

"A JEW IN A PORSCHE" JEWISH (RELIGIOUS) IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE¹

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1. *Introduction*

Since the mid-1990s, the interest in Jewish identity formation has been increasing. Why, after 50 years of Jews keeping a low profile in Europe, is there this sudden interest? A look back at the history of Jewish presence in Europe after the Holocaust might suggest some reasons for this.

One is simply a matter of time: the increasing temporal distance to the Holocaust presents a completely different situation. Today, Jews of the second and third generation live in Europe, and are integrated in society in a different, often more stable and self-confident way than their parents or grand-parents were who stayed or came back after the Holocaust and lived with the proverbial 'packed suitcases'.

Secondly, the break-down of communism in the wake of the *Wende* in Germany in 1989 allowed for more religious freedom in the former East Block countries. Although antisemitism is still very much present in the society of these countries, Jewish communities have been reestablished, and many young people rediscover their Jewish heritage.

Also, a relatively large number of Jews decided to leave these Eastern European states, especially the former Soviet Union, and to settle in the West, in particular Germany. Many small Jewish communities in Germany survived only because of these immigrants.

Finally, the stabilisation of the EU, its enlargement and the discussions about a 'European' identity have caused Jews to see their identity increasingly within a European context. Signs for this are for example the foundation of the European Council of Jewish Communities and the establishment of a representation in Brussels.²

1 This article is based on a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Philadelphia, 2005.

2 Cf. Pinto, Diana: "The Third Pillar: Towards European Jewish Identity". <http://www.hagalil.com/golem/jewish-identity/pillar.htm>, access 08. 02. 2005.

A number of literary texts written by second and third generation Jews in European countries has dealt with the challenges to the formation of a Jewish identity that Jews in contemporary Europe face. However, only recently, a number of films have been made dealing with the issue of Jewish life in Europe, thus adding new material to the discussion of the topic. They are remarkable in that they show Jewish life *today* — something quite unknown to most citizens of European countries, simply because of the small proportion of Jews in the population³ — and discuss the issue of Jewish identity in various ways. The films I have chosen are 'Jewish' not because of their producers, directors or cast (although some of them are Jewish), but because they are concerned with issues of Jewish life, history and traditions, represent struggles about Jewishness, and can stimulate the examination of their own attitude towards Jewishness for Jewish (and non-Jewish) viewers.⁴ They are set in various European countries⁵, thus reflecting the different environments in which Jewish identities are constructed and the influence of the European context. Although of varying artistic quality, all four films are included because they are among the first to take up the topic of Jewish life today.

My theoretical material consists of various studies of the Jewish community in Europe, as well as some autobiographically influenced texts by Jewish authors living in Europe, most of them published within the last 10 to 15 years. A statistical, detailed survey of the changing situation of Jews in Europe is so far not available.⁶

The term 'identity' is used by most studies in a common-sense understanding as a feeling of belonging to a certain group which helps to make sense of life and the world with respect to the past and future.⁷ Jonathan Webber

3 Cf. also for the issue of the absence of Jewish life in Europe since 1945: Wasserstein, Bernard: *Europa ohne Juden: Das europäische Judentum seit 1945*. Köln: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1999.

4 Cf. Weiss, Iris: "Kashes — Vier Fragen". <http://www.hagalil.com/judentum/feiertage/pesach/pesach/fragen.htm>, access 08. 02. 2005.

5 ALLES AUF ZUCKER! (Dani Levy, D 2004) and DAS APFELBAUMHAUS (Andrew Hood, D 2004) are set in Germany; LE TANGO DES RASHEVSKI (Sam Gabarski, B/L/F 2003) in Belgium; SUPERTEX (Jan Schütte, NL/D 2003) is set in Holland. All have been shown at various film festivals. Apart from DAS APFELBAUMHAUS, which was made for German TV, they have also been relatively successful as commercial features.

6 Cf. Pinto, Diana: "Plaidoyer for a European Jewish Review". <http://www.hagalil.com/golem/jewish-identity/review.htm>, access 08. 02. 2005. Some surveys for individual countries have been conducted so far, cf. Dencik, Lars: "Jewishness' in Postmodernity: The Case of Sweden". In: Gitelman, Zvi; Kosmin, Barry; Kovács, András (eds.): *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2002, pp. 75–104.

7 Cf. Liebman, Charles S.: "Jewish Identity in Transition: Transformation or Attenuation?". In: Gitelman, Zvi; Kosmin, Barry; Kovács, András (eds.): *New Jewish Identities: Contemporary Europe and Beyond*. Budapest: Central European UP, 2003, S. 341f; Simon, Heinrich:

emphasises the dynamic, changing and constructed nature of identity in its postmodern understanding, which he sees as particularly relevant for the construction of Jewish identities.⁸

2. *Jewish identity in a European context: The theoretical discussion*

Norman Solomon lists ten factors that in his view play a role in the formation of Jewish identity:⁹ family history; Jewish history and culture, including religion; national identities and European cultures; Jewish values; the Holocaust; relations to Israel (positive or critical); relations to Christianity (as a negative identity marker, Jews as non-Christians); status as a minority and the accompanying feelings of persecution and discrimination; external determinants, e. g. antisemitic stereotypes or cultural products presenting certain images of Jewishness that are adopted or opposed.

