Versions of Home: 
German Jewish Refugee Papers 
Out of the Closet and Into the Archives

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By Way of Explanation.

This article draws on papers presented at three quite different events: a conference on “Jewish Voices — German Words: The Impact of the German-Jewish Experience on Western Culture” held at the University of the Negev in Beersheva in March 1998, a conference at Cornell University in March 2001 on “Narrative and the Holocaust,” and, most directly, a seminar on “Archives and the Production of Political Cultures” at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in November 2000 at which my husband Frank Mecklenburg, Research Director of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, and I reflected, from quite different perspectives, on the origins, construction, and preservation of German-Jewish memory after 1945. In both cases, I took advantage of the prescribed themes to try out — tentatively, with both abashed ambivalence and guilty pleasure — what so

many scholars in this age of memoir and postmemory have been doing recently: to link explicitly (rather than just in conversation with their friends and shrinks or on the meta-schmoozing level of conference conversation) personal histories and received social memories with current academic projects.²

I gave myself permission to think out loud (probably both critically and self-indulgently) about my own overdetermined relation to German-Jewish history and archives: as historian of Germany, child of German-Jewish refugees, a past and potential donor to and occasional user of the Leo Baeck Archives for the history of German Speaking Jewry, and as someone who is part of a larger social and scholarly community that claims some ownership (albeit without providing any significant financial support) of that archive (not to mention as the spouse of the research director and chief archivist, who has his own complicated personal connection to these topics). In other words; I wanted to see what would happen, not if I wrote a separate self-reflexive autobiographical piece (another temptation), but if I worked explicitly from what was anyway implicit: the vantage point of someone who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in New York City in a family of former Berlin Jews, for whom the Upper West Side of Manhattan became in some ways an inadequate ersatz extension of Weimar Berlin and in other ways a new and even better urbane metropolis.

The Archive as Institution

At the Ann Arbor seminar we discussed the Leo Baeck Institute archives as an institution initially established for the preservation and generation of social memory among a group whose collective identity — as the much mythologized German speaking Jews of prewar Central Europe — is rapidly fading, as well as a repository whose contents are increasingly relevant not only to scholarship but to the highly contested production of political culture for both Jews and Germans. The texts, photographs, and artifacts contained in the archives have long provided fodder for well-trodden academic debates about the fate of German Jewry: cultural symbiosis versus failed assimilation, proud legacy of cosmopolitan West European culture versus “dreams and delusions” in

². To my knowledge, the most interesting formulation of this sort of mixed project, carefully mixing personal memory and history, is Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer’s work, “Ghosts of Home: The city of Czernowitz in Jewish History and Memory.”
the face of eliminationist anti-Semitism. Somewhat surprisingly, however, for an institution that defined its mission as rescuing and documenting remnants of an irretrievably destroyed past, turn of the millenium political culture has provided the archives with a new lease on social and political as well as scholarly life.

The unified Berlin Republic’s search for identity and legitimacy and Germany’s growing confrontation with multiculturalism has intensified the (both praised and ridiculed) obsession with somehow comprehending and re-appropriating a missing Jewish past. This past, had, after all, been not only exterminated, but also transferred in countless lifts carrying the accoutrements of German-Jewish life to all corners of the globe. Indeed, one could remark polemically on the curiosity that, unlike the Holocaust, this forced emigration is often presented as a tragic loss for, rather than a crime by, Germans, but that is another discussion. At the same time, for highly divided Jewish communities in the United States, Israel, and Western and Eastern Europe (indeed virtually everywhere from Tokyo to Buenos Aires) the history of German Jewish struggles around secularism vs. observance, acculturation vs. tradition, universalism vs. particularism, even the highly developed debates about intermarriage and reforming religious practice, have taken on (at least potentially) new resonance. Our current memory boom, fueled by panic about the loss of eyewitnesses’ living memory (and perhaps our own middle-aged lapses), has led not only to a much debated public memorial culture centered on World War II and the Holocaust but also to heightened individual fascination with genealogy, family history, and personal memoir.

Finally and more mundanely, but absolutely crucial to the maintenance of an archive, human life cycle intervenes: the refugees are dying


or moving out of their family homes into old age facilities. Their children and grandchildren need an alternative to simply chucking out the debris, the relics, and the history of this supposedly vanished but somehow constantly recycled and re-interrogated cultural group. The children and grandchildren are generally thoroughly integrated members of the (non-German) national and ethnic/religious communities in which they ended up, and quite unattached — and if at all, mostly on the level of family memoir or in a minority of cases, in terms of scholarly work — to any notions of “German-Jewish legacy.” Relieved to find a safe place for papers and artifacts they dimly imagine to be important but for which they have no space and no use, they become the “donors.” Ironically, many of the “users,” or at least those with the greatest sense of urgency (and one might add, funding) have been Germans determined to excavate a history that they know is theirs only in the most excruciatingly complicated ways. All of these relationships are in a particular state of flux at a moment when the Leo Baeck Archives in New York are for the first time sharing physical (and mental and psychological) space with American-Jewish and East European Jewish (the background of most American Jews) archives in the Center for Jewish History on New York’s West 16th Street on the one hand, and on the other hand, have opened a separate distinctly “German-Jewish” branch in the new Jewish Museum in Berlin.

The Personal History

What then does all this have to do with the focus of my paper at the Ann Arbor archives seminar: the German-Jewish papers — and multiple other artifacts — that came tumbling out of, in great piles of dust and mildew, my mother’s and my aunt’s closets a couple of years ago when I had to relocate both of these elderly Berlin-born ladies (much against their will) from their Manhattan apartments to nursing homes in (horrors!) the Bronx and Queens respectively? My parents arrived in New York relatively late, in 1948, after a circuitous adventurous route, separately and together, through Iran, India, and Palestine; my aunt in 1949, after ten years spent working as a domestic servant in London. Their lifts (and those of other family members with other routes) contained the souvenirs not only of their upbringing in Germany but of their farflung emigration: the boxed Goethe and Schiller sets next to Persian rugs and miniatures, the guidebooks to the Palestine desert next to ones for New York skyscrapers, the heavy down quilts of Central
Europe packed next to the tropical shorts and hats from India, Bauhaus pottery with ivory elephants, expressionist art books and German chamber music programs from Teheran. They had not been in Berlin, their hometown, for over 20 years, and yet once installed in New York, they immediately became part of the quite hermetically-sealed, insistently German-speaking, but also quintessentially worldly New York Yekke community which defined my childhood in the 1950s.

My father reappropriated in conscious parody the old folk-song: *Nur am Hudson möchte ich leben, nur am Hudson glücklich sein, Nur am Broadway möchte ich leben, nur am Broadway glücklich sein* [Only near the Hudson do I want to live, only near the Hudson will I be happy; Only on Broadway do I want to live, only on Broadway will I be happy], in that interesting mixture of bemused painful Weimar nostalgia and joy in New York, where the modernist Americanist dream of Weimar, now finally became one’s own.

