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Beyond Collective Memory? The Reestablishment of Jewish Life in Post-Holocaust Germany

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To what extent is collective memory used as a lens through which people define their present-day reality? To what extent does communal remembrance implicate a manifestation of ideology? How do these questions specifically relate to practices of remembering and memorialization for German-Jews and non-Jewish Germans currently living in Germany? When dealing with memory as a collective enterprise, the objectivity of historical fact becomes subject to the political interests of competing groups. It is as well the variety of memories within Jewish communities that deflect off one another to create the present landscape of Jewish life in Germany. It is all of these memories, working alongside and against each other that reveal the production of memory practices.

A new Jewish Berlin?

In the summer of 2001, I spent six weeks in Berlin where I became familiar with the Jewish community and its members, and explored the many Holocaust-related memorial sites and museums that dot the city. When I first arrived, my intentions were to interview as many German-Jews as possible. The term German-Jew, however, has become rather ambiguous and is no longer open to straightforward definition. The destruction of Jewish life in Europe as it was known before the Second World War produced that effect. Today there are many different kinds of Jews living in Germany and no one is a German-Jew in the prewar sense of the word. There are of course those Jews born in Germany or those of German descent, but for the most part, even these individuals, their parents, or grandparents experienced the chasm imposed upon German-Judaism by the

Holocaust.

Some of the people I interacted with in Berlin were part of the first wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1970s, while others had arrived only since the end of the Cold War. German-Jew came to mean Jews of East European lineage who unwillingly settled in Germany immediately following the war and have been waiting for the chance to go somewhere else, *anywhere else* since then. Many of them are still waiting to leave, and their children, born in Germany, have since inherited this same outlook. I met Jews who were born in Germany but then managed to leave before the war and spent a substantial part of their lives in a foreign country. To be back in Germany, for them, was to be back in their *Heimat*, to be back where they felt comfortable. Yet they were always sure to make distinctions between a German-Jewish identity and a non-Jewish German identity. Then there were those Jews who were born in Germany, spent the majority of their lives there and had every intention of continuing to live their lives in Germany as Jews. These future-oriented impressions came mainly from those individuals affiliated with the liberal and alternative streams of Judaism that are egalitarian, open to gays and accepting of Jews of patrilineal descent. The newest Jewish presence in Germany is the influx of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and its satellite countries; they have been arriving by the thousands since the end of the Cold War. As they attempt to integrate into German society, their impact both demographically and socially on the Jewish communities across Germany, as well as their attitudes toward German society and the history of the Holocaust, represent a further reorientation and dynamic in German-Jewish relations.

The role of collective memory in the reestablishment of Jewish communities in Germany is the main focus of this paper. Present-day Jewish communities in Germany continue to define themselves and to be defined by others in relation to the Holocaust. Even though the majority of Jews living in Germany today are of the second and third generations following the Holocaust, they seem, for the most part, unable to form an identity outside of an event that they never directly experienced. Since collective remembering does not require a direct experience of the object or event being remembered, it is often the case that public discourse and state ideology infringe upon

practices of group memory. What then, if any, is the possibility for a normalized relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans to develop outside of the boundaries of former victim and former oppressor?

Jewish life in Germany since the Holocaust

The contradictions and obstacles that have faced Jewish community and identity formation in the decades following the Holocaust arise out of the paradox of an almost 6000 year old religion suddenly confronted with a defacement of its history. Although the beliefs and practices of the Jewish people were not altogether erased by the Holocaust, Jewish life in Europe as it was known before the war had been successfully eradicated. If Jewish life in Germany were to continue, a serious renegotiation of both past and present would be necessary.

The initial postwar Jewish communities that emerged in Germany were composed of two very different groups: Jews of German descent and Jews of East European ancestry. About 15,000 German-Jews managed to survive the war on German soil, either in hiding or in mixed marriages. At the conclusion of the war about 8000 of these Jews chose to stay in Germany. There were also an additional 2000 – 3000 German-Jews who returned to Germany after having either been transported to East European concentration camps, or who had managed to emigrate from Germany prior to the drafting of the Final Solution in 1942. These Jews who willingly chose to remain in or return to Germany after 1945 attempted to reclaim the cultural and economic prosperity of their prewar lives. Instead, they encountered a land that had been devastated by war and ideologically ravaged by a totalitarian regime. In the pre-Holocaust era of the Weimar Republic, German-Jews represented the ability of a minority group to successfully integrate into a majority society. Although anti-Semitism persisted throughout this time as well, never in the history of Jewish life in Germany had there been a time of such widespread social, economic and structural success for Jewish communities as occurred during the interwar period. From a religious point of view, however, this time period was also one of substantial assimilation.

The second and larger component of postwar Jewish communities was made up of 200,000 East European Holocaust survivors who were brought to Germany at the end of the war against their will. These individuals were referred to as Displaced Persons (DPs) and their presence in Germany was marked by their temporality in refugee camps. In contrast to their German-Jewish counterparts, these Jews were primarily orthodox with a strong traditional connection to Judaism. The first Jewish communities to emerge in postwar Germany developed from the ones established by East European survivors within the DP camps. However, many of these DP communities dissolved as soon as Jews began emigrating toward Israel and North America at the end of the 1940s. From the approximately 200,000 DPs that resided in German refugee camps in the years immediately following the war, only about 15,000 of them stayed in Germany at the time of their closure (Rabinsbach and Zipes 28). Their motivation to remain in Germany had more to do with psychological and physical inability to immigrate to a new country or to face the hardships of an underdeveloped Israeli state than with a direct interest in Germany itself. These 15,000 East European Jews were to join the 8000 German Jews who had chosen to remain in Germany as well. Together, these two groups formed the first Jewish communities, as well as represented a new dimension of Jewish life in Germany, following the war and DP camp era.

