

# Exile Dreams: Antifascist Jews, Antisemitism and the 'Other Germany'

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## Abstract

This article examines the meanings antifascist German Jews invested in antifascism and highlights its role as an emotional place of belonging. The sense of belonging to a larger collective enabled antifascist Jews to hold onto their Germanness and believe in the possibility of an 'other Germany'. While most German Jewish antifascists remained deeply invested in their home country in the 1930s, this idea of the 'other Germany' became increasingly difficult to uphold in the face of war and genocide. For some this belief received the final blow after the end of the Second World War when they returned and witnessed the construction of German states that fell short of the hopes they had nourished while in exile. Yet even though they became disillusioned with the 'other Germany', they remained attached to antifascism.

## Keywords

Germany – antifascism – antisemitism – exile – Jews – communism

In Spring 1933, a few weeks after escaping from his home country, the German-Jewish writer Arnold Zweig began working on a short book in which he 'took stock' of German Jews' achievements as well as reflected on their current situation. In his French exile, he lamented German Jews' shortsightedness who by and large had allied themselves with bourgeois and even nationalist parties, oblivious to the fact they were 'proletarians, proletarians in a thick coat of bourgeois culture'.<sup>1</sup>

1 Arnold Zweig, *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1991), 10. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

Zweig asserted that since Jews lacked the power and means to defend their rights 'only antifascism and democracy could guarantee Jewish existence'.<sup>2</sup> Jewish leftist intellectuals, Zweig further argued, had formed an alliance with the working class parties, 'from which, as it should be, both sides benefitted, and which we upheld, we and the workers – their names and ours stand together like brothers on the casualty lists'.<sup>3</sup> Referring to his book as a '*Kampfbuch*' [fight-book], Zweig perceived the fight against antisemitism as a crucial part of his antifascist fight against Nazism.

Like Zweig, other German Jewish leftist intellectuals joined the antifascist cause. However, in contrast to Zweig, many of them did not consider their Jewishness as a central component of their antifascism. They fled the country as political activists, not as Jews, even if they knew that their Jewish origin put them at additional risk.<sup>4</sup> These German Jewish antifascists were persecuted both for their politics as well as for their ethnic origin. They shared a leftist, socialist worldview, but they differed in their political opinions. Many German Jewish antifascists allied themselves with communism, others supported the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [SPD; Social Democratic Party of Germany], again others were critical of both the social democrats and communists.<sup>5</sup> Among those who joined the Communist Party, attitudes towards the party shifted and their understanding of the antifascist struggle did not always follow the official party line. To avoid reducing antifascism to a simplistic definition, this article examines a range of ideas, sentiments, and hopes.<sup>6</sup> In its essence, antifascism constituted a negation of fascism and everything it stood for. If Nazism meant exclusion and persecution of Jews, antifascism promised inclusion and protection for those Nazism rejected. Thus, building

2 Quoted as in Jost Hermand, *Arnold Zweig: Mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 72–73; original in Archiv der Akademie der Künste (hereinafter AAK), Zweig Archiv, 926.

3 Zweig, *Bilanz der deutschen Judenheit*, 230.

4 Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 44.

5 Mary Nolan, 'Antifascism under Fascism: German Visions and Voices,' *New German Critique*, no. 67 (1996): 51.

6 Anson Rabinbach, 'Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism,' *New German Critique*, no. 67 (1996): 10; Jens Späth, 'Antifaschismus: Begriff, Geschichte und Forschungsfeld in westeuropäischer Perspektive,' *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 4 February 2019, [https://docupedia.de/zg/Spaeth\\_antifaschismus\\_v1\\_de\\_2019](https://docupedia.de/zg/Spaeth_antifaschismus_v1_de_2019), accessed July 2019; Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet, Cristina Climaco, 'Introduction: Beyond Revisionism: Rethinking Antifascism in the Twenty-First Century,' in *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*, ed. Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta, Xavier Tabet and Cristina Climaco (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 3.

on Anson Rabinbach's understanding of antifascism as 'less an ideology than a mentalité, more of a habitus than a doctrine',<sup>7</sup> this article reveals the ways in which antifascism could provide German Jews with a place of belonging.

Literature on Germans in exile tends to divide historical subjects into two distinct groups: on the one hand, the Jewish refugees; on the other, the political emigrants. Antifascist Germans of Jewish origin are often subsumed under the category of political emigrants and their Jewishness is considered as of little relevance, if it is noted at all.<sup>8</sup> Yet their Jewishness clearly affected their lives, and Nazism posed a different threat to them than it did to non-Jewish leftists. While some, like Zweig, turned to antifascism to fight antisemitism, others underestimated antisemitism and misjudged the role it played within Nazi ideology. Individual perspectives were shaped by the discussions and particular discourses in the various places of exile. Antifascist Jews' understanding of antisemitism also changed over time as the extent and drive of Nazi persecution became clearer. Responses also depended on how strongly these antifascist intellectuals self-identified as Jewish, and to an extent the notion 'the more radical the Marxist, the less interested in the specificity of the Jewish question' holds true.<sup>9</sup>

Existing literature tends to dismiss leftists' readings of antisemitism as misguided and blinded by Marxism.<sup>10</sup> Yet antifascists were not unique among German Jews in underestimating Nazi antisemitism. For most, the direction

7 Anson Rabinbach, 'Paris, Capital of Antifascism,' in *The Modernist Imagination: Intellectual History and Critical Theory: Essays in Honor of Martin Jay*, ed. Warren Breckman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 184.

8 See for instance Charmian Brinson, "'The Creation of a Free, Independent, and Democratic Germany': The Free German Movement in Britain, 1943–1945,' in *Vision and Reality: Central Europe after Hitler*, ed. Richard Dove and Ian Wallace (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1–22; Hans-Albert Walter, *Bedrohung und Verfolgung bis 1933: Deutsche Exilliteratur 1933 bis 1950*, 2 vols. (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1972); Marjorie Lamberti, 'German Antifascist Refugees in America and the Public Debate on "What Should Be Done with Germany after Hitler", 1941–1945,' *Central European History* 40, no. 2 (2007): 279–305; Kasper Braskén, 'Making Antifascism Transnational: The Origins of Communist and Socialist Articulations of Resistance in Europe, 1923–1924,' *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 573–596; Dan Stone, 'Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating it,' in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism*, ed. Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

9 Martin Jay, *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Mark Worrell points out that some of the more radical members of the Frankfurt School pushed research on antisemitism see Mark P. Worrell, 'The Other Frankfurt School,' *Fast Capitalism* 2, no. 1 (2006): 161–173.

10 For one example see Joseph W. Bendersky, 'Dissension in the Face of the Holocaust: The 1941 American Debate over Antisemitism,' *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 85–116.

in which Nazi persecution was headed became clear only in hindsight.<sup>11</sup> In fact antifascist German Jews warned early on – and more vehemently than others – about the danger that Nazism posed to Jews. A reading that reduces their responses to their focus on economics, which admittedly meant they underplayed other factors, makes us miss the effort of antifascists to publicize and condemn Nazi antisemitism and prevents us from trying to understand antifascist Jews' particular perspectives and predicaments.

