

# Introduction

IN LATE 2001, I WAS LIVING IN Great Britain and meeting members of the aging German Jewish refugee community through my doctoral work at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies at the University of Sussex. These former refugees from Nazi Germany were actively engaged in preserving German Jewish history. In impeccable English, they asked pointed questions regarding my research, which was still in its infancy. I did not know to what degree they were representative of typical German Jews from London and the south of England. Yet, it was evident that they were different from the German Jewish refugees I knew in New York City. My personal experience with this population, up until this point, had consisted of childhood weekends spent with my refugee grandparents and their social circle in Washington Heights in Upper Manhattan. There, German was the primary language heard among refugees on the street, in parks, and in homes. The weekly Jewish newspaper, *Aufbau*, literally translated as “build up,” was published almost exclusively in German. Refugee manners, appearance, and habits reflected the retention of German Jewish culture, even after decades of living in the United States.

The longer I spent among former refugees in London, the greater my sense grew that they appeared more British than the refugees in New York seemed American. Their dress, leisure activities, and home décor, in addition to language and accent, supported this observation. Intrigued, I poured through current and back issues of the *AJR Information*, the Association of Jewish Refugees newsletter that had been in print in London since 1946. The articles, classifieds, and advertisements confirmed my suspicion that after the war German Jewish refugees had established a uniquely British refugee community in London; one that was unlike Washington Heights and the other refugee enclaves in New York, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, and in Forest Hills, Queens. I became focused on comparing

the London and New York communities but knew I would have to look back to the 1930s, the early years of their flight from Nazi Germany, to fully understand how they came to appear so dissimilar from one another. This was the beginning of *Cities of Refuge*.

To appreciate the extent to which German Jewish lives were transformed in London and New York in the 1930s and 1940s, it is useful to briefly review the long history of Jews in German-speaking lands. Providing a straightforward narrative, however, is no easy task. Since the end of World War II, there have been extensive efforts to understand the ways German Jews balanced *Deutschtum*, roughly translated as “Germanness” and *Judentum*, “Jewishness,” prior to the rise of Hitler. In memoirs, former refugees have insisted that their own families were “assimilated” or “integrated.”<sup>1</sup> Some historians have described a “symbiotic” relationship between separate Jewish and German culture. Others have argued that a German Jewish “subculture” or a “parallel associational life” existed as a response to antisemitism.<sup>2</sup> It is only in the past twenty or so years, as the approaches of Cultural Studies and Gender Studies, in particular, have become more widely utilized by historians, that a more nuanced and richer picture of German Jewish experience has developed.<sup>3</sup> Scholars are reconsidering meanings of “Germanness,” “Jewishness,” “citizenship,” and “normality” through close analyses of individual lives.<sup>4</sup> The result is a more wide-ranging, diverse understanding of the history of German Jews and their identities.<sup>5</sup> *Cities of Refuge* draws on these developments to uncover the new patterns of identity practices among German Jews in London and New York.<sup>6</sup>

### Millennia of Jewish Life in German-speaking Lands

Archaeological evidence indicates that Jews arrived in Central Europe with the ancient Romans as early as the first century CE.<sup>7</sup> By the fourth century, Jewish settlements with synagogues and ritual baths existed alongside newly Christianized Germanic peoples on the Rhine River.<sup>8</sup> For the next thousand years, Jewish communities developed near trading centers such as Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Cologne. Medieval Jews were restricted in their employment and housing options. They engaged in money lending and trade with Christians, but lived, studied, and prayed among themselves.<sup>9</sup> On the whole, however, Jews maintained a relatively low-profile day-to-day existence in the Middle Ages, punctuated by episodes of antisemitic persecution. In the

