

The German-Jews' Identity and Reactions to the Nazi Policy

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In early April 1933, the racist laws went into effect in Nazi Germany. These officially dictated that all involvement with Jews should be severed by keeping a safe distance. On the eve of Hitler's taking power, there were some six hundred thousand Jews in Germany. They enjoyed full civil rights and were deeply involved in social and political life. The German Jewish identity was clear-cut to most of them, and some were convinced that Nazi ideology had nothing to do with them. The following article, which focuses on the period between January 1933 and November 1938, will present some responses and identical dilemmas of those German Jews, who found it difficult to accept that Nazi laws include them as Jews only. It will describe their conduct within a community preparation that was gradually being formulated already in Zionist and German-Jewish responses and activities. Most of the sources and examples in this article are aimed to observe the German Jewish dilemma based on their dual cultural loyalty as Germans and as Jews as well. Describing these difficulties, and the German Jews' reactions to the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, and after the Kristallnacht pogrom in 1938, intends to describe expressions of uncertainty and a sense of detachment that characterizes German Jews more prominently. This article deals with the Legal-Racial Laws experienced as German Jews and its future impacts on their fate during the war and afterward.

Keywords: *Nazi rules, German-Jewish identity, German-Jewish responses, german-Jewish organizations, German-Jewish women*

Introduction

Hitler was sworn in as the German chancellor at noon on January 30, 1933. A wave of Nazi terrorism, led by the Gestapo, swept across Germany, and Nazi propaganda began to work in full force. On April 1, a national boycott was declared on Jewish businesses, doctors and lawyers, university lecturers, and teachers. Jews were removed from public office, from all spheres of art and communications, from schools and kindergartens, and from all cultural and community centers. In view of a situation that deteriorated daily, the Jews

were forced to hold fast to Jewish communal anchors and create a parallel life. They had to create educational, cultural and research systems, analogous to the Nazi ones from which they were barred. It is important to understand that concomitantly with the shock, they suffered a blow to their German identity and a deep rift that was imposed upon them; all the Jewish professors were dismissed from their posts in the universities and research institutions and excluded from the campuses. The extent of the patriotism and loyalty of the German Jews was also manifested in the fact that in World War I some 100,000 Jews enlisted in the German army, approximately 18% of all German citizens were Jews, the majority served on the fronts and some 12,000 Jews fell in the war or were announced missing in action. Some 35,000 Jews were awarded medals of honor.¹ Until the outbreak of World War II, tens of thousands of German Jews left Germany, some heading for Palestine and some to South America and the Far East. The response of the Jews shifted in accordance with the worsening of the Nazi policy, mainly after the publication of the Nuremberg Laws. Their public appearance also decreased, however, even though the number of Jewish newspapers diminished it was still possible to get a picture of the situation that reflected the impact of the reality that was forced upon them and the strength of their German identity.

Despite all the events taking place around them, the German Jews who chose to remain, tried to cultivate their community frameworks, and resist the Nazi rules and the Reich's policies against Jews, as far as possible.² At the same time, there were training frameworks and Zionist organizations in Germany that encouraged youth and young adults to direct their lives towards emigration to Palestine. Some of these movements, called *Hachshara* in Germany, took on greater urgency after Hitler's rise to power in 1933. *Hachshara* established training centers aimed to provide young urban Jews with agricultural skills which might prove useful in Palestine. Training sometimes took as little as several months, while in other cases it ran for more than a year. The training centers were registered with the local police, which raised no objections until 1941 since the goal was to facilitate emigration, a Nazi objective at that time. From the first days of the Nazi regime, the Jewish communities found themselves in an entirely new situation. They had to organize social care for their ever-poorer members, provide them with advice and help and support emigration, and manage to bridge their ideological differences - in particular those between the German assimilationists and the Zionists - and to create a new umbrella organization: *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Reich Representation of German Jews). It was headed by the distinguished liberal rabbi Leo Baeck. Despite the cultural connection to the German homeland and their identity with

¹ Gilbert, M. (2006). *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction*. London: Harper Collins Publishers

² Kaplan, M. A. (1999). *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*. Oxford: University Press; Benz, W. (2015). *Antisemitismus. Präsenz und Tradition eines Ressentiments*, Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag.

it, one of the main results of these reactions and activities was the falling number of Jews in Germany due to emigration.

Between 1933 and 1939 more than half the Jewish population left to Palestine and other Western countries. In subsequent years the number of emigrants fell with a certain amount of regularity, when German Jews lost any remaining illusions regarding the possibility of finding a *modus vivendi* with the Nazi regime. From the start of the war in September 1939, opportunities to emigrate fell rapidly, and it became more and more difficult for emigrants to find target countries willing to accept them. Jewish organizations supported emigration and tried to ensure that emigrants were as well prepared as possible for life in their new country, organizing language and retraining courses. Several young people passed through *Hachshara* - agricultural training in the countryside organized by Zionists which prepared them for emigration to Palestine. The leaders of the Jewish community also tried to ensure that emigration went smoothly and tried to prevent panic from spreading and people from emigrating without necessary preparation.³

The Nazi authorities did support the emigration of Jews, since it corresponded to their aim of ridding Germany of its alleged enemies, but at the same time they tried to take as much property as possible from the fleeing Jews. Thus impoverished, German Jews had much greater difficulty finding asylum in some target countries. In 1933, Zionist organizations managed to conclude the *Haavara Agreement* (Transferring Agreement) with the Nazis. This stated that emigrants to Palestine who had to leave property in Germany would import German goods into Palestine in return, after which they would receive a large part of their original property back. It is important to realize that mostly young people were involved in emigrating, while the elderly people could not or did not want to leave Germany. Many of these youngsters, members of the *Hachshara* movements and other Zionist organizations, who reached Palestine, never received British visas (one of their goals) but rather entered illegally, and in some cases, there are even ship manifests disclosing when they arrived.

