

The Power of Organizing and the Rise of Democracy. ca. 1780-1914

Professor Dr. M.J. Janse

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

J.M. Schneider

November 15, 2008

**The Formation of The Central Association of German Citizens
of Jewish Faith:
An Appeal for Recognition**

The Formation of The Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith: An Appeal for Recognition

CONTENTS:

I. Introduction, A Different Take on History

II. Scene Setting--Jews' One Foot in the Door and Two Hands Out

III. A Cautious Plea for Acknowledgment of and Respect for a New Jewish Identity--Taylor's
Politics of Recognition at Work

IV. The Foundation of the C.V., A Leap of Faith and An Act of Courage--Löwenfeld's
Identity Claims Find Resonance

V. Conclusion

I. Introduction, A Different Take on History

The story of a single association's struggle to obtain a piece of the pie to which they were hitherto denied in some form or fashion in society, is more often than not an inspiring one. Be their cause to garner attention, to fill a practical gap in their representation, to serve as a public pressure group of sorts, or to assert their legal rights, in each case, the pursuit is filled with triumphs and failures, peaks and troughs. History looks to the success stories of those associations to be heralded as a model for others to follow, and to the failures of others to be examined for where they went wrong. Success stories are commonly measured by their achievement at leading to something bigger and more far-reaching than themselves--the beginning of a movement or path to greater things, that was spawned or initiated by the single association, and the failures measured by focusing in on what appears to be the fundamental *flaws* of the approach applied, and/or the association's demise in support. One thinks of the case of the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S., with the *success* of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) headed by Martin Luther King Jr. and the failure of the Black Panther Party led by Malcolm X at overcoming the institutionalized racism in the U.S. Yet one can easily imagine that the story of the U.S. Civil Rights movement is more complex than those statements of success and failure would suggest, that a far more nuanced story is to be told. How might the SCLC have been shaped if there had never been the Black Panthers?--one might ask, for example. The importance of the so-called "failed" approach in setting the tone of the debate and inserting counter-points into the movement, thus comes more into light, such that one can see room for a different assessment of the movement and those organizations' role in history, than the simplified one mentioned.

Indeed there is often much more to tell in the story of a single association, about the way the groups of people get together in the first place, how the road to their formation is in itself a singular act of achievement and interest in its own right, and has significance which lies outside the ultimate success-failure spectrum in the big picture of history. If one looks only at those broad strokes, those monumental and outstanding developments that make chapter headings in textbooks, then the full depth and breadth of what is to be learned from history is lost and goes missed. Those broad strokes of history do not detract from the singular acts of courage, assertiveness, and experimentation with something revolutionary in itself--whether or not a revolution is set in motion--and point to a different definition of what is to be learned in history, not as ultimate successes or failures rather

broadly defined from the perspective of the present looking back, but rather, as the acts in time which pointed to a new direction in thought and societal relations from the perspective of the onlooker in that historical context.

This essay is a foray into the argument that the paths between those peaks and troughs, and even more importantly, the story of their motivation to take claim to that piece in the first place, is essential in itself, and speaks volumes to others. It speaks not only through the prism of its ultimate success or failure, but for the betterment of our understanding of societal struggles and claims-making, and for the enrichment of our understanding of the individual players at work in mind-altering, relations-changing, policy-shifting developments, through the microscope of *their* place and circumstances in *their* day and age.

To be sure, one could easily devote a lifetime to studies of all the singular struggles which make up our collective efforts at progress and change, over time. Yet when the literature on a particular association presents a lopsided picture of their significance through the lens of today's framework of judgement, then, the painting of a fuller picture is called for, both to do justice to their cause, and to reveal more about what is to be learned from their fight for respect, due accord and equal treatment before the law. The organization of focus is a one Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, whose title alone suggests a great deal about the nature of the claim which they put forward in the setting of the 1890s in Imperial Germany. The Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith (henceforth abbreviated to C.V.) was formed at a time when Jews had over the two odd decades since their emancipation, reached unprecedented levels of assimilation and achievement in business and intellectual life in Germany, and at the same time faced renewed popular antisemitism typified by the election of some 16 antisemites into the German Parliament in 1890 (Pulzer 106), whilst a large segment of Jews themselves believed speaking out on their own behalf would be detrimental if not counterproductive to the cause of fighting antisemitism (Steinitz 14). A detailed account of the leading up to their formation and their motivations is to be told later.

For now it suffices to point to the relevance of a theoretical framework for highlighting an aspect of the story of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith which has not been told, and that is the prime importance of their claim for recognition, in the act of their formation and the initial stages of their pursuit in establishing a voice for

themselves. This is a theory construed by Charles Taylor, on the so-called *politics of recognition*.

That is in no way to say, however, that placing the C.V.'s struggle in the larger context of historical movements is not of paramount importance to appreciating the gravity of their claims given the horrific turn of events in the Third Reich. Apart from *recognition*, the C.V.'s substantive demands for equal treatment before the law and legal redress for public acts of antisemitism, are indeed of substantial import, and that much is reflected prominently in the literature on the subject with more than ample cause. Works by Barkai, Pulzer, Meyer, Jensen, Nathans and Reinharz flesh out those issues in varying detail. These demands were imperative to the greater struggle for holding onto gains solidified by Emancipation and figure a large role in the ultimate survival story of the Jews of Germany pre-Holocaust.

