The Future of the German-Jewish Past
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Looking Back to Future Visions of the German-Jewish Past
In 1948, the philosopher Simon Rawidowicz published a Hebrew essay under the title “Am ba-holekh va-met.” It served as the basis for his posthumous English publication “Israel: The Ever-Dying People.” These could have been appropriate titles for this volume as well.

“The world makes many images of Israel, but Israel makes only one image of itself: that of being constantly on the verge of ceasing to be, of disappearing. The threat of doom, of an end that forecloses any new beginning, hung over the people of Israel even before it gained its peoplehood, while it was taking its first steps on the stage of history.” Thus begins Rawidowicz’s essay, which was written—as we should keep in mind—in the shadow of the annihilation of most of European Jewry. “He who studies Jewish history will readily discover that there was hardly a generation in the Diaspora that did not consider itself the final link in Israel’s chain,” Rawidowicz reminds his contemporaries who were standing at the abyss of the greatest catastrophe in Jewish history. He tells them that “in the centuries following the destruction of the Second Temple, almost every leading Jewish poet and scholar considered himself the last—the last poet, the last scholar.”

BEFORE CATASTROPHE

Among German Jews, such threats of doom were widespread from the beginning of the twentieth century. Obviously, none of them predicted the real catastrophe that would soon befall European Jewry. Their prophecies were based mostly on demographic data
and sociological developments. In 1911, the Berlin Zionist Felix Theilhaber published his widely discussed book Der Untergang der deutschen Juden (The Decline of German Jews), while two decades later the Communist Otto Heller wrote his Der Untergang des Judentums (The Decline of Jewry).

Both accounts, which were deeply inspired by a more general “Decline and Fall” discourse culminating in Oswald Spengler’s classic Der Untergang des Abendlands (The Decline of the West, 1918–20), carried a clear message: European Jewry, in its present form, was doomed to disappear. While the physician Theilhaber’s prescribed treatment against this diagnosis was immigration to Palestine and the building of a “normal, healthy” society, Heller, who was also the author of a book called Siberia: The Russian America, advocated total assimilation as the only option for the future. His solution was the classical communist one. As he claims, his books analyze the “Jewish question” and its “solution through the proletarian Revolution.” For Heller, traditional Judaism as well as Zionism were not options and only the Soviet Union and especially Stalin’s Birobidjan project represented the future of a de-Judaized Jewish population in a classless society.

Theilhaber’s book received considerable attention and was published in a second edition, in which he refuted all arguments brought forward against him in the preceding decade and even sharpened his tone. The critics, he argued, closed their eyes in front of the unpleasant facts, which, in his opinion, spoke a clear language—a language of gradual dissolution of Jewish life. And, he would argue, this was nothing unique in Jewish history: integration led to assimilation, which led to disappearance. Chinese Jews had shown us that it was possible to disappear, as had the original Italian-Jewish community and the Sephardic population of Holland. Providing evidence of low birth rates, increasing mixed marriages, and declining religious practice, his conclusion was crystal clear: German Jews will follow in the footsteps of the lost Jewish tribes. “All conditions, preconditions and processes which contributed to the systematic dissolution, are existent for Germany’s Jews. The Jews are caught in a net, which is tied with all its parts to this development.”

What, he asked, should be the remedy for this deadly disease? “Teach them Hebrew language and culture, their own customs and laws, and force even the last Jew . . . into a viable whole. Create first and foremost a healthy Volkstum, possibilities of normal love life, an economic basis—just become Jews like in earlier times.” Theilhaber, the physician, is prescribing a bitter medicine to his patient: overcome the dream of assimilation and you will survive. It is a radical treatment that seems to contradict any law of history: recreate the Jew of the past. Clearly, his writings not only reflected the language of a national movement, but also the racial discourse of the time. A “healthy Volkstum” and a “normal” love life, which means to abstain from sexual contact with people outside the group, would destroy any individualism and bring the people back
to the collective. It is unsurprising to learn, as John Efron has shown, that Theilhaber became a leading promoter of a racial, though not racist, science of the Jews.\textsuperscript{7}

