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Prologue

Books have their history.[1] I first learned from the book ‘Biographical Research’ by Werner Fuchs, published in 1984, that in 1939/1940 a ‘scientific prize competition’ was held by scholars at Harvard University to collect autobiographies centering on persons who had emigrated from National Socialist Germany as well as Austria. And I wondered what came of it. The answer was surprisingly easy to find: The documents are housed at Harvard University’s Houghton Library (previously the Houghton Archives) – and they have been, and continue to be, little used. The corpus is largely untapped. Neither was the potential of the submitted autobiographies exploited in the original project, nor have later generations of scholars, with a few exceptions, systematically engaged with the documents. To this day I cannot understand why this ‘treasure’, which is immensely instructive not only for historians but also, among others, for sociologists, psychologists, educationalists and, perhaps especially, for biographical research, has remained untapped.

Since the 1990s, together with Sylke Bartmann, Ursula Blömer, Stefanie Bretschneider, who unfortunately passed away much too early, Axel Fehlhaber, Stefan Kanke, Sandra Kirsch, Wiebke Lohfeld, Claudia Thiede, and Nicole Welter, I set out to bring this corpus out of the darkness of an archive into the light of the scientific community and a wider public. Numerous trips to the archive were made, applications for external funding were written, approved, but some were rejected, doctoral theses were completed, and publications, mostly in journals, were submitted as a result (cf. ‘Publications following the Harvard University Scientific Prize Competition’, in this volume). This book, aimed at a wider audience, is intended to be another building block, perhaps a foundation, both for accessing the autobiographical record and for understanding some (exemplary) life histories, as well as the concept of (moral) misrecognition.

I wrote this book on ‘interrupted lives’ to give those affected by the 'Nazi takeover' a voice, those persons threatened, persecuted, and finally murdered in the sense of anamnetic, i. e. remembering, “solidarity with the victims of history for their own sake” (Micha Brumlik).

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[1] I was able to begin work on this book during a stay as a member of the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton from September 2007 to July 2008. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for their financial support. The translation is the work of David Kettler. Any errors are my responsibility. I also wish to thank my friends Wolfgang Althof, Hans Joachim Barth, and Jérôme Prieur, as well as Claudia Thiede and Nicos Karydis, for helping me to turn many manuscript pages into a readable book.

“On the streets you could see legs in black shank boots stomp like machine parts; looking upward, one saw the disgusting brown of the shirts, interrupted by the red arm stripes with the vicious black spider in the white circle, a black belt, a black leather strap across the upper body; the shirt collar and the edge of the brown cap left just enough of the face free, that you could recognize these dully staring automatons as people”.

Ms. Franziska Schubert, 205, p. 59f.

Introduction

At the beginning of his autobiographical notes, the physician Martin Andermann reflects on why he writes his memoirs in early adulthood for a ‘scientific competition’. His central insight is that

> “those 35 years of my life … are a self-contained unity, they are perhaps all that I will one day look back on as ‘my’ life; for their conclusion – my emigration from Germany – may well have meant the end of what I had hitherto been accustomed to regard as ‘my life’. Today, I am faced with the problem of how far I will be able to continue, be allowed to continue, in the new country my life up to now as what it seemed to me and made my own – an immensely difficult question which makes it seem justified to stop for a moment and to ask retrospectively: What was?” (Ms. Andermann 6, p. 1).[2]

In the following lines I will refer to the manuscript submitted by Martin Andermann and take up the question ‘What was’ and give a brief answer. At the end of the book, in the final section, I will then deal with ‘what became’; how could, how was Martin Andermann allowed to continue his life: What became of him?[3]

First of all: What was? Martin Andermann was born into an educated middle-class household in Königsberg on October 17, 1904. Martin Andermann’s father, Max, was a well-known lawyer in East Prussia, a long-standing member of the Königsberg City Parliament, and for a short time a member of the Prussian Parliament for the left-liberal ‘Progressive People’s Party’ (FVP); in addition, he was a “respected member of the Kant Society” (Lichtenstein 1985, p. 10). Martin Andermann’s childhood and especially his youth were accordingly shaped by the ‘spirit of the city’, the morally emphasized ‘Königsberg Kantianism’. For his father, “Kant, Schiller, and Goethe … formed the ‘household spirits and gods,'" and "through (his) mother (Beethoven and Mozart, Schubert and Schumann, and Brahms and Wolff) found a place of worship" (Ms. 6, p. 8).

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[2] The spelling as well as the punctuation of the autobiographical manuscripts were largely retained and only occasionally slightly corrected.

[3] The manuscript by Martin Andermann was published in German, supplemented by several articles on his life and work (Garz/Welter 2024).

Now, one might think that such an educated bourgeois socialization would make school life, especially high school life, easier. But not in the case of Martin Andermann. He was isolated within the class community. And there was a very specific reason for this: Martin Andermann was Jewish.

"Probably my comrades felt it to be an insolence that I, with my much better knowledge of German literature and intellectual education, had, as it were, usurped German culture in their eyes" (ibid., p. 12).

He himself saw no contradiction between Judaism and the German classics.