The question of *how to define Jewishness* has become problematic in particular with regard to Jews from former East block countries, whose parents might not have been practising at all. With the increase in intermarriage, children of mixed marriages might feel at home in their Jewish fathers' community but are not accepted as members. Also, the right to citizenship in Israel is restricted to those who are halakhically Jewish, i. e. somebody born by a Jewish mother, or who has converted before a rabbinical court. A child of a Jewish father, or a conversion before a Reform rabbi — the Reform definition of Jewishness — will not be accepted as Jewish in Orthodoxy.

For Sartre, Jewishness was largely a matter of (antisemitic) outside definition depending on the situation, but not religion, history, culture etc.: "Nicht ihre Vergangenheit, nicht ihr Glaube, nicht ihre Erde vereinen die Söhne [sic] Israels. [...] sie leben in einer Gesellschaft, die sie als Juden betrachtet."¹⁰

"Zum Problem der jüdischen Identität". In: Horch, Hans Otto; Wardi, Charlotte (eds.): *Jüdische Selbstwahrnehmung/La prise de conscience de l'identité juive*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997, p. 15

8 Cf. Webber, Jonathan: "Introduction". In: Webber, Jonathan (ed.): *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*. London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994, p. 4.

9 Cf. Solomon, Norman: "Judaism in the New Europe: Discovery or Invention?". In: Webber (ed.): *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, p. 92–95. These factors return in variations in other studies. Cf. Carlebach's list of four: Carlebach, Julius: "Jewish Identity in the Germany of a New Europe". In: Webber (ed.): *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, p. 207f.

10 Cf. Sartre, Jean-Paul: "Betrachtungen zur Judenfrage". In: Sartre, Jean-Paul: *Drei Essays*. Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1960, p. 142.

Diana Pinto, however, sees an increase in Jewish self-definition,¹¹ where the criteria probably change from person to person. Similarly, for Iris Weiss, the question of who is a Jew is less dependent on birth or external factors, but rather on the person's feeling of belonging to the Jewish community and his or her willingness to engage in its cultural and/or religious challenges.¹² In this understanding, being Jewish is a dynamic identity that might change in the course of a person's life.

For Alain Finkielkraut, Jewish identity is defined by one single element, the collective Jewish history of the *Shoah*, even if the respective person has not experienced it. Jews might actually enjoy the special status that is conferred on them by their belonging to the sufferers of the Third Reich, as he says of himself: "Mit dem Judentum war mir das schönste Geschenk zuteil geworden, daß [sic] sich ein dem Völkermord nachgeborenes Kind erträumen konnte. Ich erbe ein Leid, das ich nicht erfuhr. [...] In aller Ruhe konnte ich ein außergewöhnliches Schicksal genießen. Ohne mich einer realen Gefahr auszusetzen, hatte ich das Format eines Helden."¹³ People like Finkielkraut himself, who are Jews without a Jewish background of traditions and culture, are in his view modern 'Luftmenschen'.¹⁴ His book, which has caused controversial discussions¹⁵, has been rather sharp in its criticism of the instrumentalisation of the victim status by Jews who hadn't suffered. But going beyond his criticism, he calls for a reflexion of Jewish identity that will make it more substantial, filled with the whole heritage of Jewish culture, history and religion, and not reducing Judaism to the Holocaust.¹⁶

In nearly as provocative words as Finkielkraut, Rafael Seligmann criticises the "Holocaust-Fixierung als jüdische Ersatzreligion".¹⁷ He calls for Jews to leave their "Angst- und Schuldghetto (als Davongekommener im Land der Mörder zu leben)"¹⁸ and, without denying the past, turn towards the future.

Without dismissing the importance of the Holocaust, Pinto sees the time come for Jews to stop being guardians of their past, and to turn forward to make their voices heard in the context of a new Europe. In her view, the chan-

11 Cf. Pinto: "Plaidoyer for a European Jewish Review". See also Webber: "Introduction", p. 16.

12 Cf. Weiss: "Kashes — Vier Fragen".

13 Finkielkraut, Alain: *Der eingebildete Jude*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1982, p. 15.

14 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 43.

15 Cf. Schruoff, Helene: *Wechselwirkungen: Deutsch-jüdische Identität in erzählender Prosa der 'Zweiten Generation'*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2000, p. 46f.

16 Cf. Finkielkraut: *Der eingebildete Jude*, p. 198–202.

17 Seligmann, Rafael: *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung: Juden, Deutsche, Israelis*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991, p. 98.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 315.

ce to develop a positive Jewish identity lies to a large degree within the changes the *European Union* is going to bring, especially by its enlargement towards the East. This is not only a chance for Jews to establish new communities, strengthen ties to other communities within Europe, establish a 'Jewish space'¹⁹ in the Union's public, and to find a home in a plural, multi-cultural society, but also for non-Jewish Europeans for whom the multiple loyalties of Jews and their rootlessness can serve as an example of how to integrate national and European identities and live in the more mobile, changing societies of today's Europe.²⁰ In this new context, it is important to realise that a stable, unitary identity is no longer possible, neither for Jews nor for non-Jews, and that fragmented, multiple identities with their accompanying loss of security will be both the challenge and the chance for Europeans today. Pinto sees the opportunity for Jews to become "active propounders of an open and pluralist Europe",²¹ but she is somewhat pessimistic that Jewish and European interests and identities might not be compatible, and that Jews might not be able to use their chances, not least because of problems within the Jewish community of not being able to voice its positions.²² As Y. Michal Bodemann notices in a short analysis of material for an electoral campaign of the Berlin Jewish community, interest in European issues is low in the official communities: European institutions or 'identity' were not discussed or mentioned at all.²³

