Beyond Jericho: The Resurgence of German Jewish life since the Fall of the Berlin Wall

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Beyond Jericho: The Resurgence of German Jewish life since the Fall of the Berlin Wall

A thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors in History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia.

by

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Introduction

This is a thesis about life after near-death. At this moment in history, it is rare to find Americans who are unaware of the plight of German Jews during the Shoah. Soon after assuming control of the German government in 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party implemented a concentrated and institutionalized campaign of anti-Semitism. What began with job restrictions, loss of citizenship, and arbitrary prohibitions morphed into a policy of orchestrated mass murder.

However, the story does not end there. Despite the devastation done during the Shoah, Jewish life in Germany continued after 1945. At first the community was no more than a shadow of its old self. The vast majority of German Jews who survived soon emigrated, primarily to Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom where they joined existing Jewish communities. Of the Jews who did remain in East and West Germany, few were natives. Most were “Displaced Persons” from Eastern European nations such as Poland.

These new communities did not thrive. It is estimated that by 1989 there were no more than 1,000 Jews living in East Germany. The Jewish population of West Germany, estimated to be 25,000 in the late 1980s, was ostracized by most of the international Jewish community because they remained in a land that had been hostile to Jews. Before the end of the Cold War they were an aging minority that seemed destined for obscurity. This all changed after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over the next twenty years a sudden and unexpected wave of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union moved to the newly reunified Germany. The number of Jews in Germany tripled, growing from 50,000 to 150,000 by the end of the 1990s.
This thesis shows that this sudden resurgence of Jewish life in Germany has made it possible for German Jews to once again identify themselves as Germans. Although the label “German Jew” looks rather ordinary on first glance, this is not the case. Before the Shoah most of Germany’s Jews were so assimilated that they often thought of themselves as Germans before they thought of themselves as Jews. In its aftermath, the Jews that remained in Germany did so believing that it was impossible to be both German and Jewish. Thus when an umbrella organization for Jewish communities in West Germany was established it was intentionally named the Central Council of Jews in Germany rather than the Central Council of German Jews. In the past twenty years, Jewish organizations and communities have been primary facilitators of the integration of Soviet Jews into German society. German Jewish culture has grown more visible with Jewish buildings, museums, and restaurants popping up in cities throughout the country. Today’s German Jewish community is moving in fascinating new direction. The future is bright for a community that once hovered on the edge of extinction.

A Brief History of German Jewry Until 1945

Jewish life has existed in what is now Germany since the fourth century. The earliest recorded communities were in Cologne and Worms. Not unlike Jewish populations the world over, German Jews were subjected to anti-Semitism and legal discrimination. Laws limited their choice of profession and they were forbidden from attending German universities. They were seen as a foreign presence and were not awarded the status of citizenship. German Jews were also subject to anti-Semitic violence and pogroms.

The position of German Jews began to improve with the advent of the
enlightenment in the late 18th century. Influential thinkers such as Voltaire argued that religious tolerance was a necessary feature for the emerging nation-states of Europe. Concurrent with the enlightenment was the *Haskalah*, a distinctly Jewish enlightenment movement to modernize and assimilate Jews into European society. Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn is widely seen as the founding father of the *Haskalah* movement.

In Mendelssohn’s view Judaism and Christianity both originated in Mosaic traditions, meaning that Jews and Christians should be able to live side by side in modern society. He believed that the primary means for reconciling the cultural gulf between German Jews and non-Jews would come through the process of Jewish assimilation into German culture. Mendelssohn personally translated the Old Testament into German. He also asserted that Jewish ritual services should become more like those of Christian Germans. Above all Mendelssohn believed that German Jews should put great emphasis on studying German language and culture, thus hastening the process of assimilation. His ideas would eventually lead to the creation of Liberal Judaism, the most representative denomination of prewar German Jewry.

The 19th century bore witness to Jewish emancipation in German lands and the assimilation of the majority of German Jewry. In a bizarre twist of history, it was Napoleon that was responsible for the initial emancipation of many German Jews. The Prussian Empire was forced to turn towards reforming their laws after suffering a crushing loss to the French at the Battle of Jena in 1806. After a series of reforms such as the abolishment of serfdom in 1808, the Imperial Edict of March 12, 1812 recognized the equality of Jews before the Prussian law and rescinded existing employment restrictions. However the reforms in Prussia and other German states were short lived and most
disappeared in the years following the Napoleonic era. In 1818 a Prussian edict once more prevented Jews from attending universities and in 1819 the state of Westphalia barred Jews from holding civic positions.

This backlash was felt deeply by German Jews, many of whom had been on the cusp of total assimilation. It was not uncommon for many Jews during this time to convert to Christianity. Among those who converted were famed composer Felix Mendelssohn (the son of Moses), Karl Marx’s father, and the influential writer and poet Heinrich Heine. Liberal Judaism soon took further efforts to Christianize their religious practices. Nineteenth century synagogues began to look more like churches, services were conducted in German rather than in Hebrew, and some congregations went as far as celebrating the Sabbath on Sundays.

The goals assimilation and emancipation were finally realized during the latter half of the 19th century. A watershed moment for German Jewry came during the fateful year of 1848. Several Jews were able to participate as delegates at the German National Assembly in Frankfurt during this year. Although the Assembly’s statement of basic rights called for an end of religious distinctions deciding citizenship, it was soon forgotten in the aftermath of the many failed European revolutions during this year. In 1869 the North German Confederation repealed all legal restrictions on Jewish citizens. The same was done by many southern German states in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. German Jewish Emancipation was officially realized with the passage of the Imperial Constitution of the German Empire in 1871.

In the years leading up to World War I the German Jewish community increasingly assimilated itself into the society of the newly formed nation. Many attended
German Universities. With the rise of Germany as an industrial power, Jews that worked as professionals and merchants also prospered economically, entering the ranks of the nation’s growing middle and upper-middle classes. Many German Jews also became zealous supporters of their new nation. German Jews took a hostile stance towards the burgeoning Zionist movement (the call for a Jewish state in Palestine). As proud Germans, they saw little need in emigrating from a modern industrial state to what they viewed as a desolate and oriental land. When Theodor Herzl (the movement’s founder) tried to hold the First Zionist Congress in Munich in 1897, a group of German rabbis intervened. As a result, the conference was moved to Basel in Switzerland.

The end of the 19th century bore witness to the first wave of Jewish immigration to Germany from Eastern Europe. This was largely due to the increased prevalence of pogroms and anti-Semitism in Tsarist Russia and Eastern Europe during this period. The Jews that emigrated to Germany had not experienced the rapid modernization of the Haskalah. Most practiced what is today known as Orthodox Judaism and had the same outward appearance as their ancestors for centuries before then. Rather than welcome them into their midst, the German Jewish community reacted with antipathy to their newly arrived brethren. Jewish immigrants were deridingly labeled as Ostjuden (“Eastern Jews”). Indeed many German Jews feared that the arrival of Ostjuden was a threat to the work of assimilation carried out during the previous century.

With the outbreak of World War I many German Jews (including Otto Frank, the father of Anne) signed up to fight in the German army. Although anti-Semitism was present before, during, and after the war most German Jews saw themselves as a Germans. German Jews also continued to play an important role in politics and business
in Germany. No less than five Jews served as government ministers during the Weimar Republic. Sadly, their fortunes changed drastically in the coming years. Within ten years of coming to power in 1933, German Jewry went from a thriving community to the brink of destruction.

**On German Identity**

Perhaps no group has suffered a greater or longer identity crisis than Germans during the modern era. For the greater part of the past five hundred years, present-day Germany was a series of small kingdoms and states. Many German speakers migrated to Eastern Europe, further distancing them from the majority of Germans in Central Europe. This situation was further complicated by the imperialist rise of Austria in the south and the Kingdom of Prussia in the north. The two kingdoms spent much of the 19th century posturing to become the dominant national state for German speakers in Eastern and Central Europe. After the Kingdom of Prussia won the Franco-Prussian War, a united German empire was formed in 1871. Otto von Bismarck, Prussia’s cunning Prime Minister and Germany’s first chancellor ensured that his master, King Wilhelm I of Prussia, became Kaiser Wilhelm, the emperor of the German Empire. Nonetheless, German speakers were still divided into two separate states; the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The ambiguous definition of who was “German” began shortly after the Empire’s creation and was closely tied to issues of religion. Most Germans living in the north were Protestant and most living in the south were Catholic. The dominant role played by Protestant Prussia in the formation of the empire meant that many saw southern Catholics as insufficiently German. By the same token, the unification forced many to reexamine
the emancipation of Jews. Less than a century later, many questioned whether Jews could ever be truly emancipated and integrated into German life. They were seen as having a distinct culture that was incompatible with that of the new German Empire. With the rise of political and intellectual anti-Semitism during the late 19th century, many Germans came to believe that their nations Jews formed a state within a state, negating any possibility of their “Germanness”.

Seeking to limit the influence of Catholic politicians from southern states such as Bavaria, Bismarck launched the *Kulturkampf* (“Cultural War”) in the hope of further securing the hegemony of Protestant Prussia within the Empire. Although this policy was brief, the legacy of Germany’s Catholic-Protestant and north-south divide continue to the present. The legacy of the *Kulturkampf* had a great influence on the young German sociologist Max Weber, inspiring his most famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. During my own time in Germany, I remember my home-stay “father” consistently advising me to avoid going to Munich because it was “too conservative”.

Germany’s identity problem began to drift towards fascism after World War I. The Treaty of Versailles stripped the nation of land in both the east and the west. Much of their former territory in the east was ceded to the newly created Polish state. The creation of the Danzig Corridor, which gave Poland access to the Black Sea, separated the province of East Prussia from Germany. Germany also ceded the territories of Alsace and Lorraine (whose acquisition were a motivation for Germany entering World War I). Few Germans were satisfied with their new democratic government, known as the Weimar Republic. Its existence was a constant reminder of the open wounds created by the Treaty
of Versailles. The 1920s were a tumultuous decade for the young republic, characterized by frequent economic crises and a rising amount of political violence from both the left and the right.

Enter Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. Their ideology was rooted in a demented view of what was German and what was not. Hitler believed that Germans could trace their origins back to the Aryan tribes of ancient India and that they had a long tradition as a warrior people with dominion over lesser races. Hitler and his cronies proclaimed Germany as the Aryan masters of the world and attempted to purge their country of its recent culture and history that they deemed undesirable. Within months of coming to power the Nazis began passing laws that alienated German Jews from their fellow citizens. The Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service in 1933 prohibited Jews from holding any positions in the German civil service. The Nuremberg Laws of 1935 was one of the most egregious attempts to strip German Jews of their right to citizenship and their German cultural identity. Among these laws were prohibitions for German Jews to marry non-Jews or to display German national colors in their homes or in public. Soon works by German Jewish authors and thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Heinrich Heine, and Franz Kafka that are presently viewed as ubiquitous parts of German culture were banned because they were deemed intellectually degenerate. By the time the reign of the Nazi party had come to an end, millions had died at their hands and much of the once thriving liberal and intellectual culture of the past had been tossed aside.

The postwar division of Germany into two separate states only added to the nation’s identity issues. The German Democratic Republic (colloquially known as East Germany) was a communist member of the Soviet influenced Eastern Bloc. The Federal
Republic of Germany (colloquially known as West Germany) was a liberal democracy firmly aligned with the United States and Western Europe.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the German reunification of 1990, Germany has still struggled to define its national identity. A streak of strong animosity between the citizens of the former East and West Germany was an unexpected side effect of the reunification. West Germans saw East Germans (referred to deridingly as “Ossies”) as lazy, economically and culturally backward, and obsessed with their newly found materialism. In the other half of the nation, East Germans saw their western counterparts as money-obsessed elites with little interest in building a strong national community. Further issues hindering identity formation included West Germany’s large immigrant population (the vast majority being former “Guest Workers” and their families from Turkey) and the arrival of ethnic Germans (known as Spätaussiedler) from Eastern Europe and Russia during the early 1990s.

Much has been written on the affect that memory of the Shoah has had on Germany’s continued identity formation. Whereas most nations take great pride in their national history as a foundation stone for their culture and identity, contemporary Germans are by and large unable to do so. Germans have and continue to struggle to make sense of their past in the aftermath of the Shoah. Almost all works and theories on German identity since 1945 have used the Shoah as a basis for defining Germanness. The Sonderweg (“Different Path”) theory was especially popular from the late 1970s to the 1990s. Adherents of this theory believe that Germany modernized in a way that was different than the development of liberal democracies in Western Europe.

The Sonderweg theory entered the realm of popular culture after the publication
of historian Daniel Goldhagen’s influential book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* in 1996. In the book Goldhagen argues that anti-Semitism has been a central tenant of German culture for hundreds of years. Upon its publication the book shot to the top of bestseller lists in the United States. More surprisingly, it was also a bestseller in Germany, indicating the existence of a streak of self-loathing in many contemporary Germans.

Dan Diner’s “Negative Symbiosis” theory, first mentioned in his 1986 article “Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz,” has also played an important role in discussing the relationship between Jewish and German identity formation. The theory states that the Shoah defines Jews and Germans as the antithesis of each other. In their quest to define themselves, Germans define Jews as the ultimate other. Although Diner is the most influential scholar to study this concept, thinkers such as Hannah Arendt previously addressed it and it continues to be an important basis for literary criticism of works by Jewish and non-Jewish Germans that relate to the Holocaust.

Another illuminating event in the troubled formation of Postwar German identity is the *Historikerstreit* (“Historian’s Argument”) of the mid 1980s. The event began when conservative German historian Ernst Nolte published an article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Nolte argued offered a nationalistic solution to integrating the Shoah into a more positive narrative of German history. In his article he claimed that the Shoah should not be seen as a unique event outside of the realm of Western history, suggesting that Germany should no longer be forced to apologize and be ashamed of its past. The bulk of the article, which identifies the threat of Stalinism amongst other factors for the murderous drive of the Nazis, has since been seen as little more than a thinly veiled apologia for the failure of the German people to prevent the Shoah. In the aftermath of
the article a lively debate began among public intellectuals in Germany about how German identity formation should proceed in the aftermath of the Shoah. Philosopher Jürgen Habermas was the leading voice of dissent objecting to Nolte. Habermas, perhaps the most important postwar German philosopher, believes that parts of German culture and identity are directly responsible for the rise of the Nazi party and the Shoah. Much of his rebuttal relies on a belief that Germans should seek to identify and rid their culture of such traits.

Presently, Germany has yet to define any tangible national identity. Traces of divisions of north-south, Protestant-Catholic, and east-west, are still tangibly felt. Promoting multiculturalism and integrating recent immigrants are also issues that continually arise in common discourse (just last year Prime Minister Angela Merkl told a gathering of Christian Democrats that Multiculturalism was a failure). One particularly troubling development has been a desire to establish a German *Leitkultur* (“leading culture”). Adherents of *Leitkultur* believe that defining a person as German should depend on certain “essentialistic” linguistic and cultural qualities. The dark side of *Leitkultur* is that it often relies on portraying Germany as a conservative Christian nation. This has had a profound effect upon Germany’s immigrant population and their children, often making them much more hesitant to identify themselves as German.

