Jewish legacy had a realistic future outside of the German-speaking world, as well. The founders of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, London, and Jerusalem thought at the time that studying German-Jewish history could never happen again in Germany, but would only be possible abroad.

Take a look at Palestine/Israel for a moment as an example. There were 50,000 *Yeckes* (the mocking-derisive term at the time for the stereotypical German Jew) who were able to immigrate to Palestine and created a new home for themselves where many continued to lovingly maintain their own cultural legacy to a remarkable degree in salons, concert halls, newspapers, and lecture series. They did this, and continue to do so today as well as they can, albeit cognizant that the culture in which they grew up and brought with themselves is a dying culture. Still, at least the first generation of *Yeckes* continued to adhere to their own culture; it was an inherent part of their own identity.

Things developed in a similar manner in the United States, although the adaptation process to the surrounding society for Jews coming from Germany proceeded much faster and was less problematic than in Palestine, or later in Israel. Their German background often just played a lesser role; acceptance of American citizenship after a period of time resulted in those possessing a U.S. passport considering themselves to be first and foremost Americans, not exile-Germans or refugees. The memories of Germany and of their own background faded significantly faster here.

Yet despite all this, the German-Jewish cultural legacy could soon be felt in particularly prominent ways. This is not only true for the film industry, but also several renowned universities where refugees from Germany transplanted entire scientific disciplines. In the 1930s, Renaissance research, for example – formerly at home in Germany – found a safe harbor in the United States and experienced a new prime. Another significant example is Jewish sociologists, including those from the Frankfurt School, who founded their own Institute of Social Research at Columbia University in New York and had a crucial influence on the New School in New York. Nevertheless, these are ‘remnants’ – cultural islands and regional phenomena. An authentic, historically-matured German Jewry as it existed among the Mendelssohns, Oppenheims, Wolffsohns, and Wertheimers – a coherent tradition that unites German culture and enlightened with open-minded Judaism – is as good as non-existent in Germany. German Jewry was, for all practical purposes, completely obliterated by the Hitler dictatorship and the

Holocaust, and that which we call ‘the German-Jewish legacy’ has been struggling with a ‘stigma of homelessness’ ever since. This can be viewed with regret and a source of grievance, nothing can change the fact that the German-Jewish legacy remains in limbo, no longer with a place to be attached to.

There have been, without question, a few respectable attempts in recent decades to reclaim and integrate the German-Jewish cultural legacy (insofar as this is possible and conceivable), the very least, to make it part of the common German cultural and historical consciousness. This can be illustrated by two concrete examples: Ludwig Börne and Heinrich Heine. These two men are no longer the “homeless journeymen” they were disdainfully referred to in the past by anti-semites of all stripes. Quite to the contrary: The non-Jewish majority society has begun to reexamine their works, even to identify with them. Furthermore, Düsseldorf named their university (albeit belatedly in 1988, 22 years after its founding) after the city’s most illustrious native son, Heinrich Heine. Recognition did not stop there. There is now a Heinrich Heine Institute, several collected editions of his writings and letters have been published, and a society with local chapters in different cities carries Heine’s name. The city of Düsseldorf also arranged naming a boulevard after the poet. The city also established the Heinrich Heine Prize, which is awarded once every two years to individuals who exemplify Heine’s legacy with its emphasis on individual freedom and human rights, social and political progress, and the unity of humankind. It can justifiably be said that Heinrich Heine has finally ‘arrived’ in Düsseldorf am Rhein.

Something similar can be said for Ludwig Börne, who had been born in the ghetto of the city of Frankfurt. Here as well, his native city named a school after Börne in the center of the city, and every year the Ludwig Börne Prize is awarded to a German-speaking political journalist in the St. Paul’s Church. The speeches delivered on these occasions try to commemorate the ‘other Germany’ – the democratic Germany which had always existed, which is unfortunately all too often forgotten.

Another example of the rediscovery and reevaluation of the German-Jewish cultural legacy is the composer Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Indeed, Richard Wagner’s trivialization of Mendelssohn Bartholdy and his works (in Wagner’s vitriolic essay *Jewishness in Music*, published soon after Mendelssohn’s death) led, among other things, to Mendelssohn Bartholdy, a popular and influential figure in the music world prior to his death, being relegated second-rate status, his works rarely performed, then labeled during the Nazi period as works polluted with a ‘degenerative Jewish influence.’ Mendelssohn’s Romantic compositions and his *Songs without Words* (previously maligned as “trivial music”) are again enjoying a level of popularity in Germany, after being banned by the Nazis. Today

the oratorios *Paulus* and *Elias* even belong to the standard repertoire of German sacred music.

