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# After the Holocaust:

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## The History of Jewish Life

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### in West Germany

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Ruth Gay, *Safe Among the Germans: Liberated Jews after World War II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 347 pp., \$35.00 (hb), ISBN 0300092717.

Jael Geis, *Übrig Sein – Leben 'danach'. Juden deutscher Herkunft in der britischen und amerikanischen Zone Deutschlands 1945–1949* (Berlin: Philo, 2000), 485 pp., 19.00 € (pb), ISBN 3825701905.

Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 330 pp., \$24.99 (pb), ISBN 0521541263.

Anthony Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews: Munich 1945–1965* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press/The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2004), 326 pp., \$60.00 (hb), ISBN 0803227639.

Zeev W. Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 335 pp., \$40.00 (hb), ISBN 0521811058.

Anke Quast, *Nach der Befreiung. Jüdische Gemeinden in Niedersachsen seit 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), 473 pp., 45.00 € (pb), ISBN 3892444471.

In July 1945, Rabbi Leo Baeck remarked that the Third Reich had destroyed the historical basis of German Jewry. 'The history of Jews in Germany has found its end. It is impossible for it to come back. The chasm is too great'.<sup>1</sup> Heinz Galinski, a survivor of Auschwitz who led West Berlin's Jewish community until his death in 1992, could not have disagreed more strongly. 'I have always held the view', he observed, 'that the Wannsee Conference cannot be the last word in the life of the Jewish community in Germany'.<sup>2</sup> As these diverging views suggest, opting to live in the 'land of the perpetrators' represented both an unthinkable and a realistic choice. In the decade after the Holocaust, about 12,000 German-born Jews opted to remain in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and comprised about half of its Jewish community. Rooted in the German language and typically married to

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1 'Begegnung mit Leo Baeck', *Aufbau*, 13 July 1945, 1.

2 Quoted in Michael Brenner, *Nach dem Holocaust: Juden in Deutschland, 1945–50* (Munich: Beck, 1995), 148.

non-Jewish spouses, they still had some connections to Germany.<sup>3</sup> Such cultural and personal ties did not exist for the other half of West Germany's Jewish community – its East European Jews. Between 1945 and 1948, 230,000 Jews sought refuge in occupied Germany from the violent outbursts of antisemitism in eastern Europe. Although by 1949 only 15,000 East European Jews had taken permanent residence in the FRG, those who stayed behind profoundly impacted upon Jewish life. More religiously devout than their German-Jewish counterparts, they developed a rich cultural tradition located mostly in southern Germany. But their presence also complicated Jewish life. From the late nineteenth century, relations between German and East European Jews historically were tense and remained so in the early postwar years; the highly acculturated German Jews looked down upon their less assimilated, Yiddish-speaking brothers.<sup>4</sup> In the first decade after the war, integrating these two groups emerged as one of the most pressing tasks for Jewish community leaders.

But why did Jews opt in the first place to rebuild their lives in the very country that had sought their total elimination? For over fifty years, historians have largely ignored the re-emergence of Jewish life in Germany and its broader significance for the postwar period; only a handful of studies appeared from 1945 to 1989.<sup>5</sup> With the opening of new archives holding government documents of the former East German regime, the increased historicisation of Germany's postwar past, and the influx of thousands of Russian Jews after German unification, interest in post-1945 German-Jewish history has increased dramatically. Beginning in the early 1990s, historians have paid particular attention to the history of the Jewish displaced persons (DPs) and the small Jewish community that emerged in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).<sup>6</sup> Work on Jews in West Germany has appeared more belatedly, but in the past five years a number of important, well-researched studies – mostly published dissertations by German and US scholars – have appeared.<sup>7</sup> An increasingly comprehensive understanding of Jewish life in the FRG is now emerging.

3 This essay considers all members of the Jewish community as Jews. The books reviewed here do not discuss substantially the postwar history of *Mischlinge* designated by the Nazis as Jews of varying degrees.

4 Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

5 Harry Mào, 'Über den Wiederaufbau der Jüdischen Gemeinden in Deutschland seit 1945', PhD thesis (Universität Mainz, 1961); Doris Kuschner, 'Die Jüdische Minderheit in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Eine Analyse', PhD thesis (Universität Köln, 1977); Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes, eds., *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986).

