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Entangled Identities and the History of Spaces in Twenty-First-Century Jewish Literature from Germany and Poland

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> Still later I learned to be proud of what I am: a crazy German-Russian-Jewish mixture. Or is it rather Russian-German-Jewish? Do I have to decide now? Or do I just tell myself that?[1]
> My past sits in me deeply, but when I try to reach it, I encounter a void, as if I were born yesterday.[2]

Self-descriptions, both literary and personal, do not fit into a binary system of categorization. The above quotes by the writers Lena Gorelik and Piotr Paziński are united by the fact that Jewishness is that part of the identity which remains subject to question and needs to be constantly reassessed. Meanwhile, a pluralistic understanding of identity, meaning a personal definition formed of a combination of nationality, religion or other beliefs, can be uneven, contradictory, even baffling. Although the existence of diversity within single identities has become an unquestioned fact, this acceptance does not seem to have been extended to acknowledging its existence within Jewish identities. Public and scientific discourses on the literature of this group reveal certain automatisms: we assume that their texts must refer to the Holocaust and the fate of their family members. Many excellent publications provide a systematic analysis of motifs and generational issues[3] but usually maintain their focus on the Holocaust as *leitmotif.*

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[1] Lena Gorelik, *"Sie können aber gut Deutsch!". Warum ich nicht mehr dankbar sein will, dass ich hier leben darf, und Toleranz nicht weiterhilft* (München: Pantheon, 2012), 138. All translations are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

[2] Piotr Paziński, *The Boarding House*, trans. Tusia Dabrowska (McLean, IL, Dublin: Dalkey, 2018), 89.

This article examines how autobiographical texts approach the apparently volatile nature of Jewish identity and how they manage to emancipate it from the trauma narrative. With reference to Gaston Bachelard's[4] idea of *topophilia* (positive places) and theories on personal reappropriation of so-called non-places,[5] particular attention is paid to the spatial organization described in the texts: according to the conception of Marc Augé, a non-place is deprived of history and does not possess any function in identity building. In the case of lost or overwritten Jewish places, exploring the nature of these sites means conducting a critical assessment of that past and repositioning it within the frame of family and individual identity narratives. The act of reappropriation turns a non-place into a space that is "familiar, localized, historic, organic, and meaningful to its occupants, a space where identities, relationships and a story can be made out."[6] I consider the texts to be not only a movement of the narrator between physical spaces, but, above all, to be a movement across psychological boundaries which are also subject to shifts – especially regarding the normative notion of identity. In doing this, the examples challenge the binary character of the commemorative debates. Agata Tuszyńska's *Rodzinna historia lęku* [*A Family History of Fear*, 2017] from 2005; Lena Gorelik's *Hochzeit in Jerusalem* [Wedding in Jerusalem] from 2008; Piotr Paziński's *Pensjonat* [*The Boarding House*, 2018] from 2009; and Channah Trzebiner's *Die Enkelin oder Wie ich zu Pessach die vier Fragen nicht wusste* [The granddaughter or how I didn't know the four questions during Passover] from 2013; all deal with opposing yet crucial conflicts, that is post-memory vs. future perspectives, Polish and Jewish "victim rivalry," and post-Soviet Jewry vs. German Jewry.

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[3] Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska, *Odcienie tożsamości. Literatura żydowska jako zjawisko wielojęzyczne* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2004); *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica T. Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015); *Reconstructing Jewish Identity in Pre- and Post-Holocaust Literature and Culture*, ed. Lucyna Aleksandrowicz-Pedich and Małgorzata Pakier (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2012); *Żydowski Polak, polski Żyd. Problem tożsamości w literaturze polsko-żydowskiej*, ed. Alina Molisak and Zuzanna Kołodziejska (Warszawa: Elipsa, 2011); *Osteuropäisch-jüdische Literaturen im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert. Identität und Poetik / Eastern European Jewish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. Klavia Smola (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013); Joela M. Jacobs, "Die Frage nach dem Bindestrich. Deutsch-jüdische Identitäten und Literatur," in *Hybride jüdische Identitäten. Gemischte Familien und patrilineare Juden*, ed. Lea Wohl von Haselberg (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), 169–182.

[4] Gaston Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer Verlag, 1975), 37–38.

[5] Matthias Däumer, Annette Gerok-Reiter and Friedemann Kreuder, "Einleitung. Das Konzept des Unorts," in *Unorte. Spielarten einer verlorenen Verortung; kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Matthias Däumer, Annette Gerok-Reiter and Friedemann Kreuder (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 12.

[6] Peter Merriman, "Marc Augé on Space, Place and Non-Places," *Irish Journal of French Studies* 9 (2009): 16.

The analysis provides a new perspective on Jewish writing which is intended to diversify our notion of Jewishness in Central Europe. It also includes a closer look at contemporary misconceptions of Jewish life as imagined or perpetuated by the non-Jewish majority in Poland and Germany respectively. For this reason, a short introduction into the specific national discourses is also provided, to help contextualize the literary examples.

