After working for almost thirty-five years as an archivist at the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), I have been wondering increasingly what this archive at the LBI actually is. What does it mean? What is the meaning of the 4 million-plus pages of documents and what does the archive as a “memory with legitimacy” mean? The archive and the library hold a managed collection of 80,000 titles and 10,000 mostly personal collections of documents from individuals, families, and businesses, plus some 5,000 artworks, all pertaining to a rather small group of people when looked at on the national scale—never more than 1 percent of the population in Germany, with a higher concentration of 4 percent in prewar Berlin. However, half a million people is still a very sizeable group with a high degree of diversity, and to look at the German Jews as a closed entity misses the aspects of participation and impact in a much larger society and its context. The Leo Baeck Institute probably holds the largest archival documentation of that group.

Michael Meyer wrote in his introduction to the fiftieth anniversary volume of the Leo Baeck Institute: “On May 25, 1955, sixteen men . . . came together in Jerusalem. Using German as their common language, they addressed the task of setting forth a program for a newly envisaged Leo Baeck Institute. . . . According to Buber, now that German Jewry had reached the end of its historical journey, the survivors possessed an obligation to determine how the German-Jewish ‘symbiosis’ came into being, how it functioned, and what remained of it after crisis and catastrophe.” Michael Meyer wrote this at a moment shortly after two major changes had taken place. The LBI in New York had moved into new quarters at the Center for Jewish History and the archives were associated with a new major German institution—the Jewish Museum
Berlin. He also wrote this shortly before the archives began to put the entire content on the World Wide Web. The German-Jewish legacy had begun its transformation process from a survivor-based “landsmanschaft” organization to a research institute that is now a solid part of a consortium of Jewish libraries at the Center for Jewish History in New York with a strong Internet presence, which so far has increased the archival usership tenfold. The German-Jewish legacy became part of the canon of American-Jewish history, an integral part of Jewish history at large, and also achieved recognition as part of the history of German-speaking lands. German-Jewish as we knew it as a distinct history has recently become more Jewish and more German, and also American-Jewish and part of American history.

The beginning of a new millennium brought two significant changes that took the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, into new contexts and directions. It joined with the two other major Jewish research libraries in the United States, American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) and YIVO, to form the Center for Jewish History, which in the meantime has acquired more library and museum components; and it also banded together with the newly established Jewish Museum Berlin—which is a German institution, not the museum of the Jewish community—to create a joint archive facility; this decision put the LBI into previously unfamiliar cooperative settings. It created mutual recognition between significant but rather unequal partners, and it granted the LBI the stamp of acknowledgment of its importance in a global historical context. The New York joint venture of the Center for Jewish History admitted the LBI into the canon of American-Jewish history. The German tradition became an integral part of Jewish group identity in the United States. By way of a joint cataloguing facility with the Center for Jewish History, partner library overlaps between the different histories became visible, demonstrating how traditions moved across the continents and underpinning the transitions and demographic shifts of the global dynamic of the diaspora. The initial creation of the LBI in Jerusalem signaled a new relationship between the center and the periphery, with the immediate postwar triangularity between the main places of refuge, Israel, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This has subsequently shifted by adding another pillar of Jewish life, again in continental Europe and, of all places, in Germany. The move of all its archival collections in the form of microfilms and then digital images to Berlin signaled the acceptance of German-Jewish history as an integral part of German history (Austria is still procrastinating).

So, where are we now? It is fascinating to see that with the eightieth commemoration of the Anschluss and Kristallnacht, national identities are still standing in the way of a more common understanding of the many shared aspects of society, politics, and culture. Until the end of the twentieth century, and the symbolically charged end of a millennium, in the initial decades after the creation of the LBI, the institute was part of a network of intimately connected refugee organizations: the newspaper Aufbau,
Congregation Habonim, the social services organization Self-help, and so on, providing cohesion for its members and a platform for ideas and discussion. The audience was comprised entirely of Yekkes (Jews of German-speaking origin) and the staff came from the same pool of people. This has radically changed. Very few Yekkes are left to attend the lectures and events, and a younger crowd is gradually coming to listen—people who do not share the same ethnic background and cohesion but who are interested in what is now called the relevance of the German-Jewish experience. The LBI has become a research institute and it is the foremost place for the study of German-Jewish history.

