7 Jewish *Germaniya*

In 2018 the German TV channel RTL launches a new series, *Sankt Maik* (*Saint Maik*). Maik Schäfer is a small-time criminal who puts on a deceased priest's robe to escape the police in one of his con games. Good-looking Maik ends up as the new priest in a Catholic parish – where he gets involved with the choir leader, who actually happens to be a police officer and from all of which more complications and mix-ups happen.

Maik is played by Daniel Donskoy. Donskoy is 1.90 meters tall, red-haired, has freckles, and a broad smile from ear to ear. The viewing figures are fantastic, fans post video clips with Sankt Maik with a naked torso on YouTube, Donskoy's Instagram followers increase by the day, Google suggests "Daniel Donskoy girlfriend" when you start entering his name.

Donskoy was born in Moscow in 1990. In that year his parents emigrated as Jewish quota refugees to Berlin, where Donskoy grew up in Marzahn. His parents separated. In 2002 Donskoy moved to Tel Aviv with his mother and stepfather, where he was discovered at age 16 and started modeling. In 2008 he finished high school, returned to Berlin – as a German citizen he was exempt from Israeli military service – and entered university, which he soon quit in favor of the stage: "I can't help it, I'm a stage tiger," he says about himself.[1] Already in 2008 he had made it to the preliminary round of *Kokhav Nolad*, the Israeli version of the *American Idol* franchise. He then studied acting and singing in New York and London, from where he commuted to the shooting of *Saint Maik*.

Berlin-Marzahn is a hotspot for Volga Germans who remain below the radar of the media, the exception being the Lisa scandal in January 2016. Unlike the Volga Germans, the second group of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, the Jewish quota refugees, is very visible in culture and the media. It is enough to recall some names who have made a splash in recent years, for example the writers Alina Bronsky, Lena Gorelik, Olga Grjasnowa, Kat Kaufmann, Lana Lux, and Sasha Marianna Salzmann. Or in theater and television: Marina Frenk, Alisa Levin, Palina Rojinski, and Donskoy. Or in classical music: Igor Levit, Olga Scheps, Anatol Ugorski, and Jascha Nemtsov. This visibility in culture and the media

stems from the fact that they are disproportionately from educated, urban intelligentsia families. They were well set up to make it as a writer, pianist, or violinist, or also as a computer programmer and dentist. But of course German history also plays a role: in 1989 no one in their right mind would have dared to imagine that after the Holocaust Germany might again become a destination for Jewish immigration, let alone the country with the world's fastest-growing Jewish community. That this has nonetheless happened is what generated media interest – internationally.[2]

Since 1989, 230,000 Jewish quota refugees have immigrated. Most of them are secular and have no interest in religion, but some are registered in the Jewish communities with their roughly 100,000 members.[3] These communities and Jewish life in Germany more generally have, however, changed massively.

Quota Refugees

The beginnings of this Jewish immigration go back to Gorbachev's Perestroika. In the late 1980s the Soviet Union loosened its travel restrictions, which increased mobility inside the Soviet Bloc. It became quite easy to obtain tourist visas and travel, for instance, by car from Leningrad – renamed St. Petersburg in 1991 – via the Baltic states, Belarus, and Poland to the GDR.

When the GDR dissidents began meeting at round tables after the opening of the wall, there was one such table specifically devoted to the subject of the Jews and Israel. The GDR had never established diplomatic relations with Israel, which was typical of the pro-Palestinian states of the Soviet Bloc. The dissidents took this as a point of departure for moral and political discussions about, for example, the GDR's self-description as an antifascist country that supposedly had nothing to do with Nazism. Meanwhile the Jewish Cultural Association, an organization of, among others, secular Jews that had been founded in January 1990, heard rumors of impending pogroms against Soviet Jews. (Note that in 1989 in the entire GDR a mere 500 Jews were registered in synagogue congregations.) There had also been the first cases of Soviet Jews who were in the GDR on tourist visas and had not returned to the USSR for fear of antisemitism. At the Jewish Cultural Association's behest a motion was filed at the round table: "We request that the GDR government make it possible, irrespective of current regulations, for those who feel discriminated against and persecuted in the Soviet Union as Jews to stay here."[4]

The GDR's first free elections took place on March 18, 1990. The Volkskammer, the legislature, convened on April 12 and passed

a resolution proposed by various parliamentary fractions that originated from discussions at the round table: "The first freely elected parliament of the GDR on behalf of the people of this country admits its joint responsibility for the humiliation, expulsion, and murder of Jewish women, men, and children. We feel sad and ashamed, and acknowledge this burden of German history. We ask the Jews of the whole world for forgiveness. We ask the people of Israel to forgive us for the hypocrisy and hostility of East German policies toward Israel and also for the persecution and degrading treatment of Jewish citizens in our country after 1945."[5] The last sentence was a reference to the antisemitic purge in the communist party (SED) of 1952–1953, a time when Eastern European communist parties excluded, imprisoned, and sometimes executed Jewish members. Finally: "We support granting persecuted Jews asylum in the GDR."[6]

After the passing of this resolution, 650 Soviet Jews came on tourist visas. In the meantime representatives of West Germany, the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the State of Israel, and the Soviet Union became involved in the discussion. On July 11, 1990, the GDR Council of Ministers resolved: "The government of the German Democratic Republic grants, initially for limited numbers, foreign Jewish citizens who are threatened with persecution or discrimination the right to stay on humanitarian grounds."[7] This declaration was a diplomatic walk on eggshells. It tried to neither embarrass the still fairly powerful big brother Soviet Union nor infringe upon the self-definition of the State of Israel, with which the GDR wanted to establish diplomatic relations (there can be no "asylum" for Jews, since for all the Jews in the world there is only one homeland: Israel). Three months later the GDR collapsed, diplomatic relations with Israel were never established, and a year and a half later the Soviet Union dissolved.