To be German-Jewish, I thought, comfortably ensconced between Zabars, Gitlitz Wurst Geschaeft, The Tip Toe Inn, Café Eclair (where my father had his Stammtisch), Riverside Drive, and the Museum of Natural History, was to be from the Weimar metropolis Berlin, Bohemian, avant-garde, cosmopolitan, secular, and a little bit Communist. Only later did I learn that in Washington Heights and New Jersey it might also mean to be religious, ordentlich, pünktlich, und gemütlich [orderly, prompt, cozy]; in other words, organized, disciplined, and enjoying much Kaffee und Kuchen. It was a time in the 1950s and 1960s, when I had to practice English (how to say my “ths”) at PS 87 on West 78th Street, while the butcher, the baker (Royale made the best Sachertorte), the shoemaker (who made those horribly sensible walking shoes that my Lebensreform-enthused mother forced me to wear), and the no-nonsense pediatrician (who later killed himself) all spoke German. So did the sex-reformed gynecologist who still kept on display the Pessare and diaphragms that he had rescued from his Ehe-und-Sexualberatungsstelle [marriage and sex counseling center] in Berlin, and who together with Dr. Gräfenberg from the Kurfürstendamm had discovered (invented?) the G spot. Rabbi Hahn at Congregation Habonim (Liberal, not reform or conservative, following the tradition of the Fasanenstrasse synagogue in the 1920s) delivered his sermons in German; this only changed when his successor Bernhard Cohn took over and not only spoke to us, the second generation, in English, but
marched in Selma and embraced the civil rights movement with Martin Luther King, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and another German-Jew, Rabbi Joachim Prinz from Newark, New Jersey.

Our family Bible was the Aufbau. My father read it religiously, starting always with the obituary pages, to ascertain “ob ich noch lebe,” [“if I am still alive”] and then moving on to the movie reviews, since film-going was restricted to only those films deemed sehr sehenswert [very much worth seeing], by the Aufbau critics, who were judged to be more sophisticated and less philistine than even those of the New York Times or WQXR. The Aufbau also offered an endless supply of Gerglish jokes to remind the Yekkes of the absurdities of their attachment to German. There was the recently arrived refugee tenant, housed in a room along the long corridors of the overcrowded Washington Heights apartments who stammers to the Con Ed man demanding to inspect the “meter,” “The meter, the meter, but I am the Mieter [tenant].” Or the thrifty Hausfrau, outraged by the local price of healthy vegetables, “So much for a cauliflower! But I can bekom [get] a cauliflower across the street for much less.” I remember the Sunday walks in Fort Tryon Park where one would never know that a language other than German existed; the excursions to Yorkville, the German-German district on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, on Christmas Eve so that my father could order his Weihnachtsgans [Christmas goose].

But I also remember the agitated debates about Wiedergutmachung [reparations], about Hannah Arendt’s Eichmann in Jerusalem when it first appeared in The New Yorker, and the televising of the trial in 1961, which my father made me, a child of ten, watch every night. For me as New York German Jewish child, however, there was never any doubt about the distinction between those who were refugees (like my parents) who had escaped the worst and those who were survivors. The latter had been in what was always called a KZ and had blue numbers on their arms. The relatives and friends with numbers on their arms came with the terrible taint of survival, the whispering about how they had made it through. Tante Lee had been very beautiful, it was said; she had to work in a brothel, servicing Nazis and Kapos to stay alive. Her husband, years later, committed suicide. There was no honor back then in being a survivor, certainly no desire to inflate the designation to include all who had escaped the Final Solution one way or another, much less the second or even the third generation.
And when the *Wiedergutmachung* payments started arriving in the late 1950s (my father was a restitution lawyer), the annual *ersatz* summer outings to the Catskills, to the German-Jewish lodges in Tannersville and Fleischmann's where dinner came with *Sauerbraten* and red cabbage, quickly returned to the real thing: a holiday in the Swiss Alps or in the Dolomites. Moreover — this is a story perhaps more common than we might think — there were the relatives left in Germany, the ones who had, like so many German-Jews, intermarried. They had stayed behind, had survived the camps and forced labor, or had been in hiding. They in turn had become even more polyglot, intermarried now with more recent immigrants to the new postwar Germany, in our case, from Saudi Arabia and what was still referred to as the “Belgian Congo.” Every summer on our way to and from the obligatory tours of Florence or the Alps we stopped off to visit the family in Germany; they seemed so alien, so un-American and of course they were Catholic, but, I — like so many of the refugee kids I knew — an only child with no grandparents and very few living relatives, was thrilled to have cousins.

**The Archive and Personal History: Dilemmas**

The Leo Baeck Archives was part of that German-Jewish refugee world, along with the *Aufbau*, Congregation Habonim, and Café Eclair, clearly more social institution than academic repository. This latter circumstance was underscored by the fact that most of the employees were non-professionals, taking advantage of their German *Wiedergutmachung* pensions to labor for little or no money in their own personal community archive. In fact, when I was a high school junior, who knew a lot of German but very little history, my after school job was at the Institute, cataloguing what turned out to be an important collection: one of the LBI newsletters has a photo of myself and a friend, also a child of refugees, in miniskirts and lots of black eyeliner, shelving books. For years, even after I trained as a historian (German, not Jewish or German-Jewish), the LBI always seemed to me to be more communal storage locker than serious archive.

But as the profession opened to social history, history of everyday life, women’s history, gay history, history of sexuality, gender, and the family, history of madness and psychiatry, the mounds of German-Jewish personal letters, diaries, and memoirs being tossed into the dumpster or carted into the Institute were cast in a new and more “serious”
historiographical light. At the same time, it became clearer that the history of German Jewry, their life in Germany and after emigration, represented an absolutely necessary complement, and not just nostalgic coda, to German and Holocaust history. I too came to share — at least in theory — the perspective of the acquisitive archivist or searching historian whose interest generally is omnivorous, “Just hand it over, everything is interesting, it will be useful to some researcher, even if you don’t think so; there is virtually nothing that should not be preserved.”

Only in the past couple of years, since the papers literally fell out of the closets, have I had to think from the combined perspective of the donor as well as of the historian user. I’ve dragged my feet on handing over materials that I might be thrilled to find if they were someone else’s papers neatly organized in some other archive. I’ve engaged in all the evasive behaviors that archivists struggle with on a daily basis as they try to wrest documents away from their owners. I want to read everything myself before I give it away. But I don’t have time to read it all, or even part of it, so maybe it would be better off in my attic, waiting for me to have the time. And maybe I don’t really want to read it all anyway; there are plenty of things about my family I’d rather not know or have confirmed, nor am I sure that I want (or can afford) to expend the emotional energy required to confront all this material with an insider’s eye. But then, why should anyone else know those things? Do I really want to let some young German graduate student who has decided to become an expert on Jews to interpret my family papers — however he or she sees fit — as an example of German-Jewish experience or sensibility?

