

STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITIES: SECOND-GENERATION JEWS IN  
DIVIDED GERMANY, 1945-1989

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## **Abstract**

Max Lazar: Strangers in Their Own Communities: Second-Generation Jews in Divided  
Germany, 1945-1989  
(Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch and Karen Auerbach)

This thesis employs a comparative approach to examine the efforts of young Jews in Frankfurt am Main and East Berlin to create new Jewish spaces that existed beyond those of the official Jewish Communities in their respective countries. Despite growing up in drastically different Germanys, the founding members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* (Frankfurt) and *Wir für uns – Juden für Juden* (East Berlin) challenged the Jewish establishment by calling for greater religious pluralism and re-imagining the ideological basis for the continued existence of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust. In addition to providing a more unified approach to the history of Jewish life in postwar Germany, this thesis sheds light on the postwar efforts of European Jews to grapple with the concepts of exile and diaspora, as well as Jewish reactions to societal changes in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

DP	Displaced Person
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
SBZ	Soviet Zone of Occupation
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany
VJGGDR	Union of Jewish Communities in the German Democratic Republic
ZA	Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland
ZJD	Zionist Youth of Germany

*“I want to see myself as a part of this society.”*<sup>1</sup> – Micha Brumlik

In his 1996 autobiography, Ignatz Bubis, the President of the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland* (Central Council of Jews in Germany),<sup>2</sup> had few kind words about the generation of Jews that had grown up in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the immediate decades after World War II. Bubis wrote that, “The postwar generation of Jews, above all in Frankfurt and Berlin...that committed themselves to changing society found it uninteresting to engage themselves in the Jewish communities.”<sup>3</sup> Over a decade earlier, Peter Kirchner, the President of the Jewish Community in East Berlin, had also voiced his disappointment with Jewish youth in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Speaking to the Canadian sociologist Robin Ostow, Kirchner said that one of the problems facing the tiny community of Jews in East Germany was that, “the young people don’t come up with many ideas of their own.”<sup>4</sup> Both men, as it turns out, were wrong.

During the 1980s, members of the first generation of Jews to grow up in the FRG and the GDR simultaneously challenged the rigidity of the Jewish establishment in their respective countries by creating new Jewish spaces – both literary and physical – that existed beyond those

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Chaim Schneider, *Wir sind Da! Die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis heute* (Berlin:

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as the *Zentralrat*.

<sup>3</sup> Ignatz Bubis and Peter Sichrovsky, *“Damit bin ich noch längst nicht fertig”: Die Autobiographie*, New York: Campus Verlag, 1996), 88.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Moses in the Land of Marx* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 18.



of official Jewish Communities (*Gemeinde*).<sup>5</sup> In Frankfurt am Main, leftist Jewish intellectuals created the *Jüdische Gruppe* (Jewish Group), which served as a platform for its members to openly criticize the politics of the Israeli government, pursue a pluralistic approach to Jewish religious practice, and function as a collective bulwark against what they considered to be hasty attempts to “normalize” German-Jewish relations in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

Concurrently, the children of Jewish Communists in East Berlin founded the group *Wir für uns – Juden für Juden* (For Ourselves – Jews for Jews)<sup>6</sup>, which served as an inclusive space in which its members could explore the Jewish background that their parents had disavowed or hidden from them during their youth. *Wir für uns* also challenged the prevailing norms of the Jewish Community in East Berlin. In addition to embracing individuals who only had a Jewish father<sup>7</sup>, the members of *Wir für uns* increasingly defined their Jewishness as an identity based on cultural, rather than merely religious practices.

While a number of scholars have focused on Jews in the FRG and the GDR, many holes remain in what must be considered a preliminary historiography of Jewish life in postwar Germany. Indeed, the majority of these works tend to fall into one of two categories that examine Jews on opposing sides of the former border between East and West Germany. The first consists of an extensive literature exploring the fate of Jewish displaced persons (DPs) living in the

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<sup>5</sup> Abbreviation for the German term “*Synagogengemeinde*.” In Germany, official religious groups such as the Catholic and Lutheran Church are recognized as statutory corporations (*Körperschaften öffentlichen Rechtes*) who are allowed to collect tax revenue from the government. This means that both the GDR and the FRG had an official Jewish community, whose members were officially registered as Jews with their respective governments. For the remainder of the paper the word “Community” will be used to refer to *Gemeinden* in the GDR and the FRG.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Wir für uns*.

<sup>7</sup> Judaism has traditionally adhered to a matrilineal model of descent that defines a Jew as someone with a Jewish mother.

Allied zones of occupation immediately after World War II and the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup> The periodization for these books often begins with the fall of the Nazi regime and ends with the foundation of the state of Israel or shortly after the establishment of the FRG, eliding the continued development of a West German Jewish community, which was a *mélange* of DPs, German-Jewish *Remigranten*<sup>9</sup> and members of successive, but small waves of Jewish immigrants who primarily came from Eastern Europe. Thus, few monographs have attempted an extensive examination of inter-communal conflict and the complicated process of identity formation in the first generation of Jews who were socialized in the FRG.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to Jews on the other side of the Iron Curtain, several scholars have taken a close look at the complicated relationship between the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the small, official Jewish community in the GDR.<sup>11</sup> One problem with this approach is that these works tend to concern themselves with only two periods in the history of the GDR: the arrest and subsequent exodus of Jewish community leaders during the Stalinist purges of 1952/3 and the SED Party Secretary Erich Honecker's attempts to establish diplomatic relations with the United States by way of Israel at the end of the 1980s. More importantly, this approach obscures the fact

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<sup>8</sup> A selection of these works includes: Jael Geis, *Übrig sein – Leben 'danach'. Juden deutscher Herkunft in der britischen und amerikanischen Zone Deutschlands 1945-1949* (Berlin, Philo, 2000); Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> The German term for emigrants who returned to the FRG and the GDR after 1945.

<sup>10</sup> For a scholarly monograph that focuses on Jewish life in the FRG from 1945 until the early 2000s see Anthony D. Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat: Eine deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Mario Kessler, *Die SED und die Juden – Zwischen Repression und Toleranz. Politische Entwicklungen bis 1967* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995); Lothar Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel: die jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ/DDR und ihre Behandlung durch Partei und Staat 1945-1990* (New York: Georg Olmos Verlag, 1997); Ulrike Offenber, *'Seid vorsichtig gegen die Machthaber': Die jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ und der DDR 1945-1990* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1998); Angelika Timm, *Hammer, Zirkel, Davidstern: Das gestörte Verhältnis der DDR* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1997).

that only a small fraction of Jews in the GDR belonged to the Jewish Community, which was strictly defined as a religious organization. In fact, the majority of Jews in the GDR consisted of committed communists who had renounced Judaism during their youth, fled to the West following the Nazi's seizure of power, and returned to the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ) and the GDR with their children in order to "build socialism."<sup>12</sup>

By focusing on the creation of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns*, this paper takes a comparative approach toward the history of Jewish life in both Germanys after the Holocaust. Although the members of these two groups were socialized in two radically different states, they espoused a desire to reimagine Jewish life and identity in post-Holocaust Germany. Inspired by their transnational connections to other parts of the Jewish diaspora, both groups called for a more pluralistic and inclusive approach to organized Jewish life. The members of *Wir für uns* and the *Jüdische Gruppe* also called for greater intra-communal and societal engagement with the Nazi past, arguing that Jews in the FRG and the GDR constituted living memorials who could combat the increasing demand to normalize Germany's Nazi past. Second-generation<sup>13</sup> Jews in Frankfurt am Main and East Berlin also believed that their Jewishness should inform their interactions with non-Jewish German society. Indeed, the history of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* must also be placed within the larger context of Jewish reactions to the evolution of society in the FRG and the GDR. The *Jüdische Gruppe* can be seen as a Jewish subculture within the leftist youth culture of 1968 in the FRG. Furthermore, the creation of *Wir für uns*, which had to exist within the formal framework of East Berlin's Jewish Community, should be seen as part of the redevelopment of civil society during the GDR's final decade. Finally, this

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on these so-called "Westmigranten" see Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt. Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> The term "second-generation" applies to the children of Holocaust survivors in divided Germany, particularly those that were born between 1939 and 1950.

paper not only sheds light on similarities and differences in the development of Jewish life under communist and democratic systems of government in postwar Europe, it also shows how European Jews interpreted ideas of exile and diaspora in the wake of the Holocaust and the foundation of the state of Israel.

Although there are a number of similarities between the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns*, it is important not to forget the particularities of the two drastically different nations and societies that they lived in. Thus, this paper will begin with a section on the childhood experiences of the founding members of these two groups before examining separately the context in which each formed. In Frankfurt am Main the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe*, who were born during the 1940s and influenced by leftist politics in the FRG, criticized Jewish Community leaders for restricting intra-communal discourse on Israeli politics and for cultivating what they viewed as a sycophantic relationship with the West German government. On the other side of the German border, *Wir für uns* formed in reaction to the constricting norms of East Berlin's Jewish Community during an era in which the children of Jewish communists increasingly expressed a desire to explore and cultivate the religious and cultural aspects of their own Jewishness. Finally, the paper will explore the transnational connection between the members of these two groups that sought to reinvigorate and reimagine Jewish life in the FRG and the GDR.