> "The Jewish traditions in which I grew up seemed to marry most harmoniously with the German spirit as it became known to me; there seemed to be no breach, let alone opposition, between these two worlds. It was a delightful unity, and the love of Germanness that was planted in the boy at that time, even the storm of the last years has not been able to uproot" (ibid., p. 8).

This storm of the last years was the time of National Socialism.

Andermann describes how his orientation to the "humanist-German tradition" (ibid., p. 18) led him to turn to "the young republic" (ibid.), while this was (not) the case for his "classmates and also for the majority of the teachers" (ibid., p. 19).

> "The experience of the Revolution and the collapse of the monarchy was ultimately incomprehensible to these people, for it did not mean the disappearance of a political form or a system of government. For these people, as they stand vividly before my eyes, all these sons of burghers, officers, pastors' children, for them Germany was first and foremost the Fridrician Prussian Germany, the military career was the visible expression of the moral hierarchy, and the emperor was the pope of this Prussian-Protestant worldview" (ibid.).

Andermann, for whom the end of the First World War coincided with the transition to adulthood as "a shaking of my naïve belief in values" (ibid.), assumes,

> "that my 'crisis' at that time was a very typical expression of my generation, of my time, just as the 'Weltschmerzerlebnis' was an expression of the Werther generation. What I was going through at that time was a 'nihilistic existential crisis'[4], and it was actually this crisis that made my medical studies seem to me to be a relatively unimportant bread-and-butter study, while my philosophical interests seemed to be the only essential one. … These students of philosophy, who often enough, like myself, belonged to another faculty as their main subject, but who were driven by

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[4] By nihilism, Andermann understands, following Nietzsche's determination that 'the highest values devalue themselves', "a definitely outlined psychological situation … One could also say that nihilism is that state in which existence is experienced as absolute meaninglessness" (ibid., p. 23).

> the problems of the time to occupy themselves with the basic questions of knowledge, these students were certainly as characteristic an expression of Germany after the revolution as my reactionary classmates. In the years that followed, they were the real Germany for me” (ibid., p. 22).

After Andermann had attended philosophical lectures with Husserl and Heidegger in Freiburg alongside his medical studies, he continued his studies in Berlin, where he took courses with Romano Guardini. He finished his medical studies in Marburg – he had gone there to continue listening to philosophy with Martin Heidegger. He spent his years as an assistant in Heidelberg and Berlin before settling down as a doctor in Berlin and finally moving his practice to Königsberg in 1934 – in the (vain) hope of being able to build up a larger base of private patients there, since as a Jewish doctor he no longer had a license to practice in Berlin.

In his memoirs from 1940, Martin Andermann not only describes his Königsberg childhood, which was influenced by Kant, but there are also reflections on his apolitical behavior, on Heidegger’s relationship to National Socialism – which, according to Andermann, “gave the deepest expression to the essence of his time” (ibid., p. 57) – and there is an extraordinary, an extraordinarily ambivalent view of the period between 1933 until his emigration in 1937. “That for all the terrible things I experienced in Germany, I never got rid of that feeling: it is a great time, and I am glad to experience it – despite everything” (ibid., p. 117). – It is unlikely that Martin Andermann would have formulated this assessment, written at the beginning of 1940, in the same way after 1945.

In his autobiographical manuscript, however, he is still optimistic. He wants to pause,

> “to ask in retrospect: what was? … To find, perhaps, from the revival of the past, the answer to the question: Whether a path to a real, humanly founded future is possible from the contemporary emergency construction of the present?” (ibid., p. 1).

Already these few details about Martin Andermann draw attention to various aspects that can be found in a similar way, perhaps less explicitly, perhaps less eloquently presented, but in a large number of the autobiographical manuscripts presented here. They are narratives and reports,

- central to life before and after 1933 and (especially) to life before and (less so) after emigration;
- which show the insecurity or the ambivalent attitude towards the emerging and for some ‘abruptly’, for others gradually asserting National Socialism;
- that address the difficult childhood, which was nevertheless often perceived as not oppressive, and
- which repeatedly illustrate the problematic relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.

These and a number of other problem areas are the focus of this book. I want to illuminate them, discuss them, and shed light on them as far as possible. This will be done in three larger sections.

In the first part of the book, my aim is to show where these extraordinary materials came from, how they were obtained, and what results they have yielded.

In a second part, I will present four particular life stories in more detail; the selection is oriented toward presenting as contrastive a sample as possible from the abundance of autobiographical manuscripts submitted, so that experiences of life, of suffering, of resistance, of emigration that took place, and of arrival and 'readjustment' in the country of emigration become visible. The life stories of two men and two women are presented: Alfred Fabian emigrated to Shanghai and subsequently to the USA, Hilde Rosa Stern went to the United States and then 'returned' to the GDR, Carl Paeschke emigrated to Switzerland and stayed there, Rudolfine Menzel went to Palestine, later Israel. Went? Had to go – could go. A merchant, a social worker, a journalist, and a chemist with a doctorate who worked as a scientist and dog breeder. These were the professions practiced before emigration – after that we will see.

In the third part of the book, I will unfold the autobiographical developments, the educational stories, under the anthropological or moral aspect of recognition by others, but even more so that of deprivation, non-granting, and finally the deprivation of solidarity, right, and the love of neighbor or humanity, by combining theoretical considerations and case studies.