**Reclaiming Agency through Conversation: Life Narrative Interviews of German-speaking Jews in Israel**

Palestine, or later Israel, is the country that welcomed us, that saved us. I am grateful for that. But what I will always miss in the land of “milk and honey” are the white and purple lilacs. And chestnut avenues.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The above quote comes from Cary Kloetzel. Born in Berlin in 1919, Kloetzel grew up in the Weimar Republic and witnessed the rise of National Socialism. Her family managed to escape the antisemitic regime and emigrate to British Mandate Palestine in the 1930s. Despite economic hardship, geopolitical tensions, wars, and the vast cultural differences between the nascent Jewish state and her country of origin, Kloetzel adapted to her new environment and became an Israeli. Even so, Kloetzel could not erase her background. Instead, her ties to German culture remained part of her identity, now as a German-speaking Jew (yekke/yekkete) in Israel. It is this dichotomy that she expressed in the quote.

Kloetzel is one of sixteen yekkes interviewed by journalist and author Andrea von Treuenfeld in 2009, and these interviews form the basis of a book published in 2011.[[2]](#footnote-2) Von Treuenfeld’s book is one of a number of similar works by German and Israeli (mostly lay) historians who, during the 1990s and 2000s, conducted interviews with yekkes in an attempt to preserve for posterity[[3]](#footnote-3) the unique stories of the aging men and women. For systematic historical research, the use of oral testimonies poses manifold methodological challenges. At the same time, the interviews offer a fascinating window into a bygone world. They are even more valuable now as most first-generation yekkes have passed away and the opportunity to interview this unique population diminishes with time. Against this backdrop, this article utilizes von Treuenfeld’s book as a case study to investigate whether and how such works can be used for systematic historical research. These oral history interviews, I argue, offer a rare perspective on the ways in which yekkes negotiate their affiliations and loyalties between Germany and Israel, between Germanness and Israeliness.

The early historiography of German-speaking Jews in Israel has made use of yekke oral testimonies to establish these immigrants’ contributions to state and society. Such scholars mostly employed interviews uncritically to elicit historical facts or to embellish their own texts with anecdotes.[[4]](#footnote-5) In contrast, a small number of recent studies have used oral testimonies more critically. At the same time, these studies have paid little attention to how individuals construct their own life stories, an issue that occupies a prominent place in debates about oral testimony.[[5]](#footnote-6) In a pioneering study, Guy Miron analyzed forty yekke autobiographies to investigate how these authors experienced the historical ruptures and upheavals of their lives and the ways in which public discourses and collective memories shaped their recollections. Miron’s study contributes to our understanding of the interviews conducted by von Treuenfeld. Autobiographies, however, differ in important ways from oral testimonies, as I will discuss.[[6]](#footnote-7) A closer look at the yekke interviews also provides an opportunity to reflect on the use of these sources more generally. Scholars specializing in oral history are often reluctant to use materials collected by others, preferring instead to conduct their own interviews.[[7]](#footnote-8) Yet with the growth of easily accessible online archives, the question of how researchers can critically incorporate already existing testimonies into their research is becoming increasingly important. Accordingly, the study of yekke interview collections can enhance our understanding of their specific history by focusing on individual narratives and at the same time contribute to the debates surrounding the use of oral history archival sources more generally.

I begin with a discussion of the challenges and opportunities of using these interviews as sources for historical analysis and proceed to examine the narratives that emerge from these interviews by focusing on the different stages of the interviewees’ life stories.

**The Yekke Interviews as Oral History**

The testimonies collected by von Treuenfeld and others are part of the now well-developed field of oral history. Oral history became established as a historical discipline in the 1970s, and early scholars embraced oral testimony as a credible source for reconstructing historical events or processes. Since then, fierce criticism from colleagues and new insights into the workings of human memory have led to lively and fruitful methodological debates.[[8]](#footnote-9) Today, few historians use testimonies to establish historical facts. Rather, they ask what such materials can tell us about the functions of historical memory and the ways in which individuals create an acceptable self by telling stories about themselves. In talking about their lives, people construct coherent life stories, a version of themselves that they can live with comfortably; in doing so, Graham Dawson has argued, they try to achieve a sense of composure.[[9]](#footnote-10) For this reason, oral historians often ask their respondents to narrate their lives rather than pose questions about specific issues or periods.[[10]](#footnote-11)

Memories are not stable but in constant flux, influenced and reshaped by later developments and public debates. Subjective experiences do not always fit neatly with collective memories and sometimes contradict them. In creating coherent life histories, individuals must deal with these tensions and can either choose to adapt their own memories accordingly or to resist and contest public discourses. Against this background, oral history interviews provide an opportunity to explore the interactions and tensions between collective and individual memory.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Seen from this perspective, oral history interviews share much in common with autobiographies. Oral history interviews also reveal attempts to create coherent life stories, and scholars critically scrutinize these sources for their narratives. At the same time, oral testimonies display distinct differences from autobiographical writings. While the latter tend to be carefully crafted and authors often spend years writing and revising, interviews create a more dynamic, ad hoc situation. Respondents are required to organize their life stories and decide spontaneously what is important enough to tell. To be sure, this is not to argue that oral testimonies are somehow more authentic memories. Many of the anecdotes that make up a life story have been told and retold many times before. But the spontaneity of an interview situation tends to produce rawer narratives, including contradictions and unfinished thoughts. Moreover, oral history interviews are usually considerably shorter than autobiographies and force the interviewees to produce a more condensed version of their narrative selves. Therefore, argues Luisa Passerini, oral expressions often create a more stable or “fixed” identity than what we find in autobiographies, which center on the development of the individual and their character.[[12]](#footnote-13) In addition, Alessandro Portelli has emphasized the difference in authority between memoirs and oral histories. The interviews are initiated and conducted by the interviewer, often with people who would not otherwise speak, let alone write an autobiography.[[13]](#footnote-14) Indeed, only one of the interviewees in von Treuenfeld’s book, Esther Golan, had previously published her memoirs.[[14]](#footnote-15)

