Preface

A Word from the Editors of this Volume

In the last four decades, and especially since 1990, international migration has profoundly changed the profile of receiving (destination) nations all over the globe, while also deeply influencing conditions in migration exit (origin) countries. The change has been particularly felt in European countries, which in the past were quite homogeneous from a national, ethnic, linguistic, and often religious point of view. The influx of large numbers of immigrants from different countries and continents irreversibly challenged the concept of the classic nation-state with the emergence of a variety of new, culturally- and nationally-diverse frameworks within European societies.

Trans-border movements and its relation to issues of identity and culture are by no means new to Jewish historiography. On the contrary, it could be said that modern Jewish identity and culture as such were created by transnational migrations, at least in Europe and other Western countries. Thus, a particular Jewish identity developed in Europe over a period of almost 200 years, as a cross-national entity based on solid religious traditions, in ongoing conflict with the emerging nation-states and their exclusive aspirations. This phenomenon was used by nationalists and anti-Semites, who exploited it politically, blaming the Jews of ‘cosmopolitanism’, which, they claimed, undermined their local and national loyalty. It was seldom perceived as a political contribution in the construction of new transnational identities for the general population. Among Jews, the tension between a parochial heritage and universal perspective was fruitfully rendered into a combination of communal identity and societal adaptation, one that defines Jews in every modern European country in the broadest range of possible degrees.

Cultural diversity is never conflict-free. However, Jews in the modern era have demonstrated that the results shouldn’t be dissolution of societal solidarity on the one hand, or withdrawal into isolation on the other, but rather a transformation of identities and values into a kaleidoscope within a given society. This outcome is known as the ‘Jewish global identity’ or in other words – ‘Jewish Peoplehood.’

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Jews have experienced massive influxes of migration for different reasons, such as escaping pogroms, wars and hunger in Eastern Europe, but also a search for a new cultural and professional future in the New World and in Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). The largest and most vibrant Jewish demographic center of that time was still situated in Eastern Europe. In the course of the twentieth century, however, Eastern European Jewry
was shaken and stricken in a devastating way – in particular by the Nazi-German organized Holocaust, but also by 70 years of State Communism in the USSR and by 40 years of similar political repression in the countries of the so-called socialist “East Bloc.” Jewish community life lost most of its structure and vitality and to this day we have witnessed a constant outflow of Jews from the East, while the State of Israel and the communities in North America and Western Europe have become the new, vibrant Jewish centers of the late twentieth century.

At the turn to the New Millennium, something surprising happened in the heart of Europe, something that sparked disapproval and amazement across borders. Germany, the country of the Nazi thugs and Holocaust murderers, masters of barbarity and crime in the Second World War became not only a leading country of the European Union, but also an attractive destination for émigrés from the crumbling Soviet Union. No later than the mid 1990s it had become clear that tens of thousands of former Soviet Jews (Halachic Jews, non-Halachic Jews, and non-Jewish spouses) who left their homeland have not headed to Israel or to America, rather they have gone precisely to that country that was responsible for the Holocaust. One must admit that by the end of the twentieth century, a general respect has grown towards the visible German transformation from a cruel militaristic, trigger-happy and intolerant state, into a stable democracy, seemingly cosmopolitan and open-minded towards other ethnicities, cultures, and religions. This was a new Germany, no doubt, yet who had ever seriously believed in a Jewish wave of migration back to this country of Goethe and Bach, as well as of Hitler, Eichmann, and Goebbels?

Surprisingly, no small number of former Soviet Jews decided to take this route. In 1990, on the eve of a vast migration from the FSU, the Jewish communities in Germany numbered around 29,000 registered people. In 2013 the Jewish communities numbered approximately 101,400 registered members. The official data reveals that in the heydays of migration, up until 2004, some 220,000 Jews (Halachic Jews and non-Halachic Jews) and non-Jewish members of their families had immigrated to Germany. As a result, the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat) now consists of 108 Jewish communities that are organized in 23 regional associations. In addition, 24 communities are organized under the roof of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany (UPJ).

It would be correct to assess that the ex-Soviet Jewish influx into Germany, especially during the 1990s, prevented the disappearance of all the few small, weak, and outdated Jewish communities in Germany.