Yet this greater struggle need not diminish the telling aspects of the story of the C.V., which yield important insights on the way groups in a democratic society, however fragile it might be, respond to renunciations of their equal right to space *and* respect for their difference in the public sphere. Steinitz strikes a chord in saying that the approach toward writing about the C.V. must not be confined to the Post-Auschwitz view on the period. Furthermore, if one applies the very cogent theory put forth by Charles Taylor on the politics of recognition, a number of salient factors in the lead-up to the C.V.'s foundation and their entrance into public life and consciousness, sheds new light on the thus far success-or-failure dominated schematic through which their story has been told. Taylor's theory asserts the centrality of a group's plea for acknowledgment from the mainstream or dominant group, of its *difference* whilst being equal citizens, in their *raison d'être*. That is to say, the chief aims of a group as expressly laid out in their works may say nothing of the kind, that it is *recognition* which they seek, but recognition is often indeed key to reaching those aims and implicit in every call for action from the dominant group which is taken.

A consequence of Taylor's approach then, is to shift the parameters from which to measure the organization's success, to a smaller scale, whereby the organization's surfacing to public scrutiny can be seen as an achievement in itself, indeed an exercise in democracy at its infant stages and against enormous pressure by Christians and Jews alike, to remain in the shadows. This essay will outline the full extent to which Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition finds resonance in the case of the formation of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith and its beginnings, and in doing

so, feature a facet of their story which yields potential insight for the assessment of others groups' pursuits in testing democratic promises.

II. Scene Setting--Jews' One Foot in the Door and Two Hands Out

Some two decades after Jews were granted full citizenship through emancipation in 1869, a large number of them took to the cities, taking advantage of their new freedom of movement and settlement. The majority moved from the countryside to the city during this time, especially in the Prussian state, which saw an increase of over 25 percent of its Jewish population between 1871 and 1910 (Meyer 27). What's more, already accustomed to internal migration in search of the best conditions for rights on choice of profession and settlement before Emancipation, the lot of Jews, now having procured a secure status across the country, put an extra premium on socio-economic advancement (Meyer 23). Between 1815 and 1871, the proportion of German Jews making up the middle and upper classes grew from 35% to 60%, while those of the lowest class shrunk from 50% to between 5% and 15%, varying by region (Barkai 13). The inroads they made in academia were also of great import, as, it had also been an avenue largely excluded to Jews. Though often at the price of baptism, the number of Jewish scholars with posts at universities grew significantly, from 9.4 percent all of German university teachers in academic year 1874-1875, to 12 percent in 1889-1890 (Meyer 158).

The extent to which the presence of Jews was felt in public life, is highlighted by an educationalist, Friedrich Paulsen in 1903, when he points to the remarkableness of the socio-economic ascent of Jews in the 19th century-- "a people that only a hundred years ago was regarded as alien, and felt itself to be so" [. . .] now "conduct the business of the world, create public opinion, and fill colleges and universities" (Meyer 240). Of course, in the very same breath, Mr. Paulsen, though himself having repudiated antisemitism, goes on to add that this process "leads to abnormal conditions" under which, if equal opportunity for Jews were to persist, would lead to "foreign domination" (Meyer 240). A Königsberg theologian, Rudolf Friedrich Grau had taken it a step further in his assessment of the role of Jews at modern society in 1880: "a handful of people, who so frighten us that

our own culture, so widely praised, has become in their hands a weapon against our ourselves” (Jensen 369).

Paulsen and Grau’s statements in many ways reflect the general state of things for Jews in Germany at the turn of the century. Assimilation is at its peak in many respects--on top of structural advancement, both intermarriage and conversion are at all-time highs (Meyer 14)--with Jews engaged in a vibrant cultural and intellectual scene in Berlin among other cities, and involved in the booming associational life alongside Christians. By virtue of the sheer magnitude of their economic success within a handful of generations, Paulsen and Grau, as well as other intellectuals of the time are to a large extent forced to abandon the long-held belief that Jews were *feeble-minded* or of inferior intellect. Yet the sense that Jews nevertheless represent a threat to the integrity of the German Christian hold on matters of political power and social consequence is pervasive. Both Paulsen and Grau’s emphasis on Jews’ *alienness*, as such, furthermore touches upon the delicacy of the matter of Jews’ national loyalty, itself a subject of much debate at the time. In short then, though extensive progress can be measured in the establishment of an active Jewish bourgeoisie, their place as entrenched pillars and/or respected members in society is not solidified, and as will be explained below, ample reason was to be found for fearing a possible erosion of the national consensus that Jews be treated as equal citizens, if not for the erosion of the right to that citizenship in itself.