Theilhaber found an ally in the person who established the field of Jewish demography, the German Zionist Arthur Ruppin. In 1904, he had published the first edition of his account, \textit{Die Juden der Gegenwart} (The Jews of Today), which appeared in a second edition the year that Theilhaber’s prophecy of doom was published. Already, in the preface, Ruppin makes clear that, as someone “to whom the fate of the Jewish people is more than a purely scientific question, I could not abstain from drawing conclusions of the facts and express my attitudes and hopes towards the future.”\textsuperscript{8}

Ruppin’s first sentences are an analysis of a society in the process of dissolution: “Before our eyes stone after stone is loosening from the once so firmly built construction of Jewry. Conversion and mixed marriage lead to significant losses and the enormous decrease in births will make it more difficult to close the gap in a natural way.”\textsuperscript{9} This process was no longer restricted to Western or Central European communities, but, Ruppin argued, was already visible in Eastern Europe as well. Thus, his book \textit{Die Juden der Gegenwart} concentrates in its first part on the problems of his time. Its chapters have gloomy titles, such as “The Reduction of Births,” “The Loss of Meaning of Religion,” “Mixed Marriage,” “Conversion,” and “Antisemitism as Insufficient Barrier to Assimilation.” The second part of the book, entitled “Jewish Nationalism,” then points to the solution. Its chapters discuss the strength of the “Jewish race” and its viability: “The Racial Value of the Jews,” “The Cultural Value of the Jews,” “The Creation of a Closed Jewish Economic System Through Return to Agriculture,” and “The Revitalisation of the Hebrew Language.” No wonder that the last chapter, its apotheosis, is called “Zionism.” The book, whose author had emigrated to Palestine between the first and second editions of its appearance and who was a chief engineer of the new Jewish society, ends on an optimistic note about Jewish survival outside Europe—the hope of “the national rebirth of the Jewish people in Palestine.”\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{POSTMORTEM}

There was no time left to prove Ruppin’s or Theilhaber’s visions right or wrong. The dissolution of the Jewish communities of Europe came faster than any of them had predicted, and in quite another fashion than they could have imagined. When the heavens darkened over European Jewry, collective survival on the bloodstained soil of Europe seemed a distant thought for the few who had escaped hell. In the imagination of most Jews, both the remainder in Europe and the vast majority outside, the old world seemed nothing but a huge Jewish cemetery. As one of the leaders of the surviving Jews, the \textit{she’erit ha’pleita}, Samuel Gringauz, put it: “After the catastrophe,
Europe was no longer characterised for the Jews by Westminster Abbey or Versailles, nor by Strasbourg Cathedral and the art treasures of Florence, but by the violence of the Crusaders, the Spanish Inquisition, the pogroms of Russia and the gas chambers of Auschwitz.” His only conclusion was: “Adieu Europe!”

And still, not only in the communities of Western Europe that were spared the worst fate of European Jewry but also in other parts, where political circumstances allowed it, Jews reconstituted Jewish life immediately after the war. This can be seen more clearly than in Germany itself. There are even cases where a new Jewish community was reconstituted before the official end of the war, as was the case in Cologne in April 1945. The few surviving German Jews were joined by around a quarter million Eastern European Jewish displaced persons who all hoped to leave the then-occupied Germany when the Jewish state was founded and U.S. immigration restrictions lifted. But again, despite all prophecies to the contrary, even after 1950 the German-Jewish community survived. To be sure, it remains a shadow of its prewar existence but, due to immigration from the former Soviet Union, it grew to over 100,000 in over 100 organized communities by the beginning of the twenty-first century. In France, the Jewish community drew from immigration from Northern Africa and became larger than ever before.

