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## EDITOR'S NOTE



**F**OR SEVERAL MONTHS NOW, I have been editing the papers of 24 women working in different fields and in different places throughout the world. These women also come from very different parts of the Jewish community and work in a variety of settings: some are academics; some are writers; some are social workers. All originally presented papers in 1997 and 1998 at the Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women located at Brandeis University. Reading their work, thinking about their ideas, and sometimes struggling to translate them into English has been an unexpectedly absorbing experience for me and I've wondered what it is, exactly, that I find so rewarding. I've concluded that spending time in the company of an international, interdisciplinary group of Jewish women begins to fill a most basic and persistent need in me: the need of human beings to see themselves sympathetically represented and reflected in their culture.

As a Jewish woman growing up in post-war America, I rarely saw any semblance of my reflection in the mainstream culture. Although I grew up in the middle of New York City where almost everybody in my immediate world was Jewish, representations of Jews were absent from the museums I visited, the movies I saw, or the books I read in school. Except for *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which I consider problematic reading for a young Jewish girl, there was no Jewish heroine in the books of my childhood. I identified with active, adventurous girls like Jo March, Nancy Drew or Cherry Ames and liked reading about the dramatic lives of European and English queens. I didn't then notice that none of the women I was reading about were Jewish, or that Archie and Veronica seemed to have no Jewish friends; that there were no Jewish Mouseketeers; or that there were no Jewish girls in *American Girl* or *Seventeen*.

I was in my forties and listening to West Indian writer Jamaica Kincaid speaking at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston, when I suddenly perceived their absence (like Pnina Motzafi-Haller in her essay about *mizrahi* women in Israel, I applied the insight of an African-American woman to my own life). Jamaica Kincaid had done a brilliant and audacious thing: invited to choose her favorite painting at the museum and speak to a large audience about the reasons for her choice, she had beamed an old snapshot of her mother on the museum's large screen and talked about it.

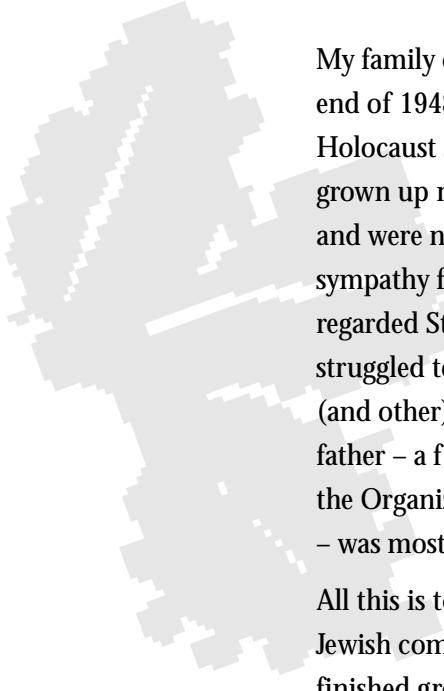
All of us in the audience, of course, had been accustomed to viewing the parade of art history on such a screen – from the Greeks to the Renaissance masters to the Impressionists and Abstract Expressionists. We were accustomed to oil portraits and elaborately framed photographs. The effect of Kinkaid's snapshot was shocking and made the author's point more forcefully than her words: Had we ever seen the image of an ordinary West Indian woman on the walls of a museum? Had we ever contemplated her face? Her body? Her surroundings? Her life? How did we ascribe value to this snapshot when it was viewed in a private photo album, in a newspaper, or here, in the context of other portraits in the museum? We had all read or at least heard of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, but what about the invisible woman? In this case, what about an entire sub-culture usually hidden by the majority African-American minority culture?

I viewed many of these working papers as such snapshots that raised some of these and many other questions.

In addition to experiencing a kind of invisibility as a Jewish girl in America, I also felt an invisibility in the Jewish community as the daughter of Czech Jews (of *ashkenazi* descent on my mother's side; *sephardi* on my father's). We lived on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where there were many Jewish refugees from Central Europe but where the definition of Jewish culture was determined by people who, like the majority of American Jews, were of Russian and Polish descent.

This particular group, I later learned, had jettisoned their working-class, Yiddish-speaking parents (as well as their working-class culture) in the Bronx, or Brooklyn, or Queens, or the Lower East Side.

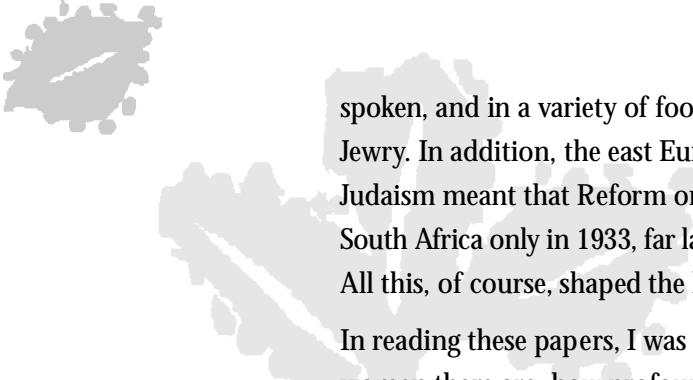
They were West Siders now, middle-class, highly educated, new Jews, who frequented the American – not Yiddish-language – theater and Lincoln Center, collected art, read the cultural sections of the *Times* and the *New Yorker*. The men worked as professionals; the women were delighted to be full-time homemakers in the image of Betty Crocker. Most were political liberals who had flirted with Communism or Socialism in college; they had friends or acquaintances who were blacklisted and were deeply affected by McCarthyism. They had also been deeply affected by the events of the second world war and were in every way invested in a prototypically 1950s American mainstream lifestyle.