## **Sources**

The source base for this paper is primarily composed of autobiographies, memoirs, essays, and interviews with second-generation Jews in the FRG and the GDR. By virtue of their genre, many of these works provide a partisan perspective of life in the established Jewish Communities of East Berlin and Frankfurt am Main, with authors utilizing the opportunity to

settle scores across generational lines. Nonetheless, these sources should not be discounted because they provide an invaluable window into the experiences of these second-generation Jews who were socialized in divided Germany. This paper is particularly indebted to the work of two authors who have published interviews with Jews from the FRG and the former GDR. The first is the journalist Richard Chaim Schneider, whose book *Wir sind da!: Juden in Deutschland seit 1945* (We are here!: Jews in Germany since 1945) consists of thirty-four interviews he conducted for a documentary on Jewish life in Germany since 1945. Schneider, whose parents were Jewish DPs from Hungary, is hardly a stranger among the founding members of the *Jüdische Gruppe*. In several interviews he either implicitly or explicitly references his past relationship or friendship with his interview partners. Additionally, Schneider openly admits that he chose his interview partners and conducted his interviews in a way that would shed light on specific aspects of Jewish life in postwar Germany that he wanted to highlight.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Schneider's personal relationships with members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* provide an intimate view of this particular community's history and evolution during the postwar era.

Equally important are two volumes of interviews that the sociologist Robin Ostow conducted with Jews in the GDR, both before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>15</sup> The first of these volumes is especially problematic because a representative from the International Press Center of the GDR was present during each interview, suggesting that many of her interview partners may have been unable to fully express their feelings about life in the GDR. Follow-up interviews with certain participants in Ostow's second book also reveal that several of her interview partners had dramatically reappraised their own views of life under "real existing

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<sup>14</sup> Schneider, 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*; Robin Ostow, *Juden aus der DDR und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung: Elf Gespräche* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1996).

socialism” during the final years of the GDR. This in turn raises the question of whether this perspective change can be attributed to perceived restrictions on what they could say in earlier interviews, or to changes in their ideological conceptions of themselves and their pasts in the months before German reunification. Despite these impediments, though, Ostow’s interviews enriches our understanding of the social history of Jews during the final years of East German dictatorship by demonstrating that there was a plurality of political views within the Jewish Community in East Berlin.

### **Another Germany: Growing Up Jewish in Divided Germany**

The childhood experiences of members of what would become the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* reveal a number of similarities in the everyday life of Jewish children during the initial decade of the GDR and the FRG. For one, most were the children of refugees. In the GDR, the parents of the future members of *Wir für uns* were avowedly secular communists who had fled Germany following the Nazi rise to power. After spending much of the 1930s and the Second World War in Western Europe, Palestine, or the United States, these Jews made the fateful decision to return to the SBZ and later the GDR in order to build socialism and raise their children in a new, anti-fascist German state.<sup>16</sup> Unlike their counterparts in the East, few, if any of the parents of the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* decided to live in the FRG out of ideological conviction. Many were DPs from Eastern Europe who either could not return or *decided* not to return to their former homes from before the Holocaust. Those who were originally from Germany had often grown weary of continually trying to adapt both culturally and economically to life in a foreign land. Indeed, during the late 1950s – the height of the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* (Economic Miracle) – more than 6,000 Jewish émigrés and their children

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<sup>16</sup> Cora Ann Granata, “Celebration and Suspicion: Sorbs and Jews in the Soviet Occupied Zone and German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001), 70.

returned to the FRG, with over sixty percent of them coming from the recently established state of Israel.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the differences in their parents' backgrounds, young Jews on both sides of the Iron Curtain grew up with an acute awareness of their own difference from their German neighbors. Many children of former émigrés experienced confusion and distress when they first arrived in occupied Germany. In his memoir *Mein Weg als Deutscher Jude* (My Way as a German Jew), the historian Julius H. Schoeps, who had spent the first four years of his life in an idyllic town north of Stockholm, recalls the emotional distress he felt when he first came to Germany in 1947. While riding the train to the German university town of Erlangen, Schoeps felt that he was “encountering something strange and upsetting. I was frightened by the trip through a ruinous landscape, the grey, empty faces of the people that sat across from me in the southbound train wagon.” Further complicating the matter was the fact that Schoeps, who until then had only spoken Swedish, could not understand what the other passengers were saying.<sup>18</sup> In the newly established GDR, Vincent von Wroblewsky, who was born in France, also struggled to adjust to life in a country where he did not speak the language. Because his mother had avoided speaking German in order to blend in while living in France, Wroblewsky only knew how to say “*gute Nacht*” and “*schlaf gut*” when he arrived in East Berlin in 1950.<sup>19</sup> Like Schoeps, von Wroblewsky was also dismayed by the new environment he encountered, recalling that his

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<sup>17</sup> Harry Maor, “Der Wiederaufbau der jüdischen Gemeinden in Deutschland” (Ph.D. diss., Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 1961), 43-45.

<sup>18</sup> Julius H. Schoeps, *Mein Weg als deutscher Jude* (Zurich: Pendo Verlag, 2003), 39-41

<sup>19</sup> “Good night” and “sleep well.” Schneider, 345.

earliest memories of the GDR include the terrible odor of shoe polish and the strange manner in which other children were dressed.<sup>20</sup>

Second-generation Jews faced constant reminders of their otherness through their interactions with non-Jewish Germans. Daily encounters with adult Germans, especially males, often evoked the question, “where were you during the war?” Reflecting on his childhood in Frankfurt, Micha Brumlik writes: “Back then one could truly say: ‘The murderers are among us!’”<sup>21</sup> In 1961, a Jew who went out to buy some bread, to ride the tram, or to take care of a bureaucratic issue had a great chance of encountering a baker, a conductor, or civil servant that was either a former member of the SS, a Wehrmacht soldier who had participated in deportation and anti-Partisan operations, or who had legalized Aryanization.<sup>22</sup> Young Jews also encountered the Nazi past when they attended public school. In an autobiographical essay, the noted historian Dan Diner remembers how one of his teachers who had been an officer in the Wehrmacht would frequently mourn the loss of German-occupied France.<sup>23</sup> Second-generation Jews in Frankfurt also felt a greater sense of distance from their non-Jewish peers because they

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<sup>20</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> A reference to the East German film *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, which addresses the presence of war criminals in German cities following the end of World War II.

<sup>22</sup> Micha Brumlik, *Kein Weg als Deutscher und Jude: Eine Bundesrepublikanische Erfahrung* (Munich, Luchterhand, 1995), 28. This is not to say that all Wehrmacht soldiers took part in deportations and anti-partisan actions during the Second World War. For a thorough analysis on the relationship between Nazi ideology and German soldiers – specifically those fighting on the Eastern Front – see the following two works by Omer Bartov: Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986); Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> Dan Diner, “Fragments of an Uncompleted Journey: On Jewish Socialization and Political Identity in West Germany,” trans. Gary Smith and Moishe Postone, in *Germans and Jews Since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 124.



did not have to participate in Protestant or Catholic religious education classes that were offered in public schools.<sup>24</sup>

Young Jews in both Germanys also encountered the not-too-distant Nazi past through their interactions with the relatives of their non-Jewish friends. A common theme in the recollections of second-generation Jews is discovering an old German uniform or pictures of fallen soldiers when they visited their friends' apartments.<sup>25</sup> In some cases, they were not even allowed inside. Irene Runge remembers stealing glances at photographs of men wearing *Wehrmacht* uniforms while she waited for friends to meet her at the door of their apartments in East Berlin.<sup>26</sup> For a young Jew in the GDR, a nation where it was taboo to mourn those who had fought for the Nazis during the war, such moments may have raised questions about fellow citizens who were now engaged in the creation of an anti-Fascist and socialist state.

Another similarity in childhood experiences in divided Germany is the fact that although these young Jews experienced the bulk of their socialization in public schools, their social lives were primarily spent in separate Jewish or de-facto Jewish spaces implying the existence of a distinct Jewish "subculture" in both the GDR and the FRG.<sup>27</sup> Although the parents of the members of *Wir für uns* overwhelmingly identified with communism and even belonged to the ruling SED, most only maintained close connections with the families of other *Westmigranten*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, identity, and Jewish German Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; Schneider, 347.

<sup>26</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> My understanding of subculture is related to the definition employed by David Sorkin in his seminal work on German-Jewry during the age of emancipation: David L. Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5-8. For information on the existence of a similar subculture in postwar Poland see: Karen Auerbach, *The House at Ujazdowskie 16: Jewish Families in Warsaw After the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 4-6.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 12.

who had a Jewish background. When asked about her family's move from the United States to the GDR in 1949, Irene Runge responded, "In a way, when I first came here, I didn't really come to Germany because the people I met had all just gotten back too, and the children I played with were, naturally, the children of these returning emigrants." Runge also said that this extended network functioned as a kind of ersatz extended family for her parents and their friends.<sup>29</sup> Given the fact that many *Westmigranten* had lost relatives during the period of National Socialism, their tight-knit social world can also be seen as a way of coping with feelings of loss and absence in the aftermath of the Holocaust. These connections would later prove to be important for the creation of *Wir für uns*. Indeed, Anetta Kahane recalls that it was "strange to encounter many people I knew well from different connections" when she attended the group's first meeting in the spring of 1986.<sup>30</sup>

This sensibility was echoed in the FRG, albeit in an explicitly Jewish and frequently Zionist context. Cilly Kugelmann, a founding member of the *Jüdische Gruppe*, claims that despite attending a public school, much of her youth was spent in Jewish settings that eschewed a connection with non-Jewish West German society.<sup>31</sup> The same is true of Micha Brumlik, whose adolescence was largely defined by his membership in the Zionist Youth in Germany (ZJD), which encouraged young Jews in the FRG to make *Aliyah*<sup>32</sup> to Israel once they finished high school. In addition to meeting every Saturday, the group, whose members also included Cilly Kugelmann and Dan Diner, also spent six weeks a year at holiday camps throughout

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<sup>29</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 44-45.