How should one view such a development? There was the classical Zionist interpretation, which regarded any diaspora existence as fragile, and a post-Shoah one in Europe as pathetic. This view is represented by Israeli historian David Vital, who in 1990 made this utterly clear: “It must be said that there are communities in contemporary Europe which can only strike one with dismay. How can there be an organized Jewish community in Germany in our time? Or in Austria? There are aspects of the modern history of France, too, which prompt one to ask whether the Jews, of all peoples, have not lost their historical memory and much else besides. . . . The major communities in central and Eastern Europe are gone, of course, and are no more than subjects for academic research, much too much of it vitiated by nostalgia and vulgar sentimentality.” Even the British and French Jewish communities, in Vital’s opinion “manage to do no more than persist. . . . In any event, to a traveler like myself, the Jewries of Europe cannot fail to seem subject to steady erosion, if not decay. They are too small to be culturally self-sustaining.” Only “a form of re-entry into the ghetto” could save their future, according to Vital.

A few years later, British historian Bernard Wasserstein published a book that earned him a place of honor in the niche of the prophets of doom of European Jewry. He called it Vanishing Diaspora. Like Theilhaber, he predicted for European Jewry the same fate as for Chinese Jewry, which had disappeared because of assimilation. What the Nazis did not manage by mass killings, the friendly integrationism of Western Europe would finally achieve: a judenfrei Europe, with the exception of a few insignificant and marginal ultra-orthodox islands in London, Paris, and Antwerp: “a picturesque remnant like the Amish of Pennsylvania.”
Wasserstein’s conclusions are clear: “The dissolution of European Jewry is not situated at some point in a hypothetical future. The process is taking place before our eyes and is already far advanced on at least three fronts. 1. We witness now the last scene of the last act of more than a millennium of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. . . . 2. We witness now the withering away of Judaism as a spiritual presence in the daily lives of most Jews in Europe. . . . 3. We witness now the end of an authentic Jewish culture in Europe.”

Wasserstein’s analysis, in its last consequences, holds true for the American diaspora as well, with the significant difference that it is a much larger community, concentrated in a few centers, and still being held together by substantial centers of learning. In general, though, American Jews, according to this analysis, will be hit by the same fate. Wasserstein’s European patient suffers from the same disease as American Jewry, according to Alan Dershowitz (who in 1997 published a book called *The Vanishing American Jew*), with the only difference that he is in a more critical and lethal state. In this respect, there is a direct line from Ruppin and Theilhaber via Vital to Wasserstein and Dershowitz and most Israeli demographers who have no doubt about the dissolution of European Jewry and little doubt about the predictable end of the Jewish diaspora as such. Even more radical was French sociologist Georges Friedman’s 1965 analysis, *Fin du Peuple Juif?* (The End of the Jewish People?), in which he suggested that the increasingly Western materialistic culture of Israel will ultimately lead to a collective assimilation and transform Israelis into “Hebrew-speaking Gentiles.”

In Israel, the opposite argument can be heard: that the survival of Jews and Judaism is possible only in a Jewish state. As renowned journalist Amotz Asa-El wrote in 2004, all attempts to construct Jewish life in the diaspora are suicidal: “Today, there are still, around the world, many Jews unwittingly nurturing national suicide, from Russian Jews flocking to Germany to Lubavitch Hassidim opening up yeshivot, mikvas and kosher butcheries in Crimea, Siberia and Kalmykia. These Jews are still in the business of feeding future generations of antisemites with vulnerable communities to prey on.”

**FROM REQUIEM TO REVIVAL**

The first major voice of dissent in this choir of doom was that of a novelist. Philip Roth’s *Operation Shylock*, published in 1993, contained a shocking message: the return of Israeli Jews to the Europe that had killed their families. “The so-called normalization of the Jews was a tragic illusion from the start. . . . The time has come to return to the Europe that was for centuries, and remains to this day, the most authentic Jewish homeland there has ever been, the birthplace of rabbinic Judaism, Hasidic Judaism, Jewish secularism, socialism—on and on. The birthplace, of course, of Zionism too.
But Zionism has outlived its historical function. The time has come to renew in the European Diaspora our pre-eminent spiritual and cultural role.”