Rethinking Jewishness? The Challenges Faced by Jewish Communities in Germany since 1989

In 1991, a conference of German interior ministers decided to facilitate the granting of asylum to people from the former Soviet Union who could prove their Jewish roots. By 1999, 120,000 people had taken advantage of the simplified emigration procedure and they came to Germany over the next 15 years as *Kontingentflüchtlinge* (quota refugees).[7]

Although the local Jewish community saw an increase in its numbers, its members remained skeptical: Doron Kiesel, a member of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, argues that, on the one hand, the secular orientation of immigrants cannot be linked to the points by which German Jews identify, which are the Holocaust and religion.[8] The reference with which the immigrants identified was Russian culture, not Jewish culture, he argues. The emotional relationship with the Soviet Union was, in many cases, tantamount to identification with the fate of their parents' generation under communism.

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[7] Barbara Dietz, "German and Jewish Migration from the Former Soviet Union to Germany: Background, Trends and Implications," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 4 (2000): 635. From 1990 until 2005, the HumHAG, *Gesetz* über *Maßnahmen für im Rahmen humanitärer Hilfsaktionen aufgenommene Flüchtlinge* [Law on measures for refugees admitted within the framework of humanitarian aid operations] allowed Jews and people with Jewish ancestry from the Soviet Union at its successor states to immigrate to Germany.

[8] Doron Kiesel, "Neuanfänge. Zur Integration jüdischer Zuwanderer aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion in Deutschland," in *Juden in Deutschland – Deutschland in den Juden. Neue Perspektiven*, ed. Micha Brumlik and Michal Bodemann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 159–166.

From today's perspective, the generation of immigrants from the former Soviet Union is in the majority in the Jewish communities of Germany. However, it should be added that the age of the immigrants, and therefore the age of the new members, was already advanced when they arrived, meaning that the effect of the rapid growth has diminished over time. Today, the Jewish community, like every other religious group in Germany, is struggling with a lack of interest and involvement from the young. Conservatives argue that the cause is to be found in increasing secularization. But Toby Axelrod, in his 2013 study,[9] concedes that German communities are too resistant to accepting new members who deviate from established norms in terms of either historical experience or ancestry: the issue of recognizing patrilineal Jews is crucial in a discourse where the question of "who belongs to us?" is raised. It is precisely this narrow definition of any assignation of identity, which seems far detached from the realities of the lived experience that becomes the central theme of Lena Gorelik's oeuvre.

Lena Gorelik: Jewishness "in the Making"

Authors of Jewish origin who hail from the former Soviet Union belong to a group of authors whose works are both popular and prolific. This is evidenced by the numerous publications of Vladimir Kaminer, Olga Grjasneva and Lena Gorelik, among others. In recent years they have co-created "post-migration literature" as a response to the label of *Migrationsliteratur* (migration literature), which is used in both academic discourse and feuilletons and which consigns them to a position as outsiders. Recent texts indicate that they are weary of being confined to the subject of migration, as if their value were only to serve as a good example of integration. Lena Gorelik has contributed an essay to the discourse entitled *But You Speak German Well! Why I No Longer Want to be Grateful for Being Allowed to Live Here and Why Tolerance does not Help*. In this text, the author challenges stereotypes and addresses the role assigned to Jews in the "theater of memory" (*Gedächtnistheater*) that is created by German self-presentation during the performance of the ceremonies of Holocaust and Second World War commemoration.[10]

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[9] Toby Axelrod, *Jewish Life in Germany: Achievements, Challenges and Priorities since the Collapse of Communism*, 2013, accessed May 3, 2023, http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Jewish%20life%20in%20 Germany.pdf.

[10] Max Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!* (München: Hanser Literaturverlage, 2018), 64–65.

Gorelik describes the experience of a woman who attended her author's evening. The woman states that she "actually visits the Days of Jewish Culture every year, specifically to feel bewildered. And this year she wasn't, unfortunately, because of my book."[11] The use of a sarcastic tone while depicting Jewish immigrants is a way of confronting readers with the absurdity of thinking of her solely as "an author who has actually integrated so well that she writes books in German" – as one reviewer wrote.[12]

In 2004, Gorelik's book *Meine weißen Nächte* [My white nights], in which her alter ego, Anja Buchmann, tells the story of emigrating to Germany and growing up in a new environment, achieved success. In the novel discussed here, *Hochzeit in Jerusalem* [Wedding in Jerusalem], Gorelik describes the further life of Anja, who, plagued by the trials of love, registers on a Jewish online dating site. Here she meets Julian, who has recently learned of his father's Jewish background. He hopes to find a form of cultural and spiritual exchange as he is planning to go to Israel on a trip which he believes will enable him to understand his family history. Anja, both impressed and surprised by Julian's eagerness to become Jewish, decides to accompany him.