eleventh century, Jews were massacred by Crusaders in cities such as Worms and Mainz. Two hundred years later, Jews faced waves of antisemitism resulting in Jewish dress codes in some states that required the wearing of “Jew hats” by men or a yellow ring stitched onto their clothes. In cities such as Cologne and Trier, Jews lived in designated Jewish quarters.<sup>10</sup> Some ghettos were walled and gated like Frankfurt’s *Judengasse* or “Jews Alley,” where Jews had limited contact with Gentiles, outside of business interactions. Jewish communities often flourished in these quarters with their own newspapers, hospitals, and Yeshivas.<sup>11</sup> Hamburg and other Northern cities of the early modern era saw an influx of Sephardic Jews from Dutch and Belgian cities, whose ancestors had originally fled Spain in 1492. In the countryside, Jews tended to live in or on the outskirts of Christian villages, clustered with other Jewish families. Traditionally they engaged in the trade of cattle and textiles. Both urban and rural Jews remained active in commerce throughout the early modern period. Yet, they were still living on the margins and, on the whole, were prohibited from entering other professions.<sup>12</sup> It is estimated that by the mid-eighteenth century, three-fifths of Jews in German-speaking lands remained among the “poor classes.”<sup>13</sup>

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and industrialization and urbanization in the nineteenth century transformed the social and political climate for Jews in German-speaking lands. By the 1830s, modern concepts of liberalism, citizenship, and secularism were embraced by a burgeoning German middle class. With a swiftly expanding and liberalized economy, Jews gained greater financial security and rose in social status. Along with the German Protestant and Catholic bourgeoisie, German Jews valued *Bürgertum*, “civic contribution” and *Bildung*, roughly translated as the “cultivation of secular culture,” and participated in the development of a German liberal middle-class society.<sup>14</sup> Across the separate and competing German-speaking principalities, from Baden to Prussia, the idea of belonging to a greater German nation began to take hold. Efforts to create a unified and liberal Germany in the 1830s and 1840s overlapped with organized movements for Jewish emancipation. *Haskalah* or “Jewish Enlightenment” of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century, was a Jewish intellectual movement that explored issues around reconciling Judaism with secularism.<sup>15</sup> *Haskalah* directly influenced the establishment of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the scientific study of Judaism, the Reform Movement of Abraham Geiger, and the Modern Orthodox Movement led by Samson Raphael Hirsch, groups that were in support of emancipation for Jews.<sup>16</sup>

Germans of Jewish Descent:  
Imperial Era, 1871–1914

In 1871, the German principalities were formally declared one nation under the reign of Wilhelm I, the former king of Prussia, who was now the emperor of Germany. Some liberal concessions were made, including the granting of universal male suffrage. Jews became citizens of this new nation with equal rights in the eyes of the law. The German Imperial Era began with the unification of Germany in 1871 and ended with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. With their newly acquired legal rights, Jewish small-business owners and tradespeople expanded their production and distribution of goods on a national and even global scale.<sup>17</sup> Between 1870 and 1920, 60 percent of Jews were living in cities. A small but significant number of Jews attended German universities. They could now enter previously prohibited professions such as law and medicine. Jews entered the growing German middle class. They strove for *Bildung*, an appreciation for German high culture in private and public life, while simultaneously preserving Jewish values and traditions within the home and community. As Robin Judd wrote, “*Bildung* appealed to many Jews because it transcended religious and national distinctions. Men of any background could achieve civil and moral betterment if they were familiar with a certain corpus of knowledge and exemplified ethical behavior.”<sup>18</sup> Cultural signifiers such as dress, language, food, and décor expressed both German *Bildung* and Jewishness. Marion Kaplan illustrates in *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* how Jewish women played an integral role in shaping this culture.<sup>19</sup> She explores how wives, mothers, and daughters demonstrated loyalty to both the “Fatherland” and their Jewish heritage through everyday customs and rituals in the home. The finest furniture-filled homes, and bookcases lined with German classics, stood near mantels bearing silver menorahs and ceremonial candle holders. Daily meals were typical German fare, consisting of hot midday dishes and cold evening meals with dark bread. Kaplan estimates that approximately one-half of all Jewish homes kept Kosher, but did so within the framework of the German dining schedule. German standards of cleanliness and order were adhered to in Jewish homes. This was coordinated by the female head of household, with the employment of at least one domestic servant. Kaplan writes that for Jews, “Culture did not begin and end with the university or German classics. It included the creation of a model home life, a model family.”<sup>20</sup> Kaplan also shows how

German Jewish women used parenting, household management, and leisure activities to maintain this balance between German *Bildung* and Judaism.