Between the resolution of July 11 and the end of the GDR on October 3 another 2,000 Soviet Jews immigrated. Now the ball was in the court of unified Germany. The behind-the-scenes negotiations between the Federal Republic, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Heinz Galinski, the State of Israel, and probably also the Soviet Union have yet to be fully reconstructed. It is also contested whether it was Chancellor Kohl or Galinski who insisted on going beyond the halakhic definition of Jewishness and accepting people who had only one Jewish grandparent.[8] On the other hand, we do know that Israel wanted to limit Jewish emigration to Germany – for Zionist reasons and because of the Holocaust. In 1990 Germany still seemed a very unlikely place to live happily and safely as a Jew. At the same time there was a consensus in the German media, from leftist newspapers to the conservative Axel Springer outlets, that if Jews – after what had happened –

knocked on Germany's door, this was an unbelievable gift, and it would be a shame not to accept it. Even though many details of the negotiations remain unclear, their result is known. The conference of interior ministers decided to grant Jews who were seeking asylum the legal status of quota refugees.

This legal status had been created in 1980 for the Vietnamese Boat People, refugees from communist Vietnam, whom international rescue ships like the *Cap Anamur* of German human rights activist Rupert Neudeck picked up from their boats in the South China Sea.[9] This status derives from to the Geneva Convention, not the basic right to asylum in Article 16 of the German Constitution. Compared with an asylum seeker, the status of quota refugee has the advantage that persecution in the country of origin is presupposed rather than subject to examination. So there is no asylum case as such, no hearing, and additionally all quota refugees are enrolled on a language course paid for by the state and receive a work permit. However, quota refugees too, like other refugees and *Aussiedler*, are distributed among the federal states according to the *Königsteiner Schlüssel* allocation method. So their mobility is restricted and they cannot, for instance, move to Berlin if they have been sent to Saxony-Anhalt. Since 1980 the federal government can implement quotas in the context of humanitarian actions following refugee movements. Germany most recently made use of this option in 2013 and 2014 for 20,000 refugees from Syria, who thus ended up getting a more comfortable legal status than other refugees from the civil war-ravaged country.

After the USSR dissolved in late 1991, it became even easier to emigrate because the new, democratic Russia guaranteed full freedom of movement. Germany became increasingly attractive as a destination. In 2002 for the first time more Jews from the ex-USSR emigrated to Germany than to Israel or the United States: 19,262 went to the Federal Republic, 18,878 to Israel, fewer than 10,000 to the United States.[10] The immigration wave of Jewish quota refugees came to a halt only in 2005, when a new immigration law came into force that raised the bar: ever since then, those interested in immigrating must furnish proof that a Jewish community is prepared to take them in and that they "can permanently provide for themselves in the Federal Republic of Germany." Quota refugees also have to pass a language test at a certain level.[11] Since then Jewish immigration has become a trickle.

The ageing West German Jewish communities, with their mere 30,000 members in 1990, were in danger of disappearing sooner or later. Naturally, they placed great hopes in the Soviet Jews. But when they celebrated the first Passover Seders and other High Holidays, they were

disappointed: some of the new arrivals took out Ukrainian *salo*, cured pork fat, wrapped in greasy parchment paper – needless to say, this was not compatible with Jewish dietary laws. Instead of Jewish songs, or at least the Hebrew folk song *Hava Nagila*, they sang, accompanied by accordion or guitar, Russian romances or the songs of the underground bards of the 1960s. In short, they didn't have the faintest idea about Jewish traditions and rituals. The 74 years of Soviet atheism had thoroughly expunged religion from them.

West German Jews had themselves originally come from the east. When Hitler came to power in 1933, there were only half a million Jews in Germany. Many of them fled Germany, some were exiled – in 1939 roughly 250,000 Jews were left in the German Reich. The vast majority of these, about 200,000, were murdered between 1941 and 1945. After the war only very few of the Jewish refugees returned to Germany. Instead, East European Jewish DPs, mostly from Poland, remained stuck, as it were, in the Federal Republic. Take Marek Lieberberg, who was born in 1946 as the son of Polish Holocaust survivors stranded in the Zeilsheim DP camp. In 1970 he founded the agency Mama Concerts and that same year brought The Who to the city of Münster. His later company, Marek Lieberberg Konzertagentur (MLK), organized Rock am Ring and brought Sting, Guns N' Roses, and many other performing musicians to concerts in Germany and later also in Israel. As a reaction to Mölln, Hoyerswerda, and Rostock-Lichtenhagen, in December 1992 he organized "Heute die! Morgen du!" ("Today They! Tomorrow You!"), a concert against right-wing extremist violence with an audience of 150,000 at the Frankfurt Messehalle.

What is more, and this is not widely known, two decades earlier Soviet Jews had once before immigrated to Germany, more precisely to Berlin. In the 1970s Galinski, then chairman of West Berlin's Jewish community, had arranged through a special agreement with Israel that a small portion of the Jews emigrating via Vienna to Israel (or the United States) would be offered the option of going to Berlin. (Because of the non-existence of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel, there were no direct flights, therefore Soviet Jews emigrated via Vienna or Rome.) In this way 3,000 Soviet Jews ended up in West Berlin during the East–West détente between 1973 and 1980.[12]

A snapshot of Jewish life in the Federal Republic before 1989 would have looked roughly as follows: people were sitting on slightly less packed suitcases than 10 years earlier, yet every elementary school, home for the elderly, and synagogue had to be protected by the police. Any Jewish person in the public limelight got anonymous hate mail from old Nazis and neo-Nazis. Most of the Jews in communities were orthodox in terms

of religious ritual, men and women sat separately during services. The orthodox ritual applied to everyone, there were unified communities. Yet Reform Judaism with its combined service for both sexes and organ music had emerged in Germany in the 1920s; today it constitutes one of the three branches of American Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox). Broadly speaking, in 1989 there were few Jews in Germany, the communities were very small, and the Jewish marriage agency Simantov was essential for German Jewry's survival. Most of them spent the summer in Israel, but there as elsewhere in the world they had to justify why they were living in Germany. In public discourse there were a few important, brave voices who fought antisemitism as much as philosemitism with the power of the word: the real-estate agent Ignatz Bubis, Central Council president from 1992 until 1999, the literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, the journalists Henryk M. Broder and Michel Friedman, the historian Michael Wolffsohn, and the writer Maxim Biller. They all constantly had to balance when they wanted to speak just for themselves and when they wanted to speak for "the Jews" *tout court*.

Who and What Is Jewish?