Finally, interviews are conversations. While autobiographers may have specific audiences in mind during the writing process, the interview is a direct dialogue with a concrete interlocutor. Much of the dynamic depends not only on the interviewee, but also on the interviewer and the relationship between the two. In fact, oral historians are increasingly taking the interview situation into account in their analysis. While earlier works mainly focused on the interviewee’s answers, scholars now discuss the interviewer’s role and their influence on the creative process, the oral testimonies themselves,[[15]](#footnote-16) and published interviews such as the yekke works. Scholars dealing with such volumes have little knowledge of the interviewing process, the conversations that take place before and after the interview, and the personal interactions between interviewer and interviewee. What is more, the texts are normally not verbatim transcriptions of the interviews but have been edited and refined. Mostly, authors do not specify which questions the interviewers asked and if or how they intervened and made specific inquiries. As anthropologist Judith Oakley pointedly put it, “Interviewing is rather like marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets.”[[16]](#footnote-17)

Nevertheless, we can try to uncover some of the underlying parameters of this discussion in our concrete case study. The great advantage of von Treuenfeld's book is that she questioned her interviewees. She may have asked questions when necessary for her own understanding, but she did not try to steer the interviewees in any direction. She edited the interviews as little as possible and maintained the interviewees' word choice and sentence structure in order to “preserve their authenticity.”[[17]](#footnote-18) These methods create life narratives that allow us to draw conclusions about the biographic self-understanding and -depiction of the respondents.

Von Treuenfeld is a non-Jewish German who came to Israel as a volunteer in the 1970s and became fascinated by the yekkes. For decades she did not feel comfortable asking German-speaking Jews to tell her their life stories, but by the early 2000s, she knew that these stories would soon be irrevocably lost.[[18]](#footnote-19) As her background makes clear, von Treuenfeld did not collect the testimonies out of historical curiosity but as a German with a historical responsibility for the fate of the interviewees. Günter Jauch, a popular German television host beloved by the yekkes, makes this point in the preface to von Treuenfeld's study. Jauch expresses his hope that the book will help “to preserve the memory of the most horrible chapter of our history.”[[19]](#footnote-20)

Von Treuenfeld found the respondents through newspaper ads and similar means. She did not know them beforehand. The interviews were conducted in German and published in Germany for a German audience.[[20]](#footnote-21) Consequently, to the interviewees, von Treuenfeld represented a broader German (non-Jewish) public. It was not the first contact the yekkes had experienced with Germany after the war; most of them had been to their former homes, and many reported several encounters with Germans. Some had participated in long-standing German-Israeli exchanges. Against this background, the interviews can be interpreted as part of a wider German-Jewish dialogue. Although the interviewees do not address this openly, they typically refer to von Treuenfeld as German. Often, they found it necessary to explain the basic facts of Israeli society to their interlocutor, such as the social divisions between European Jews and those from North Africa and the Middle East.[[21]](#footnote-22) At times, the interviewees allude to the fact that von Treuenfeld is not from the region, as in Cary Kloetzel's description of the “oriental atmosphere” she encountered when she arrived in Jerusalem, observing Arabs in tents and their camels alongside. “Can you imagine that?” she asks her interviewer, assuming this is not a familiar site to von Treuenfeld.[[22]](#footnote-23) Finally, Ahuva Salant addresses the interviewer directly in a passage about migrant workers in Germany today: “How they treated us Jews....so terribly,” she exclaims. “What have the Germans gotten for us? Migrant workers—are they more cultured people? What kind of exchange did **you** make? [my emphasis]”[[23]](#footnote-24) Salant’s use of the personal pronoun in this context highlights her perception of von Treuenfeld as representative of the German people.

At the same time, the interviewees are in conversation with Israeli society. We can assume they have told many of these stories before, perhaps to their children and grandchildren, some of whom accompanied them on heritage trips to Germany. Their narratives were also shaped by these encounters. At the time of the interviews, all the yekkes had been living in Israel for many decades and, accordingly, recalled their life stories in conjunction with their current living environment. This is expressed in many statements in which the interviewees draw comparisons between their first years in the country and present-day Israel. For example, Chaja Florentin recalls the many hardships she and her family faced during their first years in Palestine. Despite these difficulties, she compares those days favorably to present-day Israel. “Today,” said Florentin, “everyone is materially oriented. In the past, there was nothing like that here. We did not eat caviar, but we did not starve. And we had joy in our hearts, which is the most important thing, and help from everyone. Anyone who could help, helped.”[[24]](#footnote-25) Moreover, as this study shows, the yekkes’ recollections of the past draw on and respond to public debates in Israel. Consequently, the interviews should be understood as a trialogue of the interviewees with both Germans and Israelis.

**The Plot**

Prior to 1933, few German Jews immigrated to Palestine. While Imperial Germany had been an important pillar of the Zionist organization, and the German-speaking world produced a number of influential Zionist activists, the vast majority of German Jews were not active in the movement and did not consider emigrating to Palestine, even as Jewish settlement efforts in the area gained momentum after World War I. German Jews were by and large acculturated into German society and saw themselves as full members of the German nation. This did not change until the 1930s. To be sure, antisemitism had previously been central and pervasive in German culture and society, but the rise of the National Socialists with their virulent antisemitism and the gradual exclusion and persecution of the Jewish population represented a new quality of the phenomenon. Between 1933 and 1941, nearly 55,000 Jews from Germany fled the Nazi regime for Palestine.[[25]](#footnote-26)

The interviewees were part of the wave of emigrants who left the Third Reich in the 1930s. In some respects, the group that von Treuenfeld interviewed is quite heterogeneous. The interviewees all came from different geographical parts of Germany, some from large cities, others from small towns. Several of the interviewees describe a long family history in Germany. Others were born to parents who had recently immigrated to Germany from East Central Europe. A few of the interviewees came from a religious background, but most had grown up without much connection to Jewish religion and tradition. After arriving in Palestine, the interviewees took different paths. Some moved to large cities such as Haifa or Jerusalem; others went to small agricultural settlements or kibbutzim.