6 On the DPs, see Angelika Königseder and Juliane Wetzel, *Waiting for Hope: Jewish Displaced Persons in Post-World War II Germany*, trans. John A. Broadwin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern, 2001); Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany 1945–1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998). On the GDR, see Peter Monteath, 'The German Democratic Republic and the Jews', *German History* 22, 3 (2004), 448–68.

7 In addition to the books reviewed here, see Donat Strathmann, *Auswandern oder Hierbleiben? Jüdisches Leben in Düsseldorf und Nordrhein 1945–1960* (Essen: Klartext, 2003); Jürgen Zieher, *Im Schatten von Antisemitismus und Wiedergutmachung. Kommunen und jüdische Gemeinden in Dortmund, Düsseldorf und Köln 1945–1960* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2005).

This review essay discusses and evaluates this recent surge of interest in post-1945 German-Jewish history. It limits its focus to West Germany in part because an excellent review essay on Jews in the GDR already exists, but also because studies on the FRG represent a wider range of methodological approaches.<sup>8</sup> Research on Jews in the GDR, while generally of high quality, has produced mainly political histories focused on the question of how the regime hindered the development of Jewish life. Studies on the FRG, in contrast, reflect a more diverse mix of political, social, and cultural history. Mirroring these various interests, this essay discusses three central themes that have dominated the recent literature. First, historians have written what might be called a communal or institutional history. Dominated by local and regional approaches, this describes the actual process of rebuilding Jewish life – the reconstruction of Jewish organisations and communities. Second, scholars have explored the relationship between Jews and Germans, looking at such issues as memory, restitution, and antisemitism. And third, the question of identity – how Jews in Germany perceive themselves – has received considerable attention from scholars. This essay discusses two books in each of these categories and concludes by evaluating the state of the historiography.

### **Rebuilding Jewish life after the Holocaust**

For a brief period after the war, occupied Germany became, ironically, a safe haven for thousands of east European Jews. Although the systematic killing of the Nazi death camps had ceased with the end of the Second World War, the murder of Jews did not stop in eastern Europe. From 1945 to 1947, over 1,000 Jews perished in pogroms carried out mostly in Poland.<sup>9</sup> In the face of continued persecution, east European Jews fled to the western zones of occupied Germany. The occupying forces were initially ill prepared for their arrival. Given only small amounts of food and placed in crowded camps, life for Jewish DPs was initially harsh. Still, the DPs quickly worked to improve their living conditions, developing a vibrant political, religious, and cultural life. But once the state of Israel came into existence these Jewish organisations disappeared and along with them most of the DPs. By 1950, only 15,000 east European Jews had decided to remain in Germany, mostly those who wished to stay for economic reasons, or those who could not emigrate because of illness or old age.

Over the past decade, this brief, remarkable history of Jewish life in Germany has captured the attention of numerous historians. Most studies have concentrated on the administrative structure, cultural life, and politics of the camps.<sup>10</sup> The recent book by the Israeli historian Zeev W. Mankowitz – one of the most sophisticated studies on

8 Monteath, 'German Democratic Republic'.

9 Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War II* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986), 370–74. The Holocaust Library, originally published by the non-profit organisation Holocaust publications, is now operated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

10 See n. 6 above.

the DPs to appear – largely continues this approach. In the book, based on his dissertation directed by Yehuda Bauer, Mankowitz provides the most detailed portrait yet of how quickly the Jewish DPs formed social, political, cultural and educational institutions. He argues that the DPs were agents of their own fate despite their dependence on the occupation forces and international Jewish welfare organisations. But Mankowitz's achievement lies not in his discussion of political and institutional developments; it is found instead in his fascinating analysis of how the DPs understood the caesura of the Holocaust. Based on a close reading of Yiddish documents published in camp newspapers such as *Undzer Veg* (Our Way) and *Landsberger Lager Tsaytung* (The Landsberg Camp Paper), he shows how the DPs came to believe that the Holocaust had spelled the end to Jewish life in Europe. The gulf between European and Jewish culture had become too great. Hitler's Germany had caused much of this rift, but it was the renewed persecution after the war that 'finally broke the camel's back' (p. 173). Most Jewish DPs thus came to identify with the Zionist cause. They saw the formation of a Jewish state as their only hope both physically and psychologically: Eretz Yisrael would provide for their security, while sending a powerful message that the Nazis had not succeeded in destroying Jewish life altogether.