However, it did not prevent them to continue, that would later turn out to be the only way that saved them. Furthermore, it became harder and harder for Jewish emigrants to find target countries in addition to Palestine. A well-known case is that of the *St. Louis*, a ship that set sail for Cuba in May 1939 with over 900 refugees from Germany on board and was rescinded by the Cuban authorities despite diplomatic efforts, so the refugees were not allowed to enter Cuba, or even the US, and the *St. Louis* had to set out back for Europe. Finally, the UK, Netherlands, Belgium, and France were persuaded to take the passengers of the *St. Louis*. Unfortunately, many of them were overtaken

³ *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit. Band IV: Aufbruch und Zerstörung, 1918–1945*, p. 227.

by the Nazi "Final Solution" after some of these countries were occupied, and further Jews' attempts to escape and emigrate were blocked and stopped altogether after 1940.

From Hitler's rise to power in 1933, through the publication of the Nuremberg Racial Laws in 1935, until the November 1938 *Kristallnacht*, and their final deportation, the German Jewish community had to find ways to adjust racial discriminative rules without losing their German Culture. The Nuremberg Laws and the Reich Citizenship Law made German Jews (and Jews) second-class citizens, and thus de facto deprived them of political rights.⁴ The consequence was that Jews became *Staatsangehörige* (foreign citizens), while "Aryan" Germans (or people with "related blood") were designated as *Reichsbürger* (Legal Reich citizens). This was achieved mainly in the framework of the Jewish Culture Union (*Jüdische Kulturbund*), and The Central Organization of German Citizens of Jewish Faith (*Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*). As long as these organizations operated under the supervision of the Nazi police, their separation from the Aryan population was guaranteed. Falling in line with this course of action, Nazi rule did not prevent Jewish activities such as the National Delegation of German Jews, led by Rabbi Leo Baeck, or The Jewish Center for Adult Education, (*Mittelstelle für Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung*), headed by Martin Buber and Ernst Simon, and the Reich Association of Jewish Cultural Associations (*Reichsverband Jüdischer Kulturvereine*), headed by Kurt Singer. All these activities were closely scrutinized, with an intention of focusing solely on Jewish material.⁵

The Nazi policy was ambivalent: on the one hand, it supported the anti-intellectual perception, highlighting the subjects and activities that would train the new generation in loyalty and obedience to the Nazi state.⁶ On the other hand, it encouraged reading and revising books relating to German history, science, and literature, with the objective of mastering ideological and executive excellence for the greater good of Germany. In this way, they engendered emotional manipulation and total control over the youth's consciousness.⁷ In the beginning, some of the Jewish *intelligentsia* leaders in Germany, although

⁴ Day, L., Haag, O. (2017). *The Persistence of Race. Continuity and change in Germany from the Wilhelmine Empire to National Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books.

⁵ Wegner, G. P. (2002). *Anti-Semitism and Schooling under the Third Reich*. New York: Routledge Falmer Press, pp. 2-7; Reagin, N. R. (2007). *Sweeping the German Nation: Domesticity and National Identity in Germany, 1870–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Miron, G. (2019). The Home Experience of German Jews under the Nazi Regime. *Past and Present* 243(1), pp. 175–212.

⁶ *Sünker, H., Otto, H. U. (2014). Education and Fascism: Political Identity and Social Education in Nazi Germany*. London & New York: Taylor and Francis, pp. 1-15; Ortmeier, B. (2016). *Rassismus und Judenfeindschaft in der NSLB-Zeitschrift "Deutsches /Nationalsozialistisches Bildungswesen" 1933–1943*. NS-Ideologie im Wissenschaftsjargon, Teil I, Frankfurt / Main: Protagoras Academicus.

⁷ Pine, L. (2010). *Education in Nazi Germany*. Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 2–12.

understanding the Nurnberg Laws from 1935, perceived the Nazi method as a temporary status of an avant-garde ideology, ludicrous as it may have been. It forced them to create ways of adjustment to keep their intellectual and cultural-pedagogical activities, and yet, there was nothing that prepared them for what was about to happen a few years later.

For most Nazi methodologists, Jews were the prototype of the anti-race as they believed that the divine preceded human existence, and thus the origin of their race and existence had neither essence nor definition.⁸ Their philosophy was neither particularly academic nor rational, but rather a mystical synthesis that created deformed links between Aryan nature and German history. Most of the Jews in Germany could not understand what had happened to their German "brethren" or why they surrendered, almost with no resistance, to such radical messianic perceptions. They could not believe that they had abandoned modern attitudes and adopted a sinister dictatorship, making the person who declared his intention to annihilate the Jewish people, their undisputed leader, and the savior of the German Reich.

German Jews rejected the Nazi ideas not only as Jews but mainly as part of the German people. They searched for ways that would reinforce their German-Jewish belonging to this new phenomenon, attempting to act in more intellectual and rational ways. Despite the racist declarations, most German Jews, even the Zionists, still felt themselves Germans, loyal to their culture and their *Vaterland* (fatherland). They identified themselves as Germans: "We spoke the German language, so dear to us, our mother tongue in the truest sense of the word, through which we received all values of our lives, and language means almost more than blood [...]"⁹

One of Berghahn's important conclusions was that there was no difference between the religious and the non-religious German Jews in relation to their Germanness. Their German identity ignored the religious-Jewish context and raised the ethnographic context above their religious-communal belonging. Therefore, their establishment as a community occurred relatively quickly, to alter the equilibrium between their Germanness and their Judaism, and to focus on what was happening within the community. Researchers of German Jewry during the Nazi era, Marion A. Kaplan (1999) and Guy Miron (2019), analyzed and scrutinized dozens of documentary and epistolary sources written by Jews who continued living in Germany until 1939. According to their study most of the German Jews identified culture with institutions, and Judaism with religion. Kaplan describes how the Nazi policy and the regime's operations against Jews were received with understanding and compliance.

⁸ See more about these ideas: Probst, C. J. (2012). *Demonizing the Jews: Luther and the Protestant Church in Nazi Germany*. Indiana: Indiana University Press; Day, L., Haag, O. (2017). *The Persistence of Race. Continuity and change in Germany from the Wilhelmine Empire to National Socialism*. New York: Berghahn Books.

⁹ Berghahn, M. (2007). *Continental Britons German Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, p. 48.

