Returning to Stay? Jews in East and West Germany after the Holocaust

Andrea A. Sinn

ABSTRACT. To better understand the position of Jews within Germany after the end of World War II, this article analyzes the rebuilding of Jewish communities in East and West Germany from a Jewish perspective. This approach highlights the peculiarities and sometimes sharply contrasting developments within the Jewish communities in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, from the immediate postwar months to the official East-West separation of these increasingly politically divided communities in the early 1960s. Central to the study are the policies of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, which exemplify the process of gradual divergence in the relations between East and West German Jewish communities, that, as this article demonstrates, paralleled and mirrored the relations between non-Jewish Germans in the two countries.

AFTER the end of the Second World War, the Allies met between 10 and 15 million uprooted peoples within central and western Europe. Approximately 7 million of them were so-called displaced persons (DPs)—a term used by the Western Allies to refer to individuals who had fled, or had been driven or deported from their countries of origin during or as a result of the war.¹ These DPs were initially grouped into assembly centers administered by Allied authorities and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). By the end of 1946, approximately 250,000 Jewish DPs of different national citizenship lived in camps and urban centers in occupied Germany. These non-German Jewish DPs organized their daily lives deliberately separated from the surrounding German society. In contrast, the majority of German Jews who had been liberated by the Allied forces—according to Michael Brenner, approximately 15,000—or the even smaller number of German Jews who returned after 1945 from exile

to one of the four Allied occupation zones did not receive DP status. During the first postwar months, these German Jews were classified as German nationals and therefore settled alongside various other German refugee groups within larger cities, where they founded Jewish communities (*Jüdische Gemeinden*) as early as April 1945. In fact, by 1948, a total of some 20,000 members were registered in more than one hundred reestablished Jewish communities. This situation did not, however, alter the fact that the vast majority of the roughly quarter-million Jews who lived for variable lengths of time within the boundaries of the Allied zones of occupation did not wish to remain in the “land of the perpetrators.” Instead, these Jews sought to emigrate during the second half of the 1940s, preferably to the United States or, after 1948, to the newly founded State of Israel. Ultimately, very few Jews remained in East and West Germany. Those who did are usually credited with rebuilding Jewish life and the foundation of new Jewish national organizations, which later developed into independent Jewish institutions.

While many published studies during the last decades have focused on Jewish DP life and the DPs’ desire to emigrate, less attention has been given to the small number of Jews who found themselves in or returned to the Allied zones of occupation immediately following World War II and became actively involved in safeguarding and securing Jewish life in the two postwar German states. It is also noteworthy that apart from a few exceptions, such as Jay Howard Geller’s 2005 book *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany* or Michael Brenner’s edited volume on the history of Jews in Germany from 1945 to the present, published first in German in 2012, most studies that examine the process of rebuilding Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany typically discuss the developments in one of the two German

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states instead of carrying out a comprehensive comparative analysis. This lacuna is especially remarkable taking into consideration that one single Jewish representative body voiced the interest of Jews living in both German states until the German Democratic Republic (GDR) isolated itself after building the Berlin Wall in 1961.

When the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the GDR were founded in 1949, the number of German Jews and Jewish DPs in the overall area of formerly occupied Germany had dropped just below 30,000. This article argues that despite its small size, the Jewish community’s postwar development is a noteworthy example of entanglement and interconnections that existed between the two German states and societies in spite of all their differences. Aiming for a better understanding of this important aspect of Germany’s postwar history, this article builds on the extensive, and growing, literature examining the situation of Jews in the two German states. It analyzes the rebuilding of Jewish communities in East and West Germany comparatively from a Jewish perspective. The analysis demonstrates that the post-1945 history of the Jewish communities reflects the broader political transformation of the country, yet it highlights one remarkable deviation from other striking patterns of the time: In the first decade after the founding of the two German states, in a time of growing division, the small Jewish community displayed a fierce determination to keep the representation of Jews living in Germany central—indeed a rare case of German-German entanglement that could be sustained as long as the Jewish leadership in both East and West Germany resolutely opposed the growing antagonism of the Cold War.

The peculiarities and sometimes sharply contrasting developments within the Jewish communities in the two German states are examined from the immediate postwar months in 1945 to the official East-West separation of the Jewish community after the German-German border was closed by the GDR in August 1961. The policies of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, Zentralrat)—a consolidated political representative body established in Frankfurt am Main on July 19, 1950, which

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represented until 1961 all Jewish communities in Germany—will be at the center of this article because it exemplifies both the ongoing efforts to maintain an overall Jewish representation in the face of growing division and the complicated process of gradual divergence of East and West German Jewish communities in the context of the developing Cold War. The organization’s debates and strategic positioning vis-à-vis the situation of the eastern Jewish communities suggests that neither joint representation of Jews in East and West Germany within the Zentralrat nor the agency’s approach (which aimed to depoliticize all the community members’ interactions on either side of the Iron Curtain) were enough to prevent the inevitable split. Eventually, relations between the Jewish communities in the two German states broke down following the Second Berlin Crisis in 1961. This development paralleled and mirrored the relations between non-Jewish Germans in the two countries—and also similarly, relations between the separated Jewish communities were restored only after the fall of communism in 1989.

To document both the entanglement and gradual divergence of the Jewish communities in the two postwar German states, this article is structured in four sections. The first explores the postwar dilemma of Jewish Holocaust survivors who had to decide if they would return to Germany, stay in Germany, or leave. The second section describes the challenges the Jewish minority in Germany faced in their efforts to organize Jewish life after the Holocaust and explores the growing differences between East and West German Jewish communities in the first years after the foundation of the Zentralrat. The third section examines the persecution of leading members of Jewish communities in East Germany and the West German response; and the last section traces the process of gradual divergence of the Jewish communities in the GDR during the 1950s that resulted in the official separation of the Jewish communities in the two German states at the beginning of the 1960s.

Postwar Decisions: Returning, Staying, or Leaving?