While it is true that the Shoah will continue to play an important role in the formation of German identity, this cannot be the be-all and end-all in the ongoing process of identity formation. In the past twenty years Germany’s Jewish community has changed so drastically that it challenges many of the theories mentioned above. As will be proven in this thesis, since the fall of the Berlin Wall the German government has actively sought
to include Jews in contemporary German culture and German Jews have begun to once again view themselves as Germans.

Literature

A few words on the sources used for this thesis. By virtue of this paper’s examination of the very recent past, many of the secondary sources are very new. The work done on this topic often hits close to home. I encountered very few books written by non-Jewish scholars and it was not unusual to find secondary sources written by German Jews such as Dan Diner and Michael Brenner. The tone of these scholars has changed as well. Earlier pieces of literature from the 1990s, while seeing the arrival of Soviet Jews as an interesting development, often overlooked this trend. Instead these earlier pieces, especially those of renowned German Studies scholar Sander Gilman are also filled with extreme apprehension about the newly reunited Germany and the rising popularity of ultra-nationalism, especially in former East Germany.

A wide variety of primary sources were used for this thesis. Previously translated newspaper articles, old pamphlets, political statements, and pieces of literature were frequently consulted (I would especially like to thank the editors of the amazing primary source reader Germany in Transit, a primary source reader on immigration and multiculturalism in post-World War II Germany for making my life much easier over the course of this project). It was also critical to examine websites of German Jewish communities and organizations, often in both English and German to get as full a picture as possible. Using Google street view, which recently arrived in Germany, was an integral part of the research for chapter 4 as were Youtube videos of the comedian Oliver Polak.
Nomenclature

I would also like to clarify the use of two phrases that are used extensively throughout this thesis. The first deals with the use of the word “Shoah” instead of the word “Holocaust”. The Holocaust is often used to describe the Nazi orchestrated mass murder of Jews, Roma, gays, communists, and others during World War II. “Shoah” refers only to the killing of Jews. Using the word Shoah is an important distinction to further concentrate this paper on the perspective German Jews have of that gruesome period of history.

The other important term is “community”. Unlike the United States, Germany does not have full separation of church and state. Those who belong to a religious organization registered with the German government may elect to have part of their taxes go to their respective religious organization. A Jewish Community is the central organization of Jews in a given town or city. These Jewish Communities receive tax revenue from the German government and are thus able to provide social services for their members. It should be stressed that the word “Community” should not be confused with the word “congregation”. Congregations often belong to a world Jewish denomination, while Communities represent the entire Jewish population of a city.

The Author and this Thesis

I must confess writing this thesis has been an incredibly personal experience from its conception onwards. Judaism has always played an integral role in my life. While I was not brought up in an observant household, I was raised to be proud of my Jewish heritage and culture. It is not uncommon for Jews growing up in a post-Shoah world to develop a certain antipathy for all things German. As a case in to point, many of parents’
Jewish friends and acquaintances refuse to buy German cars. The development of my passion for German language, history, and culture was a surprise for many (let alone myself!). After spending a semester in Berlin during the winter and spring of 2011, my obsession has only grown further. For five months I was a Jew in Germany. I must admit that this experience only strengthened my obsession.

That being mentioned, this work should not seen as a piece of optimistic and youthful naïveté. The picture of today’s German Jewish community is not without problems. While it is estimated that 200,000 Soviet Jews have immigrated to Germany since 1988, the actual size of the official Jewish community in Germany today is around 150,000 in size. This means that large swaths of the Soviet Jewish community do not see themselves as a part of the new German Jewish community that exists today. It is also important to mention that anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism are still present in German society. The neo-Nazi Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD) political party currently has seats in the state parliaments of Saxony and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Earlier this year a major neo-Nazi cell was discovered to have been functioning in the city of Zwickau for several years. It also must be noted that the German Jewish community is nowhere near the size it once was. Barring another huge wave of immigration, it is doubtful that German Jewish life will ever like as it once did.

However this last thought should not be seen as the end of all Jewish life in Germany. German Jewry is, in the opinion of this author, on the verge of a major renaissance. The New German Jewry will be infused with Soviet Jewish culture as well as the newfound plurality of theological and denominational voices. Also, a younger generation of Jews with different memory and understanding of the Shoah is coming of
age. It will truly be fascinating to see what will be accomplished and what will change in the coming years.

Chapter 1
“In the Wilderness”: Jewish Displaced Persons at the end of World War II

“This is what Freedom looks like! Behind us, a sea of tears, in front of us a tomorrow consisting of nothing but a huge question mark and the today full of obstacles, sad, dark, and grey” – Sama Wachs
What happens to a culture slated for annihilation? This question was uppermost in the minds of the survivors of the Shoah upon their liberation in the winter and spring of 1945. After twelve years of state sponsored terror and persecution under the Nazis, the few survivors of Germany’s once vibrant Jewish community stared into a bleak future filled with confusion and uncertainty. The long process of liberation began in January as the armed forces of the Soviet Union began their final push to win the war on the Eastern Front. On January 27th, Soviet troops entered and liberated Auschwitz in Poland, the most notorious and deadly Nazi extermination camp. By V-E day Soviet, British, and American soldiers had liberated hundreds of other camps, varying in size and scope of human destruction.

Long before the world had learned the grisly details of Hitler’s Final Solution, it was very clear that Germany’s postwar Jewish population would be significantly smaller than it had once been. Jews have lived in Germany for two millennia. The earliest recorded Jewish community was formed in what is now Cologne during the year 321 CE.¹ At the start of the 20th century, German Jews were largely secular. Indeed, contemporary denominations such as Reform and Liberal Judaism can be traced to Abraham Geiger, a prominent nineteenth century German Jewish theologian. Even during the Nazi rise to power during the 1920s and early 1930s, most German Jews would still identify themselves as “German” before identifying themselves as “Jewish.”

German Jews began leaving their country of origin en masse during the 1930s as the Nazi party began to eliminate their right to German citizenship. Émigrés left with heavy hearts and empty pockets. Official Nazi policy forced Jewish emigrants to

surrender whatever property or capital they still had in Germany. Most went to the United States or Great Britain, choosing to live amongst extended family networks in firmly established Jewish communities. Some managed to illegally enter the British mandate of Palestine, which would eventually become the State of Israel. When mass deportations of Jews began in 1941, over 300,000 German Jews had emigrated while approximately 163,000 remained in Germany.²

At the end of the war the majority of Jews left in Germany were officially classified as Displaced Persons (DPs). The phrase, coined by the United Nations and the Allied Forces, was applied to anyone in mainland Europe that was no longer in his or her original place of origin. In practice, this definition proved to be incredibly vague. Jews, four million Fremdarbeiter (“foreign workers”) that were conscripted by the Nazi government, ethnic Germans expelled from countries in Eastern Europe, allied prisoners of war, and Germans displaced within their nation’s borders were all classified as DPs.³ Of the eight million DPs within German borders, only 50,000 were Jews.⁴

A series of DP camps were hastily assembled within weeks of the war’s end, with the vast majority being former concentration camps. The few hopes of the remaining Jews in concentration camps were quickly dashed when they realized that they were still imprisoned, albeit with new and more compassionate wardens. Malnutrition and disease were the first priority of camp leaders in the American sector of occupied Germany. Unfortunately, many camp inmates contracted dysentery and died after eating army

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³ Ibid., 72.
rations handed out by American GIs. In Dachau, one of the oldest concentration camps, drastic measures were taken to ensure the physical well being of inmates. The camp-appointed nutrition officer was responsible for providing a diet high in calories. They offered 2,455, 2,966, and 4,200 calorie diets consisting of eggs, milk, cheese, fat, bread, sausage, gravy, coffee, and soup. This was still not enough to satisfy the hunger of many Jewish inmates. In the first months of the DP camp’s existence inmates broke into and consumed an entire warehouse of raw meat. Many resorted to thickening their soup with leftover DDT, which had been used for de-lousing purposes. One American personnel officer noted that there were no eggshells in the camp’s trash because inmates would not waste any available source of food.

Jewish DPs were also preoccupied with the presence of anti-Semitism in the camps. When the British liberated concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, they had captured a group of Hungarians that were auxiliary forces to the German SS (Schutzstaffel) units that had run the camp. In his journals, British army chaplain Isaac Levy wrote that these men continued to use anti-Semitic slurs and threaten Jews on a daily basis. In the American sector, Polish DPs were the primary source of anti-Semitism. At Dachau, Shabbat services were constantly under threat of disruption and one Jew was stabbed after his team beat their Polish challengers in a game of soccer.

Again, this problem can largely be blamed on the vague definition of the term “Displaced Person.” Both the British and Americans hoped to repatriate DPs in their original homelands. In the process of creating individual DP groups, Jews from Germany

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5 Kalinsky, After the Holocaust, 51.
6 Ibid., 65-66.
7 Ibid., 57.
8 Brenner, After the Holocaust, 11-12.
were classified as German DPs, Polish Jews were Polish DPs, and so on. Individual nationalities were often given their own camps in the hope of maximizing efficiency. The Americans realized that this system was flawed during the creation of the Diepholz camp for Polish DPs. After moving in a group of 950 Jews, it became clear that the camp did not have enough room for the rest of its intended population. It was decided that upon the arrival of Polish DPs, the Jews would move into closer quarters. As this transition happened, many of the Poles shouted anti-Semitic slurs and several physical altercations broke out.\footnote{Kalinsky, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 58-59.} One can hardly imagine the frustration felt by these Polish Jews. During the war, the Nazis had confiscated their homes and given them to Poles or Germans. Despite an Allied victory, they were once again being evicted. Seeing the failure of their endeavor, the Americans decided that Jews would henceforth be categorized as “Jews” in all subsequent repatriation cases. This spurred the creation of distinctly Jewish DP camps such as Feldafing in Bavaria and Zeilsheim, where over 5,500 Jews lived in a camp designed to hold 1,800.\footnote{Brenner, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 12-13.}

Jewish DPs in the British occupied zone of Germany were less fortunate in seeking their own category due to Britain’s determination to keep its territorial claim to Palestine. European Jews had immigrated to Palestine at a steady rate since the outbreak of pogroms in late 19th century Russia. In the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair of 1894 in France Theodor Herzl created Zionism, a movement calling for a Jewish state in Palestine. Many of Europe’s Jews embraced the ideology, forming Zionist youth groups and other cultural organizations. The possibility of a Jewish state came closer to reality in 1917 when British Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour sent a letter to Lord
Rothschild, then the most prominent Jew in England, saying that, “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” The British later changed their tune when they saw the strategic importance of Palestine in the Middle East. Despite an earlier promise to issue 100,000 entry certificates to Jewish refugees, the British Labour Party decided to only issue 1,500 per year after assuming power.

Their desire to limit immigration was hurt by the sudden influx of Eastern European Jews into the American zone of occupied Germany. Although over 6 million DPs had already been repatriated, most of the remaining DPs were Jews. This was the result of the growing presence of a resurgent anti-Semitism in countries such as Poland. Most believed that immigrating to Germany would bring them one step closer to their desired destination, Palestine. By the summer of 1946 illegal immigration was at an all time high. It surprised few when over 4,000 Jews crossed over the Czechoslovakian border in just one night. At years end, Bavaria’s Jewish population became larger than it was at the start of 1933. The total number of Jews registered in American DP camps grew from 32,848 in February to 124,980 in December.

Much of this illegal immigration came in the aftermath of a directive issued by Harry Truman on December 22, 1945. At this time only 39,000 immigrants from Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans were allowed to enter the USA annually. Two-thirds of these spaces were allotted to Germans and no more than 10% of the yearly total

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12 Kalinsky, After the Holocaust, 115.
13 Ibid., 189.
14 Ibid., 149.
15 Ibid., 131.
could arrive per month.\textsuperscript{16} Truman advised his Secretary of State, Secretary of War, Attorney General, and several others to drastically increase the speed of American visas issued in their occupied zone of Germany.

Despite the streamlined nature of applying for an American visa, most Jewish DPs still had their eyes set on Palestine. Of 138,320 respondents to a 1946 survey of Jewish DPs conducted by the Anglo-American Committee, 118,570 listed Palestine as their desired place of immigration.\textsuperscript{17} After suffering persecution for two millennia, many of Europe’s remaining Jews were ready to take part in the development of a future Jewish state.

Limits on Jewish immigration to Palestine soon came to an end, as did the existence of the British Mandate of Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations voted to partition what is now Israel into two new nations, one Arab and the other Jewish. On May 14, 1948 Israel declared its independence. Many Jewish DPs immigrated to the new nation now that there were no more roadblocks standing in their way.

\textbf{The Creation of a Jewish Community in West Germany}

While most German Jews had been deported to concentration camps in eastern Europe during the war, a small but sizeable number survived the Shoah by hiding in German cities and towns. This group and Jewish DPs also had a different demographical problem at the wars end, their age. In most extermination camps the SS murdered most of the children and elderly upon their arrival, meaning that 90% of Jewish DPs were between the ages of 18 and 45.\textsuperscript{18} Half of the surviving Jewish population in Berlin, where

\textsuperscript{16} Harry S. Truman, “President Truman’s Statement and Directive on Displaced Persons,” \textit{Jewish Virtual Library}, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/truman_on_dps.html
\textsuperscript{17} Brenner, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 137.
\textsuperscript{18} Brenner, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 22.
rescuers had harbored many Jews during the war, were over the age of 50 and only 6.8% were under the age of 18.\textsuperscript{19} In addition, a large portion of this group did not personally identify themselves as Jews. The Nazi Party identified individuals that had at least one Jewish grandparent as \textit{Mischling Juden}, thus classifying them as racial Jews.

In spite of these challenges, the process of re-establishing organized Judaism in Germany began in earnest soon after liberation. On April 11, 1945 (almost a full month before V-E Day on May 8, 1945) a group of approximately 30 Jews in Cologne sent a message to the local American Authorities requesting a space where they could perform religious services. Two weeks later they were allowed to meet in an air raid shelter below what had been the city’s Liberal Synagogue.\textsuperscript{20} In some cases the Americans took the initiative in helping the process of re-organization. One of the first orders of American commanders in Frankfurt am Main was the establishment of a \textit{Jüdische Betreuungsstelle}, a care center for sick and elderly Jews.\textsuperscript{21}

The first attempt at an organized meeting of the surviving Jews in Germany came during the summer of 1945 in Munich. However, before meeting plans were finalized, the organizers suffered a major setback. The Soviet Union said that it would not allow Jews living in their sector of occupied Germany to leave for the conference. The St. Ottilein conference began on July 25, 1945 in the same beer cellar where Adolf Hitler had launched his famed Beer Hall Putsch 22 years earlier.\textsuperscript{22} The conference accomplished little but the establishment of bad blood. At one point Josef Rosensaft, the lead delegate for Jews in the British zone threatened to leave because he believed the conference was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 42.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Kalinsky, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 148-9.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 157.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 106.
\end{itemize}
little more than an attempt to center all future Jewish activity in Munich. At its end, the delegates had only one clear objective, to immigrate to Palestine as quickly as possible.