All Jewish congregations, from (ultra-) orthodox and conservative to (ultra-) liberal, are present in contemporary Germany. Quite a few new synagogues have been built, Jewish schools and kindergartens opened. Jewish cultural centers attract Jews and non-Jews in nearly the same intensity, Jewish museums are in
construction, and even three rabbinic schools have opened their gates in recent years.

Politicians, intellectuals, social scientists, and other scholars try to get to the bottom of this phenomenon: How will the unexpected influx from the former Soviet Union affect Jewish life in Germany in the long run? What does it mean for the single individual – to be a Jew in twentieth century Germany, in the so-called Berlin Republic? What happens ‘on the ground’ in local Jewish communities, what are the current demographic trends among Jews? What happens in Jewish arts, music, literature, and social networks? Is it possible nowadays to live not only side-by-side, but also jointly with the non-Jewish German population? What makes a typical Jewish identity here, and not to be forgotten: How safe is it to live as a discernable Jew in Europe’s currently most vibrant country?

All these questions were intensively discussed at an international conference, titled: From Rejection to Acceptance – To be Jewish in 21st Century Germany, hosted on February 10–12, 2013 by the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University, in cooperation with the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies at Potsdam University, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty – Jerusalem, and Beit Hatfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People, at Tel Aviv University.

The organizers wanted to shed light on Jewish life in present-day Germany from a host of different perspectives – for example, achievements and challenges of the Jewish communities, Jewish cultures and sub-cultures, ties with the German Christian majority and with other local minorities; the consequences of Jewish demographic changes (including the Israeli migration); interrelations between different Jewish congregations and organizations; and also their relations with the Federal Government and other political bodies. One important goal was also to examine levels of anti-Semitism and xenophobia in contemporary German society, and finally on the dynamic of German-Israeli relations in the last decades.

Our hypothesis was that in large part, Jewish immigrants had integrated successfully into the general society, and in many cases had become leading actors in society, culture and economics, while at the same time struggling to maintain their unique Jewish cultural and communal identity. The participants were asked to highlight the social, cultural, demographic, economic, and political processes, which brought about the integration of Jewish immigrant groups into contemporary Germany, both into the Jewish communities as well as into the general social fabric. We hope we laid a foundation for more comprehensive studies on immigration and society in Germany in general, and on new forms of Israel-Diaspora relations.
The conference volume at hand reflects important aspects of ongoing discussion on how Jews in Germany could succeed in developing new thriving life after the Holocaust. It also shows how the ex-Soviet-Jewish influx into reunified Germany has not only stabilized local Jewish community life but also radically changed its self-understanding and ‘internal compass.’ We learn about the new self-confidence of the Jewish community but at the same time also about growing threats of renewed anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia that raise questions about the future. The volume tells us about revivals and new beginnings in Jewish culture, arts, philosophy, and – yes – also of a return of multifaceted Jewish religion. Finally we encounter ideas about how new structures and opportunities of Jewish education help the Jewish veterans and immigrants – ‘old’ and ‘new’ to come together and to undertake this daring and courageous attempt to reconstruct Jewish Life in twenty-first century Germany.

Michael Wolffsohn’s article on Jews in Divided Germany (1945–1990) and Beyond: Scrutinized in Retrospect examines the development of Jewish life in divided Germany after the Second World War, and the effect on the Jewish community in the wake of the fall of the Eastern Bloc and the unification of Germany. Wolffsohn’s conclusions are in a way very provocative. “Germany’s new Jewry has become and will increasingly be a community of Jews without Judaism”, he predicts: “with a vocal and growing Orthodox minority, and a much smaller but also very active liberal mini-minority.” Wolffsohn also assumes that another phenomenon, a parallel Jewish world will develop in Germany, trying to be an alternative to practicing forms of Judaism: “Israelism.” “But”, he continues, “such ‘Israelisms’ culminate in a farce, not an Israeli reality. It is an absurdity, and an absurdity cannot be the ingredients for strengthening identity.” Although it is not a ‘farewell eulogy’ to the future of Jewish life in Germany, it will be interesting to follow the connections that may be created by the ‘Israelists’ and the expanded Israeli community in Germany in the coming years.