And what if I want to write my own book? Perhaps if I made the leap from scattered sorting through to systematic research in my own private archive, a publisher or granting agency would give me the money that would buy me the time. But wouldn’t I then have succumbed to the widespread and to my mind, highly problematical, contemporary academic propensity to write self-absorbed and narcissistic — if often quite fascinating — texts about ourselves and our own histories. Wouldn’t it be better if I let go and left it to others, even callow and naive German graduate students, to forage among the debris of my mother’s and my aunt’s closets? And so on and so on. But, damn it, it’s my story, my stuff. And once it’s in an archive, it’s no longer mine. Simply by virtue of being boxed and labeled in an archive, catalogued and categorized, and made available to others, even under whatever restrictions I choose
to decree, the family remnants become public and historical. That, of
course, constitutes both the magic and the terror of archives.

Unavoidably then, and somewhat separate from my questions about
whether I or someone else should work on this material, I in my dual
role as donor and historian have to decide what pieces of my inherited
“stuff” should become public and historical in this manner. This raises a
whole other set of questions which really do matter when we talk about
archives as sites of political culture and the molding of social memory
and knowledge. What belongs in an archive and what doesn’t? What
can in fact be legitimately thrown away or stored in the attic until it
falls apart? Clearly, advanced techniques of preservation and reproduc-
tion have made it physically possible to conserve and collect much
more than ever before. But what do we really need to preserve and
why? Who really needs all this stuff and why? What can the personal
papers of a few more German-Jews still tell us about a history that has
been exhaustively researched and memorialized? Could it be that at a
moment when historians feel overwhelmed by the sheer mass of avail-
able data, when hardly anyone has enough time or money for long-term
archival research (except commissioned studies with teams of research-
ers), when someone else is always already working on a similar topic,
when coherent narratives constantly threaten to dissolve into microhis-
tories or, alternatively, grand metahistories (of the twentieth century, for
example), telling the highly particular idiosyncratic stories contained in
personal papers is the most interesting and constructive contribution we
can make to historiography? How do we, the guardians of personal
memory and the producers of published history, negotiate the con-
stantly shifting borders between the “historically valuable” on the one
hand and pure voyeurism or obsessive collecting on the other?

In the second half of this article, I would like to exemplify these ques-
tions, first by describing some of what fell out of the closets, and sec-
ondly by beginning a historical analysis of a particular group of papers.

The Stuff: For the Archives?

Here is a very partial and abbreviated list of some of the items I pulled
out of the closets and chests in those Upper West Side apartments: dis-
colored trousseau linens; dainty and still beautiful lace doilies; hand-
painted china, both cracked and intact, from a family porcelain factory in
Nuremberg; black and white Feldpost postcards sent home from the
Eastern front in World War I; garish color postcards from postwar excursions to the Alps or Redwoods; faded photographs of people whom I did not recognize but who were all "of a familiar type;" concert and theater programs from Berlin, Teheran, Bombay, and New York; scores for house chamber music quartets; menus from generations of weddings, Bar Mitzvahs and transatlantic ocean voyages; elegantly tailored 1930s women's suits and matching shoes; masses of birthday cards; airplane tickets and itineraries testifying to the inextinguishable Weimar passion for tourism; rusty cameras, nail clippers, and sewing needles; piles of tattered newspaper clippings about anything remotely to do with Jews and the Holocaust, and plastic bags filled with postwar aerogrammes linking friends and relatives scattered all over the globe, from Tokyo to Tel Aviv, Capetown to Canberra, Buenos Aires to Boston.

From the bookshelves floated hundreds of volumes, most of them falling apart: the ubiquitous Goethe and Schiller sets but also Tucholsky, Brecht, Marx, and Emil Ludwig; the Koran and a German-Hebrew Siddur; Baedeker guidebooks to virtually everywhere; 1920s sex manuals; and beautiful prints of modernist art. None of them, alas, in a condition that would attract the interest of an art or antiques dealer. But nonetheless, an extraordinary inventory of moments in life cycle and historical time. And this list does not even include the truly embarrassing items like the manic anxious scribblings in my mother's daily calendars, the handwritten 1947 marriage contract in which my parents promised to allow each other separate vacations and "friendships," and the long brown braid — perfectly preserved by my mother in tissue paper — that I had cut off when I was in third grade. What to keep? What to throw out? What to note as possibilities for the "object theater" planned as part of the exhibitions in the then soon-to-be-opened Jewish Museum in Berlin? What belongs in an archive? In a museum? On my private shelves? In attic boxes for my own children and grandchildren to rummage in? In the garbage? Some choices are obvious — certainly no one needs any more worn copies of Goethe and Schiller and the braid has been disposed of — but most are not.

Finally, almost indistinguishably mixed in with the old newspapers and recent birthday cards and smelly prescription bottles, were the "documents": amazing overwhelming amounts of paper recording intensely private dramas, some of them (which part? How can one separate?) undoubtedly also of general historical interest. There was the full
correspondence between my father, carefully numbering his letters from behind barbed wire while interned by the British as an enemy alien in the Himalayas, and my mother, his errant girlfriend, who had chosen to stay behind in romantic Teheran. She had refused to follow him on what was supposed to be an escape from the Persian desert, where they, two adventuresome Berlin Jews, had met in 1935, to western civilization in New York City. She writes dreamy letters about skiing down the Iranian mountains in her bathing suit and torments him with elliptical tales of her other romances. He describes in minute detail the bizarre-ness of being both a European colonial and a prisoner of war. He vents within the limits of censorship his anger about the clear British preference for the better behaved Nazi/Germans over the unruly anti-fascist/German prisoners who keep insisting they should be released to join the war-effort. He yearns for cold weather and female company. At the bottom of that pile there were some moving reflections by my secular father on serving as the internment camp “rabbi” and saying Kaddish among the Jewish inmates in Dehradun, British India on VE Day for what was already then defined as the “six million” dead. These are surely powerful and intriguing texts (typed and in English thanks to the censors’ demands!); however, they perhaps tell us more about British colonial rule during World War II and the life of Europeans in exotic locales, than about German-Jewish history as conventionally conceived (not to mention more than I ever wanted to know — or want anybody else to know — about how weird my parents really were).

There were masses of other letters. Letters written by my aunts in London to the British relief agencies beg for passage for their parents trapped in Berlin; letters exchanged by my maternal grandfather in Berlin and an uncle in Buenos Aires try to arrange last minute passage out of Germany. Letters written by my father on two risky (and still rather mysterious) journeys back to Berlin from Teheran in 1936 (he went to the Olympics) and 1938 chronicle the tightening vise, his unsuccessful efforts to get out his widowed mother, and his stopovers in Palestine where he worked on “import/export” exchanges between Germany and Palestine via Iran. Letters between a young cousin who had ended up in (what was then called) Bulawayo, Rhodesia, and her sister in London show both of them laboring desperately and in vain to organize emigration for parents left behind in Berlin. And there were the many proud, exasperated, and bemused letters from relatives and friends reporting on
life in Palestine; as well as travelogues from a young Viennese Jewish woman who had befriended my mother in Teheran and then gone off to serve as governess to an aristocratic Arab family in Baghdad.