Less than a year later the same sentiment would be echoed at the so-called “First Conference” of Jews in the American sector, again held in Munich during January 1946. This time, the planners were quite open about their Zionist leanings, inviting the future prime minister of Israel David Ben Gurion to be a guest of honor. One attendee, Dr. Zalman Grinberg aptly summed up the general opinion of those gathered when he said, “We (Jews) cannot possibly be expected to contribute to the reconstruction of Germany. We want to get out of Germany, we want to get out of Europe, we want to go to Palestine.”

The possibility of a future for Jewish life in Germany was increasingly in doubt. One important reason for this was the continued existence of tension between Jews from Eastern Europe and those originally from Germany. This problem was not a new one. As mentioned earlier, Germany’s Jewish population was one of the most assimilated Jewish communities in the world. Eastern European Jews, often referred to deridingly as Ostjuden, came from drastically different circumstances. Many had lived in small rural communities, called Shtetls, or in distinctly Jewish quarters of large cities.

This division manifested itself primarily during the establishment of new religious congregations in German cities. Upset with the disproportionate amount of aid going to Orthodox Jews, deemed Glaubensjuden (“faith Jews”), a group of more secular Jews in Frankfurt broke from an existing Jewish organization for the city. The named their new organization the Reichsvereinigung der Juden, roughly translated as the Imperial

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23 Ibid., 107.
25 Ibid., 166.
Association of Jews. Frankfurt’s new population of Hungarian Jews also found trouble when looking for a place of worship. After being turned away from several congregations for having religious practices that were deemed as incompatible with those of German Jews, a synagogue for Ostjuden was founded in 1946.\textsuperscript{26} In Hannover the Jewish community refused to allow non-Germans to join their congregation.\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps the most extreme example of exclusion occurred in Hamburg in 1945. A group called Wir aus Theresienstadt (“We from Theresienstadt”) created a community that consisted of only German Jews who had been in the Theresienstadt concentration camp.\textsuperscript{28}

The continued existence of anti-Semitism further hindered the establishment of new Jewish communities. This often came in the guise of German and Allied bureaucracy, which proved as impersonal as ever after the war. One particularly insensitive moment happened in Düsseldorf shortly after the reestablishment of a Jewish community in the city. Local officials decided that it would be an appropriate time to request payment for property taxes unpaid by the old Jewish Community during the years 1938 to 1945.\textsuperscript{29} This claim was outrageous on several levels. Most of the Jews living in the city at this time were living in extreme poverty, having lost all of their money and property to the Nazis shortly before their deportation to concentration camps. It is also hard to imagine that the Jewish Community had any official holdings after the start of the Final Solution in 1941. Whether or not the city had considered the recent past of its new Jewish population, most Jews believed that their request reflected the continued existence of a “Juden Raus” (“No Jews Allowed”) ethos in the city.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 169.  
\textsuperscript{27} Brenner, After the Holocaust, 47.  
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 50.  
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 53.
This mentality was also present in Frankfurt at the start of 1946 after mayor Walter Kolb gave a speech inviting Jews to resettle in the city. A group of citizens calling themselves the “Elderly Citizens of Frankfurt” sent Kolb a scathing letter demanding that he rescind his invitation. Their reasoning was that black market activity in DP camps showed that Jews were little more than criminals. They ended the letter by suggesting that if they came, Jews would contribute nothing to the rebuilding of the city and would instead focus on their own criminal interests.  

These and several other assertions of criminal activity in DP camps led to what has been dubbed the “Stuttgart Incident.” While it is true that there was some black market activity in the camps, it was not overwhelming and not strictly Jewish in origin. Nonetheless, the American forces in Stuttgart had heard enough rumors of criminal activity to launch a raid on a local DP camp in the hopes of putting an end to it. On March 29 1946 a contingency of 230 German police officers and 8 American soldiers entered a DP camp in the city limits. The prospect of armed Germans entering a Jewish camp, in uniform no less, evoked terrible memories from the recent past. Several DPs had managed to procure weapons since liberation and decided to resist what they saw as another infringement on their rights as human beings. Eventually a fierce gun battle broke out and Szml Danzyger, whose name implies an Ostjuden background was shot in the ensuing melee.  

In many other cases, anti-Semitic incidents were consistent with long standing prejudices toward Jews. One problem with resettlement of DPs was that many Jews were placed in small rural towns, many of which had never had a Jewish population. In the

30 Kalinsky, *After the Holocaust*, 194.
31 Ibid., 201.
small Bavarian city of Memmingen anti-Semitism was evident in a court case between a German landlady and an Eastern European Jew that had been her tenant. In theory it was a normal case, with the former party suing for rent that had not been paid. However, it soon took an interesting twist when the plaintiff testified that the Jew and his family had forced her son to drink alcohol before drawing some of his blood in order to make “Easter biscuits.” Her claim echoes one of the oldest sources of anti-Semitism, the so-called “Blood Libel.” For centuries it has been asserted that Jews used the blood of Christian children to bake matzo and other foods. Similar accusations of this practice were also made in Bavarian cities such as Bayreuth.

Sadly, events such as these were still to be expected during this period. At one point the Office of the Military Government in the US zone commissioned a survey on German attitudes towards Jews since the end of the war. The dismal results were published in 1946. Over half of respondents described themselves as “ardent anti-Semites” and 80% said they had a negative view of Jews. During 1947 there were several incidents of cemetery and shop desecrations. Phillip Auerbach, the Bavarian State Commissioner for Victims of Racism and eventual head of the German Jewish Community received hundreds of hate letters from around the country. During 1949 there were over 100 desecrations of Jewish cemeteries. In response to the rising tide of anti-Semitism Germany’s postwar Jewish population dwindled at an astronomical rate. Although it had initially inspired Eastern European Jews to enter Germany, the Truman Declaration soon inspired thousands of German Jews to leave the country. By 1949

32 Brenner, After the Holocaust, 53.
33 Kalinsky, After the Holocaust, 195.
34 Ibid., 196.
35 Brenner, After the Holocaust, 52.
93.7% of the Jewish population of Bavaria was originally from Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{36}

Additionally, the creation of the State of Israel changed the global Jewish community’s stance on supporting Jewish life in Germany. After the war a slew of Jewish aid organizations opened offices in the Allied Zones to facilitate the regeneration of the community. These groups soon went from being friendly allies to hostile critics of the future existence of Jewish life in Germany. At a 1948 meeting of the World Jewish Congress in 1948 the organization issued the Montreux Resolution, clearly outlining their opposition to future Jewish resettlement in Germany.\textsuperscript{37} In 1949 the World Zionist Organization applied the label “traitors” to the remaining Jews living in Germany, citing a lack of relevance for the future of World Jewry.\textsuperscript{38}

When examining the language of the German Jewish community of this time, it becomes clear that they may have identified more with Israel than with their current country. In 1949 Heinz Galinski the head of the West Berlin Jewish Community and Julius Meyer the head of the East Berlin Jewish Community traveled to Israel to report on the new country for the newsweekly \textit{Der Wegs}. In their report both men referred to Israel multiple times as “our” land.\textsuperscript{39} The Central Council of Jews in Germany at one point also agreed that there was no future to Jewish life in their country. In their official greeting for Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year in 1950 they referred to Israel as “our government” and openly encouraged eventual immigration to Israel.\textsuperscript{40}

Miraculously the community survived, but as a shadow of what it once was even

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{38} Michal Y. Bodemann, "Between Israel and Germany from the "Alien Asiatic People" to the New German Jewry," \textit{Jewish History}, 20, no. 1 (2006): 94.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 95.
during the immediate aftermath of the Shoah. By 1950 25,000 Jews were officially registered with the Jewish communities in West Germany, down from a potential size of 250,000 during the height of DP migration to Germany.\textsuperscript{41} By 1952 over 80,000 Jewish DPs had immigrated to the United States, and only 12,000 DPs remained.\textsuperscript{42} On February 12, 1957 Föhrenwald, the last Jewish DP camp closed and its inmates moved to various West German cities.

One of the greatest struggles that remained for the community was the restitution of former property. This proved to be an especially difficult task due to the recent departure of Jewish aid organizations. Their attempts were almost foiled when it was decided that after New Years Eve 1948 an indemnity law would go into effect, severely hampering future attempts to gain back property. The Jewish Restitution Successor Organization was quickly formed in the American zone and over 300 Jews worked tirelessly to try to identify over 100,000 pieces of lost property. Despite reclaiming 60% of former property in cities such as Berlin, they were largely unable to help Jews living in small communities.\textsuperscript{43}

German Jews were less successful in attempting to secure reparations from the newly established West German government, leading to the tragic demise of Philip Auerbach, the first head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. In 1952 it was reported that there were irregularities in many of the reparations filings he had made. The West German periodical \textit{Der Spiegel} soon led the call for an example to be made of him, claiming that Jews should no longer play the victim card. At the end of his trial five judges, (of which three had worked under the Nazi regime) sentenced him to 2 and a half

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 93-94.  
\textsuperscript{42} Brenner, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 40-41.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 62-3.
years in jail and handed him a 2,700 DM fine.\textsuperscript{44} Two days later on August 16, 1952, Auerbach committed suicide.

\textit{Garbage, The City, and Death: West German Jewry until 1989}

For the next 30 years the Jewish community of West Germany remained relatively silent and out of sight. In 1963 the community suffered another slight at the hands of the world Jewish community, this time regarding the status of Jewish university students. The \textit{Bundesverband Jüdischer Studenten Deutschland} ("Federal Association of Jewish Students in Germany") was formed in 1960. At this time it had over 1,000 members, held several seminars per year, and was seen as a place where German Jews could meet future spouses due to the lack of young Jews in West Germany at this time.\textsuperscript{45} In 1963 their application to join the World Union of Jewish Students was denied. The final insult came in 1967 when the Union declared that Jewish life was incompatible with life in Germany and Austria and that Jews that remained there were doing so largely for selfish personal advancement.\textsuperscript{46}

The West German Jewish community’s reemergence as a group with a unified voice and influence did not come until 1985 at the premiere of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s play \textit{Garbage, The City, and Death} in Frankfurt am Main. Before mentioning this event, it is important to tell the long and convoluted history of the play. Fassbinder was one of the great directors and authors of the New German Cinema, a movement concerned with rejuvenating German film after the Nazi period that began in 1962 with the famous Oberhouse Manifesto and continued into the 1980s. Although he was primarily based in Munich and Berlin, he briefly came to Frankfurt in 1974 to work

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 135-136.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 68.
with the Theater am Turm group. At this time the city was undergoing a massive and controversial commercialization of its Westend district. The district, which had once been a major Jewish center in the city before the war, was now in a state of decay. Its low rents had turned it into a community of lower-middle class Germans, foreign workers, and students before the city mayor decided to transform it into a major new business district.47

Fassbinder supposedly wrote Garbage, The City, and Death during a late night frenzy. The result would prove to be one of his most controversial works due to its ambiguous anti-Semitism. The central villain in the play, known simply as “The Rich Jew,” is a Frankfurt real estate developer. At one point the character pompously declares, “The city protects me, it has to. Besides I’m a Jew. The police chief is my friend…the mayor invites me over…The city needs the unscrupulous businessman who allows it to transform himself.”48 Later in the play the pimp Hans von Gluck shouts in frustration that “The Rich Jew” is, “Drinking our blood and blaming everything on us because he’s a Jew and we’re guilty.”49

Jewish scholar Andrei Markovits describes this as an attack on a trend that has often been described as the “Auschwitz Bonus,” which many Jews used to receive favorable treatment from West German authorities. At an academic conference, Markovits told a story of one of his father’s cousins from Frankfurt to illustrate the use of the “Auschwitz Bonus” in everyday life. After receiving a parking ticket the cousin went to a local police station to have what was a clear violation rescinded. He asked an older

49 Ibid., 180.
German police officer if he had used soap during the war before stating, “I just wanted you to know that you washed with soap that you Nazis made out of my family.” Upon hearing this, the officer promptly ripped the ticket in two.\textsuperscript{50}

Soon after its publication in 1976 the play’s ambiguous anti-Semitism was noticed and its further publication banned. However this did not end the debate on the content of the play and whether or not it should be produced for the stage. In 1985 Günter Rühle, who had previously bashed the play in an article for the \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung} left his post at the paper to become the artistic director of the \textit{Schauspielhaus} theater in Frankfurt. After an apparently bizarre change of heart, he placed the play on the theater company’s schedule for that year with an opening night set for October 31 1985.\textsuperscript{51} That night a group of 30 Jews stormed the stage holding a banner reading “\textit{Subventionierter Antisemitismus},” (“Subsidized anti-Semitism”) and prevented the performance from taking place.

While this extraordinary event was a source of pride for the West German Jewish community it remained in a state of stagnation and decline. In the coming years, the West German Jewish community would change radically, but for now it remained small and aged.

\textbf{Trials and Tribulations: Jewish Life in East Germany}

It would be remiss to not briefly sketch the history of East Germany’s Jewish population. Unlike the Allied Occupation Zones, the Soviet Union claimed that its entire Jewish population was German. According to a 1949 survey there were only 1,149 in East Germany.\textsuperscript{52} Their situation soon grew grave as it became apparent that the new East

\textsuperscript{50} Benhabib et. al, “Renewed Antagonism,” 5.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{52} Kalinsky, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 150.
German government was less concerned with banishing anti-Semitism than it was all traces of fascism and capitalism. After the 1952 show trial of the Jew Rudolf Slánsky, former General Secretary of the Communist party in Czechoslovakia numerous East German Jews were stripped of their positions in the communist party and several suffered in show trials of their own.\textsuperscript{53}

However, the East German government was still eager to show that a Jewish community could survive after the fall of fascism. In that very same year they instigated the formation of the \textit{Verband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik} (“Association of the Jewish Community in the German Democratic Republic”). Not long after, the government demanded that Julius Meyer, now leader of the organization issue a statement equating Zionism with fascism. As a result, from 1952 to 1953 Meyer, the leaders of the Jewish communities of Dresden, Leipzig, Erfurt, and half of the nation’s Jews fled to West Germany.\textsuperscript{54}

During the next four decades, the community’s presence was almost non-existent. By the 1980s it is estimated that no more than 200 Jews lived in East Berlin, the center of Jewish life in East Germany.\textsuperscript{55} No other Jewish community was large enough to regularly hold Jewish worship services, which according to biblical law require a minimum of 10 men over the age of 13 to take place. The absence of kosher butchers meant that meat had to be flown in from Budapest and a continuous stream of foreign rabbis was brought in to lead services in East Berlin.\textsuperscript{56} In 1988, few would have guessed how drastically the size of the Jewish community would grow in the coming decade.