The growing *self-confidence* of second and third generation Jews and their insistence not to be defined through nothing but the Holocaust, antisemitism and Israel,²⁴ but to contribute actively to a contemporary Jewish culture, leaves the impression that there has been a certain rupture between identity constructions of the older and younger generations and that now the time has come for a positive, new beginning. Seligmann, Pinto and others see the way there in the recollection of the larger history of Judaism, its plurality and contributions to the countries Jews have lived in and are still living in. Knowledge

19 Cf. for the question of a Jewish public and who populates it: Gruber, Ruth Ellen: *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

20 Cf. Pinto: "The Third Pillar: Towards European Jewish Identity"; Pinto, Diana: "Am deutschen Kreuzweg". *Die Zeit* 28 (2000). http://zeus.zeit.de/text/archiv/2000/28/200028.jued_leben_.xml, access 08. 02. 2005; Weiss: "Kasches — Vier Fragen".

21 Pinto: "Plaidoyer for a European Jewish Review".

22 Cf. Gruber, Ruth Ellen: "Gibt es eine europäisch-jüdische Identität?". *Tachles* 28. 05. 2004.

23 Cf. Bodemann, Y. Michal: "Global Diaspora? European Jewish Consciousness? Reflections on German Jewry and the Postmodern Debate". In: Eder, Klaus; Spohn, Willfried (eds.): *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005, p. 57ff.

24 Cf. Gruber: "Gibt es eine europäisch-jüdische Identität?"

of traditions and culture, and participation in the continuation of Jewishness in the European context are also a part of that.²⁵

Seligmann sees the more assertive, self-confident appearance of Jews as the best means against *antisemitism*:²⁶ because of its inherent irrationality, rational arguments will not help, but a stronger, more confident self-identity will at least take some of the pressure off the Jews.²⁷ For in spite of memorials to the Holocaust and state and church officials' acknowledgment of their guilt and plea for forgiveness, antisemitism is still very much a part of daily life for Jews in Europe, and thus a shaping influence on their identity. Various authors notice a changing quality in the antisemitic acts in Germany after 1989: with the greater temporal distance to the Holocaust, it seems to have become more acceptable, more direct and is less punished by the public.²⁸ With the increase in racist crimes, Jews are wondering whether antisemitic attacks might escalate from vandalism and vocal discrimination to outright violence, as their relative invisibility is only a weak protection against attacks. For France, Michel Wieviorka sees the reasons for this new antisemitism in a stronger ethnic definition of Jewishness, which then leads to competition and jealousy from other ethnic groups who are less successful in forming their own communities.²⁹

Relations to Israel shape Jewish life in the diaspora not only with regard to antizionism, which has become a disguise for antisemitism in many cases, but also as a geographical anchor for Jewish identity, and the centre of Jewish culture. The other 'pillar' of Jewishness, the *USA*, also has a strong influence on European Jewry. The relations to these two largest communities of Jews in

- 25 Cf. Seligmann: *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung*, p. 55; Pinto: "Am deutschen Kreuzweg". One has to be aware that what on the one hand, is seen as desirable by these intellectuals, on the other hand, is an old, antisemitic reproach: that Jews are people without a nation, therefore notoriously illoyal and unreliable.
- 26 Seligmann: *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung*, p. 55; cf. also Gruber: "Gibt es eine europäisch-jüdische Identität?"
- 27 Cf. similar views expressed by young Viennese Jews studied by Bunzl (Bunzl, Matti: *From Silence to Defiance: Jews and Queers in Contemporary Vienna*. PhD Thesis University of Chicago. Chicago, 1998).
- 28 Cf. Benz, Wolfgang: "Zwischen Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus". <http://holocaust.juden-in-europa.de/antisemitismus/benz.htm>, access 08. 02. 2005; Ochse, Katharina: "What Could Be More Fruitful, More Healing, More Purifying?" Representations of Jews in the German Media after 1989". In: Remmler, Karen; Gilman, Sander L. (eds.): *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*. New York: New York UP, 1994, p. 113–129; Rauscher, Hans: *Israel, Europa und der neue Antisemitismus: Ein aktuelles Handbuch*. Wien: Molden Verlag, 2004.
- 29 Cf. Wieviorka, Michel: "The Changing French Jewish Identity". In: Ben-Rafael, Eliezer; Gorny, Yosef; Ro'i, Yaacov (eds.): *Contemporary Jewries: Convergence and Divergence*. Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 263.

the world are somewhat ambiguous for European Jews, especially for those living in Germany. On the one hand, Jews in Europe depend to a large degree on financial and personal support by the USA and Israel (e. g. for trained rabbis or cantors, funding for institutions, artists etc.). On the other hand, European Jews have had to defend their decision to stay on in Europe against reproaches from overseas, and their reemerging European Jewish culture against the Israeli and American influence. Still in 1996, the Israeli president Weizmann reproached the community for staying in Germany.³⁰ In particular small communities in the former East Block states need Israeli help, such as exchange programs, summer camps, teachers etc., in order to become reacquainted with Jewish heritage and traditions. But, as Peter Krasztev remarks, these imported traditions are of little help in an environment so completely different from Israel.³¹