Dressing elegantly and in a refined manner emphasized one's social and financial standing, and helped gain respectability within the community. Yet, with their elegant clothes, they maintained a careful measure of understatement, some argue, to prevent antisemitic backlash.<sup>21</sup> German was the primary language spoken by middle-class Jews, and the use of Yiddish was discouraged. The newly formed *Liberale* synagogues had German-language sermons, texts, and prayer translations, and classical music was played. German first names such as Ludwig, Siegfried, and Liselotte were adopted by middle-class Jews, although obvious Christian names, such as Lukas and Maria, were avoided. Family names were more often, but not always, identifiable as Jewish.<sup>22</sup> Jewish social and cultural organizations and clubs proliferated. The leading umbrella organization representing Jews in Germany was called the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith.

### World War I and the Weimar Republic: 1914–1933

Like their Christian compatriots, Jewish men served in the German army during World War I. More than one hundred thousand Jewish soldiers fought in the trenches against the Allied powers. An estimated twenty thousand German Jews were killed and another thirty thousand were decorated with military honors. Jewish participation in the Great War strengthened their loyalty and sense of belonging to the German nation.<sup>23</sup> With the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the first real modern democracy in German history, German Jews were members of a modern liberal nation-state made for and by its citizens.

Throughout the Weimar Era, Jews were well established in German trade and culture. There were Nobel Prize winners, prominent architects, and famous musicians among them. German Jewish families owned businesses of all sizes. Although most Jewish women focused on marriage and family, they had more educational and professional opportunities than ever before. Rates of Jewish-Christian intermarriage remained remarkably low. Out of 525,000 officially registered Jews in Germany, roughly 35,000 were in mixed marriages, or 6.6 percent. This statistic belies the prior accepted wisdom that Jews strove to assimilate wholesale as Germans and is supported by works on the “Jewish Renaissance” of the Weimar Era.<sup>24</sup>

## Nazi Germany, 1933–1945

With the rise of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist Party in January 1933, Jewish lives in Germany became severely restricted. Jews were systematically forced from their professions; Jewish-owned businesses were boycotted. By May 1933, Jewish migration out of Germany had begun. It is estimated that between 37,000 and 45,000 German Jews fled Germany in 1933.<sup>25</sup> The enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which codified the antisemitic Nazi visions of “Germanness” and “Jewishness,” rescinded the German citizenship of Jews. This prompted another wave of emigration. Jews were no longer officially German. By 1937, approximately 129,000 Jews had left Germany, out of an estimated pre-1933 population of 525,000. By paying high penalties, it was still possible for Jews to transfer money overseas prior to their departure. German Jewish men and women continued to pack furniture and family heirlooms in containers that were shipped to their destination countries.

On the evening of November 9, 1938, Nazis attacked Jewish communities throughout Germany in a pogrom they referred to as *Kristallnacht*, also known as the “Night of Broken Glass.” They systematically destroyed 190 German synagogues, vandalized thousands of Jewish shops, and sent twenty thousand German Jewish men to concentration camps. In the days and weeks that followed, wives and mothers frantically sought visas from any country that would grant them.<sup>26</sup> Proof of emigration plans could expedite the release of a loved one. Foreign visa applications tripled between October 1938 and December 1938 and preparations to emigrate began on a massive scale.<sup>27</sup> Jewish communities and organizations across Germany offered classes in English, Spanish, and Hebrew. Training sessions in anticipated job skills such as sewing, plumbing, and farming were available. By 1939, Jews were permitted to transfer only ten *Reichsmark* out of Germany (equivalent to \$150.00 today). In that year, an estimated 78,000 more Jews emigrated. In October 1941, the German government officially halted all Jewish emigration.<sup>28</sup>