In other respects, however, the group is homogeneous. The interviewees are all women born between 1909 and 1930. They experienced the Nazi regime as children, adolescents, or young adults. While they endured many hardships in their new home in Palestine or Israel, none of the interviewees remigrated to Germany or emigrated to a third country. They have all become Israelis. They belong to what Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos have called a social generation that mobilizes the same discourses of self-identification.[[26]](#footnote-27) While the sixteen women are not a representative sample of German Jews in Israel, their similar backgrounds and life trajectories indicate that they all witnessed the same public debates and became part of the same memory culture. Seen from this perspective, the interviews constitute a great opportunity to investigate the interplay between individual and collective memories.

In this regard, it is striking that, despite von Treuenfeld’s minimal interventions, all the interviewees’ responses are structured in a similar way. They begin with the subject’s childhood in Germany and continue with the increasing persecution under the Nazis. The interviewees move on to describe their flight to Palestine and their life in the State of Israel. At the end of the interview, they deal with their current attitudes and feelings towards Germany and Germans. The main plot, which structures the interviews, is the rupture in the interviewees' lives caused by persecution and displacement. Yet despite these drastic upheavals, all the interviewees present what Mary and Kenneth Gergen have described as “progressive narratives” in which the narrators successfully overcome obstacles and adapt to new realities.[[27]](#footnote-28)

**Lost Homeland**

Each interview begins with a recollection of life in Germany. The descriptions of the former homeland vary in length, some very detailed, others only a few lines. What is striking is that all focus heavily on their family’s relationships with their non-Jewish surroundings and the extent to which antisemitism shaped Jewish life. While some interviewees talk about antisemitic incidents before 1933, most describe a rather placid life and good relations with both Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors. This changes radically with the rise Nazism in 1933. At this point the interviewees turn to accounts of discrimination and persecution. The yekkes describe the gradual exclusion of their families from German society and the increasing problems and challenges they faced in their daily lives. In addition to recounting the hardships and injustices, many of the interviewees mock the absurdity of some of the policies and new regulations. For example, Sara Singer said that everyone in her school had to raise their hands for the Nazi salute even though both teachers and students were exclusively Jewish.[[28]](#footnote-29) Such anecdotes underscore the ludicrousness of Nazi ideology in the eyes of the yekkes and mark the great difference in living conditions before 1933. The erasure of hostility and anti-Semitism from the respondents’ memories of the Weimar Republic emphasizes their perception that the rise of National Socialism was the turning point at which a former paradise was lost.

Even for the period after January 1933, however, the narratives do not paint a one-dimensional picture. Contrary to oversimplified views of Jewish life in Nazi Germany, many narrators describe the ups and downs of their families’ lives and the difficult decision-making processes involved in deciding whether to stay or go. They point to the various factors that played a role in these considerations such as the socioeconomic situation of the family, social networks, availability of visas, or unfamiliarity with other cultures and languages.[[29]](#footnote-30) Jewish life in the 1930s, as many of the interviews show, did not deteriorate steadily but was marked by different periods, some of which seemed to promise a certain stability. It also becomes clear that the new regime affected families differently, depending on their individual backgrounds and situations. Shula Cohen, for example, mentions that during the first years of the new regime, her father’s factory managed to recover from the economic crisis and thrive.[[30]](#footnote-31) Age was also an important factor in how individuals experienced this period. Most of the interviewees witnessed National Socialism as children. Despite the many hardships, some of them remark that they had a good childhood. When Aliza Falk’s parents were forced to leave Berlin in 1933, they opened a guesthouse for Jews in the small Brandenburg town of Woltersdorf. Aliza and her brother, she said, did not have a room of their own but slept under the roof. Her father stayed with neighbors. “Nevertheless,” she said, “the time in Woltersdorf was wonderful for us children. We had enormous freedom.”[[31]](#footnote-32)

And yet, at some point, even this temporary relief came to an end. Many interviewees describe a specific incident that stood out and caused the families to leave the country. Chaja Florentin, for example, recalls the murder of her father’s friend in a bar as such a turning point.[[32]](#footnote-33) Many of them present Kristallnacht as a critical moment, especially in cases where fathers were imprisoned in concentration camps as a result.[[33]](#footnote-34) It is questionable whether individual experiences categorically stood out as single defining moments. More likely, they were the final push in a long and difficult process of decision-making. In the narratives, these “conversion experiences”[[34]](#footnote-35) come to symbolize the final and definitive break with Germany.

Beyond their individual dimension, these accounts of Jewish life in the 1930s can be read as a response to later Israeli debates in which German Jews were accused of failing to grasp the true nature of the Nazi regime and passively accepting their tormentors’ decrees rather than emigrating as soon as possible. The yekkes interviewed are clearly aware of these debates. Many mention that they were embarrassed to speak German on the streets of Israel in the 1940s and 1950s. Hilde Hoffmann openly refers to the emotional scars she received from these discourses. During her time in trade school in the late 1940s, she had many yekke friends whose families had managed to bring some of their household furniture with them from Germany. When her own family left after Kristallnacht, they were unable to take anything with them and had to make do with “the cheapest furniture from Yaffa.” Embarrassed by this, she did not want her friends to visit her, fearing they would understand from the interior of her apartment that her family had left Germany at the last minute. “Why,” she recalls the questions swirling in the mind of her former self, “were we so stupid not to see [what was going on, DM]?”[[35]](#footnote-36) A few pages later, Hoffmann mentions the changes in Israeli discourse brought about by the public trials of former SS member Obersturmbannführer and Adolf Eichmann, the central organizer of the Holocaust. As a result of the Eichmann trial in 1961, the Israeli public heard many testimonies from victims of the genocide. This, says Hoffmann, was particularly important for German Jews. “They [the Israeli public] always said: How could you let them treat you like sheep and not fight back? For the first time, they heard that this was wrong. That there was resistance.”[[36]](#footnote-37)