The main action of the novel therefore takes place in Israel. It transpires that we are not, in fact, dealing with a love story, but rather, Julian's journey leads Anja to confront and reconsider her own story. But it is only in the epilogue that we learn this and we then find ourselves compelled to recall the conversation of the prologue: "Do you really not think about who you are?" "No. Only when I'm asked such questions. I'm usually just myself."[13] Following Anja's denial of any engagement with the issue of identity at the beginning of the book, the epilogue, in which she listens to an interview she has recorded with her Jewish grandmother in order to preserve the older woman's life story, is even more surprising. The great ellipsis in the narrative indicates that, although she does not reveal the stories to the reader, Jewish family memory nevertheless plays an important role in Anja's life. Obviously, a physical distance from Germany and the Jewish community there is necessary for Anja to be able to ask herself questions about identity. However, we learn about the importance of Jewishness for Anja only indirectly; that is, through an analogy with Julian's fate. Upon arriving in Israel, the young man experiences situations and doubts similar to those that Anja experiences upon arriving in Germany. However, it is the contrast between the patrilineal Jew who is just discovering Jewishness and the Jewish woman who sees herself as German and Russian that points to hybrid identity constellations. According to the terms first coined by Bethamie Horowitz, we are dealing here with examples of both the "sudden Jew" (Julian) and the "Jew by choice" (Anja).[14]

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[11] Gorelik, *"Sie können aber gut Deutsch!,"* 104.

[12] Ibid., 11.

[13] Lena Gorelik, *Hochzeit in Jerusalem* (München: Diana, 2008), 9.

In Gorelik's case, sites representative of Jewish faith, such as synagogues or the Wailing Wall, are shown to be unnecessary to her Jewish identity. In the sixth chapter of the book, while the pair are still in Germany, Anja accompanies Julian on a visit to a synagogue. The rabbi does not recognize Julian as a Jew, which perpetuates Anja's negative view of institutionalized Judaism. At the same time, national boundaries present additional hindrances to Julian finding a form of Jewish self-confidence: While they are waiting for their turn to talk to the rabbi, an old woman, stunned by the fact that Anja and Julian are speaking German to each other, complains with a strong Russian accent: "Yeah, yeah, no German Jews in Germany. Not a single one. No German Jews. All foreigners." "Russian Jews", she says and proudly points to the other people around her, "Russian Jews in Germany. Without Russian Jews, no Jews in Germany."[15] Reflecting on her visit, Anja concludes: "God and I, we work it out between us, even without a synagogue."

The chapter that follows the depiction of Julian's first contact with institutionalized Judaism in Germany takes place during Anja's childhood. It shows her own first contact with the religion: following their first months in Germany, gaining the recognition of the Jewish community has become an important step for the family, but their attendance at a ceremony organized by the community is met with indifference at best and rejection at worst:

> The German Jews, as we called them, did not notice us. They did not welcome us and did not ask where we were from. They chatted about what opera tickets who had bought and where they were going on vacation. I went to the playground to see the children, but they ignored me, just as their parents ignored my family. Only once did a girl call out in passing, "Eww, what is she wearing?" I was wearing my best Russian clothes.[16]

After the years spent silencing their religious background in the Soviet Union, Germany might have proven to be a safe space for Gorelik's family to explore being Jewish and to confidently pursue a life as Jews. However, they and others who shared their specifically post-Soviet-Jewish backgrounds were marginalized and obscured twice over: first by the established Jews, who rejected them due their allegedly inferior living standards and non-Holocaust-focused approach to religion, and second by the non-Jewish Germans, who accepted the "quota refugees" only if they integrated quickly into German society by acquiring native level language skills (unobtrusive behavior through fast assimilation). Consequently, Jewish families from the former Soviet Union cannot be misused in the German *Gedächtnistheater* that regards contemporary Jewish life in Germany as the best proof of Germany's rehabilitation. In Israel, however, Anja and her family are subject to harsh criticism for having emigrated to Germany. For Anja, the home provided by her parents is the secure space in which she can simply be herself, free of the expectations that accompany the roles ascriZbed to her. Forced to reinvent her Jewishness as a young teenager, she relies on the experiences and memories of her grandmother, who is the only silent character on the diegetic level.[17] After the wedding of a distant cousin, the book ends with Anja on a flight to Toronto, during which she listens to the recording of her grandmother's voice. This minor character gains increased significance in the epilogue. She functions as a link between the previous generations of religious Jewish ancestors and the family now assimilated in Germany. Gorelik's attempt to preserve her life story for the future is a part of the mnemonic reconstruction work of the family home or, as Bachelard puts it: "When we evoke memories of the house, we always add dream values; we are never real historians, we are always partially poets, and our emotion may express nothing but lost poetry."[18]

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[14] Katka Reszke, *Return of the Jew. Identity Narratives of the Third Post-Holocaust Generation of Jews in Poland* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 185.

[15] Ibid., 9.

[16] Gorelik, *Hochzeit in Jerusalem*, 61.

Additionally, Gorelik's case is an example of how Jewish space is intentionally created throughout the entire European continent. With her origins in Ukraine, emigration from St. Petersburg, settlement in Germany, and continued close ties to relatives in Israel, Gorelik embodies the divergent narratives and opinions on Jewishness.

Channah Trzebiner: Whose Life to Live?