The letters are postmarked from a dizzying variety of locales but in many ways they are quite similar. They all veer between anxiety and despair about the situation the writers had escaped and which they seem powerless — despite enormous exertions — to change, and the fascination and often exhilaration felt by young people starting life anew in strange and faraway locales. Here too, the historically relevant, the simply bizarre, and the highly individual all mix together in ways that I cannot yet fully track. I can fantasize various novels and movies, but it is not at all clear to me how these types of documents — and as I noted, this is only a very partial listing — are to be integrated into German-Jewish social memory or academic history. Certainly, they are not typical of what is — as yet — to be found in the Leo Baeck Archives. Probably for that very reason, they belong there.

Then there were the letters written after 1945. They document the painstaking efforts to re-establish communication, to discover who is alive and where, and to ascertain what had happened to the dead; the effort to digest somehow the enormity of the catastrophe that had occurred while many of the letter-writers stood helplessly (and at times having a wonderful time) on the sidelines. They too come from an astonishing variety of places; some of my favorite “what if” letters are pleas from a childhood buddy of my father’s who had somehow ended up via Johannesburg in Tokyo trying unsuccessfuely to persuade my father to give up on restarting his long interrupted legal career in favor of joining a business exporting Japanese electronics to the US (My father unfortunately demurred). My father’s younger brother, a Catholic convert who had remained in Germany with his Catholic wife and five children until he too was taken to Auschwitz, wrote to announce his liberation from Mauthausen. Other letters revealed that my father considered (and quickly rejected) offers to return to Berlin as a judge.5 Angry exchanges about the return and sale of Aryanized family property anticipate the willful amnesia that allows the owner of the Hotel Astoria at Fasanenstrasse, my paternal family’s former home, to advertise “one of the friendliest hotels in

5. For another version, see the 2001 film Nirgendwo in Afrika [Nowhere in Africa], directed by Caroline Link and based on a novel by Stefanie Zweig.
Berlin," with "a special style and service like in the good old days." A hotel brochure proudly explains that in 1938 Paul Berghausen, the current proprietor's grandfather, purchased [sic] the property "with the charm and solidity of the past century" and that in 1947 after Reserve Naval Lieutenant and commander of a minesweeper Walter Berghausen (1911-1999) returned in 1947 from an American POW camp "he helped his father Paul with the reconstruction of the Hotel Astoria and further hotel business. . . ," eventually receiving "the silver and golden pin of honor of the Berlin Hotel and Inn Guild" but makes no reference to the poisoned transactions that made that business possible.6

Finally, there were many more letters chronicling the rather humdrum return to bourgeois normality, whether in New York, Palo Alto, Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, London, Bern, or Sao Paulo: degrees completed, businesses established, children born and graduated, voyage enjoyed, friends passed away. Here, particular questions about selection and relevance arise. Do the chatty letters sent back and forth between say, Los Angeles and Jerusalem in 1963 (in German of course), about aches and pains, the achievements of children and grandchildren, the latest jaunts to the Dolomites or Paris, belong in an archive of German-Jewish history? What about the eightieth birthday greetings mailed in 1990? Descriptions of return trips to Germany? Where does one draw the line? Does everything accumulated within the lifetime of one person once identified as a German Jew count as history for a German-Jewish archive? Or at least as social memory? Am I not allowed to throw out anything? Do I get to pick a date, a year, after which these papers are just family memorabilia or junk, and not "History"? A topic category which defines certain events as now clearly just "American" or British or Israeli, and no longer in the purview of German-Jewish history?

The History (Out of the Closet): The Berliner Who Left

Finally, I want to highlight two sets of German-Jewish documents which clearly do qualify for the archives and therefore present other problems. The first bunch literally fell out of the very back of my mother's hall closet onto my head, just when I thought I had cleared

out everything and was about to close up the apartment forever. The second set sits well catalogued but relatively unknown and unstudied in the Landesarchiv Berlin. Together they provoke questions about how to fit particular life stories preserved in personal papers into larger historical narratives, and about how the frame of the archive — where and how papers are preserved, and under whose auspices — orders how they can be used and interpreted.

I am currently working on — and thinking about how best to use — the first set, documents and letters belonging to my maternal grandfather, Heinrich Busse, who survived “underground” in Berlin after his wife was deported to Auschwitz from her forced labor job during the notorious Fabriaktion in February 1943. The materials tell us very little about his life as an “illegal” and how he actually survived. A former Ullstein editor with a flair for writing, Busse clearly felt that his story had historical significance. An unsuccessful exchange of letters with Victor Gollancz and Heinz Ullstein indicates that he had hoped already in 1946/47 to publish a memoir dramatically entitled Berlin Underground. But he never found an interested publisher and he never seems to have written the proposed book, settling instead, in his old age, on a pacifist tract with a flaming rocket on its cover called Ohne Krieg. From the moment of going underground until just before liberation, there is — not surprisingly — no paper trail. However, the papers he did keep from the period 1945 till 1948 do, I think, tell us a good deal about postwar German history, and the ever vexed history of German-Jewish relations.

Despite the Nazi pledge to make Berlin judenrein, Jewish life in the capital of the Third Reich had never completely stopped. It survived in precarious niches; underground among the Jewish “illegals” hidden in factory lofts, apartments and the shacks of Berlins’ many garden plots [Schrebergärten], on the grounds of the Weissee Jewish cemetery, and both officially and secretly, in the strange ambiguous world of the Jewish Hospital [Jüdisches Krankenhaus] under the eyes of the Gestapo. Indeed, the scope and variety of the Jewish presence in the vanquished former capital of a regime that had succeeded in exterminating most of European Jewry was quite extraordinary. Shortly after war’s

end, some some 6-7,000 Jews were counted as Berlin residents. It is crucial to note here that these figures are imprecise and confusing and depend heavily on when exactly the count was taken and how “Jew” was defined. Two thirds of those identified as Jewish survivors in Berlin shortly after the war were intermarried or the children of mixed marriages; of the 5 to 7,000 Jews who had actually gone underground, probably no more than 1,400, including my grandfather, made it to liberation. Jewish survivors in Berlin, represented a high proportion of the 15,000 Jews who survived within the entire Reich, but of course only a fraction of the 160,000 who had been registered as members of Germany’s largest and most vibrant Jewish community in 1932.