\textsuperscript{53} Brenner, \textit{After the Holocaust}, 141.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 141.  
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 143.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 148.
Chapter 2
The Flood: Soviet Jewish Immigration to Germany From 1988 to the Present

At The Precipice

On New Years Day 1988 there still existed two separate German states. The Jewish communities of these respective countries, while incredibly different in size and influence, were both in a state of decline and stagnation. Although the aforementioned “Fassbinder Incident” had served as a rallying point for the Jews of Frankfurt am Main, it would be extremely generous to suggest that it ushered in an era of increased activity for the West German Jewish community. At this time there were no more than 25,000 active members of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the central organization for Jewish life in the West Germany. It was an aging community, a problem that had been a reality since the immediate postwar years, when most young DPs immigrated to Israel, Great Britain, and the United States. If a resurgence of German Jewish life seemed unlikely in West Germany, it seemed impossible in East Germany, yet that is where it began.

The following year saw a veritable flurry of activity by the communist regime to address issues and work with the country’s Jewish population. It had long been asserted (and still is) that the East Germany had a “Holocaust Problem.” Countries behind the Iron Curtain tackled Holocaust historiography in a manner far different from their Western European counterparts. Communist historians interpreted the war as a capitalist-funded genocide of the proletariat. Little focus was put on studying the suffering of specific ethnic groups such as Jews and Roma who had been slated for annihilation by the Nazi
regime. What made 1988 such a compelling year for East Germany to confront the Holocaust and its Jewish past?

This move was most assuredly motivated by a desire to indirectly strengthen ties between East Germany and western nations such as the United States. Perhaps sensing a need to keep their increasingly stagnant nation alive, Party Secretary Erich Honecker and other communist officials began a targeted campaign of activity to further diplomatic relations between East Germany and Israel. The East German parliament devoted several sessions to discussing Jewish suffering under the Nazis, and East German authors published a flurry of books on the Shoah.\(^{57}\) In addition Edgar Bronfman, then president of the World Jewish Congress became the first representative of his organization to officially visit East Germany. The East German government also agreed to fund the eventual reconstruction of the *Neue Synagoge* on *Oranienburgerstraße* in East Berlin. This last step can be construed as particularly important because the building, once one of the largest and handsomest synagogues in Europe had been left in a perpetual state of ruin since the end of World War II.

Then the truly unexpected happened. Slowly but surely Jews from the Soviet Union began to emigrate to East Germany due to the precarious nature of civil society in the Soviet Union in the years leading to its dissolution. Like others who went abroad in these years, they cited environmental issues, rising unemployment, a sputtering economy, and a worsening political climate as prime motivators for their move.\(^{58}\) What separated


\(^{58}\) Judith Kessler, "Foreigners in Wonderland? A critical View of the Expectations and Experiences among Jewish Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Berlin," *Russian-Jewish emigrants after the Cold War : perspectives from Germany, Israel, Canada and the United States*, ed. Olaf Gloeckner, Evgenija Garbolevsky, and Sabine Von Mering (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Center for German and
them from other Soviet immigrants was their fear of the rising tension between the various nationalities of the Soviet Union. Since the country’s creation, Soviet Jews had dealt with several waves of anti-Semitism emanating from the government and the greater population. Extreme nationalism had frequently been a catalyst for anti-Semitism and xenophobia in European and Russian history. Sensing an imminent crisis, many tried to leave en masse to Israel, the United States, and East Germany.

What began as a trickle of Soviet Jews in 1988 became a deluge after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. It is important to note that this is the same anniversary of the Reichspogrom of 1938, also known as Kristallnacht (“The Night of Broken Glass”), one of the most destructive actions towards German Jews carried out by the Nazis before the start of World War II. While the ninth of November is now seen as a celebration of democracy and the start of German reunification, it had previously been viewed as an anniversary of Germany’s descent into the violent authoritarianism of the Nazi regime.

In the aftermath of reunification Sander Gilman, a ubiquitous scholar of German studies, and others such as Holocaust survivor and writer Elie Wiesel prophesized this switch in mood as a harbinger of a new effacement of the Shoah from the collective memory of the reunited nation.59 While it is true that the Mauerfall (fall of the Berlin wall) is the more actively remembered event in contemporary Germany, neither Kristallnacht nor the Shoah have been forgotten. Gilman’s view also precludes the notion that the Mauerfall heralded the beginning of a vibrant new era for Germany’s Jewish community that is still growing over twenty years later.

Multiculturalism and its Discontents: Postwar Germany as an Immigration State

1945-2000

The history of immigration in postwar Germany is a long and complex affair that has been written about extensively in the past forty years. Like other Western European nations Germany has and still is coming to terms with what it means to be a country of immigration. Before addressing these issues, it is important to give a brief history of immigration in Postwar Germany. The origins of the reunited Germany’s present immigration demographics can be directly traced back to two legislative decisions within the first twenty years of West Germany’s history. The first dealt with their generous asylum policy for refugees the world over. The second was the establishment of the Gastarbeiter (‘Guest Worker’) program, which allowed thousands of workers from Turkey, Greece, Italy, and other developing nations to immigrate to West Germany on what was initially a temporary basis.

West Germany began its life on very shaky ground. Although most of the allied nations were apprehensive about the creation of any new German state, the arrival of the Cold War made the foundation of a West German state an immediate concern. Hoping to assuage any fears of a return to authoritarianism, the new government created a new constitution, known as The Basic Law For The Federal Republic of Germany (It should be noted that West Germany was officially called “The Federal Republic of Germany,” implying that it was the rightful heir to German governance). After being passed on May 8, 1949 it was officially approved by the occupying powers of West Germany on May 12th of the same year.

Although it was only a small section of the exhaustive new constitution, Article
16 of the Basic Law would be important for the future immigration of Soviet Jews and other refugees. In very plain language the Article states that, “Persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum.” It is not shocking that this became a part of West Germany’s new constitution. In addition to establishing a new system of law, the Basic Law was also written to prove that the new state would be an ideal liberal democracy. The clause was a succinct rebuke of Nazi policies of discrimination, implying that West Germany would gladly allow victims of persecution to move there.

Like many constitutions, what once appeared clear in definition proved vague in reality. It is clear that when drafting the new law there was little or no debate about what qualified as “political persecution.” This opened the door for thousands of immigrants to enter the country as asylum-seekers during the first decades of the nation’s existence. By the late 1970s large numbers of refugees from Palestine, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, and Turkey were using Article 16 to successfully apply for asylum in West Germany.  

Unsurprisingly, West Germany was ill prepared for the existence of a new and non-European refugee population within its borders. Actions to curb the rapid influx of foreigners on the basis of asylum were first taken by the West German government during the 1980s and were continued by the government of the reunited Germany in the early 1990s. In 1982 West Germany adopted the Asylum Procedure Law, in the hope of counteracting the vagueness of Article 16. According to the new law, an asylum seeker would only be granted entry to West Germany if the government of their homeland had

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directly persecuted them.\textsuperscript{62} Hidden within this bill was a clause that would have important ramifications for future Jewish immigrants to Germany. Section 45 of the law created a schematic for what percentage of each year’s refugees would be allowed to settle in each Bundesland ("German province").\textsuperscript{63} Larger and more prosperous Länder such as Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, and North-Rhine-Westphalia were slated to receive the lion’s share of refugees.

The next law that significantly altered the process of obtaining asylum in Germany was passed shortly after the reunification of 1990. In 1993 the Bundestag voted to amend Article 16 of the Basic Law. One of the new provisions of the law stated that the law could, “not be invoked by a person who enters the federal territory from a member state of the European Community or from another third state in which the standards of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms are assured.”\textsuperscript{64} The bill also devolved important decisions to the Bundesrat, the meeting body representatives of Germany’s 16 Länder. As of July 1, 1993 the Länder had the right to designate which nations could be classified as having political persecution.\textsuperscript{65}

While the asylum law is responsible for many of the demographic changes in Germany, its influence pales in comparison to that of the Gastarbeiter program. The impetus for this program was one of economic necessity. After the near destruction of all German industry during World War II, West Germany and to a lesser extent East Germany underwent a period of rapid industrialization during the 1950s and 1960s.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 16-17.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{64} “Article 16,” 120.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 121.
known as the *Wirtschaftswunder* ("Economic Miracle"). Suddenly, a labor shortage developed in West Germany where most citizens did not want to work menial jobs in newly built factories.

The West German government decided to look beyond its borders for a solution. The *Gastarbeiter* ("Guest Worker") program allowed male workers from foreign countries to come to West Germany and work in the nation’s burgeoning industrial sector. Individual contracts were made between West Germany and Italy in 1955, Spain and Greece in 1960, Turkey in 1961, Portugal in 1964, Tunisia and Morocco in 1965, and Yugoslavia in 1968.\(^\text{66}\) While many workers returned to their homelands many *Gastarbeiter* stayed on in West Germany, believing that it was more advantageous to remain there than return to their original homeland. Indeed, a 1974 law allowing spouses and children under the age of 18 to join the predominantly male *Gastarbeiter* triggered a massive wave of immigrants from Turkey to West Germany.\(^\text{67}\)

The plight of *Gastarbeiter* and their families that stayed warrants its own intensive study well beyond the scope of this one. However, it should be mentioned that to this day their place in German society, especially that of the Turks is an extreme point of contention. The debate over the triumphs or failures of attempts at multiculturalism continues to this day and only in the 1990s was a streamlined path to citizenship for *Gastarbeiter* and their descendants finally created.

**After the Flood**

Although the immigration of Soviet Jews to East Germany had begun well before

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\(^\text{67}\) Peck, *Being Jewish*, 87.
the fall of the Berlin Wall, it exploded in the days and months following November 9, 1989. What motivated this unprecedented mass migration to a land once considered anathema to the existence of Jewish life? One reason for this ironically was anti-Semitism in the USSR. Like many of its Eastern Bloc counterparts, anti-Semitism was a chronic problem in the Soviet Union. Its prevalence fluctuated throughout the various periods of the nation’s existence, flaring up violently after World War II and eventually becoming less omnipresent, in the late 1950s and 1960s.

Beginning in the 1970s Soviet Jews sought to leave the Soviet Union with increasing urgency. While most had little to no knowledge of Jewish religion they were labeled as Jews by the state, which often restricted them to working in certain professions and hampered their already slim chances for upward mobility economically or in the Communist party. The government was also learning that their efforts to suppress nationalism in the various Soviet Republics were failing. It was unclear whether Jews, who were already alienated from the greater populace, would suffer further alienation in the wake of calls by individual Soviet republics for independence and autonomy. On top of these other factors, the Soviet Union’s economy was increasingly lethargic, further motivating the nation’s Jews to look for greener pastures abroad.

While it is surprising that so many Soviet Jews to immigrate to Germany, it was both a pragmatic and inspired immigration choice. During the late 1980s it was almost impossible for Soviet citizens to travel abroad to Western nations such as the United States or the United Kingdom. Despite the best efforts of Jewish activists around the globe, the route to Israel was also still far from being open to Soviet Jews. But, it was not hard to procure travel passes to East Germany because of its alliance with the Soviet
Union in the Warsaw Pact.

They soon immigrated with a heightened sense of urgency than before. Over two-thirds of Soviet Jews who entered Germany between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the middle of 1991 claimed to have done so spontaneously.\(^{68}\) Soviet Jews continued to immigrate to Germany well into the late 1990s and 2000s. Many older Jews saw it as an easier move because it was geographically closer than the United States or Israel. Also, the German government offered welfare support to all Soviet emigrants on arrival.\(^{69}\) It was also seen as a nation with a culture more similar to that of their old homeland. In the eyes of Soviet Jews, Germany was a land of European “poets and thinkers.”\(^{70}\) Irina Knochenhauer, an immigrant from the Former Soviet Union and Jewish community leader said that, “Israel is, for many, myself included, too oriental…it’s not European. And most Jews who come here (Germany) are from the European or Eastern European origin.”\(^{71}\)

With the creation of the newly reunited Germany came a need to establish an official immigration policy for those Soviet Jews seeking entry. The official reunification of East and West Germany on October 3, 1990 brought an end to all East German government activities, including the implementation of pre-existing immigration policies. On the day before, at the urging of the former West German government, the new German government ordered all of its consulates in the Soviet Union to issue no more visas.\(^{72}\) This solution was both temporary and ineffective. Thousands of Jews continued

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\(^{68}\) Kessler, “Foreigners in Wonderland?,” 113.


\(^{70}\) Kessler, “Foreigners in Wonderland?,” 113.

\(^{71}\) Ibid. Laurence, “(Re)constructing Community),” 220.

\(^{72}\) Peck, *Being Jewish*, 43.
to stream into Germany, by illegal and semi-legal means, often claiming that they were invited to visit the country by relatives.

Much needed clarification of German immigration policy vis-à-vis Soviet Jews came early in 1991. On February 15, 1991 the German Länder (“states”) signed an agreement that would regulate future Jewish immigration. They would be classified as “Contingent Refugees,” meaning that they would have access to financial support and welfare from the government as well as a legal right to work upon their arrival. It is important to note that the agreement said that only Jews who could prove that they were Jewish within at least one generation could enter the nation. Over fifty years after the start of World War II, it was now advantageous to be listed as a Jew in official German documents. The letter “J” became a path to citizenship rather than a path to disenfranchisement. No limit was placed on the number of Jews allowed to enter. By 1999 102,311 Soviet Jews had entered Germany.

A Desired Minority

While there have been many reactions to the arrival of Soviet Jews in Germany, most have been overwhelmingly positive. During the 1990s Soviet Jews continued to arrive at a steady rate due to the lenient immigration policy put forward by the German government. As an addendum to the aforementioned agreement of 1991, The Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Federal Government signed another agreement stating that Jewish immigrants would be distributed to the 16 German states based on existing ratios of Jews to non-Jews. While many moved to existing Jewish centers such

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73 Marshall, *New Germany and Migration*, 34.
74 Ibid., 34.
as Berlin and Munich, many more went to the large states of Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Hesse, which already had large immigrant communities.\textsuperscript{76}

This does not mean that no German states or municipalities voiced concern or objections to the new government policies. In 1997 the small town of Gollowitz in the state of Brandenburg, in the former East Germany, was asked to welcome 60 Soviet Jews into their community. Their regional council voted against the plan, claiming that the arrival of immigrants would drastically change their largely agricultural town.\textsuperscript{77} On a state level, North Rhine-Westphalia was the only Bundesland to vocalize their reservations. In 1990 the state government announced that too rapid an influx of Soviet Jews could usher in a new wave of anti-Semitism.\textsuperscript{78} This fear was not completely unwarranted.