Israel as Jewish homeland remains for many an ideal, and allegiance to it is expressed in holidays spent there, money given to Israeli causes, the following of the news,³² etc. As Wieviorka remarks, for many French Jews, the Six-Day-War and other issues in Israeli politics were part of the reaffirmation of their Jewish identity, especially because Jews were now proven to be not only victims, but also active fighters and able to defend themselves.³³ This active, more self-confident role is now taken on by some European Jews with regard to Israel and the US: instead of being simply a living memorial of the past (both the Holocaust and the rich, pre-war European Jewish tradition) or reenactors of American or Israeli traditions, they assert their independent role as a 'third pillar' of world Jewry and a critical partner of the US and Israeli communities.³⁴

In all the debates on factors of Jewish identity, *the religious element* seems to play a relatively small part. As Marion Kaplan notes, traditional religious practice "is far from the norm for the vast majority of Jews in Germany".³⁵

30 Cf. Primor, Avi: "Die Wiedererstellung der jüdischen Gemeinde in Deutschland aus israelischer Sicht". <http://www.goethe.de/kug/ges/rel/dos/de66123.htm>, access 02. 11. 2005.

31 Cf. Krasztev, Peter: "Confronting Jewishness. Part III: Tradition and Normality". *Central European Review* 1/10 (1999). <http://www.ce-review.org/99/10/krasztev10.html>, access 08. 02. 2005.

32 Cf. the importance of news from Israel in Jewish publications, e. g. www.tachles.ch, www.hagalil.com, etc. Nevertheless, the issue of Israel becomes relevant to many Jews at the latest when they are forced into discussions on Israeli-Palestinian relations or the recent war in Lebanon by non-Jews, as if they were a kind of specialists on the issues, simply by being Jewish, no matter what their own attitude or interest in the conflicts.

33 Cf. Wieviorka: "The Changing French Jewish Identity", p. 258.

34 Cf. "Editorial". <http://server.hagalil.com/hagalil/golem/jewish-identity/editorial-d-99.htm>, access 08. 02. 2005; Pinto: "The Third Pillar: Towards European Jewish Identity".

35 Kaplan, Marion: "What is 'Religion' among Jews in Contemporary Germany?" In: Remmler; Gilman (eds.): *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany*, p. 88.

And Webber thinks that the remaining traditional religious elements are too weak to actually build a Jewish identity on it.³⁶

In Germany, the situation is difficult because of the fact that religious practice, at least in a communal setting, is mostly restricted to the more traditional *Einheitsgemeinde*. Both strictly Orthodox and Reform communities have to fight for acceptance (and financial support) by the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the established communities. This means that the rather broad term of 'religion' and 'religious practice', which in the US can reach from very liberal Reform to strictly Orthodox Judaism, is in Germany restricted to a very small section of this spectrum.³⁷ Liberal Jews in Germany might therefore not include the religious element in their identity, because they do not feel welcome or at home in the traditional community³⁸, but would do so if there was a liberal community available. There even seems to be a sense of inferiority among non-Orthodox Jews, as if only Orthodox religious practice and traditions established 'legitimate' Judaism.³⁹ It might be a sign of the 're-emergence' of Jewish life in Germany that in 1997, the *Union progressiver Juden* was established which serves as an umbrella organisation for the 19 liberal communities, groups or *chavurot* in Germany.⁴⁰ In September 2006, three rabbis have been ordained at the Abraham Geiger College in Dresden, being the first liberal rabbis to be ordained in Germany since before the Third Reich — another sign of an increasing plurality in the religious landscape of Germany.

Given the relative unimportance of religious elements, many Jews would probably subscribe to a more secular interpretation of identity. For them, cultural elements, history (especially the Holocaust, but also beyond) and a (new) sense of ethnicity, as it is developing in France and Great Britain,⁴¹ make up their sense of being Jewish rather than keeping a kosher kitchen or going to synagogue on the Sabbath. As Kaplan notices, it is cultural events more than religious elements that connect Jews to Jewishness.⁴² Many younger Jews

36 Cf. Webber: "Introduction", p. 2.

37 Cf. Remmler, Karen: "Reclaiming Space: Jewish Women in Germany Today". In: Brinker-Gabler, Gisela; Smith, Sidonie (eds.): *Writing New Identities: Gender, Nation, and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 185.

38 For example, in most *Einheitsgemeinde* synagogues, a balcony for women is still being used, although, depending on the community, seating might be mixed. As Kaplan notes: "[U]nless reforms set in, especially with regard to women, the synagogues will lose the small chance they might have to attract the new, Russian Jews, some of whom might be willing to join with their families, but most of whom would find the idea of women 'upstairs' hopelessly alien." (Kaplan: "What is 'Religion' among Jews in Contemporary Germany?", p. 90).

39 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 89.