A number of events as well as influential publications bring expressions of antisemitism in its raw unadulterated form back to the forefront of the national consciousness some years after Emancipation and reaching a peak in the 1890s. A pamphlet written by Heinrich von Treitschke, Reichstag member and the editor of a respected journal, the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, warns in 1879 of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe coming to dominate the German economy, and alleged Jews’ refusal to assimilate into German culture, even coining a phrase “Die Juden sind unsere Unglück” (the Jews are our misfortune) (Barkai 74). A petition with 225,000 signatures is presented to Bismarck in April 1882, calling for restriction on Jewish immigration and Jews’ access to positions of power, characterizing what Germany historian Eli Nathans pronounces the *leitmotif* of the time: “fear of Jewish success and power” (117). A number of associations also took to explicitly barring Jews from membership in the 1890s. “No-Jews” clauses were introduced into the Bund der Landwirte (Agrarian League), Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfenverband (National Union of Commercial Employees), and several student Burschenschaften (fraternities) in

the 1890s (Nathans 118). Jewish immigration was restricted in 1881, though less as a response to the petition than to keep unwanted persons who might have had something to do with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, out of Germany (Nathans 118). But the most unsettling event to shake up the Liberal consciousness was the election of 16 antisemites in the 1893 Reichstag election, or 3.4 percent of the total vote (Meyer 223). That was an increase from 47,000 votes or 5 seats in 1890, to 263,000 or 16 seats in 1893 (Reinharz 20). Though it was far from clear that any of them had any particular concrete agenda of rolling back Jewish rights, it proved nevertheless jolting for many in the Jewish community (Meyer 224). It was a reminder, in the words of Judaism historian Michael Meyer, that “Jewish fellow citizens [. . .] might enter general society, but not without knocking” (245).

Of course, the Jewish community was not without representation on its behalf to fire back on those developments. The *Israelische Wochenschrift* printed in 1890: “the walls of our house are already hot. Do we want to wait until the fire burns bright ablaze?” (author’s translation) (Barkai 22). An article by a Liberal Reichstag member Heinrich Rickert in *Die Nation* served as a first-of-its-kind response to the elections of antisemites in Parliament, suggesting that Jews and Liberals could not sit idly by and watch as prejudices went unchecked (Meyer 253). The article spawned further interest by Gentile notables which culminated in the foundation of the Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus, or Abwehr-Verein (defense organization) in 1890. Jews themselves were heavily engaged in the formation and financial support of the Abwehr-Verein, yet it was by and large an organization governed by and having its shots called by non-Jews, being essentially, as it were: “Protestant, middle-class and patriotic” (Meyer 254). Their aims were as follows: to publicize the issue of the illiberalism of antisemitism; to pressure Reichstag officials to speak out against antisemitic agitation and discrimination in public service; and finally to lobby against the antisemitic candidates for elected positions of government (254). Yet the Abwehr-Verein were less concerned with ensuring the long-term viability of the Jewish community per se, than with safeguarding Liberal rights of equality before the law: “[the Abwehr-Verein’s] starting point was the defense of equal rights for all citizens; it saw the antisemitic assault on this principle as not merely a specific evil but a threat to Liberal institutions and Liberal values generally” (Meyer 254). It was through assimilation, including intermarriage and conversion, the Abwehr-Verein maintained, that Jews would have the best means of asserting Jewish attachment to the German nation and best hope for overcoming antisemitism (Pulzer 106). They furthermore considered predominantly

Jewish-based organizations to be *separatist* and even counterproductive to the cause of dampening antisemitism (Meyer 255). Some members even preferred to conceal their Jewish identity when coming to their defense (Meyer 255).

Representative of specific Jewish interests, then, the Abwehr-Verein was not, and far from it. Moreover, the Abwehr-Verein did nothing to tend to the increasing need on the part of a large contingent of Jews, to feel *accepted* as *Jewish* and equal human beings to Christians at the same time. The urgency attached to asserting that case only grew after the foundation of the Abwehr-Verein. Uproar over the possible murder of a cabinet-maker's child in the Rhineland in 1891 led to a faulty accusation against a Jewish neighbor which ultimately proved baseless and for which the neighbor was acquitted, yet served to fuel antisemitic agitation (Robertson 188). What's more, in 1892 the Conservative Party held a conference at a beer hall in Tivoli which resulted in a political deal that embraced antisemitism as a tool for gaining popularity: "radicals argued that, to be electorally successful and to compensate for its shrinking social base, the party needed to accept a more 'populist' platform," which meant "abandoning the traditional elitist disdain for antisemitic rabble-rousing and putting in place a more pronouncedly antisemitic agenda" (Levy 708). A year later, the last of the non-baptized Jews to serve in the Reichstag or Prussian parliament went into retirement in 1893 (Meyer 256).

It is against this backdrop that a rare pamphlet in defense of Jews surfaces in Berlin in that same year. .

III. A Cautious Plea for Acknowledgment of and Respect for a New Jewish Identity-- Taylor's Politics of Recognition at Work

It is New Year's Day 1893 and an anonymously published pamphlet reads: "Protected Jews or Citizens?" (*Schutzjuden oder Staatsbürger?*) on the cover. The title in itself suggests several things. It names at once the status which Jews previously endured, whereby agreements were made with local authorities to protect Jews from harm in exchange for rather restricted liberties. This Schutzjuden pact reflected the fact that Jews were second-class citizens, if citizens at all, living or subsisting at the good will or whim of Prussian (to name but one state) authorities before 1869. It also speaks to the fact that in theory, Jews are now full-fledged citizens by virtue of the Reichsverfassung (imperial

constitution) which granted them full citizenship status. But because of the author's question mark, the reader is immediately asked to reflect which concept reflects the reality of today, as, it is indeed in many ways in question. The author bothers to say that he is "a Jewish citizen," and in smaller print beneath the title, he adds "it's medicine, that I'm offering you, not poison" (Löwenfeld 0). The author goes on to explain why he neglects to print his name by adding, it is not out of fear, and that only if he is so lucky as to find like-minded people who would wish to know who he is, would he have no qualms revealing it, but in the case that his words should go "unheard," then it very well doesn't matter who said them, he claims (Löwenfeld 0).