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the decision to remain within or return to Germany was by no means easy for Jews. For example, the German Jewish journalist Karl Marx, who was one of the first civilian German Jews to return from exile in 1946 (his goal was to support Jewish survivors) said a question that instantly came into his mind when entering the British occupation zone was: “How can you possibly, after all that has happened, live there [in Germany] as a Jew?” After he decided to remain permanently, both his friends and many strangers fired exactly the same question at him. These people, and among them especially Jews, were either unwilling or unable to understand his motivation for attempting to rebuild a sustainable Jewish community in Germany. Despite this lack of comprehension and the German-Jewish communities’ overall political isolation, about 9,000 to 12,000, or roughly 4 percent of the estimated 280,000 Jewish emigrants from German-speaking countries who had escaped the concentration and extermination camps by taking refuge in


neighboring European countries or overseas, remigrated to the country of their expulsion before 1960. The small number of returnees suggests a strong determination of those few who committed themselves to the project of reestablishing an integrated and unified German Jewish community.12

Moreover, the option to return was dependent on more than merely the declared intention of each individual. At the beginning of the occupation of Germany in 1945, the borders of the Allied zones were at first closed; crossing the frontier was possible only with the protection of the occupying powers on both sides of a border. This might explain why many of the first returnees were people who had served in the occupying armies, sometimes in the Jewish Brigade, an independent, national Jewish military formation of the British Army during World War II.13 A few months after the liberation, the occupying forces also started to encourage German-Jewish translators, lawyers, and journalists to return to Germany. There was a desperate need for professionally trained, language-skilled personnel who had not collaborated with the Nazis, to be employed for example in the war-crimes trials and in reeducation programs. Some emigrant Jews qualified for these jobs. A great number of Jewish emigrants also reentered postwar Germany as aid workers for American and British relief organizations. These organizations operated for varying periods of time, but fairly early on sent rescue teams to support the survivors of the Holocaust.14

After returning German-Jewish emigrants successfully coped with the occupying forces, the next obstacles they faced were German civilians and the German political leadership. Though domestic and foreign observers reported that violent acts and vocalized antisemitism were almost nonexistent in German public life immediately after the end of the war, they never disappeared completely. One indicator is Report No. 49 on antisemitism published by the US Military Forces (OMGUS) in the year 1947. It revealed that 18 percent of the Germans were still “radical antisemites,” 21 percent “antisemites,” and 22 percent more moderate “racists”; only 20 percent did not show any racist resentments.15 Other indicators were the increasing number of violent actions in public spaces committed against Jews, the administrative obstructions of supplies destined for Jews in German territories, threats and anonymous antisemitic letters sent to individuals or published in newspapers, and acts of desecration in Jewish cemeteries.16 Between 1945 and 1950 alone, no fewer than 200 of the 500


13The Jewish Brigade Group was composed mainly of Jews who lived in Mandatory Palestine, a geopolitical entity under British administration. See Morris Beckman, *The Jewish Brigade: An Army with Two Masters, 1944–1945*, e-book (Stroud: Spellmount, 2014).


Jewish cemeteries in all occupation zones had been desecrated according to the records of the Allied authorities. The small number of German Jews who decided to return to their former home often faced difficulties readjusting within this context. Still, they suffered less than non-German, mainly East-European Jewish DPs, who were the main targets of antisemitic offenses. Germans typically distinguished the non-native, less-integrated Jewish DPs from the “good German Jews” and blamed the former for major black market activities. This aggravated the already tense situation between the East-European Jewish DPs on the one side and German Jews on the other side, as well as between all Jews and the surrounding non-Jewish German majority.

Among the Allies, only the Soviets pursued a deliberate repatriation policy. But they typically focused their efforts on communists, former social democrats, or other people whom they hoped to recruit for the Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) founded in April 1946. Two of them were Alfred Norden and Jürgen Kuczynski. Norden, who was the editor of the communist newspaper Rote Fahne before 1933, went into exile during Nazi rule, and ultimately found safety in the United States. He returned to Berlin after the war and was appointed head of the press section of the Information Department of the Ministerial Council of the GDR in 1949—a position he held only until 1952. The communist Jürgen Kuczynski had emigrated from Berlin to England in 1936, where he was interned as an enemy alien in 1939, but he was released after American intervention and was recruited by the US Office of Strategic Services as a statistician. He returned to Germany after the war (initially with the US Army) and decided to settle in East Germany, where he became one of the leading intellectuals of the SED. In 1946, he was appointed to the chair for economic history at Humboldt University in Berlin. Though a high number of Jewish returnees to the GDR did not build careers as party dignitaries, they still can be characterized as left-wing intellectuals. Among this group were the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who returned from his American exile to the GDR in 1948; the University of Leipzig had offered him the position of professor of philosophy. It also included the communist jurist and writer Alfred Kantorowicz, who returned to East Berlin from his American exile in 1946 and became professor of German literature at Berlin’s Humboldt University in 1950. One of the most important German female writers of the twentieth century, Anna Seghers, returned from her Mexican exile to West Berlin in 1947, moved to East Berlin in 1950, and shortly thereafter became the president of the GDR’s Writers’ Union (DDR-Schriftstellerverband). These three had already been close to or were members of the Communist Party (KPD) before 1933 and had escaped Nazi persecution by fleeing to locations other than the Soviet Union. Their experiences qualified them in the

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17 The National Archives of the UK (TNA): Public Record Office (PRO) Foreign Office (FO) 371/93574, paper C1852/3, letter from the Chancery, Office of the United Kingdom High Commissioner, to the German Political Department, Foreign Office, SW1, May 19, 1951.
20 In fact, many of the communists who returned by 1949–50 were encouraged to play a central role in the establishment of the East German state; see Marita Krauss, Heimkehr in ein fremdes Land: Geschichte der Remigration nach 1945 (Munich: Beck, 2001), 66.
eyes of the SED for high-profile positions in the emerging “socialist state of the German nation.”

Contrary to the Soviet approach, West German official policy only occasionally addressed the theme of return after 1945. Aside from some individual calls that were directed especially toward politicians, academics, and writers—but not explicitly to Jewish returnees—a statement that the heads of the governments of the federal states (Länder) in the three western occupation zones issued in June 1947 remained the only official West German appeal to all refugees from the Third Reich, including Jews. Yet early on, leading West German politicians from across the political spectrum—including the Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, Liberal Democrat Theodor Heuss, and the Social Democrat Kurt Schumacher—recognized that the promotion of Jews and Jewish culture could serve as an effective method for Germany to reintegrate into the community of Western countries. Later developments, especially the passage of two reparation laws and one regulating restitution by the West German Parliament, the Bundestag, during the 1950s, clearly encouraged German-Jewish return and reconciliation.