Since the bulk of postwar Jewish communities was composed of East European Jews, it was assumed that these communities would quickly dissolve. It was rather clear that, for the majority of Jews remaining in Germany, it would only be a matter of time before they would receive their compensation for persecution from the German government and then move on to another country. For many East European survivors, a strong identification with the newly established state of Israel in 1948 also redirected the focus away from potential establishment in Germany. There existed only a minority group of returning leftist Jews or German nationalist Jews who had intentions of permanently settling in Germany (Brumlik 4). Otherwise there seemed to be a complete lack of belief that a Jewish community would ever arise in Germany again. In the first few years following the war, the social existence of the Jewish communities was mainly welfare dependent. Many of the East

European Jews who had remained in Germany had done so because they were too weak or sick to emigrate. Nonetheless most of these Jews, although almost fully dependent on social welfare agencies for shelter, clothing and food, insisted upon aid from Jewish-run organizations only. German social aid, as well as normal integration into the German economy, was resisted because, to some degree, it represented permanency (Brenner, *Rebuilding* 71). It was for this reason that the establishment of the Central Council of Jews in Germany in 1950 as the first sign of institutional permanency of Jewish life in Germany was particularly significant (Brenner 77). In the decade following the war and after the closure of the DP camps, the Jewish communities hardly grew in number. There were, however, several small-scale waves of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s from Poland, Russia and other Eastern Bloc countries. In the 1980s, the years leading up to the decline of the Soviet Empire, Jewish life in Germany continued to be of an ambiguous nature. The institutional capacity of big-city communities was relatively rich; the large communities (Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich being the largest) had Jewish elementary and high schools, old age homes, newspaper and magazine publications, bookshops, and kosher stores and restaurants. However, most Jews continued to be rather detached from religious community life, and active participation was low.

In 1989, with the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the structure and appearance of Jewish life in Germany was radically transformed. The influx of ex-Soviet Jewry into Germany starting at the end of the 1980s and continuing at a rapid pace up to today has had huge demographic effects on Jewish communities. Nationwide, Jewish communities in Germany have experienced a tremendous population increase. The official Jewish population in 1997 was 67,471 (*Statistisches Jahrbuch für die BRD*). The population size may actually be quite a bit higher when taking into account the number of Jews living in Germany but not officially registered with the community;¹ some estimates indicate as many as 80,000 Jews in Germany. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1988, the official Jewish population in West Germany, including West Berlin, was 27,552 (*ibid.*).

The principle characteristics of the new Soviet Jewish immigrants indicate that the majority is young, educated and secular.

For the most part, they have settled in larger German cities, with a considerable majority in Berlin. In the larger Jewish communities, religious councils are still governed by the original members of the community (members from before the influx of immigration). The smaller communities have already been engulfed by the new immigrants from the East as they progressively achieve majority status (Sandford).

Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union are managed by an agreement passed in 1991 between the federal and the various state governments of Germany and the Central Council of Jews in Germany. According to this agreement, new immigrants are guaranteed "generous welfare benefits and integration programs" (Sandford 327). However, the Jewish communities provide the main source of financial and social support to incoming Soviet immigrants.

In his essay "A Reemergence of German Jewry?" Michael Bodemann considers the role of secular Soviet Jews as they enter already ethnically fragmented communities of Jews in Germany. The Holocaust, in physically and mentally uprooting German-Jews from their prewar history, has been central to a remodeling of Jewish identity in Germany following the war; up to 1989 it has largely prevented Jewish culture and identity (of a mainly non-religious character) from flourishing as it did prior to the war. Jews of both East European and German descent impede this possibility by their continued use of Holocaust memory as a marker of current Jewish identity. With the fall of the Soviet empire, however, and the sudden influx of Jewish immigrants into Germany, the basis for identity construction has changed. The new Jewish immigrants are bringing with them a different experience of 20th century history, a different sense of collective memory, and thus a different perception of current German society:

What most [Russian Jews in Germany today] have in common is that in contrast to present-day German Jewry, the Stalinist purges – not Auschwitz – are their primary trauma, and they are developing the patriotism of the immigrant, a phenomenon known all too well from North

America: they are grateful for being able to start a new life in Germany. (Bodemann 14)

Bodemann suggests that Soviet Jewish immigrants, after half a century of living under communist rule, are more likely to espouse the secular relationship to Jewish life than even the German-Jews of the Weimar Republic once did. Soviet Jews greatly value their newly gained freedoms once in Germany; present-day German society is a positive leap economically, politically and culturally, as compared to previous conditions in the Soviet Union. Along with the fact that the majority of Soviet immigrants are young and ready to assimilate into their new society, Bodemann advances the probability for a German-Jewish community predominantly influenced by the culture and tradition of *German*, as opposed to Jewish, society to arise. According to this, the focus is no longer on the emergent possibility of new *Jewish* life in Germany or of German-Jewish *prewar* identity. Rather we are considering the likelihood of the unprecedented emergence of a *German-Jewry*.

