



## CHAPTER 8

# Woman, Scientist, and Jew

## The Forced Migration of Berta Ottenstein

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### Doing German-Jewish Studies in Switzerland

“[It is] a key challenge for scholars in Jewish history . . . to step out of the long shadow of the minority history paradigm that corresponds directly with a nationalist narrative of majority history,”<sup>1</sup> writes Till van Rahden in an essay from 2015. In Switzerland, where I studied and have been working—with some shorter and longer interruptions—for almost two decades, Jewish history is still perceived as minority history. For historical reasons, Jewish studies has a different status there than in Germany. To date, there is no internal interest in higher-education policy to deal with Jewish-related topics in depth. This situation has far-reaching consequences for the national research agenda, for the appointment of professors, and for funding opportunities. Switzerland was neutral during World War II, and it was the only German-speaking country whose Jewish population neither perished nor was driven into exile in the Shoah.

In postwar Germany, “one can . . . best understand historical memory . . . as an ongoing attempt to come to terms with a murderous past that will not go away,” van Rahden writes.<sup>2</sup> In Switzerland, the opposite seems to be true: no one, apart from a small number of professional historians, has felt the urge to investigate the country’s history during the 1930s and 1940s, has worked through the numerous economic entanglements with Nazi Germany, or has addressed the inhumane refugee politics that cost countless Jews their lives. In the general perception, the Holocaust is not part of “our” history. This perception is reflected in school curricula as well as in research agendas across Swiss universities. Not only is the Holocaust not part of Swiss history, the history and culture of Jews was—and to some extent still is—not considered part of general history. Until today, one can graduate from a Swiss high school without having learned about the Holocaust or of Switzerland’s role during National Socialism

(NS). Changing this was one of the main objectives of a group of professors at Basel University just before the turn of the millennium. Future teachers had to be educated. Furthermore, only through a deep understanding of Swiss-Jewish history and culture can Jewish history become part of general history.

Until the fall of 1998, when Jewish studies was institutionalized as an independent field of study at Basel University, research in modern Jewish studies was almost non-existent. The foundation of the Basel Institute was a milestone. In its early years, there was a surplus of basic research on Swiss Jewry. Heiko Haumann, professor emeritus for Eastern European history and cofounder of the Institute, summarized the initial years and paraphrased the goals that the founding board formulated in 1998:

Research and teaching will be dealing with the life-world [*Lebenswelt*] of the Jews, their history, religion, culture, and literature in their interrelationships with the non-Jewish environment from antiquity to the present. . . . Particular attention should be paid to the history and culture of the Jews in Switzerland and in the region.<sup>3</sup>

A series of dissertations on local Jewish communities now reflect an attempt to achieve these goals. What the dissertations have in common is that, on the one hand, they represent pioneering work and, on the other hand, they seek to connect with research questions and methodological considerations from other German-speaking countries. My introduction to the field, when I began in 2001, was strongly influenced by the topics and approaches of these early years. In retrospect, it is not surprising that I undertook my doctorate in Swiss-Jewish history. I also wrote a contextualized pioneer study with a local focus.<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, Jewish studies in Switzerland has broadened its topics and methodologies through transnational collaborations and exchanges. While the field's self-image has clearly changed, the outsider perspective has not. Jewish studies is still considered a marginal subject at the fringes of history, German studies, and theology. As a scholar in Switzerland working primarily in German-Jewish studies, I am not truly part of the established academic disciplines within Switzerland, such as history or literature.

In Swiss universities, many colleagues in history and German studies departments still consider (German-)Jewish studies as minority studies. For them it is not part of the historical narrative because it is the history of the others. Jews are not considered as agents but as "objects of forces beyond their control."<sup>5</sup> For many, the self-perception in Jewish studies to understand Jews as agents and to write Jewish history as part of the majority narrative remains alienating. Antisemitism, expulsion, and emancipation—to name only three keywords—are not part of the construct of Swiss national history; instead, those activities are considered the history of the Jews. This notion has strongly influenced my own research: I do understand Jewish history as part of general history, and, by writing as well as teaching Swiss-Jewish history, I aim to change the prevailing narrative in Swiss historiography. Neither nations nor civilizations can be the exclusive

and exhaustive units and categories of historiography. This brings me to the concept of entangled history, which “examines dependencies, interferences, interdependencies, and entanglements, and emphasizes as well the multidirectional character of transfers.”<sup>6</sup> It is the notion of social interconnectedness that makes this concept so fruitful for my own research.