The cover page alone, thus, already speaks volumes about the status which Jews enjoy at this moment in time, and here we begin to find evidence of the phenomenon at play which Taylor outlines in his theory of the politics of recognition. That the author feels compelled to say that no fear is involved in his anonymity suggests something which underlines his entire essay, and that is that he is speaking to an upstanding, reasonable and sympathetic audience of Germans out there, who simply must be more than amenable to hearing his arguments out, and certainly aren't the type of people who would want to harm a man merely for words that he printed about his loyalty to the German state as an avowed Jew. Yet his anonymity betrays some element of fear that negative repercussions of some kind might be felt, and thus he cannot be sure that he is in fact speaking to the reasonable upstanding, sympathetic Germans that he however *wishes* them to be. One can already see the markings of a plea for recognition as a member of a minority deserving of respect. The author clearly defines himself as such, even distancing himself from *other Jews* of that minority group who cling to old ideas, but who are not to be held as representative of all Jews in their dealings. Yet as Taylor points out, it is only through interaction with the other that *fulfillment* of that identity can be reached (33). The author *needs* to be recognized for the identity he claims, by the German gentiles who have sway over his treatment as a Schutzjude or Staatsbürger, in order to realize it.

The essay begins by pointing out that antisemitism has become capable of Parliament (*parlamentsfähig*). This parliamentary shift of events toward *legitimized* antisemitism clearly plays a significant if not central role in compelling him to speak out against the anti-Jewish sentiment, having now taken an alarming turn. Indeed, he notes, policymakers of antisemitic persuasion now having the self-confidence of a legitimized point of view--a point of view, however, unworthy of the enlightened sons of our century (Löwenfeld 1).

This claim of ownership toward the enlightened sons of Germany through the use of the pronoun *our*, is itself a clear hint at the author's position on his feeling of belongingness in German society--a belongingness which he imploringly asserts again and again--suggesting it to be something far from a given for the average person, for, otherwise it certainly not need be stated as an argument of sorts, but rather, mentioned matter-of-factly. This again attests to the salience of Taylor's argument that a group requires validation from others in order to fulfill their definition of themselves (33).

The yearning for the recognition about which Taylor speaks, is evident, even palpable throughout the entire pamphlet written by this anonymous, yet clearly educated and well-connected Jew. His arguments are made plain by the distance he creates between himself and the Orthodox Jews who have "failed to grasp the spirit of the time" (Löwenfeld 10). He speaks of the "better part" of the German Jewish community (Löwenfeld 11) which has nothing to do with Jews of other countries, nor with their ancestors of the Orient who are many generations removed from the educated Jews of today who for the last decades have spilled their blood and sacrificed their strength for the Fatherland (Löwenfeld 11). It is a yearning for recognition of Jewish accomplishment in argumentation prowess and therefore intellect, for Jewish loyalty to the German state, and above all, for their identity as *German and Jewish*, which colors the contents of the pamphlet.

The author, later revealed as Raphael Löwenfeld, a professor of Slavic studies and among the first translators of Tolstoi to German, voices a sentiment which proves also to be on the mind of many Jews, that if they are to capitalize on the rights which had been granted them and not retreat into the precarious status in which they had lived before, then they would have to insist that they be received as the fellow German citizens that they were, and yet at the same time not have to surrender their attachment to Judaism. Löwenfeld calls upon Jews to speak up in their own defense, launching a discussion about the direction which counterattacks to antisemitism should take.

Löwenfeld's work pinpoints the stage at which German Jews (or Jewish Germans, though it was not to be in his time) find themselves in their pursuit of the enforcement of the equal rights granted them some two decades before. His appeal is a spirited call for revision of the arguments which led to Emancipation in the first place and implore the reader to challenge notions that German Gentiles and Jews are in any way fundamentally different as peoples: "Do we educated Jews stand closer to the fanatics of Talmud lore than we do

to the enlightened Protestants, whose education and upbringing is the same as ours?" (author's translation) (Löwenfeld 9). In that vein, then, he also creates a social distance between persons such as himself belonging to the *good part* of the Jewish community, having assimilated to a large extent, and embraced loyalty to the German state, and other Jews who may have different moral standards and behaviors which should not reflect upon the good intentions and patriotic sentiments of the better half of the community. He even adds that the Jews who cling to their Talmud, middle-age practices, and ignorance, have not grasped their "duties" in the united empire and are not swimming with the tide of progress (Löwenfeld 10).

Hence above all does Löwenfeld wish to be accepted as the fellow German that he defines himself to be, but, again, it remains elusive to him as long as Jews' status in the minds of the populace at large are as lesser human beings, Taylor argues: "the genesis of the human mind is [. . .] not monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but *dialogical*" (emphasis added) (32). Löwenfeld himself lends credence to that notion with his assertion of what he claims Jews *want* to be-- "Nicht Schutzjuden wollen wir sein, sondern Staatsbürger" (it is not protected Jews which we want to be, but citizens!) (12). A minority may be equal citizens by law in and every day, but as long as they are not respected as such, their monological claim goes on unheard. That Löwenfeld must question the security of his status as a fully emancipated citizen who is also *acknowledged* to be, says as much.