There are also visible signs of progress in science, the media, and in commemorative work concerning the rediscovery and preservation of the German-Jewish legacy. Since the end of the 1980s a whole series of research institutions have arisen dedicated to the history of German-Jewish or European-Jewish relations in Duisburg, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Potsdam, and Leipzig, among others.

At the same time, a number of Jewish museums have opened, for example in Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Augsburg, Halberstadt, Hohenems, Vienna, and especially Berlin. The number of visitors to these museums is more than respectable. There are commemorative works that have been integrated into everyday life and the public space in an utterly 'simple' yet effective way. The *Stolpersteine* (stumbling blocks) by Cologne artist Gunter Demnig, which bear the names of murdered German Jews, inlaid in the street or on the pavement in front of their former homes all over Germany should be mentioned in this respect. What has been undertaken in terms of *local* initiatives and projects that seek to maintain at least a part of the German-Jewish legacy, is indeed remarkable. Nevertheless, as a phenomenon, it has a fragmentary character and unfortunately is not proceeding systematically – a necessity if the German-Jewish legacy is to be anchor in the collective memory.

The Imperative to Consolidate the German-Jewish Legacy

Another shortcoming of endeavors to reposition Jews' roles in the history of German society is that until now, there has been no systematic overview or compilation of what historical material on German Jewry exists and where it is, whether it has been archived in Germany or abroad. This does not suggest there is a need for construction of additional research institutions and museums; there are enough of these. What is needed is to secure relevant archives, bequests, estates, and papers of all kinds worldwide which are privately or publicly-owned, often unknown even to professional scholars. The Leo Baeck Institute in New York with its branch offices in London and Jerusalem has thankfully taken on this task in the last few decades. Today, however, the Institute is challenged by generational change and shifting priorities: The refugees from Germany who founded the Institute are largely no longer with us and their descendants in the United States, England, and Israel increasingly have problems devoting so much

time and energy to this objective and identifying with the German-Jewish legacy handed down to them.

Under such circumstances what can still be done? There is a vital need to rapidly take stock of the ‘inventory’ – a priority that has also been recognized by the political echelons in Germany. The Mendelssohn Center is currently working on a project under the direction of Elke V. Kotowski to create a ‘handbook’ and to establish a data bank that can provide the first comprehensive overview of sources and studies worldwide on the German-Jewish cultural legacy.

For example, in the mid-1990’s, the Arnold Schönberg Archive was to be moved from Los Angeles to Europe. The University of Southern California apparently no longer had any use for it. At the time, Berlin and Vienna were competing to receive it. Both cities believed that they could make a legitimate claim to the archive. Vienna ultimately won. As founding director of the Jewish Museum of the City of Vienna, I was involved in the complicated negotiations at the time. On the one hand, the Schönberg family had to be convinced and their consent received, on the other hand, a workable acquisition concept needed to be developed. The decision was finally made in favor of Vienna, not least of all because the city agreed to make available a prestigious venue for the collection and, as a ‘cherry on the top’ – to create an Arnold Schönberg professorship. Berlin was simply unable to compete with this offer. The ‘winning acquisition model’ in the Schönberg case (if I may call it that), could certainly be applied to other cases, for example, the personal papers of the famous theatre director Max Reinhardt, presently archived at the University of Binghamton in New York State. It should be returned to where it really belongs, either to Berlin or Vienna.

Naturally, proposals of this nature demand utmost sensitivity. Complex sensibilities continue to exist, but it is at least worth a try to bring them back home to Germany. Discussion and negotiation of such a move can be flexible, and could be consummated via a host of arrangements ranging from outright purchase to long-term loan and exchange programs. Other archival estates that deserve similar discussion include Jewish holdings in the Center for Preservation of Historico-Documentary Collections (formerly, the Special Archives) in Moscow where the papers of Walther Rathenau are located, and where the 1869–1938 records of the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith (*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*) – one of the most important reservoirs of German-Jewish history – were hidden after they were transferred to Moscow among the archival booty seized by the Soviet Union in 1946 (which only resurfaced 45 years later).³

³ <http://www.research.co.il/moscow.html> (accessed March 26, 2015).