As an immediate reaction, the Jewish leadership set up a variety of associations and organizations, such as the Teachers Union, the Association of the Blind, sports associations, and other community activists. However, soon they realized that they would have to change the order of their self-definition and German identity: from now on they must say 'a Jew of German birth', and not 'a German citizen', and later – no longer 'German' at all.¹⁰

It is important to remember that the German Jews were perceived as the leaders of assimilated and modern Judaism and were prominent in almost all secular and reformist movements and German-Jewish historiography. The rational and philosophical foundation of German education which was shared by Nazi Germans and German Jews led the latter to believe that perhaps a revolutionary change could be carried out in tandem. Investment in the history of the people, cultivating sports and physical robustness, reinforcing the concept of tiling the land and building, national education, and textbooks in the *Zeitgeist* – all these took place almost at the same time, but under different circumstances. In the German world it meant training the younger generation to become loyal Nazi citizens. In the Jewish world it meant a renewal of their Jewish identity and Zionism, in preparation for emigration.

Together with the romantic, nationalist, and naturalistic schools of thought, which Nazism fervently cultivated as part of their reeducation, the Jews saw an opportunity to follow these leanings with the younger members of the community. It included the spurt of practical training for immigration (*Aliyah*), and a growing interest in the agronomic and ecological conditions in Palestine, and the appearance of Hebrew teachers in Jewish schools founded specifically for that purpose. They supported Zionist education, and encouraged the research of Hebrew sources, not for theological reasons only, but due to ethnic longings, which were part of the atmosphere of the ethos ambient in Germany.¹¹

The constraints of the reality imposed on the Jewish authorities, placed the youth movements that were already firmly rooted in their educational traditions, as stable anchors to cling to, and as an immediately answer for their needs. In Germany, until the rise of Hitler, the *Hakshshara* (preparation for immigration to *Eretz Israel*) involved primarily the organizations *He-Chalutz* and *Bachad* (*Brit Halutzim Dati'im* - League of Religious Pioneers), but also other Jewish youth movements that existed already in Germany, such as *Habonim*, *Blau-Weiss*, and the *Hashomer Hatzair* movements. Most of them

¹⁰ Kaplan, (1999). Ibid, Gruner, W. (2019, March 19). Defiance and Protest: Forgotten Acts of Individual Jewish Resistance, Lecture at the UC San Diego Library, based on the lecture given by Prof. Wolf Gruner [Video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bONTGjo7h5w&ab_channel=UCSanDiegoLibrary (Accessed February 1, 2023); Miron, (2019). Ibid.

¹¹ See: Ortmeier, B. (2016). *Rassismus und Judenfeindschaft in der NSLB-Zeitschrift "Deutsches /Nationalsozialistisches Bildungswesen" 1933–1943, NS-Ideologie im Wissenschaftsjargon, Teil I.* Frankfurt / Main: Protogoras Academicus.

have changed significantly both qualitatively and quantitatively, and adopted contents that matched the spirit of the time and the needed preparations for the coming days. Falling in line with the Nazi youth movements, the leaders of the Jewish community also sought to encourage youth to cultivate a healthier and more sports-like way of life and adopt the habit of spending their leisure time in nature. They would practice the revived contact between young Jews and their land, cultivate the physicality of the New Jew, a person who would be independent, a fighter, creative, adhering to national aspirations – the antithesis of the exilic-type Jew whom the Nazi leaders wished to wipe off the face of the earth.

However, here a new factor emerged in the ambivalence, which was strongly identified with the Jews in Germany: the socialist tone that they adopted in some Zionist activities. Most of the youth movements and the *Zionist Aliyah* youth adhered to ideals that denied the expression of diplomacy, the bourgeoisie and any form of capitalism, fascist tyranny, and oppression of the individual. Due to the characteristics of the political and public Zionist activities, the Jews were easily identified as communist agents and as such, the archetypal enemy, and an ever-increasing threat to Nazism and the Western world in general. The natural affiliation shown between Jews and communists further stimulated justification to support the call for the exclusion of the Jews, their absolute separation, and their loathing.¹²

Beyond the orders of the Nazi regime to mark all Jewish businesses in a way that would accentuate their belonging, an edict was published in January 1939 according to which the name ‘Sarah’ would be added to every Jewish female’s name, and the name ‘Israel’ to every Jewish male’s name. The reason for the urgency in carrying out this order derived from the fact that most of the German Jewish citizens did not have names that were characteristic of their origin, but rather typical German names. This is another aspect of the arguments raised earlier about their Jewish foreignness. In many instances their outward appearance, their names, and occupations, created problems among the representatives of the Nazi regime who were given orders to identify and separate Jews from the German population for purposes of boycott, banishment, and expulsion. Despite the enforced separation between them and the Germans, the symmetrical connection which they sought to preserve created an inner conflict. Since they were given orders to delete the status of “German Jew” they had no choice other than to remain with the definition of Jew, and therefore the addition of the word 'Zionist' or 'communist' filled the gap that undermined their stability. Following is a citation taken from an interview with the historian Prof. Zvi Bachrach about his life as a young boy in Nazi Germany, illustrating this ambivalence:

¹² Pine (2010). Ibid, pp. 25–48.

My name is Zvi Walter Bachrach. I was born in 1928 in Hanau, Germany, and with the rise of the Nazis to power I was expelled together with all the Jewish children from school and sent to a Jewish school. In the beginning, I understood nothing. After the publication of the Nuremberg Laws, violence towards Jews was prevalent everywhere. I remember that every day when we left school our friends from the *Hitlerjugend* would be waiting for us. They threw rocks at us, cursed us, and beat us. One day I came home covered in blood after they had attacked me on my way home from school, shouting at me *farfluchte Jude* (cursed Jew). Till this day I cannot understand it. My father fought in the German army in World War I and was decorated with medals. We had a typical assimilated German home. We celebrated the Jewish holidays only symbolically. We did not deny our Judaism, but we did not abide by the Jewish laws in our daily life. For me, as a child, this was even more confusing. I did not know how to define myself. I knew I was German. For my father, his connection to the Jewish community was more significant. It never dawned on us to leave Germany. I had an uncle in Palestine, my father's brother. He begged us to come when it was still possible. But my mother said that it was too hot in Palestine. Zionism and the sense of community were not for her. This is why we remained in Germany until there was no way out [...] One of the most interesting conclusions is that for the German Jewry the blow of Nazism came from within, not from outside. It was not like it was for the Jews in Poland, when the blow came from outside, enforced upon them by Nazi occupation. For us it came from within, from our Germany.¹³