## Flight from Nazi Germany and the Challenge of Numbers

Despite the availability of immigration records, it has thus far been impossible to track the precise numbers and movement of German Jews around the world between 1935 and 1945. Nazi-maintained records of Jewish exit

visa applications offer information on how many people tried to leave at any given time. In order to emigrate out of Germany, however, one needed to simultaneously hold a German exit visa and an entrance visa to another country. As has been explored by numerous historians, the number of immigration and transit visas granted to Jewish refugees by other nations was sharply restricted. Therefore, while hundreds of thousands of German Jews applied for exit visas, many were unable to actually leave Germany. Additionally, thousands of Jews left Germany on temporary student or tourist visas, only to reenter Germany within a year. By December 1939, desperate circumstances led to an unrecorded number of illegal entries and exits throughout the world with no official paper trails. Another difficulty in using Nazi records of emigration was that many refugees did not end up where they had initially planned to settle. In addition to looking at German emigration documents, historians have poured through immigration records of recipient countries. These also have proven to be limited in their use. For example, U.S. immigration visas were granted according to one's nation of origin, such as Germany or Poland, and not by religious affiliation. Germans and Austrians also were counted under one quota, making it difficult to differentiate nationalities between those immigrant records. Furthermore, it is possible to access the official number of German and Austrian immigrants in any given year, but not the percentage that were Jewish. Research conducted by Bat-Ami Zucker shows that U.S. consular staff in Germany were given some discretion in deciding who received or did not receive a U.S. visa.<sup>29</sup> Zucker also found significant evidence that antisemitism guided much of their decision making. Nevertheless, determining the precise number of German applicants who identified as Jewish remains elusive. As Louise London argues in *Whitehall and the Jews*, Britain willfully chose not to track the number of visas granted to refugees from Nazi Germany. She wrote, "The Home Office studiously avoided keeping its own statistics on the highly sensitive issue of Jewish immigration to Britain. This saved it from having to give precise answers to embarrassing questions asked in Parliament and the press about the numbers of Jewish refugees in the country."<sup>30</sup>

The best way thus far for historians to track the movement of German Jews has been to look at the number of visas granted per country, and then try to corroborate those with social service records, refugee organizations, and synagogue records. This, of course, excludes the significant number of refugees who neither sought formal assistance nor joined refugee-related groups. Historians could also examine ship manifests, and cross-check the

names of people who traveled through more than one country. By 1940, evacuations, internment, and military service made it even more difficult to establish the precise number of German Jews in any one place at any given time. Today there remain significant discrepancies between the numbers of German Jewish refugees calculated by various historians, demographers, and sociologists. To settle these differences, one would have to trace the individual paths of each of the 525,000 Germans who self-identified as Jews in 1933, and those who were identified as being “racially” Jewish by the Nazis after 1933. This in itself would be a gargantuan and likely futile task. However, the burgeoning field of digital history has opened the door to the possibility of someday developing software to cull multiple archival databases, access the appropriate information, and then plot out the migration patterns of German Jews during the Nazi era. In the meantime, however, Louise London’s figures appear to be the most thoroughly investigated and accurate.

The number of Jews fleeing Germany between 1933 and 1945, as researched by Louise London, breaks down as follows: 18,000 German Jews escaped to Shanghai, 140,000 to Palestine, 85,000 to Latin America, and 6,500 to Australia. Approximately 30,000 refugees fled to continental European countries such as France, Holland, and Italy, which were eventually occupied by Nazis. Another 20,000 moved east to their country of birth, mainly Poland. By 1945, approximately 250,000 German Jews had entered the United States and more than 80,000 entered the United Kingdom.<sup>31</sup> By war’s end, approximately 5,000 Jews survived in hiding in Germany and another 14,000 lived discreetly with Christian spouses. As to the number of Jews from Germany killed in concentration and extermination camps, estimates range between 150,000 and 170,000.

Great Britain granted temporary asylum in the form of transit visas to tens of thousands of German-speaking Jews. According to the Association of Jewish Refugees’ anniversary publication of 1951, Great Britain saved more Jewish lives than any other country in the year between the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the outbreak of war in September 1939.<sup>32</sup> Approximately 4,000 financially solvent German-speaking Jewish refugees arrived in Britain between 1933 and 1934.<sup>33</sup> Another two thousand refugees were assisted by the Academic Assistance Council, formerly the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, which placed German-speaking scholars in positions at UK universities. Additionally, the Special Areas Act of December 1934 was designed to attract German entrepreneurs to poorer regions of Britain. This resulted in the establishment of 1,000 refugee firms outside of London that employed more than a quarter of a million British

citizens by the war's end. Some affluent German Jews sent their children to boarding school in Britain in the prewar years. Approximately 20,000 German Jews arrived on domestic service visas between 1935 and 1938. Such permits were offered by the British government to bolster the shrinking service class in Britain. While the vast majority of these visas were allocated to women, a limited number of men also traveled to Britain as gardeners and cleaners. The children and spouses of domestic servants were not guaranteed entry into Britain.