Transnational migration, cultural transfer, and transfer of knowledge have been and are key focal points of my research. In my dissertation, I studied the history of Jewish watchmakers in Switzerland, an immigrant community of originally rural commodity dealers who entered a new industry that not only brought profound inner-societal changes (secularization, urbanization, social advancement) but that also enabled the industrialization of watchmaking in Switzerland.<sup>7</sup> My second book (*Habilitation*) is a biography of Salman Schocken, a German-Jewish entrepreneur, philanthropist, publisher, and cultural Zionist who was forced to leave Germany in 1933 for Jerusalem. The study is more than the description of Schocken’s life; it is an analysis of how the cultural area of German Jewry was constituted and changed outside of Germany after 1933.<sup>8</sup>

In my current project, my team and I work on Switzerland in the transnational network of science in exile from 1933 to 1950, and we understand Switzerland and its political and academic landscape as one location within the transnational academic network(s) of German Jews after 1933. By employing digital methods to study the networks, I aim to show how new methodological approaches can help us to think and write about (German-Jewish) history differently and how we can present our research in scholarly publications as well as on the web. Part of the data and analytical filters will be made accessible on the project website. In the public interface, readers will be able to visualize the data geographically, socially, and chronologically. The website is addressed to a heterogeneous audience. It can be used by teachers to introduce students to different aspects of (forced academic) migration such as migration patterns, the relevance of age or gender in migration, or the connection between political decisions and migration, to name just a few. But it is also addressed to scholars in the field with more specific questions, such as comparing career paths, studying migration patterns in different academic fields, or tracking the numbers of emigrant scholars in different universities throughout time, and much more. Preset filters and scenarios (various sets of settings) will help readers to use the data depending on their interests and questions.

It is also my goal to move Switzerland more into the focus of broader German-Jewish studies. Earlier, I argued that working as a scholar of German-Jewish studies in Switzerland leaves one at the fringes of the field. We need to ask ourselves how we want to define German-Jewish studies and what the common denominators are of our various topics and approaches. Is it shared experience, the common language or space, or a distinctive culture? I would like to argue that the definition depends on the epoch and the research questions. What makes the field so intriguing to me is its topi-

cal and methodological openness as well as its entanglements. With forced-academic-migration.net, I would like to carry German-Jewish studies into the virtual space so that as many people as possible can access it (including those outside of our research community). In the second part of my chapter, I share a first glimpse of my project.<sup>9</sup> I chose a case study that I will present both here in this volume as well as online. On the project website, anyone can access the data and prepared scenarios. The link included in the endnote takes the reader directly to the life and career trajectory of the German-Jewish dermatologist Berta Ottenstein.<sup>10</sup>

### **Berta Ottenstein: A Contextualized Biography**

In Germany, dermatology was established in the late nineteenth century as an independent subfield of medicine. Of the first- and second-generation researchers and practitioners in the field, a good 27 percent were Jews.<sup>11</sup> When, in April 1933, the newly elected Nazi government passed the “Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*), most Jewish dermatologists lost their positions. While an enormous personal tragedy for those who were dismissed, it was also a major setback for the discipline. Researchers have made clear that the mass layoff has caused lasting damage to German science.<sup>12</sup> In this chapter, however, I will not dwell on this loss despite its importance; rather, I will focus on a single fate as a way of highlighting one of the many who were forced to leave Germany and who tried to continue their profession in academia. Biographical case studies allow us to examine the many difficulties expelled scientists experienced in their professional and personal lives. Through a close look at German-Jewish dermatologist Berta Ottenstein, we can shed light on how age, gender, family status, and professional networks have influenced academic careers in exile. Of the 569 Jewish dermatologists in Germany in 1933, at least 259 were forced into exile, about 180 survived in Germany, 57 were murdered in concentration camps, and 13 died by suicide; the fate of 60 is unknown.<sup>13</sup>

One of the exiled was the German-Jewish dermatologist Berta Ottenstein, who held PhDs in chemistry (1913) from the University of Erlangen and in medicine (1919) from the University of Nuremberg, as well as a *Habilitation* in dermatology (1931) from the University of Freiburg. She was the first woman in Freiburg and the first woman in dermatology to earn this highest academic qualification, which is required in many continental European universities to conduct self-contained university teaching and to obtain a professorship. After her dismissal from the University of Freiburg, she first migrated to Hungary, later to Turkey, and finally to the United States. As a dermatologist, she was very well respected and a groundbreaking researcher, but as a woman she had to overcome many obstacles; as a Jew she was expelled and discriminated against in her own country. Without her professional network, which was based on her scientific excellence as well as on her ability to build friendships in all the many places she lived, she would have not been able to continue her career in exile.