40 Cf. <http://www.liberales-juden.de>, access 05. 11. 2005.

41 Cf. Webber: "Introduction", p. 9f.

42 Cf. Kaplan: "What is 'Religion' among Jews in Contemporary Germany?", p. 92, 102f.

with a more secular approach to Jewishness form inofficial, cultural groups, such as the *Kulturverein* in Berlin, some with a small element of religious practice, e. g. the celebration of holidays such as Chanukka, Friday night meetings etc.⁴³

Identity issues might also be made more difficult by the internal difficulties the communities face. The *plurality* of the Jewish population due to immigration, various degrees of observance, age, official and inofficial status etc. is perceived as both a blessing and a challenge.⁴⁴ In Germany, there are tensions between Jews from the East and the West.⁴⁵ In France, the plurality within the Jewish community is increased by the migration of Sephardi Jews from North Africa.⁴⁶ Although it is often difficult to integrate these different groups, it is also a chance to enrich Jewish life in the community not just by numbers, but also in the variety of traditions and approaches.

It has become clear that Jewish identity is not developed in a vacuum, but in reaction to a certain *environment* one lives in which shapes elements of Jewish identity in different ways.⁴⁷ The situation in Germany, with the Holocaust playing a strong role in Jewish and non-Jewish historical consciousness and the organisational structure of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, provides a very different background than former East block states' small communities or England's relatively strong, well-organised Jewish population. Jews in these countries have their own particular issues, e. g. the inheritance of the Communist era, or the tradition of strong assimilation and privatisation of religion in France.

After a close look at the theoretical debate on contemporary Jewish identity in Europe, it has become clear that Jewish identity is far from uniform, but a very individual recombination of certain elements such as Jewish culture, religion, Israel, the Holocaust and Jewish history, the European setting and plurality within the Jewish community. While some intellectuals or progressive Jews see the importance of developing a European identity, for others it is more important to learn about Jewish traditions and culture first of all, and keep strong ties to Israel. An important element is the more visible, outspoken and self-confident way of being Jewish, which leads to the formation

43 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 98f.

44 Cf. Pinto: "The Third Pillar: Towards European Jewish Identity"; Remmler: "Reclaiming Space: Jewish Women in Germany Today", p. 175.

45 Cf. Remmler, Karen; Gilman, Sander L.: "Introduction". In: Remmler; Gilman (eds.): *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany*, p. 5.

46 Cf. Wieviorka: "The Changing French Identity", p. 257f.

47 Cf. Webber's discussion of the traditionalist view on Jewish identity (independent of environment) and the modernist view (identity defined by time and place): Webber: "Introduction", p. 7.

of Jewish groups, participation in the Jewish cultural production and for some Jews to renewed or increased religious practice. This self-confidence is not only noticeable in relations to the non-Jewish society Jews live in, but also internally, in dealing with matters of reform, plurality and integration of other traditions.

3. *"A Jew in a Porsche" — "A Jew with a hat": Jewish identity in film*

Films as cultural productions are always part of and therefore reflections of the culture they originate in. They might work as affirmation of certain trends or tendencies, but they can also function as critical voices, pointing out problems and tensions, and developing alternative visions of that society.⁴⁸ Thus, they have both a diagnostic and constructive or critical function.

Working with four films (*SUPERTEX*, *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!*, *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, *LE TANGO DES RASHEVSKI*) portraying contemporary Jewish life in Germany, Holland and Belgium, I will analyse which factors of Jewish identity in contemporary Europe they represent, and how Jewish everyday life, traditions and religious elements are shown to the Jewish and non-Jewish audience.

In the narratives of all four films, Jewish identity is not self-understood for most of the characters. So by what is their interest in Jewish identity and Jewish life raised? It is interesting that in two of the four films, the question of Jewish identity arises with a family member's death: both in *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!* and *LE TANGO DES RASHEVSKI*, the mother's death and her wish to be buried in a Jewish cemetery awakens the more secular members of the family to their Jewish heritage. As David says in *LE TANGO*, saying Kaddish for his mother made him feel Jewish for the first time, which not even the Six-Day-War had done for him. In *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, the issue comes up in the context of the reappropriation of Jewish property, but is also linked to Karl's mother's need to return to Judaism in the face of her approaching death. In *SUPERTEX*, for Max, it is his relationship with the religious Esther and the reproaches of an Orthodox family, whose son he nearly run over, for racing around town in a Porsche on Sabbath, which brings up the issue of his own Jewishness first. For Boy/Benjamin, Max's brother, the encounter with practising Jews in Morocco and the falling in love with their daughter brings about a more religiously defined identity. Thus, in matters of love and death,

48 Cf. Valentin, Joachim: *Zwischen Fiktionalität und Kritik: Die Aktualität apokalyptischer Motive als Herausforderung theologischer Hermeneutik*. Freiburg: Herder, 2005, p. 291–302.

at the extreme points of human life, the issue is raised and becomes important for the characters as they start to think about what makes up their own lives and is central to their identity.

The contrast between secular and religious Jewish identity is the most obvious in all films. In *SUPERTEX*, it is illustrated by the phrases "A Jew in a Porsche" and "A Jew with a hat", relating to secular and religious Jews respectively. In this film, religious identity is personalised in Esther and Benjamin. For Esther, keeping Sabbath and sitting shiva for her ex-husband are natural and important elements of her life, which she has to defend against Max's secular approach to Jewish life. The Jewish (religious) element is very strong in her identity, and when she decides to give her life a new turn and move 'home' to Israel, to her family of Jewish people, it is her way to complete the piece of her identity that had been missing when she lived in Holland. Similarly, Benjamin finds his place in life and develops a rounded personality only after he discovers the religious element in his identity, within the family context of practising Jews.