Vladimir Kaminer, who came to East Berlin in 1990, was clearly Jewish since both of his parents were Jewish. Jewish religious laws, the Halakha, define as Jews those whose mothers are Jewish and those who have converted to Judaism. Conversion is an elaborate process because Judaism, unlike Christianity or Islam, does not proselytize. When the interior ministers of the federal states discussed in fall 1990 who should qualify as a quota refugee, the "who is a Jew?" question came up – it is also highly contested in Israel ever since its foundation: should persons who have only a male Jewish parent be recognized? The Central Council of Jews in Germany rallied for a generous definition. The German state agreed and brought Nazism into the equation, arguing that, since the Germans adopted a capacious definition of who was Jewish (in the 1935 Nazi Nuremberg Laws), they should not now, when helping Jews who were being persecuted yet again was at stake, create the impression that they wanted to keep the group of potential immigrants small. This is how the political will to have a generous rule came about, the concrete result being that one Jewish grandparent was sufficient for immigration to Germany. The next question then became: how could a person from Astrakhan or Vladivostok prove to the German Consulates or the German Embassy in Russia and other USSR successor states that at least one of their grandparents is Jewish?

Just like "German" in the case of the Volga Germans, "Georgian" with Georgians, or "Russian" with ethnic Russians, "Jewish" was recorded as a "nationality" (*natsional'nost'*) in Soviet domestic passports and other documents. Equally, as for the Volga Germans (the Volga German ASSR until 1941), Georgians (the Georgian Socialist Soviet Republic), or ethnic Russians (the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic), there was also for the Jewish nationality an ethnoterritory – the Autonomous Jewish Republic of Birobidzhan in the Far East on the Mongolian border. True, that was largely pro forma, very few Jews actually lived there. Jewish Soviet citizens mostly lived in the cities of the fifteen Soviet Republics.

After the October Revolution of 1917 they migrated there. The tsarist empire had been a "prison of the peoples," and it had limited the mobility of Jews to the Pale of Settlement, an area that consisted of parts of contemporary Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Lithuania, and Latvia. As soon as it became possible, many Jews migrated from the sthetls, the poor villages, to the cities: to them the Soviet Union meant modernity, Bolshevism meant emancipation. They were spectacularly successful at modernity, many converted wholesale to Marxism and tried shedding anything Jewish, especially religion, once and for all. Many early Bolsheviks – Leon Trotsky, Yakov Sverdlov, and Lazar Kaganovich – and many Soviet celebrities in the arts and sciences were Jewish: the poet Osip Mandelstam, the violinist David Oistrakh, the gymnast Maria Gorokhovskaya, who won seven medals at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, more than any other woman before or after her in a single Olympics, the World Chess Champion Mikhail Botvinnik, and the poet Joseph Brodsky, who won the Nobel Prize in literature in 1987.

Yet time and again the Soviet Union descended into antisemitism, especially after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948. Stalin's fight against "rootless cosmopolitanism" in 1948 or against the alleged "Doctors' Plot" in 1952 cost a lot of Jews their jobs and their freedom – hundreds were imprisoned. Later there was less violence, but systemic, institutionalized antisemitism continued: there were strict, unofficial acceptance quotas at universities (no more than a certain percentage of those admitted could be Jewish, even though, judging by their levels of qualification, many more students in a given year should have been Jewish), and many Jews were not allowed to join the Communist Party. And there was always plenty of antisemitism in everyday life. By the late 1960s it would have been unthinkable for a Jew to join the Politburo, as Kaganovich had in the 1930s. In this situation an underground movement of those who wanted to emigrate to Israel formed, consisting of Zionists, who were called refuseniks because their applications for

emigration to Israel had been refused. They were not allowed to work and were subjected to numerous other forms of harassment while waiting for their emigration permits for years – much like the Volga German activists.

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985 and introduced elements of a market economy, Jewishness became an opportunity, but also a renewed liability. It was an opportunity because it became possible to emigrate to the "golden West" – the joke regarding marriages of convenience between Jews and non-Jews was that Jews had become the fastest means of transportation from Moscow to New York, but it applied for emigration to Haifa or Berlin as well. Many oligarchs were and are Jewish: Roman Abramovich, Piotr Aven, Boris Berezovsky, German Khan, Mikhail Fridman, Yuri Milner, Viktor Vekselberg. They no longer had to hide their Jewishness; the oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, for example, was President of the Russian Jewish Congress from 1996 until 2001. On the other hand, a new liability was that antisemites could now act unchecked and openly threaten Jews. The facade of fraternity of peoples (*druzhba narodov*) had collapsed, and after the bankruptcy of Communist ideology many shifted to Russian nationalism, with Jews and people from the Caucasus becoming "the Other" incarnate. With this, nationalists took up old antisemitic traditions of the tsarist empire. Rumors about pogroms started circulating in 1988, "in the first months of 1990 such rumors reached a peak."[13]

Born in the USSR, Life in *Germaniya*

For the family of 8-year-old Dmitrij Kapitelman, emigrating to Germany, not Israel, was a last-minute decision. The visas for Israel were ready and the suitcases had been packed – when an immigration permit for Germany also arrived. "You would have always been a second-class Jew here," answers his father, 20 years later during their first trip to Israel, when his son asks him why they chose Germany. Kapitelman's father is Jewish, but his mother is not, therefore, according to the Halakha, their son Dmitrij is not Jewish.[14]

Also the 20-year-old Dmitrij Belkin, a history student, ultimately decided in favor of Germany. In early 1992 he had tried the embassies of the United States, Canada, and Australia in Moscow, but everywhere the hurdles would have been too high for him. In the United States one needed close relatives there to immigrate as a Jew. And Israel wasn't ideal because he, like Kapitelman, was paternally Jewish (his father at the time had no intention of emigrating). In the German Embassy in Moscow it was explained to him, as he recounted, that "Hitler also persecuted

paternal Jews (and I am one), therefore the country would accept this group of people."[15]

"Jewish citizens over here!," Belkin hears in Russian with a German accent several months later, though in Kyiv rather than in Moscow. A clerk called this out to the people lined up in front of the German Embassy.[16] Moscow, where Belkin had first traveled, was the wrong capital, because on January 1, 1992, he had become a citizen of a new country, Ukraine. The clerk at the embassy, Kurt Schatz, was also from a country that had ceased to exist, the GDR. He was one of the few diplomats the West German diplomatic service had taken on. In Kyiv he decided on 40,000 applications. He not only checked for the criterion "Jew" in Soviet documents, but also interviewed applicants to determine whether at least one grandparent was Jewish and whether they had experienced antisemitism.