## Biography in Context: Methodological Reflections

Writing a *biography in context* takes into account that “the autonomy of the agentic subject is an illusion”<sup>14</sup> but understands the person as part of the social group(s) in which they were educated and of which they were part. People are, to use the phrase of Anthony La Vopa, “positioned in a dense cluster of [historical] contexts.”<sup>15</sup> The reconstruction of a singular life allows us to reconstruct “how social, economic, cultural, political and ethnic networks form, solidify and intersect, or dissolve.” A biography is hence “neither structure nor agency, but always both.”<sup>16</sup> As Margit Szöllösi-Janze notes, scientific biography is able to depict history in all its shades by integrating different approaches and subject areas, including historical migration research, the history of science, network analysis, and gender studies.<sup>17</sup>

My interest goes beyond the mere biographical: I aim to analyze the development of the interplay between the individual, structures, institutes, relationships, and knowledge across time and space. Historical network analysis allows scholars to study the social network of people and institutes systematically. The social relations we study are articulated in networks of people and objects that spread across space regardless of political boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

With a strong interest in the biographies of refugee scholars and scientists, my main interests lie in the agency of individual actors within transnational networks and political structures in the specific circumstances of refugee scholars. Whereas in social network analysis the individual experience is of little interest, historical network analysis can undertake biographical research because it illuminates the structural and political influences that determine, enable, or limit their actions as well as the function and influence of social contacts on their life. By comparing the life journeys of different actors in a specific network, we are able to highlight singularity, differences in action, and, hence, agency.

Historical network analysis is still a rather young but steadily growing subdiscipline in the wide field of historical research. It mainly draws from tools and principles of social network analysis, which are adapted to historiographical questions and data. Established in the 1970s in the social sciences, network analysis conceptualizes individuals as embedded within webs of social structures through which influence and other resources are transferred. Software-based data gathering makes it possible to visualize the network structures of actors, their social relations, and their functions. Recently, a number of computer- and web-based environments and applications have been developed for social and historical network analysis. In my main project,<sup>19</sup> my research group is working with *nodegoat*<sup>20</sup> in order to collect and analyze all relevant data on forced academic migration. At a later stage we will publish the data, a set of filters, and analytical tools on our website.

For the study of biographies, digital methods offer “visual analytics techniques to synthesize information and derive insight from . . . dynamic, ambiguous, and often conflicting data” to detect expected constellations, but also to discover novel and un-

expected connections.<sup>21</sup> Florian Windhager, a pioneer in the field of data-based visualization and the study of biography, suggests a multi-perspective approach that includes geotemporal visualization to show patterns of movement and relational dimensions to display network patterns as well as cultural/academic production. The visualization of Berta Ottenstein's biography as well as her network can be found on the project website. All data as well as a set of filters are available there.<sup>22</sup>

### The Life of Berta Ottenstein

Berta Ottenstein was born in 1891 in Nuremberg as the youngest of six children in a merchant family. Despite the early death of her father in 1907, the family's wealth allowed her to attend the Königliches Realgymnasium and later the Universities of Nuremberg and Stuttgart. In 1914, Ottenstein earned her doctorate in chemistry from the University of Erlangen. She spent the summer semester of 1914 as a visiting researcher in Oxford. She returned to Nuremberg after the outbreak of World War I and commenced studying medicine at the university there. After spending two years (1916–18) at the University of Munich, she earned her second doctorate in medicine in 1919.<sup>23</sup> Ottenstein was one of the few women in Germany who had the privilege of higher education. In Bavaria, women were allowed to enroll as university students from 1903,<sup>24</sup> but, for girls, earning a high school diploma (*Abitur*)—the kind of diploma that allows young people to study at a university—at a regular *Gymnasium* was only possible in 1912 (Munich) and 1916 (Erlangen). Female enrollment therefore grew slowly.<sup>25</sup>