Right after the Soviets took control of the city in May 1945, Jews received ID cards from the reconstituted Jewish community [Gemeinde] and “Victims of Fascism” [Opfer des Faschismus, OdF] insignia. Registrations which only days, certainly weeks, before would have meant deportation and death now had concrete benefits in terms of housing and increased rations. My grandfather’s papers, tucked in a brown leather folder in that hallway closet, tell one story of these drastic shifts of identity. A March 1945 receipt under a false name from a lodging house in the Berlin suburb Lehmitz still marked him as a hunted illegal. The next form dating from August 13 was a modest typed certificate from the reconstituted Jüdische Gemeinde, Berlin, Iranische Strasse, certifying that Heinrich Busse was a full Jew and had

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lived hidden [verborgen]. A year later, on July 15, 1946 a more official Ausweis Nr. 2584 [identity card] from the Gemeinde confirmed that he was of the mosaic faith, had worn a star, and had lived as an “illegal;” it came with ration stamps for a pullover, socks, shirt [Sporthemd], and food. On August 30, Heinrich was a Berliner again; he had a full Ausweis with photograph issued by the Magistrat der Stadt Berlin, Hauptausschuss OdF, certifying him, in German and Russian, as a fullfledged OdF. He was now stamped both as a Jew and a victim of fascism, useful designations in the hard year 1946 in Berlin.

On July 4, 1946, a year after the Americans entered Berlin, Heinrich Busse also re-acquired his German civil identity. He was issued a real Berliner ID, signed not by occupation or Gemeinde authorities, but by the Berlin police chief, listing his citizenship as “German” and omitting any mention of religion. By June 27, 1947, however, he also possessed a much more valuable document. Printed in French and English, a Titre de Voyage or “Travel Document in lieu of a national passport,” allowed him to enter Folkesstone, England on October 20, 1947 and rejoin two daughters who had fled to England as domestics in early 1939.

In addition to his precious official documents, Busse also saved carbon copies of all the letters he wrote from Berlin to his daughters in London and Teheran from the end of 1945 until he reached England in Fall 1947. In fact he seems to have exchanged his hard-won rations for a (surely black market) typewriter and the services of a typist. In the very first letter that he was able to post to his family in England on December 12, 1945, he addressed the most important question immediately, head on and unsparingly: “You will all be wondering how it is that I am saved and our dear mother was not able to escape the rabble. Well in brief...” He then recounted in horrifying riveting (and sardonic) detail that he had tried in vain to convince his wife to attempt a last ditch flight into Switzerland and how after his wife’s irrevocable deportation from her forced labor job at a Siemens plant, he managed the next morning to outwit and outrun the 3 SS men who had interrupted his own preparations to finally flee, with a “now or never” [Jetzt oder nie] leap out the window and dash for the nearby woods:

I was now preparing myself to escape alone and was prepared enough that I was planning to head out in a few hours, but then my landlady in Schlachtensee [suburb of Berlin, near the Grunewald] (a really nasty woman) called quite merrily into my room: “Herr Busse, you are
being taken away!” And in came 3 SS soldiers and gave me a few minutes time, one was such a fresh rascal, I almost punched him in the face. I sat there, only half dressed in housecoat and slippers and explained to him that I had to get myself ready. In one unguarded moment however, I thought to myself, now or never. And ran, just as I was, in slippers and without a hat, through the backyard into the nearby woods, ran in a zigzag back and forth, finally hid myself in the bushes, and lay there, despite the cold, hungry and freezing, until the evening. As I discovered later that night from a fellow tenant, the soldier had ran after me like a crazy man, pointing his revolver, but despite his 20 years and my 68 he couldn’t get me. This was certainly an achievement, it required a strong will and determination, also quick thinking, but also a lot of luck. . . . Well you see I made it. . . .

After the intervention of a nephew who had returned to Berlin in American uniform assured a steady supply of CARE packages with food and cigarettes for black market barter, Busse quickly recovered physically and apparently psychically. Virtually alone in Berlin, his children emigrated, his wife murdered, most of the rest of his family incinerated, his letters were full of the astonished exuberance of survival. The septuagenarian was irrepressible, full of projects, and signing his letters in 1946, “Long live life, your still lustig for life. . . .” He recorded with undiminished Berliner Schnauze the strangeness of life for liberated Jews in post-Nazi Berlin. Describing a (now legendary) public Passover seder for over 2000 soldiers from the four occupying armies and including local Jews, held in April 1946 at the Schöneberger Rathaus, he noted, “there was a very good meal for free, but in exchange one had to listen [in Kauf nehmen müssen] for hours to an English-Hebrew service, which not a soul understood.” (20 Apr. 1946).

But even as he delighted in the long lost pleasures of “an English cigarette and a pitcher of coffee of the same origin,” he took on the grim task of explaining the scope of the catastrophe to those who had escaped: To his son-in-law in London (whom he had never met) he sent a “devastating document” [ein erschütterndes Dokument], the final letter from his mother before her deportation. “I can only press your hand in my thoughts and express the hope that your dear mother did not have to suffer for long” he wrote and added “to speak about any further hopes seems useless.” In postwar Europe where so much survivor energy was bound up in trying to locate, or at least to find traces of, the dead and missing, people pleaded that they would be grateful for “any,
even the tiniest information.” They were loath to accept that, as Heinrich Busse wrote to still hopeful relatives abroad in December 1945:

I am very much afraid that we will all have to accept the awful fact that there is no more hope. Whoever hasn’t returned by now, will hardly have, as the Gemeinde tells me, the possibility of reporting or suddenly surfacing with the countless refugees who are crisscrossing the country. All the search actions are only a tranquillizer, because how are we to find anyone in the midst of these millions upon millions, especially given the lack of lists and documentation.

Reading these letters, it became clear to me that for a very German Jew like Heinrich Busse who at times briskly described his life in the underground as just another challenge to a hardened German gymnast for whom, “there was no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing,” [Es gibt kein schlechtes Wetter, es gibt nur unpassende Kleidung, 12 Dec. 1945], the real recognition of the irrevocable loss of his Heimat and the need to find another or substitute one came only after the war had ended. He realized that despite the hopeful excitement of liberation, which had made him feel as if “newborn,” there would always be — as he put it in a birthday letter to his 36-year-old married daughter in London on June 18, 1946 — “a sediment of mourning in the heart of your and all of our joy in life and ability to experience pleasure.”

Only in 1947, however, over two years after his liberation, when Busse had left Berlin behind forever, did he begin to articulate more fully the enormity of the German-Jewish catastrophe and the persistence of anti-Semitism. Once arrived in London and waiting to organize his further emigration to New York, he kept both sides of a rather stunning correspondence with some of his former rescuers, the Germans who hid him during the last years of the war. These letters reveal a good deal, I suggest, about we might think of as not the banality of evil but the banality of good. They deal not with political virtue or moral heroism or the role of the righteous gentile; they are in many ways, sad, angry haggler’s letters. They are about money and possessions and who owes what to whom and why, about who has and is suffering more, who has lost more and why; about what, if anything, Germans and Jews, even those who had stood by each other, in moments of extremis, still have to say to each other after 1945. And ironically, it is only after 1945, when Busse is safe in England, and Berlin is occupied, that any kind of real discussion of, and recognition of anti-Semitism can take place.
He had, Busse acknowledged to a former business partner and rescuer:

always, as you may know, considered myself more as a German than as a Jew, and rejected the stupid and deliberately constructed division between people who have lived in one land for many hundreds of years.