My family entered this Upper West Side Jewish milieu towards the end of 1948 like creatures from another planet. My parents were *both* Holocaust survivors and political exiles from Communism. They had grown up middle-class, did not speak Yiddish, had never seen a bagel, and were not especially interested in Israel. Although they had no sympathy for McCarthyism, they were staunch anti-Communists who regarded Stalin as another version of Hitler. During the 1950s, they struggled to earn money and to adjust to America. Like many Jewish (and other) refugee women, my mother supported the family. My father – a former Olympic water polo player and sometimes officer of the Organization of Czech Sportsmen in-Exile-in-the Western World – was mostly unemployed until I was ten years old.

All this is to say that, as I was growing up, I felt as invisible in the Jewish community as I did in the American one. And when I had finished growing up, although I was counted as an American Jew, I still did not feel like American Jewish culture included me. G.B. could have been describing the Epsteins when she writes “Iranian Jews do not easily mesh with the majority Jewish culture. Those who live in North America feel marginalized: their experience has been that American Jews know nothing about them... The Iranian Jewish diaspora is triggering a re-examination of hegemonic notions of American Jewish identity. Iranian Jews with their own ethnic and cultural tradition are challenging the American Jewish culture that was brought from Eastern Europe and that is presumed to apply to all arriving Jews regardless of their background. This ashkenazi standard for Jews is similar to the WASP standard for assimilation to North American society.”

The issue of cultural hegemony is addressed in an even more dramatic way by South African Sally Frankental. “It is a truism to note that all Jewish communities, in all times and places, reflect the context in which they are located,” she writes. “In the South African case, the segregationist policies of the colonial authorities, the Boer republics, and the Union, followed by the apartheid system of the past fifty years, form the inescapable frame for all who live in South Africa... the disproportionate numbers who arrived from one region, Lithuania, gave the community an unusual degree of homogeneity relative to other diaspora communities. This was reflected in the virtual absence of Hasidism (until the 1970s), in the particular form of Yiddish



spoken, and in a variety of foods and customs particular to Lithuanian Jewry. In addition, the east Europeans' lack of exposure to Reform Judaism meant that Reform or Progressive Judaism was established in South Africa only in 1933, far later than in most diaspora communities." All this, of course, shaped the lives of South African Jewish women.

In reading these papers, I was struck by how many kinds of Jewish women there are, how profoundly we are influenced by our country of origin and the continuity or discontinuity of Jewish life within its borders, and by our experience of such factors as entitlement, dislocation, prejudice and outsider status. History, particularly this century's history, has not treated all Jewish women equally. In writing their papers, some authors – like Katalin Talyigas of Hungary – was reconnecting to and reconstructing the history of Jews in their country for the first time. Others, like Micaela Procaccia, who lives in Rome, is steeped in her history and writes with the surety of long immersion in the past: "In the year 1537, a Roman Jewish working class girl named Lariccia cried for days because of an unwanted match," begins her paper. "The day before the *qiddushin*, or betrothal, a washerwoman named Clementa heard Lariccia saying to her father: "I do not like this man, nor do I desire him. I refuse him and reject him, nor do I want him." She declared herself to be "the unhappiest of all women," and on the next Shabbat, she told her father that she would not agree to let "the *qiddushin* become *nissu'in*.' Her father then hit her with the butt of a knife."

The biographical section of this volume itself makes for fascinating reading – as much for the wide geographical spectrum represented as for the facts each woman deemed important to include. As different as each woman is, I find much in common with her. It was easy for me to enter into her world.

Although this first HRIJW collection of writing by Jewish women around the world is inevitably uneven and incomplete, it is a respectable beginning. The authors represented here are, in some countries, part of a larger scholarly and cultural project of researching and writing about women's lives; in others, they are pioneers – the first of their kind. In some countries, they have been able to draw on a large body of data and literature; in others, they are themselves creating that data and literature. Ana Lebl from Split (now in Croatia) lives in an aging and relatively poor community of only 100 Jews

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with scarce resources; Americans Riv-Ellen Prell and Pamela Nadell enjoy the support of Jewish Studies as well as Women's Studies departments at major American universities. Our Israeli and Latin American contributors bring both these realities into yet another perspective.

Some of the authors chose to spend time reworking their original presentations; others were content to have published what they originally presented. Many have struggled to express themselves in English – their second or third or fourth language. As a writer who has often had to communicate in foreign languages, I admire their pluck; as editor, I hope they forgive my journalistic bias, my many questions, and my inadvertent mistakes. Parts of all their work – even where it represents a starting point – moved and inspired me. I hope it will move and inspire you.

**Helen Epstein**

*October, 1999*

# JEWISH LIFE AND JEWISH WOMEN IN GERMANY TODAY

by Tobe Levin and Susanna Keval

“Jewish women are always in diaspora; being foreign is perfectly normal.”

Vivet Alevi in *Nach der Shoah geboren*

**W**hen we survey the international Jewish community, the Jewish community in Germany stands out as truly dynamic, having nearly doubled in the last ten years to become the fourteenth largest in the world. Compared to the pre-war Jewish population of 500,000, seventy-thousand German Jews may seem a paltry number. But fifty years after the *Shoah*, Jews have begun to regain visibility in journalism, the arts, and various domains of public life.

The situation of the Jewish woman in Germany after 1945 reflects community history as a whole. Following the *Shoah*, many Jewish immigrants entered the Federal Republic. Of these, few had been German citizens before 1945. The Jewish women (and men) resident in Germany today have their roots in, among other places, Poland, Hungary, Romania, the former Czechoslovakia, the former Soviet Union, Israel and, since reunification, Eastern Germany. The descendants of those Jews who for over 600 years had lived continuously in German-speaking realms and developed a highly complex culture, including a women's culture, today compose only a tiny minority of the German-Jewish population. Heterogeneity is the key element – at once binding and differentiating – that characterizes not only Jewish women but the community itself.

The linguistic and cultural diversity characteristic of the post-war German-Jewish community, though appearing problematic at first glance, has inspired productive and creative moments. Our article opens with a brief historical overview of Jewish women before the war, followed by several contemporary voices. Then, in two parts, we will look at the present situation of German Jewish life from a more personal perspective, inspired by our own heterogeneity.

