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# Afterword

For many decades, Jewish life in Europe was a synonym for the Holocaust, and post-war Europe was, to a certain extent, rebuilt with the Shoa as a cornerstone of its identity and the primary purpose of existence. Scholars view this historical event in even broader contexts – as defining for all of humanity. Dan Diner introduces the concept of "the rupture of civilization"[1] (*Zivilisationsbruch*), which attributes both a universal and particular dimension to the Holocaust: "This universal crime was perpetrated against humanity in the medium of the extinction of a particular group, namely the Jews."[2] Aleida Assmann comprehends the Holocaust as a "universal symbol with a global resonance"[3] that gained its fields of action through representations such as images, films, books, events, and discourses. Despite its global impact, Assmann, however, also remarks that the historical memory of the Holocaust is close-knit with Europe and World War II. Therefore, it is not unexpected that European Jewish communities have remained suffering from the consequences of the Holocaust – in terms of demography, impacts of intergenerational traumas, and collective uncertainties between Jews and non-Jews.

In parallel to these challenging perceptions, it became apparent that the emerging culture of commemoration has gradually gained an uncontested role in public life. Simultaneously with the cultivation of remembering, a powerful societal consensus led mainly by the political elites on combating antisemitism and strengthening Jewish communities has been established. Predictably, the scale of such efforts varies from country to country.

One of the primary aims of this study was to evaluate the status quo and potential fundamental shift of once seemingly irreparably damaged relations between Jews and non-Jews. The authenticity assessment of such a significant change should involve consideration of whether most developments naturally arise or are instead compulsive demarcation or artificial dialogue scenarios. In any case, what may even start as positive advancements initiated as a top-down approach must be subsequently implemented in highly functioning grass root societies to succeed in the long run.

**1** Dan Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse. Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust, Toldot 7* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

**2** Ibid.

**3** Aleida Assmann, "The Holocaust – a Global Memory? Extensions and Limits of a New Memory Community," in *Memory in a Global Age*, edited by A. Assmann and S. Conrad (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230283367_6.


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At the same time, it shall not be omitted that the Jewish population also dramatically influences whether a "normalization" of mutual relations will be fulfilled. One of the noteworthy concepts in Judaism "repair of the world" (Tikkun Olam) holds Jewish people accountable not only for their own moral, spiritual, and physical prosperity and eudaemonia but for the flourishing of humanity as a whole. This significant principle has been globally materialized in the activities and efforts of numerous Jewish individuals and organizations. Veritably, this guiding idea of assuming responsibility for the benefit of the entire society strongly resonates with the "idealistic aspiration to advance a better world," which the European Union recognized and self-declared as one of its fundamentals.[4]

In this very universe of discourse, the EU strives to reconfirm its position as a worldwide "normative power" by encouraging peaceful coexistence, equality, solidarity, respect to diversity, social inclusion, and non-discrimination, to name just a few of the basic democratic principles and human rights promoted globally by the EU. The above-mentioned implies that it would be in the best interest of European Jewish communities to pursue these common goals by becoming active and well-organized proponents of European values and the integration process.

According to the latest assumptions, EU leadership openly relies on European Jews taking a "central role in improving and promoting inter-religious and inter-community relations within Europe"[5] and, besides the conventional fight against antisemitism, expanding their scope and involving "other categories of racial and religious discrimination, including, of course, Islamophobia."[6] This is seen as a particular opportunity to battle "the logic of exclusion,"[7] representing one of the principal roots of the twentieth century Jewish catastrophe.

Therefore, the crucial research question of the following study should be to determine whether European Jews identify with the expectations vocalized above and whether they are equipped to carry on the fight for human rights and democratic principles as a perennial forerunner of other minorities. Are they prepared to actively assist the European Union with promoting and implementing its fundamental yet universal values and policies? And further, are Jewish communities willing and able to mediate between the EU and other European minorities? The topics resulting from qualitative anthropological research in European Jewish communities may serve as impulses for upcoming scholarships.