There was a sharp increase in anti-Semitic and anti-foreigner sentiment and violence in the aftermath of German reunification. In 1990 the far-right and neo-fascist Republican Party managed to win 11 of 138 seats in West Berlin’s parliament.\textsuperscript{79} While many of these xenophobic incidents occurred in the former East in cities that had no previous history of an immigrant population many also happened in the former West. Some of the most violent attacks were carried out against Turkish immigrants. An early example came in September of 1991 several Turks in Hoyerswerda, a city in Saxony

\textsuperscript{76} Marshall, \textit{New Germany and Migration}, 41.
\textsuperscript{77} Olaf Gloeckner, "Only Renowned Immigrants are Mentioned in the Press: German Media and the Russian-Jewish Minority From 1990 to 2005," \textit{Russian-Jewish emigrants after the Cold War: perspectives from Germany, Israel, Canada and the United States}, ed. Olaf Gloeckner, Evgenija Garbolevsky, Sabine Von Mering (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Center for German and European Studies, 2006), 108.
\textsuperscript{78} Gilman, “German Reunification,” 187.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 185.
were chased out of their residences and pelted with stones.\textsuperscript{80}

Another instance of Neo-Nazism happened on September 25, 1992 when barracks at the memorial site for the Sachsenhausen concentration camp just north of Berlin were firebombed.\textsuperscript{81} Scarcely a month later another firebombing took place at Ravensbrück, another former concentration camp and a Holocaust memorial was desecrated in Überlingen, a small town in the south of Germany.\textsuperscript{82} During September of 1993 there were two attacks on refugee centers. On September 2nd one center was set afire at Ketzin in the eastern state Brandenburg and two days later another was set aflame at Leverkusen in the industrial western state North Rhine-Westphalia.\textsuperscript{83} By the end of the year, 80 Jewish cemeteries had been desecrated. This number was especially dismaying because according to Ignatz Bubis, the head of the Central Council of Jews in Germany this was more than in the years 1926-1931 combined.\textsuperscript{84} As the decade progressed it became clear that there was a significant increase in the yearly number of attacks coming from the German far-right. In the year 2000 there were 15,951 reported acts of right-wing violence compared to 2,031 reported incidents in 1990.\textsuperscript{85}

In spite of the despicable acts from the far-right, the vast majority of Germans had positive views of Jewish immigrants. The German government was especially open to

\textsuperscript{80} Peck, \textit{Being Jewish}, 90.
\textsuperscript{83} Legge, \textit{Jews, Turks, Strangers}, 45.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{85} Lily Gardner Feldman, "A three-dimensional view of German history : the weight of the past in Germany’s relations with Jews in Germany, Israel and the Diaspora," \textit{Germany at fifty-five : Berlin ist nicht Bonn?}, ed. James Sperling (Manchester, United Kingdom: Manchester University Press, 2004), 115.
this new minority. In 1992 the *Bundesrat*’s commission on constitutional reform positively described German Jews as “*ein entsprechendes Minderheitenselbstverständnis*,” a minority group with a specific understanding of itself.\(^{86}\) Jewish communities also began to receive generous amounts of funding from both federal and local governments in Germany. From 1997 to 1999 Berlin’s Ministry of Culture gave thirty percent of their annual religion budget to the Jewish community, which at that time represented only 0.58 percent of the city’s inhabitants.\(^{87}\) In a revealing quote from the records of the *Bundestag* former German Secretary of State Horst Waffenschmidt said that, “‘an influx of (Russian) Jews will strengthen the Jewish communities and also lead to a re-vitalization of the Jewish element in German cultural and intellectual life.’”\(^{88}\)

It is important to note that Waffenschmidt was a member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the most dominant center-right political party in Germany. The Christian Democrats have traditionally been vocal critics of the negative effects of foreign immigration to Germany. However in 2000 the CDU’s immigration committee stated that Judaism, like Christianity, Greek philosophy, humanism, Roman law, and the enlightenment is one of the foundation stones of Western culture.\(^{89}\) This contradiction has not been lost on other observers. Michael Brenner, a professor of Jewish Studies, aptly addressed the issue in a 2000 opinion piece. Brenner asserted that the CDU consciously

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\(^{87}\) Laurence, “(Re)constructing,” 212.

\(^{88}\) Gloeckner, "Renowned Immigrants,” 104.

changed its concept of the “Christian Western world” into a “Jewish-Christian Western world” because they believe Judaism is a part of traditional German culture, removing their traditional label as the “other.” Nonetheless, this change is indicative of how Germany’s Jewish community has gained a coveted place in contemporary German culture.

This sudden and conscious elimination of the “otherness” of Soviet Jews can be traced largely to factors of race and culture. The vast majority of Jewish immigrants came from the European half of the Soviet Union. Most were from large cities such as St. Petersburg, Moscow, Riga, Kiev, and Odessa in Russia, Ukraine, and Latvia. Soviet Jews also had the benefit of outwardly looking like other Europeans. Unlike Turkish immigrants, who are darker skinned, most Soviet Jews bore a closer resemblance to ethnic Germans. It may be possible, as Sander Gilman suggests that this helped to ensure the lack of deportation of Jews entering Germany illegally during the early 1990s while other immigrants were being turned away or deported. With the outbreak of increased violence towards Roma living in Romania, over 161,000 Roma entered Germany from January to April of 1993. By the summer at least one plane a day was returning them to their original country, while Soviet Jews seeking asylum were able to remain.

It is also important to note that Germans had skewed perceptions of the rapidly growing community of Soviet Jews upon their arrival consistent with the government’s

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92 Gilman, Jews in Today’s German Culture, 23.
93 Ibid., 21-22.
view that they were a desirable minority. Despite a general lack of coverage of their arrival, the German media heavily shaped common perceptions. Most were expected to speak Yiddish and Hebrew and to be religiously observant.\textsuperscript{94} Soviet Jews were also consistently portrayed as being exceptionally motivated to learn German and integrate compared to other minority groups.\textsuperscript{95} To this day Germans see Soviet Jews as a minority group that has adapted more to German society than any others.\textsuperscript{96}

The reality of Germany’s new community of Soviet Jews was drastically different. Most immigrants were avowedly secular and had little or no experience observing Jewish rituals and beliefs. Very few speak Yiddish and almost a third have a non-Jewish spouse.\textsuperscript{97} To this day only half of Soviet Jewish immigrants regularly take part in the religious and communal life of their local Jewish communities.\textsuperscript{98} While a 1999 survey by the Moses Mendelssohn center showed that 22.1% of Soviet Jews identified with Liberal Judaism, 67.1% of respondents gave no answer or stated that they identified with no branch of Judaism.\textsuperscript{99} Soviet Jews have also consistently struggled to find gainful employment in the economy of their new country. Although 68% of Soviet Jews in Berlin have the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree or higher, over 75% of those who are working aged were unable to find employment in the late 1990s and early 2000s.\textsuperscript{100}

In spite of these odds Soviet Jews have continued to immigrate to Germany with

\textsuperscript{94} Gloeckner, “Renowned Immigrants,” 105.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{96} Legge, Jews, Turks, Strangers, 84.
\textsuperscript{97} Kessler, “Foreigners in Paradise?,” 117.
\textsuperscript{98} Gloeckner, “Renowned Immigrants,” 111.
\textsuperscript{100} Kessler, “Foreigners in Paradise,” 114-116.
full support of the German government. An excellent example of this can be seen in statements issued by three of the major German political parties during the election season of 2005. Franz Müntefering of the Social Democrats (SPD), current German chancellor Angela Merkel of the CDU, and Claudia Roth of the Green party all voiced support for the continued arrival of Soviet Jews.  

However many Jewish observers have expressed a cynical view of the government’s openness to Jewish immigration. Julius H. Schoeps, the director of the Moses Mendelssohn Center at the University of Potsdam openly complains that, “On memorial days, state celebrations, and official gatherings, German politicians never tire of claiming that the absorption of Russian Jewish émigrés from the former Soviet Union is a sign of democratic stability and of historical responsibility.”  

There is an element of truth to this criticism. As stated before Soviet Jews are a more desirable minority group in the eyes of the Germans, but that should not negate the fact that Germany continues to leave their borders open to them. Also, history dictates that the German government be overly sensitive to the needs of a minority it once tried to destroy. Indeed in Claudia Roth’s statement for the Green Party in 2005 she claimed that Jewish immigration is a heartening trend in modern German history.  

Ultimately, it would be wrong to dismiss such optimism as mere politicking. Three years earlier in 2002 18,000 Jews from the Former Soviet Union immigrated to Israel and 19,000 immigrated to Germany. For the first time since the Nazi era, Jews were actively seeking to make Germany their new home.

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102 Schoeps, “Packed Suitcases,” 18.
103 “Immigration of Jews,” Germany in Transit, 329-330
104 Peck, Being Jewish, 54.
Chapter 3

Contemporary Jewish Life

Germany and the nation’s Jewish community have both changed dramatically during the twenty-two years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Jewish communities that were mired in stagnation have swelled in size, with several growing larger than they were before the Shoah. New Jewish communities, comprised almost entirely of Soviet Jews, have sprung up in cities that were devoid of Jewish life after World War II.

However, it would be foolish to describe contemporary Jewish life in Germany as idyllic. The creation of a more varied Jewish life has often led to in fighting amongst powerful Jewish organizations and communities. However, this should not be seen as a
strictly negative trend because these disagreements indicate the flowering and diversity of German Jewish life. Old theological debates are once again an important part of dialogue between community members, indicating a greater plurality of approaches to Judaism. Also, after two decades, many communities still struggle to actively engage Soviet Jews in community life.

To combat this, many Jewish communities have consciously taken on the challenge of integrating Soviet Jews and their children into Jewish life and into contemporary German society. This has been a high priority for many Jewish communities because of the high unemployment many Soviet Jews and other immigrants often face upon arriving in Germany. By taking integration into their own hands, these communities show that they are not merely Jewish, but German as well.

Struggles between the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland and the Union Progressiver Juden Deutschland

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland is the most prominent umbrella organization for Jews in contemporary Germany. They claim to represent 105,000 Jews in 108 Jewish communities throughout the nation.\(^{105}\) The council defines its membership as any paying member of an affiliate community whose mother is Jewish. The organization also serves as the primary liaison between the German government and the many individual Jewish communities throughout the nation. While the organization has undergone changes that mimic trends in the greater republic, such as

\(^{105}\) Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, “Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland,” http://www.zentralratdjuden.de/de/topic/1.html.
relocating their headquarters to Berlin when it became the nation’s capital, much of its identity has remained static in the face of massive change.

Nothing is more representative of this than the very name of the organization. When translated into English it is “The Central Council of Jews in Germany.” This implies that German Jewish life is rooted in coincidence, as if these Jews are in Germany because of mere happenstance. On some level, this is slightly true. Of the Jews who remained in Germany after the Shoah most were Ostjuden, Jews from the nations of Eastern Europe with little previous connection to German culture. They remained in that nation while most of the remaining German Jews immigrated to Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In a contemporary context it is also applicable to Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who saw Germany as the most advantageous destination for emigration.

Nonetheless, the organization’s name should be viewed as a remnant of the mentality of the West German Jewish community before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over sixty years after the Shoah, the Central Council often errs on the side of caution when identifying with the nation they live in. On one level this is both logical and understandable for a community that was once slated for annihilation because it was seen as decidedly un-German. However, this view is problematic due to the Central Council and other Jewish organization’s active role in the process of integrating Soviet Jews into German society. In addition to work done to educate Soviet Jews about the religious traditions of the community, they also provide German language lessons and information on writing resumes and seeking employment. The organization’s website boldly claims that it has helped the integration of more than half of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet
This raises a question; can one ever be a “German Jew” after the Holocaust or are the two mutually exclusive? It would appear that many elderly Jews involved with the Central Council continue to view themselves as a minority group that is decidedly not German.

While the Central Council represents the majority of Jews in Germany, it does not represent the entire Jewish community. A sizable number of Jewish communities and congregations are affiliated with the Union Progressiver Juden Deutschland (“The Union of Progressive Jews in Germany”). Whereas the Central Council claims to represent all Jews in Germany, the Union of Progressive Jews is affiliated with the World Union of Progressive Judaism, an umbrella organization for Reform, Liberal, Progressive, and Reconstructionist Judaism the world over. The Union Progressiver Juden Deutschland was first established in 1997 to represent the desires of the Progressive Jewish communities in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland before deciding to focus strictly on the German Jewish community in 2002.  

The existence of the Union has been slightly problematic for the greater Jewish community. Because the German government recognizes the Central Council as the official umbrella organization of Jewish citizens, the Union of Progressive Jews has not received the same amount of generous funding as the Central Council has received from the federal German government. Its existence also undermines the Central Council’s belief in a so-called Einheitsgemeinde (“Unified Community”) of all Jews living in Germany.

It is also interesting to note that with the exception of several congregations in

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106 Ibid.
Berlin, the Union is only made up of communities that are located in what was once West Germany. This means that they have often drawn their membership from existing communities of non-immigrant Jews while putting less attention on newer Jewish communities composed of Soviet Jews in the eastern part of the country. It is very telling that unlike the Central Council, there are no sections of their website in Russian and it mentions nothing about integration of Soviet immigrants.

An excellent example of the divide between the more youthful Union of Progressive Jews and the Central Council of Jews in Germany can be seen in the autumn years of former Central Council president Ignatz Bubis. After surviving the Shoah, Bubis moved to Frankfurt am Main where he worked in real estate (it is often speculated that he was the primary inspiration for “The Rich Jew” in Fassbinder’s *Garbage, The City, and Death*). Bubis assumed control of the Central Council in 1992, a year marred by several acts of xenophobia from the German right. Over the course of his term as president he espoused an increasingly pessimistic view of Jewish life in Germany. At one point he was approached by the Free Democratic Party, of which he was a prominent member, to run for the German presidency. He promptly turned down the offer because he feared that it would potentially cause further acts of right-wing violence and even his own assassination. When asked in an interview two weeks before his death to point to the successes of his term he bluntly replied, “I have achieved nothing- or almost nothing.” In a last act of pessimism he requested that his body be buried in Israel, fearing that neo-Nazis might desecrate his headstone (this had happened to the grave of

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109 Guardian article
110 Friedlander, “Bubis.”
his predecessor Heinz Galinski). Bubis also typified the more traditional approach to Judaism espoused by communities affiliated with the Central Council. Shortly after the appointment of Bea Wyler as the first female rabbi in post-Shoah Germany Bubis commented that, “We in Frankfurt would never engage a female rabbi- not as long as I have a say in the matter.”

While the animosity between the Central Council and Union of Progressive Jews can be seen as a detrimental development, it can also be seen as an optimistic development. It is incredibly hard to find any contemporary or historical Jewish community in the Diaspora or Israel that does not have a plurality of voices. The development of a counter-voice to the Central Council points to the newfound vibrancy of the greater Jewish community. Although the groups are arguing, at least the have something to argue about.