Tobe Levin grew up in the 1950s as an American Reform Jew on the Jersey shore. Her point of view reflects an upbringing which consigned the experience of anti-Semitism in America to the older generations, as the unprecedented receding of Jew-hatred after McCarthy allowed those Jews who were not children of Holocaust survivors to entertain a naive disassociation from Christian society's past revulsion.<sup>1</sup> Levin arrived in Berlin in 1975 to research the German women's movement for her Cornell Ph.D. in comparative literature. Marriage in 1985 to Christoph Freiherr (Baron) von Gleichen formalized, ironically enough, her previously 'voluntary' contact to the Jewish Community in Frankfurt, where she had moved in 1979 to begin teaching for the University of Maryland in Europe.<sup>2</sup> At the urging of her philo-Semitic husband, she enrolled their three-year-old daughter Rosa in the *Lichtigfeld Schule*, a Jewish institution, from which Rosa transferred in August 1999 to an 'integrated' public *gymnasium*, with a nominally Christian majority and

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<sup>1</sup> This easing of anti-Semitism finds an interesting application in Karen Brodkin. *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The licensing procedure requires registering a religion – for tax purposes, as 10% of what one otherwise pays goes directly to the Church or synagogue. Thus officially 'joining' the Jewish Community by writing "Jewish" in the appropriate blank brought Tobe all the usual literature, invitations, etc.

a significant minority of Muslim students. Rosa's comment after her first day of school could also have served as our epigram. "Mom," she said, "even though we're Jews, they don't seem to be against us."

Although the contemporary German women's movement offered Tobe friendship and collegiality, she sees in her daughter's distrust a realistic sensitivity to what Letty Cottin Pogrebin has called the anti-Semitic virus, possibly dormant at present, but which can, like asymptomatic chicken pox, develop into shingles. In today's Germany, the conflagration would target not only, or even mainly, Jews, but also 'guest workers' and refugees, especially those from Africa. Recognizing that Jews and (other) foreigners need to make themselves heard, Tobe has been engaged outside Jewish circles, particularly with African diaspora women in the struggle to end genital mutilation. As she will explain in detail below, alliances between Black and Jewish women in Germany may be taken for granted, because, in fact, Jewish women here are not infrequently written about as 'Black'.

The perspective of Susanna Keval, in contrast, is one of an immigrant from the former Czechoslovakia, who has been living in Frankfurt since 1968. In search of her Central European family's tradition, she also connected to the heritage of liberal German Jewry. En route, Susanna not only founded a reformed egalitarian group that after six years has become an anchored part of Frankfurt Jewish life, but she has also discovered the broad field of Jewish women's studies which she is currently striving to establish within the university curriculum. Her recently completed dissertation, *Painful Work of Memory: German Resistance Fighters Speak About the Persecution and Annihilation of European Jewry*, will be published this autumn, (1) and exemplifies pioneer work in the field in Germany. Finally, Susanna is active in the Trialogue involving Jewish, Christian and Muslim women in Germany.

As German Jews, we are heirs to a distinguished tradition of German-Jewish women. The earliest known German Jewish woman writer, Glückel von Hameln, composed her *Memoirs* (2) in 1690-1691 in the form of a diary addressed to her children. This housewife and mother opens her narrative with a discourse on theological and moral principles which she encourages her children to follow. At the same time, she documents contemporary life in Hamburg at the close of the seventeenth century: religious conflict during the Thirty Years' War, anti-Semitic persecution and pogroms, arrival of the false Messiah Sabbatai Zvi, the plague, illnesses and the death of her first husband. As a widow, Glückel of Hameln saved the family's property by becoming a skilled businesswoman. The *Memoirs*, first published in 1896, preserve the record of a woman's daily life. Gluckel expresses her religious principles and opinions so clearly that a "feminine religiosity" and "domestic spirituality" have been attributed to her, in opposition to the public male ritual domain.

Another major historical influence is the cohort of Jewish women in Germany who lived at the end of the 18th century and into the early 19th. Enlightenment ideas and the option of emancipation entered Jewish communities as the *Haskalah*, and affected Jewish life in Eastern and Western Europe. The French revolutionary era witnessed increasing numbers of Jewish women venturing out into the Gentile world; their wealth and education encouraged their interest in, and made them interesting to, the Romantics whose acolytes were also somewhat socially marginalized. The most famous of these Jewish women, Rahel Levin Varnhagen von Ense (1771-1833), (3) maintained a salon that attracted not only philosophers like Hegel and Schleiermacher but the philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt and the brothers Grimm. Levin von

Varnhagen herself entered literary history as the author of essays and a vast correspondence. She also converted, but at a time when Orthodox practice provided the only Jewish option, we see this as the consequence of her desire for freedom from religious obligations. Levin von Varnhagen remained thirsty for knowledge, however, and produced a penetrating body of literary work. Today, she would be called a public intellectual.

The Jewish woman's presence in Germany's public life is further exemplified by Bertha Pappenheim who, without abandoning tradition, enjoyed a secular education and became the well-known founder of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* (Jewish Women's Movement). Its passionate pre-war campaigns have been brilliantly captured by historian Marion Kaplan. (4) Launched in 1904, the movement, affiliated with the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF) (Union of German Women's Associations), attracted mainly middle class un-waged mothers. Like its German gentile counterparts, the JFB believed in a politics of "separate spheres" and women's responsibility for social problems viewed as extensions of the household. It urged improvement in women's education (even if restricted to "female professions"), and organized social work to relieve the elderly, the orphaned, the impoverished and, above all, prostitutes. Bertha Pappenheim's 1927 *Sisyphus-Arbeit* [The Work of Sisyphus] described efforts to stop Jewish pimps and to save Jewish girls from the so-called "white slave trade."