Belkin told Schatz about "how in 1984 the striker of the opposing team, after his team had lost, came into our locker room and brought a jar of jam. Out of respect for the performance of our team." "But don't let the Jew have any of it," he added.[17] But more than anything else Belkin feels embarrassment about having to "sell" his own experience of antisemitism in order to be able to emigrate to Germany. This doesn't fit with his self-image of a proud, self-respecting young man who wants to be anything but a victim. Later in Germany he was surprised how poorly people were able to identify Jews "phenotypically," that is by looks, as though Nazi caricatures like those in *Der Stürmer* had never existed. "Dmitrij, are you actually Greek, Iranian, or Italian?," he is often asked; if anything, people perceive his looks as *südländisch*, "Southern."[18]

In the Soviet Union there was a widespread belief that minorities like Jews could be identified by looks through a trained, purportedly laser-sharp gaze with the help of external markers like nose, facial features, and hair. Even those Jews who had "Russian" as nationality in their documents because one of their parents was ethnically Russian and the family had decided, for obvious reasons (better life chances for the child), in favor of the hegemonic nationality of ethnic Russian. Antisemitism was a common experience not only for halakhic Jews or those who were Jewish according to their documents, but also for those whom non-Jews identified as Jewish, no matter if this was true or not.

By the way, Jews and Volga Germans were not the only ones who emigrated from the (former) Soviet Union on the ethnobiological or ethnoreligious ticket. A lot more countries than is commonly known have Laws of Return; the idea that only Germany (ethnobiological) and Israel (ethnoreligious) have such a law is a myth. Finland has "repatriated" at least 30,000 persons of Finnish descent from the former Soviet

Union since 1991, especially from Estonia and Russian St. Petersburg.[19] Greece has taken in at least a quarter of a million persons of Greek ancestry since 1991, and Armenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, and other countries all have laws of return as well.[20] As always with such emigration, there is some fraud with forged papers – Greece in particular for a long time was a well-known gate for EU citizenship. It used to be easy to buy forged documents in Russia and Ukraine that showed Greek heritage. The trick was to enter Greece with these papers and then use the right of intra-EU mobility to settle in another European country, such as Britain or the Netherlands. In this way wealthy Russians who wished to emigrate but had no Jewish, German, or Finnish background got a coveted EU passport.

In December 1993 Belkin and his classmate "Edik," Eduard Fleyer, who is also Jewish and will later switch from History to Law and become a successful lawyer in Frankfurt, start their bus trip from Ukraine via Poland to Germany. The trip takes four days. After the bus has passed the German–Polish border, Belkin sees the first half-timbered houses in his life – and thinks that the advent lights in the windows are Hanukkiahs: "The thought that so many Jews lived here was both overwhelming and comforting."[21]

Through the *Königsteiner Schlüssel* allocation system Edik ended up in the state of Hesse, whereas "Dima" found himself in Baden-Württemberg, where he spent the first 9 months in a shelter for asylum seekers in Reutlingen. In 1994 he started studying History in Tübingen, later got a Ph.D. there, and ultimately ended up working as a curator for exhibitions, publicist, and consultant at the Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Scholarship Fund (ELES) for Jewish students in Germany, one of thirteen federally funded foundations that provide scholarships for gifted students (Figure 7.1).

In Tübingen Belkin often ended up being irritated by the relationship of educated Germans, *Bildungsbürger*, toward Jews. There was the drop in temperature, the seriousness that begins to pervade a conversation when it turns to Jews, the palpable tensing when merely pronouncing the word *Jude*. But there was also the philosemitic celebration of anything Judeo-Christian in a protestant parish. Belkin noticed that the Jews were always seen in terms of an abstract Judaism, or as the Jews murdered in the Holocaust, or as those Jews who represent the "German–Jewish symbiosis," the Kafkas and Einsteins. Yet the Germans looked straight past the concrete, living Jews, the Jewish new arrivals from Russia, who were making ends meet as cleaning ladies, security guards, or pool attendants. Belkin also noticed the emphatically irreverent approach to the subject among some 68ers. These former student revolutionaries seemed critical

Figure 7.1 Dmitrij Belkin, 2022. Photographed by Jonatan Schwenk, © Dmitrij Belkin.

both of antisemitism and of philosemitism, and were so concerned with normalization that they wanted to include Jews too among the butts of their all-pervasive sarcasm. Consequently they sometimes made deliberately politically incorrect remarks that sounded, if taken literally, antisemitic – a complicated, intellectual form of antisemitism once removed, an antisemitism of actually well-intentioned anti-antisemites.

The attitude in Kapitelman's Leipzig housing projects was much more in-your-face. Neo-Nazis terrorized the eight housing complexes with their 80,000 inhabitants: "In Grünau I fled from neo-Nazis with knives, neo-Nazis with dogs, and neo-Nazis with baseball bats. Once I made it into our house, I took the elevator up to our apartment on the eighth floor. A sticker on the neighbors' apartment door announced: 'Rudolf Heß – people's hero [*Volksheld*]. Friday party here.' After several years in Grünau, around the time when we first had the Holocaust in history lessons at school, my dad gave me the following advice: 'If you want to avoid problems, never get mixed up in others' business. Unless something directly concerns you, stay out.' Stay out of everything. Become invisible. 'Dad, but wasn't the Holocaust possible only because non-Jews stayed out and nobody protested?' 'Yes, but – ' Before my father could finish his sentence, a neo-Nazi asked us for a light. 'I not have fire,' replied my dad in an accent that could hardly have sounded more East European. The Nazi exploded: 'I don't want no fucking fire from you, Abraham.' Silence. Dad tried appearing physically threatening. The two heads taller Nazi actually did appear physically threatening. Then he suddenly turned around and left. With a facial expression as though he had postponed

