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Key words: Jewish Studies, Germany, immigration, Holocaust memorialization

Abstract: Jewish Studies in Germany reflects the tremendous demographic transformations of the Jewish community since 1990. Yet, this article also posits that non-Jewish Germans too have changed substantially due to immigration and new generational views on the legacy of the Holocaust. As such, Jewish Studies has to communicate the history of the German Jewry to Jews and Gentiles mostly unfamiliar with its rich legacy. It needs to comment on Holocaust memorialization to educate new generations of Gentiles as well as Jewish immigrants, for whom the end of the Cold War bears more significance than the Holocaust. Finally, it needs to be part of new conversations between Christians and Jews that also includes the large Muslim minority in Germany. While the changing audiences in Germany dictate a focus on Jews in Germany, Jewish Studies also needs to embrace a more European perspective reflective of the more comparative and trans-disciplinary scholarship abroad. Despite the significant growth of Jewish Studies in Germany over the last two decades, these challenges call for even greater efforts.

(1) Introduction: Revival and New Questions

Following unification, Germany has seen an astonishing rebirth of Jewish life largely attributable to immigration from the former Soviet Union. This tremendous demographic change within the Jewish community also demands a new intellectual framework to make sense of “central issues in the humanities: nationhood; identity; migration; diaspora; media; text” (Morris 2009: X). Undeniably, these themes not only speak to the legacy of the German Jewry so tragically betrayed by their German compatriots in what Moshe Zimmermann called a war waged by Germans against Germans (Zimmermann 2008: 252). They also apply to the experience of recent Jewish immigrants to Germany whose identity was shaped by socialization in the Soviet Union and Russia and not by the Holocaust. Furthermore, these issues concern Jews and non-Jews alike since German identity, conceptions of nationhood and attitudes towards migrants are as much in flux as German discourses on the Nazi past. Given these tremendous changes in both Jewish and Gentile Germans, Jewish Studies in Germany has to embrace a much more trans-disciplinary approach and reach out to ever changing audiences.

The difficulty in understanding this new Jewish identity in Germany became abundantly clear at the 2009 “Revival and New Directions? Jewish Arts in German-Speaking Countries” conference organized by Prof. Dr. Hava Tirosh-Samuelsan at Arizona State University. This meeting chose to explore art as a medium of investigation for identity

(ASU Jewish Studies). It was not for a lack of thoughtful contributors that the conference failed to come to a tangible conclusion. If anything, the challenge was that the participants could not agree on what constitutes this now radically different Jewish community and how to make sense of the diversity of its artistic expressions and their interactions with non-Jewish audiences.¹ What emerged from this only superficially unsatisfactory conversation were questions of how such a heterogeneous community can speak to the legacy of the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis of the 19th and 20th centuries, establish a new Jewish culture in Germany reflective of its own diversity and different histories, and enter into a meaningful Jewish-Gentile dialogue. Equally central to the revival of Jewish life in Germany is the need to communicate the horrors of the Holocaust to younger generations of both Jews and non-Jews. The more than 24 centers for Jewish Studies and many more collections, memorials and museums concerned with Jewish life in Germany are both reflective of the recent growth and new diversity of Jewish life in Germany and of the need to engage Jews and non-Jews in debates about these questions (Verband der Judaisten 2013).

(2) The Jewish Community and Jewish Studies in Germany

Between 1991 and 2004, the number of Jews living in Germany rose from 30,000 to 250,000. Most of the growth can be attributed to 219,000 Jewish immigrants from countries of the former Soviet Union (Haug 2005: 6). In 2004, 103,000 German Jews were members of the registered communities in Germany (Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland 2012: 7). These numbers made the Jewish community in Germany the third largest in Europe; yet they also triggered a series of questions about migration, identity, and integration that concern both the Jewish community and society at large. This led Michael Brenner to conclude in 1997 that “despite increasing neo-Nazi tendencies, despite recently damaged synagogues and memorials, united Germany will definitely not be a Germany without Jews. The big question on the eve of the next millennium is whether there will again be a Jewish life among the Jews of Germany, whether they will know ‘why and how’ they identify as Jews” (Brenner 1997: 157). Yet, the question is not only what it means to be Jewish in Germany but also what it means to be German in an increasingly diverse society (Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin 2002: 175). Thus, the need to confront anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Germany as well as the challenges of the integration of migrants and the renewal of Jewish life engendered enough political support on the federal and state levels to lead to considerable public investments into Jewish Studies. New or expanded academic programs such as the Heidelberg *Hochschule für Jüdische Studien*, created in 1979 and expanded in the 1990’s, or the joint *Center for Jewish Studies* in Berlin and Potsdam, which opened in spring of 2012, were perhaps the most prominent but not the only beneficiaries. Places of memory like the former concentration camps of Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald, memorials such as the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin,