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, this process of German-Jewish reconciliation was also expected and supported by the Western Allies. At the second conference on the future of the Jews in Germany that the adviser on Jewish affairs in the American zone of occupation, Harry Greenstein, held in Heidelberg in July and August 1949 to discuss the question of Jewish interest representation in the emerging German states, keynote speaker and later US High Commissioner John J. McCloy called German attitudes about the Jews a “barometer of democratization.” The development of the Jewish community could be understood as “the test of Germany’s progress toward the light,” McCloy stated, and he further asked the Jews to contribute to the transformation of German attitudes by acting with honesty and courage. Despite these attempts by leading West German politicians and the Western Allied authorities to reestablish Jewish life in the first years after the war, a majority of the German population did not welcome returning Jews, who oftentimes lived in an anti-Jewish if not outright antisemitic environment.


23The legal basis for property restitution was initially provided by laws passed under the Western Allies’ military governments. It was not until 1953 that the German Bundestag passed a nationwide compensation law. This law was replaced in 1956 by a new version, the “Bundesentschädigungsgesetz,” abbreviated BEG. Hans Günter Hockerts, “Wiedergutmachung: Ein umstrittener Begriff und ein weites Feld,” in Nach der Verfolgung: Wiedergutmachung nationalsozialistischen Unrechts in Deutschland?, ed. Hans Günter Hockerts and Christiane Kuller (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 7–33.

For returning Jews, beginning anew in the old homeland was further complicated by the circumstance that their continued presence in the “land of the perpetrators” was condemned by international Jewish organizations. Jewish leaders and global Jewish institutions (particularly the World Jewish Congress) decided that Germany could not be a safe haven for the Jews. Among these influential figures was the German rabbi and leader of Progressive Judaism in Germany, Leo Baeck, who had survived the Theresienstadt concentration camp, where he had been the spokesman for the Council of Elders (Judenrat) and settled after the war in London. This stance was mainly because of continued negative opinions of Jews held by the majority of Germans. Consequently, those who remained in Germany found themselves, especially during the early postwar years, disliked by the Germans and ostracized by world Jewry.

In the face of this isolation, struggling for recognition, and finding themselves confronted with the question of German reparations to Jews at the end of the 1940s, the representatives of both Jewish DPs and German-Jewish communities from East and West Germany agreed to come together on July 19, 1950, in Frankfurt am Main to establish a consolidated political representative body, the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland, which still is the most influential Jewish institution created in post-Holocaust Germany. Henceforward, the Zentralrat claimed to voice the interests of all Jews living in both parts of Germany and identified the needs for compensation and restitution as among the most pressing issues. Yet, given the differences between the political systems established in the two German states, the developments of the Jewish communities in the West and the East followed very different paths.

Difficult Beginnings: Restoring/Consolidating Jewish Life in Postwar Germany

By the end of the 1940s, no more than approximately 25,000 Jews lived in the recently founded FRG. By the end of 1951, a good three years after the founding of the State of Israel and the change of US immigration policies, which both created better opportunities for Holocaust survivors to immigrate to these countries, the official figure in West Germany was down to about 21,500. New arrivals to the West came only, and sporadically, from the Eastern bloc. At the same time a much smaller number of approximately 4,000 Jews had decided to settle in the East. At the time of the foundation of the GDR in 1949, the East German–Jewish communities included 1,250 members. Jewish communities existed in Brandenburg/Havel (68 members), Chemnitz (49), Dresden (188), Halle (95), Leipzig (82) ...

25For Leo Baeck’s position, see his interview in Aufbau 11, no. 51 (December 21, 1945). For the statement of the World Jewish Congress, see “Germany,” in Resolutions Adopted by the Second Plenary Assembly of the World Jewish Congress, Montreux, Switzerland, June 27th-July 6th, 1948 (London, 1948), 7.


An additional 2,500 Jews who lived in East Berlin were registered members of the joint Jewish community, the Gesamtgemeinde, in the former capital city. In view of the Cold War, it is not surprising that at the beginning of the 1950s neither the existence of the Zentralrat, based in Düsseldorf, nor the presence of a national German-Jewish newspaper known today as the Jüdische Allgemeine, founded in 1946 in the same city, attracted much attention abroad. Nevertheless, it was during this time that leading representatives of the Zentralrat and the independent newspaper against all odds successfully reclaimed the right to represent the concerns and complaints of all Jews living in the two German states. Especially influential were the lawyer Hendrik George van Dam, the first general secretary of the Zentralrat, and the journalist Karl Marx, the longtime editor of the Jüdische Allgemeine, which was the most important postwar German-Jewish newspaper. Despite initial problems—Marx was suspected by the British occupation administration of having served as a spy for the Germans during the first years of the war, and both Marx and van Dam had been interned for significant amounts of time in England like many other German-Jewish refugees during World War II—both men soon earned the trust of the American, French, and British occupying powers because of their professional educations and their status as German-Jewish emigrants. The latter factors had convinced the British to allow their return to postwar Germany by crossing into the British zone as early as 1945 and 1946, respectively. Their personal backgrounds, professional qualifications, and the networks they were able to establish for the British and American authorities and the German political leadership in the early postwar years helped both to take on the responsibilities of high-profile representatives of the Jewish community in Germany.

A close analysis of the beginning of Jewish representation in Germany leaves no doubt that van Dam’s and Marx’s main strategy to consolidate and vindicate the return of Jews focused on two core issues. On the one hand, their inward-looking policy was geared toward the “principle of unity”; and on the other, their call for acceptance of the Jewish communities (and their various regional and national associations) served as a “leitmotif” of the institutions’ “foreign policy.” Together they worked to strengthen solidarity among the members of the Jewish community in the East and West and sounded warnings when the community’s coherence was threatened. For almost two decades, they cooperated very

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28 In 1945, approximately 3,500 Jews lived in the Soviet zone of occupation, which is not more than 3 percent of the Jewish population living in that area before 1933. Angelika Timm, “Ein ambivalentes Verhältnis. Juden in der DDR und der Staat Israel,” in Zwischen Politik und Kultur—Juden in der DDR (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 17–33, esp. 18.


30 Over the course of its existence, the newspaper repeatedly changed its name. Founded in April 1946 as Jüdisches Gemeindeblatt für die Nord-Rheinprovinz und Westfalen, the newspaper was renamed Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland in 1949. From 1973 to 2002, it was published under the name Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung. Since 2002, the newspaper has been called the Jüdische Allgemeine, which is—for reasons of simplification—the term used to reference throughout this paper.