The character Philip Roth, author of Portnoy’s Complaint, in Philip Roth’s novel, says those words to the character Aharon Appelfeld in a suite of the Jerusalem King David Hotel. Just as in his novel about the Nazi plot against America, reality and fiction are interwoven. In Operation Shylock Roth wants to save Israeli lives by directing Jews out of their endangered states. For this purpose, he even meets Polish Solidarity leader (and later president of Poland from 1990 to 1995) Lech Walesa to discuss a large-scale resettlement of Polish Jews.

Operation Shylock can be read as a counter-novel to Leon Uris’s Exodus. Roth’s diaspora Jews are the mirror image of what he depicted already in a 1961 speech as “the image of the Jew as a patriot, warrior, and battle-scarred belligerent” as depicted in Exodus. Israeli writer Yitzhak Laor noted that “Israelis cannot read this corpus without being threatened by yet another complicating question posed in front of our Imaginaire. . . . Roth’s project is too big for public discourse, for tastemakers to discuss.”

It is significant, of course, that Roth lived in the United States. He may have shared the thought not only of a grand European Jewish past but also of a possible Jewish future in Europe, but he was no part of it, was not contributing to it, not drawing inspiration from it. Similarly, in a relatively recent attempt to reinterpret Jewish history in a grand manner, David Biale’s Cultures of the Jews does not deal at all with post-Shoah European Jewry, while containing chapters on contemporary American and Israeli Jews. Only one of its twenty-three contributors is based in Europe.

Is Europe then, as Vital and Wasserstein argue, utterly marginal in the Jewish world? Or are there any Jewish voices in Europe that may apply Rawidowicz’s thesis of the ever-dying people so apt to survive to Europe? The most eloquent voice promoting a new European Jewry has been that of the Italian-Jewish historian Diana Pinto, educated at Harvard and living in Paris.

In several essays and numerous speeches, mostly written around the turn of this century, Pinto argues for the construction of a new European Jewry within the New Europe, for a third pillar of world Jewry next to America and Israel. European Jews, she writes, “must have the intellectual vision to realize . . . that Judaism recovered from other devastating historical experiences: the Spanish expulsion, for example.” Europe today, she wrote in the mid-1990s, offers the unique chance of a new postnational identity: “Jews can and should take advantage of this new paradigm and create a European identity for themselves. . . . For Jews, Europe is newly emerging. It is not a finished product.” They can, and should, create a “Jewish space” fifty years after the Holocaust and revive a positive Judaism. And while Wasserstein’s account ends with a comparison of European Jews to Chinese Jews who disappeared as well, Pinto’s conclusion is optimistic concerning the survival of European Jewry: “Europe is not Australia.
It is a place where Jewish history, culture and creativity have been rooted for more than two thousand years. That history cannot be reduced to a mere episode of colonization in an Israeli rewriting of history; nor should it become a latter-day version of post-1492 Spain in which Jews exist primarily as a symbolic memory. It is up to us, as Europeans and Jews, to turn Europe into the third pillar of a world Jewish identity at the cross-roads of a newly interpreted past, and a pluralist and democratic future.  

Between those contradicting visions, what then is the future of European Jewry? Historians are no prophets, and instead of predicting the future we analyze past developments and draw conclusions from them. Our conclusions of these analyses are less based on objective facts than on our own biases; they grow out of our personalities rather than of indisputable truths. How else can we explain that Israeli demographers continue to predict the slow decline of the Jewish diaspora, while some of their American Jewish colleagues see a more rosy picture of their own future? The disputes begin with very different notions of “Who is a Jew?” For example, the number of Jews in post-Communist communities like Hungary or Poland vary a huge amount due to differing definitions and they end with basic disagreements over the definition of Jewish culture. It matters if we look at the world from a Zionist or a diasporist point of view; it matters if our personal inclination is that of an optimist or that of a pessimist. And none of us can predict how the State of Israel and the Middle East will look in one generation, even ten years from now; none of us can predict how much longer feelings of ethnic pride will continue to exist in America, or how antisemitism will develop in Europe. Those are just a few of the factors that will influence Jewish life in Europe and beyond in the next decades.  