Mankowitz ends his account in 1947 when the realisation of an Israeli state had become increasingly likely. This endpoint supports his overarching argument that Zionism became the *modus vivendi* of the DPs, but it also weakens his account. The analytical thrust of the book assumes that Israel was the only aim. There is no discussion of how the DPs interacted with other Jews in Germany, nor is there much recognition that a number of DPs left for the United States, Canada, and Latin America. Moreover, the presence of Jewish DPs in Germany had not ended altogether by 1948. Mankowitz overlooks the 15,000 Jews who decided to live in West Germany. Why some DPs remained and how they eventually integrated into West German society needs to be explained.

In *Nach der Befreiung*, Anke Quast is one of the first historians to move beyond these limitations. Taking the example of Hanover, she analyses relations between east European and German-born Jews from 1945 to the 1960s. Initially, both groups remained separated, even establishing two different organisations: the German Jews formed a Jewish community (*Gemeinde*), while the Jewish DPs organised a Jewish committee. These two institutions not only carried out different cultural and religious practices, but their functions diverged in a fundamental way. German Jews reconstituted a permanent community that was seen as the historical successor of Hanover's pre-1933 organisation, whereas the DPs set up a temporary committee intended to negotiate their departure with British authorities. At first, relations between the two groups remained tense; the Jewish community restored the traditional practice of excluding east European Jews from its ranks, while the Jewish committee clearly had no intention of staying in Germany. But by 1947, east European and German Jews began to work together, setting up two regional institutions that organised both Jewish communities and committees throughout Lower Saxony. After the formation of Israel and the subsequent stabilisation of Hanover's Jewish community, the two organisations then merged to form one Jewish community of

about 350 members (250 were German Jews). Tensions between the two groups, however, did not end entirely. For much of the *Gemeinde's* postwar history, German Jews held all the key administrative posts. It was not until 1963 that an East European Jew was even elected to the *Gemeinde's* executive committee, and it took an additional decade for one to rise to the position of chairperson.

### **Combating antisemitism and promoting reparations**

The re-establishment of Jewish communities was not, however, the only key to restoring Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany. An equally determined effort had to come from the German government as well. After the collapse of the Third Reich, how vigorously the state combated antisemitism and was willing to push for reparations became crucial in helping Jews to determine whether or not they wanted to stay. Although most of the books reviewed here discuss these governmental efforts in some form, two newly published works by Anthony Kauders and Jay Howard Geller address them directly. Well researched and cogently argued, these works add especially important insights to our understanding of postwar German-Jewish history.

Kauders discusses antisemitism and links it to the larger question of West Germany's democratisation. By the late 1960s, he claims that West Germans became 'liberal democrats' in part 'because they took up the idea that safeguarding democracy involved an earnest reflection on antisemitism as well as a belief in surmounting all forms of prejudice' (p. 5). In one of the clear strengths of the book, he examines how West Germany reached this point by demonstrating the gradual shift in thinking among its political and religious elites. Taking Munich as a case study, he analyses how the Social Democrats (SPD), Free Democrats (FDP), Christian Socials (CSU), and leaders of the Catholic and Protestant churches changed their positions toward Jewish issues between 1945 and 1965. In the early postwar years, it was only US occupation authorities, Jewish leaders, and SPD politicians who linked support for the Jews with democracy. The other parties and the two churches opposed sweeping forms of restitution, rarely recognised German guilt, and continued to harbour antisemitic views. But by the late 1950s a notable shift had emerged. The churches began to speak more openly about the persecution of the Jews; the CSU recognised the need to make amends for the Nazi past; the SPD strengthened its support for Jewish causes; and diverging views toward Jews emerged in the FDP, no small achievement for a party that proved the most antisemitic of the mainstream parties and had long opposed denazification.