What interests us most in Kaplan's statistics on the JFB are participation rates. Whereas the BDF at its acme served 500,000, a mere 1% of its constituency, (5) the JFB, in its first ten years, attracted 35,000 and attracted a membership of 50,000, representing a full 20% of eligible adults by the 1920s. Figures from 1933's record 60,000 adherents in 400 local chapters, clear evidence that Jewish women wanted to act on the world stage, moving beyond a sectarian or religious framework. At the same time, however, engagement in the JFB can be interpreted as filling a spiritual void in an epoch of increasing secularization, civil emancipation and assimilation.

Social work can easily be seen as a *mitzvah*; in fact, the JFB newsletter consistently debated the issue of religious content in project plans. That women had a more conservative than revolutionary role to play in the eyes of the movement's founder is implicit in the slogan "social motherhood," accompanied, however, by a disinterest in questions of public religious practice. To illustrate: when Lily Montagu, an executive board member of the Jewish Religious Union of England became the very first woman to preach in Berlin's Reform Synagogue, the JFB failed to exploit the occasion to urge amplified authority for women. It would take a few more years before the question of women in the rabbinate was raised and enthusiastically discussed, and before the first female rabbi, Regina Jonas, was ordained in 1935.<sup>3</sup> Had 1933 not marked the end of all such liberalizing developments, the unresolved issue of women's spiritual leadership and liturgical role would surely not have remained in the background, as it is today. (6)

### ***Nach der Shoah geboren***

The problems that Jewish women confronted after the second world war, in the 1940s and 1950s, were existential: founding families, achieving material security and overcoming the immediate trauma of the concentration camps. In addition, many Jews tried to reconnect to pre-war religious traditions, thereby

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<sup>3</sup> by Rabbi Max Dienemann of Offenbach

attempting to graft East-European *shtetl* practices onto the tree of pre-war liberal, enlightened, exterminated German Jewry. For these East European women, of course, this implied a continuity of gender-specific roles.

A chorus of Jewish female voices collected in the early 1990s by Jessica Jacoby, Claudia Schoppmann and Wendy Zena-Henry (7) initiates us into the perils of negotiating life in a world which, to a degree unlike elsewhere, witnesses the past moving along hand-in-hand with the present.<sup>4</sup> Autobiographical sketches from Jewish women whose origins include Argentina, Austria, France, England, Hungary, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, South Africa, Turkey, the USA, and both Germanies identify disturbances in the tranquil surface of mundane interactions while at the same time illustrating that Jews can live (well) in Germany and have even experience a cultural rebirth.

No one writer can speak for the others, yet themes recurrent in many entries come to the fore in Karen Margolis's piece. She finds "the meaning of Jewishness ... in ... rifts" caused by "constant immigration and emigration." (8) Born in Zimbabwe, she moved to South Africa and London before coming to Berlin to work as a freelance journalist and translator. "When asked what has molded me as a Jewish woman," she says, first, that "Hitler ... shaped my childhood" (9), as did exclusivity. "My father would sometimes say, 'Anyone not Jewish will put you in a concentration camp'" (10), from which Margolis concludes, "The Germans may not have succeeded in annihilating us, but they managed to stamp us as victims," (11) a stereotype magnified in Germany where, to escape the debilitating image, Margolis followed many Jews into radical politics. Typically, she entertains contradictory views of Jewish life in Germany. She believes that "assimilation is perhaps the greatest myth of the twentieth century" (12) while contending that neo-fascism remains unappealing to the vast majority of Germans with whom she interacts.

As Erica Fischer phrases it, "Germany is probably the most secure country in the world for Jews today – as long as you don't flaunt it." (13) A journalist, Fischer devotes herself to themes characteristic of Jewish women in this collection: Blacks in South Africa, Slovenians in Austria, foreigners in Germany, women the world over – racism, sexism, and marginality. "Only later did it dawn on me: in a spiraling process I was moving ever closer to myself." (14)

Although contributors to this volume uniformly stress one thing – that German xenophobia targets other 'Others' more viciously today than it does Jews – the tale of Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, an open lesbian in the Bundestag from 1987 to 1990, is instructive. Born in Jerusalem, Oesterle-Schwerin is often asked, "How can you live here after all they did to you?" The subtext she hears is: "Why in the world did you come back?" which sounds to her very close to "Why don't you go home?" Her repartee is: "How can *you* live here? Does it mean you've forgiven the Nazis their crimes?" (15)<sup>5</sup>

If heterogeneity characterizes the community, ambivalence is its attitude. Speaking in Berlin at Israel's 50th birthday celebration, Ambassador Avi Primor claimed that, "after the USA, Germany is Israel's best friend in the world." (16) Many German Jews would agree. What other country has witnessed hundreds of thousands of citizens forming candlelight processions against xenophobia as the Germans did in 1991?

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<sup>4</sup> *Nach der Shoah Geboren. Jüdischer Frauen in Deutschland.* (Born After the *Shoah*: Jewish Women in Germany)

<sup>5</sup> Since the book has not been translated, we recommend the comprehensive review by Tobe Levin, in Bridges. *A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends*. Vol. 6, No. 1 Summer 5756/ 1996. 111-118.

And the phenomenon of a Jewish Community College in Frankfurt (where Tobe taught in the early 1990's) sustained by the enthusiastic enrollment of mainly non-Jewish Germans.

However, the late Ignatz Bubis, head of the organized Jewish Community in Germany, often insisted on "the fine line between anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism." (17) Similarly, to open his 1997 discussion of German/Jewish relations Munich historian Michael Wolffsohn wrote: "In the beginning was mass murder." (18) Although they are warned *not* to limit their reading of German history to the line that leads from Bismarck to Hitler, many scholars do – with good reason. Half a century after the slaughter, the *Shoah* continues to mark Jews in Germany and Germans of Christian descent, of whatever gender.