After the Nazi pogrom of 1938, Britain accepted approximately 60,000 Jews from Germany. One-sixth of this cohort was from the children's transport program, also known as the *Kindertransport*. This quickly organized endeavor provided visas and housing for 10,000 German-speaking Jewish youth aged two to eighteen years old. After arriving by train into London, unaccompanied by parents, the children were placed in hostels, boarding schools, with foster families, and, on occasion, into the homes of distant relatives. Approximately one-half of the children remained in London, while the rest were sent to homes and schools across the country. The entry of *Kindertransport* children was contingent upon proof of financial resources for their care and eventual emigration out of Britain. The nondenominational organization *Movement for the Care of Children from Germany* and the *British Committee for the Jews of Germany* took full financial responsibility for them. It is estimated that 30,000 refugees emigrated out of Britain between 1933 and 1939, mostly to the United States and Palestine. This left approximately seventy thousand German-speaking Jews living in Britain at the outbreak of war; although five times more than that had applied for asylum, according to Louise London.<sup>34</sup> Until the end of World War II, visa recipients had no reason to believe that Britain would permit them to stay beyond the date stamped in their passports.

During the first four years of Nazi rule in Germany, the United States' annual quota of 25,000 immigration visas allocated to German and Austrian nationals combined remained woefully unfilled due to too few applicants. As reported in Steven Lowenstein's *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, only 535 refugees came to the United States from Germany in 1933, and roughly 2,310 followed in 1934.<sup>35</sup> American efforts to bring refugees to the United States included the work of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced German Scholars which brought 300 German academics to the United States between 1934 and 1939. Proof of financial sustainability or an affidavit from a U.S. citizen was all that was required to obtain a visa. Under a special provision, one thousand German Jewish children were

permitted unaccompanied entry into the United States, sponsored by the German-Jewish Children's Aid organization in collaboration with the Hebrew Sheltering Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). The Wagner-Rogers Bill called for the entry and placement of an additional 20,000 refugee children in the United States, similar to the British *Kindertransport* program. The bill died before making it to the floor of Congress in February 1939, despite the support of first lady Eleanor Roosevelt.<sup>36</sup> By the end of 1938 an estimated 33,000 additional German-speaking refugees entered the United States. In 1943 the total number of German-born Jews living in the United States was close to 197,000. The majority held permanent resident immigration visas that carried few employment restrictions.<sup>37</sup>

Nonetheless, for many, the road to a new home in the United States was a long one. German Jews often spent months or even years in exile in places such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Shanghai, or Lisbon, awaiting the American affidavits and papers that would allow them entry to the United States. Some refugees who settled in Britain came via stints on the Continent, in countries such as France, Belgium, and Holland. Other Jews went directly from Germany to Britain, such as the *Kindertransport* children and those who arrived on domestic visas. In the immediate years after the war there was a reshuffling of German Jews on a global scale. This included German Jews in Great Britain who emigrated out of Britain again, as well as refugees in Shanghai, South America, the Caribbean Islands, and across the African continent, who left for the United States or Palestine after 1945.

### London and New York as "Cities of Refuge"

Cities have traditionally been points of settlement for immigrants, yet only a few historians have compared studies of migration patterns across multiple cities. In *Migrants, Emigrants, and Immigrants: A Social History*, Colin Pooley noted, "through the work of local historians, we know something about migration into particular villages or small towns, but we know much less about migration into and out of large towns and cities and very few studies have made a genuine attempt to compare different places and time periods."<sup>38</sup> Over the past decade, sociologists and anthropologists have developed new theoretical constructs for investigating the role of urban life on processes of migration. For example, the concept of translocal communities recognizes the mobility of immigrants in cities. It sees houses of worship and social clubs as communal spaces, at the same time that their members

lived dispersed throughout a city. A translocal approach looks beyond the traditional concept of immigrant “ghettos,” while drawing on urban studies scholarship of “unbounded” communities.<sup>39</sup>