31 For a biographical introduction to both Karl Marx and Hendrik G. van Dam and their processes of return from exile, see Sinn, Jüdische Politik und Presse in der frühen Bundesrepublik, esp. 55–115.

32 For a detailed analysis of this policy and postwar Jewish politics, see Sinn, Jüdische Politik und Presse in der frühen Bundesrepublik, 190–352.
closely, and they continually considered these central precepts to be essential for the achievement of their political aims. They agreed that in the wake of the Nazis’ and their collaborators’ systematic, state-sponsored persecution and mass murder of the Jews, restitution and compensation were the primary challenges. These issues were unavoidable, and they were of fundamental moral and financial importance for the Jewish communities while they were struggling to redefine “home” and reestablish a Jewish culture in Germany.33 In line with this policy, van Dam and Marx initially also utilized the aforementioned argument made by US High Commissioner John J. McCloy in 1949 that the success of Jewish integration is a sign of “Germany’s progress toward the light,” to make their case for why Jewish life had to continue in the “land of the perpetrators.”34

However, neither the formative act of establishing one national umbrella organization of Jews for the two Germanys nor the emerging consultations concerning the question of German compensation with the West German government constituted guaranteed security for the permanent return of Jews. At this juncture in the early 1950s, the outcomes of the Zentralrat’s policies were uncertain, and thus failed to quiet justified worry about the future of Jews in Germany. One great concern was the fact that the Zentralrat’s members lived not in one, but in two diverging German states. This naturally led to questions concerning the inclusion and continued involvement of the Jewish communities located in the newly established GDR.35

Although the GDR was hardly a top destination for Jewish refugees and survivors after the Second World War, some German Jews were attracted by the opportunity to build a different kind of Germany under Soviet protection. The leader of the Jewish community in East Berlin and later president of the State Association of Jewish Communities in the GDR (Landesverband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR, Landesverband), Julius Meyer, was keen to realize his dream of a socialist society in East Germany. As a member of the German Communist Party since 1930, he had been imprisoned in two Nazi concentration camps, Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, and decided to resettle in East Berlin after the war, where he joined first the KPD and in 1946 the SED.36 Meyer defended the politics of the nascent GDR, which presented itself as an “antifascist” state and claimed to be the successor of the communist and socialist resistance against National Socialism.37 He became a member of the board of the Jewish communities of Greater Berlin in 1946 and represented the Jewish


34 US High Commissioner John J. McCloy during the keynote speech at the second conference on the future of the Jews in Germany on July 31, 1949, quoted in Geller, Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945–1953, 75.


36 On April 21–22, 1946, the KPD and SPD in the Soviet occupation zone had merged to form the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED). For more information about the SED, see Andreas Malycha and Peter Jochen Winters, Die Geschichte einer deutschen Partei (Munich: Beck, 2009), 16–51.

communities of the Soviet occupation zone in the Directorate of the Working Group of Jewish Communities in Germany (Direktorium der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Jüdischer Gemeinden in Deutschland). Together with others he founded the Landesverband in 1950 and became its president from 1952 to 1953.38

His opponent on the board of the Jewish Communities of Greater Berlin was Auschwitz survivor Heinz Galinski, who emerged as the leader of the Jewish community in West Berlin. Unlike many other Holocaust survivors, Galinski, like Meyer, had remained in Germany after the end of the Second World War. He functioned both as chairman of the Jewish community in West Berlin and since 1950 also as an elected representative of the East Berlin Jews to the newly founded Zentralrat. These roles strengthened Galinski’s position in the Zentralrat, especially because representatives of the Jewish communities in the GDR who lived in East Germany, such as Meyer, were oftentimes hindered by the Soviets when they attempted to participate in the common meetings of the Zentralrat, which for the most part took place in the West.39 In fact, no representative of the Jewish communities in East Germany was invited to the inaugural meeting of the Zentralrat in July 1950. For this reason, Galinski brought up the importance of reserving one seat in the new directorate of the Zentralrat for a representative of the Jewish communities in the GDR.40 His suggestion sparked a fierce debate. One of the leading players in the State Association of Jewish Communities in Hesse, for example, spoke out against the participation of representatives from the GDR, mainly for two reasons. First, he argued that difficulties could arise if East German representatives were to contact German government representatives in Bonn on behalf of the Jewish communities in the East or West. Second, he was convinced that any interaction with or representation of the Zentralrat, an organization headquartered in the democratic West German state, would cause major problems with these spokespeople’s East German government, which strictly opposed any Western interference in the GDR’s domestic affairs.41 Another point of discussion was focused on whether a representative from the Berlin community could effectively represent the interests of all the Jews living in East Germany.

In the end, Galinski’s idea attracted enough support. The general secretary of the Zentralrat, Hendrik George van Dam, threw his weight behind the proposition by making his acceptance of this new position dependent on the presence of GDR representatives in the directorate (in addition to the presence of Galinski, who represented the Jews in Berlin). The deputies in attendance at the very first meeting of the Zentralrat agreed on a directorate of five delegates and five alternates, supported by a governing council of fifteen representatives. The governing council met once a year to elect the directorate, and they entrusted the general secretary with all active business. One seat in each of these newly estab-
lished organizations was reserved for a representative of the Jewish communities in East Germany, despite the problems that might arise from their participation.42

During the next months, many issues filled the Zentralrat’s agenda. One of the priorities was to advocate for the right of Jews to live in Germany. Another important subject, mentioned before, was to establish the necessary economic and legal conditions to allow the rebuilding of a sustained Jewish community. That process was generally summarized by the term reparation negotiations (Wiedergutmachungsverhandlungen). The work in this area focused on moral and material compensations for both Jewish victims of Nazi persecution as well as Jewish communities.43 A third priority was the restoration of the principles of law. Among other things, this included voicing a unified stance on antisemitism and promoting a consistent approach to all neo-Nazi manifestations, as well as opposing any attempt to rehabilitate individuals convicted of war crimes or crimes against humanity.44

