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Returning to the "Estranged Homeland":

Return Migration from Israel to Germany (1933-1967)

The rise of the German National Socialist Party in 1933 triggered a wave of emigration, which came to a halt with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. During this period, 300,000 Jews managed to escape Germany, about 10% of whom settled in the Land of Palestine. This immigration was part of the so called "Fifth Aliyah" and had a different cultural background from the previous immigration waves which had been mainly made up of Eastern European Jews. Thus, those immigrants encountered numerous additional absorption difficulties: a strange new language; a hot, humid climate; an unknown culture; a collective ideology which contradicted their bourgeois ethos; and the lack of adequate employment opportunities.

These and other difficulties caused the phenomenon of return migration to Germany. Already during the 1930's, more than 10% of the refugees returned to Nazi Germany. The return migration movement was renewed after the end of the Second World War.

Between 1945 and 1961, about 12,000 German Jews returned to their "homeland", approximately 4000-5000 of whom came back from the Land of Israel. The phenomenon of the return migration from Israel differed from the return migration from other places (such as Latin America and China) with regard to the years during which the migration took place, the age range of the returnees, and their choice of communities in which to settle.

This project tries to analyze the character and the cause of the return migration phenomenon from the Land of Israel to Germany in the years from 1933-1967 with an emphasis on the social and cultural profile of the group of migrants. It examines for the first time both countries, the one from which and the one to which the migration was directed. The questions which arise in this context will focus mainly on the reasons

for returning to a country which was hostile and had forced them to leave just a few years before. Although the decision to return was a highly individual one, there is a great interest in understanding the common reasons that caused this step. Returning to East Germany was primarily ideologically motivated whereas the return to West Germany involved several factors such as: language difficulties, health, economical and professional problems, and "homesickness". This research intends to compare the motives of the returnees from the Land of Israel to those returning from other countries, differentiating between those returning to the East and to the West. In addition it intends to analyze the integration of the returnees into the two German societies with special emphasis on the place of Jews in the German societies after the Holocaust.

Another aspect of this research will deal with the returnees' position within the population of the Fifth Aliyah. Those returnees who failed to integrate can shed light on the absorption process and can foster an understanding of the difficulties involved in this process.