Channah Trzebiner is named after her maternal grandfather's first wife, who died, together with their unborn child, in Auschwitz. Her motivation to write is her failed Jewish marriage. At first, the plot seems to fit into post-traumatic narratives. The first part of the book is devoted to the narrator's relationship with her grandfather, which proves difficult for every family member: it is ambivalent and oscillates between closeness and tyranny.

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[17] Elisa-Maria Hiemer, *Autobiographisches Schreiben als ästhetisches Problem. Jüdische Vielfalt in der polnischen und deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019), 144.

[18] Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes*, 25.

Later, however, the chapters dealing with the young narrator's professional career make the reader understand how her identity as a Jewish woman in Germany changes. Her main aim becomes the fusion of the Jewish and non-Jewish parts of her life. Herein lies the motif for the novel's development; most of its scenes deal with liberation from historical family trauma. Besides, her new, non-Jewish partner, Marco, greatly facilitates Channah's contact with the non-Jewish world. Despite Channah's family's disapproval of their mixed-faith relationship, the couple decide to move in together. The novel thus focuses on Channah's conscious rejection of the expectations made of her – just as in Gorelik's case – by her Jewish surroundings.

Channah's work place, a bank, is a zone with a lot of contrasting spatial semantics. To some extent, she retains the cynical worldview passed on to her by her grandfather, but she also starts to redefine the cruelties her family experienced as a powerful character feature that distinguishes her from her German environment. During a job interview at a bank in which the atmosphere becomes stressful and tense, she recalls:

> My grandma had had to stand naked in front of SS men and bend over in time, had seen the woman next to her shot because she was too weak to walk fast enough. I was gaining confidence. I was amused. I was amused. Is this all the drama the big banks have? Yes please, what do you want to know? […] Nothing about my person outwardly suggested this sarcasm that I have carried in me from birth.[19]

The grandmother whose name she was given also impacts Channah's way of thinking and behavior in everyday life by providing her with a source of confidence.

In the following years, however, Channah expresses appreciation of the empathetic environment at work: "I think at that point I really arrived in Germany – even though I didn't feel at home anywhere else."[20] By achieving recognition in the professional sphere, Channah "gets her own voice in Germany"[21] and she compares this to being born again. The rapprochement of the worlds that were previously separated reaches another stage by the end of the book: moving into a shared house represents a rejection of the

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[19] Channah Trzebiner, *Die Enkelin oder Wie ich zu Pessach die vier Fragen nicht wusste* (Frankfurt: Weissbooks, 2013), 91.

[20] Ibid., 103.

[21] Ibid., 106.

Jewish home that had previously been seen as vital ("Losing the Jewish home hurts").[22] The protagonist consciously makes this decision despite the advice and opinions of her Jewish friends, who, among other things, describe her relationship as "disgusting."[23] Since this is the final scene of the piece, the open-ended nature of the narrative, which still offers the potential of a (positive) development, becomes obvious. And so the reference to the emancipatory declaration that we find at the very beginning of the book is repeated:

> I accept who I am. I am happy to be able to do this. I have cut the connection to my innermost for years and made sure that my own feelings have no room. I nipped them in the bud. I did this for my loved ones, for filling a hole in history, for being a substitute for murdered lives.[24]

Opposing the Polish-Catholic Norm: Jewishness in Post-1989 Poland

According to Nick Lambert, historians in particular tend to construct an identity-shaping narrative of a tormenting past that is meant to serve as a point of reference for Jews worldwide.[25] This standpoint is not only Eurocentric, but also problematic because it forces narrow definitions onto countries and communities. Among others, the image of Poland as a Jewish cemetery[26] has become commonplace for describing the state of Jewry (or better: its non-existence) in that country. Yet it ignores not only manifold initiatives to make Jewish history visible and to reincorporate it into the narrative of the national history, but also the reestablishment of Jewish contemporary culture.[27]

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[22] Ibid., 135.

[23] Ibid., 222.

[24] Ibid., 11.

[25] Nick Lambert, *Jews and Europe in the Twenty-First Century. Thinking Jewish* (London, Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2008), 60.

[26] Especially the non-Polish perspective seems to pursue this opinion: Margaret Maliszewska, "Die Reise nach Polen in Jeannette Landers Die Töchter und Monika Marons Pawels Briefe," *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 3 (2009): 223–237. Ruth Ellen Gruber's study *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), also supports the assumption that Jewishness in Europe has nothing "natural" nowadays.

[27] Izabela Suchojad, *Topografia żydowskiej pamięci. Obraz krakowskiego Kazimierza we współczesnej literaturze polskiej i polsko-żydowskiej* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010); Jagoda Budzik, "Topos Polski jako żydowskiego cmentarza w hebrajskiej literaturze trzeciego pokolenia," *Narracje o Zagładzie* 2 (2016): 88–100; Natalia Żórawska, *Dziedzictwo (nie)*

Since the 1980s, Polish Jewry has taken up a remarkable amount of space in public discourse. Well-known essays such as those of Jan Błoński (*Biedny Polacy patrzą na getto* [The poor Poles look at the Ghetto], 1987) or Artur Sandauer (*O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku. Rzecz, którą nie ja powinienem był napisać…* [On the situation of the Polish writer of Jewish origin in the twentieth Century. It is not I who should have written this study….], 1982) scrutinize the complexities of Polish-Jewish relations and are not the only ones to do so. Sandauer was the first to coin the term allosemitism to mean the specifically Polish approach of defining Jewishness through otherness.[28] "Othering" means promoting a perception that a group of people are "the other" by emphasizing distinctive and differing features such as nationality, customs, appearance, or – as in this case – religion. The group that creates the definition tries to increase social distance from the other, whose beliefs and habits are perceived as deviating from its own, and thus "identities are set up in an unequal relationship."[29] These power imbalances are a common feature of the German integration fairy tale, which never aims for a comprehensive understanding of identity, but always expects subordination to the allegedly superior culture.