Regarding efforts to rebuild cultural and religious life, the members of the Zentralrat’s directorate were confronted with many pressing day-to-day questions. At their first meeting in 1951, for example, the participants identified a set of new fields of action after they agreed that religious education was inadequate; rabbis were in scarce supply; reliable membership statistics did not (yet) exist; the youth was in desperate need of attention; emigration continued to be an ongoing process; and there was no consensus regarding whom to admit as new members into the newly founded Jewish communities. In this context, the representative of the Jewish communities in the GDR and member of the Jewish community in Erfurt, Günter Singer, felt compelled to correct the false impression that the Jewish communities in the East were shifting away from Judaism. Using the example of the Jewish community in Erfurt, he emphasized that since 1945 a rich religious cultural life existed—as two examples for this he presented continual lectures about different topics and quality childcare.45

Unquestionably, these were important steps toward rebuilding Jewish life in post-Holocaust Germany. Yet, as the general secretary of the Zentralrat, Hendrik G. van Dam, remarked in his first annual report from August 1951, “in the background of all of these events, including the work of the Zentralrat, stands the world political situation, which is reflected in Germany.”46 With this statement, van Dam reminded everyone of the increasing tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War, which had resulted in both the division of the city of Berlin into East and West and the founding of the two German states. Those political developments significantly complicated the work of the Zentralrat. Van Dam also claimed that, in its short history, the organization had “fully maintained their position as a nonpartisan, Jewish organization.”47 An important element of this approach was the Zentralrat’s decision to give the responsibility for negotiations concerning the relationship between the Jewish communities and the state authorities in East

42ZA, B.1/7.221.1; ZA, B.1/7.857, “Entwurf Statuten des Zentralrates der Juden in Deutschland.”
43For details, see Geller, Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945–1953, 219–86; Sinn, Jüdische Politik und Presse in der frühen Bundesrepublik, 262–309.
45ZA, B.1/7.221.9, “Summarisches Protokoll der Sitzung des Zentralrates am 7. Januar 1951.”
46ZA, B.1/7.246, “Bericht des Generalsekretärs für die Periode Januar–August 1951.” German quote translated into English by the author.
47ZA, B.1/7.246. German quote translated into English by the author.
Germany to the Landesverband and to the Jewish community in Berlin. In spite of this policy, Cold War realities continued to pose major challenges for the Zentralrat. The political division resulted in ongoing discussions on the situation for Jews in East Germany, the implications of the GDR’s positioning toward the Jews, and how both issues had affected the work of the Zentralrat since its foundation.

Political Reorientation:

The Persecution of Leading Members of the Jewish Communities

At the beginning of the 1950s, despite the growing antagonism of the Cold War and the rejection of developments in the GDR by individual members of the Zentralrat’s directorate, the Zentralrat was determined to maintain a joint representation and felt responsible for the well-being of all of its members. Consequently, one major point of discussion in the directorate of the Zentralrat was the beginning of persecution of leading members of Jewish communities in the GDR. To give the SED authorities no grounds for a persecution, they debated for example, whether it was necessary to censor information that the Zentralrat (and others) published, especially in the Jüdische Allgemeine, which was distributed both in East and West Germany. The Zentralrat wished to avoid “putting the Jewish community” in East Germany “at risk.” The presumption that informed this debate was that politically charged statements voiced by Jews in West Germany held the risk of escalating the already difficult situation for the Jewish communities in the East and might even, this was the Zentralrat’s worst fear, result in an externally enforced ending of the existing cooperation between the Jewish communities in East and West Germany.

A closer analysis of changes in the treatment of Jews in the GDR in the early 1950s provides important context for this discussion in the Zentralrat. Since the founding of the GDR, the new SED party elite increasingly used the small East German–Jewish community as an instrument in the Cold War against West Germany. Members of the Jewish communities were forced to sign declarations that distinguished the antifascist East German state from West Germany, where many prominent Nazis were entrenched in government and the private sector. At the same time, the SED leadership adopted an increasingly critical attitude toward any contacts between Jewish functionaries and Israeli or American-Jewish organizations. In this atmosphere, a growing number of practicing members in the Jewish community in Berlin found themselves at odds with the newly established political leadership in the GDR. Statements like the ones the editor of the Jüdische Allgemeine had published concerning the importance of Israel for post-Holocaust Jewish identity, restitution negotiations (that were initiated in the West, but denied in East Germany), and discussions of the political outlook of the Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der...
Verfolgten des Naziregimes, VVN) were all perceived with great concern. The evolution of the latter organization that had been founded from local committees as an all-German organization in Berlin in 1947 is a good example of how the evident Cold War tensions began to impact and change organizational structures that (initially) connected people from both sides of the German border. By the early 1950s, the VVN came under the influence of the KPD in West Germany, while the SED accused leading members of the VVN in the East of spying for the West. Members of the Zentralrat monitored this development very closely because many of the Jewish communities’ spokespeople in both German states, among them Julius Meyer (who was an elected representative of the East German Jews to the Zentralrat) and Hans Freund (a Member of the Board of Jewish Communities in Greater Berlin), were members of the VVN. The latter was even the deputy chairman of the VVN in Berlin from 1949 to 1951. When it became known in West Germany that—especially after the political reorientation of the VVN in the Federal Republic—membership in this organization could have negative effects, since it was interpreted as identification with communist ideas, representatives of the Jewish community living in the Federal Republic quickly began to terminate their membership in this association. In addition, Jewish organizations, including the Zentralrat, began from then on to discourage membership in this organization in order to prevent their members from becoming trapped in the growing antagonism of the Cold War. When in 1953 the VVN was abolished in the GDR and the Committee of the Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters (Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer, KdAW) was founded in its place, further efforts of the persecutees of the Nazi Regime living in East and West to cooperate on this front were dropped. This was not the case with the Zentralrat.

Once the SED regime had begun accusing members of the VVN of espionage for the West, the Zentralrat feared that disadvantages for members of Jewish communities in the GDR resulting from membership in the VVN could be exacerbated if critical views of Jews in West Germany were shared within East Germany. In light of further developments, the Zentralrat’s concern about this issue that they identified as a threat to the interconnections between Jews across the Cold War divide proved justified. In early 1953, the already difficult situation for Jews in the GDR grew even more restrictive, following the virulent anti-Zionist campaign launched by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union and throughout eastern Europe.