Other interviewees do not directly address the accusation of passivity but use anecdotes to highlight forms of everyday resistance. Elly Freund, who was already a student and married in the 1930s, describes how she and her husband did not want to give up the enjoyment of culture and attended the Berlin State Opera even though Jews were forbidden to attend cultural events. When Freund passed her medical exams, the young couple celebrated by going to the movies.[[37]](#footnote-38) Shula Cohen’s mother regularly took her to eat cake in a café despite the sign on the door forbidding Jews to enter,[[38]](#footnote-39) and Aliza Falk rode her bicycle right through a cordon of SS men on Berlin’s central boulevard, Unter den Linden, openly wearing a large Star of David necklace.[[39]](#footnote-40)

Another dimension of the interviews that stands out in this context is the rebellious character that many of the women ascribe to themselves and the tensions this caused with their parents.[[40]](#footnote-41) These girls joined Zionist youth organizations and prepared for life in Palestine, often against the explicit will of their parents. While such stories reflect the generational differences in dealing with Nazi persecution, they also reflect an important symbolic dimension. In their inability to comprehend the changing times, parents embodied the lost world of German Jews. These parents—and especially the fathers—were so deeply embedded in German culture and society that they were unable to leave everything behind and start a new life in Palestine. The most tragic example of this tendency is Hilde Hoffmann’s father. He refused to emigrate from Germany until he was arrested during Kristallnacht and imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp. After his release, the family managed to flee the Third Reich, eventually reaching Palestine. But according to Hoffmann, her father never came to terms with the profound changes in his life. In 1951, he returned to Germany to reclaim the family's property. While in his old homeland, he fell ill and died. The family decided to bury him there. “Germany,” she concludes, “was his country, and he returned to it.”[[41]](#footnote-42) Author Luisa Passerini noted that female interviewees often use the rebel stereotype allegorically, expressing not only “problems of identity in the context of a social order oppressive to women,” but also “a sense of otherness, and hence of directing oneself to current and future changes.”[[42]](#footnote-43) In this vein, while many parents remain trapped in the old world, the rebellious daughters successfully transitioned to new environments.

While the reflections on Germany marks grave ruptures in the women’s lives, it also allows the protagonists to present themselves as actively coping with exclusion and persecution and ultimately taking control of their destinies.

**Pioneers and State Builders**

The transition to life in Palestine was anything but easy. Many of the interviewees reported serious difficulties in obtaining visas and perilous journeys to escape the Nazi regime. Some parents had to make difficult choices, such as whether to give their visas to friends in need.[[43]](#footnote-44) Others had to leave their grandparents behind, not knowing if they would ever see them again (often they would not).[[44]](#footnote-45) Many of the families did not travel directly to Palestine but via several stops in Europe, the Middle East, and even Shanghai. Once in Palestine, they encountered adverse living conditions, problems with the British authorities, violent clashes with Arab insurgents in the 1930s and 40s, and finally the turmoil of war in 1948.

One of the challenges was the deterioration of the socioeconomic status of the interviewees. Many of them came from middle-class backgrounds. While some began their academic studies in Germany, most left before they could enter university.[[45]](#footnote-46) In Palestine, the new immigrants often had to work in manual jobs either in the city or on farms to make a living. Many of the women regretted not having the opportunity to study. Hilde Hoffmann, for example, laments the fact that she could not go to university and therefore felt "like a little silly" all her life. This was even more painful when she compared herself to her husband, a successful lawyer.[[46]](#footnote-47) Several women took jobs they would not have been willing to do in Europe, such as Hanna Blitzer who temporarily worked as a cleaning lady.[[47]](#footnote-48) “If I would have stayed in Germany,” Lore Wolf is sure, “I would have become a doctor.” She quickly adds, “I never shed a single tear about leaving Germany, I was always happy and content here.”[[48]](#footnote-49) But the thought of what life might have been like underscores the gravity of the transition she and others had to make.

On the other hand, life in Israel led to a softening of bourgeois gender roles. In agricultural settlements and in many other settings, both sexes worked in similar jobs, and in the face of rising tensions with the local Arab population, both men and women had to guard their villages and kibbutzim. “In those days,” Miriam Bettelheim notes, “everyone knew how to use a rifle.”[[49]](#footnote-50) In the early 1940s, some of the women worked for the British army, and in 1948 they fought in the Arab-Israeli War. In this context, it is noticeable how little the women talk about parenthood. While all of them mention the birth of their children, they do so mostly in passing, to refer to changes in their professional careers or to hardships they overcame. Elly Freund reflects self-critically on her neglect of her son. “I think,” she concludes, “that to this day he has not forgotten that his mother always worked, and that she preferred her work. That is also the reason why I have only one son.”[[50]](#footnote-51) This is not to say that their offspring are not important to the respondents. Many talk about their children and grandchildren in a different context, as we will see. In this part of their life narratives, however, the women focus strongly on their struggle to build a new life for themselves.

Beyond physical and economic survival, this struggle included integration into the emerging state and society. As noted above, German Jews who fled the Nazi regime in the 1930s were met with a lack of understanding and even hostility for not having left earlier. They also encountered suspicion regarding their ideological commitment to the Zionist project. Indeed, few of the interviewees describe themselves or their families as Zionists before 1933. Miriam Bettelheim notes that her father turned to Jewish nationalism after the death of Theodor Herzl,[[51]](#footnote-52) and Esther Herlitz’s father was the founder of the Zionist World Archive in the 1920s.[[52]](#footnote-53) Most others, in contrast, explicitly note that their families had not embraced Jewish nationalism. While all of them clearly identify as Israelis today—with varying degrees of ideological fervor—they do not hide the difficulties they have faced in adjusting to this new reality.