Michael Elm deals in his article The Making of Holocaust Trauma in German Memory. Some Reflection about Robert Thalheim’s Film “And Along Come Tourists” with the question of the Holocaust as a present traumatic event in German contemporary life. Elm investigates the notion of trauma which has been established through the course of West and East German history and asks, using the example of Robert Thalheim’s movie And Along Come Tourists (Am Ende kommen Touristen): “Which historical narrative could be helpful in building trust between non-Jewish Germans and Jews today?” The answers are complicated and not clear-cut. In the movie “a young non-Jewish German and a Pole discuss the heritage of Auschwitz without including explicitly a Jewish perspective. The question
arises – whether the position of the ‘Jewish other’ has to be addressed in such a narration or not.” According to Elm, “the emphasis on the German-Polish perspective is – from a narrative point of view – by no means excluding the Jewish experience.” That means: “Still the barriers between the collective memories remain difficult to overcome.”

**Julius H. Schoeps** in his article *Saving the German-Jewish Legacy? On Jewish and non-Jewish attempts of reconstructing a lost world* addresses the social and cultural alienation of contemporary Jewish population in Germany from the great contribution of the Jews in this country in every life’s aspect. “Some of the new immigrants from the CIS who today make up 90 percent of the membership in Germany’s local Jewish communities, are indeed interested in the German-Jewish legacy, yet this does not necessarily have anything to do with their own sense of identity.” Schoeps thinks that “cultural Jewish continuity in Germany cannot be artificially reconstructed even 70 years after the Holocaust.” One decisive question remains, however: Schoeps believes “that the integration of the outstanding Jewish contribution of the past into the new German society fabric is a mission that lies at the foot of the Germans, not the Jews. As long as this question remains significant in the dialogue between non-Jews and Jews in Germany, normalcy will remain a distant prospect.”

In contrast to this, **Eliezer Ben-Rafael** describes in his article *Germany’s Russian-speaking Jews: Between Original, Present and Affective Homelands* quite different perceptions. Ben-Rafael writes, “There was, in essence, no Jewish community […] in Germany when Russian Jews began arriving in Germany, and today they constitute the overwhelming majority (90 percent) of the Jewish population of Germany.” In contrary to scholars that predict the vanishing of Jewish identity among the Russian-speaking community, Ben-Rafael claims: “Russian-speaking Jews in Germany also participate in transnational-diaspora structures, which bind them to their counterparts in Jerusalem, Moscow, and New York. […] Russian-speaking Jews, whatever their hesitancies regarding what ‘Jewishness’ means, rely on Jewish education to transmit to the young what should make Jewish life and interest in Israel meaningful.” These findings might be even more significant for the children of the immigrants, the so-called 1.5- and the second generation.

**Julia Bernstein** in her article *Russian Food Stores and their Meaning for Jewish Migrants in Germany and Israel: Honor and ‘Nostalgia’* deals with the process of integration into a new society through preservation of food habits from the former ‘home-land.’ The text is based on a comparative study that was conducted...
in Germany and Israel. Sticking to food habit, concludes Bernstein “in the migration process obviously contribute to ‘living memories,’ yet they do much more: They also ‘make a place’ for a virtual home that preserves social status and stabilizes the self-esteem of customers [...] Food consumption in the migration process seems to promote contouring collective ‘we’-identities.”

**Elke-Vera Kotowski** compares in her article *Moving from the Present via the Past to Look toward the Future: Jewish Life in Germany Today* between the Jewish populations in Germany in the 1930s and today, and asks whether with all the obvious differences between the two periods “there are any links connecting those Jews who lost their homes during the Nazi period in Germany, and those Jews who are searching for a new beginning in Germany today?” Kotowski shows that “exiled German Jews of the 1930s who were religious or strongly connected to Jewish tradition, often were eager to join or even to establish Liberal (i.e. Reform) Jewish communities.” They influenced the receiving societies and helped to shape their destiny, but many felt alienated to the majority society. But Kotowski also concludes that “not only the German-Jewish émigrés from the 1930s but also Russian-Jewish newcomers from the 1990s have unpacked their suitcases.” However, it “seems that the second generation of immigrants will be able to participate in Germany’s society with great success.”