<sup>30</sup> Schneider, 327.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

<sup>32</sup> A Zionist term for Jewish immigration to Israel.

Germany.<sup>33</sup> Young Jews in large West German cities such as Frankfurt, Munich, and West Berlin also interacted with one another when they went to synagogue, attended community events, or met at youth centers run by the Jewish community.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, despite living under drastically different circumstances, there are striking similarities in the childhood experiences of second-generation Jews in divided Germany. In fact, one can argue that the existence of Jewish subcultures in the FRG and the GDR meant that these young Jews grew up in a different Germany than their non-Jewish peers. In Frankfurt am Main, the future members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* actively participated in Jewish youth groups and lived within a tight network of Holocaust survivors. The children of *Westmigranten* in East Berlin also inhabited a social world that consisted of other Jewish families that had returned to the GDR in order to build a socialist state. Everyday encounters with the Nazi past further reinforced the otherness felt by young Jews in both Germanys.

## **Grievances in the West**

### *Israel and its Discontents*

Beginning in the late 1960s, Israeli politics and foreign policy became a major source of friction between second-generation Jews and the leaders of the Jewish Communities in the FRG. In the minds of younger Jews, the leaders of the *Zentralrat* and Jewish Communities in large West German cities all but mandated that Jews in the FRG maintain a supportive relationship with Israel that elided any criticism of Israeli foreign and domestic policy, specifically the occupation of the West Bank. Additionally, they believed that the Community's unwavering

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<sup>33</sup> Brumlik, 31.

<sup>34</sup> A number of autobiographical sketches on Jewish youth in the GDR and the FRG can be found in the following volume, which is as a companion piece to part of the Permanent Exhibition at the *Jüdisches Museum Berlin: So einfach war das. Jüdische Kindheit in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Cilly Kugelmann and Hanno Loewy (Berlin: Dumont, 2002).

support of Israel served as a kind of substitute identity (*Ersatzidentität*) that allowed them to avoid a greater discussion of what it meant to live as Jews in Germany after the Holocaust.<sup>35</sup>

Jewish DPs began to leave the Allied zones of occupation in droves following the relaxation of immigration laws in the United States and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. By 1950, the number of Jewish DPs in the FRG had dropped from 250,000 to 30,000.<sup>36</sup> For the next thirty-nine years, the size of the official Jewish Community in the FRG was in constant flux. During the 1950s, 15,000 Jews, primarily from Israel, immigrated to West Germany. Moreover, Jews from Czechoslovakia and Romania continued to arrive on a yearly basis well into the 1980s.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, a constant flow of outmigration to Israel meant that the total size of the Community hovered around 30,000 until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Jews who remained felt a constant need to justify their continued presence in the Federal Republic to themselves and to Jews who lived in both Israel and other parts of the Jewish diaspora. The anthropologist John Borneman has argued that unlike the Jewish communists who returned to the GDR in order to “build socialism,” many of the Jewish *Remigranten* in West Germany could not claim that they had returned out of a sense of moral obligation towards the

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<sup>35</sup> Kauders, 95. The roots of Zionism as an *Ersatzidentität* can also be traced to the peculiarities of German Zionism during the first three decades of the twentieth century. Stephen M. Poppel has argued that Zionism, “ideology of national distinctiveness and even separatism paradoxically provided the Zionists with a rationalization of their lives in Germany. Being about to depart apparently made one all the more comfortable in remaining. Zionism offered an escape from the demeaning pressure of anti-Semitism, an antidote to self-denial and self-disdain, and a solution to the dilemma of Jewish existence in a Germany that seemed to deny the Jew the right to a full life of his own.” Stephen M. Poppel, *Zionism in Germany, 1897-1933: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), 164-65.

<sup>36</sup> Grossmann, 252. Regarding the final destination points of Jewish DPs who left the FRG, Grossmann estimates that up to 142,000 settled in Palestine and Israel; 16,000-20,000 in Canada; 8,000 in Belgium; 2,000 in France 5,000 in Australia; and another 5,000 in South Africa and various Latin American nations.

<sup>37</sup> Jannis Panagiotidis, “‘The Oberkreisdirektor Decides Who is a German:’ Jewish Immigration, German Bureaucracy, and the Negotiation of National Belonging, 1953-1990,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38 (2012): 508.

foundation of a new Germany democracy.<sup>38</sup> In addition to this internal crisis of legitimacy, the Jewish Community in the FRG also faced an external one. During the 1950s and 1960s they were ostracized by international Jewish and Zionist organizations that viewed the Holocaust as proof that Jewish life and Germany were now irrevocably incompatible. One way in which Jews in the FRG tried to cope with these crises was by developing what has been called a “packed suitcase” mentality, namely a belief that their stay in the FRG was temporary and that they would leave as soon as they had secured enough money to immigrate elsewhere.<sup>39</sup> Many Eastern European Jews never applied for West German citizenship and, “it was not infrequent for pregnant women to fly to the USA to have their babies, thereby insuring that their children would have American citizenship.”<sup>40</sup>

An integral part of the “packed suitcase” mentality was unfailing support for the State of Israel and a desire on the part of Jewish parents that their children would make *Aliyah* to Israel. Jewish religious education in the FRG placed little emphasis on German-Jewish history and one would often see images of Israeli political leaders, rather than portraits or photographs of members of prewar Jewish life on the walls of Jewish Community centers.<sup>41</sup> However, German-Jews continued to feel ashamed of their decision to live in Germany, especially *Remigranten* who had either returned from or decided not to immigrate to Israel. Almost thirty years after leaving Israel in 1958, Sammy Speier described his family’s move to the Federal Republic as, “a

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<sup>38</sup> John Borneman and Jeffrey M. Peck, *Sojourners: The Return of German Jews and the Question of Identity* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 24. While this is the case for some *Remigranten*, many others with a Jewish background, such as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, actively took part in building democratic institutions in the FRG. For more on the role that *Remigranten* played in West German politics, see: Scott H. Krause, “*Neue Westpolitik*: The Clandestine Campaign to Westernize the SPD in Cold War Berlin, 1948-1958,” *Central European History* 48 (2015).

<sup>39</sup> Kauders, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Cilly Kugelmann, “‘Tell Them in America We’re Still Alive!’: The Jewish Community in the Federal Republic,” *New German Critique* 46 (Winter 1989): 133.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Brenner, *Nach dem Holocaust: Juden in Deutschland, 1945-1950* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1995), 198.

night and fog operation by my parents – even my best friend back then was not allowed to know that my parents emigrated because it was a betrayal to the Jewish, Israeli people (*Volk*) and state.” Even as they left Israel, Speier’s parents had already adopted the “packed suitcases” mentality, telling their son that the FRG would be a temporary stop before immigrating to the United States. Thus Speier, like many second-generation Jews, came to view the Federal Republic as little more than transfer station in his life.<sup>42</sup>

The Community’s uncritical embrace of Israel began to break down during the late 1960s when young West German Jews came into contact with the critical discourse of leftist student groups and witnessed - often first-hand - the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. An excellent example of this generation’s transition from uncritical embrace to critical distance toward Israel can be found in *Kein Weg als Deutscher und Jude* (“No Way as German and Jew”), the autobiography of Micha Brumlik, a founding member of the *Jüdische Gruppe*. Born in Davos, Brumlik came to Frankfurt am Main in 1952. Upon arrival Brumlik’s parents, who had been unable to establish a stable existence in Palestine or the State of Israel, began to work in the offices of Zionist organizations that promoted immigration to Israel. As the child of secular Zionist parents, Brumlik was raised to believe that Israel, rather than religion, lay at the center of his Jewish identity. During his childhood his parents had him read books such as *Jaap kommt ins Gelobte Land* (Jaap Comes to the Promised Land), which tells the story of a young Dutch Holocaust survivor who emigrates to Palestine to fight in the Israeli War of Independence, and the Leon Uris novel *Exodus*, which he received as a gift for his thirteenth birthday.<sup>43</sup> Brumlik

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<sup>42</sup> Sammy Speier, “Von der Pubertät zum Erwachsenendasein – Bericht einer Bewusstwerdung,” in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. by Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Cilly Kugelmann, and Julius H. Schoeps, 182-194 (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenäum, 1986), 182.