Others have written about German Jews' responses to Nazism, but the historical actors in this study differ from the mostly liberal, Zionist or Orthodox Jews in regard to the Jewish question.<sup>12</sup> They neither considered building a state in Israel a solution, nor did they believe in integrating and assimilating into a bourgeois, capitalist society. They largely perceived antisemitism as a problem that needed no particular attention, but rather would be solved as part of their fight against capitalism and against the oppression and exploitation of the working class.<sup>13</sup>

These leftist Jews were drawn to communism and socialism because of the promise of community, equality, and universalism, and in some cases because they wished to overcome Jewish particularity.<sup>14</sup> As the Nazis gained power and leftist Jews witnessed the violent attack on left-wing activists, Social Democrats, union officials, and communists, they saw the need to fight back, not primarily as Jews, but as part of a broader antifascist front, forming a universal and not a particular response.<sup>15</sup> Writer and literary critique Alfred Kantorowicz remembered that upon joining the communist party he felt relieved, 'not to be facing the threat alone, but to go into action against it in the company of brave, selfless, true companions.'<sup>16</sup>

11 Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 15–16, 65–67.

12 For an analysis of different interpretations and responses see Guy Miron, 'Emancipation and Assimilation in the German-Jewish Discourse of the 1930s,' *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 48, no. 1 (2003): 165–189.

13 For one example see Recha Rothschild, *Memoirs 1880–1947*, Leo Baeck Institute New York, Archives, LBI Memoir Collection, ME 243, 31.

14 Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, "'Dazugehören': Junge Jüdische Kommunisten in der Weimarer Republik,' in *Deutsch-jüdische Jugendliche im 'Zeitalter der Jugend'*, ed. Yotam Hotam (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), 167–181.

15 By December 1933 the Nazis had arrested between 150,000 to 200,000 of their political opponents. See Christian Goeschel and Nikolaus Wachsmann, 'Before Auschwitz: The Formation of the Nazi Concentration Camps, 1933–39,' *Journal of Contemporary History* 45, no. 3 (2010): 522.

16 Alfred Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch* (München: Kindler, 1964), 26; see similar also Bundesarchiv (hereinafter BArch) NY 4072/179, Biographische Sammlung Alphonse Kahn.

In the early days of his exile the mathematician Emil Julius Gumbel, a pacifist and socialist from a Jewish family who had written widely against right-wing political murders in the Weimar Republic, contributed an article to the *Freie Presse*, a socialist Amsterdam exile publication, highlighting his belief in this antifascist front. He wrote, 'For socialists of all shades, this must be a great reminder of the need for unity. With provisional restraint – not blurring – of contrasts, fully conscious of the difficulty of the fight, within and outside the German shackles, they uniformly put the central thought in the foreground: Down with fascism!'<sup>17</sup>

Envisioning themselves part of a broader antifascist collective that included many non-Jewish Germans shaped antifascist Jews' relation to their German homeland. Their antifascism opened the possibility to define Germanness in contrast to the Nazis' appropriation of the term and support the ideal of an 'other', antifascist Germany. Antifascism allowed these leftist Jews to hold onto their Germanness at a time when they were violently excluded from the national community and enabled them, at least in their imagination, to shape the future in their home country. From their vantagepoint in exile, they fought for their German homeland, a perspective that separated them from other Jews.

After the Second World War, many of these antifascist Jews returned to Germany to rebuild their home country. However, their belief in an 'other Germany', already increasingly difficult to uphold during their years in exile, was frequently dashed when they faced the postwar realities of the two emerging German states. For many of these antifascist Jews, whether fellow travelers, party members or dissenters, their hopes for a future, better Germany, did not materialize, neither in the East nor the West. Yet while they became disillusioned with the 'other Germany', they remained attached to antifascism

### Fighting Antisemitism

In August 1933, a group of antifascist writers in their Parisian exile, among them Alfred Kantorowicz as well as several other communists of Jewish origin, published the *Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror*. The book aimed to prove that the Nazis themselves had set the Reichstag on fire, to defend

<sup>17</sup> E.J. Gumbel, 'Expatriieren ist Mahnung zur Einheit' *Freie Presse*, 9 September 1933, Emil J. Gumbel Collection 1912–1967, AR 7267, Leo Baeck Archives, New York. Online available at the International Institute for Social History (Amsterdam), <http://www.iisg.nl/collections/freiepresse/documents/zf1134-09.pdf>, accessed 10 November 2020.

the four communists who had been arrested alongside the arsonist Marinus van der Lubbe, and to show the world the true and violent nature of National Socialism. *The Brown Book* and the campaign to free the wrongfully accused became a rallying cry for antifascists in their French exile and a model for later popular front campaigns.<sup>18</sup> Alfred Kantorowicz contributed a chapter about the persecution of Jews which constituted a substantial part of the book.<sup>19</sup> He aimed to disprove official statements coming from Germany that the new regime did not harm Jews, stressing:

the ridiculous character of the démentis issued by the National Socialist members of the Government in connection with the reports of the persecution of Jews and the grotesque nature of the statement that the Jews would suffer no harm under Adolf Hitler's protecting rule. For fifteen years the Jews have been spoken of as a world plague, as the most brutish of sub-men, and the adherents of the National Socialist movement have been given license to calumniate and persecute the Jews. Hatred of the Jews has been systematically nurtured.<sup>20</sup>

The authors of *The Brown Book* took Nazi hate speech seriously, and they appeared acutely aware of the danger that Nazism posed to the country's Jewish population. They listed incidents in which Nazis physically attacked and murdered Jews, highlighting that these 'are cases in which the victims were murdered primarily *because they were Jews*, not because they were "Marxists"'.<sup>21</sup> Working within a Marxist framework, they perceived Nazi antisemitism as 'an old practice of the ruling class to distract the attention of the people from their actual sufferings', and imagined that 'Jewish capitalists' would be safe from Nazi terror.<sup>22</sup> Yet they did not marginalize Nazi antisemitism. Rather, they emphasized the centrality of 'antisemitism as one of the Foundations of National Socialism.'<sup>23</sup> While they misread the motivations and central drive behind

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18 Anson Rabinbach, 'Staging Antifascism: "The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror"', *New German Critique*, no. 103 (2008): 97–126.

19 Ursula Büttner; Angelika Voß, 'Einleitung: Alfred Kantorowicz im französischen Exil,' in *Alfred Kantorowicz, Nachtbücher: Aufzeichnungen im französischen Exil 1935 bis 1939*, ed. Ursula Büttner and Angelika Voß (Hamburg: Christians, 1995).

20 World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror and the Burning of the Reichstag* (London: Gollancz, 1933), 234.

21 *Ibid.*, 237. My emphasis.

22 *Ibid.*, 262.

23 *Ibid.*

Nazi antisemitism, they also warned of the immense threat that Nazism posed to Jews when many liberals in Germany and elsewhere still diminished it.