Hostility and suspicion encountered as German Jews in the 1940s and 1950s were not the only challenges that integration posed. Their own way of life and values, not all of which they were willing to abandon, also proved difficult for the women. Stereotypical yekke traits such as punctuality, honesty, and commitment are often mentioned. Some traits had to be adapted to the new environment, but others were proudly kept and even passed on to the following generations. Hilde Hoffmann, for example, notes with satisfaction that not only did she raise her children “strictly according to the yekkes’ way,” but so did her daughter. “They always told us,” she said, referring to a comment her daughter made about education, “that children should be seen at the [kitchen] table, but not heard.”[[53]](#footnote-54) Sometimes such comments about the yekke mindset take on an ironic or critical undertone. Hilde Hoffmann, for example, remarks that her father was always silent about his experiences in Buchenwald. In the course of his release, he signed papers stating that he would not speak about the concentration camp. “And as a good German,” she adds, “he kept his word.”[[54]](#footnote-55) As noted above, Hoffmann’s father was never able to integrate into Israeli society. Her biting commentary on his refusal to betray German values, even if it meant reducing them to absurdity, points to his inability to break free from the past and start a new life. A very different case is that of Hanna Blitzer, who did not feel at home in Israel until she started writing German poetry. “Today,” she exclaims, “I feel like an Israeli. Certainly not as a German, I never wanted to go back.”[[55]](#footnote-56)

What these interviews disclose, then, are descriptions of individual paths of integration and the balancing act between adapting to new values and cultures, that is, becoming a new Israeli Jew on the one hand and retaining some of the cultural affiliations of their upbringing on the other. Focusing on the ways in which they overcame adverse conditions and hardships helps the women deal with the tremendous upheavals of the 1930s and 1940s. They move from being persecuted objects to active subjects. Moreover, by highlighting their own contributions to Israel’s emerging state and society, they inscribe themselves into the Zionist narrative.[[56]](#footnote-57) The women may not have been ardent supporters of the Zionist cause in Germany, but they became pioneers in Palestine and thus earned their rightful place in Israeli society.

**Coming to Terms with Their Germanness**

All of the yekkes interviewed are still attached to German culture and language in some way. Beyond cultural attachments, the interviewees also discuss their attitudes toward the current German state and society. The women talk about their first contacts with non-Jewish Germans after the war, their visits to the country, and their feelings toward the land of their birth. Individual interviewees describe very different encounters and emotions. Yet despite the diversity of their personal stories, it becomes clear how drastic the experience of persecution and flight was for all of them and how central these memories remain to their lives and self-understanding in the present.

Many of the women express deep ambivalence about post-war Germany. They acknowledge that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) is different from its predecessor and that Germans born after the war are not responsible for the actions of the Nazi regime.[[57]](#footnote-58) At the same time, many convey fears about historical continuities and wonder how much Germans have really changed. Some recount antisemitic incidents during their travels,[[58]](#footnote-59) others describe conflicted feelings they had when presenting their German passports at the border,[[59]](#footnote-60) and many speak of their deep suspicion of Germans their age and nagging thoughts about what they might have done during the war.[[60]](#footnote-61)

Oda Kissinger is one of the interviewees who openly expresses negative feelings about post-war Germany. She calls the German reparations payments to Holocaust survivors a mockery and is critical of those Jews who returned to Germany after the war, “swallowing their pride and having a nice life.” Her first visit to the former homeland was a disaster, leading to a nervous breakdown. While she coped better after her husband joined her on the next visit, she remained very distant and suspicious of postwar Germans. “I don't believe them, they just pretend [to have changed].”[[61]](#footnote-62) Others convey more positive feelings and recount significant encounters with Germans. Miriam Bettelheim, for example, nearly fainted when she crossed the border into West Germany for the first time. But when she arrived at her destination in Mannheim, her host greeted her and her husband with a meal and Jewish prayer books: It was the evening of the Jewish New Year. “And then something inside me collapsed,” she says of her reaction to this warm hospitality.[[62]](#footnote-63) Indeed, many of the interviewees describe their encounters with Germans after the war as facilitating a personal process of cautious rapprochement. Esther Herzlitz, for example, refused to return to Germany for many years. When she finally did, in her capacity as an Israeli parliamentarian, she “could not utter a single German word.” Through her visits and encounters, however, she was able to overcome her negative feelings and actively promote the exchange of German and Israeli women, a project for which she was later awarded the Order of Merit of the FRG.[[63]](#footnote-64)

For some of the women, the rupture was profound precisely because they had felt so strongly German in the past. Decades later, this sentiment continues to haunt the women. Chaja Florentin expresses her inability to understand “how such a cultured country as Germany” could have committed such atrocities. “It remains incomprehensible. Why? What did we do wrong? We led a very normal, solid life [...] To whom did we do something bad? I will never forget. Never forget, never forgive.” After expressing such hard feelings, she tells her interviewer that she will not return to Germany. “I almost never speak German either,” she adds. “My husband does not speak German, nor do my children, grandchildren, or five great-grandchildren. Even with Mimi, with whom I have been friends for over 85 years, I speak Ivrit.” Florentin then goes on to mention, almost in passing, that she watches the German version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* hosted by the aforementioned Günter Jauch and has even met Jauch in person at Meersand, a cafe in Tel Aviv.[[64]](#footnote-65) Were it not for this casual comment about Jauch and their meeting, the reader would have to conclude that German culture and language play an insignificant role in Florentin’s daily life. The anecdote, however, is telling. Meersand is known as much for its German-style coffee and cake as for its yekke customers. According to a 2008 article by Israeli journalist Shay Feldman, Forentin and her friend Mimi Frons were part of a hard-core group of elderly yekke ladies who met almost daily at the cafe and often discussed Jauch’s show. Jauch’s visit was therefore anything but a coincidence. He read about the women and their admiration for him in a German newspaper. The article noted with amazement the women's attachment to the culture of their upbringing, in some ways “preserving a part of German culture even more than I am used to at home.”[[65]](#footnote-66) In the interview with von Treuenfeld, Florentin gives the impression that she is far removed from any German culture, but the reality seems to be quite different. Her continued attachment to German culture and language seems difficult to accept.[[66]](#footnote-67)

