Building a Jewish Future: The Resurgence of Jewish life in Europe, Post World War II

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About the Research:
This research explores how Jewish communities in Europe have rebuilt since the Holocaust and what Jewish life is like in Europe today. Upon studies completed in Warsaw, Krakow, Berlin, and Paris, this research consists of a cross-city analysis, based on evidence gathered from interviews with Jewish residents in each city. Ms. Kaden is writing a memoir about her experience.

Key Questions Asked:
- How has Jewish life resurged in Europe, post World War II?
- What is contemporary Jewish life like in Europe?
- How do Jewish people view their future in Europe?

Poland
- Pre-World War II: Poland is home to more than 3 million Jews.
- At least 3 million Polish Jews killed during Holocaust.

Post World War II:
- Communism
- Many Jews concealed their religious identity
- Post 1990 and fall of communism
- Rebirth of Jewish life
- Different generations discovering Jewish identity
- Growth in Jewish Community Centers and organized religious life (~ 3,200 identify as Jewish)

“Here people really often have to make the decision: do I want to do something about my Jewish roots? So there’s a certain kind of energy and commitment because of that.”
- Poland’s Chief Rabbi, Michael Schudrich

“No matter why you feel that you are Jewish or how you feel that you are Jewish, you will be accepted here [at the JCC] and people here will try to make you feel at home and very welcome.”
- Marcjanna Kubala, 24 years old

Berlin
- Pre-World War II: Berlin is an epicenter of Western European Jewish life, 1933: 160,000 Jews live in Berlin, 522,000 in Germany
- Between 160,000 and 180,000 German Jews killed during Holocaust.

Post World War II:
- Germany divided – Most Jews lived in West (~26,000 Jews)
- Post 1990 and fall of communism
- Major influx of Jews from former USSR (over 200,000)
- Over 20,000 Israelis move to Berlin
- Mixed identities in shifting times
- Youth groups are popular

“Today you have much more variety. In Berlin alone there are 15 active congregations…when the Russians started coming…the Jewish organizations, internationally and in Germany, saw…a huge opportunity…to build their communities.”
- Toby Axelrod, journalist

“In college, I got involved in an organization called Jung und Jüdisch … [most members] were also just starting to find out about their Jewish identity so we were all pretty much in the same place.”
- Michelle Piccirillo, National President of JJ, 2004-2012

Paris
- Pre World War II: Paris has thriving Jewish life
- 1940: 350,000 Jews in France. More than half are refugees from Eastern Europe.
- WWII: tens of thousands of French Jews deported and killed

Post World War II
- Influx of Jewish and Muslim citizens from French decolonized countries
- Continuous rise of anti-Semitism, surges after Israeli-Palestinian wars
- 2014: 282,000 Jews live in Paris
- 2015: 7,900 Jews move to Israel

“When you say that you are Jewish, in the same sentence, you also have to justify that you are still French, like I was in a Jewish Haredi school in an observant family, and still when I was outside…I tried to keep it a secret that I was Jewish.”
- Lévi-Avishaï Léger-Tanger, 29 years old

“ ‘We feel very French, but we feel like there is no choice, we must leave…The big problem is that my girls [daughters] are not prepared to leave the country. So for me, I really feel torn.’ ”
- Joyce Sananes, 62 years old old

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