In examining the course of this transformation, Kauders has written an important book. He argues convincingly that West Germany's politicians and church leaders gradually moved away from political antisemitism to supporting a democracy that would protect minorities such as Jews. The book is, however, less clear on why this transformation occurred. Kauders modifies the commonly held argument that it took the generation of the '68ers' to bring about a discussion of the Nazi past. He argues that political and religious elites during the late 1950s adopted 'a morality of responsibility' toward Jews, which later became politicised during the 1960s. The

younger generation made the ethical discourse of their parents political, spreading their ideas 'beyond the confines of rarefied debates in newspapers and journals' (p. 279). This is an intriguing argument, but one not supported throughout the book. By ending the study in 1965, Kauders never establishes how the younger generation actually disseminated those ideas. More importantly, he does not show why the attitudes of the older generation shifted in the first place. What caused politicians and religious leaders to change their views toward Jews?

One tentative answer appears in Geller's study on the relationship between Adenauer's government and the Jewish community. A wide-ranging and elegantly written book, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany* discusses a variety of topics: from the Jewish DPs to the formation of the Central Council of Jews to the small Jewish community in East Germany. It rests on an impressive range of sources – mostly government documents housed in Germany's federal archive in Koblenz – but also personal papers, newspapers, and records of Jewish institutions (particularly the Central Council of Jews). The book's main contribution lies in its discussion of reparations. Geller uncovers the vital role Konrad Adenauer played in initiating and pushing forward the landmark Luxembourg agreement that granted Israel over three billion marks in reparations. With strong moral convictions and an astute political mind, Adenauer saw reparations as an opportunity to mend relations with the Jewish community and to reinforce Germany's transformation from dictatorship to democracy. Thus, *both* ethics and politics appear to have motivated at least one representative of the 'older' generation.

By clearly showing Adenauer's concern for Jewish matters, Geller has uncovered an important aspect of postwar history. His work puts into broader perspective the grim version of Adenauer's all too well known *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – the chancellor's amnesty and integration of former Nazi party members.<sup>11</sup> And yet the account is not entirely satisfying. The passage of the Luxembourg agreement and the reestablishment of Jewish organisations lead Geller to conclude that 1945–53 represented a 'triumph' when the 'land of Mendelssohn, Heine, and Einstein had an established, diverse Jewish community' (pp. 295–6). This conclusion elides the clear demographic, political, and cultural challenges facing Jews in the early postwar years. Although Geller does an excellent job discussing the internal divisions between East European and German Jews, he does not discuss adequately external obstacles such as antisemitism and local opposition to returning Jewish property.

The only exception to this criticism appears in his two chapters on East Germany. At the outset, Geller should be commended for examining the GDR. Since historians rarely discuss East and West Germany together in a single work, it is especially innovative that he does so. But whether intended or not, the GDR becomes for him the Federal Republic's foil, reifying cold war divisions of the dictatorial East and the democratic West. To be sure, antisemitism in West Germany never reached the level that it did in the early GDR and Adenauer proved much more willing

11 Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); originally published as *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich: Beck, 1996).

to accept responsibility for the Holocaust than Walter Ulbricht, largely because he wanted to portray West Germany as the opposite of the ‘antifascist Germany’ (which refused to implement a restitution programme). Indeed, competition between the two Germanys played a crucial role in shaping debates about the handling of the Nazi past.<sup>12</sup> But in the end this stark dichotomy between the two Germanys simplifies matters. Along with the studies reviewed here, the important works by Werner Bergmann and Jürgen Lillteicher show that antisemitism and legal challenges to restitution remained prominent in the early Federal Republic.<sup>13</sup> In the realm of high politics, 1945–53 probably represented a triumph for Jewish community leaders (at least for the leadership of the Central Council of Jews, which had longed pushed for restitution) and a significant turning point in postwar German history, but how deeply that transformation penetrated the rest of society down to the local level – how much Adenauer represented broader shifts in West German society and politics – remains dubious. The period Geller studies is, after all, a mere few years after the collapse of the Third Reich. These criticisms should not, however, take away from the value of Geller’s study. *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany* is an important – indeed ground-breaking – work that will be of much use to historians.