**Soviet Jews and Pre-Established Jewish Communities**

Upon arriving in Germany, most Soviet Jews were drawn to the nation’s large cities. This was a practical decision for two reasons. As economic centers, cities were a starting point for finding gainful employment. Soviet Jews also tended to be seasoned city dwellers. Also, as was previously mentioned in chapter two most were from the large metropolises of their former homeland. In most German cities, Soviet Jews lived in close proximity to larger and more established Jewish communities. The following section provides both an overview of these large communities and an examination of how they have responded to and been affected by the influx of Soviet Jews in the past twenty years.

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111 Friedlander, “Bubis.”
112 Friedlander, “Bubis.”
These Jewish communities act as the primary source of Soviet Jewish immigrants’ integration into German life, further proof of the new existence of “German Jews.”

The Jewish Community of Berlin is by far the largest in Germany. Presently there are eight congregations affiliated with the official Jewish Community of the city. On the surface, the community is supportive of immigrants from the Soviet Union. In addition to German and English language versions of their official website, a Russian version was launched in 2008 and their monthly magazine *Jüdisches Berlin* is in both Russian and German. In addition to these more passive forms of integration, the community also devotes much energy towards active integration. The community’s welfare board currently provides elder care to all Jews in Berlin over the age of eighty and has employees that are fluent in German, Hebrew, English, and Russian. The community has also worked at great lengths to help Soviet Jews gain employment. The community has an office devoted solely to integration. In addition to programs on Jewish culture and Hebrew lessons, they offer resume workshops and German classes free of charge to all members of the community. It is also important to note that the community currently has 400 employees when the Berlin Jewish community is no larger than 10,000 people. There is little doubt that many of these employees are Soviet Jews.

Germany’s second largest Jewish community is located in Munich. On their website, the community openly addresses the non-German roots of the vast majority of its 9,500 members. In over four pages dedicated to the history of Jewish life in Bavaria, the

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114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
website mentions the Eastern European origins of the DPs that settled in Munich after the Shoah and that their congregation has more than doubled in size since the arrival of Soviet Jews.\footnote{118} Like their counterparts in Berlin, the community has an integration office and offers services in Russian as well as German, English, Hebrew, French, and Italian at the Ohel Jakob synagogue.\footnote{119}

What differentiates Munich’s Jewish community from many others is its open identification with the city it resides in. On their website the community boldly asserts that since the end of the Shoah, “Gradually Munich became a ‘Heimat’ for Jews.”\footnote{120} Heimat, which loosely translates to “homeland” in English, has consistently been a problematic word in modern German history. Since the Nazi era ultra-nationalist groups it have used the term to describe the ideal Germany of the past that they wish to defend. On one level, using the word Heimat is an opportunity for Munich’s Jews to reassert their role in German history and culture. It is also an important word choice because Munich, once the birthplace of Nazism, is now a city that German Jews can call home.

Düsseldorf bears the distinction of the Jewish community that has most readily embraced newly arrived Soviet immigrants. Almost 90% of the city’s Jewish community are immigrants from the former Soviet Union.\footnote{121} The community also puts much pride in its monthly newsletter, which is printed in both German and Russian in the hope of forging forward with integration work.\footnote{122} Lastly, on their website’s page dedicated to the history of German life in Düsseldorf the claim is made that the community had 5,500

\footnote{119} Ibid.
\footnote{120} Ibid.
\footnote{122} Ibid.
members in 1932 while the current community size is listed at 7,500 members.\textsuperscript{123} The city may very well be on the cusp of the most vibrant period of Jewish life it has ever had.

While the previous communities focus much of their attention on integration, the Jewish community of Frankfurt am Main is less accommodating to its new Jewish arrivals. The community of 7,161 Jews is one of Germany’s largest and oldest, tracing its roots back to the 12th century.\textsuperscript{124} While some efforts have been taken to be more inclusive, there is room for much more. The community website is only available in German and only select sections of their newsletter are printed in Russian.\textsuperscript{125}

A close examination of the demographics of Frankfurt’s Jewish community reveals that their lack of focus on integration may be a hindrance to further development. Unlike other cities, only one-third of Frankfurt’s official Jewish community is from the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{126} Of the Soviet Jews that immigrated to Germany, only half have become actively involved in Jewish communities. While it is the conscious choice of each individual to join a community, much of this decision rests with the efforts of the community to invite participation. At the present and in the future, well-established congregations run the risk of squandering chances for communal growth and enrichment if they do not actively engage the largely secular Soviet Jews who have made Germany their home.

**Soviet Jews and New Congregations**

A slew of new Jewish communities have also formed since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Soviet Jews or other Jewish expatriates living in Germany formed some while

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
others were created in response to complaints with existing Jewish communities. While many of these communities solicit the involvement of Soviet Jews, it has also proven hard for them to reach the widest base possible.

One of the newest communities is the liberal Jewish Community of Hamburg. What was once a small gathering of 12 Jews in 2004 is now an organization with over 360 members.\textsuperscript{127} As a member of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, the community embodies the spirit of its umbrella organization. The congregation’s website openly invites Jews and non-Jews alike to attend its services and events.\textsuperscript{128} They also address the issue of integration of Soviet Jews on several levels. One of the congregation’s main foci is on continuing Jewish education for older members, inviting Soviet Jews to learn more about Jewish culture.\textsuperscript{129} The congregation also allows non-Jewish spouses to take part in all of its activities.\textsuperscript{130} This is an excellent strategy for attracting Soviet members because many Soviet Jews have non-Jewish spouses. It also invites participation of children of mixed marriages in religious and community events. Children of mixed marriages are often turned away from Jewish groups the world over because Jewish law states that Judaism is passed on through the mother’s line. According to their website, anyone with a Jewish grandfather or father may join the community.

There are several other ways in which the congregation solicits the involvement of Soviet Jews. It costs a very reasonable 20 euros a month, 10 for those with lower incomes, to join the community.\textsuperscript{131} They also provide membership applications in both

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
German and Russian. In addition to the aforementioned classes on Judaism, the community offers a German course for non-German speakers.\footnote{Ibid.} One particularly interesting part of their inclusion of Soviet Jews is their affiliation with the music group Klezmerlech. The group is comprised almost entirely of Jews from the Soviet Union and merged with the Liberal Jewish Community of Hamburg in 2004.\footnote{Ibid.} With approximately twenty members they sing Israeli music and 19th century Jewish liturgy and in 2001 they began holding an annual Jewish music festival in Hamburg.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Jewish community of Oldenburg is a prime example of a newly re-established community in a smaller German city. The community re-constituted itself in the summer of 1992 and was able to begin holding services in the city’s once decrepit synagogue thanks to generous funding from the city of Oldenburg.\footnote{Ibid.} Since its creation the congregation’s membership has risen from 34 to 394.\footnote{Ibid.} The congregation pays much attention to both integration and understanding amongst its members. Hebrew and German lessons are offered to all members.\footnote{Ibid.} Financial aid is offered to new members with lower incomes.\footnote{Ibid.} The community also has an annual retreat to foster a stronger community atmosphere.\footnote{Ibid.}

However, an examination of the congregation’s online photo gallery suggests that there are still several demographic problems facing the community. Despite numerous

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\item \footnote{Ibid.} Der Jüdische Chor Klezmerlech, “Der Jüdische Chor Klezmerlech,” http://www.klezmerlech.davidstern.de/.
\item \footnote{Ibid.} Ibid.
\item \footnote{Ibid.} Ibid.
\item \footnote{Ibid.} Ibid.
\item \footnote{Ibid.} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
images of young children, Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, and older members of the congregation there are almost no people between the ages of 13 and 40. An inability to connect with this age group may potentially harm the future development of Oldenburg and other Jewish communities.

The Beth Shalom Liberal Congregation of Munich is a prime example of a new congregation with distinctly non-German roots. Many of the congregation’s founding members were American Jews who could not find satisfactory religious instruction for their children. It is hard to determine the true extent of participation in this congregation by Russian Jews. On the whole, the congregation has a decidedly international focus. While the vast majority of religious services are held in German and Hebrew, occasionally they are led in English as well. Although much of their online information is available in both English and German, only one page of the website is actually translated into Russian and there is no overt mention of integration work with Soviet Jews.

Beth Shalom is also very representative of several other recent trends in Jewish life in Germany. Like other congregations, they frequently struggled to find a worship space. The congregation was unable to secure a permanent house of worship until 2003, 13 years after their initial creation. Their Rabbi, Dr. Tom Kucera, was one of the first three Rabbis to be ordained in Germany since the end of the Shoah. Like their counterparts in Hamburg, Beth Shalom also seeks to bring the children of mixed

140 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
marriages into their community, albeit in a more welcoming manner. Children with a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother are designated as “supporting members” and only become a normal member upon completing an official conversion.\textsuperscript{146}

Beth Shalom’s website is explicit about Liberal Judaism’s role in modern Jewish history in Germany. In addition to mentioning the creation of the movement in 19th century Germany, the congregation’s website boldly asserts that the vast majority of Germany’s pre-Shoah Jews ascribed to the principles of Liberal Judaism.\textsuperscript{147} This is extremely significant when put in the context of the constant feuding between the Central Council and the Union of Progressive Jews. The latter organization is presented as the legitimate heir to Germany’s Jewish culture. This claim is also a fascinating glimpse into the Jewish community’s ongoing struggle with German identity. Beth Shalom has portrayed Liberal Judaism as a product of the zeitgeist of post-enlightenment Germany. The narrative that they have created leaves open the possibility that German Jews can identify themselves as active citizens and participants in the formation of the country they live in.

Lastly, the Jewish community of Hamelin is an excellent case study of a community that is composed almost entirely of Jews from the former Soviet Union. The town’s congregation was established in 1997 by a small group of Jews from the Soviet Union and currently has a membership of more than 200.\textsuperscript{148} In addition to German language classes, the congregation also offers Russian language courses on Judaism.\textsuperscript{149}

Unfortunately, it would appear that like other smaller congregations, the Jews of Hamelin

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
have dealt with chronic funding issues. The construction of the congregation’s synagogue would not have been possible without generous funding from the government of Lower Saxony, which paid two-thirds of the cost.\textsuperscript{150} The congregation also suffers from a shortage of religious resources. They do not have a full time Rabbi, meaning services are led by visiting clergy or interns from the Abraham Geiger Kolleg Jewish seminary in Potsdam.\textsuperscript{151} That withstanding, this community is still an excellent example of Soviet Jews actively engaging and often-reviving German Jewish life.

Perhaps no trend has helped the integration of Soviet Jews and the continuation of Jewish life in Germany more than the establishment and proliferation of Jewish schools in Germany. Several Jewish communities have worked with the German government to create Jewish schools that provide students with both secular and religious education on a full time basis. These schools serve as the primary means of integrating the younger generations of Jews from the Soviet Union into both Jewish and German culture.

One of the more extensive education programs can be found in the Jewish community of Berlin. The community provides educational opportunities for students of all ages. In Kindergarten, special attention is paid to German language education in the hopes of fully integrating pupils from the former Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{152} Upon completion of kindergarten students through year six are able to attend the Heinz Galinski Day School. The school, which initially had 25 pupils when it opened in 1986, currently has 270 students.\textsuperscript{153} In a move to accommodate lower income families, student tuition is determined on an individual basis to accommodate various family incomes.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{152} Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
The most telling evidence of the community’s successful integration of Soviet pupils and adults is the short government produced film “Angekommen,” which examines the Berlin community’s Jewish high school. One of the subjects in the film is a male student named Marlen Malaev. Although he immigrated to Germany when he was two years old, Marlen says in perfect German that he now feels as if he was born there.\textsuperscript{155} The film also touches on how this school and others provide an opportunity to integrate older immigrants. Large chunks are devoted to Boris Rosenthal, a music teacher at the school. Speaking German with a faint accent and a deliberate pace, Boris stresses how German society has allowed him opportunities unavailable to Jews in his native country.\textsuperscript{156} This is also true of schools in other parts of Germany. Several teachers with decidedly Slavic names, such as Irina Korniyenko and Natascha Rosahatsky are on the staff of Jewish schools in Hamburg.\textsuperscript{157} The existence of the school has not only allowed Boris to actualize his passion for music, but also given him gainful employment in an often unforgiving job market, assisting his gradual integration.

The success of programs such as the ones in Berlin is promising for the future of Germany’s Jewish community. Before the mass arrival of Jews from the former Soviet Union, Germany’s Jewish community was on the verge of a demographic crisis. The rapid aging of the community was the primary source of the growing stagnation of German Jewish life. By targeting younger immigrants and the children of immigrants,

\textsuperscript{156} Salomon, “Angekommen.”
Jewish communities have laid the groundwork for their lifelong involvement in Judaism. Concentrating on German language instruction has deftly facilitated cultural and linguistic integration amongst Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union. Also, by employing many immigrants as educators communities have furthered the process of economic immigration.
Chapter 4

Visible Jewish Culture

It has been twenty-two years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. These years have borne witness to the largest permanent mass immigration of Jews to Germany since the start of the Nazi era. However, few people outside of Germany, including vast segments of world Jewry, are aware of the resurgence or even the existence of a German Jewish community (This author has frequently been the catalyst for slacked jaws and head-scratching when explaining this thesis topic to Jews and gentiles alike in the United States). The question arises; how visible has the resurgence of Jewish culture in Germany been?

There are several ways to examine the visibility of Jewish culture in Germany and how it indicates a growing sense of Germanness amongst German Jews. The most obvious is by studying the physical presence of Jewish communities and organizations in cities and towns throughout the country. Much of this analysis is informed by historian Brian Ladd’s 1997 book *The Ghosts of Berlin*, where he profoundly states that buildings are, “symbols and repositories of memory” as well as a starting point for examining contemporary identity.\(^{158}\) This was especially problematic when the German government moved from Bonn to Berlin in 1999. In the process of their move, the government had to decide the fate of structures built by the authoritarian governments of Nazi Germany and East Germany. The German government had to walk a thin and delicate line because tearing down a building might appear as an erasure of the past. At the same time, allowing a building to stand might suggest that the newly reunited Germany was

inheriting the legacy of these criminal regimes.

One side effect of the sudden resurgence of Jewish life has been a need to create new buildings or restore old ones for community purposes. Many newer buildings have been built in the center of major cities. By doing this, these communities suggest that Jews are a part of the new German society. The community’s growing visibility can also be seen through the creation of cultural institutions such as Jewish restaurants and museums. These places are often where non-Jewish Germans can begin to educate themselves further about the culture of Jewish citizens. It is especially important to note that while these visible spaces do acknowledge the history of the Shoah, they are examples of contemporary Jewish culture and also focus on German Jewish life and Soviet Jewish life before the Shoah. Public Jewish personas in Germany are also an example of visible Jewish culture. This chapter will specifically focus on three Jewish celebrities that strongly identify as Germans.