Around the turn of the millennium, manifold initiatives on enhancing the visibility of Jewish history can be observed in the former Eastern Bloc countries (e.g., erection of monuments, restoration of former Jewish residential areas and cemeteries). Recently, (social) media and urban lifestyles have also contributed to these developments (see the growing popularity of Jewish festivals and gastronomy in larger cities), aiming at a wider perception of contemporary Jewishness – one that, according to Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska does not exist.[30] For Gruber too, Central European Jewishness remains an artificial concept. She therefore questions the very idea of a true rebirth of Jewry in post-socialist states, although she welcomes the idea of cultural tolerance that such a thing would suggest.[31]

Similarly to the situation of the cases from Germany, there seems to be a large gap between the academic and public discourses, and the perspective

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pamięci. Holocaustowe doświadczenia pisarek drugiego pokolenia (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2018).

[28] Hiemer, *Autobiographisches Schreiben*, 54.

[29] Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 2004), 61.

[30] Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska and Magdalena Ruta, "Od kultury żydowskiej do kultury o Żydach," in *Następstwa zagłady Żydów. Polska 1944–2010*, ed. Felix Tych and Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2011), 732.

[31] Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Odrodzenie kultury żydowskiej w Europie* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004), 245.

of the group that they are targeting. Furthermore, the "group" in question is actually very disparate; institutionalized Jewry, which relies to a large extent on religion as the main pillar of Jewish identity, stands in contrast to the increasingly diverse range of personal interpretations. Katka Reszke's study of the narratives of third-generation Jews in Poland is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the realities of their lives: many of her respondents describe a liberal attitude towards Jewish identity and a desire to open up the Jewish community to those who might not be Jewish halachically. Reszke summarizes that "ironically though, more than half of the young Jews in today's Poland are 'non-halachic Jews'."[32] Helise Lieberman, director of the Taube Center for the Renewal of Jewish Life in Poland since 2009, emphasizes:

> If, however, someone wants to be a Jew only because others want him to be, then his path to self-knowledge becomes very difficult. Can one want to be a Jew at all, if only negative aspects are associated with it – in fact, nothing inspires one to search, but much tempts one to shut oneself in, to hide, to withdraw… That is exactly why we must try, each for him- or herself, to make possible a positive Jewish environment in which people feel at home.[33]

The following two examples from Polish literature precisely illustrate this discord between individual approaches and the communities they are trying to connect with.

Agata Tuszyńska: An Attempt to Unite the Separate Worlds

At the age of 19, Tuszyńska learns of her mother's Jewish origins.[34] At the age of 48, she publishes *Family History of Fear*, in which she traces her family history back to the nineteenth century via the help of witnesses and archive material. Consequently, the first memories she has of her own childhood home are mainly associated with her mother. The gendered lens is a common feature among female narrators.[35] The mother refuses to memorialize the past and breaks with the cultural narrative, partly because most of the socially relevant spaces of Judaism have already been made unrecognizable through reconstruction and conversion of purpose, but also because of the way postwar Poland had celebrated heroism. "She did not go to the unveiling of the monument honoring the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto on April 19th of that year. […] It was cut out of the same black granite from Sweden that Hitler had reserved for all the monuments to his own victories. She avoided that part of the city."[36] The mother had been trying to erase everything that was connected to the experience of being persecuted and threatened for being Jewish. However, too many things in her daily life reminded her involuntarily of her past and of having belonged to a group that was supposed to be exterminated. Postwar Polish authorities, for example, continued to ask for wartime addresses, which in her case was "58 Leszno Street, Ghetto."[37] Agata states that fear and shame had been the main reasons why they had turned away from their Jewish family history and although Agata aims to change this view, a "schizophrenic dichotomy"[38] is still inherent in all the stories. Agata chooses mostly female fates and describes them in a way that makes the realities of Jewish life in Poland seem almost tangible; for example, the feeling of not fitting in, of not being able to identify with the categories of being either Polish or Jewish. Street names being "the shortest narration of all"[39] proves to be problematic, as the example of *ulica Żydowska* [Jewish Street] shows. Here lives the historian Mirek, a character who is very supportive of Agata's historical investigations. The name of the address had had an impact on Mirek's attitude: when moving there, he "was ashamed of his address on Żydowska Street."[40] The narration emphasizes spaces that in the past had been private or had had especially positive associations. Spaces that evoke associations with positive memories are actively shaped by the narrator and are manifestations of self-agency. Through the close contact between Agata and Mirek and

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[32] Reszke, *Return of the Jew,* 121.