Countless Judaica objects that are unmistakably connected with German Jewry's legacy, scattered about in collections worldwide, should also be taken into account. Those that come to mind include Judaica collections in major museums in Jerusalem, New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, as well as the relatively small art museum such as the one in Raleigh, North Carolina, which all include manuscripts and Jewish ritual objects such as Torah breastplates or crowns (*ketarim*) and finials (*rimonim*), and spice boxes. Their stories – their origins and how they came to be part of each collection – would be of historical interest, as well. Experts are aware that many of the objects displayed in the cases of these important museums originally came from the German-speaking areas. If these manuscripts, ritual items and objects reflecting the daily life of Jewish families in Germany can no longer be returned to their places of origin in German-speaking lands (no one seriously expects this to happen), the least that could be done is to catalogue them and preserve the information in a data bank.

Not only Judaica collections should be documented, but also the libraries that Jews from Germany took with them to Palestine, South America, and the United States. A first attempt in this direction has been made by the staff of the Moses Mendelssohn Center which is documenting the whereabouts of some of these libraries. The libraries of Walter Boehlich, Alex Bein, Ludwig Geiger, Ernst Simon, and other prominent Jews reconstructed in the Mendelssohn Center are thus important not only to pay homage to exceptional minds; they also reflect a pinnacle of German-Jewish cultural history of the past.

There is also an urgent need to systematically record and document paintings and other objects of art that were once the property of Jewish private collectors in Germany, that today are scattered throughout the world. It is unacceptable that there are paintings on display of established museums, and other art stored away in the vaults of such institutions whose history and ownership, how they came to be in the museum's possession, remain unexplained. Proof of origin – which is not viewed as a matter of course everywhere – should be made obligatory for all museums.

An incident that makes it crystal clear why we all must hurry to secure the remains of the German-Jewish legacy in Germany and abroad occurred at the beginning of the 1990s. While preparing the exhibit *Patterns of Jewish Life* in the Gropius Bau in Berlin, we learned of a German-Jewish couple who had been able to save all of their belongings and take them with them when they exited Germany: Literally *all* their apartment furnishings – from furniture and pictures to wallpaper. In San Francisco, where the couple ultimately settled, they took an apartment and decorated it exactly as it had been in Germany, down to the location of each article of furniture – a tangible attempt to retain *an exact replica* of a piece of their lost home. Suffice it to say, our team was electrified by this

extraordinary ‘time capsule’ and immediately embarked for San Francisco to visit the address given. Unfortunately, we no longer were able to meet the couple. As we learned, they had recently died. The biggest shock, however, was the news that the apartment had been cleaned out a few weeks before our arrival and the furnishings had all landed in the trash! Our hunt for a slice of German-Jewish living culture which had survived for decades abroad, had disappeared overnight, without a trace. Thus, studying the past presents unique experiences such as the above, but time is short.

Passing on and Discoursing the Jewish-German Legacy

Exploring the German-Jewish past and cultural legacy should never be limited to an intellectual exercise alone. There is already sufficient impetus for passing on and discussing Jewish history in today’s Germany, as the impressive attendance figures at the Jewish Museum in Berlin illustrate. An arena has emerged where non-Jews not only have begun to take an interest in Jewish culture; one even encounters a form of ‘mimicry’ where gentiles have begun to engage in Jewish culture themselves.⁴ There has also been much fruitful, public dialogue where Jews and non-Jews can come together to reconstruct a dramatic history of convergence and divergence. As a result of this dialogue, suddenly, more and more ordinary Germans have begun to recognize the enormous regional and national contributions to the visual arts, medicine, science, music, philosophy, the humanities, the economy, and philanthropy made by German Jews, primarily in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is a journey marked by a broken history. The history of Jews in Germany is an uneven, at times convoluted path – at the same time, impressive and shocking. Jews no longer remain outside the public discourse, and some now participate intensely in it. As a result, some members of the younger generation of Jews in Germany have begun to strongly identify with mainstream society. These young Jews do not ignore the trauma of the Holocaust, but they believe that the present *they* experience reflects a different reality – the emergence of a new society which is drawing lessons from the

⁴ See: Bodemann, *The Return of European Jewish Diaspora*. In: Schoeps / Glöckner (eds.), *A Road to Nowhere*, 2011, p. 183.

past, emphasizing cultural tolerance and seeking to address current problems of ethnic and religious minorities in this spirit.⁵

Dealing with the German-Jewish legacy is a major challenge for historians, journalists, educators and other professionals. What does this mean for those Jews currently building their own new communities, and how does the German-Jewish legacy impact on them?