After Ottenstein earned her second degree, her career led her to a number of research institutions as well as hospitals. Between January 1919 and September 1921, she worked together with the biochemists Otto Neubauer and Siegfried Thannhauser on metabolic diseases at the clinical laboratory in Munich. From November 1920 until December 1923, Ottenstein worked as an assistant physician at the sick and psych ward (*Kranken- und Irrenabteilung*) at the Stuttgart public hospital. In the following years (1924–27), she was an assistant at the Thüringer Landesuniversität's chemical laboratory, where she worked with Alexander Gutbier. The year 1927 she spent as the assistant to Carl Neuberg at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Biochemistry in Berlin-Dahlem. There, she strengthened her theoretical and practical knowledge in the field. Ottenstein was a hardworking scientist constantly involved in pioneering research. She was also a well-liked colleague, which is reflected in her numerous positively received publications, many of them coauthored. It comes as no surprise that in 1928 she was appointed leading scientist of the newly founded physiological-chemical department at the clinic for dermatology at the university hospital in Freiburg. In a 1933 reference letter from Professor Georg Alexander Rost, her research was described as “groundbreaking” and her skills as “extraordinary.” She developed new methods mainly in the diagnosis of syphilis.<sup>26</sup> In Freiburg, Ottenstein worked and pub-

lished with Alfred Marchionini, whom she would later meet again in Turkey,<sup>27</sup> as well as with Siegfried Thannhauser, who, in 1930, was appointed director of the university clinic in Freiburg, a position he would lose in 1933 because he was Jewish. Thannhauser immigrated to the United States in 1934 and restarted his career in Boston. Berta Ottenstein was also dismissed in the spring of 1933.

By 1933, she was the first woman granted a *Habilitation* at the faculty of medicine in Freiburg and most likely the first female *Dozentin* (independent lecturer) in the field of dermatology. Despite being one of the first female scientists awarded this academic title in Freiburg, Ottenstein does not seem to have encountered any problems on this trajectory. She was highly respected as a scientist and well connected. Nevertheless, she received neither a tenured position nor the title of professor.<sup>28</sup> Rigid barriers for women in academia remained.

It is cynical, but perhaps the only time female scientists were treated in the same way as their male colleagues was in April 1933, in the months following the declaration of Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. According to paragraph 3 of the law, all tenured civil servants and candidates for tenured positions of “non-Aryan” descent were to be fired immediately. Exceptions were made for World War I veterans, those who lost a father or a son in combat, and those who had been in civil service since 1 August 1914.

Ottenstein appealed the termination of her contract. In her appeal to the minister of culture, she argued that women were not allowed to obtain a *Habilitation* before 1919 and could therefore not be considered for tenured positions before that date. She reasoned that the cutoff date for the exception ought to be adjusted for women. Ottenstein’s petition was denied, and she was suspended from her job on 12 April 1933.<sup>29</sup> She left Germany almost immediately for Budapest, where she worked at the clinic for skin and venereal diseases of the Pázmány-Péter-University. Because of her extraordinary professional knowledge, Ottenstein arrived in Budapest with recommendations from Professor Rost of Freiburg and Professor Istvan Rothman of Giessen as well as by invitation from Lajos Nékám, director of the clinic.

In Budapest, she had two main tasks to fulfill. Ottenstein was asked to bring the clinic up to speed on the latest biochemical research, including training its scientific personal. Second, she was tasked with organizing the ninth international congress of dermatology, which was held in Budapest in 1934. In her free time, she was allowed to continue her own research at the clinic’s laboratory. Ottenstein did not receive any financial compensation for her work in Budapest and had to live on her private savings. This was only possible because she was single and had no children.