The issue of the integration of national identity and Jewish identity — which is an important question for many Jews in European countries and which some believe to be solved by establishing a larger European identity⁴⁹ — is raised in the characters of Esther and Max. Esther represents one approach, where a Jew is really at home only in Israel, whereas for Max, his Jewish identity has no national component to it at all. He is, so to say, 'a Dutch of Jewish faith', although faith is, for him and his family, translated into but a few cultural or traditional values: having chicken soup for Sabbath dinner, eating at a kosher deli, marrying a Jewish girl and knowing various Yiddish proverbs. Knowledge of Jewish traditions or the Halakhah is basically not a part of their life. Thus he does not know why he insults the Orthodox family by offering money (it is forbidden to touch money on the Sabbath) and cannot understand their commitment to the Halakhah (religious law).

A similar distinction between religious and secular family members can be found in *LE TANGO*. For Nina and her fiancé Antoine, religious practice and adherence to the law become formative parts of Jewishness and their identity. For the rest of the family, religion and traditions are less important. For Rosa, David's and Simon's mother, it had been more important to raise her children to be a *Mensch* — a Yiddish concept of a good person of character and principles — than to teach the children Jewish religious practice, especially since she herself had lost her faith in God during the Holocaust and wanted to prevent her children from persecution by raising them to be as little

49 In Germany, the problem is illustrated by the various names Jews use to refer to themselves: Jews in Germany, German Jews, Jewish Germans etc. Each one of them is associated with a different way of linking oneself to the country one lives in.

Jewish as possible. It is interesting that the religious element is more important for halakhically non-Jews (Nina has a non-Jewish mother, Antoine and Isabelle, Simon's wife, are not Jewish) than for Jews. It seems that for the Jews, it is enough to be born a Jew, so that they don't have to do anything else for it (as the Reform rabbi puts it in the film), whereas the non-Jews have to work harder for their Jewish identity and need the support of a stricter framework of laws and rituals to hold up their yet fragile identities.

In *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!*, the contrasts are even stronger, because Jaeckie is not even culturally a Jew any more — he is completely assimilated and states that he's never had anything to do with that "Club". The encounter with his brother's family comes as quite a shock for him, not only because they have been estranged for over 40 years, but also because his brother is a practicing, Orthodox Jew. Although he accepts the conditions of sitting shiva for his mother, and becomes in the end reconciled to his family, Jewishness is for him restricted to his name (which he no longer uses) and the newly established relationships to his family and thus more a matter of shared values (family) than anything else. The film casts some doubt on the value and strength of the religious element of a Jewish identity and seems to emphasise the importance of an individual approach and more general values such as life over law, family and mutual support.

In *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, the emphasis is shifted towards the issue of halakhical and knowledgeable Jews vs. newcomers who are non-halakhically Jewish or know nothing about their traditions. For Akadi, a Soviet Jew in the small Leipzig community, Jewish identity is everything. Having been persecuted in Russia by the KGB for learning Hebrew, he is now discriminated against by some members of the Jewish community for not having a Jewish mother. His personality is more than fragile, and religious traditions and Jewish teaching help him to develop some sense of security, identity and belonging.

Becoming a Jew and being recognised as such are not easy matters. In *LE TANGO*, it is mentioned at various points that Rosa's sons have not been circumcised which makes them feel as not quite 100% Jews, even somewhat guilty. For the children of Simon and Isabelle, Nina and Jonathan, this is even more true, because their mother is non-Jewish, so that Antoine, after his Orthodox conversion to Judaism, will be actually 'more' Jewish than Nina, for whom he had converted in the first place. Although they are not quite, or not halakhically, Jewish, these characters feel strongly at least as 'cultural' Jews, whereas others, in spite of being halakhically Jewish, e. g. Jaeckie in *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!*, do not feel Jewish at all. This shows the limitations of a static, one-dimensional definition of Jewishness through birth. The films quite definitely place an emphasis on the plurality of Jewish identities, including various religious and secular models, and a dynamic approach to identity.

As Kaplan mentions, the question of women's roles in Judaism will be an important factor of its survival.⁵⁰ Although female characters are rather marginal in these films (with the exception of Jael in *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, and Nina in *LE TANGO*), the roles they play in the negotiation of Jewish identities are interesting: in many cases they function as mediators between religious and secular members of the family (e. g. Marlene and Golda in *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!*), or they even introduce their male counterparts to Jewish life in the first place (Nina in *LE TANGO*, Jael and Marianne in *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*). In *SUPERTEX*, Esther is in some ways Max's only link to the religious element of Judaism. In *LE TANGO*, their reconciliatory role is emphasised in the characters of Isabelle and Khadija: it is Isabelle who does the first step after having been insulted by Dolfo, thus reconciling the non-Jewish and Jewish parts of the family, and Khadija also makes the first move after her fight with Ric and thus brings about their reconciliation and marriage. Functioning as bridges between groups within the Jewish community and between Jewish and non-Jewish groups, they are important in the development of the male characters' Jewish identity and the Jewish community as a whole.