The Physical Presence of Jewish Communities

A good place to begin this discussion is with the actual Jewish communities themselves. With the exception of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Jewish communities and organizations in East and West Germany were relatively anonymous before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Extreme alienation and suffering experienced under the Nazis meant that postwar Jewish communities tried to be as discreet as possible. As previously mentioned, most if not all of Germany’s Jewish communities have drastically changed since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the first arrivals of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union. An examination of Jewish communal spaces shows that although many older ones are still outwardly anonymous, newer buildings openly assert their place in
contemporary German culture.

As shown in the previous chapter, the Jewish community of Frankfurt am Main has been slower than others to react to the dramatic resurgence of Jewish life in Germany. The community’s headquarters exemplify their largely static post-Shoah identity. The Ignatz Bubis-Gemeindezentrum (“Community Center”), named after the influential former Central Council president Ignatz Bubis, stands at Savignystraße 66 in the Westend neighborhood of the city (see Figure 1). It is in the heart of the city, a stone’s throw from the main train station, the convention center, and many skyscrapers and office buildings. The building’s outward appearance is rather mundane, giving it the impression of a bland office building built in the latter half of the 20th century. With the exception of a sign for the kosher restaurant Sohars located inside the building, there are no signs or Jewish symbols on the building’s façade.

Figure 1: The Ignatz Bubis-Gemeindezentrum in Frankfurt am Main

Passers-by would be oblivious to the contents of the building, were it not for its
intense level of security. A high fence runs the length of the building, separating it from
the sidewalk and pedestrians. Several surveillance cameras hang from the side of the
building, constantly fixed on all who pass by. Half of the roads on each side of the
building are blocked off to traffic and parking. A glimpse of the building on Google street
view shows that the only two cars parked on the backside of the center are both police
vans.

On a practical level, this intense level of security is needed. Jewish community
centers the world over from the United States to Argentina have heightened security
systems because of past attacks on such centers. It is especially understandable that Jews
in Frankfurt and other German cities have these worries after the rise of anti-Semitic and
xenophobic acts during the 1990s. However, this policy can often be a detriment. In the
case of the Ignatz Bubis-Gemeindezentrum, the building is a Jewish island cut off from
the rest of the city. A 1998 interview with Michal Brumlik, one of the Jews who stormed
the stage at the 1985 premiere of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s play Garbage, the City and
Death shows that this is a new attitude amongst the community. Brumlik told the
Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt that, “In the 1950s, when I was in kindergarten and
school, Jewish establishments were not as intensely guarded as they are today. Young
Jews in today’s Germany must feel like they’re in an electronic ghetto.”

While several Jewish communal buildings in Berlin are not as secretive of their
contents, most exhibit the same level of intense and often un-welcoming security as the
Ignatz Bubis-Gemeindezentrum. Part of the road in front of the headquarters of the

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159 Michal Brumlik, Rainer Jung, and Angelika Ohland, "Jews in Germany: A delicate
and David Gramling and Anton Kaes (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press,
2007), 216.
Central Council of Jews in Germany at Tucholskystraße 9 is blocked off from traffic, a security camera watches the building’s main entrance, and a police officer stands guard nearby. The only visible clue that it is a Jewish building is a glass engraving proclaiming the building is called the “Leo Baeck Haus,” after the important German Jewish theologian remembered by only a handful of Jews. The Joachimstalerstraße Synagogue, located a half-block away from the famous shopping strip Kurfürstendamm in Charlottenburg is an outwardly anonymous building. The only hint that it is a synagogue is a surveillance camera at its entrance. Despite its location in the inner courtyard of a building in the trendy district of Prenzlauer Berg, Google street view shows a policeman guarding the Rykesstraße Synagogue and that half of the street in front of the building is cut off from traffic.

The centerpiece of Berlin’s Jewish community, as well as its headquarters is the Neue Synagogue on Oranienburgerstraße in the Mitte district (see Figure 2). The vibrantly colored building, with its ornate dome is an excellent example of late 19th century Jewish architecture and one of the most visible sights of the skyline in the eastern half of the city. However, the building’s renovated façade hides a structure that was dramatically shrunk by allied air raids and years of neglect from the East German government. Most of its interior houses a museum on the building’s and the congregation’s history, and the congregation meets for prayer in a small room on the second floor. The building leaves visitors with the impression that it more of a monument to the past than a part of the present.
While these older buildings are consistent with German Jewish life before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the newly constructed homes of the Jewish community of Dresden and the Jewish community of Munich and Oberbayern point to a growing sense of openness in the German Jewish community. Dresden’s New Synagogue, built with ample funding from the city and the government of Saxony, was completed in 2001. It stands on the grounds of a synagogue that was destroyed during the Nazi-sponsored Kristallnacht pogrom of 1938. The complex (see Figure 3), which consists of two postmodern buildings, does not have the traffic restrictions or police protection endemic to the aforementioned spaces. It stands free and open to the public, a short distance from the restored city center and the Elbe River, implying that it has as much of a place in German culture as these two important national symbols do. The fact that the building has its own tram stop called “Synagoge” speaks to the openness of Dresden’s Jewish community.
The same can be said of the Jewish community of Munich and Oberbayern. Their headquarters are located at St.-Jakobs-Platz, not far from major attractions such as the Frauenkirche and the Marienplatz. The centerpieces of the square are a soon to be opened Jewish museum and the Ohel Jakob Synagogue (see Figure 4). Like the synagogue in Dresden, Ohel Jakob also has a connection to Kristallnacht. The original Ohel Jakob also perished during that terrible night. Nearly seventy years later, the new synagogue was opened to the public.

This community has striven to invite non-Jews into their space. St.-Jakobs-Platz
is designed like many squares in German cities in towns. No cars are allowed, in the hope that it will be used as a meeting point and place of relaxation for the citizens of Munich and tourists alike. The community also stresses on their website that they are happy to host trips from German schools.\textsuperscript{160} This is an important shift for the perception younger Germans will have of their nation’s Jewish community. In addition to being able to visit concentration camps such as \textit{Sachsenhausen} and \textit{Buchenwald}, where Jewish life was almost eradicated, they can now visit a place where their nation’s Jewish community is thriving. The openness and visibility of these communities show that Jews once again feel a part of the culture of their cities and nation.

\textbf{Bagels and Lox: Chic Judaism}

The resurgence of Jewish life in Germany is not indicative of a greater understanding of contemporary Jewish culture by the German public. As a case in point, Germans are still unaware of the actual size of their nation’s Jewish community. The results of one survey of German non-Jews revealed that most believed there were three million Jews in Germany, when the actual number is between 100,000 and 150,000.\textsuperscript{161} While this is evidence of the general ignorance of the German public regarding their nation’s Jewish community, it unequivocally shows that the arrival of Soviet Jews and the resurgence of Jewish life during the past twenty years has not gone unnoticed.

The story of Lena Gorelik, who immigrated to Germany with her parents, provides a more humorous look at this problem. In an interview with the German periodical \textit{Der Spiegel} she said that upon immigrating to Germany as a child she decided

\textsuperscript{160} Israeliitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern, \textit{Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern}, http://www.ikg-m.de/.


76
to, “tell her grade-school teachers that it was a Jewish holiday every three days just to see how they would react.” However, the continued ignorance of many non-Jewish Germans does not imply a lack of interest. One of the bizarre effects of the arrival of Soviet Jews was a surge of interest in Jewish culture, specifically in Berlin. The following section will examine the several avenues through which non-Jewish Germans may interact with contemporary Jewish culture in Germany.

Over sixty years after the end of World War II, Berlin is once again the capital of Germany. Since the fall of the wall the face of the city has changed drastically, specifically in what was once East Berlin. A particularly interesting development has been the rapid gentrification of the Mitte-Scheunenviertel and Prenzlauer Berg neighborhoods. Unlike other parts of East Berlin, the East German government paid little attention to fixing the damage done by allied bombings to many of buildings in these two neighborhoods during the war. In the immediate period after the wall fell, they became a popular home for apartment squatters. Since then, they have undergone a further transformation. What were once bombed-out buildings have been renovated and filled with trendy stores and restaurants.

An interesting and often problematic side effect of this revitalization of these neighborhoods has been a newfound interest in their Jewish history. Suddenly, Mitte-Scheunenviertel was given the title of “Jewish Berlin.” This designation is a distortion of the neighborhood’s real past and present. While it is true that it once had a large


Jewish population, it was by no means the center of Jewish life in Berlin before the
Shoah. An equal if not greater amount of Jews lived in neighborhoods such as Kreuzberg
and Charlottenburg. Also, many of the Scheunenviertel’s former Jewish residents were
not assimilated German Jews, but rather working class immigrants from Poland and other
Eastern European nations that arrived during the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{164}

The creation of the title “Jewish Berlin” is largely due to the highly visible
presence of memorials and Jewish institutions in the neighborhood. The headquarters of
the Central Council of Jews in Germany, though largely anonymous to the public, and the
Neue Synagoge are located a short distance from each other in the Scheunenviertel. The
Großehamburgerstraße reflects both the past and the often forgotten present of Berlin’s
Jewish community. The present can be seen in the form of the Jewish high school located
on the street, but for most the past is more alluring. Directly next to the school is a newly
restored Jewish cemetery said to hold the grave of Moses Mendelssohn, the great
German-Jewish philosopher.

Across the street is an art installation by the French-Jewish artist Christian
Boltanski that addresses the loss of Jewish life in the neighborhood during the Holocaust
(see Figure 5). Boltanski chose the space because amidst the continuous row of
connected buildings, an empty space remains where one was destroyed during the war.
The memorial consists of several plaques bearing the names of Holocaust victims on the
walls of the two buildings flanking the site of the missing house to show that those
victims and other Jews may have once lived there.\textsuperscript{165} While it is powerful, the monument

\textsuperscript{164} Shimon Attie, "The Writing on the Wall, Berlin, 1992-93: Projections in Berlin's
Jewish Quarter," \textit{Art Journal}, 63, no. 3 (2003): 75,
\textsuperscript{165} Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Mourning or Melancholia: Christian Boltanski’s "Missing
is problematic because it places Jews from elsewhere in Berlin in a house that may or may not have ever housed Jewish residents. The memorial runs the extreme risk of furthering the myth of a “Jewish Berlin” in the city’s past.

Figure 5: Christian Boltanski’s “Missing House” installation on Großehamburgerstraße

Many of Berlin’s Jews have complained about the new historical identity assigned to the Scheunenviertel. They have described Oranienburgerstraße as an “Inszenierung,” a staged scene and often refer to it as “Jewrassic Park” or “Jewish Disneyland.” 166 The central problem of the neighborhood is amply summed up by the Jewish journalist Henryk Broder when he claims that this trend has led Germans and others to revel in the city’s lost Jewish past rather than in its Jewish present and future. 167

166 Peck, Being Jewish, 65.
Another interesting guide for changing perceptions of contemporary Jewish culture in Germany is the existence of Jewish restaurants. Unfortunately, most tend to go unnoticed by those outside of the Jewish community. Both Sohars kosher restaurant in Frankfurt and Gabriel’s kosher restaurant in Berlin are located in buildings with heavy security. Without previous knowledge of their existence, it would be unlikely for non-Jews to casually dine at either.

However, Jewish foods are not always confined to the interior of community centers. One highly visible example of Jewish cuisine in contemporary Germany is Salomon Bagels of Berlin. The chain presently has two stores in the heart of the city. The first is located next to the Joachimstalerstraße synagogue and looks as if it were transplanted from the streets of New York City. A neon sign proudly advertises in English that there are “Hot Bagels” inside.

Its second location is in a shopping mall in Potsdamer Platz. The decision to open a store in this neighborhood is significant for several reasons. Potsdamer Platz has become a symbol for the transformation of the newly reunited Germany. The construction of the Berlin Wall, which cut directly through the square, turned what was a once thriving space into a barren wasteland devoid of buildings and human activity. A flurry of post-reunification construction once more made the square a center of cultural and commercial life. By placing a store in Potsdamer Platz the owners of Salomon Bagels (aside from profiting from frequent tourist traffic) are making a statement that an example of contemporary Jewish culture belongs in the heart of the new Germany.

Although the store openly embraces its Jewish identity, it is more representative

of a Jewish culture alien to German Jewish history. While it is true as their website
claims that bagels are a part of Jewish culinary tradition and an ideal food for the Jewish
Sabbath, bagels are more specifically a part of the history of Jews in Poland and other
Eastern European nations.\footnote{Andreas Pfeffer, \textit{SAalomon-bagels.de}, http://www.salomon-bagels.de/} It is also important to note that bagels have long been
ubiquitous to the Jewish communities in the United States and Canada. Combinations
such as their bagel with lox and their bagel with egg and ham have origins in the many
bagel stores of the northeastern United States. The store also features foods such as
falafel and hummus because of their association with Israeli cuisine. However, the phrase
“Israeli cuisine” is a rather dubious one because its origins come from cuisine in the Arab
nations surrounding Israel. So while it is a welcome sign of the new openness of German
Jews, Salomon Bagels depicts the cultural life of other Jewish communities more than
that of German Jews.

Germans seeking a more realistic picture of the influence of Soviet Jewry on
contemporary Jewish life in Berlin and Germany would do better to visit Restaurant
Pasternak, named after the famous Jewish writer and Soviet dissident Boris Pasternak.
They are upfront about their Jewish roots, advertising that in addition to Russian food
their menu features Jewish specialties such as \textit{latkes} (potato pancakes) and \textit{kreplach}
(dumplings filled with ground meat).\footnote{Kaplan & Pinski GbR, \textit{Restaurant Pasternak}, http://www.restaurant-pasternak.de/} These menu items demonstrate how the traditions
of Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union are being incorporated into contemporary
Jewish life in Germany. It is interesting to note that when describing their location in the
city, the restaurant says it stands between the \textit{Rykesstraße} Synagogue, which they label as
the “largest synagogue in Germany” and “\textit{Dicke Hermann}” (“Fat Herman”), a famous

\footnote{Andreas Pfeffer, \textit{SAalomon-bagels.de}, http://www.salomon-bagels.de/} 
water tower in Prenzlauer Berg. Like the Jewish community of Dresden and the Jewish community of Munich and Oberbayern, they are asserting the importance of a Jewish landmark to the culture of their city.