Let's look in on a 1994 board meeting of the *Frauen Media Turm*, the major archive of the German feminist movement in Cologne. Directed by Alice Schwarzer (the closest German counterpart of American feminist Gloria Steinem) the influential group included Anke Brunn, then Minister of Education for North-Rhine Westphalia; Dr. Rita Süßmuth, then President of the Bundestag; as well as a handful of professors (with women presently at about 3% of the highest rank, you can appreciate the selectivity). I, Tobe, am the only Jew.

After the meeting adjourns and we are enjoying a Pilsner in the cobbled courtyard overlooking the Rhine, sister board member Sigrid Metz-Göckel, head of the Women's Studies advanced degree program at the University of Dortmund, tells me about her graduate students' projects. Half a dozen have chosen Jewish themes, she says, so will I come to give a talk? In Dortmund, they have no Jewish women colleagues. Of course, I nod. My pleasure. My real, if clearly ambivalent, pleasure. Though we don't articulate the reasons why Dortmund has 'no Jews', the air thickens as, in 1994, we touch the past. (19)

This past is treacherous. It continues to invade the present, coloring the perception of things. For example, it was April 1990 before I ever "saw" a Jew the way a German is taught to see him, with the heightened sensitivity born of the German context. The Jewish 'look' – I picked this up in part from Gentile relatives habitually pointing out how this or that person on TV 'looks' Jewish – includes traces of traditional Jewish stereotypes, such as larger than average noses and more than normally nappy hair, but also more subtle elements: the turned-out, upturned hand and the shrug of the shoulder. What I might have perceived, and, in the diaspora, been drawn to as a hint of New York and home, is coded here as Jewish, visibly Jewish. But visibility – an unconscious remnant of the Shoah – poses problems. Just as gentile Germans constantly confront their guilt or, equally consciously, decide not to confront it, Jews constantly face the challenge of trying to keep out of sight when in public or of coming out.

Recently when entering the *Friedberger Landstraße* branch where I had been banking for the past eleven years, I suddenly – and quite unusually – felt embarrassment. There to open a standing order for my daughter's fees at the *Lichtigfeldschule*, a teller I'd never seen before approached. He was short and heavy-set, with olive skin, and tight black curls. He also bore himself in a way that told me "I am a Jew!" Although I was relieved at first, mortification returned with his resonant voice: "Great! So she's going to the Jewish school?" I could have sworn they heard him in the attic. I felt uncomfortable, exposed, unsafe.

And yet, despite both my sensitivity and the Brandenburg election, anti-Semitism has waned. In 1949, for instance, the *Allensbacher Institut für Demoskopie* registered anti-Semitic attitudes in 50% of the German population. In the mid-80s that had fallen to 15%. (20) The American Jewish Committee found that in the period 1985-1995, the Germans were the best informed of all nations about the Holocaust after the Israelis

and no more anti-Semitic than Americans, the British, the French or some Eastern Europeans. The *AJC World Opinion Update* of February 1995 reports that only 22% of German respondents rejected hypothetical Jewish neighbors compared to 31% of Austrians in 1991; 30% of Poles in 1995; and 24% of Russians in 1992. Anti-Semitism's lowest scores came from Hungary with 17% in 1991; Great Britain at 12% in 1993; and the United States, with 5% in 1989. (21) Wolffsohn concludes: "Of course Germany produces anti-Semitic acts and crimes, but in comparison to other countries, Germany belongs to the top end of the tolerant nations. For many, these findings don't jive with the *Weltanschauung*. But they're true." (22)

What does anti-Semitism truly mean for us living in Germany today? It is an omnipresent irritation that can appear unexpectedly, even in the least aggressive, unintentional expressions or objects. Leon Poliakov describes this phenomenon as a collective trauma, that comes from as far back as the Crusades, has been incorporated into the Jewish liturgy as well as psyche, and become part of collective memory. The German Jewish sensibility stems from this constant and sometimes unconsciousness awareness that 'normality' remains elusive.

Without doubt, long-term effects of persecution continue to trouble the post-war generation of Jews. Books like *No Grass Grows Over: Daughters of Jewish Survivors* by non-Jew Ingeborg Bohringer-Brunn joins the growing list of testimonies to stubborn trauma and the need to construct post-war identities on ashes. (23) A significant problem here is what Wolffsohn calls the "absurdity of non-religious diaspora Jewish existence." (24) For the 80% of German Jews (some say 95%) who are secular, the question of identity has been reduced to a "Jewish situation" comprised of "suffering, persecution ... fear." (25) One response to this dilemma may be pursuit of higher education. By 1990, 31% of Jews completed university as against a mere 8% of Gentiles. (26)

But another response to the question of Jewish identity is the German variant of Jewish renewal, a religious movement that involves a significant number of German-Jewish women. Contemporary reform activity, given post-war impetus only in the early 1990s, proposes full participation of women in synagogue life, increased relevance for Sabbath sermons and a liturgy in German in addition to one in Hebrew. With its organization of egalitarian services launched in 1994, the Reform *Kehillah Chadaschah* in Frankfurt has challenged the *Einheitsgemeinde* (like the French *Consistoire*, the single religious authority covering the entire nation and into whose coffers all tax money flows, that has always been Orthodox) by its insistence on including women in minyanim, integrating male and female seating, and supporting women's leadership. Bea Wyler, the first post-war female rabbi in Germany, is a Conservative Jew who arrived in 1995, despite strong opposition from the Orthodox establishment. She now leads the Jewish communities in Oldenburg and Braunschweig. With 36% of the registered Jewish community in Frankfurt showing some interest in the Reform movement, their number promises to increase slowly. (27) Reform groups have arisen in other cities, too, some of them serving the specific needs of East Europeans deprived of the opportunity to acquire religious learning and allowing women now feeling that lack to become *bat mitzvah* as adults. (28) The more than 100 individuals who attended an April 1997 symposium at the *Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain* augur well for the Reform Movement and its drive for women's egalitarian inclusion.