In the case of academically trained men and women, research has shown that women were less likely to continue their careers in exile. Refugees were often denied access to the legal job market. For men, who in most cases would not accept work beyond their professional expertise, it was almost impossible to join the workforce as academics and provide for their families. Women on the other hand were willing to look beyond their professional expertise and thus had access to the informal work sector, accepting jobs

well below their qualifications.<sup>30</sup> Many of these jobs, such as cleaners, nannies, cooks, and typists, were in fields associated with women's work as well as with low social prestige and low wages. With women joining the workforce and securing the survival of their relatives, gender roles were switched within formerly bourgeois families.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, by taking over the position of the provider, as Heide Klapdor has pointed out, women stayed well within the stereotypical role of caregivers.<sup>32</sup>

The title of Klapdor's essay "Strategy of Survival Instead of Life Plan" grasps the problematic aspects of women's paid work in exile. Many women, regardless of their previous professional positions and achievements, gave up their career plans to secure the survival of their families and to support their husbands' attempts to continue their own careers.<sup>33</sup> For the emancipation of women, flight and exile during both world wars were real backlashes. Women were forced into roles and professions from which they had just freed themselves.<sup>34</sup> Atina Grossmann writes in her study on German women doctors in exile that many of the married female physicians worked in unskilled jobs that allowed their husbands to spend their time studying for the difficult language and medical exams required in new homelands.<sup>35</sup>

Although most academic female refugees were single, most doctors were married and had children.<sup>36</sup> Ottenstein, single and childless, was atypical in Germany and in exile. Seventy percent of women physicians during the Weimar Republic were general practitioners, and specialists were concentrated in the fields of gynecology and obstetrics, pediatrics, dermatology, and sexually transmitted diseases. Female doctors were practitioners, often working in public clinics that served women and the poor.<sup>37</sup> Ottenstein followed a different career path. Clinical work as a practitioner was not her focus: she primarily worked in research at various universities and laboratories. For a married woman with children, this intense geographical mobility would have been unfeasible. Her mobility in the 1920s helped to establish a strong professional network that she activated in the spring of 1933. Unlike the many Jewish women doctors who abandoned their career plans after being expelled from their jobs, Ottenstein continued as a researcher in her field. Uncertainty and demotion were the price she paid. After the two years in Budapest, she migrated to Istanbul.

From 1933 to 1944, over one thousand people migrated in the context of Turkish university reforms from Germany to Turkey, among them around three hundred women.<sup>38</sup> Coincidentally, Turkey began actively seeking foreign researchers in the same year as German academics were dismissed. Scientists, technical personnel, and research assistants from Germany migrated to Turkey in the course of Atatürk's reformation and westernization of universities. Turkey's leadership entrusted foreign scientists with the modernization, reformation, and rebuilding of its university system. Those scientists who found new occupations in Turkey made important contributions to scientific transfer from Germany to Turkey.

The migration of German-Jewish scientists to Turkey was facilitated by Philipp Schwartz, a Zurich-based German-Jewish refugee scientist, and Albert Malche, a Swiss politician and professor of pedagogy at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. Turkey



was not the first choice for expelled scientists. Many, especially in the beginning, tried to settle in the United Kingdom. Immediately after the law against Jewish civil servants was declared in Germany and the first wave of Jewish academics was obliged to leave their positions, academic help organizations were founded to “defend the principle of academic freedom.”<sup>39</sup> Many aid organizations, often founded by exiled scientists, had two main tasks: raising funds to financially support the dismissed scientists and finding work placement at universities and research institutions outside Germany.

Women were hired as secretaries, as lecturers for languages and history, as nurses, and as technical assistants and heads of laboratories in the fields of chemistry, biology, and medicine.<sup>40</sup> German men held about 80 percent of all newly established full professorships; not a single woman held one. In her article on female scientists at Turkish universities from 1933 to 1945, Regine Erichsen shows how “exiled German and Austrian women especially in the medical professions took part in the innovational shift of science and learning of the Turkish universities and the clinical practice in the institutions of public health.”<sup>41</sup> Although foreigners were recruited to replace the seemingly “unproductive and old-fashioned” Turkish academics,<sup>42</sup> they were also hired to rebuild universities from the ground up. The job of the immigrants included constructing the framework for future research, establishing laboratories, teaching Turkish staff and future scientists, conducting research, and, naturally, teaching students. Memoirs and letters from this time give insight into these complex tasks. The country lacked basic objects needed in laboratories, and utensils and chemicals were thus imported from Europe or manufactured by local artisans, who were taught how to produce them.<sup>43</sup>

Berta Ottenstein did not register with an academic aid organization. She was directly contacted by the head of the Istanbul clinic for dermatology and the study of syphilis, Professor Dr. Hulusi Behçet, who invited her to assume the directorship of the clinic’s laboratory. Behçet spent some time in Budapest and was friends with Lajos Nékám, Ottenstein’s superior at the University of Budapest.<sup>44</sup> With her difficult situation in Budapest in mind, she accepted the offer from Istanbul and wrote on 14 August 1934 that she was delighted and honored to accept the position.<sup>45</sup> After the international congress of dermatology concluded in September 1934, she packed her belongings and traveled to Istanbul, where she began her new job on 1 October.