¹ The phenomenon of a new artistic presence of the “third generation after the Shoah” in Germany was already described by Sander Gilman in 1997 (Gilman 1997: 223).

and exhibitions, most notably the Jewish Museums in Berlin and Frankfurt, were also either re-designed or newly created.² Smaller endeavors also gained considerable attention such as a film, exhibition, and publication project about young Jews in contemporary Germany that was envisioned by Gentile students of communication design in Constance (Friedrich 2006). All of these initiatives in Jewish Studies are testimony to a renewed and sincere engagement of the public with Jewish life, culture and history, but they also mirror the unresolved questions of identity, the legacy of the German Jewry for today's community and the meaning of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust. Moreover, Jewish Studies cannot ponder these questions in an academic ivory tower; instead there is a need to reach out to both Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

(3) New Audiences for Jewish Studies in Germany

The demographic changes also triggered a redirection of Jewish Studies away from the understandable, but limiting emphasis on German-Jewish relations. This was necessitated by the fact that Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union do not have any connection to the rich cultural legacy of the German Jewry before 1933. Yet, it is in this tradition of German-Jewish symbiosis that the Jews in Germany have typically placed themselves, although scholars like Gershom Scholem have dismissed the idea of such a close interaction between Jews and Gentiles as a tragic lie (Aschheim 2001: 19). Equally important is that recent immigrants connect to the Holocaust differently, since the most important historical event for them is not the Holocaust but the end of the Cold War (Lau 2010).

Not only did the Jewish community undergo transformations in the 1990s that rendered it almost unrecognizable, but German Gentiles have also changed dramatically due to immigration and generational change. Despite disconcerting right-wing extremism in Germany and repeated calls for more cultural assimilation of Muslim immigrants, many Germans in both the East and the West endorse a more diverse society and display less xenophobic attitudes than in the 1990's (Diehl & Tucci 2010: 570). Those calling for greater cultural assimilation of immigrants also find it difficult to offer a definition of "Germanness" as a backdrop for what assimilation would actually mean. Just as notions of German identity are more heterogeneous now, German perceptions of World War II and the Holocaust are also shifting with the passing from communicative to cultural memory. In a somewhat ambiguous turn, third and fourth generation Germans seem to be willing to engage the collective guilt of their forefathers as bystanders, beneficiaries or even co-perpetrators more than any other generation of Germans. Examples of this sincere engagement with the past are the public's attention to the Crimes of the Wehrmacht exhibition, the Goldhagen-debate, or the documentation of the senseless violence exercised by ordinary soldiers as revealed in the recently published recordings of Ger-

² For an overview of German Holocaust memorials and their evolution see Young 2000: 152; Niven 2004: 189-226. For further description of the new exhibitions at former concentration camps and the exemplary redesign of Buchenwald, see Knigge 2004: 9-14. For information on Jewish museums, see Stiftung Jüdisches Museum Berlin 2002 and Jewish Museum Frankfurt 2002.

man Prisoners of War in American captivity.³ Yet, this heightened sense of the culpability of ordinary Germans is also matched by a new empathy for Germans as victims of war, bombings, expulsions, and rape sparked by Günter Grass's novel 'Crabwalk' in 2002. The screening of the public television production 'Our Mothers, our Fathers' in March of 2013 epitomized this divide by telling the stories of young Germans in the 1940's with great empathy while leaving no doubt about their moral corruption and personal involvement in the Nazi regime's crimes. Yet, the movie also included many apologetic features that painted the protagonists as victims of the regime and its war.⁴ Furthermore, it presented a highly redemptive narrative by making the main characters dissociate themselves from the regime long before its collapse. Finally, overdrawn anti-Semitic Polish partisans, raping Soviet soldiers, or an only caricatured U.S. officer, who employed a former Gestapo officer after 1945 because of his "experience" in the German administration, also served as negative backdrops against which the German protagonists retain their humanity in a war that seemingly corrupted everyone. As such, the film and by extension society in general blurs the lines of responsibility and sees Germans "as simultaneously guilty and suffering in proportions still very much open to dispute" (Nolan 2005: 8).