Figure 6: Daniel Libeskind’s Jüdisches Museum in Berlin

One of the most visible examples of Jewish life in Germany comes in the form of the newly built Jewish museum in Berlin (see Figure 6). Its creation was partially accidental. Initially, West Berlin asked the Polish-born American Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind to build an addition to the city museum that would focus on the city’s Jewish history. Libeskind’s architectural design gave way to a plan to create a separate Jewish museum in the existing and proposed spaces. The building was opened with great fanfare in 2001, nearly ten years after the project was initiated. At that time, it was the single

171 Ibid.
172 Andreas Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin," Critical Inquiry, 24, no. 1 (1997): 76,
largest Jewish museum in the world.\textsuperscript{173}

Berlin’s Jewish Museum is unique for several reasons. Unlike other existing Jewish museums, it only focuses on German Jewish history.\textsuperscript{174} The museum also avoids dedicating the majority of its exhibit space to the Shoah, which cannot be said of other Jewish museums around the world. Its permanent exhibition provides an excessively comprehensive glimpse of nearly two millennia of German Jewish history. Libeskind’s design is also an important part of the museum’s identity. Its large post-modern structure makes the building stand out in a neighborhood filled primarily with large apartment complexes in the district of Kreuzberg. Upon entering the permanent exhibit, visitors walk along three corridors in the basement of the new building, which architecturally contextualize the fate of German Jews that lived during the Shoah. The first is the “path to extermination,” which ends with what Libeskind has dubbed the “Holocaust Tower,” an empty tower whose only source of light and ventilation is a tiny opening on the top of the side closest to the street. While Libeskind has been cryptic to the exact intent of this and other features of the building, the void inside provides a fascinating space for reflection and mediation of the millions of Jews killed during the Shoah. The second is the “path to exile,” ending with the “Garden of Exile.” The garden consists of a grid of stone pillars with small trees at their tops. It is oriented on a slant, perhaps inviting those walking through it to experience the confusion and disorientation faced by German Jews upon leaving their homeland. The last path, the “path of continuation” leads visitors into the museum’s main exhibit space.

While Berlin’s Jewish Museum has become an instant success story with many

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 40.
thousands of visitors flocking there on a yearly basis, it is not without some flaws. One problem concerns the museum’s initial leadership team. Primarily non-German Jews shaped a disproportionate amount of the museum’s initial design. The building’s architect, first and current director, and its first deputy director were all American.\footnote{Ibid., 45.} Another problem is the location of the museum’s exhibits on Jewish life in Germany after the Shoah, which come at the very end of the permanent exhibition. The museum is so exhaustingly thorough that many visitors move quickly through this section, sensing that the exit is near. Nonetheless, the museum is easily the most effective visible tool through which Germans and others are able to discover more about contemporary German Jewish life.

**A Hockey Player, and A Comedian, and a Politician**

So far this chapter has addressed how visible spaces raise awareness and alter the perception of German citizens regardless the contemporary German Jewish community. What it hasn’t addressed are visible Jewish personas in contemporary Germany. While the Jewish communities of both East and West Germany were often anonymous to their respective publics, there was no lack of well-known Jews in both countries. In addition to individually serving terms as president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the outspoken Heinz Galinski and Ignatz Bubis were public representatives of West Germany’s Jewish community. In East Germany singer and poet Wolf Biermann and Jurek Becker, author of *Jakob der Lügner* and *Bronsteins Kinder*, were both prominent dissidents. However, their time in the east was cut short. In the late 1970s Biermann’s East German citizenship was taken away by the ruling Socialist Unity Party while playing a concert in West Germany and Becker moved from East Berlin to West Berlin.
This section examines three prominent Jews in the public sphere of contemporary Germany; Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Evan Kauffmann, and Oliver Polak, the only one born in Germany and the primary focus of this section. The successful integration of the two foreigners into German life is indicative of how Jews are able to not only live, but also thrive in the new Germany. Lastly, Polak’s politically incorrect Jewish standup comedy is an important step towards further normalization of relations between non-Jewish Germans and Germans Jews.

The personal history of Daniel Cohn-Bendit ranges from the sublime to the ridiculous. His German Jewish father immigrated to France shortly after the Nazi party took over the German government in 1933. Cohn-Bendit returned to Germany to attend secondary school and declared German citizenship to avoid future conscription in the French army. He returned to France in the late 1960s to attend the University of Nanterre and quickly became an active member in anarchist and leftists political groups in Paris. His time in France was shortened after he played a prominent role with striking students during the riots that rocked the city in 1968. After being expelled from the university he was forced to return to Germany, where he continued to take part in extreme leftist groups before joining the Green Movement in the early 1980s. Since then he has held numerous government positions and is currently a leader of the Green Party bloc in the European parliament.

Although he has rarely addressed his own Jewish identity, his views on Judaism in Germany can be seen in a response to a speech by former Israeli president Ezer Weizman to the Bundestag in 1996 on the topic of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. While Cohn-Bendit agreed with the speech’s call for an end to racism, he felt that Weizman
depicted the German Jewish community as a group distinctly separate from the German nation. In an article responding to the speech he boldly claimed that only, “when Germany is again accustomed to the fact that Jews in Germany can be employers and entrepreneurs, debtors and bankers, conservatives and Greens, ministers and independents, harlots and thieves- then being Jewish in Germany will have become normal.”

It is understandable that he would feel this way because he has led a prosperous and meaningful life in a nation his father once had to flee.

Evan Kauffmann also arrived in Germany due to unique circumstances. He grew up playing hockey in the United States and went on to play on the varsity squad at the University of Minnesota. He began playing professionally in Düsseldorf in 2008 because his slight build at 5’9” tall and weight of 165 pounds made it unlikely that he would ever play in the National Hockey league in the United States or Canada. His decision to play there is still a surprise to many because his grandfather was a survivor of the Shoah. Most of his extended family from the Moselle Valley region perished during World War II.

Despite this Kauffmann has come to embrace the life of a Jew in the reunited Germany. In his time living in Düsseldorf he has managed to openly practice his religion with great comfort. His fellow teammates and the management of the DEG Metro Stars, the team he has played for, have accommodated his religious needs. During the fall, he has been able to miss games so that he may attend Jewish religious services on the


holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.\textsuperscript{178} He has also embraced his German identity. His German ancestry meant that he automatically qualified for German citizenship and in a February 10, 2012 game against Belarus he became the first Jew to play for the German national hockey team since before the Shoah.\textsuperscript{179} In an interview following the game Kauffmann told a reporter from the \textit{New York Times} that, “With each year, you (I) do feel a little more loyalty toward Germany, a stronger connection…I still consider myself more American, but from a hockey standpoint, I’ve committed myself to Germany. It’s something I’m proud about.”\textsuperscript{180} It should also be mentioned that Kauffmann is not the only Jew to play for a German national team. In January of 2012 the German women’s field hockey team, which has several Jewish members, won the European championship.\textsuperscript{181} The willingness of these young Jews to play on national teams is further evidence that the youngest generation of Jews has begun to readily identify themselves as German Jews, rather than Jews in Germany.

And then there is Oliver Polak, the Jewish standup comedian. Much of his material is derived from his early life in Papenburg, a small city in the northwestern part of Germany. One of his staple jokes is that since his parents were the only Jews in town, his birth increased the Jewish population there by fifty percent.\textsuperscript{182} Like other Jews in their situation, the Polaks and young Oliver had to travel to the city of Osnabrück to take part in any form of Jewish religious or cultural life. In a moment exemplifying his often dark and ironic humor, Oliver writes in his book \textit{“Ich Darf Das, Ich Bin Jude”} (“I Can Do

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{182} Oliver Polak, \textit{Ich Darf Das, Ich Bin Jude}, (Cologne, Germany: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 65.
\end{flushright}
That Because I Am Jewish") that the trip was at least an hour and a half in each direction because, “the nice Mr. Hitler,” never built an Autobahn between the two.183 Since 2006 he has toured extensively throughout Germany, Austria, and Switzerland labeling himself as Germany’s only Jewish comedian.

Although his comedy deals primarily with Jewish jokes and themes, non-Jewish Germans are Polak’s target audience. The uncomfortable reaction of German audiences is often if not more important to his bottom line than his jokes. In an interview for a segment on a Swiss TV show, he describes how the opening of his standard routine is designed to immediately put the audience on their guard and give him control over the room. After mentioning he is Jewish, generally ending their initial applause and laughter, he directs a challenge to them saying, “You can laugh at that if you think it is funny.”184

This awkwardness is a central theme of his work. It exposes the fact that most Germans are still unsure of how to handle the topic of Judaism or the Shoah in the public sphere. An article in the Jüdische Allgemeine Zeitung points to the fact that the audience reactions to the show fall into two categories: “the quiet shameful chuckle and freely loud belly-laugh.”185 While this is a problem with audiences in Germany, it is not necessarily the case in other German speaking countries. There are noticeably more smiling faces and unembarrassed laughs from the crowds in the aforementioned Swiss TV segment on him.186 Indeed, one of Polak’s rules of Jewish comedy is to have at least one joke with the

183 Ibid., 66.
186 Polak, “Schweizer Fernsehen.”
word “Holocaust” in it because German audiences will be forced to laugh due to their guilty consciences.\textsuperscript{187}

Although Polak labels his act as “Jewish standup comedy,” it is also informed by other parts of life in contemporary Germany. During a performance at the Quatsch comedy club in Berlin, Polak asks his audience, “Do we have any other minorities in the crowd tonight? Any gays? Any Blacks? Any East Germans with Jobs?”\textsuperscript{188} The joke reflects on the fact that one of the immediate and negative side effects of German reunification was a higher rate of unemployment in the former states of East Germany. Not being one to avoid political incorrectness, Polak goes on to say, “I really like East Germans. I can also understand why you are a little annoyed with Jews. After all, you no longer have your own country,” referencing the rise of right-wing extremism in many East German cities during the 1990s.\textsuperscript{189}

Polak’s ribbing of other German minority groups is not simply limited to East Germans. In another performance he trains his sights on Germany’s Turkish community, telling a fabricated story of a Turk showing up at his Berlin apartment in the middle of the night and asking him for a lesson in standup comedy. The story hinges partially on a self-awareness of Jewish comedy. Polak tells the Turk that he will give him some pointers but rather than doing Turkish standup, which is overdone, he must do Jewish standup, “Because there is no Jewish standup in Germany...well, almost none.”\textsuperscript{190} On one level, the routine incorporates jokes about Turkish culture that are often a part of

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\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{188} Polak, Oliver, "Oliver Polak Quatsch Comedy Club," performance at Quatsch Comedy Club, August 30, 2011, compact disc, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RN8tH-kFjEU.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{190} Polak, Oliver, "Oliver Polak - Jüdischer Stand up," performance on "night wash" comedy show, March 31, 2009, compact disc, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXhHowcoyOE.
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contemporary standup in Germany. It also has the effect of subtly duping the audience into laughing at Polak’s humor because it is easier to stomach through the voice of the fictional Achmed. By not just limiting himself to entirely Jewish jokes Polak boldly claims that German Jews should be held in the same respect as other minorities in contemporary Germany.

None of Polak’s works emphasize his firm identity as both a German and a Jew more than the music video for his song “Lasst uns alle Jude sein!” (“Let’s All Be Jews!). In a telling sign of his German identity Polak claims to have written the song in the style of one of his childhood idols, Austrian singer Udo Jürgens.\footnote{Böhme, “Lasst uns alle.”} In the video a lonely black and white Polak dreams up a fantasy, shown in color, where he and two friends travel around Berlin transforming Germans that they meet into “Jews,” which simply consists of them wearing black hats with fake Payos, the ear locks grown by orthodox Jews.\footnote{Polak, Oliver, "Oliver Polak & Carsten "Erobique" Meyer - Lasst uns alle Juden sein," music video for "Lasst uns alle Juden sein," November 9, 2010, compact disc, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeWnyA_pi8.} It is important to note that this video also contains a multicultural note. One of Polak’s accomplices is black and the Turkish proprietors of a Döner Kebap restaurant are amongst the group of Germans that are “turned” into Jews.\footnote{Ibid.} Polak’s humorous fantasy can be viewed a metaphor for creating a more inclusive German society. At the end of the video Polak, once again alone and in black and white, walks by a German street musician singing, “I want to be part of a Jewish community,” Polak, a member of the first generation of German Jews born after the Shoah, shows that it is possible to be both German and Jewish in a reunited Germany.

\footnote{Ibid.}
Conclusion

In the aftermath of the Shoah, it seemed clear that Jews and Germans were incompatible with one another. By 1950, most surviving German Jews had immigrated to the United States, the United Kingdom, and Israel. The Jewish communities of East and West Germany were both a shadow of a once vibrant community. By the late 1980s, these two communities were rapidly aging and bordered on the verge of complete cultural stagnation.

The sudden wave of Soviet Jewish immigration to Germany that began just before the fall of the Berlin Wall was a catalyst for reviving and drastically changing the course of Jewish life in Germany. Within twenty years the Jewish community increased nearly six fold from 25,000 to 150,000 members. The reunited German state openly encouraged Soviet Jews to immigrate to Germany, believing that they would easily integrate into German society. Although most immigrants were highly educated, their unfamiliarity with German meant that many were unemployed for extended periods of time. To counteract this trend, Jewish communities throughout the country became the primary facilitators of integrating Soviet Jews into German society. This is one of many indicators
that the Jewish community has affirmed that in addition to being Jews, they are also Germans.

The resurgence of German Jewish life does not end with integration. New communities have been formed and old ones have been revitalized. In Düsseldorf, the Jewish community currently claims that with the arrival of Soviet Jews there are more Jews in the city now than there were before the Shoah. Jewish cultural institutions such as restaurants and museums have begun to pop up around Germany. New building built by Jewish communities are not only welcoming to non-Jewish Germans, but also boldly assert that Judaism has a set place in German culture.

From a young age, I was taught that there was a certain resilient quality evident in the history of the Jewish people. Our past and present are fraught with peril. Jews living in the Diaspora have often learned to never be completely comfortable with their own surroundings. Jews have been expelled, persecuted, and murdered over the past millennia, but have managed to survive every attempt to destroy their culture and religion. Over sixty years after the end of the Shoah, the German Jewish community is still in the process of rebuilding itself. Although it was first begun in the aftermath of World War II, it was delayed and almost ended before the fall of the Berlin Wall ushered in a new era of German life. Just as German Jews are rebuilding their community, the German nation is rebuilding its own identity. While it is unclear to know the future of German Jewry, recent trends suggest that it will grow in size and openness in the coming years.

In my wanderings through the internet this February, conducting research for this thesis, I stumbled upon a surprising news piece on the website of the Central Council of
Jews in Germany. The brief blurb discussed counter-protests on the recent anniversary of the night of allied bombing that flattened Dresden in 1945. Presently, hordes of German neo-Nazis march through the streets of Dresden on February 13th, in what they claim is a tribute to the victims of “allied terrorism.” The article that I discovered addressed the active role Stephen J. Kramer, General Secretary of the Central Council, has played in organizing large counter-protests on the same day. I was particularly struck by a passage where Kramer said that Germans should not allow this sad anniversary to be hijacked by right-wing extremism. Just as non-Jewish Germans mourn Jews killed in the Shoah, German Jews are now engaged in mourning German civilians killed during World War II. Together, they mourn the past and only together can they create a more perfect future.

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The author on a particularly chilly day at the East Side Gallery in Berlin.