In 1936 Lilly Korpis, a German writer, journalist, and communist activist of Jewish origin published a collection titled *Der Gelbe Fleck: Die Ausrottung von 500000 dt. Juden* [The yellow spot: The extermination of 500000 German Jews], one of the first works to document the Nazi persecution of Jews.<sup>24</sup> The book includes photographs from Nazi publications, such as *Der Stürmer*, depicting social exclusion and public humiliation. In the book's preface, the German Jewish author Lion Feuchtwanger went beyond an economist reading, stating that these attacks were not merely due to 'economic, social and political motives . . . [they] happen because of deep enmity against reason, out of sheer delusion, out of pure joy in brutality in the defilement of human dignity, in the humiliation of the other out of hatred.'<sup>25</sup>

Next to chapters such as 'Jew-free Economy' and 'Jews in Concentration Camps', *Der Gelbe Fleck*, contains also a chapter titled 'The other Germany'. The chapter contrasts Nazi antisemitism with the reactions of the German population who are portrayed as rejecting the anti-Jewish policies. Feuchtwanger wrote also the preface for the *Second Brown Book of the Hitler Terror*, published in 1934, and here the German people are likewise depicted as dissenting Nazi violence. Feuchtwanger asserted 'that were these murders [murders of Jews and political opponents listed in the *Second Brown Book*] known to them, the German people, even from their deep present humiliation would rise and sweep away Herr Hitler and his associates with anger and abhorrence.'<sup>26</sup> While portraying virulent Nazi antisemitism, German Jewish antifascists underestimated its popular support.<sup>27</sup> They tended to distinguish between Nazis and ordinary Germans, externalizing both Nazism and antisemitism as not representing the 'true Germany'.<sup>28</sup>

When they fled the country in the early 1930s, most Jewish (like non-Jewish) antifascists embraced the notion of an 'other Germany', 'better Germany' that

24 The book was published in English by Victor Gollancz in 1936 under the title *The Yellow Spot: The Outlawing of Half a Million Human Beings*.

25 Lion Feuchtwanger, 'Vorwort,' in *Der gelbe Fleck: Die Ausrottung von 500000 deutschen Juden*, ed. Lilly Korpis (Paris: Éditions du Carrefour, 1936), 5.

26 World Committee for the Victims of German Fascism, *The Reichstag Fire Trial: The Second Brown Book of the Hitler Terror* (London: Lane, 1934).

27 See also Nolan, 'Antifascism under Fascism,' 51.

28 See for instance also Anselm Ruest, *Deutsche und 'Arier': Eine zeitgemäße Anthologie* (Paris: Edition de Phénix, 1935); Alexander Abusch, 'Der gelbe Stern und das deutsche Volk,' *Freies Deutschland*, no. 3, January 1942.



would rebel and persist against Nazism and form a foundation for rebuilding.<sup>29</sup> Rather than distancing themselves from their home country, they understood their fight against Fascism as a fight for Germany as Germans. The foreword of *The Brown Book* for instance explains 'this book aims at keeping alive the memory of the criminal acts of the Nazi Government. It is a contribution to the fight against Hitler Fascism. This fight is not directed against Germany; it is a fight on behalf of the *real Germany*.'<sup>30</sup> The belief that they fought on behalf of Germany went hand in hand with a fashioning of Germans as resistant to Nazism and antisemitism, otherwise there would have been little to fight for.

### 'The Least Antisemitic of All'

The notion that most Germans rejected antisemitism proved persistent. The German Jewish author Heinrich Fraenkel had spent most of his adult life abroad, having lived in Britain and in the US before the rise of Nazism. After a brief return to Germany in 1932–33, he fled back to England. Well-connected there, he helped form the Free German Movement during the war, a cross-party antifascist committee that aimed to help the British war effort, support antifascist resistance in Germany and spread information about National Socialism.<sup>31</sup> In 1940, while interned on the Isle of Man as a potentially hostile German national, Fraenkel wrote a book titled *Help Us Germans to Beat the Nazis!* in order to familiarize the British public with the goals of the refugee antifascists, and to rally their support in their common battle against National Socialism. Towards the end of the book Fraenkel briefly depicts anti-Jewish persecution stating that '[m]ost students of contemporary German history are apt to have a somewhat distorted view of the Jewish problem, whose worldwide publicity has been altogether disproportionate to that accorded to other

29 See also Nolan, 'Antifascism under Fascism,' 50. Not all exiled German Jewish intellectuals shared this belief in an 'other Germany'. In a letter to Arnold Zweig in which he also voiced his irritation about Zweig's *Bilanz der Judenheit*, the writer Kurt Tucholsky rejected the notion of an 'other Germany': 'But what the hell, the Germans don't want you! . . . My life is too precious to put myself under an apple tree and ask it to produce pears. Me, no longer. I have nothing to do anymore with this country, whose language I speak as little as possible. May it perish - may it conquer Russia - I am done with it.' Tucholsky to Zweig, 15 December 1935, in Kurt Tucholsky, ed. Mary Gerold-Tucholsky und Fritz J. Raddatz, *Ausgewählte Briefe, 1913–1935* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962), 334.

30 *The Brown Book*, 10. My emphasis.

31 On the British Free German Movement see Brinson, "'The Creation of a Free, Independent, and Democratic Germany'".



Nazi crimes.' He further claims that the Germans 'might well be called . . . the least antisemitic in the world.'<sup>32</sup> This belief in the lack of antisemitism among Germans went hand in hand with his conviction that many Germans did not support Nazism.<sup>33</sup>

Fraenkel lived alongside many Jewish refugees in the British camp but he discounted their accounts of experiences in Nazi Germany.<sup>34</sup> He correctly assumed that most Jewish refugees did not wish to return to Germany, thus understood their depictions as not 'not particularly instructive' for his book and focused on conversations with non-Jewish as well as Jewish political activists from different leftist camps. Like Fraenkel also other political emigres were fast to dismiss the 'bourgeois' perspective of unpolitical Jewish refugees who they believed had left Germany for economic rather than idealistic reasons.<sup>35</sup> Having fled Germany early on, antifascist German Jews often remained unaware of the open hostility and social ostracism that Jews who had stayed in Germany experienced, thus misjudging public antisemitism. Yet even decades later, scholars of Nazi Germany continue to discuss the initial support of Nazi antisemitism, and the respective role of coercion, indoctrination, manipulation and enthusiasm in its acceleration.<sup>36</sup> If assessing how antisemitic Germans were, and how and why their support of the regime's anti-Jewish measures developed remains difficult even with hindsight, it was considerably more challenging for contemporaries who examined the situation from outside the country, and who had often left as early as 1933.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Fraenkel was not alone in not merely underestimating Germans' antisemitism but in depicting the Germans as the 'least

32 Heinrich Fraenkel, *Help Us Germans to Beat the Nazis!* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1941), 105.

33 Fraenkel, *Help Us Germans to Beat the Nazis!* 105–106. Others within the Free Germany Movement shared Fraenkel's view that the Nazi leadership and not the German people were to blame. See Brinson, "The Creation of a Free, Independent, and Democratic Germany".

34 Fraenkel, *Help Us Germans to Beat the Nazis!* 105–106.

35 See also Büttner and Voß, 'Einleitung,' 19–20. In a later work Fraenkel acknowledges Jewish suffering though he still distances himself from Jewish victims of racial persecution. See Heinrich Fraenkel, *Farewell to Germany* (London: Bernard Hanison Limited, 1959), 4f.