This dramatic change in who the Jews of Germany are, how they identify and who the non-Jewish Germans are, places somewhat contradictory demands on Jewish Studies today. On the one hand, it forces scholars and educators in Jewish Studies to preserve and communicate this rich heritage of German Jews to Jews and Gentiles who are mostly unfamiliar with it. While Jewish Studies has done much to help present this legacy especially in the Jewish Museums in Berlin and Frankfurt, it has done little to make this tradition speak to the revival of Jewish life in Germany today.⁵ Especially the musealization of the German-Jewish cultural exchange fails to establish a meaningful bond between contemporary and past Jewish communities, and it is not clear if new and diverse Jewish communities "might carry on with the legacy of German Jewry," as Hermann Levin Goldschmidt already wrote in 1957 (240). Furthermore, Jewish Studies together with neighboring disciplines needs to continue to advise the German public on memorialization of the Holocaust. This could open up a debate on how third and fourth generation Germans confront the wartime sufferings of their ancestors in the context and causality of the German crimes and without apologetic or redemptive undercurrents. As if that were not enough, Jewish Studies should also be part of finding new ways to communicate the centrality of the Holocaust to immigrant communities for whom the Holocaust is not part of their cultural memory. Thus, the study of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and

³ For the Crimes of the Wehrmacht exhibition see (Heer & Naumann 1995 and 2000). Concerning the reception of the Goldhagen-debate in Germany, see Körner 2000: 74. With respect to wiretappings of German PoWs, see Neitzel & Welzer 2011.

⁴ One of many highly apologetic aspects of the movie was the representation of Polish partisans as staunchly anti-Semitic, whereas the German protagonists are almost free of ideological convictions. This triggered a harsh response from the Polish ambassador to Germany Jerzy Margański (cf. Polens Botschafter verärgert über „Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter," *Die Zeit*, March 28, 2013, <http://pdf.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2013-03/weltkriegsdrama-polen-protest.pdf>). For the movie, see *Our Mothers, Our Fathers* 2013.

⁵ Strikingly, the Jewish Museum in Berlin currently displays a special exhibition entitled "The Whole Truth... everything you always wanted to know about Jews" which starts with the question: "Are there still Jews in Germany?" Controversially, the show also includes a 'living exhibit' featuring a Jewish person in a glass box answering questions about Jews from mostly ignorant non-Jewish visitors (Kulish 2013).

its memorialization must remain central to Jewish Studies particularly in view of the passage from communicative to cultural memory, the persistence of xenophobic attacks and immigration in Germany.

On the other hand and somewhat in conflict with the first goal, Jewish Studies needs to overcome its narrow German focus. After all, Jewish history should be more reflective of comparative trends in scholarship at large. In this vein, the increasing presence of non-Jewish scholars working side by side with Jewish scholars from a host of disciplines is very much to be welcomed (Efron 2009: 3; Schüler-Springorum 2009: 8). Jewish Studies should also be presented in its European context, especially since the more diverse Jewish community in Germany has its roots in many other countries. The recent creation of the Ignaz Bubis chair for history, religion and culture of the European Jewry at the Hochschule für Jüdische Studien in Heidelberg is a wonderful opportunity to pursue such research. Finally, Jewish Studies needs to encourage not only a Jewish-Christian dialogue but must also seek to expand such discussions to include Jewish-Christian-Muslim exchanges. Michael Brenner provocatively asked in 2006 “whether a historical tragedy is required to spur the teaching of Islamic and Turkish culture to an extent comparable to Jewish Studies in a country which today is the home of two million Turkish Muslims and 100,000 Jews” (Brenner 2006: 14). The creation of the Ben Gurion Guest Chair for Israel and Near Eastern Studies in Heidelberg in 2009 was a good sign in terms of reaching out to the Muslim population in Germany and also seeking to integrate Jewish Studies in Germany into the wider context of Middle Eastern Studies. This is particularly important since the Middle East Conflict often forces Christian, Jewish and Muslim Germans to take opposite sides making a calm debate impossible.

(4) Conclusion

Jewish Studies in contemporary Germany is at a crossroads by the new, yet markedly different revival of Jewish life in Germany. It needs to both preserve and communicate the rich legacy of German Jews to new Jewish communities and to continue to find new ways of memorializing the Holocaust in view of the tremendous generational and social change among Gentiles, Jews and Muslim immigrant communities. If there is a new challenge in addressing rapidly changing audiences, then so this also translates into broadening its focus beyond Germany. Thus, scholars and educators in Jewish Studies need to adopt a more comparative European perspective and include Israel and Middle East studies in their repertoire. It is in these two somewhat conflicting goals that I see the greatest challenge for Jewish Studies in Germany.

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