The overwhelming majority of the Jewish communities of Germany today are Russian-speakers. A series of studies on Russian Jews who settled in Germany during the 1990s and early 2000s have shown that most identify with the history of *Eastern European Jewry*, although, some are proud to be descendants of those Jews who originally came from Central Europe and Germany in the late Middle Ages. In a certain sense, they even perceive themselves as part of a ‘return’ by their coming to Germany. At the same time, many see their German legacy in more contemporary and personal terms with a distinct ‘Russian’ orientation: As carriers of the heroic legacy of hundreds of thousands of veterans or offspring-‘heirs’ of the Red Army who share the ethos of the Great Patriotic War in which, at a horrific cost, the Soviet Union ultimately defeated Hitler and liberated Europe from the Nazis. This is why Russian Jews in Germany are less inclined to mark anniversaries such as November 9 (*Kristallnacht* or the “Night of Broken Glass” in 1938) or January 27 (Day of Liberation of Auschwitz in 1945) which constitute landmark events in the lives of German or Polish Jews who have been living in the country for decades. Instead, Russians émigrés celebrate Victory Day on May 9 with a passion – the day in the spring of 1945 when Berlin fell and the Third Reich unconditionally surrendered to Allied forces. Naturally, they have brought along more than their war medals, the feeling of kinship with the glorious liberators, to Germany. They also act as ambassadors – cultural agents of Russian art, music, and literature – indeed, the ‘voice’ of the intelligentsia. Even during 70 years of repressive communist dictatorship, some Soviet Jews remained eager to emphasize their Jewish *and* Russian cultural roots.⁶ On the other hand, many nearly lost

⁵ Glöckner quotes a young Jewish historian from Odessa, now living in Berlin, when asked about his feelings living in the country of perpetrators of the Holocaust: “Yes, it afflicts me. On the other hand, I see and feel that this population has undergone tremendous societal changes during the last decades. Especially since the 1960s, German society has proven its ability to deal honestly and critically with its own past. Also, I do not have the impression that current memorial events are pure exercises in political correctness. I feel that there are serious debates on the Nazi regime and all its crimes, especially among young people.” Glöckner, *Immigrated Russian Jewish Elites*, 2011, p. 216.

⁶ For example, the Russian-Jewish publicist Rafael Nudelman, who later immigrated to Israel and served as editor-in-chief of the literature magazine “22” reflected: “They say that we are Jews by nationality but Russians by culture. Are culture and nationality like an outfit on a mannequin

their ties to Jewish culture, religion, and heritage completely under communism. One of the crucial questions in Jewish community life today is: what are the main concerns of Germany's 'new Jews'? Perhaps the second generation of these immigrants will develop a strong interest in reconstructing local Jewish history and develop a closeness to German-Jewish cultural heritage as their own inheritance.

Next to the Russian Jews, a large number of Israeli and American Jews have found their way to unified Germany, with most opting to live in metropolitan centers such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich. Some are descendants of the former *Yeckes*, and it will be very interesting to see how all these different groups of Jews will constitute a *new* German Jewry. Meanwhile, some elements of the original German Jewish *religious* tradition have returned from across the Atlantic. Starting in the Cold War, military rabbis and other personnel at American military bases in West Germany have established ties with local Jewish communities and became quite active members. Some have even remained, and others arrived later in unified Germany. These American Jews are hallmarked by their interest and involvement in Liberal and Reform Jewry who were attracted by the foundation of the Union of Progressive Judaism in Germany (UPJ) in 1997, some even becoming community leaders. Today, the UPJ is part of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ), which was founded in London in 1926, but whose center of gravity was Germany: WUPJ's first convention was held in Berlin in 1928 and in its formative years, the Reform movement was led by German rabbi Leo Baeck. The strong German-Jewish impact on the early development of the WUPJ was anything but accidental. The first seeds of Liberal Judaism developed over a period of 200 years in Germany, beginning with people such as David Friedländer,⁷ who in the nineteenth century championed Jewish emancipation, modernization of Jewish ritual, and establishment of interfaith ties with Christians, then flourishing in the Wilhelminian Germany, continuing in the Weimar Republic. Landmark educational and religious institutions were founded, for example, the Institute for the Scientific Study of Judaism (*Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*) in Berlin in 1872 and the Free Jewish School (*Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus*) in Frankfurt in 1920, which pioneered innovative philosophical, liturgical, and cultural contributions to the emergence of a modern Jewry. Without a doubt, the traditions, liturgies, and ideas of the Liberal Jewish movement in Germany have strongly