It could be argued that, much as the work of the Jewish writer Heinrich Heine--despite his having converted to Christianity--was received as controversial and brash insofar as it was extraordinary for a Jew to produce popular literature at the time of the mid-nineteenth century (Jensen 362), Löwenfeld's call for self-defense and the very foundation of an organization built expressly upon that purpose, is a provocative act. Löwenfeld's erstwhile anonymity on the pamphlet attests to the provocative nature of his statements. That Löwenfeld even goes so far as to say that he wishes only to have his name made public if he finds a sympathetic ear, also bears witness to the tenuous atmosphere which accompanied assertions of equal claims by Jews, whether indirectly through literary achievement in Heine, or more directly, and arguably for that reason cautiously directed, through Löwenfeld's cry for recognition and equal treatment.

A final claim which Löwenfeld ardently makes is that Jews help themselves on their own accord, of their own labor (Löwenfeld 12). He takes a step hitherto frowned upon by asserting that Jews must come to their own defense, take the reins into their own hands, and be done with the apathy which carries the blame for the Orthodox Jews (or *lesser* half of the Jewish community) holding the greater spotlight in the public eye, rather than the enlightened Jews such as himself (10). Brick by brick, he says, must the centuries-old antisemitic ideas be taken down and proven baseless: “our friends number small, much smaller than our enemies. Yet between friends and enemies stand an enormous mass of apathetic-minded, and it is up to us, whether they are to become our enemies or our friends” (author’s translation) (13). The order is thus tall and the claims equally serious.

The range of responses Löwenfeld receives demonstrate a solid block of like-minded people, who, as it turns out, find themselves in a similar position and are inspired by Löwenfeld’s call for the coming together of Jews to fight for themselves as the most natural human response to the oppression of what Taylor calls that *misrecognition*.

I.V. The Foundation of the C.V., A Leap of Faith and An Act of Courage--Löwenfeld’s Identity Claims Find Resonance

The positive responses which flood in to Löwenfeld’s pamphlet spark further discussion compelling him to indeed reveal his identity. In a third edition of his essay with various comments attached, the gentlemen who get together publish a manifesto of sorts in the addendum, which invites persons who agree to them to write in and exchange ideas in the hope that it lead to some kind of *action*. This manifesto is worth including here, as, it sums up the identity claims which they aspire to have materialized through a collective effort.

*“Outlook of the majority of Jewish citizens,
as opposed to the misrepresentation of those incorrigible and ill-willed,
expressed clear and succinctly before the public.*

- 1. We are not German Jews, but German citizens of the Jewish faith.*
- 2. We as citizens need and require no other protection than that of the constitutional rights.*
- 3. We as Jews do not belong to any political party. The political point of view is, just like the religious one, a matter of the individual.*

4. *We stand firmly on the ground of the German nationality. We have nothing to do with Jews of other lands, no other association as do the Catholics and Protestants of Germany with the Catholics and Protestants of other lands.*
5. *We have no different morals than those of other faiths amongst the citizenry.*
6. *We condemn the immoral treatment of the individual, whatever his faith may be; we reject all responsibility for the behavior of individual Jews and safeguard ourselves from generalizations, as well as from the placing of the burden of individuals Jews, by careless or malicious judges, onto the entire community of Jewish citizens.”*

Here already, one sees an aspiration to engage in the kind of dialogue which would transform those claims into widely acknowledged givens amongst gentile Germans about their Jewish neighbors. To be refused those essential aspects of the identity which they assert and definition about themselves, otherwise provides for a state of continued oppression in *misrecognition*.

Three months after the appearance of Löwenfeld's pamphlet, a group of like-minded men, all educated professionals of the Jewish intelligentsia, present themselves and seek ought to organize a body which would put out precisely that message and those principles in a most potent manner. It is a call to counter the antisemitic slander, to defend Jews where prejudice rears its head. Running with Löwenfeld's and others' conviction that Jews themselves take up the matter of defending themselves, Berlin lawyers Maximillian Horwitz and Eugen Fuchs and medical doctor and lecturer Martin Mendelsohn, break with the credo of the Abwehr-Verein, by going it on their own--that is to say, without the strict supervision or co-founding role of a gentile notable. The belief that any politically orientated activity on the part of an independent Jewish organization would place the not-so-long-ago-acquired rights of emancipation in danger was, however, persistent (Barkai 20).

Their disownment of *bad, unrepresentative Jews* aside, the gentlemen's leap to bring their case forward and publicly on their own behalf required not only a fair amount of integrity and courage, but an optimism in the goodness of mankind and man's ability to be reasoned with that lends particular admiration for their pursuits. QUOTE

As Meyer commented on the rise of this organization, the environment in which the founders took to action commands respect for their rise: "with organized antisemitism reaching its peak in the 1890s, Jews and their well-wishers at last overcame their

reluctance to take coordinated action against both the advocacy and practice of discrimination. The psychological obstacles to such a step were considerable” (252). And yet the call to action proves to compel numerous Jews to overcome those obstacles.