But now in his letters back to Berlin he expressed a dark view of the fraught relationship between rescued Jew and the German rescuer [Rettter], one characterized by bitter disputes over scarce material goods and profound existential disagreements about what had actually happened in the very recent past:

Due to the very sharp and general condemnation of Germany — not only here [in England] but everywhere abroad, I have myself become more self-critical and perhaps more clear-sighted.

Ironically (and tellingly) Busse was most bitter, not about the mass of Germans whom he had long since written off, but about the minority of good Germans. They had helped him survive and he had maintained faith in them throughout the darkest days, even after his wife had been deported to her death, even after the rest of his family had either emigrated or been murdered.

During the war, the “illegals” and those living in mixed marriages or as Mischlinge, had relied on the help and cooperation of Germans. Even at their most desperate, those in hiding or in touch with resistance news felt somehow vindicated in thinking that they were dealing with a “real” if minority Germany, with which they might join in reconstructing their homeland after the Nazis were defeated. After liberation, Jews were shocked and aggrieved by the sentiments revealed among even the “decent” minority. Their rescuers complained about ungrateful Jews who received special favors from the occupiers, or were quick to emigrate leaving their helpers behind hungry, cold, and self-pitying in a devastated city, or who (in Allied uniform) treated them insensitively in denazification procedures. Confronted with Germans preoccupied with their own misery, and indifferent to, or in denial about, what had happened to their Jewish compatriots — what observers termed “the enigma of German irresponsibility”\textsuperscript{11} — surviving German Jews felt the force of anti-Semitism even more painfully.

than when hiding in a friendly Schrebergarten.\textsuperscript{12}

Busse was shocked and horrified by a hectoring letter from an old business acquaintance, the furnituremaker Hermann Paul, who had sheltered him in a Schrebergarten during the war’s chaotic final months (at great personal risk, but not without hope of advantage after Germany’s inevitable defeat). Smariting from the miserably cold winter of 1947, when the Tiergarten was cut down for fuel, and hundreds of newborns died, Paul complained that Busse, now safe in England, was ungrateful, insufficiently generous with his care packages, and moreover, had taken off with a radio which could have brought a small fortune on the black market. Suddenly, it seemed to Busse, he was no longer the fellow Berliner who had needed help, but just another Jewish war profiteer. He responded fiercely:

I was speechless [\textit{Mir blieb die Spucke weg}]... Even you seem to be accepting this silly as well as pernicious "Antisemitism." [\textit{Auch Sie scheinen sich ga jetzt tatsächlich zu dem ebenso albernen wie böserarti gen "Antisemitismus" bekannt zu haben.}]... I am not indifferent to what you think of me. Not in the least do I want to minimize or deny that I owe you much thanks. You behaved decently and with courage, quite unlike the overwhelming majority of Germans, towards a criminal, treacherous, and in every way deeply contemptible regime. I have expressed this to you repeatedly. But I must tell you one thing in regard to your current attitude and your outrageous version of events. As much as I value your help and your previous rejection of National Socialism — your brother Erwin had himself at the time not been shy about declaring that under the existing circumstances [late in the war] the dangers of taking me in were not so great, the benefits of helping someone persecuted possibly greater. I completely understood that, and would never have thought about even mentioning this. Now however, it is necessary. Because it might at least make you — I have no such hopes anymore about your brother Erwin — more thoughtful.

In another letter from London on April 11, 1947, Busse responded passionately to the laments of Molly, a young woman who had supported (and perhaps more) him during his years as an "illegal." She

\textsuperscript{12}. Frank Stern in \textit{Whitewashing the Yellow Star} posits that anti-Semitism was in many ways more visible in Germany after the war than before. For one German-Jewish perspective on postwar Germans, see Hannah Arendt’s much quoted lament about Germans’ “deep-rooted, stubborn, and at times vicious refusal to face and come to terms with what really happened.” “The Aftermath of Nazi Rule: Report from Germany,” \textit{Commentary} 10 (1950): 242-43.
was, he insisted, so immersed in her own experience as a victim of war, defeat, and victors’ justice that she had lost all sense of moral and historical proportion:

You have no idea how provocative it feels to those whom it affects when you now ask when will the liberators finally have satisfied their bloodthirstyness against us. When you as a German accuse them of horrendous tortures, after the entire world is still stunned with horror over the exposed and still not really admitted, somehow excused or trivialized, atrocities of the Germans, of which no one wants to be guilty or even involved. When you, despite all that has happened, literally write, “and after all, our hearts and hands are pure and with them the blood is flowing out of their collars,” and other stuff like that, you refer personally to yourself and yours, but you can’t possibly assume that the same would hold for the Germans as a whole and that one can expect the world simply to forget the horrors of Hitler, with which after all the broad masses generally identified.

Interestingly, while he came to attribute Paul’s postwar behavior to anti-Semitism, Busse, a man of his time, concluded that Molly’s skewed reaction also had to do with her gender: “It shows that even intelligent and personally worthy women should stay away from politics, if only because they judge too much by feelings and not with reason.”

In March 1947, Hermann Paul, his former rescuer, had sent another depressed and demanding missive to London. It is still snowing in Berlin and terribly cold. They can’t work in the furniture workshop since there is not enough coal; they are reduced to eating the roots from their garden:

Morale is miserable, but we must all keep going and not allow our heads to hang. . . . We are happy however that you are so well and hope that you will in time be able to send us a package with coffee and such things.

Busse is neither helpful nor sympathetic. England too has to suffer, he points out and there is certainly not enough to eat in wartorn London either. Indeed some English rations are sacrificed so that Berlin will not starve. He is, he explains, just a refugee in England, dependent on his refugee daughters, and as such has no access to the rations of luxury items [Genusmittel] such as cigarettes, coffee, and cocoa which the Berliners need for their own black market trading. He fumes that Paul should suddenly position him, who had barely escaped with his life, whose wife and scores of other relatives were murdered in Auschwitz,
as the Jew "who was doing so well" who should be sending packages to Armee Deutschland and planning new import/export business ventures for the benefit of suffering German victims. Busse is not ready to accept that role reversal. Still longing for the bracing air and beautiful lakes of his native city, he decided that he could never again live in a city where he had to explain even to his friends and saviors, "the not in the remotest way comparable difference between the conditions in Berlin or Germany now with those in Auschwitz, Belsen, etc."  