51In February 1953, the VVN was dissolved in the GDR and replaced by the Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer. Hartewig, Zurückgekehrt, 373–86; Illichmann, Die DDR und die Juden, 112–15.
52ZA, B.1/7.857, “Protokoll der Besprechung des Direktoriums am Sonntag (Nachmittag) den 7. Oktober 1951.”
54The experience of the Jewish Holocaust survivor Norbert Wollheim when immigrating to the United States is a representative example of the kind of problems that could arise from membership in the VVN. In 1951, Wollheim, a leader of the post-Holocaust Jewish community in Germany and VVN member, had successfully applied for visas to immigrate with his family to the USA. Upon arrival in the United States, he was again interned and sent to Ellis Island because the responsible US authorities maintained the suspicion that he had been politically active after 1945 in a subversive way (communist or communist-friendly) that is in a way that endangered the democratic form and order of government. See ZA, B.1/7.854, “Schreiben von Norbert Wollheim an die Chawerim vom 20. Januar 1952”; and “Schreiben von Norbert Wollheim an Hendrik G. van Dam vom 4. November 1951.”
With the aim to prevent any further disobedience within the Soviet bloc, a number of show trials were instigated that initially focused on political opponents of the communists, but at the beginning of the 1950s were extended to prosecute perceived enemies within the communist parties. This action triggered the Slánský Trial in Prague, in which Czechoslovak authorities accused fourteen individuals, eleven of them Jewish, of an alleged Zionist conspiracy in 1952. The secretary-general of the Czech Communist Party, Rudolf Slánský, was the main target. Eleven defendants (including Slánský) were accused of being “counter-revolutionaries” and “Zionist agents”; all eleven were sentenced to death and were executed without delay, whereas the three other defendants received life sentences. Strident anti-Zionism distinguished the Slánský Trial from earlier purges in other East European countries and marked all Jews as possible traitors and Western agents.55

Similar show trials were also launched in the GDR and reached their peak when the leading SED official Paul Merker, who in the 1940s had spoken out in favor of offering support to Israel and Jewish victims of the Nazi era, was detained for alleged activities involving the spread of Zionist corruption and spying in 1950.56 In the wake of these campaigns, a series of antisemitic measures was initiated against the Jews living in the GDR. Jews were removed from positions of power, the homes of almost all Jews were raided and identity cards seized, and “the leaders of all the GDR Jewish communities were interrogated and asked to sign statements that, among other things, equated Zionism with Fascism and condemned demands for restitution payments to Jews as exploitation of the German people.”57 This repression caused some 500 Jews to leave the GDR for the FRG, including Julius Meyer and Hans Freud. On January 13, 1953, they fled along with the leaders of the Jewish communities in Leipzig, Dresden, Halle, and Erfurt. Later also prominent left-wing Jewish intellectuals, such as the formerly mentioned returnees from exile, Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch and communist jurist and writer Alfred Kantorowicz, distanced themselves from the new course of the GDR’s leadership and fled to the West.58 They were by no means alone in opposing the new policies implemented in the GDR. A dramatic increase in the overall numbers of people defecting to West Germany in response to the growing repression

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58In August 1957, Alfred Kantorowicz feared being arrested and thus fled toward the West; Ernst Bloch did not return to the GDR after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. See also Timm, “Ein ambivalentes Verhältnis,” 18; Offenberg, “Seid vorsichtig gegen die Machthaber,” 84–90.
in 1952 and 1953 clearly indicates a large-scale dissatisfaction across various groups of people, among them also several non-Jewish members of and candidates for the SED.59

These political developments in the GDR rocked the foundations of the Jewish communities in the East. Simultaneously, they also posed a significant challenge for the Jewish communities in West Berlin and the FRG. How should one react? Although some individuals, such as Nathan Peter Levinson, the rabbi in the largest Jewish community at the time in Berlin, encouraged Jews living in the GDR to flee to the West, other Jewish officials, such as Heinz Galinski, refused to take sides because they feared retaliation against Jews still living in the GDR. Whether individuals representing Jewish interests in the FRG considered it appropriate to take a position quickly became of minor importance as the Zentralrat found itself confronted with a huge influx of Jewish refugees from the GDR.60

As early as July 1951, a circular letter written by Berthold Simonsohn—an attorney who had survived the Holocaust, moved to Switzerland from where he returned in 1950 to Germany, and became the first director of the newly reestablished Central Welfare Office of Jews in Germany (Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland, ZWST)—mentioned the increasing number of “penniless refugees from the Soviet zone.”61 It was not until 1953, however, that this topic became a central point of discussion in the Zentralrat’s directorate. In principle, its members agreed that the Jewish communities in the FRG had to do everything possible to play a full role in resolving the problems that arose from this refugee crisis. In response to the new situation, the ZWST was tasked with coordinating these efforts and with establishing a new emergency fund. The representatives further agreed that although it was necessary to support all Jewish men, women, and children in need, they would continue to keep their published statements intentionally “pale” to avoid additional irritations or difficulties for the Jews still living in the GDR.62

Although most Jewish communities in the West were willing to contribute to solving this problem, fighting quickly erupted among the different players over how many refugees would be placed in each community. Both space and financial resources were scarce, which significantly complicated this undertaking. The Jewish community in Frankfurt am Main, in particular, was concerned that it had been burdened by an above-average amount of refugees; it complained bitterly about this perceived injustice. But this allegation proved incorrect, considering that the West Berlin Jewish community agreed to care for 300 of the 570 refugees who had found their way across the border between January 15 and May 3, 1953.63 Due to timely and decisive action by both the head of the ZWST, Berthold Simonsohn, and the general secretary of the Zentralrat, Hendrik G. van Dam, a continuing

62ZA, B.1/7.221.33, “Protokoll der Sitzung des Direktoriums (erweiterte) in Düsseldorf am 27. Januar 1953.”
63By the middle of the 1950s, close to one-third of all Jews living in Germany were registered in the divided city of Berlin. ZA, B.1/7.221.36, “Beschlußprotokoll der erweiterten Direktoriumssitzung des Zentralrats der Juden in Deutschland vom 3. Mai 1953”; ZA, B.1/7.221.37, “Protokoll der Sitzung des erweiterten Direktoriums des Zentralrates der Juden in Deutschland am 3. Mai 1953.”
flow of generous donations and financial subsidies (among them funding from the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) guaranteed sufficient individual support for the arriving Jewish refugees from the GDR. 64

In the medium and long term, the integration of these Jewish refugees into the Jewish communities in the FRG and the communities’ subsequent stabilization became easier. The self-supporting strategy that the high-profile representatives of the Jews in Germany had developed to counteract the initial stigmatization of Jewish life was starting to bear fruit in the mid-1950s. On the basis of successful negotiations with international Jewish organizations for restitution payments, and also a West German government subsidy, the Zentralrat was able to employ a cultural head of department in 1955, to secure the annual budget of its ZWST (which supported its disproportionally aged and destitute members) and to reclaim Jewish communal property illegally seized during the Nazi dictatorship.