It is interesting to note that Jauch and his show come up repeatedly in the interviews. In Hilde Hoffmann's account, a mention of the show draws attention to her continued attachment to German culture. She acknowledges that there is a similar Israeli show, but when she watches the German version, she can answer more of the questions even though she has lived in Israel for decades. Hoffmann attributes this to the fact that she went to school in Germany and “also to the fact that my parents were completely German. It was not just the language, it was the culture, it was everything. I went to the opera for the first time when I was nine.”[[67]](#footnote-68) Shoshanna Friedländer, whose family lived in the small town of Witzenhausen for 400 years before the Nazis drove them out, expresses a different motivation for watching Jauch. In her interview, she voices a deep resentment of Germany and is puzzled how any Israeli Jew could consider living there. “I understand if you don't want to live in Israel,” she proclaims. “It's difficult and sometimes not moral. Go to Honolulu—but not to Germany!” In the next paragraph, however, she admits to watching Jauch's show. “I watch it,” she explains, “because I want to prove to myself how much I know about what Günther Jauch asks—and that's a lot. Then I don't understand why the Germans sitting there don't know. It's elementary knowledge. We may be farmers, but we speak three languages, we read and listen in three languages.”[[68]](#footnote-69) For Friedländer, part of the thrill of watching the show seems to be proving to herself that she is better than the Germans.[[69]](#footnote-70) In this way, Jauch and his show symbolize the yekkes’ multifaceted reckoning with their German roots.

The centrality of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* is a reminder that the interviews are conversations that have a German audience. Most Israelis would not have recognized Jauch, and it is likely his show would not have been discussed in an Israeli context as much as it was in the conversations with von Treuenfeld. This is also true of another statement that recurs in the interviews. Many of the women emphasize that they do not see themselves as Germans and that they could not imagine emigrating to Germany. “I would certainly have stayed in Germany if Hitler had not existed,” says Herta Proter. “But to live in Germany today—no!”[[70]](#footnote-71) For many Israelis, the question would not even arise, and in a similar collection of interviews conducted by Israeli and American historians Gideon Greif, Colin McPherson, and Laurence Weinbaum, only two interviewees address the issue of remigration.[[71]](#footnote-72) Von Treuenfeld did not ask her interviewees whether they would consider living in Germany,[[72]](#footnote-73) but the high frequency with which the women mention this suggests that earlier German interviewers may have asked such questions. Their statements make it clear that the interviews should not be understood as isolated conversations but as part of a broader German-Jewish dialogue.

In addition to the German-Jewish dialogue, conversations with subsequent Israeli generations play an important role in the interviewees coming to terms with their Germanness. It is in this context that the women talk most about their descendants. Often they mention their sons and daughters when talking about visits to post-war Germany and the places of their own childhood. Sometimes it is their children and grandchildren who ask to see the places where their parents grew up, like Sara Singer’s children did when she traveled with them to her hometown of Dortmund in 2001.[[73]](#footnote-74) In other instances, the women emphasize the significance of such trips for themselves. Esther Golan, for example, describes a visit to her hometown of Glogau (now Głogów in Poland) in 1989. “Then I could show him [my son].” She relates the following:

Where the tree is, there was a house. That's where I was born. Where the grass grows, there was a house in which we were all together, the whole family. And where there is nothing, there was the synagogue. Before, I always had the feeling that the donkey had lost me in the gallop, but now my son knew where I came from. That helped me a lot because now he understood what was bothering me—growing up an orphan and always having to live my life alone.[[74]](#footnote-75)

For Golan, the trip to Glogau with her son closed a circle. By seeing with his own eyes the places where she grew up, her son could now better understand his mother. In this way, the visit helped to bridge the ruptured gap in Golan's own life as well as the gap between the generations.

Continuity is a central aspect of the anecdotes that speak about offspring. Toward the end of the interviews, several women talk about their children and grandchildren, their achievements, their service in the Israeli military, and other aspects of their lives. The children and grandchildren provide proof that the Nazis did not succeed in wiping out their families.[[75]](#footnote-76) Aliza Frank, for example, immediately after a passage in which she talks about the fate and murder of her relatives who remained in Germany, ends her interview with a reference to her offspring: “Today I have two sons, seven grandchildren, six great-grandchildren—this is my family. There is a beautiful expression for this in Hebrew: The chain has not yet been broken.”[[76]](#footnote-77) Hilde Hoffmann, whose father was unable to adjust to the new life in Israel and died tragically during a visit to Germany, regrets that he did not live to see “what a wonderful family I have rebuilt with children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.”[[77]](#footnote-78) To Hoffmann, her offspring underscores her success in doing what her father failed to do. Not only did she become Israeli, but her family continues to thrive in the country. Similar to Oda Kissinger, her offspring reaffirms her Israeliness: “My home is here today. I am an absolute Israeli today, with German roots. If I had children here and the children have been in the military and the grandchildren are in the military today, if I have gone through enough in this country, then I feel at home here today.”[[78]](#footnote-79)

The women's encounter with postwar Germans and Germany is not merely a visit to their former homeland but part of a process through which they attempt to come to terms with their past, the great rupture of persecution, and the Holocaust. The women succeed to varying degrees. Some, like Kissinger, remain bitter and unreconciled. In other narratives, such as Florentin’s, divided feelings toward the old homeland and culture are highly palpable. Still others, like Bettelheim, insist that they have drawn a line under the past. “I decided early on,” she explains, “that there was no point in dwelling on the past. The past is dead, we live in the present and the future.”[[79]](#footnote-80) Today, they all conclude, they have become Israelis. Here, too, the level of identification with their new home varies. Some stress their emotional attachment to the state and society and their pride in the contributions of German Jews to this endeavor; others seem less enthusiastic, stating only that Israel was the state that provided them a safe haven. All note being influenced to one degree or another by both cultures. In this regard, after emphasizing her Israeliness, Kissinger continues: “But when I hear there’s a German play, I run to it. Goethe, Schiller, Lessing, I bought them for our library. I grew up with German culture, and it's in me. I have stayed a yekkete and I will always be one. Until my last breath.”[[80]](#footnote-81)

**Conclusions: Reclaiming Agency**

The beginning of this article points out some of the challenges of working with the yekke interviews published by Treuenfeld and several other authors. After doing this work, however, it has become clear that such testimonies are valuable historical sources. For my own analysis, it was particularly useful that von Treuenfeld conducted life history interviews and tried to stay as close as possible to the spoken word when publishing the testimonies. She did not reproduce silences, repetitions, stutterings, feelings of embarrassment, laughter, or other utterances. Nevertheless, the reader can glean some things from the interviews.