[33] Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak, "Nie można być Żydem samotnie. Z Helise Lieberman rozmawia Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlak," *Midrasz* 10 (2006): 15.

[34] A critical view on multiple identities and their literary constructedness takes Agnieszka Czyżak, „Biografie polsko-żydowskie i żydowsko-polskie: Rekonesans ponawiany," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria literacka* 22 (2013): 171.

[35] Magdalena Marszałek, "Von jüdischen Müttern: Geheimnistropen in der polnisch-jüdischen autobiographischen Gegenwartsliteratur", in *Osteuropäisch-jüdische Literaturen im*

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20. und 21. Jahrhundert. Identität und Poetik / Eastern European Jewish Literature of the 20th and 21st Centuries, ed. Klavdia Smola (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013), 271–280.

[36] Agata Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear: A Memoir*, trans. Charles Ruas (New York: Anchor, 2017), 52.

[37] Ibid., 49.

[38] Agata Tuszyńska, *Rodzinna historia lęku* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005), 407. The English translation does not include the closing remarks in full. Therefore I quoted from the Polish original.

[39] Däumer, Gerok-Reiter, Kreuder, *Einleitung. Das Konzept des Unorts*, 12.

[40] Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear*, 137.

their mutual support, the street lives up to its name once more: "He wrote. I telephoned, and I rushed up as soon as I could to Żydowska Street to sit by the tile stove […] to be able to speak of her as if she had just stepped outside the room for a moment."[41] According to Bachelard, space in literature is often an expression of the most elementary and ordering principles of being. He pays particular attention to the concept of topophilia, by which spaces are celebrated and defended with the power of memory. Their construction reassures the narrator that she is doing something important and right, whereas conflicting spaces are limited to the descriptive level.

Tuszyńska's writing is not restricted to Polish spaces, but also refers to global aspects which can be seen in an important chapter about those of her relatives who are living abroad: the events of March 1968 cause a feeling of loss and betrayal in Tuszyńska's family. Emotionally and politically, however, the Polish Jews are committed to Poland's socialist future: "Leave, why should he [the grandfather] leave, he had a homeland after all."[42] The maternal side of the family, her great-aunt and great-uncle, leave the country; they travel first to Denmark, before finally settling in the US. Not only the geographical distance, but also the cultural and socioeconomic changes the emigrants go through separate the family members from one another ("America took her from me completely."[43]) The narrator's journey to the US assists her in overcoming this negative perception and – again – this positive place of the Jewish diaspora is presented in a performative way.

> I slowly began to come out of hiding. But the question of whether I was a Jew, I could not answer in the affirmative for a long time. […] I was listening to klezmer music on the Lower East Side, which was full of traces of Jewish emigrants. I was catching up on my backlog. But a confession did not cross my lips. It wasn't about them, it was about me. In time, I stopped denying. Jewish? Polish?[44]

The quote allows for two interpretations. On the one hand, commercialized cultural heritage turns out to be effective for gaining access to Jewish culture, although its pure consumption might appear naïve in the quotation. On the other hand, the approach of focusing first on easily consumable cultural goods is an important part of the processes of self-questioning and self-recognizing which are, according to Katka Reszke, typical for the generation of sudden Jews.[45]

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[41] Ibid., 139.

[42] Tuszyńska, *Rodzinna historia lęku*, 213.

[43] Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear*, 368.

[44] Tuszyńska, *Rodzinna historia lęku*, 407–408.

As for the Polish outside world, the narrator's perception of its cultural, political, and historical dominance as a threat has been given to her by her mother: "At all costs, she wanted to spare me the fear and humiliation that had befallen her. She wanted to protect me from the Polish world, which – in her opinion – could be a threat."[46] The daughter's behavior mirrors this experience unconsciously: Agata operates in the background, evaluates archive material at home, does not want to draw attention to herself, yet it is only through her that it is possible to revive the Jewish space in the Polish town. The strongest gestures she performs are the attachment of the *mezuzah*[47] to her front door and the transfer of the *mazewot*[48] to the cellar of her home in Warsaw. In summary, her inherited fear of non-belonging turns into an acknowledgement of her Jewish descent. The Jewish remnants, which today are mainly found only on the periphery, are transferred to the capital. This act signifies that Warsaw will continue to be a place of Jews. On the last page, the narrator declares self-confidently: "I belong to both. And let it remain that way."[49] The attempt to recreate the Jewish part of one's identity is criticized in studies about post-1989 literature, since looking back through the perspective of a minority of which a person has not felt a part for most of their life is perceived as an artificial and therefore untrustworthy action.[50] The importance of the childhood home as an example of topophilia becomes obvious, since she finally expresses the wish to invite all of her relatives there and to gather them in one room: "Into my childhood room where you never came. Where you were missing. In this empty space, in this silence. There where I missed you so much although I didn't know of your existence, I am here and wait."[51]

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[45] Reszke, *Return of the Jew*, 199.

[46] Tuszyńska, *Rodzinna historia lęku*, 32.