The ever-growing interest of German Jews in the roots of Judaism and Zionism, as a result of the Zionist movements that were active in Germany, was not new. Considering the increasing attacks on Jews as of the rise of Hitler to power, this "new-old belonging accorded a different sense of wellbeing and a shared fate. The fact that people were becoming involved in studies in Judaism in Germany could be seen, among other things, in the establishment of the Lehrhaus in the 1920s by a group of intellectuals, the likes of Franz Rosenzweig, and was successfully run by Martin Buber in the 1930s. This organization was also involved in education and helped German Jews not only to survive but also to lead a meaningful 'German life'. Its Jewish schools accepted all the children, youth, and teachers who had been expelled from the German education system. As of 1938, there were no Jews in any educational or academic institution in Nazi Germany.

From 1929 onwards, the houses lacked the activity of the founder, the aforementioned Franz Rosenzweig (1886–1929), and although he was replaced by the aforementioned personalities, even they could not prevent the Jüdisches Lehrhaus from curtailing its activities until they were finally closed in November 1938. The Nazi regime forced over 65% of the Jewish children and youth whose families remained in Germany until 1939 to study

¹³ Bacharach, Z. (2010, February 9). Holocaust Survivor Testimonies: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pkd9YkpPNV0>; Citations from the author's interview with Prof. Zvi Bacharach (July 23, 2000). See also: <https://www.yadvashem.org/he/articles/interviews/bachrach.html>.

in these schools. Some of them were private and were run under the auspices of Zionist organizations, and others were operated in private homes. The rest of the Jewish parents simply stopped sending their children to school, due either to their preparations for escape, emigration, or due to financial difficulties. A far greater enemy of the Nazis, however, was the *B'nai B'rith* (Bnai Brith) Brotherhood League, already associated in its early days with the highest Jewish authorities in Germany, headed by Leo Baeck (1873–1956). It became significant and in those years its members numbered some 120,000. Leo Baeck, president of the association, consolidated its objectives with the rise of Hitler to power, with the intention of reinforcing connections to the Jewish tradition and universal traits. Thus, from a local cultural club it turned into a spiritual center that drew secular intellectuals from different classes. It was the Nazis who thwarted its rise when, after many attempts to stop its activities, on April 9, 1937, the Gestapo simply raided all branches of *B'nai B'rith*, arrested many personalities, and confiscated all property.¹⁴

Until the rise of Hitler to power, Zionist activities in Germany were limited, and most of the German Jews showed little interest in them. The anti-Jewish policy, which Nazi Germany adopted, the material read by Jewish youth in the textbooks, and the philosophy of those who had been their classmates in the past, fueled their interest in the Zionist movement. It offered them immigration to Palestine (*Aliyah*) as a challenging, adventurous, and daring response, analogous to the renewed love for 'Fatherland work'. Historian Moshe Zimmermann (2008) defined this as the 'Renaissance of German Jews' that commenced during the days of the emancipation in the Weimar Republic and deepened even more during the Nazi regime. He argues that it seems strange that the pages of history about what happened to the Jews during the Nazi period are filled with what was evolving outside Germany, while the events that befell the German Jews under the Nazi regime, are marginal. German Jews accepted this, and therefore their reaction was the kind that enabled them to continue their lives. The fact that they refused to relinquish their German identity included an active continuation of their intellectual, artistic, and sports-related occupations and activities.¹⁵

Despite the strict prohibition on using German books or material that related to German culture and history, the Jews continued to read the banned books subversively, in the privacy of their homes, and here and there in Jewish educational frameworks that were established specifically for that purpose, under the orders of the Nazi regime. Jewish children and youth, like the rest of their German neighbors, could not instantaneously refrain from reading the *Brothers Grimm*, or Burger's stories about *Baron Munchhausen*, and certainly not Erich Kästner's *Anna Louise and Anton (Pünktchen*

¹⁴ See: Gruner, W., Osterloh, J. (2015). *The Greater German Reich and the Jews: Nazi Persecution Politics in the Annexed Territories 1935–1945*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn.

¹⁵ See: Zimmermann, M. (2008). *Deutsche gegen Deutsche: Das Schicksal der Juden 1938– 1945*. Berlin: Aufbau Verlag.

und Anton) and *Emil and the Detectives*. These literary classics were an inseparable part of every educated German home. However, since the Nazi laws demanded unconditional separation so as not to bring Jews into an encounter with texts that were replete with German nationalism, the demand for special Jewish children's literature increased. Similar policies were adopted vis-à-vis the German press. Thus, Jewish writers, poets, and publishing houses hastened to publish an ever-growing amount of material. Children's supplements were appended to the newspapers, which comprised texts in Hebrew and texts for learning Hebrew.¹⁶ Special books were published between 1933 and 1937, among them Dr. Emil Cohn's book *The New Hebrew is Studied Quickly (Neuehebräisch schnell gelernt. 1. Teil. 2. Teil.)*¹⁷ and its continuation that dealt with the completion of Hebrew studies. It taught Hebrew grammar, reading without diacritical signs, eloquent writing, and examples of practical writing for the press, announcements, and letters. The books were published in several editions in thousands of copies, for example, the fourth edition in 1935 was printed in almost 10,000 copies.¹⁸

Another important channel for adjusting the Nazi constitutional laws, was the Jewish press in Germany. Newspapers became an anchor for the empowerment of communal ties and a means for practical organization. Everyone read the press in Germany, every age group, and every class, and therefore its impact on readers was immense. According to Herbert Freedman (1993), historian of the Jewish press in Nazi Germany, the heightening interest among Jews, manifested in their press, was a type of adherence to an existential channel, perhaps the last one, that represented a country that ejected them, turning them into undesirable foreigners. More fascinating is the fact that unlike the German papers that became a propaganda tool in the hands of the Nazi regime, the Jewish press remained loyal to liberal and Western perceptions. These publications represented no danger to the Jewish population, which was no longer considered German. For the Jewish reader, whose contacts with the surrounding German society were brutally severed following the rise of the Nazi regime, the Jewish papers were an essential channel of information and an effective stage for political, financial, cultural, and religious matters.¹⁹

The Nazi regime's conditions of German Jews should be divided into two sub-periods: from the rise of Hitler to power until the publication of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, from the years of their implementation

¹⁶ Miron, G. (2012). Transition of Identities: From Germany to Palestine. In Izre'el, S. (Ed.), *the Speech Machine as a Language Teacher: Hebrew is Spoken Here - Hebrew Voices from Nazi Germany*. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, pp. 34–56.