At the heart of these interviews is the rupture with Germany and the women's attempts to integrate into their new homes in the Jewish settlements in Palestine and subsequently in Israel. Despite the many accounts of hardships and expressions of bitterness and at times despair, all these life stories are ultimately narratives of success as the women managed to build new homes and continue their family legacies. In recounting their lives, the interviewees inscribe themselves in the Zionist narrative and consolidate their allegiance to the Israeli state and society.

Even so, the women continue to grapple with the German state, society, and culture

as well as with their own Germanness. Many emphasize explicitly that they no longer identify as Germans, but others do so implicitly by drawing a clear distinction between "the Germans" and themselves as Jews or Israelis. Concurrently, the interviews emphasize the reality that all the women maintain attachments to their German heritage.[[81]](#footnote-82) They all wrestle with these loyalties, some by actively participating in exchanges between Germany and Israel, others by visiting their old homes with their families, raising their children with German traditions and values, or by reading German literature, listening to German music, or watching German television. Such loyalties, as the interviews make clear, are not fixed and unchanging but in constant flux. They are influenced and transformed by their Israeli environment as well as by encounters with postwar Germany and Germans. The trialogue present in these interviews reveals the ways in which individuals negotiate their identification between various influences. The interviews allow the women to emphasize their Israeliness and distance themselves from parts of their Germanness while simultaneously pointing to their cultural affiliations as yekkes. The title of von Treuenfeld's book, *In Germany a Jewess, in Israel a Yekkete*, draws attention to the fixed identities the women were assigned from the outside, first in Germany and later in Israel. Through their life narratives, the women can negotiate the balance between these different affiliations and reclaim their agency as active historical subjects.