36 For a few examples of scholars who have researched the subject and came to various assessments see Thomas Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide: Hitler's Community, 1918–1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Sarah Gordon, *Hitler, Germans and the 'Jewish Question'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); William W. Hagen, 'Before the "Final Solution": Toward a Comparative Analysis of Political Anti-Semitism in Inter-War Germany and Poland,' in *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 2 (1996).

antisemitic'. In his 1942 analysis of the Nazi state, *Behemoth*, the political scientist Franz Neumann, a member of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research in exile at Columbia University, concluded that in his opinion the 'German people are the least antisemitic of all'.<sup>37</sup> Rather than merely depicting Germans as not supportive of antisemitism, both Neumann and Fraenkel place their verdict within a comparative frame, highlighting the universality of antisemitism, and singling Germans out as less afflicted. While at the time of their writing the full extent of the Nazi policy was not widely known, the effort to depict Germans as 'least antisemitic', as late as 1942, still surprises. It speaks to the strength of their belief in the 'other Germany'.

Neumann continued to see antisemitism as manipulated from above, even as he learned about the extermination of European Jews.<sup>38</sup> While he argued in later writings that 'Anti-Semitism has been, from the very foundation of the Nazi party, the most constant single ideology of the Nazi party', he reiterates the spearhead theory formulated in *Behemoth*, perceiving the persecution of Jews as merely the starting point of Nazi violence. He writes, 'not only Jews fall under the executioner's ax but countless others of many races, nationalities, beliefs, and religions. Anti-Semitism is thus the spear-head of terror. The extermination of the Jews is only the means to the attainment of the ultimate objective, namely the destruction of free institutions, beliefs, and groups.'<sup>39</sup> This reluctance to address the particularity of Jewish suffering under the Nazis syncs with the emphasis of a collective, antifascist fight against Nazism, avoiding a specifically Jewish perspective.

During the war, antisemitism became a central interest of the Frankfurt school.<sup>40</sup> In the late 1930s Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno began a vast research project on antisemitism, which went beyond their previous

37 Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 121.

38 See Franz Neumann, 'Anti-Semitism: Spearhead of Universal Terror,' in *Secret Reports on Nazi Germany: The Frankfurt School Contribution to the War Effort*, ed. Raffaele Laudani (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). This intelligence report which Neumann wrote as analyst in the Central European Section of the Research and Analysis Branch (R&A) of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) is almost identical to the 114-page appendix that Neumann added to *Behemoth* in 1944, see Neumann, *Behemoth*: 500–551.

39 Ibid.

40 See Jay, *Permanent Exiles*, 91. The article cannot do justice to the Frankfurt School's complex and changing position vis a vis antisemitism. There is, however, significant literature on the topic. See Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*; Ehrhard Bahr, 'The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School: The Failure of Critical Theory,' in *German Studies Review* 1 (1978): 125–138; Martin Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical Theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism,' *New German Critique*, no. 19 (1980): 137–149; Dan Diner, 'Reason and the "Other":

economistic approach, and more strongly addressed psychological aspects.<sup>41</sup> In their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer propose that 'Elements of Anti-Semitism', their chapter on antisemitism, should be understood as elucidating the 'reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism'.<sup>42</sup> In autumn 1944, Horkheimer further stated in an interview that:

wittingly or unwittingly, the Jews have become the martyrs of civilization. To protect them is no longer an issue involving any particular group interests. To protect the Jews has come to be a symbol of everything mankind stands for. Anti-Semitic persecution is the stigma of the present world whose injustice enters all its weight upon the Jew. Thus, the Jews have been made what the Nazis always pretended they were, the focal point of world history. Their survival is inseparable from the survival of culture.<sup>43</sup>

Similar to Zweig in his *Bilanz der Judenheit*, Horkheimer links the fight against antisemitism not merely with the fight against Nazism, but more broadly with the survival of civilization as such as he underlines the universalist nature of the fight.

Elsewhere antifascists likewise increasingly discussed the persecution of Jews. Both the *Bewegung Freies Deutschland* [Free Germany Movement] in Mexico and the social-democratic oriented *Das Andere Deutschland* [The Other Germany] in Argentina begun to highlight the extreme nature of the crimes

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Horkheimer's Reflections on Anti-Semitism and Mass Annihilation,' in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993): 335–363.

41 Anson Rabinbach, 'Why Were the Jews Sacrificed? The Place of Anti-Semitism in Dialectic of Enlightenment,' *New German Critique*, no. 81 (2000): 49–64. Their research on antisemitism should be understood in the context of a broader interest among scholars in the US in antisemitism which was spurred not merely by the developments in Europe, but also by the increase of antisemitism in the United States. See Eva-Maria Ziege, 'The Irrationality of the Rational: The Frankfurt School and Its Theory of Society in the 1940s,' in *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology*, ed. Marcel Stoetzler (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 277, 278. German Jewish exiles in other places likewise confronted local antisemitism. See for instance Andrea Aclé-Kreysing, 'Shattered Dreams of Anti-Fascist Unity: German Speaking Exiles in Mexico, Argentina and Bolivia, 1937–1945,' *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 681, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777316000436>; Katell Brestic, 'L'antisémitisme dans l'exil germanophone en Bolivie (1938–1945),' *Trajectoires*, no. 8 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.4000/trajectoires.1470>.

42 See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1994): xvi–xvii.

43 Max Horkheimer to Isaac Rosengarten, 12 September 1944. Quoted as in Rabinbach, 'Why Were the Jews Sacrificed?', 53.

committed against Jews. In Mexico in particular the issue became a central topic in the antifascist exile community. Mexico's distance from Moscow, the large number of Jews among communist party members, and their accurate information about the murder of Jews in Europe, which reached them as early as spring 1942, led to an intensive discussion of the Jewish question. Jewish communists in Mexico City such as Leo Zuckermann, Rudolf Feistmann, Leo Katz, and Otto Katz as well as Paul Merker, who was not Jewish, published extensively on the persecution of Jews.<sup>44</sup>

### Mothers and Fathers

By 1942, news about the systematic killing of Jews spread among the exile community. In November the *Aufbau* published an article titled, 'Himmler's extermination plan: State Department confirms all News', which concluded that the various reports about the murder of European Jews were 'now, in all their tragic extent, finally officially confirmed.'<sup>45</sup> German antifascists of Jewish origin grappled with the shocking news which did not only affect theoretical discussions. Most had left friends or family behind, and they worried and then grieved for their murdered loved ones.<sup>46</sup> 'How can we think about the children's shoes of Maidanek, without thinking about our own children', wrote the journalist and leading member of the communist party Alexander Abusch during his Mexican exile in 1944.<sup>47</sup> The writer Anna Seghers, who like Abusch found refuge in Mexico, unsuccessfully tried to rescue her mother Hedwig Reiling who was deported to Piaski near Lublin.<sup>48</sup> In one of her most famous stories, 'The Excursion of the Dead Girls', penned in Mexico shortly after Seghers received news of her mother's deportation in 1944, she commemorates her, writing:

44 Philipp Graf, 'Twice Exiled: Leo Zuckermann (1908–85) and the Limits of the Communist Promise,' *Journal of Contemporary History*, ahead of print article (April 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009420914706>; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997): 40–60.