[47] Small capsule to be attached to the door frame of a Jewish house. On the parchment parts of the prayer Shma Yisrael are written.

[48] Jewish grave stones.

[49] Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear*, 401.

[50] Anna Siemińska, "Pamięć uniewinniona: Pochodzenie żydowskie a problem tożsamości i wyborów identyfikacyjnych na przykładzie utworów Romy Ligockiej i Agaty Tuszyńskiej," in *Polska proza i poezja po 1989 roku wobec tradycji*, ed. Aleksander Główczewski and Maciej Wróblewski (Toruń: Wydawnictwo UMK, 2007), 122.

[51] Tuszyńska, *Family History of Fear,* 401.

Piotr Paziński: Living on the Ark

Feuilletonistic remarks and sales-promoting slogans place the novel within the survivorship narrative and therefore seemingly provide the interpretive frame. Paziński is said to be the "first literary voice of the third generation in Poland after the Holocaust"[52] and his Czech translator states, "the narrator of *The Boarding House* describes ghosts, those who no longer exist – the last Polish Jews, among whom he should also be."[53] Paradoxically, the latter quote is a bold statement that deprives the author of the right to belong to that group. And indeed, the narrator of Pazinski's novel portrays an understanding of being Jewish in Poland that is increasingly a question of choice, but which also touches upon socio-political constructions. The story is about a young man visiting a Jewish guest house near Warsaw where he used to spend his childhood vacations. Taking a look at the spatial constructions, it is worth considering Gaston Bachelard's statements on the house – the *topos* to which the whole plot of *The Boarding House* is reduced to: "For the house is our corner of the world. It is – it has often been said – our first universe."[54] The spatial constructions in the case of *The Boarding House* can be described as "fixations of happiness"[55] as the vivid memories shared by the elderly show:

> A name I've heard since forever. Like "Nalewki", or "Plac Krasińskich," "Gęsia 18," and "Świętojerska 13," where at the intersection with Nowiniarska our house was. That is, our house from before the war, however. Świętojerska was spoken of in the present tense, as if it hadn't ceased to exist. And our summer boarding house.[56]

In the course of the novel, contrasting spatial semantics between the past and the present place become evident. The reconstructed, peace-loving image of the past is contrasted with the metaphor of the ark. An important feature for the development of the plot is the description of the dense fog and humidity[57] which annoy the elderly, who usually reply with a laconic comment: "End of the world! For sure, simply the end."[58] The narrator does not present an unambiguous evaluation of this modern ark: for the older Jewish community, Śródborowianka would be the best place even in the future: "A tiny, dingy tabernacle in the desert, a place of rest during the journey. Our ark. Here, they were – we were – at home. And we will always be here."[59] The ambiguous character of the metaphor corresponds to the changing emotional load the narrator has to cope with: "the principle of Noah's Ark, because it is not the apocalypse, but also because it casts a pessimistic glance at the future, stands in the middle between paradise and hell, between apocalypse and the principle of hope", as Joanna Jabłkowska emphasizes.[60]

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[52] Justyna Sobolewska, "Taniec z cieniami," *Polityka* 31 (1999): 40.

[53] Piotr Paziński, *Letní byt*, trans. Lucie Zakopalová (Praha: Havran, 2012), 117.

[54] Bachelard, *Poetik des Raumes*, 36.

[55] Ibid., 38.

[56] Paziński, *The Boarding House*, 2–3.

[57] Hiemer, *Autobiographisches Schreiben,* 138.

[58] Paziński, *The Boarding House*, 92.

His relationship to his personal place of memory is indeed as ambivalent as Jabłkowska's description: the narrator often wonders about the significance of the elderly's discussions with regard to his life and how they might perceive the sudden visitor. "Stop snooping around, go back to your place, to your concerns, take to your heels and run fast, cut the ties. Forget and finally leave us alone."[61] The narratological parallels between biblical descriptions and the experiences are worth emphasizing:

> For after seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, for the destruction of every living thing which I have made on the face of the earth. (Genesis 7:4) And the waters overcame everything and were increased greatly on the earth, and the ark was resting on the face of the waters. (Genesis 7:18) Every living thing on the face of all the earth, man and cattle and things moving on the face of the earth, and birds of the air, came to destruction: only Noah and those who were with him in the ark, were kept from death. (Genesis 7:23)

> A sharp, afternoon aroma of sand and warmed bark, wild herbs, and meadow flowers swept into the boarding house, paying no attention to the domestic scents. The world was taking up deep breaths, big swigs of resined air, and life in all its forms burst forth from everywhere. Indifferent to switched-off chandeliers and dimmed wall lamps, as if it sought to take revenge on the old walls for their misery and infirmity and to swallow them completely, leaving behind them not even the tiniest tremble of memory.[62]

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[59] Ibid., 109.

[60] Joanna Jabłkowska, *Literatur ohne Hoffnung. Die Krise der Utopie in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitätsverlag, 1993), 94.

[61] Paziński, *The Boarding House*, 106–107.

[62] Ibid., 111.