<sup>43</sup> Brumlik, 49.

was also a passionate member of the Frankfurt chapter of the *ZJD*. During their weekly meetings and camping excursions he and other second-generation Jews sang Hebrew songs, took part in discussions on Jewish or Israeli topics, and, in the true spirit of *Zionism* and *Ashkenazi* Judaism, danced the horah.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, Brumlik lost faith in *Zionism* when he briefly made *Aliyah* to Israel after graduating from high school. The most salient factor that influenced Brumlik's sudden change from *Zionism* to anti-*Zionism* was his first-hand encounter with the legacy of Arab expulsions during the Israeli War of Independence and Israeli territorial expansion following the Six Day War of 1967. Before he left for Israel, Brumlik had been told that there was no such thing as a "Palestinian problem" because donations had been used to legally purchase Arab land before Israel declared its independence.<sup>45</sup> Arriving in Israel only three months after Israel's victory in the Six Day War, Brumlik came face to face with the reality on the ground. After researching the history of the Kibbutz where he was living and reading a number of articles in the *Jerusalem Post* about the creation of Israeli settlements in the newly acquired West Bank Brumlik was struck with an earth-shattering realization: "I actually lived in an imperialist country that was colonizing eastern territories."<sup>46</sup> In no time at all, Brumlik rejected *Zionism*, decided to return to Germany in order to study at the University of Frankfurt, and replaced the picture of Theodor Herzl he had kept above his bed with one of Che Guevara and another of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>47</sup>

The Jewish Communities in the FRG reacted harshly to the growing discontent among second-generation Jews. Brumlik recalls that on several occasions he noticed people taking

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 31-2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 76.

photos of him and other Jewish leftists at political demonstrations and that a friend of his lost her job as a stewardess with the Israeli airline El Al because of her relationship with Brumlik and his leftist Jewish coterie.<sup>48</sup> Other second-generation Jews outside of Frankfurt also dealt with the ire of the Community. As late as 1982, Julius Schoeps lost his seat on the board of the Jewish Community in Düsseldorf after he and other young Jews signed a declaration that condemned the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.<sup>49</sup> As a later section will show, the Communities' refusal to engage in a critical discourse on the Lebanon War was one of the decisive factors that led the *Jüdische Gruppe* to create alternative spaces where they could openly engage with the complicated issue of Israeli-diaspora relations.

#### *“Career Jews” and Normalization*

Another source of friction between the second-generation Jews and the Jewish establishment was the leadership style of the *Zentralrat* and Jewish Communities in large West German cities. In addition to opposing critical discourse on Israel, the older generation of Jewish leaders also hoped to maintain what was, for the most part, an uncritical relationship with the government of the Federal Republic. Historian Anthony D. Kauders has asserted that the Jewish establishment in the FRG avoided a critical relationship due to their desire to take part in a “gift exchange” (*Gabentausch*) with the West German government.<sup>50</sup> Prominent Jewish leaders, such as Werner Nachmann and Heinz Galinski, whose personal rivalry often shaped the politics and decision-making of the *Zentralrat*, believed that the continued existence of a Jewish Community was a source of political legitimacy for the Federal Republic because it represented a break from

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>49</sup> Julius H. Schoeps, “Never Forget Thy People Israel! Autobiographical Remarks,” trans. Doris Jones, in *Speaking Out: Jewish Voices from United Germany*, ed. Susan Stern (Chicago: edition q, 1995), 73.

<sup>50</sup> Kauders, 11.



the racist and genocidal policies of the Nazi regime. In exchange for helping to democratize the new German state, they expected that their engagement would be recognized and that they would be allowed to take part in West German politics. By portraying themselves as “upholders of democracy” (*Wahrer der Demokratie*) they were also able to justify the continued existence of a Jewish Community in the FRG to other segments of world Jewry.<sup>51</sup> The *Gabentausch* proved to be another source of friction between the older and younger generation because it generally precluded a critical engagement with the FRG’s Nazi past, Jewish leaders used speeches and articles in the *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, the largest Jewish newspaper in the Federal Republic, to try to ameliorate anti-German sentiment emanating from Jews in Israel and other parts of the diaspora, going so far as to claim that it was impossible to speak of a collective German guilt for the Holocaust.<sup>52</sup> According to Hans Jakob Ginsburg, whose father Alexander served as General Secretary of the *Zentralrat* from 1973 to 1988, many Jewish leaders continued to “stress the [FRG’s] differences from Hitler’s Germany, rather than the continuities.”<sup>53</sup>

In the late 1960s, second-generation Jews began to speak out against the West German government and the *Zentralrat*’s attempts to “normalize” the German past. Young Jews expressed their opposition to the Jewish establishment via their participation in the burgeoning West German students’ movement and within the formal organizational framework of official Jewish Communities. For example, during the founding conference of the *Bundesverband Jüdischer Studenten in Deutschland* (Federal Association of Jewish Students in Germany) in March of 1968. In a speech to the conference, Benjamin Korn told fellow students that, “in light

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 126-133.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 138-147.

<sup>53</sup> Hans Jakob Ginsburg, “Politik danach – Jüdische Interessenvertretung in der Bundesrepublik,” in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Cilly Kugelmann, Julius H. Schoeps, 108-118 (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenäum, 1986), 114.

of the present situation in the Federal Republic,” they needed to stop the “Teutonic oxen that stubbornly continue to drift to the right.”<sup>54</sup>

A more dramatic example came in 1978, when it was revealed that Hans Filbinger, who was governor of the West German state of Baden-Württemberg, had authorized a number of executions while serving as a Navy judge during the final months of World War II. During the ensuing controversy, *Zentralrat* President Werner Nachmann openly defended Filbinger, going so far as to write a letter in which he praised the politician for his help in reestablishing Jewish life in Baden-Württemberg.<sup>55</sup> Filbinger’s actions particularly incensed leftist Jewish journalist Michel R. Lang, who grew up in France as the son of German-Jewish émigrés, and noted Jewish polemicist Henryk M. Broder, who was born in communist Poland and came to the Federal Republic in 1958. In reaction to Nachmann’s defense of Filbinger the two decided to publish *Fremd im Eigenen Land* (Strangers in Their Own Country), a collection of critical essays written by Jews living in the FRG. In the preface to the volume, Broder and Lang explained that they had decided to undertake the project because “After talking with our Jewish friends it became clear that essentially no one feels that they are represented by the *Zentralrat*.” Another of their key grievances with the Jewish establishment in the FRG was their refusal to publish articles in the *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung* that criticized Nachmann’s handling of the Filbinger affair.<sup>56</sup> By the start of the next decade, young Jews would begin to challenge Nachmann and the leaders of West German Jewish Communities by creating their own Jewish spaces.

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<sup>54</sup> The Editors, “Die Verantwortung der ersten Generation. Bundesverband jüdischer Studenten in Deutschland gegründet,” *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, April 12, 1968, 3, quoted in Konstantin Goschler and Anthony Kauders, “Dritter Teil: 1968-1989. Positionierungen,” in *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart: Politik, Kultur*, ed. Michael Brenner, 295-378 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2012), 305.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 360.

<sup>56</sup> Henryk M. Broder and Michel R. Lang, “Vorneweg,” in *Fremd im Eigenen Land: Juden in der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Henryk M. Broder and Michel R. Lang, 11-12 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979), 11.

## New Spaces in the FRG

One result of the simmering discontent among second-generation Jews in the FRG was the establishment of the *Jüdische Gruppe* in Frankfurt am Main at the beginning of the 1980s. There are many reasons why Frankfurt am Main proved to be fertile ground for the creation of an opposition group within the Jewish Community. Tobias Freimüller has argued that a number of external factors, including the presence of prominent leftists at the University of Frankfurt and the Institute for Social Research, transformed the city into, “the intellectual center of Jewish life in the Federal Republic,”<sup>57</sup> The Frankfurt Jewish Community had also experienced a brief youth insurgency in 1971, when members of an opposition group called the *Junge Liste* (“Young List”) were elected to the Community Board. Dan Diner, a future founder of the *Jüdische Gruppe*, even enjoyed brief tenure as the Frankfurt Community’s representative to the *Zentralrat*. However, their electoral success was short-lived and by 1973, Diner and other members of the *Junge Liste* left their positions on the board.<sup>58</sup>

While the exact date of the founding of the *Jüdische Gruppe* is unknown, scholars and former members of the group identify 1980 as the year in which it first began to meet. Micha Brumlik, Dan Diner, and Cilly Kugelmann initiated the creation of the new group, which soon had between forty and fifty members from Frankfurt and neighboring cities.<sup>59</sup> As the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* began to meet on an almost monthly-basis, they turned their attention toward discussing issues of Jewish identity and Jewish life in the FRG that they felt had been

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<sup>57</sup> Tobias Freimüller, “Frankfurt am Main – Intellektuelles Zentrum Jüdisches Leben in der Bundesrepublik,” *Münchener Beiträge zur jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur*, 4 No. 1 (2010): 78-89.

<sup>58</sup> Helga Krohn, “*Es war richtig, wieder anzufangen:*” *Juden in Frankfurt am Main seit 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2011), 159-162.

<sup>59</sup> Kauders, 120.

ignored by both the Jewish establishment and their parents' generation. According to Brumlik the group's meetings frequently revolved around three themes: "The relationship between German and Jewish leftists, our self-conception (*Selbstverständnis*) in relation to our parents and their decision to raise us in Germany and, respectively, their ability or inability to share their past experiences of persecution with us. Finally we constantly engaged with the State of Israel and its policy toward the Palestinians, which we sharply opposed."<sup>60</sup>

By 1982, the group's critical stance toward Israel steered them toward open conflict with Frankfurt's established Jewish Community. On April 19, 1982, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (Frankfurt Review) published an open letter in which sixteen members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* expressed their solidarity with the goals of a protest in Bonn that had been organized by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). In the letter, the group called for peace and tolerance in the region, stating:

As Jews, we believe it is our special duty to raise our voices against these policies of the Israeli State: We stand with the Palestinian people in their fight against Israel's oppressive policies and for the restoration of their rights. We believe that neither peace in the region nor the survival of the people living there – no matter what their background is - is possible without recognizing the collective rights of the arab-Palestinaian and Jewish-Israeli peoples.