### German Jews, Jewish Germans, or Jews in Germany?

Still, when one looks at issues that cut beneath the level of politics, the challenges of rebuilding Jewish life become apparent. This is no clearer than in the complex problem of identity: How did Jews in postwar Germany conceive of themselves? This question is complex not least because it raises wider issues about the broader course of German-Jewish history. After the Second World War, a Zionist school of interpretation argued that Jews had assimilated completely into German society and rejected their Jewishness; this Jewish self-denial rested on the tragic illusion that a symbiosis between Jews and Germans had existed.<sup>14</sup> Since the late 1980s, this view has undergone revision, and historians now largely agree that German Jews embraced both German and Jewish culture.<sup>15</sup> But the Holocaust shattered this integrated notion of the German Jew. For East European Jews, the concept was of little significance as they were not products of German Jewry, but for German-born Jews the notion remained a complex issue indeed.

12 Annette Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949–1969 oder: Eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002).

13 Werner Bergmann, *Antisemitismus in öffentlichen Konflikten. Kollektives Lernen in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik 1949–1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997); Jürgen Lillteicher, ‘Die Rückerstattung in Westdeutschland. Ein Kapitel deutscher Vergangenheitspolitik?’, in Hans Günter Hockerts and Christiane Kuller, eds., *Nach der Verfolgung. Wiedergutmachung nationalsozialistischen Unrechts in Deutschland?* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 61–77.

14 Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis: Selected Essays* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

15 Paul Mendes-Flohr, *German Jews: A Dual Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Till van Rahden, *Juden und andere Breslauer. Die Beziehung zwischen Juden, Protestanten und Katholiken in einer deutschen Großstadt von 1860 bis 1925* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780–1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Why this proved to be the case forms the focus of Jael Geis's probing new study *Übrig Sein – Leben 'danach'*. Analysing articles published mostly in the Berlin Jewish newspaper *Der Weg*, Geis shows how the Holocaust changed what it meant to be a German Jew. Looking back at the emancipation process, Jewish community leaders and writers such as Hans-Erich Fabian, Moritz Goldschmidt, and Samuel Gringauz stressed the need to continue the fight for political and social equality, but criticised the tendency to adopt German culture. They argued that Jews in the past had too readily shed their Jewishness for Germanness. After the war, Jews became determined to preserve their Jewish heritage. If before 1933 they had considered themselves German Jews, afterwards they were Jews in Germany.

Moving away from Germanness and closer to Jewishness stemmed from how Jews understood both the role of ordinary Germans during the Third Reich and the nature of Jewish victimisation. Although most Jews eschewed the idea of 'collective guilt', as expressed in the newspaper articles Geis analyses, many believed that the majority of Germans had supported Nazi Germany. All Germans might not have perpetrated mass murder, but their silence made them complicit in the crimes of the Third Reich. Their passivity stood in contrast to Jewish victims. Building on earlier traditions of religious martyrdom and heroism, Jews depicted their fallen brethren as active sufferers who perished at the 'altar of human culture' (p. 197). As one Jewish leader put it in 1946, their death represented the goodness of humanity: 'Just as once Isaac should be sacrificed as a symbol of the duty to fulfil God's will, so too were our brothers and sisters sacrificed at the altar of freedom, democracy, and equality' (p. 197). In this emerging martyrology, Geis argues that Jews became more closely drawn to Jewish culture: it represented freedom, equality, and democracy, whereas Germanness stood for subordination, prejudice, and authoritarianism. Such a stark polarisation between the two cultures did not mean, however, that Jews could not live in Germany; on the contrary, Jewish leaders like Heinz Galinski, Hendryk George van Dam, and Karl Marx called upon their fellow Jews to stay and help bring democracy back to Germany.