The quotes are united by the intrusive character of nature that seems powerful enough to erase (quote 1) or to disturb (quote 2) the human order or, more precisely, that Jewish refuge. At the same time there is no doubt that those in the ark will withstand the threat.

The Jewish residents of the guesthouse do not belong to Polish society either ontologically or spatially. At the same time, the Jewish community aims to preserve its own microcosm. The boarding house thus also holds the quality of a very fragile heterotopia, an identity bound to collective places of remembrance, which not everyone is equally able to access. I consider this a conscious act of demarcation. At the same time, the narrator creates an image of a group-specific memory space somewhere between daydreaming and disillusionment. Overall, the Jews' place in Poland is claimed and defended by Jewish solidarity but due to the autofictional character of *The Boarding House*, more space for interpretation is given: autofiction neither commits to the chronological order of an autobiography, nor to the logic of plots like in fictional literature. Therefore this type of narrative best reflects the fallible process of remembering and is, as Anna Turczyń calls it, the writing mode of the unconscious mind.[63]

Conclusion

In both Polish works, Jews are located on the periphery, emphasizing their non-belonging to society. Tuszyńska tries to overcome this marginalization, whereas Paziński's narrator cultivates the marginal position, for which he contrasts the harmonious image of childhood in the boarding house with the metaphor of the ark. Warsaw, in its present form, connotes a refusal of Jewish origins, hence the meaning of the boarding house is its protective value. In Gorelik's work, all representations that refer to Jewish sacred places are conflictual and Jewish safe spaces are exclusively private. Jewishness is also detached from places of collective memory in Trzebiner's work, which points to a more individual approach to religion. The relationship between the narrated and real space is reciprocal in the case of these autobiographic writings: the denied or forgotten Jewish spaces (Tuszyńska, Paziński) force the individual to substitute their absence with actions. In the first case this means detective work, in the second case a retreat into fantasy and childhood memory through autofictional means. Religious spaces such as synagogues or Jewish family spaces make the individual think about the place he or she wants to Judaism to occupy in in life (Trzebiner, Gorelik).

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[63] Anna Turczyn, "Autofikcja, czyli autobiografia psychopolifoniczna," *Teksty Drugie* 1–2 (2007): 209.

One can observe a clear change in Jewish autobiographical narratives: Whereas Susanne Düwell concluded in her 2004 article that most of the contemporary Jewish texts draw a pessimistic picture[64], one has now to acknowledge that the cultural landscape in both countries has become increasingly diverse. The shift towards a "multi-option society" (*Multioptionsgesellschaft*) is noticeable.[65] The presented cases understand Jewishness no longer to be a mark of deprivation. The authors consciously try to design positive spaces that are indispensable for the formation of a new Jewish consciousness. In this respect, the German examples in particular deviate from their literary predecessors. Israel is no longer a denied homeland, since the center of life is Germany. The multiple traumatization of the parental and grandparental home is not met with powerlessness, but with determination to achieve emancipation from these narratives. In order to overcome the rupture between the generations that resulted from the absence of Jewish life in public life in Poland until 1989, Polish works create positive examples of family history and a (nostalgic) transformation of the past. Agnieszka Mrozik warned of a problematic perspective, since "by placing the family in the center of the novel, women disappear, dissolve in it."[66] However, in the case of Jewish memories, the gendered perspective plays an important role because Jewishness is traditionally passed down through the maternal line. The female narrators gain self-confidence and power through their examination of the past.

My examples from the literature present fundamentally different definitions of Jewishness and Judaism, with some based on private, and some on socio-historical convictions. What they all have in common is that the writing seems to have a compensatory function. They feature fictional and factual modes of narration that suggest different possible interpretations, but which do not exclude each other. Being Jewish equals being part of an international community. "The emphasis shifts away from commemoration toward dealing with the complications of a vibrant, increasingly diverse community."[67] That being said, these narratives can all support the detachment of academic research from national paradigms.

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[64] Susanne Düwell, *Fiktion aus dem Wirklichen. Strategien autobiographischen Erzählens im Kontext der Shoah* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2004), 7.

[65] *Kulturerleben nachgefragt. Generation Y, junge Eltern und 55-65-Jährige im Interview*, ed. Christoph Kochhan, Marion Lorenz Amezcua, Alexander Moutchnik and Helen Rhein (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), 65.

[66] Agnieszka Mrozik, *Akuszerki transformacji. Kobiety, literatura i władza w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Warszawa: Znak, 2012), 321.

[67] Axelrod, *Jewish Life in Germany*, 14.

Abstract

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Entangled Identities and the History of Spaces in Twenty-First-Century Jewish Literature from Germany and Poland

1989 is a turning point for Jewish communities in Germany and Poland. A strong internationalization and diversification can be observed in both societal discourses and autobiographical writings. Applying the concepts of non-spaces and topophilia, the article is based on the assumption that recent literature actively seeks for a positive reimagination of Jewish spaces. Through explorations of the family memory and a critical examination of past private, public, and religious spaces, the authors affirm their place in their countries and try to break free from past-centered narratives.

Keywords

Jewishness, Germany, Poland, twenty-first century, autobiographical writing