Ottenstein had to set up the laboratory from scratch. Dermatology was not yet an established field of research in Turkey; on the contrary, it had the reputation of being unscientific and underdeveloped. Only with Ottenstein’s lab were the preconditions for science-based research established. Once in Istanbul, she was also offered a place as laboratory head of the newly founded cancer research institute.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, from 1935 to 1945, the year Berta Ottenstein left for the United States, she was director of two laboratories, both of which she constructed herself. As director, she trained local researchers, held lectures at the University of Istanbul, worked in the clinic, and continued her own research—all in rather difficult conditions. We cannot forget that the new university system was still under construction and that German scientists faced great uncertainty, requiring much improvisation.

Ottenstein seemed to have settled in rather well. Her own research progressed steadily, which is reflected in her numerous publications from that time.<sup>47</sup> Some of the articles were copublications with Behçet, who was highly dependent on Ottenstein's work in the laboratory.<sup>48</sup> Erichsen and others have shown how crucial it was for the exiled scientists in Turkey to continue to publish and to maintain contact with the global research community if they planned to continue their career elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

Turkey was for many of the Western scientists more of a stopover than the final destination in their migration journey. Their contracts were issued for five years and had to be extended every so often. Turkey's interest in the foreign scientists was explicit: they were recruited to reform the universities and to educate a new generation of Turkish academics in the Western standards of science. Hiring Jewish scholars was never a humanitarian act; Turkey was interested in the transfer of knowledge, and visas were issued exclusively on the basis of academic merit.<sup>50</sup> But this situation was not unique to Turkey. Isabella Löhr has shown in her research that humanitarianism was not the main trajectory of the aid organizations: it was, in the words of the British politician and university official William Beveridge, the "defense of science and learning against attacks such as those . . . from Germany."<sup>51</sup> Professional standards and academic excellence—rather than altruistic considerations—were the primary reasons for supporting individual scholars and scientists. Institutions outside Germany, mainly American and British universities, were interested in extending their own reputations by bringing in renowned scholars and promising younger scientists, and they saw the expulsion of academics from Germany as a chance.<sup>52</sup>

Contracts in the United States and in the United Kingdom were also usually issued only for a limited period of time, but, there at least, refugees could feel somewhat safe. In Turkey, however, the situation was quite different. Turkey held close trade and economic relations with Germany: it imported industrial commodities and, from 1935 onward, weapons too. Turkey also exported natural resources and food to Germany. This openness toward the German government was unnerving, and many feared their visas and working permits might not be extended. Sources show, however, that people at risk were able to stay in Turkey even after German nationals were expelled following the outbreak of the war. Turkey severed diplomatic ties with Germany only in 1944 when it joined the allied forces.<sup>53</sup>

After the war, most exiled scientists left the country because hardly anyone felt at home and because many of the working permits terminated. Ottenstein did build a circle of friends and acquaintances in Istanbul, but she also did not hesitate to leave the country when the first opportunity presented itself. In a letter to her friend and flatmate Esther von Bülow, she stated that although others had been contacted about receiving Turkish nationality, she had not. When her former colleague and friend from Freiburg, Siegfried Thannhauser, invited her to Boston, she accepted without hesitation. A position at Tufts University promised more scientific opportunities for her than any Istanbul institution. Ottenstein would be in good company: about half of Turkey's

foreign scholars were about to leave for the United States immediately after the end of the war.<sup>54</sup>

On the evening of 31 July 1945, Ottenstein left Istanbul on a freighter as the only woman aboard. Just two hours before embarking, she received notification of her entry visa to the United States. After twenty-two days at sea, she arrived at the port of Boston and immediately traveled to New York to reunite with her sister.<sup>55</sup> Shortly after, she started her work as a research fellow at the laboratory at Tufts University. She picked up her research from Budapest as well as a new study with Gerhard Schmidt, Thannhauser's director of the laboratory. Conditions in Boston were much better than in Istanbul—the laboratory was well equipped, and all necessary chemicals were available. As in Budapest and in Istanbul, she used her free time for her own research, and she achieved success quickly as she prepared a number of articles for publication that she had written in Budapest and Istanbul.<sup>56</sup>