Some of the central questions of modernity affecting Jews in German-speaking lands are: Who is a German Jew and who is to tell? Are people religious or not? How long have people lived in Germany or other German-speaking lands? The power of these concepts and definitions has started to shift and erode in an era of increasing intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews, when turning away from religion became more common. After the end of the Weimar Republic, these issues took a sharp turn. Ismar Elbogen’s notion of the position of Jews in German lands and of the ups and downs of the history of Jews in Germany, illustrated in his *Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, was to characterize the relationship over a thousand-year period. In an article responding to the April boycott, published on the front page of the *CV Zeitung* of April 6, 1933, entitled “Haltung!” (which may be best translated as “Stance!”), Elbogen wrote: “Ten thousand have been pushed out of their jobs, many independent businesses have been uprooted. It makes no sense to ask what the reasons are, it makes no sense to accuse ourselves or others, this hour only knows one command: work and help! We can be condemned to suffer hunger, but not to starve to death!” Elbogen drew a line extending the historical developments of centuries and understanding the severity of the situation. Two years later, he wrote in the introduction to his 300-page history account: “Since their settlement during the Roman times Jews have always lived in Germany, they went through evil and good days, . . .” (“Seit ihrer Niederlassung in der Römerzeit haben immer Juden in Deutschland gewohnt, sie haben böse und gute Tage durchgemacht, . . .”). He finished the manuscript in 1934 and the book was published in 1935. After reporting on the history of settlement and pogroms, periods of stability and unrest, acceptance and rejection throughout the centuries, he concluded in view of the Nazi threat: “Once again, German Jews are confronted with the question of testing our resilience, to prove ourselves worthy.” Elbogen emphasized the permanence of Jewish life in Central Europe, and expressed his skeptical hope that history would continue. However, during the same year as the publication of Elbogen’s book, the question of belonging was addressed from the Nazi perspective with the radical and cynical power of the racist state. The racial laws of 1935—the Nuremberg Laws—gave definition to a number of those questions, with dire consequences for those being subject to those verdicts. As we came to understand in the aftermath, the Nuremberg Laws were a turning point into
the unimaginable, starving the Jews to death and worse. The archives of the LBI hold a rich collection of documents that are evidence of those questions and responses, and these documents can be examined in order to analyze those historical developments to attempt to put faces and names to individuals from this period of history.

The archive of the LBI represents a spectrum between urban and rural, “Stadt und Land,” between Jews in Berlin and Frankfurt and the Jews in the countryside, thousands of small towns and villages, where Jews had lived for hundreds of years. There are those German Jews who increasingly moved from the rural areas to the cities and people who came from further east—Polish Jews and also from the eastern provinces of Germany. The religious spectrum developed from traditional to modern during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the twentieth century adding a new form of belonging, being secular with ever dwindling religious connections.

And how German is it? And what does being German imply? It is not Germany (only since 1871) as a political entity within its borders, but rather German language and culture in all its diversity between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, from western Poland to eastern France, from the northern Adriatic to southern Denmark. There is no Germany without Jews, and in turn German is one of the more important Jewish languages.

That said, accepting the widely held notion that Jews were an integral part of German culture, what does that mean for the archives and library of the Leo Baeck Institute? There are, of course, larger archival holdings that contain the documents of the German-Jewish experience—the archives of the Centrum Judaicum in Berlin with the collections of the community archives of the Gesamtsarchiv der deutschen Juden; there is the Heidelberg archive of the postwar communities; and there are the many local and regional archives mainly documenting the position of Jewish communities within the larger context. On the other hand, state and federal archives in Germany do not cover much of the Jewish experience. The effort to show what holdings exist in the archives of the five new postunification states has not rendered very much; it has rather confirmed how much of a recognition gap there is. But it is the archive of the diaspora that holds the most comprehensive documentation about the daily lives of Jews in German-speaking lands in the Leo Baeck Institute. Major holdings are found in Israel, in the National Library, in the Central Archives of the Jewish People, the Central Zionist Archives, and in Yad Vashem.

On the other hand, having become part of the Center for Jewish History in New York, the LBI has entered the canon of the universalist Jewish identity and understanding of American Jewry, with the German-speaking Jews as major contributors to a broad demographic entity that is characterized by aspects of hybridity resembling the fabric of U.S. society in general. The question of belonging in the United States is being answered in ways reminiscent of Germany before the Nazi period—full civil rights and recognition, part of a broad demographic patchwork.
The surprise is to realize that in terms of German-Jewish history after the Holocaust, there were a quarter of a million Jews in immediate postwar Germany, mostly Polish refugees who had survived the war in the Central Asian provinces and in Siberia in the Soviet Union, and who after repatriation to Poland had subsequently fled to the American Zone of Occupation in Southern Germany. This fact has only surfaced in recent years. By the mid 1950s less than 10 percent remained in Germany to become the “new Jews” and in subsequent years these Jews came to be regarded as the postwar German Jews. Since the 1990s they were the German Jews whose children and grandchildren were born in Germany, and who were then confronted with a new wave of immigration from the Soviet Union and postcommunist Russia and Ukraine, whose children and grandchildren in turn are born in Germany. However, we also recognize that this pattern was already valid, though to a lesser degree, before the First World War and certainly after 1918.

Going back to prewar history, to what degree does the LBI archive represent “the German Jews”? Again, the mix of those born in Germany for generations and those one generation away from Eastern Europe comprise the Jews who fled Nazi Germany. They are the German Jews represented in the LBI archives. German-Jewish history functions also as a paradigm of demographic and social hybridity, and the German-Jewish archives are a reflection of this paradigm.

What we find in the archives are the utterances of individuals that go from the trivial to the profound. The collections display and reflect a spectrum of experience and expression that is much more colorful than the printed words vetted by publishers and editors. Daily life is encapsulated in these archives. German-Jewish history is also “general” German history—an integral part of that history. This said, the LBI then gains enormously in importance. There is no other archive documenting the lives and achievements of the German Jews in such detail. That the Jewish Museum Berlin holds a copy of the LBI’s archives, which are now almost all online, speaks to the recognition of the LBI within the framework of German governmental policies by way of acceptance from official German museum institutions. But it is also the admission of German-Jewish history as part of German history.