I would distinguish between two parallel and seemingly conflicting developments: on the one hand, a progressing assimilation, and on the other hand, a strengthening of Jewish identity and knowledge. The first, we may call Wasserstein’s Europe; the second, Pinto’s Europe. Both of them exist, and both exist at the same time. The first reflects the situation of the majority of European Jews. If we consider any practice or positive commitment to Judaism as relevant, the European Jewish community is further diminishing. Their children and grandchildren may be regarded as Jews or of Jewish descent by their non-Jewish neighbors, but many European Jews won’t know anymore what it means to be Jewish other than being regarded as such by others. Intermarriage is one strong factor in this development—the other one is the ease of integration and the secularization of European society, not comparable to an American society in which God and religion still play a major role.  

While this development concerns the majority of European Jews in the next generation, a contrasting tendency cannot be denied. The margins are drifting away, but the center may gain strength. During the last decades the number of Jewish children attending Jewish schools all over Europe has grown, especially due to a certain kind of Jewish revival in Eastern and Central Europe: a few innovative institutes of adult learning
have opened their doors; Jewish studies at universities have been strengthened; the attractiveness of Jewish culture by non-Jews has had its impact on Jews as well; and the diversity of religious life ranging from the Reform movement to Chabad has become notable. Again, those developments may only be relevant for a minority of European Jews, but this minority may indeed prove big enough to survive.

Three examples may provide some background to this development. In Great Britain, Limmud has proved an enormously successful innovation to Jewish learning. What started as a happening and learning event has become a movement. Besides the Limmud meeting around Christmastime, where thousands of British Jews gather to study and discuss a broad variety of aspects of Judaism, there are many smaller Limmud learning days all over Great Britain, and now also in other parts of Europe. In Germany, a similar event called Tarbut for Jews from German-speaking countries has proven an unforeseen success with hundreds of Jews from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland gathering regularly to discuss all aspects of Jewish life, to learn, and to meet a broad range of German-Jewish writers, politicians, and religious leaders. Another, much smaller, but more substantial enterprise is Paideia in Stockholm. Founded by an American, Paideia brings together young Jews from all over Europe for one year to teach them Jewish texts and create a solid basis of Jewish knowledge for people who then can transmit this to their own communities.

Enterprises such as Limmud, Tarbut, and Paideia are by no means guarantees for the survival of European Jewry. They are, however, signs that a substantial number of European Jews are ready to invest their time and money for a Jewish future in Europe. More than that, they underline that the memory of Europe among Jews is no longer exclusively defined by the Crusaders, the Inquisition, and Auschwitz, but also by reclaiming the diverse heritage of Rashi, Mendelssohn, Kafka, Freud, and Einstein.

Anthropologically speaking, we deal more with a thin than with a thick culture. The last generation of Jews who grew up in the shtetl, in a Europe in which being Jewish meant an everyday culture distinguishable by cloth, language, and religious practice, is no longer. The majority of the European Jews of the next generations are not willing to invest on an everyday basis. Their commitment to Judaism and Jewish culture is restricted to occasional activities, but many of them still have a social life that is primarily Jewish; they undertake efforts to find a Jewish partner and provide their children with, at least, a minimal Jewish education. They will remain tied to Israel to a greater extent than American Jewry because of their small size, their close proximity to Israel, and also, perhaps, due to their bad conscience about living on a continent many in Israel and America consider to be a large cemetery.