It is surprising that the Holocaust plays a relatively marginal role in the films. The importance of the Holocaust to the characters' identity seems to be more subconscious, coming to the fore at times of crisis. In *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!*⁵¹, it is referred to by Jaeckie when he pleads to get his place back in the pool competition from which he had been disqualified for being late. Given that he had never expressed any affiliation to the Jewish community, his friend and organiser of the competition does not fall into the trap that Jaeckie sets up by instrumentalising his victim status and accusing his friend of antisemitism: "Kannst sagen, wenn du was gegen Juden hast!"

In *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, there is also mention of inner-Jewish problems relating to the Holocaust: when Jael's grandparents sold the house to Marianne's father in order to buy exit visas for the family, Marianne's father used their urgent need for money to beat down the price of the house.

When Jael's father comes for a visit, he cannot understand how one can live as a Jew in Germany and with Germans, expressing the same lack of understanding and maybe even reproach that many Jews living in Germany are faced with by Jews from abroad. Antisemitism today is not a topic raised in the films as a serious problem. Nevertheless, the films show the police protection of Jewish institutions and thus suggest that although none of the char-

50 Cf. Kaplan: "What is 'Religion' among Jews in Contemporary Germany?", p. 90.

51 The film has been criticised for trying to accommodate non-Jewish Germans by going back to 'normal' too quickly. Cf. also Ulrich Kries's review: "Alles auf Zucker!". http://cinomat.kim-info.de/fdarchiv/fdkritiken.php?nr=7475&ref=s_uch, access 06. 11. 2005.

acters is faced with open antisemitic acts, there is an awareness of antisemitic discrimination and a readiness to defend against it.

In *LE TANGO*, in the character of Dolfo, intolerance against Jews is opposed to intolerance of Jews against non-Jews: during the Pesach seder, he remarks on Isabelle: "Soweit kommt's noch, daß uns eine Goje sagt, wie wir feiern sollen!", and thus excludes her from the community of the Jewish family members. For Isabelle, his comment is just another expression of the rejection she experienced as a non-Jew by the Jews of the family. Dolfo himself compares his remark to antisemitic comments later on, and is touched when Isabelle forgives him.

The marginality of the Holocaust and antisemitism in these films is somewhat confusing. It can either be read as an attempt to normalise and harmonise a situation that is not normal or harmonious at all in order to make the films more acceptable to a non-Jewish audience.⁵² However, it can also be understood as a sign of a more confident, forward-oriented Jewish identity that resists definition through previous and present persecutions, as Seligmann and others have demanded. Given that the films are generally positive in their picture of Jewish identity, and don't deny the Holocaust, even if it is not prominent, I would suggest that they are motivated by the latter.

Internal problems between liberal and Orthodox Jews or secular Jews are mentioned in all films and thus reflect the fact that the plurality of the Jewish community in Europe is not only a pleasure and enrichment, but also poses a lot of problems and strains on the communities.

Community life is in the films basically restricted to religious services and the role these play for the religiously identified characters. Cultural activities, friendships with other community members, mutual support etc. are not shown. The construction of Jewish identity thus seems to be mostly an affair of the individual, or the family at most.

But Jewish identity is not constructed in the vacuum of an individual's mind or the protected space of the family. The situation in the various countries the films are set in, the conditions of life in a globalised, materialistic world touch the Jewish characters just as well as the non-Jews and shape their identity: Jaeckie, Samuel and their families are strongly influenced by the former division of Germany and the reunification. The tensions between the brothers are increased by their different experiences in East and West, and the fact that Jaeckie is a typical *Wende* loser: "Hat doch wirklich Pech gehabt, der Mann. Seit der Wende nur Pech. — Jetzt soll er auch noch 'n Jude sein!".⁵³

52 Cf. Nathenson, Cary: "A Polemical Review of Post-Wall Germany's First 'Jewish' Movie". <http://h-net.msu.edu>. access 26. 02. 2006.

53 This comment — which is not addressed to Jaeckie himself — suggests that being a Jew is perceived by the non-Jewish population as being something bad, unlucky, comparable to having lost one's job and thus is a hint on an underlying antisemitism in society.

For the characters in *LE TANGO*, the multi-cultural society of Belgium with its strong proportion of North African Muslims plays a role in their private lives, too, when Ric becomes engaged to Khadija.

The relation of the Diaspora to Israel is mentioned in all films, but with a different emphasis: in *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, the early discussions about the legitimacy of settlement in Israel between the Zionist and religious movements are referred to. In *LE TANGO*, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is — so to say — reenacted in the characters of Ric and Khadija, his girl-friend. After throwing the respective prejudices at each other, they are reconciled at the end and offer a utopian vision of a possible peace between the groups. However, only the practising or Orthodox characters relate to Israel as a possible or real homeland, the others are quite settled in their respective European countries.