45 'Himmlers Ausrottungsplan,' *Aufbau* 7, no. 48 (November 27, 1942), 5.

46 See for instance letters from Brunhilde Eisler to Gerhart Eisler, February 26, 1947 and March 19, 1947, BAArch, NY 4117/61.

47 Alexander Abusch, 'Hitlers Todesfabriken und die Verantwortung der Deutschen, 1944,' in *ibid*, *Entscheidung unseres Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1977).

48 Friedrich Schütz, 'Die Familie Seghers-Reiling und das jüdische Mainz,' *Jahrbuch der Anna-Seghers Gesellschaft* 2 (1992): 151–173; also Anna Seghers and Alexander Stephan, *Anna Seghers im Exil: Essays, Texte, Dokumente* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1993).

My mother was there standing on the little balcony decorated with geranium boxes. She was waiting for me. How young she looked, mother, much younger than me. How dark her straight hair was compared with mine. Mine would already soon be grey, while not one grey strand could be seen running through hers. She stood there, content and upright, destined for the hard work of family life with the usual ordinary joys and troubles, and surely not for an agonizing, horrible end in a remote village to which she had been banished by Hitler.<sup>49</sup>

Seghers has been chided for disregarding 'the tragedy of German Jewry', and for merging all deaths, whether German victims of bombings or murdered Jews in her story.<sup>50</sup> Yet Seghers distinguishes between the non-Jewish German characters, showing the extent to which the choices they make contribute to the deportation and murder of Seghers's mother, the Jewish teacher, and a Jewish classmate.<sup>51</sup> While she does not regard all deaths the same, Seghers, in the story as well as in her later letters, remembers those who resisted Nazism alongside the Jewish victims, perceiving their fate and fight as linked.<sup>52</sup> Her personal memories of the mother she could not save merge with a depiction of the violent destructive power of the fascist regime that changed her former classmates, and German society at large.

Like Seghers, Alfred Kantorowicz tried to get a visa for his elderly father who had remained in Nazi Germany but failed to get him out of the country in time. At the end of the war, before his return to Germany, Kantorowicz wrote a short essay about his father. He depicts him, lovingly, as bourgeois, conservative, politically naïve, stereotypically German, and as a thoroughly decent man. In the brief text, Alfred writes about the meetings and exchanges between him and his father after his flight from Germany in 1933, describing his various attempts to convince his father to leave as well. He receives a last letter in fall 1941 and then nothing until after the end of the war when he gets the news from an acquaintance who was deported to Theresienstadt together with his father that the latter died there in Spring 1944. Months later Alfred

49 Anna Seghers, 'The Outing of the Dead Schoolgirls,' *The Kenyon Review* 31, no. 5 (1969): 637.

50 Susan E. Cernyak, 'Anna Seghers: Between Judaism and Communism,' in *Exile: The Writer's Experience*, ed. John M. Spalek and Robert F. Bell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982): 280.

51 See also Barbara Einhorn, 'Gender, Nation, Landscape and Identity in Narratives of Exile and Return,' *Women's studies international forum* 23 (2000): 712.

52 See Anna Seghers to Magda Stern, 12 December 1947 and Anna Seghers to Gisl and Egon Erwin Kisch, 22 December 1947, in Anna Seghers, *Hier im Volk der kalten Herzen, Briefwechsel 1947*, ed. Christel Berger (Berlin, 2000).

received a last postcard from his father, written in 1943, forwarded from a friend in Switzerland. It ends with the words, 'I wish you all a happy life and greet you from the bottom of my heart. Farewell!' This chronic of his father's life, Kantorowicz writes, 'has no punchline'; he does not try to ascribe any meaning to his father's senseless death.<sup>53</sup>

Like Seghers and Kantorowicz, the writer Walther Victor commemorated his mother after learning about her deportation while in exile. He thinks of her, he writes, before her deportation 'in her small room furnished with the remains of a proud, comfortable, bourgeois existence . . . I saw her sitting at the little table by the window, the prayer book in front of her, now and then looking out into the trees, now and then wiping a tear. Fate had hit her terribly, her children dead or exiled, she herself mistreated, her small, modest life shattered by racial hatred. But at least: there she was still, in her little room... I saw her there. I saw my picture on the wall.'<sup>54</sup>

None of these three writers addresses their parents' Jewishness in their memorial texts; Victor's reference to the prayer book may be a hint, but he does not elaborate further. While the reader will know that their parents were murdered for being Jewish from the context, Seghers, Kantorowicz and Victor do not depict the death from a Jewish viewpoint, or as part of a larger Jewish fate, but rather portray them as victims of fascist racism. Above all, however, these are personal stories of loss. They write about them as their parent – Seghers describing her mother waiting for her; Kantorowicz depicting his father's worry for his son, and his last wish that he would live well, Victor pointing to his mother missing her children and to his picture on the wall. Scrutinizing their texts for the extent to which they acknowledged 'the tragedy of German Jewry', we can easily overlook how deeply Nazi persecution affected antifascists of Jewish origin. While they maintained a self-understanding as atheists who had broken with Jewish religion and tradition, these antifascist Jews highlighted their connection to family members who became victims of Nazim's genocidal policies. They grieved as daughters, as sons, as friends, as relatives for those who the Nazi had murdered for being Jewish.<sup>55</sup> Awareness of the murder of Europe's Jews did not lead them to embrace Judaism as a religion or change, in

53 Alfred Kantorowicz, 'Rudolf Kantorowicz,' in *ibid*, *Deutsche Schicksale: Intellektuelle unter Hitler und Stalin* (Europa Verlag: Wien, 1964).

54 AAK, Walther Victor Archiv 43, ZK 2167.

55 Helmut Peitsch, 'Antifaschistisches Verständnis der eigenen jüdischen Herkunft in Texten von DDR-Schriftstellerinnen,' in *Kulturerbe deutschsprachiger Juden: Eine Spurensuche in den Ursprungs-, Transit- und Emigrationsländern*, ed. Elke-Vera Kotowski (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015): 141.



most cases at least, their self-understanding as political exiles. However, when they became aware of the extent of the persecution of European Jews, many felt the wish to voice solidarity with Nazism's main victims.<sup>56</sup>

The murder of German Jews and the passivity with which most Germans watched as the Nazis steered the country towards war and genocide, complicated their feelings towards and perceptions of their home country and its population. During the Second World War the question of German guilt became crucial in the debate among antifascists, and many increasingly saw the German people as implicated.<sup>57</sup> At a meeting of the Allies Inside Germany Council, a British organization that supported the German antifascist resistance,<sup>58</sup> held in London in March 1943, Jürgen Kuczynski, a German economist from a Jewish family and a communist party member since 1930, commented on the question of guilt:

Never in the history of mankind has a people borne so heavy an historic guilt, and never has a people counted among its sons and daughters so many criminals. That is the appalling evil which Fascism has brought to the German people, that is the reason why we German antifascists, who have grown up as sons and daughters of this people, feel a special hatred for Fascism. For Fascism has done something to us which it has not done to anyone else: It has robbed us of our people.<sup>59</sup>

56 See Helmut Eschwege, *Fremd unter meinesgleichen Erinnerungen eines Dresdner Juden* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1991): 66; Interviews with Ruth Benario and Hilde Eisler in John Bornemann and Jeffrey M. Peck, *Sojourners: The Return of German Jews and the Question of Identity* (Lincoln, Neb: University of Nebraska Press, 1995): 81–101; Interview with Florence Singwald in Wolfgang Herzberg, *Überleben heißt Erinnern: Lebensgeschichten deutscher Juden* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1990); Nora Goldenbogen, 'Leon Löwenkopf, erster Vorsitzender der Jüdischen Gemeinde zu Dresden nach der Shoah: Versuch einer Annäherung,' in *Zwischen Erinnerung und Neubeginn: Zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte nach 1945*, ed. Susanne Schönborn (München, 2006): 99–100; see also Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt: Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Köln, Böhlau 2000), 159.