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a necessary, but arduous job. He will mow the Jew lawn later."[22] In 2002 Shahak Shapira came to Germany as a 14-year-old with his younger brother, albeit not as a quota refugee, but as the son of an Israeli woman who had fallen in love with an East German and moved in with him in his hometown Laucha in Saxony-Anhalt. In the NPD stronghold Laucha and later in Berlin, Shapira had similar experiences to Kapitelman: from the 16-year-old fellow student who, with a smirk on his face, gets up in front of him, gives the Hitler salute, and calls out "Sieg Heil!," to the neo-Nazi, who abuses his brother in 2010 as *Judenschwein*, "Jew pig," and beats him up, to New Year's night 2014 when he films with his smartphone on the Berlin subway seven men of Arab ancestry shouting slogans like "Fuck Israel" and "Fuck Jews," and then gets beaten up by them, which had a global media fallout.[23]

With all of these Jewish voices it is tangible how difficult it is to find an adequate language for the antisemitism they have experienced: they don't want to engage in tear-jerking, that wouldn't mesh with their ideas of masculinity either. Yet they have experienced it and simply want others to be spared it. Kapitelman is resentful toward his parents for a long time because it is their Soviet-inflected ideas about the superiority of new apartments, in their case an apartment in a GDR *Plattenbau* made of prefab concrete slabs, that turns his way home from school into running the gauntlet: "To this day they don't understand how much I suffered from Grünau. [. . .] As for me, it took me years to detect the Grünau poison in myself. But when I finally found it, playing guitar in Berlin-Schöneberg, I lay down on the floor, cowered, and started crying."[24]

In recent years antisemitism in its new forms has become louder and more aggressive – on al-Quds Day in Berlin 2014 the demonstrators shouted "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas," in schoolyards *Jude* has become a common swearword, and criticism of the Israeli government's political actions often spills over into antisemitism, for example when "the Jews" in general, that is the world's approximately 14 million living Jews, get consistently equated with Israel and are held responsible for its politics, or when Israel's right to exist is questioned.[25]

But apart from this negative identity brought to them from outside: what does being Jewish mean for Jewish Germans of Soviet extraction? What is Jewishness to them?

For one thing, there is the memory of the negative ascription in the Soviet Union. The semi-official antisemitism, the quotas in university and in the workplace, the terrible hazing in the army that led many to commit suicide, and especially everyday antisemitism – little taunts, microaggressions, epithets, physical violence: these experiences in some

cases led to an overidentification with Russianness and a rejection of anything Jewish, that is, a wish to escape being Jewish by any means. Most often, however, they led to the contrary, to a defiant counter-reaction: bonding with similarly excluded Jews, pride in Jewish celebrity soccer players, singers, writers, actresses, scientists, and chess players. In addition there was the certainty that one would have to try harder as a Jew – Sasha Marianna Salzmann in her debut novel has the Jewish mother figure impress on her son: "You must be the best in school, much better than the Russians. If you are three times as good, you will perhaps be considered half as good as them and make it as a good Russian doctor. If you don't make it, you will always remain a poor Jewish loser." Salzmann's punch line: "Later she replaced the Russians by the Germans."[26]

Only in the rarest of cases did Jewishness signify religiosity. True, there were Jewish communities in the Soviet Union, but very few Jews had anything to do with them. There were some who practiced underground religion below the radar of state control (like Russian Orthodox or Lutheran churches, synagogues were also infiltrated by KGB informers). Yet religiously inclined Jews emigrated to Israel rather than Germany, even before the collapse of the Soviet Union (or they were prevented from emigrating: the refuseniks). Some Jewish customs survived nonetheless, for instance where food was concerned: most families had the odd Jewish dish in their diets. Many avoided pork, simply out of family tradition, even while loudly denouncing Jewish dietary laws as "medieval." Some Yiddish expressions also lingered in their speech. The choice of spouse also often happened in the traditional way. The later quota refugees Semen and Tatiana Gostrer, both atheists, were introduced to one another in 1979 in Voronezh, a city of a million inhabitants, by a Shadkhan, a Jewish matchmaker who in this way earned some extra money on the side.[27]

The Gostrer family remained secular in Germany. The same is true for the Kapitelman family and most others. A little fewer than half of the immigrants turned to religion over time. The efforts of the Jewish communities and institutions (such as the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany) focused on the children: Jewish kindergartens and elementary schools, summer camps (machanot) in Europe and Israel, soccer, ping-pong or chess in Makkabi sports clubs, trips (if qualified) to the Maccabi Games, the Jewish Olympic Games that take place every 4 years in Israel, and of course the coming of age ritual in the Jewish community at age 12 for girls (bat mitzvah) and 13 for boys (bar mitzvah). But, much like Catholics or Lutherans after confirmation, after bar/bat mitzvah many no longer pray regularly in synagogue or celebrate the High Holidays. Anastassia Pletoukhina is very much aware of that: "I am a member of

a group of people with experience of migration, a religious minority, but also a minority of people who practice religion. It's the principle of the matryoshka doll: a minority in the minority in the minority."[28]

Dmitrij Belkin was not allowed to participate in the religious life of a Jewish community – to Jewish communities he was a non-Jew because of his non-Jewish mother. Belkin went on a long journey of soul-searching that at one point brought him to Russian Orthodox Christianity. In the end he and his wife (who has no Jewish parent) decided to convert to Judaism. The bar for giyur, or conversion, is high. The family started following the commandments of the Torah. Belkin and his 6-year-old son got circumcised. In 2006 at the Oranienburger Straße Synagogue in Berlin they stepped before a beth din, a rabbinical court. This was a special beth din because it consisted of liberal and reform rabbis. Until 2005 the only rabbinical conference was orthodox, and it would have barred a family like the Belkins from giyur. The immigration from the USSR has also diversified German Jewry, from very progressive to ultra-orthodox. Thus in major German cities you can now sometimes see black-clad Jews with peyot and black hats. Generally speaking, in large German cities you now have representation of all denominations of Judaism, as they also exist in the United States, France, England, or Israel. Nowadays the Abraham Geiger Kolleg, a rabbinical seminary in Potsdam, is training non-orthodox rabbis: one graduate, Alina Treiger, originally from Ukraine, was ordained in 2010 as the first female rabbi in Germany after 1945.