The Frankfurt Jewish Community reacted swiftly and harshly to this flagrant violation of communal policy vis-à-vis Israel. Soon thereafter several members of the community posted a copy of the letter in a display case in the Westend Synagogue.<sup>61</sup> While it is unclear exactly who authorized or organized this act, it was almost certainly carried out in order to ostracize the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and to send a message to the rest of the Community that there would be no tolerance of voices critical of Israel. Furthermore, by launching this attack in the

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<sup>60</sup> Brumlik, 132.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 133-34.

Community's largest religious space, the perpetrators sent a clear message that there could be no separation in the Community between Judaism and the politics of the Israeli government.

Nevertheless, this open attack did little to weaken the *Jüdische Gruppe*'s resolve. For one, the group had already made a conscious decision to hold their meetings in spaces that were not affiliated with the Frankfurt Jewish Community. Instead, they would meet in the offices of the leftist publishing house *Neue Kritik* (New Critique), the Catholic University Association (*Hochschulgemeinde*), or at the Lutheran Academy in nearby Arnoldshain, where *Jüdische Gruppe* member Doron Kiesel worked.<sup>62</sup> The group's opposition to Israeli policy also took on a greater sense of urgency following Israel's invasion of Lebanon and on June 13, 1982, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* held a protest in the vicinity of the Israeli embassy in Bonn.<sup>63</sup> The group also organized a conference between representatives of the PLO and Israeli opposition groups that took place at the Lutheran Academy in the fall of 1984.<sup>64</sup>

Despite an initial period of cooperation, the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* began to feel a growing sense of alienation from members of the West German radical left. In his autobiography, Micha Brumlik recalls a failed attempt by the *Jüdische Gruppe* and other leftist groups to organize an anti-Lebanon War protest in Frankfurt. As the protest was taking shape, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* strictly opposed calls by groups associated with the terrorist Red Army Faction and the Marxist-Leninist Party of Germany to declare the Israeli invasion an act of genocide, arguing that it inappropriately relativized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with the Holocaust. A number of groups also refused to voice support for Israeli anti-war and opposition

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<sup>62</sup> Gert Mattenklott, *Über Juden in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag, 1992), 144.

<sup>63</sup> Their initial attempt to protest directly in front of the embassy was put to a halt when two "friendly" police officers told them that this could not be done because of security reasons: Brumlik, 136-7; Kauders, 121.

<sup>64</sup> Brumlik, 144.

groups, leading one member of the Hamburg group *Große Freiheit* (Great Freedom) to derisively declare “We will not remove ourselves from the global fight against imperialism and racism because of a few so-called progressive Jews.”<sup>65</sup> Members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* were increasingly apprehensive about growing attempts by the West German right to normalize the Germany’s past, including Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan’s 1985 visit to a West German cemetery in Bitburg which housed the graves of former SS-soldiers and the *Historikerstreit* (Historian’s Quarrel) of the late 1980s.<sup>66</sup>

### *Literary Spaces*

Realizing that the Jewish community had an iron grip on non-religious community outlets such as the *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* began to create new literary spaces to articulate their political views and challenge the present state of Jewish life in the FRG. One example is the *Frankfurter Jüdische Nachrichten* (Frankfurt Jewish News), a thrice-yearly newspaper that included articles criticizing policies of the Israeli government,<sup>67</sup> expressing a desire for a more pluralistic approach to Jewish religious practice in the FRG,<sup>68</sup> and voicing disillusionment with the Jewish establishment’s continued control of representative bodies throughout the country.<sup>69</sup> Another example is *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945* (Jewish Life in Germany Since 1945), an edited volume that was

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 138-9.

<sup>66</sup> For a succinct summary of the *Historikerstreit*, see Konrad H. Jarausch, “Removing the Nazi Stain? The Quarrel of the German Historians,” *German Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (May 1988).

<sup>67</sup> Zentralarchiv zur Erforschung der Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland (ZA), B.8 Frankfurt 7, Dan Diner, “Israel am Scheideweg. Das einundzwanzigste Jahr,” *Frankfurter Jüdische Nachrichten*, April, 1988.

<sup>68</sup> ZA, B.8 Frankfurt 7, Rachel Heuberger, “Feminismus und Judentum,” *Frankfurter Jüdische Nachrichten*, April, 1987.

<sup>69</sup> ZA, B.8 Frankfurt 7, Micha Brumlik, “Gefährdete Demokratie: Zu den Gemeinderatswahlen in Frankfurt 1989,” *Frankfurter Jüdische Nachrichten*, September, 1989.

published in 1986. In a series of scholarly and personal essays, the contributors to the volume wrote their own history of the post-Holocaust Jewish community and expressed their dissatisfaction with the present state of Jewish life in the Federal Republic. In several essays, members or friends of the *Jüdische Gruppe* presented themselves not only as “strangers in their own land,” but also as strangers in their own community because the existing Jewish leadership would not allow them any modicum of shared responsibility in organized Jewish life.<sup>70</sup> Individual essays also focused greater attention on issues such as Israel and West German attempts to “normalize” German-Jewish relations and German history forty years after the Holocaust.

One contribution that addresses a number of the concerns facing second-generation Jews in the FRG is Dan Diner’s essay “Negative Symbiosis – Germans and Jews After Auschwitz,” which is now considered a seminal work in German-Jewish studies. As the title of the work suggests, it is Diner’s own attempt to grapple with the contested concept of a “German-Jewish symbiosis” in pre-Holocaust Germany. At the start of the essay Diner states that like the influential historian and Zionist Gershom Scholem<sup>71</sup>, he agrees that this concept has been used as little more than an “idealistic falsification” of German-Jewish history. Turning his attention to the postwar period, he argues that, “Since Auschwitz...one can actually speak of a ‘German-Jewish symbiosis,’ however a negative one,” that has informed the post-Shoah identities of both

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<sup>70</sup> Monika Richarz, “Juden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik seit 1945,” in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha, Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Cilly Kugelmann, and Julius H. Schoeps, 13-30 (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenäum, 1986), 27.

<sup>71</sup> For more on Scholem’s writings and view of the “German-Jewish Symbiosis” see Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

Germans and Jews.<sup>72</sup> In particular, Diner argues that, “ Israel represents a psychic support [for Jews living in the FRG], a substitute identity, because they must explain over and again, both to themselves and Jews elsewhere, why they, by living in the hangman’s house, have helped to give the impression that after Auschwitz, normality has returned to German-Jewish relations – a normality that nothing has happened.”<sup>73</sup>

Later in the essay, Diner directs his attention to current normalization efforts on the part of West German intellectuals and the West German government. Although he does not name specific events, it is clear that Diner is particularly troubled by the Bitburg incident and the *Historikerstreit*, which had begun only several months before the essay’s publication. In the face of attempts to normalize Germany’s dark past, Diner argues that this particular moment provides the chance for a re-conceptualization of Jewish life in West Germany. Diner closes his essay by calling for a new twist on Jewish leaders’ conception of themselves as “upholders of democracy.” Rather than helping the West German government’s efforts to normalize the past, Diner argues that Jews in the FRG need to engage with West German society by refashioning, “themselves as the guardians of memory in this country.” This in turn would legitimize the continued existence of Jewish life in Germany once and for all.<sup>74</sup>

“Negative Symbiosis” also appeared as the first essay in the inaugural issue of the intellectual journal *Babylon: Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* (Babylon: Articles on the Jewish Present), which Diner co-edited with several other members of the Frankfurt *Jüdische Gruppe*.

At the start of the issue, the editors stated that they wanted “to re-establish an intellectual

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<sup>72</sup> Dan Diner, “Negative Symbiose – Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz”, in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, Cilly Kugelman, and Julius H. Schoeps, 243-57 (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdischer Verlag bei Athenäum, 1986), 243.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 253-254.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 257.



discourse on Jewish problems. We do not want so much to express ourselves as representatives of the perspective of a religious/social/ethnic minority, but as universalist-oriented intellectuals that reflectively want to transcend the particularity of our background (*Herkunftspartikularität*) without denying it.”<sup>75</sup> A look at the contents of the first issue reveals a transnational element of the *Jüdische Gruppe*’s attempts to re-imagine Jewish life in the FRG. In addition to essays by non-Jewish German intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas, the first edition of *Babylon* also contained essays by prominent American-Jewish academics, including sociologist Norman Birnbaum and noted literary theorist Harold Bloom. Even before the creation of *Babylon*, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* had been able to publish autobiographical pieces in the American journal *New German Critique*, which devoted three issues in 1980 to German-Jewish relations.<sup>76</sup>

Although the Frankfurt *Jüdische Gruppe* no longer held regular meetings after 1986, its members continued to play a vocal part in debates about Jewish life in the FRG and West German society. In that same year, Brumlik and several other members of the group ran for seats on the Community board with a platform calling for more pluralistic approaches to religious practices.<sup>77</sup> Following the example of the Frankfurt group, other *Jüdische Gruppen* began to pop up in larger West German cities. In his memoir, Julius Schoeps, a member of the community in Düsseldorf recalls his attendance at several gatherings that took place at the Lutheran Academy in Arnoldshain during the 1980s.<sup>78</sup> By the start of the 1990s there were groups in Cologne,

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<sup>75</sup> “Editorial,” *Babylon: Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* 1 (1986): 7-8.