What should be emphasized from this line of reasoning is that the influx of Soviet Jews since 1989 not only affects the demographics of Jewish communities, but also provides a new source of Jewish collective memory in Germany. As a result, the relationship between the two groups can potentially move beyond the one collective memory of the Holocaust that is grounded in blame and guilt. Bodemann focuses on the secular character of the incoming Soviet Jews and how this might lend itself to stronger identifications with German instead of Jewish culture, thus threatening to erode already religiously weak postwar Jewish communities. However, it should be pointed out that when Soviet Jews enter Germany, they do so primarily with the support of the Jewish community. Their entry into the country is officially sanctioned by the German government but it is "the Central Council of Jews in Germany and its social service organization (ZWST) [who] have spared no effort to integrate these Jews into the communities, helping them with jobs, apartments, and immigration" (Bodemann 54). The capacity of Soviet Jews' first exposure to these benefits of German social-democratic life is directly through the financial and social support of the Jewish communities, which is generally represented by the

synagogue. As such, it is fair to assume that integration into Jewish life will be furthered. Brenner even suggests that, "instead of turning outward with shrill tones, there now appears a need to make the even 'less Jewish' [new Soviet] immigrants into 'real Jews,' and in the process, [the already established Jews of Germany] often encounter [their] own Judaism" (Brenner, *Community* 156). Although newly arrived Soviet Jews offer yet another element of heterogeneity into Jewish communities, their influence also has the potential to bridge the gap between Jewish and non-Jewish German relations, as well as to imbue the already-existing Jewish communities with a newfound sense of Judaism. As Jewish life in Germany begins yet another phase of restructuring, the role that history and memory will continue to play is now more fragmented and diverse than ever before.

Memory as Ideology

In his book *On Collective Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs stresses that it is through the lens of the present that groups interpret and reinterpret the past. The extent to which this notion applies to present day Jewish identity formation in Germany needs to be examined under the theoretical lens of collective memory and the ideology involved in the very construction of memory itself.

Much research on the topic of memory functioning at the group level makes use of the term collective memory. Theoretical inquiry of collective memory is largely based on the work of Halbwachs, who speaks of memory as a social construction that is propelled by group dynamic and different social frameworks. Individuals are the central remembering agents, but it is only in the context of others that the process of remembering is possible: "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories" (38). Although more than one social framework may be at play, it is the presence of the social world which acts as a trigger of memory. This reserve of memory is itself a product of a previous or current social framework or frameworks that vary according to social factors such as ethnicity, class, age and race. It is thus necessary to consider the nature of the collectivity and the fact that often there

is more than one collectivity enacting a particular memory. Other scholars have criticized Halbwachs' seemingly simplistic account of collective memory. In his essay "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures," Jeffrey Olick has countered collective memory with the term *collected* memory, which does not assume *one* homogenous collectivity enacting only *one* memory. Current Jewish communities in Germany are certainly collectivities of diverse composition (i.e. DP camp refugees from Eastern Europe, Jews of German descent, Soviet Jews from past and current waves of migration). Nonetheless, Olick supports collective memory in the sense that it centralizes both the role of the group in the construction of its own memory and the extent to which "the past is remade in the present for present purposes" (341). There is still use in speaking of collective memories in order to assert that collectivities themselves have memories, just as they have identities. Olick supports this viewpoint by stating that ideas and institutions, although capable of meaning on an individual level, will not accrue as much significance or meaning until they are interpreted or experienced on a collective level. "Groups, for instance, tend to act more extremely than individuals. Additionally, there are clearly demonstrable long-term structures to what societies remember or commemorate that are stubbornly impervious to the efforts of individuals to escape them" (342). This paper continues to refer to *collective* memory while taking into account the heterogeneous composition of the collectivities engaged in practices of remembering.

The act of remembering at the group level is a means for collective mobilization and identity formation. To ask *why* groups remember is to also question *who* is in the best position to assert his or her version of history. Memory at the collective level thus becomes a political enterprise, often subject to ideology. When considering Jewish communities in Germany today, we must also consider the many factors and influences emanating from their social environment. Jewish communities are not collectivities of memory in and of themselves. Jewish remembering in Germany must also take into consideration German remembering, or lack of remembering. Politically, Jewish communities function under the greater authority of the government of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as functioning under the religious organization

of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. As such, the potential ideology confronting Jewish communities is multi-faceted, and most certainly affected by a variety of interests and ends that are not always compatible with one another.

Just as there is no single Jewish collectivity in Germany, there is certainly no single German collectivity. The most obvious of divisions centers on Germany's political separation following the war and up until 1989. The GDR was, to an extent, able to disregard active engagement with Holocaust memory in public discourse, as it instead focused on the construction of a new socialist, anti-fascist state. By embracing Socialism, the ideological opposite to Hitler's fascist state, the GDR denied responsibility of Holocaust memory and of having to come to terms with the past. Therefore, any mention of Germany's memory of the Holocaust prior to 1989 implicates Western Germany alone.² In the west, it was not until the 1968 student revolts when the *second* generation, the children of the war generation, advocated the need for confronting its history in public discourse. Most relevant, however, is the enactment of memory in the 1980s, considered the "Decade of Memorialization" and orchestrated by Kohl's Christian-Democratic government, as Germans began dealing with their past through a deluge of commemoration ceremonies, construction of Holocaust museums, memorial statues, and plaques throughout the country. Within this context, collective memory as an ideological process involves not only the will to exercise power, but also the ways in which memory are deliberately used as a tool for or against a consciousness of guilt.