This spirit of assertiveness is captured well in a statement made by one of those first men to come together at Löwenfeld’s cry: “Sein Schicksal schafft sich selbst der Mann” (Man himself determines his fate) (4). These gentlemen go against the grain on two parts. On the one hand, they break off from the convention of gentile and Jewish notables alike, that Jews not organize themselves, lest they give fodder to the cause of antisemitism. On the other hand, they challenge antisemitism-sympathizers themselves, who call for Jews to remain *in their place*, namely as second-class citizens, and find complacency with the allowances to freedoms they be granted by the German state, however contrary it might be to the law of the land which had officially granted Jews full rights of citizenship. As Meyer tells it, one key function of the popularly elected Conservatives with antisemitic agendas in 1893 is to spread the message that “whatever the law might say, Jews [. . .] are not really Germans,” and and to remind Jews that “they might enter general society, but not without knocking” (245). The actions which these men are to take, however, are a decisive step inside the door which Emancipation cracked open, *without* having knocked first.

The general consensus that any form of political activity by Jews would put emancipation on ice again, thus takes a blow with their formation. An important departure point is also the organizers’ readiness to take their defense to the public arena in an unprecedented way (Steinitz 14). Jewish historian and activist of the time notes that he majority of German Jews had gotten so used to humbly and patiently waiting on the sidelines: “that the German Jews would defend their rights, that they would have put up a fight against the vicious opponent, was an idea that one wouldn’t dare to think to an end”¹ (author’s translation) (Rieger 12). German Christians themselves were known to voice such thoughts in public, in at least one instance calling on Jews in the 1890s to take on a bit *more* modesty (Meyer 250).

Yet these group of men find resonance in the idea voiced in the Jewish press not to let the house burn down when the walls are already hot and seize upon Löwenfeld’s cry. The

¹ “Daß die deutschen Juden ihr Recht selbst verteidigen, daß sie sich zur Wehr gegen dem gehässigen Gegner setzen müßten, war ein Gedanke, den man vorerst nicht zu Ende zu denken wagte.” Rieger, Paul.

organization which they put together gets the name, Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith (*Centralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, abbreviated to C.V.), borrowing directly from Löwenfeld's text (Rieger 21). Its aim is set squarely at defending German Jews in the face of antisemitic attacks both through counter-propaganda and legal defense (Reinharz 28). By the turn of the following year in 1893, Eugen Fuchs initiates a legal defense commission, to which any Jew can turn for legal redress in a case of discrimination or victimization on the basis of their Jewishness (Steinitz 15). Financial support for the proceedings was also made available, thanks to generous donations from the swelling membership which the C.V. felt in their first years (Reinharz 24).

At all times during these early days is the loyalty to the German state emphasized above all else. This is in part in juxtaposition to the Zionist organizations arguing for a Jewish home in Palestine which also find support at the time, though at no point do the Zionists reach anywhere near comparable volume in support for their cause (Barkai 40). Even some 30 years after the foundation of the C.V., this theme is still of chief importance and remains a crucial sticking point in their claim vis-à-vis the German Christian majority, evidenced in a lofty essay, "Vom Heimatsrecht der deutschen Juden" ("On the Right to Homeland of the German Jews") by Rabbi and early active member of the C.V. Paul Rieger, where he takes great pains to lay arguments from several angles, as to why the Jews of Germany make up an integral part of German history and culture, and are thus deserving of full German citizenship and no less than equal status on the basis of that homeland claim. Rieger goes so far as to say that Germany is the homeland of the living Jews' soul (26).

The later texts produced by the members of the C.V. also draw heavily upon nationalist rhetoric to assert their Germaness, and in one case Rieger takes support from the Christian bible for their act of defending themselves (Rieger 4). Such arguments render their tone apologetic and self-conciliatory at times, which is suggestive of the existence of the phenomenon which Taylor identifies in his theory, that groups who suffer persistent prejudices, begin to internalize negative stereotypes and adopt self-deprecatory reflexes: "the projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized" (36). This is most obviously expressed in the repeated language used by C.V. writers, to condemn the *bad Jew*.

Interestingly, the infamous German Jew Albert Einstein, later takes issue with this point and identifies and denounces that self-deprecation. At an invitation to a meeting of the C.V. in 1920, Einstein turns down the offer on several principles, one of which is that he cannot respect rejection of “my poor East-European brothers” (author’s translation) (Barkai 7) to which the C.V. make reference time and again as the lesser half of the Jewish population. Einstein figures among the over-time increasing segment of German Jews who find no solace or advantage in stressing their German national loyalty and put more faith in their belongingness to a transnational definition of the *Jüdisches Volk* or Jewish people.

Yet to bring us back to the perspective of the founding C.V. members, and away from what Jewish scholar Inbal Steinitz calls the “Post-Auschwitz perspective” (18) that may too easily cloud our assessment of the C.V.’s undertakings in light of what we know the immediate outcome of their efforts at the time, it is important to bear in mind that there need be nothing wrong or inopportune about working *within* a system in order to stake out human rights. A recent comment made by the first African-American to be elected president of the United States, Barack Obama emphasizes that point when he says in a speech at a rally in Iowa in response to calls by various political strategists that he not give people a “false hope” by running a campaign for president in the face of significant odds against him due to his race, among other things, “there is nothing *false* about hope.” It could be added that there is nothing false about the hope which the C.V. places in the ability of German society to accept them as equal citizens simply of another faith.