But this mix of estrangement and attachment to Germany was largely generational. It defined the generation of Holocaust survivors, but not typically their children. Since Geis focuses only on 1945–49, she unfortunately is unable to take this important fact into consideration. Joining the 1960s student movements, second-generation Jews shared the view of their fellow Germans that Adenauer's government had suppressed the memory of the Third Reich. The trial of Adolf Eichmann, the growing anger against former Nazis still holding government posts, and an emerging awareness that Germans knew about the murderous acts of the Nazis moved gentiles and Jews alike to demand responsibility for the Holocaust. A strong affinity toward Israel emerged, with both gentiles and Jews trying to enter the Israeli army to fight in the Six Day War.<sup>16</sup> But, once the war ended, a division in the movement arose. With Israel's victory and its seizure of Arab territory, many non-Jewish Germans withdrew their

16 Anson Rabinbach, 'Reflections on Germans and Jews since Auschwitz', Jack Zipes, 'The Vicissitudes of Being Jewish in West Germany', in Rabinbach and Zipes, *Germans and Jews*, 27–49.



support for the Jewish state and became highly critical of its “imperialist” actions. Anti-Zionism permeated the German left, and Jews realised that they had now become targets of the very movement in which they had once actively participated. Unwilling to let the charges go unanswered, the young generation of Jews spoke out against what they saw as renewed antisemitism.

In *Safe Among the Germans*, Ruth Gay examines the leading Jewish voices of this generation. Although her study gives a broad overview of Jewish life from 1945 to the present, her last and most insightful chapter – aptly entitled the ‘New Generation’ – analyses second-generation Jewish intellectuals. Concentrating in particular on two Jewish writers who wrote during the 1960s, Lea Fleischmann and Henryk Broder, Gay analyses how the memory of the Nazi past and a growing estrangement toward German society characterised the identity of the second generation. In two widely publicised accounts, Fleischmann and Broder criticised Germany for its latent antisemitism and announced that they felt foreign in their own country. Broder then went on to rebuke the German left, noting sharply that antisemitism was hardly a problem merely of the right: ‘I only want to concern myself here with one point in your racial reservoir, one that affects me in particular: your antisemitism. That a leftist . . . cannot be an anti-Semite, because that is the domain of the right, is a much cherished lying excuse to which you cling’ (p. 266). Such open, critical language went directly against the actions of the previous generation. Earlier Jewish leaders rarely rebuked political developments in such public ways.

The limited primary source base of Gay’s study does not allow for a deeper look into the second-generation.<sup>17</sup> *Safe Among the Germans* offers a survey of Jews in postwar Germany drawn largely from previously published works, and as such will be well suited for use in introductory courses provided that one important reservation is kept in mind. Gay’s account is at times rather simplistic and portrays an overly optimistic portrait of Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany. But what Gay loses in depth and precision she gains in breadth. Her discussion of the 1960s is particularly useful. Largely overlooked by historians, this period is one of the key turning points in postwar German-Jewish history. Since the late 1960s, Jewish leaders have been much more apt to participate in West German politics and to voice their views on controversial issues. This legacy continues today in reunited Germany. Faced with an influx of Russian Jews and an increase in attacks on Jewish property, Jewish leaders of the Central Council of Jews are not afraid to press the German government for assistance and to criticise publicly antisemitism.

### **The state of the field**

The recent surge of publications on postwar German-Jewish history has dealt with some of the most important questions of the period. Based largely on dissertations, most studies rely on a number of sources such as memoirs, personal papers, Jewish

17 For a detailed analysis of the second generation, see Lynn Rapoport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity, and Jewish-German Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

community records, government documents, and newspaper articles. As a result, they provide a rich portrait of how a range of historical agents – from political parties to churches to Jewish institutions to individual Jews – dealt with the challenges of rebuilding Jewish life after the Holocaust. The historiography has been less successful, however, in integrating the rebuilding of Jewish life with wider developments in postwar German and European history. This absence applies less to the immediate postwar years where historians have subsumed Jewish issues within the history of occupied Germany. Frank Stern has spoken of a ‘historic triangle’ of ‘occupiers, Germans, and Jews,’ while Atina Grossmann has analysed relations between Germans, allies, and Jews.<sup>18</sup> But beyond 1945–49, studies examining Jewish life behind the backdrop of wider economic, social, and cultural changes are rare. In light of this fact, this conclusion proposes three possible ways for expanding the conceptual framework of postwar German–Jewish history.