A revival of Jewish women's religious practice became evident at a *Bet Devora* conference for women rabbis, cantors, scholars and all spiritually interested Jewish men and women which convened in Berlin

in May of 1999. More than 150 mainly female participants answered an invitation which stated, without equivocation, "Women are standing together with men, on an egalitarian basis, on the *bimah*," for, "increasingly, women are exercising important ritual functions" as rabbis. The colloquium asked, "What does this mean for Jewish tradition and continuity?"

Answering was the entire elite of European Jewish Women's Studies, including scholars such as Judith Frishman (Universities Leiden and Utrecht), Eveline Goodman-Thau (Universities Halle and Harvard), Susanna Keval (Egalitarian Minyan, Frankfurt/M), Diana Pinto (Consultant of the European Council, Paris); and spiritual leaders such as Rabbi Jane Kanarek (University of Moscow), Rabbi Katalin Kelemen (Jewish Community "*Szim Salom*," Budapest), Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah (London), Rabbi Sybil Sheridan (Leo Baeck College, London), Rabbi Daniela Thau (Bedford), and Rabbi Bea Wyler (Jewish Community, Oldenburg) who spoke on her "Experiences as the First Woman Rabbi In Germany since the Shoah." Additional themes included "Female perspectives on Tanach and Rabbinical Literature," "Women's Rituals," and "*Halachah* and Equal Rights for Women." *Bet Devora*, initiated by Elisa Klapheck, Lara Dämmig, and R. Monika Herweg, is planning further conferences and hopes to become established as an institution for exploring Jewish women's issues.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, activists engaged in various projects as Jews can be found in the Women's International Zionist Organization and its junior variant. Frankfurt alone boasts 500 members in WIZO and WIZO-AVIV who raise funds for a myriad of women's centers, educational institutions and hospitals in Israel. In 1997, there were regional women's groups in thirteen German cities, and more are in formation. Although the feminist aims of Pappenheim's movement have not been duplicated, the *JFB* takes pride in its social services and annual symposium. In 1997, 80 women from 19 different towns discussed "Women in a History of Change" for four days at Bad Kissingen's kosher hotel Eden Park. Among the speakers was Leah Rabin.

Welcome as participation in the new *JFB* is, where are Jewish women in the German women's movement? They are certainly there, as we have been since the mid-seventies, with experiences mainly positive and encouraging. But others have encountered conflict.

Here are some of the better-known issues:

Susannah Heschel, in "Configurations of Patriarchy, Judaism, and Nazism in German Feminist Thought" critiques German feminist theologians for charging that the ancient Hebrews killed the goddess, authored patriarchy, and have stolen the limelight from women's suffering by insisting that the Shoah never be forgotten. "The Holocaust of Jews," Heschel writes, "is classified under patriarchal concerns, not feminist concerns, as if all Jews were male and all feminists were Christian." (29)

Maria Baader, in "Taking Leave" discusses her attempt to make a place for herself as a Jewish feminist in Berlin's women's scene and regrets the competition – for resources, recognition, empathy – from the (mainly lesbian) audiences attending events sponsored by the *Schabbeskreis*, (Sabbath Circle) a group of Jewish and non-Jewish women which met Friday evenings in Berlin from 1984-1989 to discuss anti-Semitism in the women's movement and Jewish women in history. 16 Jewish members of that group

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<sup>6</sup> Further information from Elisa Klapheck, *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin*, Fasanenstrafle 79/80, 10623 Berlin, Germany. Fax +49-30-880 28 26. e-mail: LaraBLD@aol.com

put their Jewish identities on the line at various symposia only to encounter, as Baader notes, rejection or hostility. Christian German women proved so attached to their view of females as victims that they could not accept the potential agency of Christian German women as oppressors. (30) In other words, many interpreted National Socialism as a war against women rather than against Jews. However, it is only fair to add, as Annette Kuhn noted in 1993, that a good number of German feminist historians have moved away from this position toward one which retains a view of gender's importance in analyzing nazism without insisting on its centrality. (31)

Perhaps reacting to such tensions, a group called *WI[E]DER-SPRACHE* – the *International Working Group of Migrant, Black and Jewish Women for Research in German-language Literature* was founded in 1997 and, supported by the Ecology Foundation of North Rhine Westphalia and the Green Party, held a conference titled “Marginal Breaks - Cultural Production of Migrant, Black and Jewish Women in Germany.”<sup>7</sup> Edited by Cathy Gelbin, Kader Konuk, and Peggy Piesche, a volume of papers due out at the end of 1999 describes conference aims in this way:

“To varying degrees, immigrant women of the first and second generations, as well as black and Jewish women working as artists and academics ... have been marginalized, or consigned to a peripheral landscape within the academy and the arts in Germany. Motivated by the desire to challenge migrant, black and Jewish women’s secondary status in the production and dissemination of knowledge and cultural values, we also intend to displace margin and center.” (32)

Standing out among the dozen presentations are Silke Helmerdig’s “Portraits of Jewish Women in Berlin,” a photo exhibition, which preceded Ekpenyong Ani’s talk on “Breaks – Bridges – Bonding” which analyzed relations between white Christian feminists and various groups of migrant, black and Jewish women.

Continuing the theme, Cathy Gelbin discussed Jewish women’s working alliances with migrant and Black women in Germany. Francesca Stafford looked at Jewish German writer Else-Lasker Schüler in terms of marginality; while Ermut Erel treated “Crossing borders and cultural hibridity as anti-racist resistance.” Particularly enjoyable was novelist Esther Dischereit’s writing workshop, which encouraged participants to commit their feelings about marginality to paper, especially in the short-story form. The success of this first effort has encouraged *WI[E]DER-SPRACHE* to become an official foundation with a follow-up gathering planned for 2000.