Memorialization practices

Halbwachs speaks of acts of commemoration as a bonding and unifying reaffirmation of a group's cohesion. He refers to these acts of remembrance as historical memory (23). Individuals, he maintains, do not directly remember events. Rather, the memory of a particular event will be stimulated indirectly through ceremonies, written texts, and in the "[coming] together to remember... the deeds and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group. In this case, the past is stored and interpreted by social

institutions" (24). Memorialization, although important in terms of maintaining an awareness of the past, is problematic for this very same reason. Acts of memorialization are concrete symbols of the past that Hartman refers to as "anti-memory" in order to suggest that through memorialization, memory is compacted into a neat package that in no way represents the true atrocities of events such as the Holocaust (Wiedmer 4). It might be said that non-Jewish German society engages in these acts of commemoration to relieve feelings of guilt associated with the past; once the memorial object has been fixed into place, once the commemorative event has passed, all feelings of guilt have been transferred over, in a rather physical sense, onto the concrete memorial object or commemorative event. An illusion of redemption is thereby created in which the events of the history *appear* to have been dealt with and the history thus *seems* to be closed. Should every object of memorialization thus be looked at as representative of German society's transference of guilt to the point that it now feels that redemption of the past has been achieved? It might be helpful to conceive of memorialization practices as dialectic in character. On the one hand, memorialization is immediately and directly associated with remembering. On the other hand, the concrete and fixed object of most acts of memorialization negates the very history that the memory purports to sustain. This is particularly the case in Germany where there is very little awareness of actual present-day Jewish life. Although the Jewish population has been steadily growing in recent years, Jewish communities are still by no means a large and visible component of mainstream German society. In addition, Jewish communities tend to develop in larger cities, while the German population settles primarily in smaller surrounding towns. As such, the majority of German society has very little, if any, contact with actual living Jews. Rather the most prevalent representation of Jewish people occurs in the German landscape's abundance of plaques, statues and museums commemorating the dead Jews of the Holocaust. The possibility for a normalized relationship between the two groups is thus undermined; as Krondorfer suggests, memorialization practices embody ritual and repetition that ground the relationship between the commemorating group and the group being commemorated in a state of fixation (38).

Is the marginalizing effect just as strong when commemoration of victimhood stems from the group represented by the commemoration? Collective acts of memorialization by Jewish communities in Germany also tend to exacerbate the situation. Although the general conception is that it is of supreme importance to "never forget," one must also consider the repercussions of remembering too frequently. Primo Levi writes that memory that is evoked too often might become fixed in a stereotype, and the more accurate object of the memory becomes lost in the newly created stereotype (Fulbrook 142). As Rapaport suggests, Jews in Germany currently use the Holocaust in order to morally distinguish themselves from Germans according to an identity that is based in the status of innocent victim (31). Jewish communities are bound two-fold by their collective memory of this one specific historical event. Communal remembering often prevents Jews in Germany from perceiving non-Jewish German society outside of the lens of the Holocaust. At the same time, they tend to be perceived of by German society as objects (i.e. victims) of this particular historical event. This results in further alienating Jews from their German surroundings and perpetuating not only their own discomfort of living there, but also German society's perception of the Jew as victim.

Rapaport discusses the central role that collective memory has had in the identity formation of Jews in post-Holocaust Germany and suggests that for Jews living in Germany it is "memory and interplay of the Holocaust [that] have become a political weapon around which Jews more openly mobilize" (38). Rapaport makes reference to the benefits that Jewish communities have accrued in the decades following the Holocaust as a direct result of framing identity in relation to a victim status. In the last twenty years, Jewish museums, research institutions and Jewish studies programs have emerged throughout Germany. These forms of cultural capital have certainly strengthened the institutional structure of many Jewish communities. However, as mentioned, there are certain dangers for Jewish communities to have their entire identity centered on the Holocaust. When all interactions between Jews and non-Jewish Germans cannot seem to function outside of this context, both groups end up with distorted perceptions of one another. Along with

distortion come exaggeration, excessive sensitivities, overreactions and misunderstandings (Markovits 568). The simplified conception of Jewish identity represented by memorialization may provide the German population with the illusion that it in fact understands what Jewish identity entails. Within this framework, however, all that can really be recognized is an extended image of the Jew as victim and as outsider. Rapaport purports that the effect of basing self-identity on this one past event is a feeling of being "marginalized, alienated, afraid, unintegrated, reviled, uncomfortable, yet also admired and appreciated but most certainly different from its German surroundings" (Markovits 568).

In considering Rapaport's above-mentioned statement, there is a need to question the homogenous character imposed upon *the* Jewish collectivity in Germany. Rapaport groups together all Jews living in Germany under blanket terms. She negates the possibility that some variation may exist within the communities themselves in terms of national background, religious orientation and generational divide. As mentioned, reestablished Jewish communities are highly fragmented, primarily due to differences in historical and cultural background. Olick maintains that it is at times more accurate to refer to *collected* memory since it does not as readily presuppose the influence of only one memory and one collectivity, but allows for the collective memories of possibly more than one group (339). Moving beyond collective memory is important because it legitimizes the distinctions of current Jewish identity in Germany, and thus increases the possibility of moving toward more normalized relationships between the various enactors of Holocaust remembering.