At the Belkin family's giyur the son was last in line to get up in front of the beth din. "'And you?,' the rabbis asked Mark, who went to a Jewish school in Frankfurt. Mark didn't need any rational arguments, it was right before Hanukkah and he simply sang a Hanukkah song, so our appointment at the rabbinical court ended with collective singing by the rabbis and the giyur-happy family from the Soviet ruins together with their 6-year-old, Tübingen-born son."[29]

As for memory of the Holocaust and the Second World War, the Soviet immigrants differ from German Jews. For the older German Jews November 9, the pogrom night of 1938 (previously euphemistically known as *Kristallnacht*, the "Night of Broken Glass") and increasingly January 27, the day of liberation of Auschwitz in 1945, are important days of commemoration. For Jews from the Soviet Union, May 9 (1945) is the central day of commemoration. The former USSR continues to celebrate it as "Victory Day." The West marks it on May 8 as the day of capitulation – the ceasefire at 11:01 pm Central Europe Time was past midnight in Moscow, a different time zone, hence May 9. The name "Victory Day" encapsulates the key difference: Soviet Jews feel like victors, since many of their relatives fought even harder than ethnic Russians in the

Red Army against the Wehrmacht; they were even greater antifascists because they knew what was in store for them if Nazism prevailed. November 9 and January 27 by contrast stand for the commemoration of a catastrophe and a collectivity of victims. What is more, for many Jews from the former Soviet Union the Germans of the Second World War are primarily fascists who attacked the Soviet Union, not Nazis intent on annihilating the Jews. It was difficult to separately remember the Shoah, since in the innumerable Soviet war movies it was subordinated to the suffering of ethnic Russians and the victory of the USSR as a whole. Some learned about the Holocaust as a separate phenomenon, not an aspect of the war, only when they came to Germany – in history lessons at school or through Western movies like *Schindler's List*.

The Russian Jews have, however, also brought to Germany a Shoah experience that serves as a corrective to the dominant memory narrative. In Germany the Holocaust was long remembered solely as industrial mass killing, encapsulated by systematic murder through gas in death factories like Auschwitz and other extermination camps. In reality at least a third of the 6 million Jews who were murdered were shot in Ukraine, Belarus, or elsewhere in Russia and Eastern Europe. In Auschwitz primarily Central and Eastern European Jews as well as Western European Jews were killed. The depiction of the Holocaust in the German media to this day doesn't adequately reflect this. Nor does its depiction in German museums (such as the Information Center at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin next to the Brandenburg Gate), the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., the French Mémorial de la Shoah, or even Israel's Yad Vashem. The museums and media mostly tell the story of the killing in the extermination camps. A disproportionate number of German Jews is shown, as though they constituted the largest group of victims. This skewed imaginary then spills over into quotidian life: many Germans view Russian Jews as "Russians" and not as survivors of the genocide that they committed, whereas they are more likely to see Israelis or American Jews as victims of the Shoah.

Most Russian Jews – because of a Shoah memory that was differently configured or suppressed by the Soviet state – have a relaxed attitude toward Germany. They definitely do not want to be reduced to the role of victims in the Shoah, they often don't even want to talk about it. Mascha Kogan, the quota refugee protagonist in Olga Grjasnowa's bestselling novel, mocks a German philosemite, who treats her as "his personal pet Jew": "My only flaw was that I didn't come straight from a German concentration camp"[30] (Figure 7.2).

Russian Jews decided in favor of emigration to Germany for reasons that bear little relationship to the past: they want to live in "old" Europe,

Figure 7.2 Olga Grjasnowa, 2012. Photographed by Stephan Röhl, CC BY-SA 2.0.

not in the United States or dangerous, conflict-ridden Israel, where their children, both sons and daughters, would have to serve in the army. Israel is also too hot; in terms of climate Hamburg is much more like St. Petersburg, Munich much more like Kyiv.

Something else was really key to the Jewish immigrants: the recognition of academic degrees and quick integration into the German labor market. The fact that highly qualified doctors with international publications had to wait for years for the approval of their MD degree or their license to practice medicine, that accomplished pianists or engineers had to work as beauticians or in a *Spiela* (*Spielhalle*, that is, a casino), all of this meant an enormous loss of status for them – this left deep wounds and to this day is the quota refugees' number one grievance. All the more so when they hear from friends who emigrated to America how quickly these people entered the job market and how much in demand their skills acquired in the USSR are over there. To put it differently and emphasize the point, while Sergey Brin could focus on coding the Google algorithm, immigrants in Germany had to wrestle in German government agencies with forms written in impenetrable German and the hostile clerk Frau Müller –

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a demoralizing struggle with red tape that set them back for years. These immigrants wanted recognition of their know-how as mathematicians, doctors, or engineers, not for the fact that they happen to be Jewish. After all, they chose Germany as one of several options because they thought they could there continue their careers and would have correspondingly good prospects of promotion.

These problems apply mostly to the middle age cohort, those who emigrated between the ages of 30 and 50. The younger and older age cohorts in many ways have it easier. The children do exceptionally well in school, but have to overcome the typical obstacles for children of "second-class" immigrants (not those from France or Britain, but "the Turks" or "the Russians"): they are initially sent to vocational school instead of university-bound *Gymnasium*, or they are held back: "On my third day in Germany I went to school and was promptly demoted two grades. Instead of practicing algebra, I was supposed to color mandalas with crayons," as Grjasnowa has her heroine Mascha Kogan say.[31] The older generation, those aged over 50, also has fewer problems. The German social welfare state protects them, they care for their grandchildren, and they are themselves definitely much better taken care of in the Jewish homes for the elderly than in their ex-Soviet countries of origin. There a move into a nursing home continues to be perceived as a death warrant. Yet also among the older generation there are justified grievances: they are not on an equal footing with Volga Germans and their working years in the USSR do not count toward their German pension.[32]

The visibility of the younger generation in culture, politics, and the media is already remarkable and likely to grow in the future. Marina Weisband (born 1987) was leader of the Pirate Party from 2011 until 2012, and generally the public face of her party. Sergey Lagodinsky, born in 1975 and since 2019 a Member of the European Parliament for the Greens, in 2007 founded the Jewish Caucus in the SPD. Then he resigned from the SPD in 2011 because the party failed to expel Thilo Sarrazin (see Chapter 8). Both Weisband and Lagodinsky are religious and never made a secret of their background as Jewish quota refugees. Male quota refugees, such as Belkin, Kapitelman, and the rapper Sun Diego aka SpongeBOZZ (Dimitri Chpakov), write autobiographies. Female quota refugees publish novels: writers like Grjasnowa and Salzmann have already figured in this book.[33] Some of the most stimulating inputs in the migration debate are from resident author Salzmann and her Studio Я at Berlin's Gorki Theater, for example the "disintegration congress" that brought to the fore the public debate about the exclusionist character of the German concept of *Integration*. Jewish quota refugees in some ways are the vanguard, the pace-setters of the debate on migration.[34] It is only a question of time until they break through

the glass ceiling of the old, West German Jewish establishment and become as widely represented in the Jewish institutions, the Central Council, and the leading bodies of the Jewish communities as they ought to be, given their numbers in contemporary German Jewry.