57 See Nolan, 'Antifascism under Fascism,' 53; Marjorie Lamberti, 'German Antifascist Refugees in America and the Public Debate on "What Should Be Done with Germany after Hitler," 1941–1945,' *Central European History* 40, no. 2 (2007): 289.

58 The organization, renamed British Council for German Democracy in 1945, was founded in connection with a 1942 exhibition in London titled 'Allies inside Germany' which documented German resistance and aimed to refute the idea that all Germans supported Hitler. See also, Mario Keßler, 'Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik: Remigrierte Historiker in der frühen DDR,' *Zeithistorische Studien* 18 (2001): 67–68.

59 Dr. J. Kuczynski, 'On the present situation in Germany,' held at the Meeting of the Allies Inside Germany Council, 22 March 1943, The Wiener Holocaust Library, 1139/23.



His sense of loss becomes prevalent in his speech. Still, at this point, Kuczynski, like many others set hopes in the 'small opposition which is growing'; still he hoped the German people would overthrow the regime, still he claimed fascism had 'robbed' them of the German people rather than blaming Germans for following Nazism.<sup>60</sup>

Eventually, however, for many the belief in an 'other, true Germany' became increasingly difficult to uphold. The letters from Alfred Kantorowicz to his friend, mentor and fellow writer Heinrich Mann show the former's growing disillusion. In July 1941, he wrote, 'it will be up to the German people, to choose between rise in socialism or decline in barbarism. To make this comprehensible to the Germans will be our great task.'<sup>61</sup> Two years later, in December 1943 he sounded less hopeful, 'The Nazi venom', he explained to Mann, 'has eaten deep into the body and mind of this people and years of unprecedented effort will be necessary to remove it.'<sup>62</sup> He no longer perceived Germans as unaffected from Nazi ideology. A few months later he conceded, 'we know that we won't return to another Germany with flying colours. The other Germany, that we talked about, that we hoped for, is buried under the rubble.'<sup>63</sup> Many antifascists, like Kantorowicz, felt increasingly disillusioned and came to terms with the fact that the Germany they defended no longer existed. They thought they voiced the repressed desires of a population who by and large had never shared their views. In spite of their hopes Germans did not mount any significant resistance to the regime. They slowly realized that the German people would stubbornly defend the murderous regime to its last breath.

### Postwar Disillusions

In spite of the disappointment that their fellow Germans failed to resist, a significant number of communists and antifascists of Jewish origin chose to return to their home country after the war. Some made the decision with trepidation as Kantorowicz who wrote of his 'black fears'.<sup>64</sup> Spreading anticommunism

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60 Ibid.

61 Alfred Kantorowicz to Heinrich Mann, 28 July 1941, Institut für Zeitgeschichte (hereinafter IFZ). Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

62 Alfred Kantorowicz to Heinrich Mann, 24 December 1943, IFZ, Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

63 Alfred Kantorowicz to Heinrich Mann, 24 March 1945, IFZ, Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

64 Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch*, 102.

made life increasingly difficult for Kantorowicz as well as for others who had emigrated to the United States, but not all returned out of necessity.<sup>65</sup>

They remained hopeful that finally now their time had come, and they could build this better Germany out of the rubble.<sup>66</sup> 'We the survivors', remembered actress Steffi Spira who returned from Mexico in 1947, 'would build a new world, without war, filled with the ideas of communism.'<sup>67</sup> These antifascist Jews believed in their own role, as politicians, writers and artists in building a new society and re-educating the German population.<sup>68</sup> In their minds, discussing Nazi antisemitism and its roots played a crucial part in this effort. Numerous communist Jewish authors addressed the genocide of European Jews in the immediate aftermath of the war.<sup>69</sup> Articles in Kantorowicz' journal *Ost und West* [East and West], Siegbert Kahn's *Antisemitismus und Rassenhetze* [Anti-Semitism and racial agitation], Stefan Heymann's *Marxismus und Rassismus* as well as Abusch's earlier *Der Irrweg einer Nation* [A Nation's Wrong Path] examined Nazi racial hatred, perceiving it as central to the analysis of National Socialism. They understood the effort to come to terms with the past as crucial to building a better Germany in the present.<sup>70</sup> Rather than highlighting the uniqueness of antisemitism, they continued to perceive the persecution from a universalist perspective, highlighting the danger of oppression of any group on racist grounds.

While most had become more suspicious of the German population, they believed in the communist and antifascist leadership and still felt a sense of

65 On the witch hunt atmosphere see Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), see also Alfred Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch* (München: Kindler, 1959–1961); Ingeborg Rapoport, *Meine ersten drei Leben: Erinnerungen* (Berlin: NORA, 2002).

66 Frank Stern, 'The Return to the Disowned Home: German Jews and the Other Germany,' *New German Critique*, no. 67 (1996): 60–61.

67 Steffie Spira, *Trab der Schaukelpferde: Autobiographie* (Freiburg (Breisgau): Kore, 1991), 228.

68 See also Peitsch, 'Antifaschistisches Verständnis der eigenen jüdischen Herkunft,' 125–127. On the GDR's self-understanding as antifascist see Mary Fulbrook, Andrew Port, ed., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Jürgen Danyel, 'DDR-Antifaschismus: Rückblick auf zehn Jahre Diskussion, offene Fragen und Forschungsperspektiven,' in *Vielstimmiges Schweigen: Neue Studien zum DDR-Antifaschismus*, ed. Annette Leo und Peter Reif-Spirek (Berlin: Metropol, 2001): 7–19; Dan Diner and Christian Gundermann, 'On the Ideology of Antifascism,' *New German Critique*, no. 67 (1996): 123–132; Clara M. Oberle, 'Reconfiguring Postwar Antifascism: Reflections on the History of Ideology,' *New German Critique*, no. 117 (2012): 135–153; Annette Leo et al., *Mythos Antifaschismus: Ein Traditionskabinett wird kommentiert* (Berlin: Links, 1992); Antonia Grunenberg, *Antifaschismus: Ein deutscher Mythos* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993).