¹⁷ Miron, (2012), Ibid; See also: Asher, C. (2014). Jewish Education during the Nazis as Spiritual Resistance. *Tikkun the Prophetic Jewish, Interfaith & Secular Voice to Heal and Transform the World*. <https://www.tikkun.org/jewish-education-during-the-nazis-as-spiritual-resistance>

¹⁸ Elkin, R. (2015). *The Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt - Standard-Bearer of Jewish Emigration from Germany During the Years 1938 to 1941*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, pp.11–55.

¹⁹ See: Freedman, H. (1993). *The Jewish press in Nazi Germany*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.

until *Kristallnacht* in 1938, and from the outbreak of World War II in 1939 until the purging of Germany of Jews in 1943. Following the events of 1938 and the outbreak of the war a year later, the situation changed dramatically until the massive expulsion of Germany's Jews. These changes were largely demonstrated in the diminishment of the number of pages in the press and their content. The 65 Jewish papers that continued to appear after the rise of Hitler to power closed following a governmental order in 1938. Only one Jewish paper was permitted, which leaned heavily on what remained from the technical and personal infrastructures of these papers: *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt* (JN) that allowed maximal control and precluded any opposition to the laws and goals of the Reich.

The Jewish members of the editorial board were directly subordinate to the Nazi supervision bodies that dictated what and when to publish. The paper primarily published employment opportunities open exclusively to Jewish men and women. There was a noticeable rise in the demand for women to carry out cleaning, child and infant care, teachers of musical instruments, dance and handiwork, administrative work, and language teaching.²⁰ There was a great demand for teaching languages such as English, Hebrew, and Portuguese, which fell in line with the rise in the number of advertisements that dealt with selling the contents of Jewish homes, jewelry, and object d'art – all the things that could not be taken when escaping Germany. There were also reports on exotic immigration destinations, such as South America, Alaska, or Shanghai, and doubtlessly Palestine, to which many reports were devoted, in order to create the impression that Germany was encouraging emigration.

Between 1938 and 1941 about half of the pages of the JN were devoted to emigration, procedural instructions for carrying it out, and the price demanded by Germany and the countries of destination upon their arrival. It is important to emphasize that these subjects were struck off the agenda in the reports published after September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland, until the end of the German occupation of Europe in 1940. This was because the gates of Palestine were closed following the third White Paper published by the British Mandate, and the restrictions on sea voyages after the outbreak of the war. It also merits note that in the press reports there is no mention of the outbreak of the war since they were only allowed to publish topics that related to the Jewish community in Germany, with no mention of politics and political interpretations. The total of reports in the JN on emigration shows that despite the internal and international pressure exerted, neither Germans nor Jews considered the intensity of the German ties and the difficulty involved in leaving Germany on the one hand, and the scope of the restrictions and the closing of the gates of the destination countries, on the other.

In 1937 some 300,000 Jews remained in Germany out of a population of about half a million. The three principles that unmistakably symbolized

²⁰ *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt* (23), (November 1938), p. 2.

the Zionist Germanness of the German Jews were breached: the physical and mental training for settling in Palestine, the absolute responsibility of parents for the education of their children, and mainly the German Mother who cared for the wholeness of her family, and the annulment of the sanctity of marriage as a basic value for building "a proper German home".²¹ Even when the conditions of the Jews in Germany worsened, and there was no longer any doubt regarding the danger of their remaining in the country, only some 90,000 Jews left, leaving for any destination open to them. In addition, tens of thousands of children and youth were sent away by their parents, hoping that the situation was only temporary. Later, when the gates to the United States closed and the way to Great Britain was blocked due to the war, some tried to go to Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Shanghai and Harbin in the Far East. This was a real escape, to save their lives, and from emigrants they turned into refugees. The reports on the children being sent away and their enforced separation from their parents who did so halfheartedly, based on uncertainty and fear, are interesting. This event was the antithesis of the German "sanctity of the family" which they all preached, Germans and Jews alike.²² The end justified the means, particularly when the option of renewing ties with the Jewish Homeland instead of the German Homeland, was no longer accessible. In this state of emergency, all other countries were an alternative, without any connection to historical or ethnic ties to the Jewish people. The newspaper was re-published in 1940 and dealt mainly with emigration and stories about parents who sent their children outside Germany, couples who separated to inspect possible destinations, and the increase of people registering for fictitious marriages in order to obtain a visa, promising to annul the marriage once they reached their destination. Following is a report published by Martha Sara Wertheimer who objected to sending children outside Germany:

Is it clear to those mothers, to those fathers, who are acting so painstakingly to send their children before them and not with them, how a young child feels when he or she arrives in a country where people speak a foreign language, when they arrive to live with strangers? Won't the children feel that they are living in compassionate homes, while yearning for their parents and the home from which they were sent away? What do children think, realizing that their parents have left them alone? [...] Therefore, we cannot continue speaking about sending children away from Germany without repeating and emphasizing: the children's place is at home with their parents as long as it is possible. Those who know that their emigration will be possible in the future, should not break up their families. In our culture children and parents belong to one another and they should emigrate together, and this is in addition to all the pedagogical issues and their implications.²³

²¹ See: Koonz, (2013). Ibid.

²² Kaplan, (1999). Ibid, Potter, H. (2018). Remembering Rosenstrasse: history, memory and identity in contemporary Germany. *History & Political Science*. Series: German Life and Civilization, Volume 64 Oxford, United Kingdom: Peter Lang.

²³ *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt*, (April 19, 1939), p. 2.