In addition to providing nourishing academic papers, the *WI[E]DER-SPRACHE* conference introduced us to Antje Groeneveld and informed us about *Yachad - Vereinigung von jüdischen Lesben und Schwulen* (Together: The Union of Jewish Lesbians and Gays) which coalesced in 1995 and now has about eighty members, publishes a newsletter, and hosts two libertarian minyans with a female majority. (33) Its first service in the Jewish Community Center on Berlin’s Fasanenstraße attracted two hundred people. Clearly, the post-war generation of Jews, male and female, is creating alternative institutions, including a *Rosh Chodesh* group meeting regularly in Berlin.

Does this reassertion of Jewish identity affect relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans? Clearly, just as the U.S. lives out its legacy of slavery, so too do the war years continue shaping the destinies of

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<sup>7</sup> *WI[E]DER-SPRACHE* is a pun meaning contradiction and talking back.

successive generations. One small example is a 1995 article from the newspaper *Tageszeitung* – a sort of *German Village Voice* or *Libération* – whose headline reads “*Zurückgeben* (Restitution Foundation) awards grants to Jewish women scholars.” (34)

Motivating its launch was one honorable woman’s discovery that paintings passed down to her had been taken from Jews. *Zurückgeben* was launched in 1994 to underwrite Jewish women scholars and artists. It awarded a grant to Eva Lezzi-Noureldin to research the autobiographies of Jewish authors who were children during the Nazi era. A grant of 3000 DM was awarded to Edita Koch for her untiring work as editor of *Exil* magazine, [devoted to publishing Jewish German-language literature written in exile], and another to Rivka Jaussi to create a Jewish women’s prayer book. The Berlin foundation also calls on non-Jewish Germans to confront their ‘own biographical involvement.’ Not only are those Germans who profited from the expulsion of Jews during the Nazi era being called on to ‘give back’ but also those born later. Injustice continues in our day via inheritance. This foundation offers the opportunity to distance Germans from that injustice – even if only in a symbolic way – by giving some property back to the descendants of the victims. (35)<sup>8</sup>

That research on, for and by Jewish women will benefit from such encouragement is beyond doubt.

### ***Research on Jewish Life and Jewish Women in Germany***

To put it bluntly, there is virtually no relevant research on Jewish women in Germany today. What we do have is ongoing documentation of developments in Jewish life here since 1945 but rarely has the specific situation of women been investigated.

Research on the Jewish community in the Federal Republic after 1945 began in the early 1960s and concentrated on reconstruction and perspective, identity and education as well as the central concern: what would be the future of Jews in Germany under the new regime? These were mainly historical/political; psychological/pedagogical; and sociological/ humanistic studies(36-38). In addition, we have conference proceedings (39) and individual monographs (40) which represent various aspects of Jewish life. These publications, taken together, reflect the contemporary development of the institutions concerned as well as personal problems experienced by individuals. In addition to the recurrent theme of rebuilding the Jewish community in Germany since 1945, these studies confront questions of identity and education, anti-Semitism, German-Jewish relations, religious orientation as well as relations with Israel.

The specific situation of women is present only in the margins of these works. Oppenheimer, for example, in “On Jewish Youth in Germany” segregates the professional aims of boys and girls of various ages (41). Kuschner also applies sex-specific criteria in her sociological study “of minorities in the Federal Republic” by asking about young people’s feelings of belonging and their relations with a non-Jewish environment (42). In monographs by Broder/Lang and Sichrovsky, we find individual women of the “second generation,” but they tend to restrict their descriptions to individual conflict situations in tension with identity formation and integration. (43) Navé Levinson describes the post-war generation’s difficulty in finding some way to revive religious tradition as experienced before the war and includes the ramifications of these attempts for women (44). The anthology *Erinnerungen deutsch-jüdischer Frauen 1900-1990* (Memories of German Jewish Women 1900-1990) presents diverse social and political experiences women have had in the course of German Jewish history. (45)

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<sup>8</sup> Foundation “Zurückgeben,” Fritschestr. 74, 10585 Berlin, Germany.

The situation of second generation Jewish women in the Federal Republic found literary treatment as a separate category only in the mid-1990s. (46) Whereas a few studies are intellectually rich and academic (47), most are autobiographically-oriented monographs in which individual women of the “second generation” narrate their history and lives in the context of their family’s persecution (48). Central to these texts, and influenced by research on minority groups, is the view that Jewish women are “doubly disadvantaged,” as Jews and as women. (49) An exception is the recently published, more popular than scholarly book authored by Rheinz on the broad spectrum encompassing the search for a “modern identity” among Jewish women in the Federal Republic. (50) Jewish institutions and the Jewish press have also begun to pay more attention to the situation of women, in particular pointing to women’s needed but waning engagement in the community itself. (51)

Saying good-bye to her life in the Federal Republic at the end of 1980s, Lea Fleischmann has so far produced the only book-length autobiography by a Jewish woman of the second generation. (52) Laura Waco’s memoir describes the happy childhood and youth of a Jewish girl born in 1947 to East European survivors who leave Germany in the sixties. (53) Since reunification in 1989, Jewish communities in the former German Democratic Republic have received increasing attention, and with borders open to the former Soviet Union, the situation of Russian Jewish immigrants has also been examined (54). Yet here, too, woman’s specific experience, and particularly that of the “second generation,” has not been researched. (55).

Another class of academic research is comprised of psychological and psychoanalytic studies which, beginning at the end of the sixties, examine the extreme *traumata* of the *Shoah* and its ramifications in the “second generation” (56). The field itself is very well developed in the USA and Israel (57) where authors present case studies of Jewish women and men involved in individual and group therapy. In these “second generation” women, delayed reactions and strategies for coping with Holocaust trauma are examined in gender-specific ways (58) although Gampel and Pines (59) reveal the difficulty, even within the therapeutic process, of dealing with such family trauma.