<sup>76</sup> *New German Critique* 19-21 (1980). A number of these articles also appear in: *Jews and Germans since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986).

<sup>77</sup> Brumlik, 183.

<sup>78</sup> Schoeps, 255-6.

Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Munich, and West Berlin.<sup>79</sup> When sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann, a founding member of the West Berlin *Jüdische Gruppe*, organized a conference at the University of Toronto in November 1989, it was attended by members of the Frankfurt *Jüdische Gruppe* and past contributors to *Babylon* and *New German Critique*, demonstrating the continued significance that these second-generation Jews would have for their Communities and society in the era of German reunification.

In short, members of the Frankfurt *Jüdische Gruppe* challenged the Jewish establishment by creating new Jewish spaces in which they could explore new approaches to Jewish life in the FRG. Whether in conferences at the Lutheran Academy in Arnoldshain or on the pages of *Babylon*, the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* looked to challenge the prevailing attitudes of the established Jewish Communities in the FRG, including an uncritical embrace of Israel and a lack of religious pluralism. The Members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* also called for greater engagement with non-Jewish German society in order to combat the normalization or relativization of West Germany's Nazi past.

### **Grievances in the East**

*“...it seems to me quite clear that sticking to this very conservative definition of Jewishness will lead to our organizational death”<sup>80</sup> – Irene Runge*

Although most of the German-Jewish *Remigranten* who returned to the SBZ were avowed communists who had renounced their Jewishness, their options for engaging in Jewish communal life were few and far between during the first three decades of the GDR's existence. In July 1946, eight small Jewish communities came together to form an association later known

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<sup>79</sup> Marion Kaplan, “What is ‘Religion’ among Jews in Contemporary Germany?” in *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*, ed. by Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler, 77-112 (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 87.

<sup>80</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 48.

as the Union of Jewish Communities in the German Democratic Republic (*Verband der jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik - VJGDDR*). These communities faced numerous setbacks during the initial postwar years, including the ruling SED's rejection of laws that would allow Jewish Communities and individuals to reclaim property that was confiscated by the Nazis and the creation of a moral and legal hierarchy in which Jewish victims of racial persecution were not afforded the same financial support and honor as communist resistance fighters.<sup>81</sup>

The leaders of the VJGDDR soon became targets during the “anti-cosmopolitan” purges in the GDR between 1952 and 1953, which happened contemporaneously with other purges of Jewish-Communists in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup> As Michael Meng has argued, the victims of the anti-cosmopolitan campaign in the GDR were the first targets of “a distinctly antifascist anti-Semitism” on the part of the SED, “who associated Jews with the enemies of communism: capitalism, American culture, and imperialism.”<sup>83</sup> On January 6, 1953 Julius Meyer, the head of the VJGDDR and a member of the SED, was interrogated by members of the Central Control Commission, which had been tasked with purging possible spies within the Party. A week later, Meyer and the leaders of the Jewish communities in Dresden, Leipzig, and Erfurt decided to flee to West Berlin. By the end of the month, a quarter of the approximately 1200 members of Jewish communities in the GDR had also made the decision to emigrate via West Germany.<sup>84</sup> Even after the purge ended, Communities in the GDR continued to shrink

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<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 95.

<sup>82</sup> For a more thorough examination of the anti-cosmopolitan purge in the GDR, see *Ibid.*, 106-61.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Meng, “East Germany’s Jewish Question: The Return and Preservation of Jewish Sites in East Berlin and Potsdam, 1945-1989,” *Central European History* 38 (2008): 618.

<sup>84</sup> Herf, 132-33.

because of an aging population. Also, the GDR never experienced anything similar to the small waves of Jewish emigration that had maintained a stable Jewish population in the FRG. By 1974, fewer than one thousand Jews belonged to Jewish communities in East Germany and half of them lived in East Berlin, where over ninety percent of members were between the ages of 55 and 90.<sup>85</sup>

By the end of the 1970s the Jewish Communities of the GDR, which were strictly defined as religious organizations, paradoxically existed in a spiritual vacuum. Following the death of East Berlin Rabbi Martin Riesenburger 1965, none of the Jewish communities in the GDR employed a permanent Rabbi.<sup>86</sup> While the Rabbi Ernst Stein and Cantor Estrongo of West Berlin occasionally visited the Community in East Berlin, smaller Jewish Communities such as the one in Dresden had to bring in cantors from Czechoslovakia or Hungary to lead their services on the high holidays.<sup>87</sup> The lack of a permanent rabbi also meant that the few second-generation Jews grew up within the Jewish Community had almost no formal religious education. While some were under the impression that they had received a *bar mitzvah*, in reality, they were generally taught little more than how to read Hebrew letters.<sup>88</sup>

Another indicator of the spiritual and religious vacuum in East Berlin was the community's main synagogue on the *Rykestrasse* in the neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg. In 1953, ironically at the same time as the anti-cosmopolitan purge, the East Berlin government had agreed to provide the East Berlin Jewish community with enough money to rebuild the

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<sup>85</sup> Granata, 198.

<sup>86</sup> Brenner, 201.

<sup>87</sup> Ostow, *Juden*, 77.

<sup>88</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 55.

synagogue, which was renamed as the “Temple of Peace.”<sup>89</sup> With room for over a thousand worshipers, it far out-stripped the logistical needs of the small community, which often struggled to get the requisite ten adult males needed to conduct a Jewish religious service. Often having no connection or experience with Jewish rituals, the founders of *Wir für uns* would begin to explore the possibility of creating Jewish life that would exist beyond these religious spaces.

### **A New Group in the East**

When several of the founding or future members of *Wir für uns* started to establish contact with the East Berlin Jewish community in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they were confronted with a small collection of largely elderly individuals who were reluctant to welcome strangers into their midst. The case of Eva Neuman is a good example of the cold reception that many of the second-generation *Westmigranten* received when they initially attempted to engage with the established Jewish community. Like several of her contemporaries, Neuman did not find out about her Jewish roots until she was well into adulthood. After Israeli relatives of her mother visited East Berlin, “something changed, suddenly I wanted to have an identity...I wanted to know how this identity was defined and which conditions were attached to it.”<sup>90</sup> Neuman decided to attend a lecture by a certain Professor Simon (most likely Dr. Hermann Simon, who was Vice President of the East Berlin Jewish community at that time).<sup>91</sup> Following the talk, Neuman approached Simon and mentioned that, “I have an *Ostjude*<sup>92</sup> mother and a *Yekke*<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 93.

<sup>90</sup> Schneider, 389-90.

<sup>91</sup> Ostow, *Contemporary*, 35.

<sup>92</sup> A generally derogatory German term that refers to Jews from Eastern Europe.

<sup>93</sup> A Yiddish word for German Jews.

father,” only to be rebuffed with the curt reply, “Then you have a problem.” While it is hard to discern the specific meaning of Simon’s comment, it dealt an emotional blow to Neuman:

“Before I even knew what my Jewishness was, I already had a problem.”<sup>94</sup>

Another reason that Simon and other Community members reacted coldly toward non-affiliated Jews was the Community’s strict adherence to a traditional definition of matrilineal Jewish descent, dashing the hopes of potential members who only had a Jewish father. In most cases those seeking admittance quickly lost interest after members of the Board suggested that they attend meetings of the Community’s youth group, which rarely met at all. Even if an applicant persisted, they would first have to prove that they could read Hebrew, which no one in the community taught, and their knowledge of the Jewish holidays before being approved for membership by a Rabbi, which the Community did not have.<sup>95</sup> However, not every applicant was even invited to speak with the Board. In 1988 Jalda Rebling, who was the daughter of the Jewish Communist and Yiddish singer Lin Jaldati<sup>96</sup>, began to send letters to the Board about whether or not her two sons would be able to join the community. After several attempts she received word that their case would have to be forwarded to Ernst Stein, a West Berlin based rabbi who occasionally officiated religious services and Jewish life-cycle events for the East Berlin Jewish community. Rebling’s subsequent attempts to further discuss the matter with the community met with silence.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Schneider, 390.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>96</sup> For more on Jaldati and the GDR’s attempts to marshal Yiddish music for cultural diplomacy see David Shneer, “Yiddish Music and East German Antifascism: Lin Jaldati, Post-Holocaust Jewish Culture and the Cold War,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Volume 60, no. 1 (2015): 1-28.

<sup>97</sup> Ostow, *Juden*, 112-113.