69 Peitsch, 'Antifaschistisches Verständnis der eigenen jüdischen Herkunft,' 125–127.

70 Ibid., 126–127.

belonging within the larger antifascist collective. Alexander Abusch, looking back to the days when he had first arrived in Berlin after the war, remembered that ‘when Paul Merker [a fellow communist remigrant] and I took the subway to the House of the Central Committee in order to report back to Comrade Wilhelm Pieck . . . I felt finally, finally, at last, home again.’<sup>71</sup> The artist Lea Grundig who returned from Tel Aviv referred to the party as her ‘true home’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, Walther Victor, who returned to East Germany in 1947 and joined the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* [SED; Socialist Unity Party of Germany] in the same year, explained that the working-class movement had become his home.<sup>73</sup>

Yet for some of these returnees the hopes they set in building this antifascist home in the Eastern part of Germany did not pan out. After his return to East Berlin Alfred Kantorowicz founded the cultural-political journal *Ost und West*, which, as the title suggests, wanted to form a bridge between intellectuals of both camps as well as allow for voices that were critical of policies on both sides. The journal also aimed to introduce German audiences to German exile literature and, by publishing emigrants’ experiences, to the antifascist struggle.<sup>74</sup> In late 1949, the magazine closed, officially because of financial difficulties, though it was really the journal’s emphasis on building bridges between East and West that made it unappealing in the eyes of the SED leadership.<sup>75</sup> After the journal’s closure, Kantorowicz assumed a position as professor of literature at the Humboldt University in Berlin, which he held until he left East Germany in 1957. In an article published in the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* after his flight, he described the ‘painful process of my progressive disillusionment’.<sup>76</sup> After his escape, Kantorowicz fashioned himself as a victim of

71 Alexander Abusch, *Erinnerungen an die ersten Jahre der Kulturrevolution 1946–1950*, without date, BaRCH, SgY 30/1084/1: 43.

72 Grundig, *Gesichte und Geschichte* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1960): 326.

73 Walther Victor, *Kehre wieder über die Berge: Eine Autobiographie* (Berlin, Weimar 1982), 187.

74 Sean A Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics After 1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 39–40.

75 See Fritz J. Raddatz, ‘Auf den Flügeln des Friedens: Ein Reprint der von Alfred Kantorowicz herausgegebenen Zeitschrift “Ost und West,”’ *Die Zeit*, no. 52, 1979; Petra Boden, ‘Universitätsgermanistik in der SBZ/DDR: Personal- Und Berufungspolitik 1945–1958,’ *Zeitschrift Für Germanistik* 5, no. 2 (1995): 380. Earlier that year Kantorowicz, confronted with rumours that the party leadership doubted his integrity, had written to Wilhem Pieck, the first President of the newly founded German Democratic Republic. In this letter he asked for clarification why the party leadership doubted his commitment and stressed his loyalty to the socialist cause. Alfred Katorowicz to Wilhelm Pieck, 23 March 1949, IFZ, F 230/1.

76 Alfred Kantorowicz, ‘Warum ich ging...,’ *Die Zeit*, no. 38, 1957.

Stalinism and a long-time opponent of repressive aspects of the regime.<sup>77</sup> Yet what exactly led him to remain supportive of the regime as long as he did as well as his motivations for the final break elude us, and his relationship with party and state powers was more muddled than his later descriptions suggest.<sup>78</sup>

Other antifascist Jews had already left earlier, many of them in the wake of the 1952 purges when public anti-Jewish rhetoric became prevalent in the GDR. The campaign formed part of a larger wave of party purges that swept the Eastern bloc in the early 1950s and targeted those returning from Western exile, many of them Jews, as 'internationalist', 'Trotskyists', and 'cosmopolitans'.<sup>79</sup> The ties they had built to communities and people in their various places of exile, which had played a crucial role in the global struggle against fascism, rendered them now suspicious. In response to party examinations, arrests and antisemitic attacks in the press (officially depicted as anti-Zionism), more than four hundred Jews fled the GDR in early 1952, among them several members of the communist party.

In his diary Kantorowicz depicted and condemned the antisemitic campaign: 'This - this is monstrous. This is Streicher's language, Himmler's attitude, the atmosphere of the Gestapo interrogations . . . the "morality" of the murderers of Dachau and Buchenwald, of those who gassed people in Auschwitz and Maidanek.'<sup>80</sup> But other Jewish antifascist intellectuals perceived it in a different light. Replying to a letter from fellow writer Lion Feuchtwanger who looked with some concern from his Californian exile to the developments in East Germany, Arnold Zweig reassured his friend 'there can be no racial hatred in a place where the fight between the classes . . . has been resolved.'<sup>81</sup> Now, as he had two decades earlier, Zweig linked class struggle and antifascism to the fight against antisemitism: 'As far as we are concerned; we who have always experienced the fight against antisemitism as part of our antifascist resistance, we still feel well in our skin and at home here in the GDR.'<sup>82</sup>

77 Josie McLellan, 'The Politics of Communist Biography: Alfred Kantorowicz and the Spanish Civil War,' *German History* 22, no. 4 (2004): 536–562.

78 McLellan, 'The Politics of Communist Biography'; Wolfgang Gruner *Ein Schicksal, das ich mit sehr vielen anderen geteilt habe: Alfred Kantorowicz - sein Leben und seine Zeit von 1899 bis 1935* (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2007): 340–342; Michael Rohrwasser, *Stalinismus und die Renegaten: Die Literatur der Exkommunisten* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1993), 118.

79 Cathy S. Gelbin, 'Rootless Cosmopolitans: German-Jewish Writers Confront the Stalinist and National Socialist atrocities,' *European Review of History = Revue européenne d'histoire* 23 (2016): 865.

80 Kantorowicz, *Deutsches Tagebuch*, 30 November 1952, 353.

81 Arnold Zweig to Lion Feuchtwanger, 24 January 1953, Harold von Hofe, *Lion Feuchtwanger - Arnold Zweig: Briefwechsel 1933–1958*, Vol. 11 1949–1958 (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1984), 199.

82 Ibid.

For Kantorowicz, in contrast, the dream of building an antifascist state in the GDR was not fulfilled. Rather he concluded in a letter to Marta Feuchtwanger after his flight 'anyone who has fought against Hitler is discriminated against from the outset – with a few exceptions.'<sup>83</sup> In the same letter he voiced his regret about returning to Germany, 'I have often thought of the letter that [Lion] Feuchtwanger sent to me in New York . . . which begins with the words, "I hear with mixed feelings about your and Friedel's impending departure." I must not complain; I did not want it otherwise.'<sup>84</sup> While in 1945 he had concluded that the 'other Germany is buried under the rubble',<sup>85</sup> he now asserted that 'the other Germany in which we once believed in our exile was an illusion.'<sup>86</sup> What is buried can be recovered, but now, Kantorowicz concluded the 'other Germany' had ever only existed in their antifascist imagination.