One thing is certain: a Russophone infrastructure has come into being in Germany. There are grocery stores that sell Soviet *tvorog* (a kind of cottage cheese) or *vobla* (dried salted fish). And the leading Russian theater stars and pop singers regularly come to Germany during their international tours performing for the Russophone diaspora.

What about lumping together all immigrants of Soviet background as a "Russophone diaspora"? Sometimes they do so themselves and deliberately so, as in the Federal Association of Russophone Parents, where Russian-Jewish and Volga German parents have come together as a lobby group.[35] Yet often they go their separate ways, both spatially (Volga Germans in the Berlin districts of Marzahn, Hellersdorf, and Spandau; Jews in Charlottenburg, Wilmersdorf, Schöneberg, and Prenzlauer Berg) and personally (there are few friendships and marriages between the two groups). A social scientist studied the Potsdam district of Bornstedt in the middle of the 1990s: "Close contacts only exist in rare cases, which is why so far there has been no stable cross-group entanglement. Indeed, spatial yet segregated proximity amplifies the perception of social differences, because after all the two immigrant groups are treated differently in legal and social terms. Small or large successes of members of one group are commented on with eagerness to criticize by the other group. Under the pressure of a highly competitive climate in contemporary Germany the often diverging lifestyles are perceived not less starkly, but in fact more acutely. On the Jewish side, the get the same stereotypes are attached to *Spätaussiedler* as to Russians: they 'drink,' they 'are physically violent,' they are 'antisemitic.' The *Aussiedler*, by contrast, readily contest in principle the very right of Jews of Soviet extraction to live in Germany."[36]

Whence the chasm between the two groups? Is it because Soviet Jews were Mercurians, Volga Germans Apollonians? The historian Yuri Slezkine calls modern service nomads Mercurians, sedentary farmers Apollonians. Mercurians are "urban, mobile, literate, articulate, intellectually intricate, physically fastidious, and occupationally flexible." Modernity is the age of the Jews, modernization "is about learning how to cultivate people and symbols, not fields or herds." Modernity signifies education and meritocracy instead of inherited privileges and estate society. Slezkine's conclusion: "Modernization, in other words, means that everyone will become Jewish. [. . .] but no one is better at being Jewish than the Jews themselves. In the age of capital, they are the most creative entrepreneurs; in the age of alienation,

they are the most veteran exiles; and in the age of expertise, they are the most competent specialists."[37]

There is some truth to this. Many Volga Germans did indeed come from agricultural jobs and rural areas on the Volga, in Kazakhstan, or in Siberia. Many Jews are from the urban intelligentsia. But in the Soviet Union there were also unions, alliances, and coalitions that have been forgotten. Thus Gerhard Dick (1896–1998), descendant of a Russian German Mennonite dynasty of beer brewers, and Sophia Dick, who was Jewish, were happily married for 60 years. They were from similar urban milieus, both had been imprisoned in the Gulag, and they were united in the certainty that Soviet power considered them a minority – persecution as a minority in the Soviet Union was a common denominator of Volga Germans and Jews.[38] In other cases the common denominator was that after the collapse of the USSR and renationalization processes the dominant people, for example the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, discriminated in equal measure against Jews and Germans.

At any rate, for both groups the term "mobility" often describes their forms of movement better than does "emigration." They fly back and forth between Munich and Moscow, Hannover and Almaty, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Tel Aviv, and at the border they present the passport of the country they are entering. For Russia and Ukraine allow multiple citizenships. And the Germans silently tolerate this. Marina Weisband, for example, has dual German and Ukrainian citizenship.

Over the past few years another group of Jews in Germany has grown, especially in Berlin: Israelis. Perhaps 10,000 to 20,000 live in the German capital, but counting them isn't easy because many of them have a German or other European passport. A person whose ancestors the Nazis stripped of citizenship is eligible for German citizenship without having to renounce their other citizenship(s) according to Article 116, Paragraph 2 of the Basic Law. Israelis in Berlin are seeking to break out of the relatively parochial small State of Israel, they seek out the sexual diversity of the queer community, and they appreciate the cheaper cost of living and also the possibility of interacting with Palestinians and other Arabs beyond the limits that life in Israel imposes: "Ever since I've been here and living in Neukölln," says Meytal Rozental, "and my neighbors are Turks, Palestinians, Lebanese, people with whom I had no contact before – because I wasn't allowed to have contact – my feeling that life in Israel is very, very confined and very much circumscribed by political factors has become stronger. With whom you are allowed to talk, what you know about others."[39] Since Brexit and Trump, some British and American intellectuals have applied for German passports with media fanfare – it would have been hard to imagine just 10 years ago that Germany after the Shoah might some day become a beacon of political-democratic opposition among Jews worldwide.[40] This proves

once more that the place from where you migrate can become the place you escape to overnight, that the migrants of yesterday are the autochthonous of today, who are the migrants of tomorrow, who are the . . .