Frustrated with the Community leadership's obstinate stance toward integrating second-generation children from mixed marriages, Irene Runge, who had joined the community in 1976 and become a member of the Board in 1983, took the initial steps to create the group that would become known as *Wir für uns – Juden für Juden*. In 1985 Runge approached the other members of the board about holding an event for second-generation Jews who were not members of the community. Although Simon and Community President Peter Kirchner reacted skeptically to the idea of reaching out to individuals who had experienced almost no contact with Jewish religious traditions<sup>98</sup>, the board eventually approved Runge's request. Soon she and a group of friends began to compile a list of friends, relatives, and acquaintances to invite to an initial meeting.<sup>99</sup>

In May 1986 the East Berlin Community sent out event invitation letters to East Berliners who were known to have at least one Jewish parent and had expressed an interest in joining the Community. When the first meeting of the group took place at the end of June the cultural room of the Jewish Community was packed with people between the ages of thirty and forty, including several guests who had not received an invitation.<sup>100</sup> The meeting began with introductory remarks from Runge, who stressed that she had decided to join the community because of cultural and biographical, rather than religious reasons: "Skeptical people asked me what the point was. I am not religious, I never learned Hebrew, and I knew little about Jewish customs and observance. I made this decision because I wanted to enter a circle of people whose biographies I more or less share. Every Jew here is a survivor or the child of survivors. Despite Hitler, we are here. And that was also the prime motive for me to want to institutionally belong

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<sup>98</sup> Runge recalls Simon dubiously stating, "Mazze muß man essen, darüber kann man nicht reden." Schneider, 360.

<sup>99</sup> Schneider, 359-60; Irene Runge, "Wunder und Zufälle: Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland bleibt ein Dauerthema," in *Wir: Der Jüdische Kulturverein Berlin e.V. 1989-2009*, 11-30, 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> ZA, B8 DDR 1, "Ein jüdischer Abend im Kulturraum," *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, September, 1986.

to Judaism. Every Jew in this city represents hundreds, thousands of others who had no chance for survival.” Runge proceeded to outline her main objectives for forming the new group. *Wir für uns* would serve as a space in which anyone with a Jewish parent could explore their Jewish background, allow for more contact between Community members and non-members, and work toward the creation of working groups that could explore different aspects of Jewish rituals and culture.<sup>101</sup>

The group that began to regularly attend the events run by *Wir für uns* primarily consisted of the children of communist *Westmigranten* who had expressed an interest in reconnecting with the Jewish culture and traditions that their parents had rejected during the interwar period. In fact, a remarkable number of participants already knew each other from their childhood or from school.<sup>102</sup> Included in this group was translator and Sartre expert Vincent von Wroblewsky. Like other children of Jewish Communists in the GDR, Wroblewsky had increasingly felt a desire to discover more about his Jewish background during the early 1980s, but he had previously ruled out exploring his Jewishness because as an atheist and member of the SED, he had been led to believe that Jewish life could only be found in the strictly religious context of the East Berlin Jewish Community: “Naturally, this closed us out ... because we had a Jewish consciousness without being religious.”<sup>103</sup> Thus, for many second-generation Jews the group offered them their first real experience to explore their own Jewish identity in a non-religious context. The close connection established between participants with similar backgrounds also created a sense of shared identity that many participants found lacking during the final decade of “real existing

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Von Wroblewsky, *Eine unheimliche Liebe. Juden in der DDR* (Berlin: Philo, 2001), 106; Schneider, 359.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 157; Ostow, *Contemporary*, 78-79.



socialism” in the GDR. When asked in an interview about why she decided to join *Wir für uns*, Irene Selle replied that, “It was the joy to be able to belong to a group, to find intimacy.”<sup>104</sup>

Anetta Kahane went so far as to describe a heightened sense of familiarity among group members: “...it was so funny with the group “*Wir für uns*:” when the group met back then it was announced beforehand that we wanted to convene in order to get to know one another. We quickly realized we knew each other. Naturally, I had this feeling too. If I met one of them on the street or even if I had maybe spoken with them for less than ten minutes in my life, I would feel that I knew them.”<sup>105</sup>

A look at the subsequent meetings of *Wir für uns* after June of 1986 also reveals a process of working toward the reclamation of a culture that had been rejected by parents of the participants. On Sunday, September 7, 1986 forty members of the new group took part in a walking tour of the *Scheunenviertel*, which had once been the home of thousands of Eastern European Jews who had immigrated to Berlin from the end of the nineteenth century until the Nazis came to power. In an article relating what had happened at the event, the *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (“News Bulletin of the Union of Jewish Communities in the German Democratic Republic”) quoted Annette Leo, who said that, “Our parents’ disengagement from the religious community was a progressive step...but for us this means that we have lost a piece of cultural tradition, that is worth keeping (*die doch aufhebenswert ist*).”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Von Wroblewsky, 83.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>106</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, “Wanderung durch die Berliner Innenstadt,” *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, December, 1986.

Like their West German contemporaries in the *Jüdische Gruppe*, the participants of *Wir für uns* also used their activities to engage with the persistence and palpable presence of their own nation's Nazi past. In early 1988, the younger members of *Wir für uns* were joined by community members and Holocaust survivors for a meeting on the recent trial of Henry Schmidt, a former SS-officer who had managed to live undetected in the East German city of Dresden for over four decades after the end of World War II. The meeting included presentations from Eva Zakowsky, a survivor who testified as a witness, and the *Wir für uns* member Thomas Sandberg, who had worked as a press photographer for the trials. Several participants discussed how Schmidt's existence among them for so long raised doubts about how well they understood their own East German society.<sup>107</sup> The group, which was largely composed of the children of Holocaust survivors, also began exploring their personal relationship to the Holocaust. In late 1988, following a presentation by Wolfgang Herzberg on interviews he had conducted with Holocaust survivors, members, of *Wir für uns*, "heatedly debated how we currently deal with these memories and how we can bring ourselves into the context of this historical experience."<sup>108</sup>

The members of *Wir für uns* also used their new space in order to explore a greater plurality of Jewish religious practices that differed dramatically from that of the established Jewish community in East Berlin. In the winter of 1988, the group celebrated the third night of Chanukkah with Rabbi Yudy Shemtov, an emissary from the Hassidic Chabad Lubavitch movement, which is based in New York. As described in the *Nachrichtenblatt*, the event, which was also attended by members of the Community, presented the audience with an odd scene in

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<sup>107</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, Irene Runge, "Ein ganz gewöhnlicher Mann: Zum Kriegsverbrecherprozess in Dresden," *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, March 1988.

<sup>108</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, "'Wir für uns': 'Du darfst ja nicht vergessen,'" *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, March 1989.

which Community cantor Oljean Ingster briefly sang the holiday blessings before handing over the bulk of the ceremony to Rabbi Shemtov, who used the occasion to provide the crowd with an in-depth discussion of the story and meaning of Chanukkah.<sup>109</sup> Such a scene underscored the paradoxical orthodoxy of Community leaders who themselves knew little about Jewish traditions. Finally, during a lecture by the Jewish-American historian Mark Epstein in 1989, members of *Wir für uns* used the occasion to learn more about how American Jews conducted religious services in a language other than Hebrew (which few could understand) and dealt with complicated community matters such as intermarriage and assimilation, which were common issues for second-generation East German Jews.<sup>110</sup> By the time the Berlin Wall fell in November, members of *Wir für uns* had already made great strides toward exploring new conceptions of Jewishness and Jewish life that challenged the norms of the existing Community in East Berlin.

### **Transnational Connections?**

Let us return to the transnational context of these two groups. Migration was part and parcel of the cosmopolitan biographies of many second-generation Jews in divided Germany. The parents of most, if not all, of the future members of *Wir für uns* had emigrated to the United States, Great Britain, Palestine, Sweden, and France during the 1930s and returned to the GDR in order to “build socialism.” In addition to having parents who were either *Remigranten* or DPs, many of the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* were transnational individuals in their own right,

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<sup>109</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, “‘Wir für Uns’: Ein Lubawitscher Rebbe in Berlin,” March 1989.

<sup>110</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, “‘Wir für uns’: Juden in den USA – Ein- und Ausblicke eines Insiders,” *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Juden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, June 1989.

having spent part of their lives in Israel after growing up in a Zionist context that prepared them for the prospect of immigration upon reaching adulthood.<sup>111</sup>

The example of the *Wir für uns* founder Irene Runge also points to the way that Jewish life in Israel and the diaspora influenced the desire to explore new approaches to Judaism during the 1980s. Writing two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Runge said that her idea for creating a separate group was related to a 1984 trip to Manhattan, where she learned that, “the Holocaust...[was] not the only reason to be Jewish,” and discovered a Jewish community that was, “more tolerant, tighter...and open than in East Berlin.”<sup>112</sup> Runge also was also inspired by the plurality of Jewish groups and the prevailing attitude among Jewish New Yorkers that “if you do not like your synagogue, create another one.”<sup>113</sup>

In addition to her trips to Manhattan, Runge was influenced by what she encountered during two trips to Jerusalem in the late 1980s. In an article on her trip to a meeting of the World Jewish Congress in 1986, Runge described her experience of visiting the Holocaust memorial and museum at *Yad Vashem* with other children of survivors and related how hearing Yiddish and looking into small shops reminded her of postcards of shtetl life in Poland before 1939.<sup>114</sup> In 1989 the Jerusalem Foundation, which had previously given a fellowship to *Wir für uns* member Vincent von Wroblewsky, hosted Runge for six weeks while she conducted research for a book

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<sup>111</sup> In an interview with Gert Mattenklott, Doron Kiesel claimed that approximately eighty percent of the second-generation Jews in Frankfurt am Main had spent some portion of their adult life in Israel before returning to the FRG: Mattenklott, 147.

<sup>112</sup> Irene Runge, *Wie ich im jüdischen Manhattan zum meinem Berlin fand oder Reisen, Ankommen, Leben* (Berlin: Kulturmaschinen, 2012), 51.