As of yet, nothing has been published that focuses entirely on either New York or London as places of refuge for German Jews. Steven Lowenstein’s *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933–1983* centers on a particular neighborhood in New York, and Marion Berghahn’s aforementioned *Continental Britons* was based on interviews with refugees across Great Britain.<sup>40</sup> A limited number of comparative studies of immigrants in New York and London exist, such as A. C. Godley’s book, *Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in London and New York, 1880–1914: Enterprise and Culture*, Nancy Foner’s article, “West Indians in New York City and London: A Comparative Analysis,” Andrew Reutlinger’s article, “Reflections on Anglo-American Jewish Experience: New York and London, 1870–1914,” and Selma Berrol’s *East Side / East End*.<sup>41</sup> Although these works consider different periods of immigration and ethnic groups from *Cities of Refuge*, they are useful in providing ways of comparing London and New York as host cities. Moreover, they provide a historical context for immigrant experiences there.

Due to certain common traits, New York and London are ideal cities for comparison. They both experienced an influx of tens of thousands of German Jewish refugees between 1933 and 1941 and the subsequent development of immigrant networks and neighborhoods.<sup>42</sup> Many of the refugees came from German urban centers such as Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, and Cologne. It is not surprising that they would initially relocate to another city.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, because London and New York were perceived as “Western” metropolises, they may have seemed more familiar to the refugees than the “exotic” cities of Shanghai, Buenos Aires, and Jerusalem. The use of English in the United States and Great Britain eliminated a potential unfair advantage one city may have had over the other in terms of language. The fact that both countries were predominately Christian, as had been the case in Germany, also affected identity development. Additionally, comparable social, religious, professional, and political organizations created by German Jews in both cities continue to function today, such as the Association of Jewish Refugees in London and Selfhelp in New York. Their newsletters and newspapers offer primary source material that might not have been as accessible in more temporary locations. The fact that German Jews continued to live in these cities into the twentieth century adds to their desirability as areas of study.

## A Comparative Approach

Nancy Green deftly explains why a comparative approach to migration studies is imperative. First, she writes that the very nature of the immigrant experience is inherently a comparative one. For most, it entails a constant contrast of past life to present that can be recognized and utilized by practitioners of migration studies. Second, comparison allows one to explore the universals inherent in the refugee process. For example, formation of informal networks and the readjustment of family dynamics are often presented as processes unique to a particular group, when in fact they are not. Case studies provide the necessary details of a distinct migration. Yet, the comparative approach places those migrations within a broader context, one that presents opportunities for further analysis and insight. Third, it leads to a more analytical, rather than descriptive, investigation, thereby giving migration history a more “scientific” edge.<sup>44</sup> In her work, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration*, Nancy Foner explores the many new approaches to comparative immigration studies across time and place.<sup>45</sup> *Cities of Refuge* is informed by similar comparative immigrant histories, such as Samuel Baily’s *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise* and Selma Berrol’s *East Side / East End*.<sup>46</sup> Both books are structural studies of employment, education, and demographics, and have challenged the widely accepted notion of the United States as a “melting pot,” particularly at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup> As mentioned in the Preface, these works are similar to my own, in that they compare a single migrant population from one country of origin that settled in New York City and another comparable city. They employ a useful design that fits Nancy Green’s idea of “divergent” comparisons, those that look at one original population in two different settings.<sup>48</sup> These tend to focus on cities as points of comparison, rather than whole nation-states or national policies. *Cities of Refuge*, however, compares immigrant experiences in two places against the backdrop of Nazi Germany and World War II, broader contextual factors that significantly shaped processes of integration, cultural adaptation, and identity practices. This work is unique in that it reveals an unexpected discrepancy in cultural integration and identity development. Namely, it asks why German Jews in London felt pressure to appear British but did not self-identify as such, while, at the same time, German Jews in New York looked and sounded German Jewish, but identified as American. It considers the role of broader national policy as well as more localized employment and housing opportunities in both settings.