or water in a glass? When a mighty press drives one metal into another, it is then impossible to separate them, even by slicing them? We were put under enormous pressure for decades. My national feelings have no other expression than through my culture. [...] If you divide me up, I should like to know, which cells of my soul are colored in Russian, which in a Jewish color?," quoted in: Epstein / Kheimets, *Immigrant Intelligentsija*, 2000, p. 469.

7 See: Schoeps, David Friedländer, 2012.

and decisively affected non-Orthodox Judaism worldwide, and modern American Jewish life in particular. The WUPJ, today serves approximately 1.8 million Jews in 45 countries. While today, the center of gravity of the Liberal Jewish movement is in North America, at least some of its spiritual and intellectual orientation is ‘returning-reverting’ to Germany. Nonetheless, those Jews organized in local Jewish congregations who define themselves as Liberal ones still form a small minority in Germany,⁸ and it remains an open question whether the philosophical and theological ideas of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, or Gershom Scholem will again assume a leading role, and whether the liturgical music by German-Jewish composers such as Louis Lewandowski will witness a revival.

Since the late 1940s, Jewish community life in Germany has been dominated by Jewish traditions from Poland and other Eastern European countries introduced by Holocaust survivors who decided to stay and settle in Germany. Of course, in the years and decades following the Second World War significant differences appeared between ‘Easterners’ and ‘Westerners’ but their unique situation and the small size of the community forced all sectors to join together in Unified Communities (*Einheitsgemeinden*). This unique German historic construct – which required Jews in each and every locality to operate under one ‘roof’ that would incorporate all sectors of the community and administer all community needs and would represent the Jewish community vis-à-vis authorities – is still preferred by some of the Jewish elites even today.

Independent liberal Judaism was possible only after the downfall of the Iron Curtain and German unification. Today, the Abraham Geiger Kolleg (AGK), a rabbinical school founded in Postdam in 1999, constitutes a flagship of non-Orthodoxy dedicated to training future Liberal clergy not only for Germany, but for all of Europe.⁹ Interestingly, many of the rabbinical students come from Jewish families of Eastern Europe background (for example Russian, Ukrainian, or Hungarian). On the other hand, many local Jewish communities still favor Orthodox rabbis and Orthodox rituals, at least for prayer services.¹⁰ This is the general pattern 25 years after the advent of Russian Jewish immigration into Germany. Such trends may rightly be viewed as part of a process of differentiation and pluralization developing amongst Germany’s new Jews. Despite the demographic growth in

⁸ According to its own data, today, the Union of Progressive Jews has 22 local Jewish congregations with almost 5,000 registered members. The most active has been founded in Hannover, the capital of the federal state of Lower Saxony, the *Liberale jüdische Gemeinde Hannover*. The Community includes Jews from 10 different countries and it is led mainly by German Jews, among them many women. See: <http://www.ljgh.de/> (accessed August 22, 2013).

⁹ See the article by Rabbi Walter Homolka in this Volume.

¹⁰ For example, all seven local Jewish communities in the federal state of Brandenburg, which surrounds Berlin, call themselves Orthodox, including the Jewish community of Potsdam.

Jewish communities during the 1990s and all of the dynamic change seen across the generations, one should not discount the possibility of rebuilding the vibrant and diverse structure that once typified German Jewish life in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Germany's 500,000 Jews not only had prestigious synagogues, well-attended schools, strong political organizations such as the Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith, and an efficient social welfare network headed by the Central Welfare Agency for Jews in Germany (*Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der deutschen Juden*)¹¹, but they also had extensive networks of Jewish associations connected to the synagogues in the medium-sized towns and big cities.