The development of religious life in Europe is another factor not to be overlooked. In recent years, both Chabad and Reform as well as Conservative movements have made large inroads. In Eastern Europe, Lubavitch has more or less taken over large
parts of Jewish life and, even in Western Europe, religious life may become dominated by Chabad to a large extent in another generation. In Germany the first Chabad rabbi arrived in the 1980s—there were only three Chabad rabbis until the influx of Russian Jews, and now their number has grown to over twenty, which comprises a third of the total number of rabbis in Germany. In Berlin, where both Reform and Orthodox movements have established rabbinical schools and now educate German-speaking rabbis, the Chabad community has laid the foundation for a modern educational campus in 2018.\textsuperscript{22} While many Orthodox (and non-Orthodox) rabbis disagree with their ideology, almost no one dares to raise the issue, partly because the communities themselves would not be able to fill the gap caused by their retreat and partly because they are afraid of splits within the communities.\textsuperscript{23} It should be added that the Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel leaves no doubt about his support of Chabad activities in Germany and other parts of Europe. On the other hand, non-Orthodox religious activities are growing. The first female rabbi was appointed to a German-Jewish community in the 1990s and in Berlin and some other communities, egalitarian services are no longer a provocation as they were for many decades.

Those tendencies might help to build up religious Jewish life in Europe, but they also have another consequence. Whatever remained of the indigenous European-Jewish culture is about to disappear. Basically no Jew in Germany today is familiar with traditional Ashkenazi \textit{minhagim}; the Italian Jewish rite is dying out; Hungarian Jews may call themselves Neolog or Status Quo but they have little idea what those notions really mean. European Judaism is about to be replaced by the import of Israeli and American notions: the melodies heard at a wedding in Afula or Bat Yam are the same as those heard in Milano or Manchester. The \textit{shabbat nussah} heard in a conservative synagogue in Los Angeles soon will also be heard in Berlin or Budapest. The school curricula are not giving much emphasis to any particular local or regional traditions and most students don’t know much of the Jewish histories of the places in which they grow up. Despite new home-grown institutions, Judaism in Europe today rests on the import of leaders and ideas. There will be Jews in Europe, there will be Judaism, but one does not have to be a prophet to predict that this is no longer a European Judaism with its own traditions and rituals.

A \textbf{VIRTUAL EUROPEAN JUDAISM?}

As for secular Jewish culture, another phenomenon is palpable. We may soon encounter a Jewish culture in Europe that is neither Wasserstein’s nor Pinto’s Europe, but Gruber’s Europe. The American journalist Ruth Gruber, who resides in Italy, has analyzed what she calls “Virtual Judaism,” a non-Jewish Jewish culture based on klezmer music, Jewish
museums, cultural festivals, and academic study of Judaism. Much has been written on this phenomenon, including a large amount of ridicule and cynicism. This is understandable for anyone confronted with this phenomenon. Still, one may add one more aspect: this unpredicted interest in Jewish culture might have unpredictable positive effects on Jewish life. As some Jews begin to realize: if so many non-Jews like Jewish culture, maybe there is actually something to it. Some Jewish museums have begun to develop programs for Jewish schools and others inspire Jewish artists. The Rothschild Foundation in London has developed significant programs to support both Jewish cultural creativity and Jewish studies. Some of the beneficiaries of those programs are non-Jews but there are also many Jews who will contribute to a more creative world of Jewish culture in Europe in the generations to come.

One may argue that Jews in the twenty-first century do not need Europe, but Europe needs the Jews. A judenrein Europe a few generations after the Shoah would be conceived as the ultimate posthumous defeat of liberal and democratic values by the forces of totalitarianism. Therefore, even European states with the tiniest Jewish communities are well prepared to preserve and cultivate Jewish existence. Is the Jewish presence, then, to become a merely symbolic one, an exhibition of exotic animals in the European zoo? While this danger cannot be neglected, one could argue that even though Jews may not need Europe, Jewish culture would lose a significant dimension without a European presence. After all, Jews did not stay as tourists in this continent over two millennia, but were shaped by their European surroundings in all possible ways, just as they influenced their non-Jewish environment. Thus, asked for the reasons why Jews remain in Europe after all that happened, one might add to the “fleshpot” argument (to secure their economic well-being) and the “davka” argument (not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory), the “culture” argument: they feel part of either the particular French/German/Italian culture or of the more inclusive European culture.