Other examples that express the spirit of the times can be seen in hundreds of reports and matchmaking columns that illustrated the fictitious marriages for the purpose of emigration: a 41-year-old Jewish widow seeking a partner for emigration purposes including an agreement for annulment [...].”²⁴ or, “A well-educated and beautiful Jewish woman, age 50, from a good family with connections abroad and an affidavit, seeking a Jewish man for the purposes of legal marriage and immediate emigration to the United States [...].”²⁵ These extreme examples and the responses to them attest to the enormity of the moral crisis and disaster experienced by the German Jews, mainly due to the German certainty that accompanied them throughout all the changes that took place after the rise of Hitler to power, which created a mechanism of such massive denial that did not allow them to accept their fate. Consistent with the Jewish press, the sports press developed rapidly in view of an unprecedented burst of an almost obsessive involvement of the young group of German Jews in all fields of sports. Numerous sports classes and training sessions were added to the curriculum in Jewish schools that had been set up for thousands of Jewish students and teachers who were expelled from the Nazi educational system, to nurture awareness of the body and physical strength. This tendency was cut short after 1935 and 1936 when Jews were not allowed to participate in the Olympic Games in Berlin that year. It was clear that the Jews no longer represented German sports. After *Kristallnacht* they were forced to transform all their physical skills into Jewish activities of resistance and Zionism, and some prepared themselves for immigration.

Daniel Frenkel (1993), a scholar of Jewish sports in the Nazi era, believes that there is almost no doubt that this trend developed analogously to the emphasis on sports implemented in Nazi schools. Moreover, it was a call for a counter-reaction and struggle, albeit not violent, in accordance with the German culture which they so admired. Heinsohn's study (2019), which focused on sports in Germany and the assimilation of its secular patterns among German Jews during the Nazi regime, supports these arguments.²⁵ There were Jewish activities in sports clubs, more symphonic concerts, and greater participation in official art competitions.²⁶ By refreshing their leisure time with these activities, they proved that they were still ‘Germans’ like their ‘Aryan brethren,’ but at the same time they encountered revolutionary changes as “New Jews”, physically well-trained sportsmen and sportswomen, and well-trained German Zionists. By 1938, there were over 50,000 Jewish members in some 50 sports clubs and associations, comprising about 12% of the population

²⁴ *Jüdisches Nachrichtenblatt*, (March 29, 1940), p. 5.

²⁵ See: Heinsohn, K. (2019). Leisure and Sports. In M. Rürup (Ed.), *Key Documents of German-Jewish History*. Institute for the History of German Jews (IGdJ) Online edition [August]. <https://jewish-history-online.net/topic/leisure-and-sports>.

²⁶ Krüger, A. (1999). "Once the Olympics are through, we'll beat up the Jew – German Jewish Sport 1898-1938 and the Anti-Semitic Discourse". Special Issue: One Hundred Years of "Muscular Judaism", *Jewish History and Culture* 26(2), pp. 353–375.

of Jews in Germany. The exclusion of German Jews from the German sports associations did not detract from the growing importance of sports and the physical culture, quite the contrary. In order to demonstrate that the physical prowess of Jews was no less than that of the Aryans, they intensified the arduous exercises and encouraged sports achievements of unprecedented scope.²⁷ From the time of the rise of Hitler to power dozens of articles inundated the Jewish press in Germany, calling for young Jewish men and women to join the sports associations, and musical and artistic organizations. The following item appeared in the Jewish Zionist paper, *Jüdische Rundschau*, which closed down after *Kristallnacht*, later replaced by the *Jüdische Weltrundschau*, of a lesser scope:

The exclusion of the Jewish gymnasts and sportsmen and sportswomen from the German associations challenges us with new goals [...] Now is the time to open our ranks. The German Maccabi group calls all those who have newly recognized their Judaism to join the Maccabi and Bar Kokhba associations and work together with them for the sake of the future of a fine and more promising German Jew.²⁸

Several months prior to the 1938 *Kristallnacht* events, the *Israelitisches Familienblatt* published the following:

Education for citizenship in the Jewish State, like German citizenship, requires proper training of the youth for their future professions. The German Maccabi Association adopted the new educational system that has already shown success. First and foremost, this method seeks to inculcate order and discipline [...]. Today in Germany there is no educational nor sports framework that does not commence with hours of training and disciplinary exercises. It is imperative to create a connection between physical and spiritual training. Germany is now standing on the brink of a new era in our lives. The most important thing is to assimilate order, discipline, and a sense of Jewish purity since pride is the beginning of a sense of belonging. When such pride will be ours – we will gain our homeland once again.²⁹

It is not surprising that this spirit was also part of the morning assemblies conducted in Jewish schools and particularly in the physical education classes. An observer would probably see no difference between these assemblies and those that took place in the Nazi schools. It took time for the Jews to assimilate the fact that they no longer belonged to *their Germany*, that they had to create a different and separate life, partly a reality, and partly a false reality.

In recent years archival documentation has been revealed, consisting mainly of police logbooks and collections of reports by the Nazi law enforcement bodies, that attest to individual acts of resistance carried out by German Jews. The data shows surprising numbers, mainly because unlike other German

²⁷ Miron, (2015). Ibid, Krüger, (1999). Ibid.

²⁸ *Jüdische Rundschau*, (May 5, 1933), p.182.

²⁹ *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, (May 26, 1938), p. 9.

citizens, who faced a jail sentence if they opposed the regime, for Jews this meant immediate death. They coped with a complex situation characterized by a sense of dual patriotism. For them, this was a kind of development (Gruner, 2015). Their imposed separation and detachment from German society turned into a revolutionary and accelerating factor vis-à-vis the organization. It is worthy of note that this included a groundbreaking change in the status of women in the Jewish community and their important involvement in resistance and protest.³⁰