Kantorowicz was disillusioned; his hopes for the socialist Germany shattered. Yet West Germany, with its restorative tendencies and persistent anti-semitism, appalled him, and he understood why others like Zweig might not wish to move to the Western part of the divided country: 'Not to say anything against the old people like Zweig or Renn', he wrote to Marta Feuchtwanger, 'who can no longer be expected after all to take the risk of escape and start over in a furnished room, possibly at the discretion of Sudeten German Nazis and ultimate *Endlöser*, as I had to.'<sup>87</sup> Others who fled the GDR, such as Leo Zuckermann, likewise struggled with making a life in the Western part of the country; when their dream of building an antifascist, socialist country shattered there was little to hold them in the 'country of perpetrators'.<sup>88</sup> After leaving the GDR in 1953 and temporarily living in the West, Leo Zuckermann emigrated to Mexico – for the second time.<sup>89</sup> Conservative, anti-communist

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83 Lion Feuchtwanger had passed away by then. In contrast to Kantorowicz the Feuchtwangers had remained in their American exile.

84 Alfred Kantorowicz to Marta Feuchtwanger, 24 December 1958, IFZ, Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

85 Alfred Kantorowicz to Heinrich Mann, 24 March 1945, IFZ, Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

86 Alfred Kantorowicz to Marta Feuchtwanger, 24 December 1958, IFZ, Nachlass Alfred Kantorowicz, F 230/1.

87 Ibid. 'Sudeten Germans' refers to ethnic German who had been expelled from Czechoslovakia after the Second World War; '*Endlöser*' refers to people implicated in the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question' that is the Nazi genocide of Jews.

88 Graf, 'Twice exiled,' 21.

89 Leo Löwenkopf, a Social Democrat who joined the SED in 1946, and the head of the Dresden Jewish community, moved to Zürich in 1957. Julius Meyer, a Jewish communist and since 1946 the leader of the Jewish community in East Berlin, emigrated to Brazil after West Berlin refused to acknowledge him as a political refugee.

West Germany, reluctant to rid itself of former Nazis or to re-educate Germans, did not provide an attractive refuge for disenchanted antifascists from the East.

Some of those who had returned to the West rather than the East likewise decided to leave Germany a second time. In his book, *Farewell to Germany* (1959), Heinrich Fraenkel, who just a few years earlier had voiced his belief in his home country's potential, described his disillusionment after his return: 'The title of this book is to be taken literally, for I do want Germany to fare well, I want it most sincerely. Hardly a surprising sentiment since Germany happens to be my homeland. I am still devoted to it, I am still anxious to get there for a visit once or twice a year, but I no longer wish to live there.'<sup>90</sup> Fraenkel returned to London in 1949.

Like Kantorowicz, he came to the conclusion that his vision of the other Germany did not match reality. He, so he wrote, made 'the discovery that the "other Germany," in an exile's mind and his day-dreams of a future Germany were not quite alike to the reality of the post-war world.'<sup>91</sup> From their vantage point in exile, Fraenkel concludes, they 'tended to over-simplify things . . . The human and material strands of the real pattern were interwoven in a manner far too complex to fit into the simple black and white pattern of an exile's dream-world.'<sup>92</sup> Fraenkel explained that partially he struggled because he did not clearly choose a side in the conflict that began to dominate the world after the war: 'For a man these days to be neither an out-and-out fellow-traveller nor an out-and-out Red-baiter, is not quite easy . . . It is probably easiest in England, and that too may have been one of the reasons for my decision to make my home in England.'<sup>93</sup>

When the Cold War drew a new divide, people like Fraenkel who had clearly known on which side they stood when their world was split into fascists and antifascists, fell into an in-between space. Their hope of combining socialism and democracy did not find support in either West or East German postwar politics.<sup>94</sup> West Germany focused on memories of the conservative resistance and had no interest in embracing an inclusive antifascist tradition.<sup>95</sup> While the GDR appropriated antifascism as its state doctrine, official antifascism differed from the dream of the Popular Front, and was neither as vague nor as inclusive.

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<sup>90</sup> Fraenkel, *Farewell to Germany*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Nolan, 'Antifascism under Fascism?' 55.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Still, some Jews in the GDR, like Zweig, continued to hold onto their own perceptions and interpretations of antifascism. Antifascism remained more than a propaganda tool of the regime.<sup>96</sup>

Even most of those whose hopes for founding or finding the 'other Germany' did not materialize, held on to their antifascism.<sup>97</sup> In his writings after escaping the GDR, Kantorowicz drew a clear line between antifascism and Stalinism. Reflecting back after his flight he wrote, 'I will always keep the comrades at whose side I fought in the 1930s (and later in Spain and in the camps) against the Nazi terror in good memory.'<sup>98</sup> In his memories antifascism remained a place of belonging.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

Leftist, exiled Jews' response to Nazi persecution was shaped by their universalist perspective. While they recognized the danger that Nazism posed for Jews early on, they understood the fight against Nazi antisemitism as part of a broader, antifascist fight. Most remained within a Marxist framework in their understanding, yet some ventured beyond economic causes when trying to examine and analyze Nazi antisemitism, and views shifted in particular after information about the murder of European Jews reached them in their various places of exile. News of the Nazi genocide shaped theoretical discussions and also affected them personally. While the subjects of this article had left Germany, friends and relatives had remained behind. They publicly discussed the murder of European Jews as well as their personal loss. But there was not yet a word for the genocide that was taking place, and the tendency to perceive Jews' fate as merged with other victims of Nazism was commonplace. For antifascist Jews the fight against fascism was fought on behalf of all those

96 For specific examples of how Jews in the GDR and across the Eastern bloc utilized antifascism to express their worldview, to combine universalism with Jewish particularity and commemorate the Holocaust, see David Shneer, 'Eberhard Rebling, Lin Jaldati, and Yiddish Music in East Germany, 1949–1962,' *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 2015; Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, Stephan Stach, ed., *Growing out of Antifascism's Shadow: Holocaust Memory in Socialist Eastern Europe* (forthcoming).

97 Rabinbach, 'Introduction,' 8; Rabinbach, 'Paris, Capital, Antifascism,' 204; Bohus, Hallama, Stach, *Growing out of Antifascism's Shadow*.

98 Alfred Kantorowicz, 'Selbstporträt eines Abtrünnigen: Der geflüchtete Alfred Kantorowicz gibt Rechenschaft,' *Die Zeit*, no. 36, 1957.

99 Rabinbach, 'Introduction,' 8; also Rabinbach, 'Paris, Capital, Antifascism,' 204.



oppressed, including (but often without emphasizing particular concern for) Jews.

They fought also on behalf of Germany, remaining part of a larger transnational but also specifically German antifascist collective.<sup>100</sup> In contrast to most other Jews, they held onto the hope that a better Germany would be possible. An acknowledgement of popular antisemitism and support for Nazism would have, and eventually made believing in such dreams and plans for a future in their home country more difficult. Still, being part of this larger antifascist community motivated Jewish antifascists to return to Germany after 1945. While some, like Zuckermann and Kantorowicz, left the German Democratic Republic disillusioned, others like Zweig held onto their hopes, in spite of misgivings. Antifascism, in its vagueness and inclusivity, provided a non-territorial space of belonging. A translation of its ideals into shaping a society proved more difficult.

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<sup>100</sup> Regarding the entanglement of national and transnational dimensions within antifascism see Enzo Traverso, 'Intellectuals and Anti-Fascism: For a Critical Historization,' *New Politics* 19, no. 4 (2004); Späth, 'Antifascism,' 16.