Above all, young concentration camp inmates’ loss of feminine identity produces delayed reactions which Wardi (60) describes. After 1945, given their losses, the destruction of their families and feelings of nowhere-at-homeness, many rushed into starting families of their own. Among these women, Wardi has also uncovered various forms of emptiness and inability to form relationships; they experience loneliness and find it impossible to feel certain parts of their bodies which then present themselves as painful somatic or psychological symptoms in women of the second generation. Pines and Kaminer (61) see benefit, however, in immediate attempts at working through the trauma so soon after 1945, recognizing in such efforts a powerful life force and vitality as well as the desire for normality, without which a new life and emotional survival would have been impossible.

Kaminer finds further proof of that life force in the birth rate in the DP camps between 1945-1948, at that time the highest birth rate among Jews worldwide (62). Kaminer notes possible continuities with life before 1933 among the in their return to religious traditions exercised before the war (63) However, Kaminer’s work doesn’t compare men and women for their coping mechanisms nor to see whether both return to tradition in similar ways. He also fails to speculate about the meaning of these gestures for his analysands’ life plans.

German-language publications are nearly mute regarding academic studies of Jewish women's role and status in a religious context. The few studies addressing this dimension reinterpret Biblical women and females in the liturgy from theological and historical perspectives. Especially worthy of mention are Navé Levinson (68) and Herweg on "The Jewish Mother." (69) The latter's analysis of role models and religious attitudes is important for its focus on the influence of collective and individual memory on German Jewish women's understanding of their roles and themselves today. (70) Ambivalence provides the key, manifest in innumerable metamorphoses and psychic strategies. (71) Using a similar approach, Inowlocki examined how survivors passed on religious traditions from mother to daughter to granddaughter. (72)

Only in the field of Women's History has research shown considerable development in recent years. We can claim for this period a profound knowledge and a good number of interesting publications about women such as Glückel von Hameln, Bertha Pappenheim, Rahel von Varnhagen, Hannah Arendt, Lou-Andreas Salomé, and Rosa Luxemburg. (73) American historian Marion Kaplan's ground-breaking study of the *Jüdischer Frauenbund* (1904-1933) inaugurated a field which has included, since the early eighties, historic research on the Jewish women's movement and its leading figures up to 1933. (74) Original texts by Fanny Lewald and Rahel Varnhagen, have also been reprinted. (75) The discipline now stretches back through the Renaissance to reveal German Jewish women's lives during the Romantic era, Imperial Germany, and the Weimar Republic. (76) However, as with so much else, the years 1933-45 show primarily fissures and breaks. (77) Thus, the situation of German Jewish women since 1945 has unfolded along a spectrum bounded by tradition and the trauma of the parents' generation, with lives suspended between continuity and closure.

What does this imply for a research agenda? Glaring gaps are evident. Gender differences have barely been touched upon in studies of Jews in Germany since 1945. Nor have the various disciplines examined continuities and breaks within their own fields. Though surprising, this is true even for psychologically and psychoanalytically oriented work. It was only because proof of the legacy of Nazi trauma had to be provided in late-sixties reparations trials that research began looking at biographical injury. (78) The struggle to "survive survival," to tend the wounds of persecution, to rebuild community in post-war Germany, and to assure material existence left little room for philosophical or scholarly inquiry into broader questions of discontinuity or renewal. The same is true of reflection on the position of women in a religious context and possible changes in her liturgical status.

One reason for the lack of research on contemporary Jewish women has been described above. The other lies in the history and structure of the Jewish community in Germany. Before 1933, most of the 500,000, having been here for generations, felt German and called themselves "German Jews," often holding loyal, even patriotic attitudes toward German culture. About 250,000 were able to flee before 1939, thanks to the *Hachscharah* programs launched by Jewish communities as self-help measures immediately after April 1, 1933 when the boycott of Jewish shops, physicians and lawyers took place. The other half was murdered in Nazi concentration camps.

This pre-war German Jewry was overwhelmingly liberal and enjoyed a special structure as an *Einheitsgemeinde*. When, after 1945, the community became broadly heterogeneous, the structure of the *Einheitsgemeinde* was held over from the past, although it no longer fit the situation. East European

Orthodox liturgy became the so-called “common denominator,” although only a fraction of contemporary German Jews were or are Orthodox. Despite the fact that the Reform and Conservative movements as practiced in the USA have their roots in early nineteenth century Germany, their influence here was lost after 1933. Within the Orthodox institutional framework imposed on the community by fiat, there has been little space for personal and religious developments for women – apart from traditional roles.

Despite this fearsome institutional impediment, however, things have begun to change. More and more groups have instituted egalitarian services. Since 1995, we can boast of one practicing Jewish female rabbi in Oldenburg and Braunschweig – an innovation that required a certain length of time to achieve acceptance. And like all German women, Jewish women benefit from a broad range of educational opportunities. Regarding Jewish education in particular, the College (*Hochschule*) for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg has existed for the last twenty years. More recently, in 1997, the University of Duisburg began a Master’s degree program in Jewish Studies while in Leipzig the new Simon-Dubnow-Institute offers a major in East- und Middle European Jewish studies. Sadly, Germany no longer provides training for rabbis or cantors, a major disadvantage not only for women. We simply don’t have enough German-speaking teachers or adequately trained religious personnel, be they male or female.

On the positive side, as a scholar at the Gender Studies Center at the University of Frankfurt, Susanna Keval has been researching the career and family ambitions of second generation Jewish women (born mainly after 1945). In addition, for the last five years she has been involved in developing a Reform group in Frankfurt with egalitarian services, as well as lecturing and writing articles on Jewish feminist ideas. Most of her inspiration has come, over the last decade, from U.S. Jewish feminist literature – a real gift. These imported works not only stimulate a positive personal feeling of authenticity as a Jew, but also clearly enhance Jewish life in Germany. It is appropriate to close this paper with lines from a poem by American poet Eliane Starkmann. In “We Are” (1977) she well illustrates the situation of German Jewish woman today:

*“we are a generation  
seeking tradition  
transforming symbols  
Jewish women  
not yet ourselves.”*

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## 8. SEVERAL ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PERSONS, INSTITUTIONS

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