The German Jews saw themselves as part of the intellectual elite of European Jewry and the Jewish communities in general. In an almost instantaneous response to the publication of the Nuremberg Laws they knew that they must not become defenseless but rather behave like brave and proud Germans, act in a Machiavellian manner and transform weak points into strong ones.³¹ Two main counter-reactions may be seen, mainly in individuals: one indicated a local manifestation of opposition on the municipal level in matters pertaining to their German citizenship, whose rights had been impaired. The second type was immediate organization for pedagogical, cultural, and social planning among the Jewish communities, on the issue of teaching in the spirit of the times. The need to address the Nazi policy through a new German-Jewish ideology was demonstrated almost naturally. The objective was to send an open message to the Nazi rulers stating that if they were deprived of their German identity, they still possessed an ancient Hebrew one. It was naïve of them to believe so, but intuitively, and based on a survival instinct, they sought to alleviate the severity of the decree or, alternatively, prepare themselves for *Aliyah* and transferring their German culture (*Unzere deutsche Kultur*) to Palestine. Recently several historians uncovered archival sources that indicate the individual protest of Jews, in each city separately, the most important among them, Wolf Gruner (2018).³²

The archival collection of verdicts shows a considerable number of punishments imposed upon Jews who violated the racial laws by going to the theatre, concerts, and libraries, sitting on benches in the public parks that were allowed only to citizens of the Reich, or eating in German restaurants. Some refused to return their medals of war which they were awarded as German heroes after serving in the army and fighting in World War I. They were imprisoned for this action. Some were accused of anarchism or belonging to communist parties, among them quite a few Jewish women. They continued although it was obvious that any type of resistance would end in imprisonment or immediate execution. Reinforcement of these arguments presented here can

³⁰ See: Merson, A. 1985. *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*. London: Lawrence and Wishart; Koonz, C. (2013). *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, The Family and Nazi Politics*. Oxon: Routledge.

³¹ See: Gilbert, (2006). Ibid, Reagin, (2007). Ibid.

³²<https://www.cornell.edu/video/wolf-gruner-jewish-defiance-protest-nazi-germany>, posted on March 31, 2016, by Cornell University Library, Jewish Students Program.

be found in interviews conducted with German Jews who survived and testified after the war. One of them, with Ingrid Frank, is always being introduced by Prof. Wolf as an expression of his theories:

One day, when my grandfather Doctor Jozefstal died, my uncle Fritz, who was a lawyer, read a report on the main page of the newspaper *Der Schtirmer* that the honorable Dr. Jozefstal died, and when they entered his home, they found in his basement bodies of Jewish virgins and children, whose blood was used to bake *matzos* for Passover. My Uncle Fritz was shocked to read this report about his father. He was a proud German, a decorated officer in the German army in World War I. In protest, he put on his uniform, attaching to it all the medals which he had refused to return to the authorities, put on his shiny military boots and walked at noon to the offices of the newspaper, holding the paper. Despite the fact that they did not let him go in without an appointment, he pushed his way in, bursting into the office of the editor-in-chief, Julius Schtreicher. The editor was stunned and saluted to him. My uncle asked him if he, as the editor-in-chief, knew Dr. Jozefstal, who starred on the front page of the paper he edited. The answer was no. Then my uncle moved closer to him waving his military whip. "Now you know his son!" he shouted, banging the desk with his fist, and leaving the room, slamming the door behind him. He was never arrested, and no complaint was ever filed against him. This was close to *Kristallnacht*.³³

Another expression of opposition was evident among Jewish women during the Nazi regime. Adopting the revolutionary change in the behavioral patterns regarding the concept of diligence and abolishing the work of servants who were supposed to do all the unpleasant domestic work, was achieved at the same time, albeit for the opposite reasons: the Germans were no longer allowed to enlist the help of services performed by Jews, and the Jews were banned from employing German workers. The implications of German Jewish women's renunciation of the German domestic ethos regarding the German classics went far beyond the physical abandonment: It was a revolutionary change for them as wives and mothers. The separation of German Jewish women from their well-kept "German Apartments" and professions from now on, also encountered an external vacuum in their social and cultural space. They had to get used to an environment that was reduced only to the Jewish community without its classes and its German glamour.³⁴ These facts intensified the impulse of resistance among young Jewish women, who still related to their German girlfriends or their "Next door neighbors".

In Nazi society everything was done to repress feminist movements, demoting women to do domestic work and perform their sacred work of raising the next generation of the Reich. On the other hand, among German Jews,

³³ Defiance and Protest: Forgotten Acts of individual Jewish Resistance with Wolf Gruner" (2019), <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb3588248r> (Accessed January 17, 2023).

³⁴ Marion A. Kaplan (1995). Jewish Women in Nazi Germany Before Emigration. In Quack, S. (ed.), *Between Sorrow and Strength: Women Refugees of the Nazi Period*, New York: Cambridge University. Press, pp. 23–29; Also see: Samson, M. (1934). Das Möblierte Zimmer. *Der Morgen*, p. 58.

the fact that most of the men were unemployed, engendered feminism and created an opportunity for Jewish women to break the cycle of traditional domestic work, thus exposing them to new challenges, coping with the authorities, and training them for new occupations, and there were even some who joined overt and covert protest movements.³⁵

Kaplan (1999), who studied the response of Jewish women to Nazi legislation, believes that the symmetry was expressed in accepting the Protestant principles of non-Jewish Germanness, that did not contradict Jewish customs. These were elements of diligence, the prevention of wastefulness and greedy behavior that were all considered a sin. The feminist window of opportunity that opened, based on German women's solidarity, made it possible for Jewish women to act as well, which could not have occurred earlier. Following is a citation from a magazine of the Jewish women's organization from 1935:

Peacefully and in a clear mind we must see in all the difficulties new assignments that demand outstanding efforts on the part of all German women, and therefore we call all Jewish women to act. First and foremost, by practicing mutual help, taking responsibility for our children, and reinforcing our status and pride in safeguarding the German Jewish home [...] The Jewish German women's treaty warmly commends the willingness for taking this action. Together with youth movements and other organizations, the Treaty of Jewish Women reexamined the training of young women in spheres that had been the exclusive spheres of young men. This was achieved in the spirit of the German movements surrounding us, and the demands of current conditions. It is worthy that this power grows not only among girls but among older women as well, which is extremely important at this time [...].³⁶

Researchers of the German women's protest group under the Nazi regime, such as Tim Mason (1976), Matthew Stibbe (2003), and Claudia Koonz (2013) state that despite demoting women to a limited and clearly defined status, cells of resistance developed, fighting against Nazi policies among German women that had more impact on German Jewish women than was known to us before. More than half of the 525 Germans who received the honored Righteous among the Nations were German women, who featured prominently among those who risked their lives to rescue Jews during World War II. It is worthy of note that there were also subversive connections between the Zionist socialist movements in Germany and the communist underground that included young women who participated in the struggle against Nazism.³⁷

One of the examples is the young German Jewish woman, Marianne Baum, who together with her German friends established an active cell and represented

³⁵ Gruner, (2019), *ibid*.