The Holocaust lens

Berlin is an institutionally rich environment in which all the necessary elements for a strong Jewish community are in place. All that is missing, a sentiment echoed by most of those individuals that I interviewed, is active participation and a genuine interest in the religion outside the scope of the Holocaust. Gesa, a Jewish woman in her late 30s, maintains,

to be Jewish outside of Germany, especially in a city

like New York, is a lot more natural. In Germany, Jewish identities are defined by the Holocaust. Many Jews say, 'I am Jewish because my parents lived through the Holocaust.' Whereas in New York, or in other places that I have been to, Jews are Jewish because they hold it to be important, thrilling, interesting, or simply because they belong to the community. (Markus, Personal Interview)

Regardless of direct or indirect experience in Nazi-era Germany, the Holocaust as a point of reference in identity formation reverberates continuously in the Jewish consciousness. Rabbi Ehrenberg of the Orthodox congregation in Berlin is in his late fifties, has Israeli citizenship but has been living outside of Israel, and for the last seven years has been leading congregations first in Austria and now in Germany. He maintains that Germany, due to its history, engenders a particular kind of Jew unlike anywhere else in the world.

Here, no one is a German-Jew. He is a Jew. And the Jews in Europe and in Germany in particular are very strongly tied to Israel as their homeland. We must also understand that because of the past, the survivors of the Holocaust, the people who lost family, remained here but not as Germans. In two, three generations it may no longer be like this. But momentarily, it is my impression that many young people are leaving Germany in order to go to Israel or to England. Maybe in a couple of generations, Jews will choose to remain here, and more Jews will have the feeling that they are accepted here. [...] But for now, the injuries of the Holocaust, emotionally speaking, are still there. (Ehrenberg, Personal Interview)

A consciousness of guilt

Gesa relates her worries concerning the framing of Jewish identity in relation to the Holocaust.

The Holocaust is amazingly present and actual. In the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, the topic appears in every issue. And the current discussion of the memorial here in Berlin is constantly being discussed; there is always something being debated about. In academic and intellectual circles, it is discussed at a very personal and conscious level. When there are problems confronting the Jewish communities, things are dealt with very well. With arguments, in the public discourse, things are really good. But sometimes things are too oversensitive and this can be very embarrassing. There are even certain standard words or phrases used when speaking about Jews. "Our fellow Jewish citizens" for example. It's almost like "my small little puppy." It's meant well, but doesn't always come out sounding that way. (Markus, Personal Interview)

There are many instances of stagnant representations of Jewish life in relation to the Holocaust. Gesa, in reflecting on the way in which the Holocaust was taught in her high school in southern Germany, expresses a rather common sentiment about the inevitable association in Germany between Jews and the Holocaust.

What's interesting is that [the Holocaust] was taught from a history textbook, in a chapter entitled 'ancient Israel.' So really something that deals with antiquity. In this book, the chapter on Israel was introduced with photos of the Holocaust. I criticized that very strongly. It is a symbol of a very big problem that Judaism today in Israel is often looked at as stemming out of the Holocaust, that the Jew is only looked at as a victim. It's not that the

Holocaust is not taught enough; it's that Judaism as a topic separate from the Holocaust is never, or hardly ever, considered. (Markus, Personal Interview)

Multi-faceted representations of memory

The Jewish communities of Germany today are "schizophrenic," as Barak, an Israeli-born German-Jew pointed out, because of the heterogeneity of cultures and backgrounds, and because of the constant renegotiation between past and present that is visible in almost every component of Jewish life in Germany.

It was mentioned by several of the people I interviewed that Berlin and its Jewish community, the largest in Germany today, is atypical of the whole of Germany. This has much to do with the central role that Berlin, a city physically, politically and culturally divided for 28 years, has had in bringing together, since 1989, its western and eastern communities into one. Historically, Berlin is also where the Liberal stream of Judaism has its roots. Today the more alternative branches of Judaism, those who recognize gay Jews and Jews of patrilineal descent, continue to have the proper breeding ground in Berlin. Along with the element of transformation offered to Jewish life in Germany by the growing number of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union, a strong sense of renewal is also attributable to the younger generation of German-born Jews who accept Germany, not only as their arbitrary birthplace, but also as a fertile environment for a progressively restructured Judaism. These two collectivities offer the most important model of restructuring Jewish life in Germany because their basis of identity is not grounded in one collective memory dominated by the Holocaust. Also, both groups are involved in reinterpreting Judaism altogether. For the time being, the Soviet Jews may not be very active within Jewish life, but their participation at whatever level is certainly making a mark on the communities they are entering. Martin, a young father living in the Bavarian town of Regensburg, expressed enthusiasm at the growing presence of Soviet Jews in his congregation.

I am happy that so many Soviet Jews are entering our community. Most are older individuals but there are young families as well and this is certainly strengthening the congregation. Were it not for them, Saturday morning and holiday services would be empty. (Kurz, Personal Interview)

For the most part, post-Holocaust Jewish communities around Germany have been slow to reestablish themselves outside of the spectrum of politicized memory as differing Jewish and non-Jewish German interests deflect off one another. The Soviet pulse and the alternative scene, however, counterbalance these barriers by shifting the focus and looking ahead.