**Fania Oz-Salzberger** deals in her article *Israelis and Germany: A Personal Perspective* with a phenomenon that for many Israelis (and maybe even to many “bio-Germans”) – not to speak of the Jewish communities in Germany – is difficult to digest. It means, the almost mystical attraction of Germany (and Berlin in particular) to *Sabras* (young native Israelis), that pushes so many to visit, to live for different periods of times among Germans and even to emigrate to Germany. Oz-Salzberger studied the various social networks of Israelis in Berlin (either in real life or virtual networks) in order to find the common characteristics that bond all Israelis in Germany in general and Berlin in particular. Although she found that “many of the current Hebrew-speaking residents of Berlin whom I have met in recent years, Jews as well as Arabs, are enchanted, fascinated, and sometimes even obsessed with the dark past.” Yet, according to Oz-Salzberger, “Berlin remains problematic for them, and they live their problematic life in it as a matter of choice; because life is not meant to be simple, and because this urban, highly cultured, intense global-polis is not offering its newcomers either harmony or simplicity. It is not part of the deal.”

**Hanni Mittelmann** deals in her article *Reconceptualization of Jewish Identity as Reflected in Contemporary German-Jewish Humorist Literature* with the question
of humor and humoristic Jewish-German literature that tries to reflect Jewish life in contemporary Germany on one hand, and on the other tries to reshape Jewish identity and culture by the young generation of Jews in Germany. In contrast to the post-War generations, Mittelmann explains, the new generation of writers is “no longer afraid of Germany,” and deals with wide range of topics, from politics to sex. The contemporary literature, Mittelmann concludes, “released the Jews from their role as victims, and attempts to free Germans from fear of their own shadow.”

Singer and poet Karsten Troyke in his article Hava Nagila (the name of a popular Hebrew song that means ‘Let us rejoice’) shares with us “A Personal Reflection on the Reception of Jewish Music in Germany.” Troyke suggests “there was not the slightest interest in Jewish music in Germany after 1945.” Yet, for different reasons, Troyke claims, the 1980s witnessed a big change and “many young people in East and West Germany suddenly started singing Yiddish songs.” In the United States, young Jews had already started to do so. This later became known as the ‘Klezmer revival’. It burst out of its Jewish roots and became a well-established multifaceted genre, although the boom seems to have passed the zenith already. Troyke himself has sung Yiddish songs around the world but “only in three countries I did find large non-Jewish audiences. These countries were Sweden, Poland and – Germany.”

The American movie director and producer Zachary Johnston shares with us in his article Aliyah Le Berlin (Making Aliyah to Berlin): A Documentary about the Next Chapter of Jewish Life in Berlin his insights on the emergence of a diaspora of Israeli youth in Berlin. In many ways – second only to Fania Oz-Salzberger (see her article in this volume) – he is one of the pioneers in identifying the phenomenon that he follows in his documentary, and he had done it well before it became a hot issue in the Israeli media in 2014. Johnston challenges the common Israeli set of values about migration. “One cannot use the term ‘aliyah’ out-of-context without eliciting a knee-jerk response due to its value-loaded nature of the word, which is tied to the ‘ascent’ of Jews to Israel,” writes Johnston, and he adds: “Perhaps, this new age of Israeli and Jewish exploration in Germany has a higher purpose that has yet to be ascertained, that down the road the concept of aliya will receive a something deeper, stronger, and broader meaning for the nation of Israel and its citizens.”

Monika Schwarz-Friesel in her article Educated Anti-Semitism in the Middle of German Society: Empirical Findings claims that “the experience of the Holocaust and dealing with the lethal ideology that led to Auschwitz did not bring the strate-
gies of verbally dehumanizing and demonizing the Jews to an end. Such strategies prevail and are frequently used in modern discourse even by highly educated people from mainstream society.” Obviously this goes hand-in-hand with the rise of anti-Semitic manifestations in Europe during the last decade. “The articulation of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes”, adds Schwarz-Friesel, “by projecting them on Israel has increased significantly.” One of the dominant strategies of dealing with actual anti-Semitism in German public discourse, Schwarz-Friesel writes, is to deny its very existence. She also concludes, based on her studies that “the age-old basic Jew hatred is alive in the middle of German society and that is by no means a sole phenomenon among Right- or Left-wing extremists.”