³⁶ *Blätter des Jüdischen Frauenbundes für Frauenarbeit und Frauenbewegung / Jüdischer Frauenbund von Deutschland*, (October 11, 1935), p. 3.

³⁷ See: Mason, T. (1976). *Women in Germany, 1925–1940: Family, Welfare and Work. History Workshop* [Spring], pp. 74–113; Stibbe, M. (2003). *Women in the Third Reich*. London: Hodder Education; Koonz, C. (2014). *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics*. Oxon: Routledge.

the left-wing opposition to National Socialism. They acted primarily between 1937 and 1942.³⁸ The Baum group comprised approximately 150 individuals, many of whom were young communist Zionists. Concurrently with the communist partnership, the Zionist movement training camps continued to reinforce their agricultural and sustainable skills to facilitate the process of adjustment to communal life and their work as farmers or laborers upon their arrival in Palestine. No doubt viewing the German Jewish resistance through gender perceptions as well, will heighten our understanding of their reactions and their symmetrical complexity. Another point that should be highlighted is that all the resistance cells did not have well-defined leadership or planned goals. Most of the acts of resistance were carried out by individual German Jews and not by groups. According to the data found in local archives in many of the central German cities, it was individual resistance that bore the struggle of German Jews, and the number of women among them was conspicuous. This fact can also show us that the extent of their identity as law-abiding Germans created an unavoidable symmetry in such a complex and intricate diversity of reactions and ways of coping.

Concluding discussion

When viewing the totality of Jewish initiatives and organizations created throughout Germany in response to Nazi policy and propaganda, one may be impressed by a kind of Jewish Renaissance. Of the 522,000 German Jews living in Germany in 1933, over 160,000 lived in Berlin. In 1941 the Berlin Jewish community still numbered about 65,000. The Zionist philosopher Akiva Ernst Simon described this unbelievable prosperity, "a building within destruction".³⁹ The response of Jewish youth and families to the Nazi policy that was deployed in all educational institutions and marketing channels, can be divided in two: the first group belonged to non-Zionist secular Jews who were still determined to define themselves as German citizens. The other group, which grew in numbers, were Jews whose youngsters were members of Zionist sports clubs and youth movements, in the beginning in small numbers and after the rise of Nazism – the majority. Among them were Jews who later understood that the only solution for them was to emigrate and leave "their Germany" as soon as possible. It is important to emphasize the fact that there were different Jewish

³⁸ See: Simon A. E. (1959). *Aufbau im Untergang. Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland als geistiger Widerstand*. Tübingen: Mohr. (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Institute of Jews from Germany. 2)

³⁹ See: Simon A. E. (1959). *Aufbau im Untergang. Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland als geistiger Widerstand*. Tübingen: Mohr. (Schriftenreihe wissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen des Leo Baeck Institute of Jews from Germany. 2)

reactions between the period of 1933 and 1935 compared with the period between 1935 and 1939.

Hitler's rise to power failed in reducing the intellectual creativity and activity of the German Jews' community organizations. The distribution of Jewish newspapers greatly increased, and the number of subjects dealt with was far more diverse, with the objective of satisfying the different needs of Jews of all ages. However, at the same time, acts of resistance and protest grew in almost all German cities, by individual Jews, who until then, in the early days of the Nazi rule, enjoyed political and cultural freedom. Evidence of different expressions of the reaction of German Jews can be found in thousands of Jewish newspapers that were published during those years, even though their number dwindled to the point of disappearance after their final expulsion from Germany. Although the Jewish press operated under the vigilant eyes of Nazi censorship, and editors often suffered threats and imprisonment, in general terms until 1938 they were relatively free in all matters that appeared to be legitimate Jewish affairs. The present article also deals with the topic of gender that illustrates, the response of German Jews in almost all spheres of life. The idea of cultivating German women from the physical point of view reflected also on Jewish-German women, but for the opposite reasons. Instead of repressing their freedom, they became the bearers of the fate of their families and struggles in an imposed reality. The change was particularly evident in the fateful decisions they made about emigration, or the decision to smuggle their children out of Germany without knowing what was in store for them.

Until 1935, most of the German Jews did not realize the impending danger nor the Nazi phenomenon that swept over those who had only recently been their German colleagues, classmates, and neighbors across the street. As people who felt themselves through-and-through Germans, they inaugurated cultural clubs and encouraged the Jewish community to send their children to Zionist youth movements that included training prior to *Aliyah* to Palestine and other countries. All these were designed to prove that even if they were accused of being sub-humans, and there was a call to wipe them off the face of this earth, they would continue to be proud German Jews with a rich intellectual and spiritual life, preparing themselves to realize their Zionist vision, after all.

One of the additional conclusions of this article is that together with the seemingly temporary "flourishing" of the Jews, there were quite a few acts of protest and resistance. Closer scrutiny of the archival sources, such as German local police journals, shows many Jews who performed individual acts of resistance and protest, which continued until the final deportation. These studies demonstrate that although many individual Jews in Germany, men, and women of every age, took great risks, and even paid for their courageous acts, they protested the Nazi regime in diverse and heroic ways. One definite conclusion that this research shows is that we must continue studying the German Jewish phenomena, their resistance, as individuals and as underground activists and their dual loyalty. Many years after the war ended,

the German Jews were still identified as a separate community that maintained its special "German way of life", its musicians, philosophers, taste, and accent, and its Unique "German Weltanschauung" that impacted generations ahead. Nevertheless, despite the most devastating and dreadful chapter in human history, which was carried out by "Legal German Authorities" who made Jews illegitimate, not only as Germans, but rather as human beings, some of the German Jews' descendants, especially in the state of Israel, still attribute special respect and attitude to their *German Culture* origins.

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