Because the films were also seen by a large non-Jewish audience, and for many spectators, this might well have been their first contact with Jewish traditions, culture and religion, it is important to look at how they represent Jewish life. The Jewish milieu in which the films are set is depicted in a number of religious rituals and cultural traditions. In all four films, rituals around death and burial — the Kaddish, ripping the clothes, sitting shiva — are represented, being for some characters the initial contact with Judaism. Other elements, such as daily prayer, keeping kosher, synagogue service, celebrating Sabbath, are shown in one or more films. Rabbinical teaching is mentioned only once, in an image of a volume of the Talmud in Antoine's bedroom. Purim, with its celebration of Jewish victory over antisemitism, plays a prominent role in *DAS APFELBAUMHAUS*, and the celebration of Pessach is shown in *LE TANGO*. Partly, the rituals are explained to secular or non-Jewish characters in the film, and thus to the non-Jewish audience, so that the films serve as 'information material' about Judaism. By the use of Yiddish and Hebrew expressions an authentic atmosphere is established. Such laws as covering the head, growing a beard and sidecurls, wearing a tallit or tefillin for prayer, however, are not explained.

Although the films help getting to know Jewish traditions better (most non-Jews in Europe probably know nothing about Purim or the rules of conversion) and by that help to reduce stereotypes and antisemitism,⁵⁴ the representation might be somewhat counter-productive: the intricate laws regu-

54. An inherent problem in the representation of Jewish characters in a non-Jewish majority culture is the danger of feeding antisemitic stereotypes. Especially *ALLES AUF ZUCKER!* works strongly with stereotypes (the *Ossi*, the *Wessi*, the *belle juive*, the *Yiddishe Mamme*, etc.). However, the films (mostly) manage to avoid reinforcing anti- or philosemitic stereotypes by presenting a wide variety of characters, each with their own attitudes towards Jewishness, Judaism and the non-Jewish environment.

lating Jewish everyday-life (613, as the Orthodox boy in SUPERTEX explains to Max and the spectators) appear quite bizarre, especially in ALLES AUF ZUCKER!, where Marlene's attempts to do a crash course on Jewish laws serve as material for quite a few jokes. The reasons for keeping these laws are not explained, and therefore Orthodox practice appears to be irrational and possibly even harmful (in the characters of Joshua in ALLES AUF ZUCKER! or the Orthodox family in SUPERTEX). Elements counterbalancing this effect are better-developed religious characters such as Esther in SUPERTEX or Samuel in ALLES AUF ZUCKER!, the seriousness and eagerness with which Antoine in LE TANGO commits to Orthodox Judaism or the healing effect that religious rituals have for Akadi in DAS APFELBAUMHAUS.

By showing characters that vary in their attitudes to Jewish life in all its various facets, the films show that there is not one way of integrating all these elements into *the* Jewish identity, but rather, that there are as many identities as individuals, based on variable ways of integrating more or less common elements of Jewishness into their identity.

4. *Film and reality: Concluding remarks*

The films represent the current situation in a way that is mostly consistent with the theoretical studies I presented earlier. Most obvious is the shift of emphasis with regard to the Holocaust, which plays a less important role in the films than in the studies, whereas the question of the religious and secular model of Jewish identity is presented as a more important issue. Interestingly, relations to Christianity, which Solomon had listed among his ten formative aspects, is not mentioned in the films at all. Similarly, community life, antisemitism of the society they live in or the relation to Israel are less prominent than expected. What is suggested by the films more so than by the studies is that Jewish identity is a very individual affair with the community playing a small role. Consistent with the studies is the more forward oriented and self-confident approach to their Jewishness many of the characters in the film show. Although none of the characters can be said to have a *European* Jewish identity, as they are all strongly connected to either the country they live in or Israel, they live their Jewish identity in a European context, in the plurality of multi-cultural societies and Jewish communities made up of members from a wide variety of countries.

Paradoxically, the 'model' of Jewish identity that is transmitted by the films is this: that there is no single 'model', but that Jewish identity is plural. The films express the hopes that the acceptance of plural communities and dynamic, multi-faceted identities will prove more fruitful and successful in a future Europe than a static and monolithic definition of Jewishness.

As Sam Gabarski, the director of *LE TANGO* states,⁵⁵ his film is an expression of his own experiences of the living together and growing together of various cultures, traditions and religions within a family or circle of friends. It is also a vision of a future when other families and societies will be able to coexist and interact peacefully in a multi-cultural setting. In another interview he puts it in these words: "Das Thema des Films ist gerade die Toleranz, die unverzichtbare Offenheit gegenüber der Komplexität der verschiedenen Sichtweisen. Es gibt so viele mögliche Interpretationen der Torah im Talmud. Man kann sagen, es gibt so viele verschiedene Interpretationen der Torah, wie es Rabbis gibt, die sie lesen. Das ist das schöne [sic] am jüdischen Denken. Diese Vielfalt hält die jüdische Religion lebendig [...]"⁵⁶ And just as the many ways of interpreting the Torah or practising Jewish religion keep it alive, the many more Jewish identities keep Jewishness alive. To accept this plurality and use it as an asset for Jewish future in Europe, the films encourage their Jewish and non-Jewish audiences.

55 Cf. the interview with the director in the bonus material of the DVD edition by Epix Media, Berlin 2005.

56 "Der Tango der Rashevskis — ein Interview mit Sam Gabarski". http://www.kino-zeit.de/filme/artikel/2208_der-tango-der-rashevskis-ein-interview-mit-sam-gabarski.html, access 06. 11. 2005.