On December 21, 1948, Heinrich Busse crossed his last border, following his middle daughter who had recently arrived from Teheran. The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service admitted the seventy-four-year-old to New York City where he became an enthusiastic resident of Morningside Heights. The last official document I found was from December 13, 1957, about a half year before he died at the age of 83. It is a letter from the Entschädigungsamt, Berlin, informing him of a raise in his reparations pension to DM 87 a month. These misleadingly titled but all important Wiedergutmachung payments would accompany — still do — all German Jews, whether successful or not in their new lives, whether they needed them or not, throughout what they persisted in thinking of — even 60 years after the fact — as their emigration.

The History (in the Archive): The Berliner Who Stayed

But there were also other resolutions, other ways, albeit less likely, to be a German Jew after May 1945. The debates about whether to stay or go, to stay away or return, were played out in countless conversations and letters that moved back and forth between Germany and the multiple emigration destinations. Some of them are mirrored in the papers of Sigmund Weltlinger, a Berlin Jew who survived in Nazi Berlin and insisted on remaining there, zu Hause at war's end, an exception to the

13. Parts of this section on Busse and Weltlinger were previously published in Grossmann, "Home and Displacement."

14. Nachlass Siegmund Weltlinger, LAB, Rep. 200 Acc 2334. Others would come back later, when the situation in Berlin had stabilized, after the division of the city and the formation of the Federal Republic. For example, Hans E. Hirschfeld, whose Nachlass also lies in the Landesarchiv Berlin. A veteran of World War I and the Hamburg Workers and Soldiers Council, he had fled to the US from France in 1940 via the Pyrennees and Lisbon, but after eight unsatisfying years in the US, working for the OSS, and continuing to feel himself as exile rather than emigrant, he returned to Germany to work for Ernst Reuter's Senat. These guys were the minority — absolutely — but in Berlin they loomed large. See LAB, Rep.200, Acc. 2014.
general rule observed by an American Jewish observer: “The fact that the German people feel no compulsion to make amends for the crimes of Nazism is the most important reason why a substantial part of the few remaining German Jews have decided to emigrate.”

Weltlinger’s papers are not stored in a German-Jewish archive, but as befits the Nachlass of a German government official, in the Berlin Landesarchiv. Weltlinger was appointed the first Commissioner for Jewish Questions [Beauftragte für Judenfragen] with the postwar Berlin Magistrat and later served as a conservative Christian Democratic (CDU) deputy in the Berlin Assembly [Abgeordnetenhaus]. From February 1943, after their children had been sent to England, he and his wife had lived concealed in Berlin with friends. Like many “illegals,” they rarely left their hiding place, made it through several terrifying house searches, and had relatively little sense of what was going on around them. Like Busse, Weltlinger wrote postwar letters in a strongly defensive mode. He, however, was defending himself not against aggrieved Germans but against uncomprehending Jews who questioned his decision to stay in Berlin. On July 8, 1946, his niece Resilottie Lisser, now living at 750 Riverside Drive in New York, a classic Washington Heights (Fourth Reich) refugee address, wrote to her uncle and aunt in Berlin. She tried to persuade her only remaining close relatives to come to New York: “What a life we have here in freedom — it is good to live here.” She assured them that everyone could find work and that they would not be a burden. On March 3, 1947, she tried again, reflecting the thoughts of the vast majority of her fellow Yekkes living in that Viertes Reich on the problematics of what it meant to be home, zu Hause.

No, for us there can be no going back, even if in my thoughts I am often back “at home.” But it was all only a dream, my youth, and everything to do with it. I am at home here now and happy!

She had a four year old American daughter with blond braids.

Weltlinger however did not want to leave Berlin. He had only just emerged into its daylight again, and he found the city open and fascinating. In the hard years 1946/47, like so many Berliners, he and his wife went to the theater, heard Furtwangler conduct Menuhin, admired Gründgens, Dorsch, and many other great actors and actresses on the

reopened, if unheated, stages. He was a minor big shot, privileged now as a Jew with good contacts to the Allies, enjoying the many receptions and parties with German and occupation officials.

Inevitably, there are silences and ruptures and inconsistencies in his stories. He reported how well they were living, better than most Berliners; his wife was greeted at receptions as _Frau Stadtrat_. He insists, “In contrast to most of the emigrés, we now live just as we did before, we have a nice small apartment just for us, I have a very prestigious position.” But he also pleaded for shipments of food and clothing to be sent from New York; through the US Chaplains Office and the British Jewish Relief Unit. On September 9, 1946, he carefully chronicled the lost and murdered; listing the names of those “unfortunately gassed” _[leider vergast]_ . . . actually most of our old friends — one mustn’t think about it.” But of course he must think about it. In the same letter from January 20, 1946, which announced her lovely four year daughter with the blond braids, Resilotte, now 28 years old, confirmed that her parents had been deported to Riga: “Yes, my dear Uncle Siegmund, Your optimism has triumphed, the Nazis have been defeated, but what a horrendous price have you had to pay.” There are wrenching exchanges in the letters, about judgements and decisions made and unmade. Wettlinger defends himself against accusations that he had influenced Resi’s parents to stay in Berlin until it was too late. No, he claims, everyone had to make their own decision, but for him, yes it was clear, that he would never leave, that he had preferred the illegal life at home to the free life in exile.

So Wettlinger and his wife stayed on in postwar Berlin, even as their children made new lives abroad. His children, sent away early for safekeeping, would never again think of Berlin at home. The daughter became a painter in Rome, with two children. Her husband a successful economist from Cambridge working with UNESCO turns out to be a former German-Jewish kid himself. The son in England does not feel so at home, and is apparently still looking for a wife in the mid-1950s. But the reports from abroad, whether from Rome, London, or New York, and certainly not from Palestine, do not tempt Wettlinger. He is horrified (10 Sep. 1946) that his brother-in-law who had had an elegant apartment in Berlin, and would immediately be reinstated as a judge and notary if he returned, now works as a chauffeur in Jerusalem, lives in a 2-room apartment with one room rented
out, and his wife selling handicrafts.16

Weltlinger was not convinced by all the letters reporting on successful new lives and begging him to join the emigrés. In December 1949, he informed his friend Max in New York: “You can believe me that the few Jews who are still around and capable of working are everywhere in key positions and very beloved.” Yet the inconsistencies and ruptures keep intervening; he adds, “Where however the DPs are present in masses, there is also anti-Semitism.” Still, he is entrenched in his hometown, “We have found a new and stimulating circle which makes a lot of music. We hear good operas and concerts. Berlin is right up to par,” he contended in 1951. He continued to campaign for former Berlin Jews to return to a place he still considered home, mistrusted their insistence that they had created new homes, saw himself as an advocate for “unsere armen Menschen,” and perhaps most importantly a voice for reconciliation. Weltlinger even made the prescient (very — about 40 years) argument that a vital ongoing Jewish community was necessary if only because Berlin was the logical destination for a future but inevitable exodus of Jews from the Soviet Union. And he wrote things about his choices and those Jews who questioned his choices that would make me cringe were I reading them as his granddaughter and not as a historian pleased to find another trove of personal letters.