1. Andrea von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland eine Jüdin, eine Jeckete in Israel: Geflohene Frauen erzählen ihr Leben* (München: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011), 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. von Treuenfeld. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Among others: Anne Betten and Miryam Du-Nour, *Wir sind die letzten. Fragt uns aus. Gespräche mit den Emigranten der dreißiger Jahre in Israel*, 1996; Shlomo Erel, *Jeckes erzählen: Aus dem Leben deutschsprachiger Einwanderer in Israel* (LIT Verlag Münster, 2004); Walter B. Godenschweger and Fritz Vilmar, *Die rettende Kraft der Utopie: Deutsche Juden gründen den Kibbuz Hasorea* (Frankfurt a.M: Luchterhand, 1990); Gideon Greif, Colin McPherson, and Laurence Weinbaum, *Die Jeckes: Deutsche Juden aus Israel erzählen* (Köln / Weimar / Wien: Bohlau Verlag, 2000); Gabriele Koppel, *Heimisch Werden: Lebenswege Deutscher Juden in Palästina* (Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2000); Wolfgang Melzer, *Biographien Jüdischer Palästina-Pioniere aus Deutschland: Über Den Zusammenhang von Jugend-Und Kibbutzbewegung* (Springer-Verlag, 2013); Peter Zinke, *Flucht nach Palästina: Lebenswege. Nürnberger Juden* (Nürnberg: Antogo, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mostly, scholars did not bother to refer to specific interviews when making their claims. See e.g., Shlomo Erel, *Neue Wurzeln: 50 Jahre Immigration deutschsprachiger Juden in Israel*, 1. Aufl. (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1983); Yoav Gelber, *Moledet Hadasha: Alyiat Yehude Merkas Eropa ve-Klitatam 1933–1948* (Jerusalem: Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Two scholars have conducted interviews with yekkes for their PhD dissertations. See Viola Alianov-Rautenberg,” Liftmenschen in the Levant: A Gender History of the German-Jewish Immigration to Palestine/Eretz Yisrael, 1933–1939, (PhD dissertation, Technical University of Berlin, 2018); Katharina Hoba, *Generation im Übergang: Beheimatungsprozesse deutscher Juden in Israel* (Köln/Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2017). Patrick Farges has made use of archived interviews conducted by linguists interested in the German of the yekkes. See e.g., “‘Muscle’ Yekkes? Multiple German-Jewish Masculinities in Palestine and Israel after 1933,” *Central European History* 51, no. 3 (2018): 466–87. Dorit Yosef wrote a PhD dissertation on female Central European immigrants but used both oral history interviews and written memoirs and based her analysis mainly on the latter. See e.g., Dorit Yosef, “From Yekke to Zionist: Narrative Strategies in Life Stories of Central European Jewish Women Immigrants to Mandate Palestine,” *Journal of Israeli History* 33, no. 2 (2014): 185–208. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Guy Miron, *Mi’sham Le’kan’ Be-Guf Rishon: Sikhronoteiyem Shel Yotzey Germaniyah Be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. On this issue, see Alexander Freund, “Oral History as Process-Generated Data,” *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 2009, 22–48. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For an overview of these debates, see e.g., Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Routledge, 2016); Julia Obertreis, *Oral History* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012); Donald A. Ritchie, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the Past?: Memories, Trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester University Press, 2007). The discussion is also strongly inspired by the work of the sociolinguist Charlotte Linde, see Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford University Press, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. In conducting such interviews, the methods developed by the two German sociologists Fritz Schütze and Gabriele Rosenthal have been widely influential. See e.g., Gabriele Rosenthal, “Reconstruction of Life Stories: Principles of Selection in Generating Stories for Narrative Biographical Interviews,” *The Narrative Study of Lives* 1, no. 1 (1993): 59–91. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. On this, see e.g., Christof Dejung, “Oral History und kollektives Gedächtnis. Für eine sozialhistorische Erweiterung der Erinnerungsgeschichte,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 34, no. 1 (2008): 96–115; Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton, “Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia,” 1994; Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Ester Golan, *Auf Wiedersehen in unserem Land* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. For one of the most self-conscious and intriguing discussions of the interview process and its impacts on scholarship, see Stacey Zembrzycki, *According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury’s Ukrainian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Ann Oakley and Helen Roberts, “Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms,” in *Doing Feminist Research* (London: Routledge, 1981), 30–61, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. As she notes in her introduction. See von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland eine Jüdin*, 10. In an interview, von Treuenfeld stated that at most she moved individual sentences when it seemed thematically appropriate. Interview with Andrea von Treuenfeld, July 8, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland eine Jüdin*, 8–10. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Ibid*.*, 7 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Interview with Andrea von Treuenfeld, July 8, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Chaja Florentin explains this when relating her “rebellious” act of marrying a man from Morocco. See Ibid. 70. Had the interviewer been Israeli, this would have hardly been necessary to mention. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. *Ibid.,* 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. *Ibid.*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. Yoav Gelber, “The Historical Role of the Central European Immigration to Israel,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 38, no. 1 (1993): 323–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Sofia Aboim and Pedro Vasconcelos, “From Political to Social Generations: A Critical Reappraisal of Mannheim’s Classical Approach,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 17, no. 2 (2014): 165–83. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. See Kenneth J. Gergen and Mary M. Gergen, “Narratives of the Self,” in *Studies in Social Identity*, ed. Theodore R. Sarbin and Karl E. Scheibe (New York: Praeger, 1983), 254–73. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. On the difficult decision of whether or not to leave Germany during the 1930s, see David Jünger, *Jahre der Ungewissheit: Emigrationspläne deutscher Juden 1933–1938* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. *Ibid.*, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. *Ibid*., 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. As were, for example, the fathers of Hilde Hoffmann and Shoshanna Friedländer. See *ibid*., 112, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. In their autobiographies, workers in the era of industrialization often depicted an outstanding event, such as a mass demonstration, which “converted” them to the cause of the labor movement. See Mary Jo Maynes, *Taking the Hard Road: Life Course in French and German Workers’ Autobiographies in the Era of Industrialization* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. *Ibid*., 124. For an overview of Israeli Holocaust memory and the role of the Eichmann process, see Dalia Ofer, “Israel,” in David S. Wyman, Charles H. Rosenzveig, and Rabbi Charles H. Rosenzveig, *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 836–924. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. *Ibid.*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. *Ibid.*, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. See e.g., the interviews with Chaja Florentin, Herta Proter, or Cary Kloetzel, *ibid*., 70, 89, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. *Ibid.*, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory*, 27–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. As did Miriam Bettelheim’s father, see von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. E.g., the interviews with Shoshana Friedländer and Aliza Falk, *ibid.,* 157, 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. One of the exceptions is Elly Freund, who studied medicine and became a doctor in Israel. See her interview in *ibid*., 25–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. *Ibid*., 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. *Ibid.*, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. *Ibid*., 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. *Ibid*., 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. *Ibid*., 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
51. *Ibid*., 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
52. *Ibid.*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
53. *Ibid.*,125. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
54. *Ibid*., 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
55. *Ibid*., 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
56. In contrast to the autobiographies and interviews analyzed by Dorit Yosef, however, the women do not downplay the rupture of war and Holocaust by fitting everything into a “Zionist super-plot.” Compare Yosef, “From Yekke to Zionist.” [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
57. E.g., Ahuva Salant, Miriam Bettelheim, and Oda Kissinger, in von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 62, 140, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
58. E.g., Chaja Florentin, Cary Kloetzel, and Shoshanna Friedländer, in *ibid*., 74, 107, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
59. E.g., Oda Kissinger, in *ibid.*, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
60. E.g., Ahuva Salant and Cary Kloetzel, in *ibid.*, 62, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
61. *Ibid.,* 176–178. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
62. *Ibid*., 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
63. *Ibid.*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
64. *Ibid.*, 72–74. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
65. Cited after the German translation of the article, Shay Feldman, “Die heißesten Mädels in der Stadt” (Haaretz October 24, 2008), <https://www.hagalil.com/01/de/Israel.php?itemid=2891&catid=20>. Jauch, in his preface to the book, points out with amazement that in Tel Aviv “six ladies meet at Cafe Mersand after each show to go over every single question from the quiz again.” See von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
66. In the interview with Feldman, Florentin was much more introspective in this regard. She said that she gets angry every time she hears the word “German,” and her automatic reaction is to say, “Let them burn.” Yet a few lines later she related a recent discussion she had with “nice young Germans.” “I have nothing against them at all, on the contrary,” she told Feldman. “But you just can't change old habits. We've lost too much in this war.” See Feldman, “Die heißesten Mädels.” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
67. *Ibid*., 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
68. *Ibid*., 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
69. Similar sentiments are expressed in an anecdote she relates in the next paragraph. She tells of her visit to Germany in the late 1970s, a time of left-wing extremist attacks. When a loud noise is heard during a train ride, everyone reacts “hysterically,” fearing a bomb attack. After many experiences with such attacks, Feldman is the only one who remains calm. *Ibid*., 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
70. *Ibid*., 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
71. Greif, McPherson, and Weinbaum, *Die Jeckes*. Miriam Yaron claims that during a visit to her birthplace, Bad Mergentheim, the local mayor, asked her why none of her family ever returned. She spontaneously answered, “No one returned and no one will return.” *Ibid*., 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
72. Interview with Andrea von Treuenfeld, July 8, 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
73. von Treuenfeld, *In Deutschland Eine Jüdin*, 52. See also Aliza Frank and her sons, in von Treuenfeld, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
74. *Ibid.*, 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
75. E.g., Herta Proter, in *ibid*., 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
76. *Ibid.,* 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
77. *Ibid.,* 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
78. *Ibid.,* 179. The German original text reads as awkwardly (“Ich bin heute absolut Israelin mit deutschen Wurzeln“) as the English translation and illustrates that von Treuenfeld attempted to convey the text of the interview as faithfully as possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
79. *Ibid.,* 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
80. *Ibid.,* 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
81. In contrast, for example, to German-Jewish emigres in Canada. See Patrick Farges, “A Transnational Yekkish Identity? Comparing German Jews in Canada and Israel,” in *Being German Canadian: History, Memory, Generations*, ed. Alexander Freund (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)