A conspicuously high number of the younger Jewish immigrants became active on behalf of refugees in 2015, even though it would appear that all Jews might resent immigration from Arab Muslim countries because it can bring with it antisemitism and terrorism, and not very well-off older Jews of Soviet descent might worry because such incomers would be new competitors for social benefits.[41] In 2016 Dmitrij Kapitelman was asked in an interview: "It's impossible to compare your immigration as an 8-year-old with the arrival of an 8-year-old refugee from Syria. Can you nonetheless imagine how these children must feel?" His response: "I saw the video of the bus that arrived in Heidenau a year ago and had stones hurled at it and was attacked by a mob. There's a small boy there who is about to get off the bus and can't understand what's going on outside. He cries bitterly. Given my experiences, which came at a later age and weren't as brutal, I know that he will never forget this feeling of rejection. [. . .] And after what my family has been through I can but feel empathy and solidarity."[42]

Thus there are refugee charity aid projects sponsored by the Jewish and Muslim student scholarship foundations ELES and Avicenna. Akiva Weingarten, an ELES scholarship student alumnus and now a rabbi, comments: "As human beings we must of course have a sense of responsibility for other people who are suffering. As Jews we have experienced this again and again, and when it took longer until other countries recognized that we are in trouble, it cost us millions of victims." Weingarten can "understand that some people say, 'Yes, but how can we know who is a terrorist and who isn't?' Of course, when we accept millions of people from these countries with open arms, there will be a few terrorists among them. [. . .] But that doesn't mean that we have no responsibility, just because there might be terrorists in this group."[43] Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council, warns of a new, imported antisemitism, but at the same time says about the AfD: "It is a party that stokes fears of minorities. At the moment primarily against Muslims. I am, however, convinced that, when the subject of Muslims is no longer interesting and it would furthermore be politically and socially opportune, then it could easily concern other minorities. Among these I also count Jews."[44] There is an echo here of Marek Lieberberg's concert after Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992: "Today They! Tomorrow You!"

Conclusion

"My mother tongue is Russian, but I would *no way* call myself Russian. [. . .] I don't go to synagogue, don't observe Jewish laws and rituals, know

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neither Hebrew or Yiddish, yet still feel an attachment to the Jewish people. How, what explains this? I don't know. But I also feel attachments to Ukraine and to Germany, the country where my family and I have been living for 13 years, whose language I know quite well and find fascinating and whose citizenship I have, after all. Who am I then? A monster thrown together from very different parts? Or a human being of the future who belongs to several cultures at the same time?"[45] This could be read in an internet forum in 2008. For the writer Lana Lux, who immigrated from Ukraine as a 10-year-old quota refugee in 1996, the "Who am I then?" question also came up. She had become a mother, and suddenly Jewishness was an issue. She and her husband celebrate Shabbat and High Holidays in order to pass on to their daughter elements of Judaism before she gets externally identified as a Jew – before she learns about the Holocaust at school or is confronted with Israeli politics in everyday life.[46]

Jewish quota refugees from the former Soviet Union juggle their own set of attachments. It bears emphasizing – *contra* a common misconception – that these quota refugees are not German Jews who had been expelled in 1933. The vast majority of Soviet Jews are descendants of the Jews who were cramped together in the Tsarist Empire's Polish–Ukrainian–Belorusian Pale of Settlement, who after the Russian Revolution moved to the cities of the USSR and became Russian-Soviet in terms of language and culture. But they also have little in common with the more than 200,000 Russian Jews who in the 1920s populated Berlin-"Charlottengrad," published newspapers and books, and ran theaters and student associations: these were directly from the Pale and predominantly spoke Yiddish.[47] They also have little in common culturally and linguistically with the locals of the German postwar Jewish communities, for these were descendants of the Polish Jews in the DP camps after the Second World War. If they resemble anyone, the quota refugees most resemble the several thousand Soviet Jews who came in the 1970s – the Berlin writer Friedrich Gorenstein, for example, or the Jewish Russians around Radio Liberty/Free Europe in Munich.

Judaism and Jewishness are notoriously difficult to pin down. If religion isn't practiced in some form, if no one marries within the Jewish community and there are no converts to Judaism, it will disappear some day. Secular Jews too complain about this: Judaism will have been annihilated through assimilation, in retrospect Hitler will have won after all.[48] That is why it was important for Belkin to convert to religious Judaism even though in his family only his father is Jewish. Circumcision to him was particularly important in this: "Circumcision to me meant the repairing of something that had been violently interrupted. Not just by the Nazis, not just by the Soviets, not just by the twentieth century. It was the course of life itself, and

now it had been repaired. It had begun with my father's love for my mother and was reconstituted through my marriage with Lyuda, our emigration, Mark's birth, and now this covenant. We'll see about the rest."[49]

One aspect of the Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union is that the Jewish religion is again practiced more openly and less dominated by anxiety in Germany. The same kind of openness can be observed with Islam. Both are positive developments. It is to be hoped that some day it will no longer be necessary to have policemen in front of synagogues. And that mosques continue moving into the city centers from where they are now, hidden away in the most distant corners of the industrial estates. Perhaps the time has come to consider introducing general, non-Christian religious holidays? How about at least one holiday for the other two Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Islam? Christianity is historically so prominent in the Federal Republic's festive culture that for instance Lana Lux considers Christmas "irritating": "There are a lot of people who don't celebrate Christmas and they are also part of society. [. . .] I've got the feeling [. . .] that we somehow get run over."[50] A Jewish (and Muslim) religious holiday per year on which everyone in Germany takes a day off could mitigate this feeling.

Apart from that, it is very specific, job market-related, economic and social policy questions that are at the top of the list of many Jewish quota refugees. It is important to them that academic degrees be recognized more easily and faster. That the glass ceiling in Germany's Jewish institutions starts crumbling so they can move up into leading positions. That the glass ceiling in non-Jewish institutions starts crumbling and the general public becomes accustomed to museum directors, professors, and politicians who speak with an accent. That they get put on equal footing with the Volga Germans insofar as the recognition of work done in the Soviet Union for German pensions is concerned, for poverty in old age is widespread among them.[51]

But there is room for symbolic improvement. Symbolic empowerment is also the express goal of the website www.rentajew.org, through which one can invite a Jewish person as speaker: "For contemporary Jewry," says Lea Simon, "it is essential to get across to non-Jews that there are still living Jews around today. And very diverse ones indeed. This can be done through an action like 'Rent a Jew.' You can rent a Jew/Jewess. The title is pretty provocative, just the idea that one can rent another human being. But the concept behind it is what counts. We need visibility for the fact that there are very different people with very different biographical trajectories. Not all Jews are dead or Israelis. And suddenly they are again like you and me. Plus Jewish."[52]