**4** Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, 2016, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

**5** Sharon Pardo and Hila Zahavi (eds.), *The Jewish Contribution to European Integration* (Lanham, 2020).

**6** Ibid.

**7** Ibid.

Undoubtedly, Western Europe represents, partially due to its (post)colonial history, a highly diverse ethnocultural and ethnoreligious environment, including the Jewish population as the de facto oldest minority on European ground. In the former state-communist Eastern Bloc, such exchanges were not desired. Moreover, the respective regimes pursued distinct, often latent, anti-religious policies. Consequently, an impartial dialogue between Jews and non-Jews was delayed in certain parts of Central and Eastern Europe until the 1989 political turn, epitomizing even today an "uncharted territory."

However, since this dialogue has begun, an interest in the Jewish religion and tradition, local Jewish histories and culture, and contemporary Jewry has occurred on quite a massive scale for a variety of reasons. Motives may range from persistent feelings of guilt (particularly in Germany), Philo-Semitic tendencies, cultural appropriation, and exotification, to name a few that are loaded with complex emotions, to historical, sociological, anthropological, theological, in brief scientific explorations, sharing a coherent attempt to gain an understanding of "the other culture" that has been present on the continent for almost 2,000 years.

There are indeed many reasons on the side of the Jewish population to engage more intensively with their surrounding culture, that is, by a decisive part of individual members of the minority perceived as their native culture.

Jews from the liberal Jewish spectrum might develop a lively engagement with Christian (and Muslim) culture. Jewish activists and intellectuals shared accounts of joining "Societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation" to highlight the fatal connections between religious (and related) anti-Jewish prejudices, unquestioned "normal" discrimination, and periodic outbreaks of violence across many centuries. Intentional interfaith and cross-communal network building involves analytical work to find similarities and significant differences between worldviews while searching for common cultural experiences.

There are also other, problematic reasons for seeking interreligious alliances that are worth mentioning to complete the picture. Those are in a similar manner based on the mutual connection of Christians and Jews, this time affiliated with fundamentalist ideologies. Their intentions are not uncommonly tainted by inclinations to reinforce themselves at the expense of the Muslims, who are being stereotyped and reduced as a security threat.

The interreligious dialogue, or rather trialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, is an inevitable part of the process of restoration and reconciliation. Along these lines, initiatives, both top-down and bottom-up, take place. An inspirational Berlin's "House of One" includes all aspects necessary for progressing this

path. Interestingly, the project found its mirror image in Middle Eastern Abu Dhabi, where the Abrahamic Family House was recently inaugurated.[8]

Jewish and non-Jewish artists play music and theater in many European places and organize film festivals together. Intercultural encounters with theological and philosophical exchange are increasingly popular. The revival of Jewish art and culture, not infrequently carried out by non-Jewish artists and activists, is often and well-meaningly accompanied by the media. Unsurprisingly, many activities might go unnoticed – and there are indeed many informal contacts, cooperation, and networking occurring in semi-private settings.

The overall findings favor the assumption that the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe is less problematic than in any historical period. However, the question remains whether this seemingly positive turn from former hostility or parallel realities to gradually successful shared lives is a temporary phenomenon staged by politicians, civil society activists, and artists or a stable trend that extends into the communal neighborhoods. Most results showed, however, mixed outcomes on this essential topic; therefore, follow-up research would be highly beneficial.

In Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Germany, where the research project "United in Diversity" focused on current Jewish life and the relations between Jews and non-Jews nearly eight decades after the Shoah took place, crucial findings about dynamic structural developments, a new Jewish self-awareness, creative social participation, evolving forms of mutual rapprochement and understanding, but also increasingly influential old demons of revisionism and antisemitism, were captured in this book. Europe may face its most significant challenges today – internally and externally. Although relatively weak in demographic terms, the Jewish communities are willing and able to contribute to the continent's future with all their experience and potential. Our study impressively demonstrated this.

**8** M. Menachem Zoufalá, J. Dyduch, and O. Glöckner, "Jews and Muslims in Dubai, Berlin, and Warsaw: Interactions, Peacebuilding Initiatives, and Improbable Encounters," *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2022): 13.