First, the re-establishment of Jewish life can shed light on the transformation of West German politics and society. By integrating the three major themes discussed in this essay – institutional rebuilding, German–Jewish relations, and identity – historians can add to recent discussions about the complex process by which the Federal Republic developed into a liberal, democratic society.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, one of the clearest ways to see how Germany moved away from the policies of the past is to look at the postwar history of Jewish life. The point is not to write a history of success or failure, but to examine a process – a transformation over time with both continuities and discontinuities. Second, broadening the temporal focus of the historiography is needed. The literature has surprisingly failed to think carefully about how the postwar Jewish community both differed from and was similar to its predecessor before the Holocaust. When Jews decided to stay in the Federal Republic, did they think of themselves as continuing a long tradition of Jewish life in Germany? Or was 1945 a *Stunde null* – a complete rupture with the past – for which Jews had to develop an entirely new identity? Moreover, the studies reviewed here focus almost exclusively on the early postwar years; future work will need to concentrate on the later decades, especially the 1960s and the post-unification period. While the lack of current research has precluded discussing the 1990s here, the changes currently unfolding today should not be overlooked. The influx of Russian Jews has made the Federal Republic home to the fastest growing Jewish community in Europe, and German society has become intensely interested in Jewish culture.<sup>20</sup> The task is to observe the shifts in German–Jewish history as they occur from 1945 to the present.

18 Frank Stern, ‘Historic Triangle: Occupiers, Germans, and Jews in Postwar Germany’, *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 19 (1990): 47–61; Atina Grossmann, ‘Home and Displacement in a City of Bordercrossers: Jews in Berlin 1945–1949’, in Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes, eds., *Unlikely History: The Changing German–Jewish Symbiosis, 1945–2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 63–100.

19 On democratisation and liberalisation in postwar Germany, see Ulrich Herbert, ed., *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1989* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002); Konrad H. Jarausch, *Die Umkehr. Deutsche Wandlungen 1945–1995* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004).

20 Michael Brenner, ‘The Transformation of the German–Jewish Community’, in Morris and Zipes, eds., *Unlikely History*, 49–62.

And finally, the study of postwar German-Jewish history would benefit from transnational approaches.<sup>21</sup> The Holocaust decimated Jewish communities across Europe and the challenge of rebuilding afterwards was hardly unique to Germany. The largest and most vibrant re-established Jewish communities existed in France and Hungary.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, most survivors of the Holocaust decided to stay.<sup>23</sup> These developments stood in stark contrast to the history of Jewish life in postwar Poland. From 1945 to 1946, a series of pogroms forced about 200,000 Polish Jews to flee from their homes. The small Jewish community that stayed behind never fully recovered and virtually came to an end with the antisemitic purge of 1968 that removed Jews from all areas of public life.<sup>24</sup> Historians need to integrate the postwar German story into this wider, European framework. Moving in such a direction would overcome the narrow, national framing of postwar Jewish history and the tendency to reify cold war divisions – to see the West as a success story without sufficiently probing what everyday conditions were like in the Soviet sphere. More broadly, it would help us understand the meaning and nature of ‘the nation’ in post-Holocaust Europe. As proponents of transnational history have cogently argued, historians need to historicise the nation rather than taking it as an a priori mode of analysis. This seems especially important for the postwar period. The Nazi genocide and the forced removal of ethnic minorities during and after the war have engendered – for the first time in European history – nations that are almost entirely ethnically homogenous. Studying minority groups such as Jews has the potential to reveal much about the function, meaning, and nature of the European nation-state at this unprecedented moment. In short, historians of postwar Jewish history now have the opportunity – indeed the good fortune – of writing broader histories that push analysis in more engaging, innovative directions.

21 Literature on transnational history has grown considerably particularly among US, German, and French historians. For a useful introduction, see Deborah Cohen and Maura O'Connor, eds., *Comparison and History: Europe in Cross-National Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

22 Since Great Britain was not directly affected by the Holocaust, I am not including here the sizeable community of British Jewry.

23 Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

24 David Engel, ‘Patterns of Anti-Jewish Violence in Poland, 1944–1946’, *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 43–85; Bożena Szaynok, *Pogrom Żydów w Kielcach 4 lipca 1946* (Warsaw: Bellona, 1992); Jerzy Eisler, *Marzec 1968. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Panst. Wydaw. Naukowe, 1991).