Her reputation traveled and, in 1947, she was offered an extraordinary professorship (*außerordentliche Professur*) in Hamburg. According to a letter to her friend Esther von Bülow, whom she affectionately called Bülowa, Ottenstein was invited to Hamburg by the dermatologist Alfred Marchionini. Marchionini was a former colleague from Freiburg who in 1938 went into exile in Turkey because his wife, the neurologist Mathilde Sotbeer, was, under Nazi laws, considered “non-Aryan.”<sup>57</sup> In Ankara, he established the department of dermatology and was appointed its first chair in 1947. Marchionini was one of the few Germans offered a permanent position in Turkey; however, he decided to return to Germany when he accepted the post of director for dermatology in Hamburg.<sup>58</sup> Berta Ottenstein declined the Hamburg offer. She wrote to her friend that she was flattered by it and that the thought to “again be somebody” was intriguing, but she had decided to stay in the United States because she “did not want to miss the opportunity to become a citizen and to get the medical license.”<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, in the United States, she “became somebody” in the research community at least. Even so, she never managed to pass the medical exam.

She started studying for the exam in 1946 and failed the test in 1947 and again in 1948. The first time she succeeded only in pathology, biology, and bacteriology; in 1948 she did not pass a single discipline.<sup>60</sup> The fact that she failed the exam's fields in which she held great expertise—dermatology, biochemistry, and toxicology—was, in her opinion, proof of the general negative tendency toward foreigners in the practical medical fields.<sup>61</sup>

Based on the statistics provided by the American Medical Association (AMA), we can confirm her suspicion. From the mid-1920s onward, physicians could not practice medicine without approval from one of the 48 state medical boards, each of which had different requirements.<sup>62</sup> In 1947, 14,429 medical licenses were issued in total; among the 6,747 examinees,<sup>63</sup> 601 graduates were from medical schools outside the United States and Canada, and 52.9 percent of them failed. To compare, of the 6,374 graduates of approved medical schools in the United States, only 10.5 percent failed the

exam.<sup>64</sup> In 1948, the year Ottenstein took the exam for the second time, chances for foreigners with licenses issued outside the United States were equally low: 51.5 percent of them failed the exams as compared to 3.4 percent of students coming from US medical schools.<sup>65</sup> The high failure rates of physicians from abroad, most of them from renowned European universities, continued from the early 1930s throughout the post-war years. From 1930 to 1947, 14,520 graduates from foreign universities (excluding Canada) were examined by boards in the United States: the overall failure rate among these physicians was 48 percent. That almost half of all European doctors who took the exam, among them professors and renowned researchers, did not pass the board test at least once cannot be attributed to a lack of knowledge or skills. In a 1949 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, the organization's official publication organ, the authors claim that the underlying problem with the foreign physicians was "the quality of the medical education the graduates had received."<sup>66</sup> With more than half of the graduates in question coming from long-established universities in Central Europe, this argument seems questionable. Taking the example of Ottenstein, who failed in her own fields of specialization, we can argue that neither her missing expertise nor the quality of her training caused her to fail the exam. Instead, what comes into focus are the AMA's policies designed to protect American-trained physicians from refugees and immigrant doctors.

Ottenstein hoped for some long-term financial security that would have come with the medical license for which she worked so hard. But after she failed twice, she did not try a third time—at least there are no hints that she did—and she needed once again to rely on research foundations to continue financing her work. Returning to Germany did not seem, despite everything, to be an option. She did travel to Heidelberg in 1949 to present a paper at the first German congress of dermatology but turned down a second offer from Marchionini to come to Hamburg.