History and Memory: Where?

Apparently undisturbed by such scruples, Weltlinger’s son donated his papers to the Berlin Landesarchiv. Ever the Berlin patriot, Weltlinger would undoubtedly have approved. As it stands in the Landesarchiv, however, Weltlinger’s Nachlass is presented primarily as an interesting example of early West Berlin communal politics. The

16. One thinks of the poignant descriptions in Vittorio Segre’s memoir of his rented room on the Ibn Ezra Strasse in Jerusalem where he lived as a British soldier in the early 1940s. He remembered his landlady as “a completely typical representative of the German-Jewish bourgeoisie, who while impoverished by the emigration to Palestine, was nonetheless resolved to maintain at all costs the external forms of the lost social status.” Every Shabbat, her husband Dr. Wilfred, an unemployed physician who tried to do some import/export business, invited over his friends, put on his best suit, — white linen in summer, tweed in winter — his wife having put on her jewels and set the table with silver — and drank coffee from the best china, read from the best books that had come over in the Lift from Hamburg, and argued politics, the course of the war, and the future of Zionism. See Vittorio Segre, Ein Glücksrabe: Die Geschichte eines italienischen Juden (Munich: dtv, 1996) in English as Memoirs of a Fortunate Jew (Bethesda: Adler and Adler, 1987) 250-58.
anxious and uncomfortable debates about German-Jewish identity and German Jews’ relationship to postwar Germans they also contain are entirely marginal to the social and political memory and knowledge production of the archive in which they rest. I can’t help but wonder, however, whether these letters would read differently and be used more frequently if they were embedded in a different (and perhaps less lonely) context. Would Weltlinger’s son, if given the choice now, have been willing to give the papers to the Leo Baeck Institute archives attached to the Jewish Museum in Berlin? Would that have changed their social meaning and historiographical impact?

Alternatively, once I struggle my way through deciding when I’m ready to give Heinrich Busse’s papers to the Leo Baeck Institute, does it matter — in an age of electronic reproduction where originals have increasingly symbolic value — whether they land in New York or in Berlin? Will they be categorized in Berlin as part of the uneasy story of post-war Jewish life in the divided former capital; in New York as the long prehistory to a necessary emigration? Will they be used to tell the story of German postwar self-pity and willful incomprehension of their own responsibility, or to examine the twists and turns of German Jewish identity in the shadow of the Holocaust? Or to reflect on the endlessly tortured (and still somehow fascinating) exchanges between Germans and Jews about their inextricably linked but polarized past and present, as revealed by the limits of understanding in even that most potent (and glorified or sentimentalized) relation of rescuer and rescued? Obviously, all those questions are relevant; is the location of the papers likely to affect and to what degree, how they are all addressed? What would Heinrich have wanted? Would he have been pleased or horrified to be “returned” to Berlin over a half century later. Would he have preferred (my prejudice) that his memories of Berlin stay in New York? Will German scholars be more likely to read the materials productively in New York, and American and/or Jewish scholars in Berlin? Will they have more contemporary relevance in Germany — becoming a part of debates about responsibility and memory — than in the US, and does that matter?

Finally I return to the question of “what is history for the archives?” There are large chunks of Weltlinger’s Nachlass that could be easily classified as entirely private, uncomfortable and embarrassing, if a bit titillating and voyeuristic for the researcher to read. But they are part of the package for whomever chooses to look. The same of course could be
said of my grandfather’s papers. Many of the letters, such as the ones from which I have quoted above, are unquestionably of historical interest; with others or parts of others, the categories are much more ambiguous. Certainly, there are many, like most of Heinrich Busse’s, still resting in dusty closets or shaky boxes, at best in orderly manilla folders, awaiting their readers and their decisions about what goes to which archives.

For the vast majority of those letter writers, like those corresponding with Weltlinger, by the 1950s, home had irrevocably shifted, even as it continued to move; in New York, for example, from Washington Heights to the Upper West Side, from upper Riverside Drive to West End Ave. As one refugee turned new American wrote to Weltlinger in Berlin on March 22, 1951:

One has to work, work hard to get ahead. Refusing to work is not allowed. In the morning one rushes full of energy into the chaos and in the evenings one returns exhausted into one’s more or less comfortable residence. It is a rough and colorful life here in New York, hectic and full of chasing about, and only every now and then a calm reflective hour, which one deeply appreciates. It is a nerve wracking exhausting city . . . I really don’t want to sugarcoat anything, life here does not proceed in a gemütlich manner, as it did “once upon a time” in Berlin!!! But, why is it after all, that no one wants to go back? I know no one who would trade this hard life against a better one back there!

Another friend confided contentedly on April 19, 1955 “. . . I work hard, collect my fat paycheck, and everything else is up to me. That’s America.”

For Heinrich Busse also, living on West 111th Street in Manhattan, one building away from where I now live, it was clear that as much as he and his friends preserved their refugee world, no one ever, even for a moment, wanted to go back. Even though, perhaps because, in certain ways, they never left. The refugees knew very well that the world they had not quite left no longer existed as a real place to which one could return.

For the most part, if not entirely, the history of German Jews continued outside of Germany, in the exile communities, Washington Heights, Upper West Side, Golders Green and Hempstead Heath, Tel Aviv, Moshav German and Rehavia, certain neighborhoods in Buenos Aires, Melbourne, and elsewhere. In some ways they were all the same, the same china, the same doilies, the same accents. But, the curious thing is that the second generation ended up virtually unrecognizable as anything
that might be called German Jewish. Increasingly I am struck by how often I discover quite by accident that colleagues and acquaintances, my children's pediatrician, parents in my children's schools, fellow scholars, share some of this background. I am struck also by how curious it is that this most visible — sometimes irritatingly so, in their insistence on being emigrés, exiles, or not eager to assimilate European immigrants, with their clinging to their language and their rituals, their afternoon walks [Spazierengehen], their Kaffee und Kuchen still served on the family porcelain amazingly intact from their long voyages in the huge lifts of the 1930s and 1940s, their determined critical distance from all things too Amerikanisch (or Israeli? Or otherwise rooted) — should have produced this most invisible second (not to mention third) generation, generally completely integrated into Jewish middle class life, certainly in the United States. Surely there is more comparison to be done with how the story plays out in Israel, in Europe, in South Africa, or in Latin America. Some, a very few, refugee children went so far as to go "back" to live longterm in Berlin, some only so far as to steal a Berliner back here to that better Berlin, New York.

And how ironic, interesting, and also unexpected it is in many ways, that scholars and even some community leaders should now turn back to pre-Nazi Germany and the legacy of German Jewry, for a perspective on what it means to be not only German-Jewish, but indeed Jewish in a multicultural universe, at the turn of the millenium and well over a half century after the Shoah.