Another advantage to the comparative approach is that it can potentially shift paradigms in the field of Jewish history. Werner Mosse notes that

comparison “can throw light on the interaction between internal Jewish developments and external factors. . . . A regional pattern can be superimposed on what is often an overly Judeo-centric approach, while at the same time national compartmentalization can be transcended.”<sup>49</sup> Although case studies of specific Jewish communities are critical, comparative research recognizes that the Diaspora transforms over time and place. It questions traditionally held beliefs; in particular, national stereotypes. A comparative approach identifies the factors underlying assumptions about absolute specificity and uniqueness of particular Jewish groups or regions, such as Sephardim and Ashkenazi or Eastern European and German Jews. One particular comparative study, Rainer Liedtke’s *Jewish Welfare in Hamburg and Manchester, c. 1850–1914* provides a useful theoretical framework for *Cities of Refuge*.<sup>50</sup> In this work, Liedtke analyzes the historical development of self-formed Jewish welfare organizations in these two cities. In doing so, Liedtke addresses broader questions of how Jews perceived their place in British and German society and the external and internal factors that affected this. It does not, however, focus on two immigrant populations.

Research on diasporas continues to flourish in the fields of sociology and anthropology. This work is inherently comparative in nature. For example, Donna Gabbaccia’s *Italy’s Many Diasporas* was one of the first to apply social scientific concepts of diaspora and transnationalism to the study of historical Italian immigrant networks.<sup>51</sup> A challenge for historians who compare immigrant groups is in quantifying rates of cultural adaptation and identity formation. These processes are, by nature, fluid and dependent on multiple variables as described earlier in the introduction.

In this book, I have deliberately veered away from traditional notions of wholesale assimilation. Rather, the terminology and language used here outlines the myriad ways in which German Jews retained, relinquished, and practiced their culture and identities. The emergence of this critical theoretical approach by historians of Jewish history allows for recognition of the transience, complexity, and subjectivity of migration processes. Discourse around identity practice and performance are now being applied to the concepts of “Jewishness” and “Otherness” in the same way that gender has become a theoretical framework for analysis.<sup>52</sup>

### German Jewish Refugees as a Subject of Study

Since the flight of German Jewish refugees began in 1933, scholarship on this cohort has been prolific. Sociological studies out of Columbia University

were published as early as the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>53</sup> Social service organizations and governmental committees also produced research findings with titles such as *Refugees in America: Report for the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* and *Experiences, Problems, and Attitudes of German-Jewish Refugees*.<sup>54</sup> Beginning in the 1950s, a steady stream of books came out that focused on prominent refugee groups. A sampling of well-known titles includes: *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe*; *Exiled in Paradise: German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s*; *Hitler's Gift: Scientists Who Fled Nazi Germany*; and *Jurists Uprooted: German-speaking Émigré Lawyers in Twentieth-Century Britain*.<sup>55</sup>

A body of scholarship has developed around the everyday experiences of the tens of thousands of so-called “typical” refugees. These studies differ from the previous group in that they closely examine the obstacles, both material and emotional, faced by immigrants.<sup>56</sup> Some research focuses on children and young adults, including studies of the *Kindertransport* program.<sup>57</sup> Case studies have been published on German Jewish refugee communities in locations across the globe, including the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Brazil, Shanghai, Zambia, India, Australia, New York City, and upstate New York.<sup>58</sup> Nation-based studies of German Jewish refugees in Switzerland, Canada, Australia, France, Turkey, and Ireland have critically evaluated their immigration policies and governmental procedures.<sup>59</sup> Each nation that accepted refugees provided a unique set of conditions influencing identity practices including: national immigration policies, employment opportunities and prohibitions, and their proximity to and level of engagement in World War II. *Cities of Refuge* directly compares how these broader external factors affected German Jews in London and New York.

A historiographic debate has developed among scholars of refugee history in Great Britain, which needs to be considered in this transatlantic study. In *Remembering Refugees*, historian Tony Kushner raises serious concerns about the presentation of refugees in historical accounts.<sup>60</sup> Kushner maintains that scholars should apply a more critical and less “celebratory” approach to their study of past and present refugees in Britain. He argues that while there is value in recognizing the contributions of the mid-century European Jewish refugees to British culture, it is vital that historians avoid the pitfalls of wholly embracing Britain’s national narrative of the United Kingdom as a historical place of asylum. In his own expansive body of work, Kushner has been unafraid to expose the antisemitism and xenophobia faced by Jewish immigrants throughout Britain’s history.<sup>61</sup> Anthony Grenville has taken another tack. He is the author and editor of numerous publications, such