Finally, from a historical perspective, prominent and wealthy German Jews of all different backgrounds and professions have been eager to co-found and run associations, foundations, and institutions that promote their members' social interests and needs, providing for culture needs and mutual economic aid.¹² For example, members of the Mendelssohn, Oppenheimer, and Friedländer families were very engaged as philanthropists, art collectors¹³, patrons of academic projects, and sponsors of health institutions, or recreational centers. They viewed such public-spirited activities as a sign of their patriotism for Germany; this stance remained popular until the 1930s but the dream of a "German-Jewish symbiosis" was extinguished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka. Decades passed before Jews in Germany were willing or able to again take part in public discourse or raise their voice in any social or political context. Nevertheless, three features have come to characterize those Jews who were willing to speak out as Jews in (West) Germany: strong support behind combating neo-Nazism or racism in any form, and upholding human rights in Germany; a commitment to a 'politics of remembrance' for victims of the Holocaust and others; and, finally, more or less unconditional solidarity with Israel. While all these activities remain necessary and commendable, they are not really associated with the original core heritage of the German Jewry before 1933.

11 The Central Welfare Board of German Jews was founded in 1917 as the umbrella organization of the various Jewish social welfare institutions and organizations. The famous Austrian feminist Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936) was a strong influence. The Welfare Board was closed by the Nazis in 1939.

12 One of the famous examples in Berlin was the Society of Friends (*Gesellschaft der Freunde*) founded in 1792 and closed by the Nazis in 1935. It was originally an intellectual club for young Jewish men, but later turned into an important cultural center led by Jewish professional elites and closely connected with the Berlin Jewish community. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Society also served as an informal network for the well-to-do and was commonly frequented by non-Jews as well. See: Panwitz, *Die Gesellschaft der Freunde 1792–1935*, 2007.

13 See: Ludewig / Schoeps / Sonder (eds.), *Aufbruch in die Moderne*, 2012.

Are there signs of a ‘healing process’ in German-Jewish relations? It is interesting to note that a few years ago there was an internal debate whether to the name of the Central Council of Jews *in Germany* should be changed to the Central Council of *German Jews*.¹⁴ The unresolved debate seems to indicate that at least some of Germany’s Jews indeed ‘feel German’ today. Of course, this says little about their distinctive self-image and identity towards the German-Jewish heritage of the past, or other forms of Jewish heritage for that matter. Even for those Jews who are descendants of German Jewish families, it is extremely difficult in today’s Germany to reconnect with their former heritage. This is the crux of the core question that remains hanging about the future of Jews in Germany: How will the general Jewish population in Germany understand itself in the long run? Perhaps the next generation of Jews in Germany will reflect interaction among the community’s disparate parts, fueling a new identity or new identities that will be the product of a cross-fertilization of worldviews and practices of Russian, American, Israeli, and ‘indigenous’ German Jews – an identity that perhaps will be able to embrace former German-Jewish culture, parallel to self-confidence and pride as equal European citizens.

For older Jews in Germany, including the second generation after the Holocaust (children of survivors), this might be impossible, not only due to the disruption and destruction of the Jewish world of their parents from before 1933, but also because of their own exposure to stigmatization by their non-Jewish surroundings in the postwar years. My own father, who returned from Sweden where he found refuge during the Nazi period, received a chair at the University of Erlangen, however, he was the recipient of countless letters of latent and open anti-semitism, enough ‘material’ to fill a book... I think it was even more painful for him that well-meaning friends never ceased asking him – “Why have you re-migrated to Germany of all places?” We know from recent sociological studies that Russian Jewish immigrants from the 1990s were asked the same question. As long as this question remains significant in the dialogue between non-Jews and Jews in Germany, normalcy will remain a distant prospect. In the meantime, the ‘stigma of homelessness’ continues, and the hour for ‘a new German Jewry’ has yet to arrive.

¹⁴ The discussion was even promoted by Charlotte Knobloch, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany from 2006 till 2010, but ultimately ended with no results, see: Herzinger, in: *Die Welt*, August 22, 2009.

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