Furthermore, disownment of the Eastern-European Jewish brother need also not be viewed as treacherous, as, that which the C.V. claims is to be--an *individual* German citizen responsible for himself and his own well-being, wishing also to be *received* as an individual--requires stereotypes based on the poorer segments of Eastern-European Jews applied to all Jews, to be cast aside. What’s more, the C.V. is the first organization of its kind to emphatically *embrace* Jewishness as compatible with German citizenship, and not to rely on Christians or baptized Jews to do their work for them.

The C.V.’s first periodical, printed in July 1895, is a testament to this central message of Germanness, bearing the title *Im deutschen Reich* (in the German Reich). The first issue is a series of essays aimed at introducing themselves as an organization and as a people to the public at large. The issue begins with a defense of their self-defense. Reference is made to a legendary and hallowed amulet of a German war hero in the Thirty Years War

which bore the inscription “Hundesfott, wehr dich!” roughly translated as “Stupid scoundrel, get up and defend yourself!” (*Im deutschen* 2). This is meant to give added weight to the argument of the C.V., that any dignified person should and indeed has every right to defend himself and in doing so, the Jews behind the organization need not be seen as separatists in any way, but rather, self-respecting men who who are doing the most natural and honorable of things in taking to their own defense. Reaching out to the prospective German gentile reader who would relate to that message, is no doubt partly the aim of the writers.

The first issue goes on to portray detailed stories about members’ family histories and personal struggles. The Jew as a caricature or an unknown, distant *other* is torn down in the process. The stories are rife with praise for the German language and culture, as immigrant Jews come to discover it and adopt it wholeheartedly and with great joy (*Im deutschen* 10). An important part of the story in one case is to portray the unique struggle which many Jews face in moving forward in German society. The story of a writer’s father, a poet, is described wherein he is presented with the choice of taking a scholarship to attend university in his desired course of study, providing that he surrender his Jewish faith, or refuse the scholarship and take a lesser desired course of studies elsewhere. The author emphasizes the father’s embrace of German culture and identity at the same time that his Jewish faith, however, does not suffer (*Im deutschen* 11). It goes without saying that this man’s choice is something to be admired for the dignity and self-esteem which it conveys. Furthermore, the author goes on, religion is a private matter--how one comes to terms on a personal level, with that greatest of questions about belief--should be free for the individual to decide (*Im deutschen* 11). The author’s emphasis is on Jewish forefathers’ German national consciousness and incorporation of all that is German whilst maintaining loyalty to their Jewish faith, is offered up as the antithesis both to the pervasive belief that Jews have no national loyalties and thus cannot be reliable German citizens, and to the belief on the part of Jews who have abandoned their faith completely in favor of complete assimilation into German society, that that need not be the case. The contentions made here, again point to the salience of Taylor’s theory applied to the C.V. activists. The supplications seen in the C.V.’s writings point to their need for recognition as *German and Jewish* and the oppression which alternatively plays itself out.

V. Conclusion

A Jewish newspaper representing the later student arm of the C.V., the *Kartell-Convent der Verbindung deutscher Studenten jüdischen Glaubens*, presents an interesting argument in 1914, that the Jews of Germany cannot necessarily freely choose to be Germans, but are compelled to take on that identity as a matter of natural course: “the integrated position of the Jews in Germany [lies in] deeper emotional and psychological phenomena. [. . .] Jews are not Germans by choice, but by emotional and intellectual necessity” (Reinharz 35). If we take Taylor’s point of a person or group’s place of origin and upbringing to be key to identity definition (33), then the point they make finds heightened relevance in the press which the C.V. makes to adopt Germanness. The reasoning put forth by Jewish historian Jehuda Reinharz suggests this argument to be in contrast to that which the C.V. explicitly puts forward, in adopting Germanness voluntarily.

The ideology driving the C.V. is indeed stated repeatedly in the claims of their right to a homeland in Germany and as equal Germans, on account of their presence in the region for centuries, the close relationship which they had with several significant cultural achievements in Germany, and Jews’ voluntary embrace of German citizenship and loyalty to the German state. Yet that need not in any way exclude other factors from playing a role in Jews’ push for acceptance as Germans. That is to say, Reinharz’s juxtaposition of the two arguments--one on Jewish voluntary entrance into German citizenship, expressed explicitly by C.V. founders--and the other by writers of the Jewish periodical *Kartell-Convent Blätter*, that more psychological reasons are at play to explain Jews’ interest in acceptance as Germans, is misplaced. The C.V. members’ *voluntary* embrace of Germanness can only be realized by German gentiles’ acknowledgement and respect for them as Jewish-Germans, and the appeals which the C.V. make in the defense of German Jews, attests to that psychological need at work.

Furthermore, it would have been nonsensical to make any argument of the kind on their behalf, as, a key ingredient in the mix which would have been required for German gentiles to respond positively in greater numbers than they did to any *moral* argument, must have been that *every* person has a human dignity and that people have a moral imperative as such, to extend that dignity to others: “as against this notion of honour, we have the modern notion of dignity, now used in an universalist and egalitarian sense, where we talk of the inherent ‘dignity of human beings,’ or of citizen dignity. The underlying

premise here is that *everyone* shares in it” (emphasis added) (Taylor 27). Germany’s infant democracy is not at a stage in which that dignity is extended to *everyone* as such. Rabbi and early active member of the C.V., Paul Rieger, identifies this missing component in German society as felt by Jews, as he writes in his book *Ein Vierteljahrhundert im Kampf um das Recht und die Zukunft der deutschen Juden* (A Quarter-Century at the Fight for the Justice and Future of the German Jews): “Numerous Jews perceived their position in the German Reich to be incongruous with their sense of honor. They ground their teeth as they saw their equal rights robbed of them.” (author’s translation)² (12).