as *The Experience and Achievement of German-speaking Exiles from Hitler in Britain, 1933 to Today* and *Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria in Britain, 1933–1970: Their Image in AJR Information*.<sup>62</sup> In 2002, Grenville wrote that “the current preoccupation of historians and social scientists with attitudes to race and racial prejudice in Britain has led some academics to create what seems to me almost a counter-myth, projecting the tensions arising from Britain’s transition to a multi-racial society back onto the history of the Jewish refugees from Hitler and systematically downplaying or even ignoring anything positive in the interaction between Britain and the Continental Jews.”<sup>63</sup> The tendency in Britain for former refugees to express gratitude toward Britain in their memoirs and interviews is obvious. Yet, as Kushner indicates, it is imperative that historians of German Jewish refugees do not present this group as immune to the prejudices normally experienced by refugee populations. This cohort struggled in both Britain and the United States. As evidenced in their own testimony, they were not “welcomed with open arms,” yet they had positive experiences in both London and New York. Rather than attempting to evaluate the motivations and accomplishments (or lack thereof) of the American and British Jewish communities to assist European refugees, I strive to compare the refugees’ own perceptions of their integration in each city and their understandings of nation and its meaning in the United States and Great Britain in a time of war.

Debórah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt’s *Flight from the Reich: Refugee Jews, 1933–1948* is the most comprehensive work to date on the fate of German Jewish refugees.<sup>64</sup> The authors successfully acknowledge refugee achievements while critically analyzing the obstacles they encountered in Germany and around the globe. Methodologically, Dwork and van Pelt draw on a diverse range of sources including oral history testimony, memoirs, letters, and refugee newspapers. As stated in the preface, *Flight from the Reich* offers a broader historical context to the more narrow scope of this comparative study of German Jews in London and New York. In her 2003 article on her own personal connections to the community, Atina Grossmann observed that there is an ever-expanding body of German Jewish personal papers, such as letters, diaries, and other memorabilia, filling the archives of institutions around the world.<sup>65</sup> In recent years much of this has been digitized and made available online. This has become a treasure trove for historians. Hopefully, as worldwide archives synchronize their collection of metadata, many more avenues of investigation will open to historians of German Jewry.

The findings in this book come from a careful analysis of a wide range of sources. It draws on the archived collections of thirty-four individual

refugees, including hundreds of letters, ten diaries, and more than twenty mostly unpublished memoirs archived in Britain, the United States, and Germany. Refugee publications such as *Aufbau*, *AJR Information*, and the Free German Cultural League's *FDKB Nachrichten*, and the documents and records of refugee and government organizations have been extremely useful. In addition, I conducted ten interviews with former refugees who had written unpublished memoirs, diaries, or articles. The ongoing discourse over the meaning and use of survivor/refugee testimony is part of an entire subfield on memory and the Holocaust.<sup>66</sup> My approach to refugee testimony is grounded in a consciousness of this dialogue. It would be wrong to assume that distinct collective refugee experiences existed in London and New York. Rather, I look for patterns that arise in the content and language of individual testimony on both sides of the Atlantic. I find myself nodding my head in agreement with Judith Gerson, when she writes,

Although I initially treat each memoir as a case, I also am interested in aggregate patterns—something one can only discern by comparing these memoirs to one another. What at first appears to be an individual experience or reaction may also prove an illustration of a more generalizable pattern. Thus the most obvious form of comparison I rely on when reading these memoirs is contrasting them with each other. Closely related to this form of comparison is my reading of them with a larger socio-historical context.<sup>67</sup>

In the same way, my analysis of interviews, memoirs, diaries, letters, organizational documents, and newspapers reveals clear differences in identity practices and performance of German Jewish refugees in these two cities. It shows how specific policies and perceptions of the host countries affected this.<sup>68</sup> Distinct and divergent patterns arise. Refugee testimony of everyday life in London differs markedly from testimony in New York. German Jews were forced under the Nazi regime to rethink their identity as Germans of Jewish descent. It is the subsequent practices of German Jewish identity development and cultural adaptation in Great Britain and the United States that are the focus of *Cities of Refuge*.