To illustrate the work of the LBI, the latest example is the 1938 Project—a direct application of the original documents to a contemporary purpose. What does the memory and experience of that year represent for us today? Whether the associations we make are political, social, personal, psychological, or philosophical is a matter of personal opinion. But the knowledge of the march of time on a level of great personal and geographic detail provides a more concrete look into what history means on the ground. Looking at the events at the time combined with the connecting tissue of the daily lives of ordinary people provides a different dimension of history. It offers a sense of our own daily life intertwined with various aspects of our own social existence. The history and stories of the luminaries don’t tell us much about “the people.” It is rather
the ordinary citizens who with their individuality display a range of behavior and experiences that enable us to learn about people in a general sense. We need to compare in order to gain perspective. Compare the lives of Jews and non-Jews and recognize the sense of a spectrum, not just polarity.\textsuperscript{10}

With approximately 10,000 archival collections, donated by individuals and families, the archives represent over 50,000 names and stories, which is approximately 7–10 percent of the pre-1933 Jewish population of Central Europe. This is meant more symbolically rather than as an accurate figure. But nevertheless, these were real people, individuals, not abstract entities, not statistics or numbers. And fifty thousand is more than any individual researcher could handle. Some current research employing the methods of digital humanities seems to approach serious networking analyses, cluster research and literary corpus analysis. The documents and written remnants of everyday life, used, for instance, in the aforementioned 1938 Project—the school report cards, the \textit{Schulzeugnisse} of the Central European education systems, highly valued in Germany and even more among Jews, but completely useless in America; the endless photo albums of the summer and winter vacation trips to the mountains or to the sea—clearly signs and testimony of accomplishment and pride; and the letters in the late 1930s and early 1940s between parents and children from the \textit{Kindertransport}—all of these archival items find increasing recognition and provide insight into people’s lives, giving color to the statistics.

What remains of the German-Jewish past? The children of the refugees are becoming more active, whether in retrieving the documents of their parents and taking an interest in preserving the legacy, or by getting their children and grandchildren interested or writing memoirs and family histories, making reunions with former teachers, making contact with groups online and offline, and recently, by claiming German citizenship in the form of a passport to which the descendants are legally entitled. German-Jewish studies has found its way into German studies as well as Jewish studies when looking at the annual meetings of the German Studies Association (GSA) and American Jewish Studies (AJS). And Germany has become the third strong pillar of scholarship, to quote Ismar Schorsch, in addition to Israel and the United States: \textit{Wer hätte das gedacht}? Who would have possibly thought that at the time of the establishment of the Leo Baeck Institute?

\section*{WHAT IS MISSING?}

According to its mission, the LBI is not dealing with postwar history, at least not in Germany. Postwar German-Jewish history is to be gathered, kept, and dealt with in Germany and not by a foreign entity with a foreign view on that matter, this being
eagerly guarded by archives in Germany which have taken on that task. And in a way it is true. The LBI is an institution of the diaspora and is one of the few institutions that deals exclusively with the German-Jewish diaspora/refugee population and its history. However, the story is more interwoven in complex ways between the pre-Holocaust history, the diaspora, and the global community as signified, for instance, by the periodical *Aufbau*, which has recently become recognized for its important role.

What is still missing is an investigation of the connection between classical, traditional German-Jewish history and postwar history. Is postwar Jewish life in Germany another chapter in German-Jewish history? We need to take a serious look at the period between the end of the Second World War and Reunification, the GDR (the German Democratic Republic of [East] Germany) and the BRD (Federal Republic of [West] Germany) as two chapters in parallel, actually 1945 till 1949 as the first postwar chapter, and postunification the last chapter. Who knows what is to follow? Maybe Diana Pinto’s vision of European Jewry will become a reality, although her concept has been somewhat reduced since the end of the Cold War."

The silence about the GDR chapter goes hand-in-hand with the combination of anticommunism and antisemitism, including the question “Who is a Jew?” denouncing Jewish communists as not being “really Jewish,” which on the other hand has to confront the fact that German Jews returning to postwar Germany often went to the GDR in the hope of building a new, antifascist Germany. In lining up all these chapters of modern German-Jewish history, from the time of Moses Mendelssohn to the present day, we can see the ups and downs, triumphs and defeats, rapid growth and total destruction. The reemergence of Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust demonstrates the resilience and capacity of rebound, or as the old saying goes, that the end is also a new beginning.

**NOTES**

5. Ibid., 314.
6. To this list one could also add the Wiener library archive in London, as well as the German-Jewish family archives at Sussex University.
8. What I described here is the story of the Bundesrepublik (West Germany); the history of Jews in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) remains to be addressed and written, and it seems that that history is quite different. But that is another matter.

9. For more information see the project webpage: www.1938projekt.org.

10. A similar and yet very different approach to the 1938 Project is the Russian history website concerning the year 1917, https://project1917.com.