Because German-Jewish representatives were initially excluded from the official negotiations among German, Jewish, and Israeli parties regarding restitution claims, 65 a compromise with the Jewish Successor Organizations—three organizations established by the Western Allies to pursue the restitution claims of the so-called heirless assets of German Jewry that in 1951 merged into the Conference of Jewish Material Claims against Germany—had been their best chance to receive financial support and the assignment of restitution claims necessary to gain full legal estate regarding former Jewish communal properties. 66 At the same time, the World Jewish Congress and the World Zionist Organization agreed to the equal inclusion of German-Jewish representative members into their organizations. For the Zentralrat, the disappearance of serious threats to the existence of a Jewish community in

64 For more information concerning financial assistance that amounted to 500,000 DM in 1954, see ZA, B.1/7.221.37, “Protokoll der Sitzung des erweiterten Direktoriums des Zentralrates der Juden in Deutschland am 3. Mai 1953”; and ZA, B.1/7.157, letter from Samuel Haber (AJDC) to Dr. Simonsohn (ZWST), May 7, 1953; “Protokoll der Sitzung der ZWST der Juden in Deutschland e.V. am 29. Juni 1953”; “Auszug aus dem Besprechungsergebnis einer Sitzung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Spitzenverbände der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege in Hamburg. Bezug: Beihilfe für die Ostzone (Eingangsstempel: 27. August 1953)” ; and “Voranschlag des Sozialbudgets aller Jüdischen Gemeinden und Landesverbände in Deutschland für das Rechnungsjahr 1954.”

65 Following a government policy statement from German federal chancellor Adenauer, discussions began in September 1951 and, despite considerable political opposition within Germany, were concluded only a year later, on September 10, 1952, with the signing of the Luxembourg Agreement. The agreement stipulated that West Germany should pay collective reparations of 3 billion DM to Israel and 450 million DM to the Claims Conference. See Wolfgang Benz, “Das Luxemburger Abkommen 1952: Moral, Pragmatismus und politische Vernunft,” Tribune 46, no. 183 (2007): 110–18; Nana Sagi, German Reparations: A History of the Negotiations (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986).

66 To avoid a situation, in which German states (Länder), the successors of the Third Reich, would claim heirless Jewish property, the Western Allies began to confiscate forcibly expropriated property within the liberated areas immediately following their invasion. At the same time, they created Jewish successor organizations in their respective zones that in 1951 merged into the Conference of Jewish Material Claims against Germany. These three organizations prosecuted the restitution claims of the so-called “heirless assets” of German Jewry, including property owned by Jewish communities before 1933 as well as the holdings of German Jews who had perished in the Holocaust. For a discussion of the Jewish property policy and the role of Jewish successor organizations in postwar Germany, see Hans Günter Hockerts, “Anwälte der Verfolgten: Die United Restitution Successor Organization,” in Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, ed. Constantin Goschler and Ludolf Herbst (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989), 249–71; Sinn, “Restoring and Reconstructing Jewish Communities”; Ayaka Takei, “The Jewish People as the Heir: The Jewish Successor Organizations (JRSO, JTC, French Branch) and the Postwar Jewish Communities in Germany” (PhD diss., Waseda University, 2004).
Germany marked a milestone and strengthened the communities in the West before once more waves of antisemitism in the FRG at the end of the 1950s presented new challenges for Jewish integration—a situation the GDR used in the heated atmosphere of the Second Berlin Crisis to label the West as a “fascist state.” Already before this juncture, however, the status of the Jewish communities in the GDR became a matter of great concern.

**Gradual Divergence: Jewish Communities in the GDR during the 1950s**

Following the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953, Soviet leadership seemed to become more moderate. More consumerism, less communism was the new motto. On June 11, 1953, and without any elaboration, the East German government announced its “New Course,” which would partially reverse the harsh policies introduced during the previous year; but the earlier unpopular increase in production norms remained. Then, what began on June 16, 1953, as a strike by East Berlin construction workers against these heightened production quotas quickly escalated the next day into a spontaneous and widespread uprising against the GDR government. Historians still debate whether this escalation of events should be attributed to the workers’ discontent (arising from economic concerns) or to a more general dissatisfaction with the SED regime felt by a broader section of the population. Whatever the reason, the East German Uprising was the first serious attempt to challenge Communist authority in Eastern Europe after Stalin’s death. The level of public discontent clearly demonstrated that the 1952 SED policy to accelerate the “building of socialism” was unpopular with many people. Yet, despite this demonstration against the government, which ended with Soviet military intervention, the “New Course” also awakened widespread hopes that further reforms were possible.

For the Jews living in the GDR, this perceived opportunity for change partially materialized as government-led discrimination against Jews came to an end following Stalin’s death. East German–Jewish institutions that had been closed during the time of the show trials were reopened and received government support, which enabled the Jews to rebuild destroyed synagogues and maintain their organizations. Julius Meyer’s flight necessitated a reorganization of the Landesverband, however, and from this point onward, their presidents were responsible to the state. The composition of the Jewish communities also had changed dramatically. Only a tiny and increasingly geriatric community that numbered just 1,715 members remained in the GDR in 1955, and this community experienced a substantial decline in religious life. Its continued existence was dependent on Jews accepting specific SED definitions and regulations. As a group, they were defined as having been persecuted by the “fascists,” and they could observe

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certain religious rituals. Nevertheless, they were not allowed to express any form of “national or ethnic” dimension of Jewish identity, that is, Zionist ideas. This latter rule included a promise of suppression of any contact or identification with the State of Israel.70

Using the example of the Jewish community in Leipzig, historian Hendrik Niether has convincingly demonstrated that these new policies constrained the Jewish communities in the East considerably, but did not result in their complete isolation from the Jewish communities in the West.71 This argument is reinforced by the fact that the Jewish communities in the East appointed two new representatives to the Zentralrat’s directorate after their reorganization: Hermann Baden, chairman of the Jewish community in Halle and successor of Julius Meyer as president of the Landesverband, became a regular member, and Max Cars from Erfurt became his deputy. Though neither were politically active, their nominations confirm that the Jewish communities in the GDR were still members of the Zentralrat at this time. Financial donations, shipments of much needed prayer books, and kosher-food deliveries around the time of the Jewish High Holidays are just three examples of ongoing support provided from the Jewish communities in the West for the communities in the East.72