Jews from the former Soviet Union bring with them memories and perceptions of German society that are separate from the otherwise ubiquitous Holocaust lens. As such, they are capable of establishing themselves in German society with a future-oriented gaze. This affects change in the already established communities as well. Arcady, a Jew from the former Soviet Union himself, came to Germany in the first wave of Soviet immigration in the 1970s. His impression concerning the current influx reveals its impact on Jewish life.

Since coming to Germany in 1976 there have been two dramatic developments that are worth mentioning. The first has to do with the unification of Germany and the second with the reunification of Berlin and the two Jewish communities. After the reunification, we encountered a huge wave of Jewish migration from the former Soviet Union. The population of the community rose considerably in number. And there were certainly new pulses that came into the community with the new immigrants. Now the community is no longer monolingual, but bilingual: German and Russian. (Fried, Personal Interview)

Dinah, a young woman in her 20s, also considers the changes

to the Jewish community brought on by the current wave of immigration.

When I was in [Jewish] elementary school, the kids there were all kids of survivors: people who came to Germany after the war. After the fall of the Berlin wall, many people came from the East. The community has already changed a lot because of that. (Gelehrter, Personal Interview)

Mass migration into already fragmented Jewish communities creates problems as well. Although heterogeneity within a community may prove to have many positive results, the threat to communal cohesion in the face of cultural, historic and differing religious orientation inevitably arises. Frau Wolff, a German born Jew, speaks of her experience with Soviet Jews in the Jewish seniors' residence where she currently lives.

Immigration is a big topic these days. There are many Russian Jews coming into Germany now and they want nothing to do with us. They have a different mentality. I am not judging this. I was also an immigrant at one point. But you have to adapt to the people in your new land as well. (Wolff, Personal Interview)

Although it is important to consider the effects that this new presence of Soviet Jews are having on the inner structure and cohesion of the Jewish communities, it is also necessary to consider the extent to which Jews from the former Soviet Union, drawing on a different set of historical and cultural backgrounds, may influence and change current Jewish life. Their influence on Jewish life is potentially problematic because, coming from secular socialist states, this group is generally lacking in religious identification. This, however, may quickly change since they receive such a high level of integration into Jewish communities upon arrival in Germany. For most Jewish immigrants from the East, the first exposure to German society is through the financial and social support of

the Jewish communities. As such, it is rather probable that their affiliation with Judaism will grow at least to some extent. This new Jewish component in Germany redirects the focus, if only partially, away from a Holocaust memory that is often imbedded in ideology and a consciousness of guilt.

For the most part, those people interviewed who expressed the most optimistic accounts of the current situation of Jews in Germany were individuals directly involved with leadership positions in the community, those of German, as opposed to East-European Jewish background, and those who have ties to more liberal leanings within Judaism.

For Jews living in Germany today it seems as if acceptance of a permanent Jewish life in Germany functions primarily with a renegotiation of Judaism altogether. Tali, a woman in her early 20s of German-Jewish ancestry has spent her entire life living in Germany and is an active member of the Egalitarian Jewish movement currently growing in Berlin. She is the first female cantor in the country and is very supportive of the progressive and alternative streams of Judaism. "Judaism here in Berlin is interesting because it is so pluralistic," she says. "We have the Orthodox stream and the Conservative-Liberal, the Progressive, and even the Egalitarian synagogue that welcomes female cantors and rabbis. This is progress." When asked whether or not she considered Germany to be her home, she enthusiastically agreed that, regardless of her dual Israeli-German citizenship, Germany is definitely her *Heimat*. Tali is as well involved in active dialogue between the Jewish community and the Christian one. In speaking of the possibility that Germans today might be resentful of the growing Jewish communities in Germany, her response was as follows:

I think that it is definitely a problem for some. But for others the reunification of the Jewish communities has since made them more open, tolerant and accessible. Therefore Christian communities can learn a lot about Judaism now. That in and of itself is wonderful. I go to churches and schools where I speak about Judaism. Through this, a strong openness between the communities is

established. Therefore there is no longer so much refusal to know about one another; issues between the communities become familiar and people become more aware of the parallels between the communities. (Gestellter, Personal Interview)

Conversely, there seems to be a strong link between traditional Jewish adherence and East-European lineage and an inability to perceive Germany outside of the lens of the Holocaust. Dinah, the young woman mentioned above, although she has spent her entire life in Berlin, feels bitterness and resentment toward her birth country. Unlike Tali, Dinah's grandparents stem from Eastern Europe and her paternal grandfather is a survivor of the Holocaust. Dinah is a member of the Conservative synagogue and is on the executive of the *Jüdischer Studentverband*, a student association connected with the Orthodox and Conservative synagogues. She attends synagogue regularly and takes a strong interest in the Jewish activities of the community. When asked whether or not she considered Germany to be her home, she answered that,

on the one hand, yes. I have lived here my whole life; my entire family lives here as well. But I want to leave. I don't want to remain here forever. I can imagine myself staying here and raising a family, but not happily. I would really like to go somewhere else: England, Israel, maybe even to North America, although I have never been there. (Gelehrter, Personal Interview)

Even though neither Dinah nor her parents had direct experience of Germany under Nazi rule, present-day Social Democratic Germany continues to be perceived through the scope of a fascist history. The result of this is that any circumstance, negative or positive, is interpreted in terms of the past and in language indicating that progress and change have only superficially been achieved for appearance's sake. Dinah answers the following when asked how German society has changed since the events of the Holocaust:

It has become quieter. People don't say anything now because they think that if anything anti-Semitic is said, then the *Zentralrat* will immediately come out and cause an uproar. Actually the Germans have not changed. Of course there are some now who are different. Even during the war there were people who thought differently. But overall they have all just become quieter. I guess the young people have become more liberal but I don't think that things have really changed otherwise. (Gelehrter, Personal Interview)

Daniel, who was born in Germany and is in his late teens, expresses similar resentment toward German society. Like Dinah, he has spent his entire life in Germany and has Eastern-European Jewish lineage. Daniel is an active member of the Orthodox synagogue and serves on the executive of the *Jüdischer Studentverband* as well. He expressed to me a strong resentment of Germany. Although we met under friendly terms after a Friday evening synagogue service, his bitterness toward German-Jewish related issues were aggressively voiced. His response as to whether or not he considered Germany to be his home brought up his deep-rooted resentment of both past and present-day German society.

I want as little to do with anything German as possible. I am here now because I have to be. My family is here and this is where I can get my education for free. But as soon as I can, I will leave for Israel. For the time being, I go out of my way to avoid anyone who is German, and if possible, anyone who is not Jewish. You can still see the hate in their eyes. I don't see any point in talking to them. (Daniel, Personal Interview)

Of rather different mindsets are German-born Jews of German ancestry such as Elisa and Gesa. Similar to Tali, both are active members of the more modern and alternative Jewish streams.

Elisa, a 40-year old woman, is the founder of a woman's rabbinical league, studying to be a rabbi, editor of the Jewish community's official magazine *Jüdisches Berlin*, and a strong advocate of redefining Judaism in the changed German landscape of the 21st Century. Elisa was born in Düsseldorf and has a long family history in Germany. The history of the Holocaust is a definite factor of her life in Germany, but her association with it is more academic and based in trying to incorporate such a history into a renewed present.

Except for my studies in the Netherlands, I have always lived in Germany. It is my culture. Like many Jews here, because of the past, I have given thought to leaving. I spent three months in Israel and I have been to the U.S. many times, but my personal questions as an intellectual, as a journalist could not be asked there. I need the German environment in which to ask my own questions and in which I can further grow. I come from a mixed family: my mother is Jewish and my father is non-Jewish. So the German culture is also very important to me. My family's Jewish history in Germany dates back to the 14th century. I have my roots here. (Klapheck, Personal Interview)

Memory as such is used in a very specific manner. Elisa, along with other Jews sharing her outlook, redefines the memory of the Holocaust into the present so as to give Jewish life a new, future-directed meaning. This process is very different from the way in which memory is perceived and implemented by individuals such as Dinah and Daniel. For them the German past negates the possibility of Jewish life in the present. They perceive their presence in Germany as temporary and look to Israel, the rest of Western Europe or North America when considering the future.

Gesa, mentioned earlier, is a colleague of Elisa's and has a German-Jewish background. She was born in Germany but often moves between Germany and Israel, where she is studying to be a rabbi within the Liberal stream of Judaism. Germany, as she emphatically repeats three times, is her home. This does not mean,

however, that she is not engaged with issues of the past or current dilemmas of Jewish existence in Germany. Gesa mentioned several times that German society seems incapable of viewing Jewish communities outside of the discourse of Holocaust memory. At the same time, however, she considers the artificiality, as it might be labeled, with which Jews in Germany are currently being treated, as a necessary step toward acceptance of new Jewish life in Germany.

In Germany, it has become completely impossible to make publicly intolerant statements against Jews without any serious repercussions. To give an example, a German literary critic has said that to be Jewish in Germany is not normal. When, for example, someone is giving a lecture about Kafka and interpreting his work, the context of his Judaism becomes the central point. It is impossible to have anything to do with Judaism that goes unnoticed. But I am not saying that this is altogether bad. One can, of course, criticize the current situation, but at the same time, one needs to think about the time period. If you consider how horrible the situation was leading up to and during the Holocaust, and how, now, an entire society has managed to turn around in the way it deals with and looks at Jews, then I would say that a lot of progress has been made. Of course, when one looks at this situation from a more ideal point of view, then there is certainly much to criticize. And it's also important to criticize. There is a lot that needs to be changed, but at the same time, I think it is important to consider how much has already changed. (Markus, Personal Interview)

What do Jews like Tali, Dinah, Daniel, Elisa and Gesa tell us about memory, about the way in which memory defines past and present? And most importantly, what do they tell us about the way that all of these elements affect interactions with and perception of their non-Jewish German neighbors? All of the above-mentioned

individuals are part of the generation born after the Holocaust, yet the events of the Holocaust play themselves out actively in all of their memories and daily engagements in German society. Although they all share the wider definition of being Jewish along with a relatively similar age cohort, their different cultural heritage and particular Jewish orientation seem to have a tremendous effect on the way that history is perceived and subsequently applied to their current experience of Jewish life in Germany. Dinah and Daniel, those who are most resentful of German society and who see themselves mainly as outsiders anxiously awaiting to move to another country, both have East-European Jewish heritage and have strong traditional ties to Orthodox Judaism. Tali, Elisa and Gesa, those expressing optimism for the future of Jews in Germany, are all of German-Jewish descent, and very involved in more liberal-progressive forms of Judaism; they are very happy with the alternative scene that is growing within the German environment. Gesa relays the following:

In recent years, an important development in Germany has been the rise of more alternative Jewish congregations within the communities. What is really new is the awareness that the synagogues of our parents and grandparents are no longer appropriate. It is not altogether clear what changes are wanted or needed, but there is certainly awareness that change is necessary. And out of this sentiment has arisen the more alternative congregations within communities all across Germany, mainly here in Berlin, but also in other parts of the country. In Berlin there is the Egalitarian synagogue in the Oranienburgerstrasse, as well as a congregation that accepts Jews of patrilineal descent and gay Jews. In large or small cities, these groups function either as a direct part of the inner community, or more on the fringes. But what is important is that they are there and that they are growing. (Markus, Personal Interview)

When asked whether or not such an alternative scene could be found in Jewish communities elsewhere in the world, Gesa responded, "No, actually. This is particular to Germany. Other places have the reform, renewal and reconstructionist movements, but the alternative scene is really only present in Germany" (Markus, Personal Interview).

Regardless of the fact that neither Dinah nor Daniel had any sort of direct experience with the events of the Holocaust, their identities as Jews living in Germany seem to be marred by the presence of the Holocaust in their collective memory, seemingly most influenced by their East-European lineage and Orthodox affiliation. Cultural background and religious orientation certainly play an important role in perspective and identity formation. But to consider the extent to which they are at odds with the very environment in which they grew up – and both come from middle class families and have enjoyed the liberties and freedoms of growing up in a democratic western country – reveals the impact of collective memory beyond lived experience.

"Public frames of remembering" (Irwin-Zarecka 56) refers to the influence of public discourse on the construction of memory. As such, memory at the collective level is capable of transcending lived experience by creating empathetic attachment and awareness of history regardless of actual experience of it. According to Halbwachs, "group memberships provide the materials for memory and prod the individual into recalling particular events and into forgetting others. Groups can even produce memories in individuals of events that they never 'experienced' in any direct sense" (Olick *Collective* 335). This notion accounts for the extent to which certain second and third generation Jews define their identities in such close relation to the memory of the Holocaust, a memory that is essentially void of direct experience. The focus is on the ability of memory to now be politicized and imbued with ideological signification by the German State and by the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Thus, we can understand how young individuals such as Dinah and Daniel feel such strong resentment toward their German environment. The fact that other individuals of the same generation, such as Tali, Elisa and Gesa, have a more positive disposition toward Germany and continue to identify with Germany,

is testimony that collective memory does not function according to one collectivity enacting only one memory (thus creating the need for the term *collected* memory). Individuals such as these are not invincible to the effects of collective memory based in Holocaust discourse, but they manage to move beyond it by redefining the collectivity with which they identify.

Conclusion

The constructionist elements of memory are exposed once we consider memory as a source of social cohesion, as the object of political agendas and the tool around which guilt is either negated or advanced. It is the confrontation between various Jewish and non-Jewish German collective memories that in turn imparts identity to each group individually.

It has been more than fifty years since the liberation of Nazi concentration and extermination camps. As we begin a new century, it is clear that remnants of the past are not easily forgotten. Nor should they be. Jewish life in Germany today is not without its share of social, political and ideological conflict. Anti-Semitism is still a problem as is the difficulty for many second and third generation Jews, as well as non-Jewish Germans, to deal with their grim history. But the Germany of today is also quite different from Hannah Arendt's 1949 impressions of "the *nightmare* of Germany in its physical, moral, and political ruin" and the "deep-rooted, stubborn, and at times vicious refusal" of the Germans "to face and come to terms with what really happened" (403). The German government, in conjunction with the Central Council of Jews in Germany, is working to establish a positive relationship between Jewish and German communities. This is evident in the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a term expressing the idea of mastering the past that insists that Jews and its communities form a large part of the country's public consciousness. There are still many challenging issues that affect Jewish life in Germany today, but the voice of the government is strong in its willingness to help establish the Jewish community of the 21st century as a fixed entity of German society at large. To ensure this, however, we need to move away from a model of identity formation based in *one* collective memory. This model

of collective memory defined solely by the Holocaust becomes grounded in one ideology and thus obstructs the possibility of progress; Jewish communities stagnate by continually offering an image of themselves to general German society as victims. The image of the victim then becomes an extension of the construction of the other and confines current Jewish identity to stereotype and exclusion. New waves of Judaism, such as those offered by the immigrants of the former Soviet Union or by those engaged in a more liberal and alternative reshaping of Judaism itself, provide a new, and possibly more normalized orientation for Jewish life in Germany. When considering the reestablishment of Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany, it is necessary to take into account that life could not just pick up from where it left off in 1933. A chasm was imposed upon Jewish history that necessitates a shift in perspective if any form of Jewish life is to continue in Germany; a future-directed orientation is just as important as one that is centered on remembering and honoring the past. It is only then that the dialogue between former victim and former oppressor will finally take place in a newly defined language of reestablishment and renewal.

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Notes

¹ Official registration with the community refers to individuals who have paid an income-dependent tax to their religious congregation. All residents of a German city have the option of declaring no religious affiliation and are then exempt from religious taxation.

² Due to limitations of length, the variation of Holocaust memory practices between West and East Germany will not aptly be discussed in this paper. The focus will remain primarily on West Germany.

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