<sup>113</sup> Runge, “Wunder,” 11.

<sup>114</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, Irene Runge, “‘Alle Juden sind füreinander verantwortlich. Jeder für Jeden.’ Bemerkungen zum Weltkongreß,” *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der jüdischen Gemeinden in der deutschen demokratischen Republik* March, 1986.

she planned to write about the city.<sup>115</sup> In the work, Runge describes her encounters with Israeli Jews spanning the gamut from secular nationalists to ultra-orthodox anti-Zionists and her growing fascination with the Chabad Lubavitch movement. Runge also describes how the crowd at German cultural events evoked memories of a lost pre-war German-Jewish culture.<sup>116</sup> However, the transnational networks of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* extended beyond Israel and the North American diaspora.

During the fall of 1986 the Jewish Community in East Berlin hosted a meeting with two representatives from the Lutheran Academy Arnoldshain in the FRG: Cilly Kugelmann and Doron Kiesel. According to the *Nachrichtenblatt* – the official newsletter of Jewish communities in the GDR – their visit was in connection with “a publication on Jewish life in both German States and the guests expressed interest in learning more about the activities of the Berlin Jewish Community.”<sup>117</sup> Although the precise schedule of their trip is unknown, Kugelmann and Kiesel, who were two of the founding members of the Frankfurt *Jüdische Gruppe*, likely met with Irene Runge, who was a member of the Board of the Jewish Community in East Berlin. One way of assessing this assertion is Runge’s later claim that her idea for creating a new Jewish group came from similar activities she had heard of and witnessed in Frankfurt and the USA.<sup>118</sup>

The connection between these groups became more explicit during an April 1988 conference of ninety members of independent Jewish groups from German-speaking

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<sup>115</sup> Irene Runge, *Sechs Wochen in Jerusalem. Ein Reise-Bericht* (Berlin: Reiher, 1990), 24.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-7.

<sup>117</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, “Besucher in der Gemeinde.” *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der jüdischen Gemeinden in der deutschen demokratischen Republik*, December, 1986.

<sup>118</sup> Schneider, 359.

countries.<sup>119</sup> Echoing common themes in the conversations and writings associated with the *Jüdische Gruppe*, Micha Brumlik, Doron Kiesel, and Cilly Kugelmann – who had organized the event – urged participants to think about what positions leftist Jews should take toward issues of contemporary memory politics, such as the *Historikerstreit* in the FRG. The organizers also framed the conference by asking, “Which positions and political perspectives can critical Jews in the diaspora take toward Israel and Zionism?”<sup>120</sup> Among the prominent speakers at the conference were Dan Diner, who spoke about the historical origins of the first Palestinian Intifada, and Irene Runge, who presented an essay on the difficulty she encountered when trying to research a book on the *Reichspogromnacht* that she had co-written with the East German historian Kurt Pätzold.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the formation and ideology of both groups were heavily influenced by transnational connections between themselves and with the Jewish diaspora.

## Conclusion

During the 1980s, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* simultaneously began to create new Jewish spaces in which they could explore their own Jewish identity and reconceive the ideological basis for the continued presence of Jewish life in divided Germany. In doing so, the second-generation Jews in both of these groups respectively challenged the prevailing views of the leadership of the postwar Jewish Communities in the FRG and the GDR, albeit for different reasons.

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<sup>119</sup> It would appear that frustration amongst second-generation Jews was not merely endemic to the GDR and the FRG. In fact, the case of second-generation youths in postwar Vienna bears some striking similarities to that of the founding members of the *Jüdische Gruppe*. For more information see: Evelyn Adunka, *Die vierte Gemeinde. Die Geschichte der Wiener Juden von 1945 bis Heute* (Vienna: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft, 2000), 360-373; 468.

<sup>120</sup> ZA, B.8 DDR 1, Irene Runge “Die jüdische Diaspora ist unschlüssig – Gedenkpolitik oder Politik der Denkenden?” *Nachrichtenblatt des Verbandes der Juden in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, September, 1988.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. Runge’s essay was later published in an edited volume on the relationship between second-generation Jews in the FRG and the DDR and the history of the Holocaust: “Mein 9. November 1938. Gedanken einer Nachgeborenen,” 45-58, in *Reichspogromnacht: Vergangenheitsbewältigung aus jüdischer Sicht*, edited by Micha Brumlik and Petra Kunik (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel Verlag), 1988.

In Frankfurt am Main, the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* grappled with the need to legitimize their decision to remain in a country that was both a land of perpetrators and their home. Most had been raised in a Zionist context that demanded eventual immigration to Israel and inherently characterized the Jewish Communities in the FRG as exilic and ephemeral in nature. Inspired by the leftist politics of 1968, they rejected their parents and the West German Jewish Community's uncritical embrace of Israel as an ersatz-identity for Jewish life in the FRG. Instead, members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* used meetings in new physical spaces and writings in new literary spaces to develop an ideological program in which efforts to combat increasing normalization and relativization of the Nazi past could ameliorate the West German Jewish Community's continued crisis of legitimacy.

On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the members of *Wir für Uns* questioned the small East Berlin Jewish Community's adherence to a strictly religious conception of Judaism. After growing up with little to no knowledge of their Jewish heritage and background, the members of *Wir für uns* expressed a desire to reclaim lost aspects of Jewish culture during an era of growing dissatisfaction with East German life and society under "real existing socialism." Through activities such as learning about Jewish customs and the Jewish history of Berlin, the members of this new group also created a space in which they could begin to articulate the aspects of their own identities and pasts that separated them from other East Germans.

Although the members of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* lived in radically different societies, this study also reveals a number of similarities in the experiences of second-generation Jews in divided Germany. Young Jews in the FRG and the GDR grew up within distinctly Jewish subcultures and faced constant reminders of both their otherness and Germany's Nazi past. Influenced by their experiences with Jewish life in Israel, America, and other parts of the

transnational Jewish diaspora, the members of both groups also advocated for a pluralistic approach to Judaism, with young Jews in East Berlin calling for a more liberal definition of who could be defined as a Jew and the *Jüdische Gruppe* calling for greater gender-equality in religious observance.

Jewish life in Germany would continue to change drastically during the following decade. Beginning in 1989, an immigration wave of Jews from the Soviet Union and its successor states more than tripled the combined size of the Jewish communities in FRG and the GDR.<sup>122</sup> In addition to coming into contact with the city's reunified Jewish community, the first wave of Soviet Jewish immigrants in Berlin were also able to seek out help from the *Jüdischer Kulturverein* (Jewish Cultural Association), an extension of what was once *Wir für uns* led by Irene Runge. Other Soviet Jews came into contact with the *Union Progressiver Juden in Deutschland* (Union of Progressive Jews in Germany), a group of Liberal Jewish congregations chaired by Micha Brumlik. Soon, Soviet Jewish immigrants also began to establish new Jewish communities, adding yet another set of voices to the ongoing conversations about Jewish life and identity in post-Holocaust Germany.

While Jewish communities in reunified Germany are no longer subject to the same crisis of legitimacy that they experienced during the initial decades after the Holocaust, over the past decade, an increasing number of voices have once again begun to question the viability and sustainability of Jewish life in not only Germany, but in Europe as a whole.<sup>123</sup> One author has even argued that the persistence of not only anti-Semitism, but also philo-Semitism has ruled out

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<sup>122</sup> According to the website of the Zentralrat there are approximately 100,500 members of 108 Jewish Communities in reunited Germany: "Mitglieder," Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, accessed October 27, 2015, <http://www.zentralratjuden.de/de/topic/5.mitglieder.html>.

<sup>123</sup> A recent example is Jeffrey Goldberg's cover story from the April 2015 issue of *The Atlantic*. Jeffrey Goldberg, "Is it Time for the Jews to Leave Europe?" *The Atlantic*, April 2015, accessed November 22, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/04/is-it-time-for-the-jews-to-leave-europe/386279/>.



the possibility that individuals would be able to identify as both Jewish and German in the twenty-first century.<sup>124</sup>

But reflecting on the history of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns* serves as a reminder that being able to self-identify as “German” was never a priority for the second-generation Jews who wanted to re-imagine the ideological basis for continued Jewish life in Germany. Indeed, becoming “German” would have betrayed the “negative symbiosis” that Dan Diner believed would solve the Jewish crisis of legitimacy in the FRG. Furthermore, by exploring their own Jewish background the second-generation Jews in East Berlin – who by-and-large were members of the SED – increasingly defined themselves as different from the majority of citizens in the GDR. Although the members of these two groups often felt that they were strangers in their own communities and even in their home countries, they continued to feel an emotional attachment to their respective *Heimat* in Frankfurt am Main and East Berlin. Challenging the Zionist belief that they were living in exile, the founders of *Wir für uns* and the *Jüdische Gruppe* believed that Germany could once again be a vibrant part of the Jewish diaspora, a condition which, “often emerges from a displaced or uprooted situation...[but] also endures as a practice of putting down roots.”<sup>125</sup> Moving forward, further scholarship on Jewish life after German reunification will hopefully shed light on the fate of the *Jüdische Gruppe* and *Wir für uns*’ efforts to re-imagine Germany’s place in the diaspora.

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<sup>124</sup> Yascha Mounk, *Stranger in My Own Country: A Jewish Family in Modern Germany* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).

<sup>125</sup> Barbara E. Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 98.

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