Other steps, however, suggested a growing alienation of the Jewish communities in the East from the Jewish communities in the West, which was a declared goal of the SED regime.73 To reflect its new status, the Landesverband der Jüdischen Gemeinden in der DDR changed its name to the Verband der Jüdischen Gemeinden (Association of Jewish Communities). As a second measure, its main office was moved from Berlin to Halle.74 In spite of all that, the facts that Jews in theSED were encouraged to stay away from Jewish communities and were forced to maintain a low profile illustrate how difficult “being Jewish” still was in the GDR. Even though the Zentralrat continued to restrict its political statements to a minimum to keep open the channels of communication to the Jewish communities in the GDR, the distance between Jews in East and West continued to grow.

The building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 marked the beginning of the end of cooperation between the Jewish communities in the two German states. Up to that moment, contacts between the two Jewish communities within Berlin had been the most important connection between the two broader Jewish communities in East and West Germany. With this line cut, it became impossible for representatives from the GDR to travel and participate in meetings organized by the Zentralrat. The generational leadership transition in many Jewish communities and the appointment of a loyal SED member, Helmut Aris from Dresden, as the representative for the Jewish communities of the GDR, following the death of Hermann Baden in 1962, contributed further to the growing distance between the communities on both sides of the Iron Curtain. At the same time, this development is to be interpreted as a concrete expression of the antagonism of the Cold War, which manifested itself in the rejection of the central representation of the Jews in East

71Niether, Leipziger Juden und die DDR, 183–218.
72ZA, B.1/7.221.38, “Beschlussprotokoll der Direktoriumssitzung am 28. Juni 1953.” See also Hartewig, Zurückgebent, 388; Mertens, Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel, 81.
and West Germany by the Jews in the GDR that led to its separation. After a period of inactive membership, the Jewish communities in the GDR officially withdrew from the Zentralrat in 1963 and thus ended the Zentralrat’s longstanding effort to transcend the fact of division and guarantee joint support for Jewish cultural life in both East and West Germany.

Conclusion

After the end of the Second World War, the return of Jews and Jewish institutions to Germany was by no means a foregone conclusion. Initially, all newly established Jewish organizations were considered temporary entities because permanent Jewish residence in postwar Germany seemed unimaginable after the Holocaust. Against all odds and despite the German-Jewish community’s initial isolation, however, the Zentralrat was committed to representing all Jews living within the two German states and working toward its goal to unite the Jews living in the East and the West. Diverse challenges called into question whether the new beginnings would be successful. Some of the early challenges were the inner-Jewish disputes about how to divide responsibilities between existing and new—yet to be established—organizations and the continuation of antisemitic sentiments in both German states. It took awhile for the Jews in Germany to join hands and find their self-governing bodies accepted by both German non-Jewish and international Jewish partners. Yet, the close analysis of the development of the leading national organization, the Zentralrat, demonstrates that this umbrella organization had successfully established itself as a pivotal representative body of Jews in both German states by the middle of the 1950s.

The Zentralrat and its policy are one example that entanglement and interconnections existed between the two German states and societies despite all the growing differences in the context of the Cold War during the 1950s. Ultimately however, as the Zentralrat’s internal documentation reveals, the members’ concerted efforts to remain a joint organization failed. The split occurred in large part because of the opposing political systems established in the two German states. The divergence, however, developed already before the Jewish communities were confronted with the closing of the boarders by the GDR in 1961. Greater government attention for the concerns of Jewish survivors existed in West Germany compared to in the East. Although a path toward revitalization of Jewish communities was generally supported by the new democratic leadership elected in the FRG, the policies of the East German government that focused first and foremost on the “building of socialism,” which included the attempt to repress the influence of all religions, and the increasing persecution of leading members of Jewish communities in the GDR that reached its peak in 1953, resulted in a continuous deterioration of Jewish cultural life and a noticeable decline in representation for the Jewish communities in the GDR. Overall, the new German-Jewish leadership’s agenda was supported during the early postwar years by the Western Allies’ opinion that a Jewish community would help Germany to reenter the family of nations. Their efforts to reestablish the Jewish minority in Germany was of vital importance to the Zentralrat’s agenda to acquire

essential financial and practical support for the foundation of Jewish institutions that continue to exist in Germany today. However, this incentive was not sufficient to calm the growing Cold War tensions, nor to prevent the official separation of the Jewish communities in East and West Germany in the early 1960s.

Irrespective of the disappointing outcome of the Zentralrat’s efforts, the findings presented in this article arouse interest and curiosity regarding whether other minority groups attempted to establish similar networks and how the members of these groups in East and West Germany attempted to bridge the German-German divide. For sure, the close examination of the Zentralrat’s policies—its approach to mastering the postwar present and its attempts to shaping the future—offers new insights regarding different policies and competing efforts in East and West Germany to rebuild their states and societies after 1945 while at the same time offering clarification on when the actual divide between the Jewish communities in East and West Germany actually happened. Moreover, this case study also raises the question how the Zentralrat positioned itself after the building the Berlin Wall in 1961 and how it defined its relationship with the Jewish communities in East Germany from the moment of separation up to 1990, when a mere 400 registered members of the Jewish communities that survived in the GDR entered the Zentralrat after the fall of the Iron Curtain. What role did generational shifts in leadership play in defining the relationship between Jews in East and West after 1961? How did the Zentralrat respond to the continuous decline of Jewish life in East Germany? And could a comparative analysis of the development of Jewish life in East and West Germany between 1961 and 1989 possibly provide answers to questions aimed at explaining differences, for example, in the extent of antisemitic violence that we see today in East and West Germany? Based on this study, it seems reasonable to assume, that even though we know that the eventual re-incorporation of the East German Jewish communities did not alter the composition of the existing German-Jewish landscape significantly, this chapter of Germany’s more recent history might benefit in the same way from a comparative/entangled analysis that could point to important questions and topics for future research as the highly entangled development of both German successor states in the Cold War era and discourses and politics surrounding the “burdens” of the Nazi past.

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