**Günther Jikeli** in his article *Anti-Semitism within the Extreme Right and Islamists’ Circles* stresses that “antisemitism has long been a part of the extreme Right and Islamist movements. However, [...] often takes indirect forms. In the case of the extreme Right, it is frequently embedded in revisionist positions on the Second World War. Islamists, on the other hand, voice anti-Semitic positions with references to Israel, anti-Jewish excerpts from Islamic scripture, and hostile attitudes towards Western societies in the context of an alleged ‘war against Islam.’” Jikeli underlines his observation that “the extreme Right and Islamists are not isolated from mainstream society; similar attitudes are widespread, and exist beyond the membership of organizations associated with extreme Right and political Islam.”

**Julia Eksner** analyses in her article *Thrice Tied Tales: Germany, Israel, and German Muslim Youth* the complicated attitudes of Muslim youth in Germany with Jews and with Israel and vis-à-vis their German ‘homeland’. –“The argument made here”, writes Eksner, “is that German Muslim youth’s positioning against Israel is by no means a ‘natural’ or ‘cultural’ given; rather, Muslim youth’s responses are structured by preexisting discursive relations in Germany.” Her conclusions back that of other authors in this book that anti-Semitism is well rooted in the German culture and in contemporary German society, especially in its anti-Israeli form. “In effect”, Eksner concludes, “German social and discursive context legitimizes and encourages both the critique of Israel and Muslim youths’ anti-Israeli attitudes as ‘normal and acceptable’, thus channels expression of anger at their disenfranchisement from the object much closer to home (both literally and figuratively) to a ‘legitimized’ transnational object – the State of Israel, and, by implication, its (Jewish) citizens.”

**Olaf Glöckner** in his article *New Structures of Jewish Education in Germany* deals with the burden of preserving traditional religious Jewish education in Germany in an era of secularism and large non-religious Jewish population that migrated to
Germany after the fall of the Iron Curtain on one hand, and the dominance of the German state’s educational systems on the other. Many Jews in Germany express their wish to learn more about Judaism, religion, arts, philosophy and the legacy of history – but often lack the opportunity for this on-site. Glöckner argues that “in summary, it can be said that the Jewish educational system in Germany has undergone impressive advances during the last 15 to 20 years [...] ranging from Jewish religion, tradition, and history, to the State of Israel, Jewish culture, and Hebrew mastery – being offered to different age groups.” Nevertheless, Glöckner stresses that it is of vital importance to settle the imbalance in comprehensive Jewish education between relatively strong Jewish centers and the relatively weak sub-centers of the Jewish periphery. He also refers to the huge importance of finding a way to improve the accessibility of teenagers to Jewish education.

Walter Homolka sums in his article A Vision Come True: Abraham Geiger and the Training of Rabbis and Cantors for Europe how a new generation of young men and women – very often from Eastern Europe – have discovered the world of Jewish Theology anew and are preparing to bring this world (back) in order to revitalize communities across Germany and beyond. With the School of Jewish Theology, opened in 2013 at the University of Potsdam, the training of Liberal and Conservative rabbis has finally received an academic theological framework within the German university system. “In 1836”, Homolka writes, “Abraham Geiger demanded the establishment of a Jewish theological faculty as the litmus test of Jewish emancipation in Germany.” More than 170 years later, this test has finally begun to be proven successful.

We hope that these articles can be a modest contribution towards a better understanding of contemporary Jewish life in Germany, which is undergoing surprising and dynamic changes at present, yet still faces decisive challenges in the near future.

In conclusion, we wish to thank all the organizations and individuals that contributed their knowledge, time, and means to the success of the conference and made it possible to publish this volume about contemporary Jewish life in Germany. It has been a pleasure to cooperate with all of you in this important endeavor: The Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University; the Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies at Potsdam University; the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Liberty – Jerusalem, for its generous financial support; Beit Hatfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People; The Goren-Goldstein Diaspora Research Center, Tel Aviv University; The Tel Aviv University Research Authority. Special thanks are given to the dedicated staff of the Kantor Center: Ronith Greefeld, Talia Naamat and Adrian Gruszniewski.
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