Yet through and through, the language of the C.V. points to a tremendous trust and faith in the goodness and fairness of mankind, and in particular, to the conviction that, as Taylor describes “human beings are endowed with a moral sense, an intuitive feeling for what is right and wrong” (28). One sees this again and again in their both rational and nationalistic as well as highly emotional appeal to that sense in the minds and hearts of German gentiles, in asking that them that Jews be treated as the equally capable and valuable human beings which they are. Taylor’s take on explaining the factors at work behind the C.V.’s efforts, thus casts new light on the motivations of the founders and their early supporters which should not be tossed out as unimportant in and of themselves for subject of study.

It is all too tempting to take the story of the C.V.’s inception and reflect back with skepticism about their claims, and indeed a heavy heart, as, the optimism which the founders have for the soundness of their claims to the “enlightened” German public proves most horrifically shallow with the onslaught of Hitler Germany’s antisemitic reign of terror in the 1930s and shortly thereafter the Holocaust. Yet one can pose the question--how many struggles have been fought and lost, and does that mean their courage and efforts and creativity and faith in the spirit of humanity dissolve into meaninglessness? One should think not. Surely the ins and outs of their rise to public view and scrutiny in the face of bad odds yields lessons to be learned, and need not detract from the significance of the *failure* of the German and European majority Christian populations, to heed their cry for justice. Taylor too suggests this process of the struggle for recognition as undoubtedly worthy of focus in and of itself for the: “What has come about with the modern age is not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognized can

² “Zahlreiche Juden empfanden, daß ihre Stellung im deutschen Reich mit ihrem Ehrgefühl unvereinbar war. Zähneknirschend sahen sie, daß ihren ihre Gleichberechtigung geraubt war.” Rieger, Paul.

fail” (35). An analysis of the pursuit of the C.V. thus, stands to yield telling insights for other cases.

To see the utility of Taylor’s model for pinpointing how and under what circumstances a people may be compelled to make claims of recognition which are crucial to the end of their oppression not only in a physical sense, but also at a psychological level, serves as a lesson in how democracy at its best must work to avert oppression at any level. Focusing in on the language used by the founders of the C.V. also alerts our attention to the underlying claims which are at play. An entreaty for respect and acknowledgment as an equal human being *and* different is crucial for the health of a democratic society of multiple levels of heterogenous groups--which arguably all societies increasingly are, as a result of migration as well as changing social relations. The story of the emergence of the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith stands thus as an effort in history with particular resonance for democratic challenges of all times.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

Die Abwehrblätter: Mitteilungen aus dem Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus. Ausgabe 1891.

Im deutschen Reich: Zeitschrift herausgegeben von dem Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Ausgabe 1895.

Löwenfeld, Raphael. "Schutzjuden oder Staatsbürger? von einem jüdischen Staatsbürger." Dritte Auflage, Vermehrt um Stimmen der Presse und Zuschriften aus dem Publikum. Verlag von Schweitzer & Mohr. 1893.

Rieger, Paul. *Ein Vierteljahrhundert im Kampf um das Recht und die Zukunft der deutschen Juden: Ein Rückblick auf die Geschichte des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens in den Jahren 1893-1918 von Landesrabbiner Dr. Rieger Braunschweig.* Verlag des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Berlin SW. 68. 1918.

Rieger, Paul. "Vom Heimatsrecht der deutschen Juden." *Das Licht*: Heft 4. Philo-Verlag, Berlin. 1922.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Barkai, Avraham. „Wehr dich!“ Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.) 1893-1938. Beck, München 2002.

Jensen, Uffa. "Into the Spiral of Problematic Perceptions: Modern Anti-Semitism and gebildetes Bürgertum in Nineteenth-Century Germany." *German History*: 25, 3. 2007.

Levy, Richard (Ed.) *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution.* ABC-CLIO Ltd: 2005.

Meyer, Michael (Ed.) *German-Jewish History in Modern Times Vol. 3: Integration in Dispute 1871-1918.* Columbia University Press: 1997.

Nathans, Eli. *The Politics of Citizenship in Germany: Ethnicity, Utility and Nationalism.* Berg Publishers: 2004.

Pulzer, Peter. *Jews and the German State: The Political History of a Minority, 1848-1933.* Blackwell Publishers, Oxford: 1992.

Reinharz, Jehuda. "Deutschtum and Judentum in the Ideology of the Centralverein Deutscher Staatsbürger Jüdischen Glaubens 1893-1914." *Jewish Social Studies*: 36, 1. 1974.

Robertson, Ritchie. *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature: 1749-1939, Emancipation and its Discontents.* Oxford University Press: 2001.

Steinitz, Inbal. *Der Kampf jüdischer Anwälte gegen den Antisemitismus: Die strafrechtliche Rechtsschutzarbeit des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (1893-1933).* Metropol Verlag, Berlin: 2008.

Taylor, Charles. "Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition: An Essay." Princeton University Press: August 1992.