One factor that seemed rather marginal to the future of Jewish life in Europe in the late twentieth century, but which has gained momentum as an argument among modern-day prophets of doom, is antisemitism. The second decade of the twenty-first century has seen a significant rise of verbal attacks against Jews and of actual violence against Jewish institutions in almost all European countries. While one cause for this development is the transmission of the Middle East conflict into European territory with its side-effect of the growing presence of radical Islam, another troubling development is the revival of right-wing nationalist parties. Their rhetoric is nowadays often friendly toward Jews and especially toward Israel, and their anti-Muslim agendas even appeal to some Jewish voters, but their xenophobic ideology will ultimately be counterproductive to any revival of Jewish culture in Europe. As always, though, the rise of antisemitism not only has the effect of Jews hiding their Judaism or leaving for other
places: even if one disagrees with Jean-Paul Sartre’s thesis that antisemitism creates the modern Jew, there can be little doubt that, among many Jews who otherwise might have assimilated, it involuntarily strengthens a sense of solidarity. Thus, antisemitism works both to weaken and to strengthen Jewish identity.

It is impossible to know if the numbers are substantial enough and the creativity sufficiently strong to lay the foundations of a future European-Jewish life. But synagogues are being built, new Jewish community centers are opening, innovative operations are beginning their activities, schools are increasing the number of students, and ideas about a new “European Jewry” are floating around. So, at least for the short run and contradictory to all prophecies after the Shoah and to all appeals of Israeli prime ministers and chief rabbis to emigrate, European Jews will be around for some time. In fact, in recent years more Israelis have emigrated to Europe, with Berlin as a new hub, than European Jews to Israel. More former Soviet Jews have settled in Germany in the early 2000s than in Israel. Those facts also have some impact for a future Jewish world.

European Jewry is the smallest pillar in the Jewish world next to North America and Israel, but it is still here to stay as long as the economic conditions remain stable and antisemitism is not an everyday experience. Individual Jews will always opt for other options, such as remaining Jews outside Europe or remaining Europeans without Judaism. The majority will not disappear that fast.

Two countries with small but lively Jewish communities prove the notion of the ever-dying people: Spain and Germany. Five hundred years after the expulsion, fifty years after the Shoah, Jewish communities are existent in both places, have been growing in the last generation, and—whether one likes it or not—will be there for the next few generations. If those countries have Jewish communities after their respective experiences, then how can we predict the decline of any Jewish community?

Let us then, in conclusion, return to Simon Rawidowicz. “When we analyze somewhat more deeply this constant dread of the end, we discover that one of its decisive psychological elements is the general, not particularly Jewish, sense of fear of losing ground, of being deprived of possessions and acquisitions—or, still deeper, the sense of fear that came over man when he first saw the sunset in the west, not knowing that every sunset is followed by a sunrise, as the midrash so beautifully described Adam’s first great shock.” That the sunrise is also there for the Jewish people is Rawidowicz’s point in a post-Shoah world. He regards the fear of cessation as a “protective individual and collective emotion. Jewry has indulged so much in the fear of its end that its constant vision of the end helped it to overcome every crisis, to emerge from every threatening end as a living unit, though much wounded and reduced. In anticipating its end, it became its master. . . . There is no people more dying than Israel, yet none better equipped to resist disaster.”
NOTES


5. Ibid., 153.

6. Ibid., 157–158.


9. Ibid., 3.

10. Ibid., 302.


21. Ibid., 15.


25. The most recent attempt to embrace Jews by a right-wing party is the establishment of a group called “Juden in der AfD” in Germany. See *Jüdische Allgemeine*, October 7, 2018.