In 1951, at the age of sixty, she was naturalized as an American citizen and appointed *ausserordentliche Professorin* (adjunct professor) at the University of Freiburg. Eighteen years after she was expelled from the university, she received this honorary title as appreciation for her scientific achievement and as reparation for her unlawful dismissal. It was Marchionini, now chair for dermatology at the University of Munich, who initiated the process. Ottenstein was no doubt happy about these developments; they did not, however, secure her financial situation. Like many other immigrants, she possessed no savings and no retirement funds. When in 1952 the *Gesetz zur Regelung der Wiedergutmachung nationalsozialistischen Unrechts für die im Ausland lebenden Angehörigen des öffentlichen Dienstes* (Law regulating the reparation of National Socialist injustices for members of the public service living abroad) was passed, Ottenstein was able to sue for the subsequent appointment of an ordinary professorship (*planmässige Professur*). The law was meant for university staff (*Bedienstete des Hochschulbetriebes*) as well as nontenured extraordinary professors and private lecturers (*Privatdozent\*innen*) who would likely have become full professors under different political circumstances.<sup>67</sup> In 1955, three years after Ottenstein filed her lawsuit against the state of Baden-

Württemberg, the court decided in her favor. In 1954, the court asked the university to comment on the matter. The dean of the medical faculty forwarded the request to the chair for dermatology, Professor Stühmer, and added in his letter that the faculty felt it had already done enough for “Ms. Ottenstein.” Alfred Stühmer agreed with the dean. His evaluation of Ottenstein’s work was scathing: after leaving the University of Freiburg, Ottenstein, according to Stühmer, had not employed any new methods, and her publications did not actually contain any real dermatological specialist work. By referring to Berta Ottenstein as “Ms.,” Stühmer violated the German protocol of using proper academic titles and thus discriminated against her as a woman. The degradation of women’s performance is a common form of misogyny in academia. He summarized that she would not have been considered for a professorship in the field. In an obvious demonstration of gender discrimination, both Stühmer and Dean Jung negated Ottenstein’s scientific work and the enormously difficult and psychologically stressful accompanying circumstances.

Nevertheless, the court weighed the favorable valuations of Marchionini, who was then chairman of the German Dermatological Society, and of Professor Rost, who was honorary professor at the Free University of Berlin, higher than the devastating judgment of the University of Freiburg. For Ottenstein, the decision was not just satisfaction for the injustice that had happened to her. It also meant financial security for her retirement age. Tragically, she died of a heart attack shortly after the verdict was pronounced.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

“Being expelled requires the strength for a fragile and yet practical draft of an existence of any kind, the draft for a life that is fleeting, but nevertheless everyday and can be mastered every day,”<sup>69</sup> writes Klappdor in her paper on female refugees. Ottenstein temporarily suffered from the volatility of her existence and the uncertainty of her future. Nevertheless, she persisted in her career with tenacity. What distinguished her was her willingness to adapt: her ability to adjust her research to the respective context without losing her own compass. It became clear that her professional network was intrinsically important for a career-in-exile. We have clear evidence from research in the field of the history of exiled scholars that personal networks were of paramount importance for successful scientists’ emigration. The contextual biography of Ottenstein attests to show this observation.

About half a million of Jews left Germany from 1933 to 1945, and Jewish academics are part of this transnational exile community. Ottenstein is one of many examples. The digital approach of the larger project will allow us to understand and map the manifold links between individual scholars, institutions, help organization and the development and migration of science and knowledge in a comparative way. The project is one example of how digital developments can be employed to address specific ques-

tions and problems in the field of German-Jewish studies, thus opening up possibilities for new lines of research and innovative results.

**Stefanie Mahrer** is assistant professor for modern European, Swiss, and Jewish history. Her publications include her recently published biography, *Salman Schocken: Topographien eines Lebens* (Neofelis, 2021), and her book-length study of Jewish watchmakers in Switzerland, *Handwerk der Moderne: Jüdische Uhrmacher und Uhrenunternehmer im Neuenburger Jura, 1800–1914* (Böhlau, 2012), as well as a number of articles that deal with Swiss and German-Jewish history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She is currently an SNSF-PRIMA grantee at the Institute for History at Bern University, where she leads a group of researchers working on forced academic migration from 1933 to 1950.

### Notes

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1. Till van Rahden, “History in the House of the Hangman: How Postwar Germany Became a Key Site for the Study of Jewish History,” in *The German-Jewish Experience Revisited*, ed. Steven E. Aschheim and Vivian Liska (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), 182.
2. *Ibid.*, 174.
3. Heiko Haumann, “Lebensweltlich orientierte Geschichtsschreibung in den Jüdischen Studien: Das Basler Beispiel,” in *Jüdische Studien: Reflexionen und Praxis eines wissenschaftlichen Feldes*, ed. Klaus Hödl (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2003), 105. Heiko Haumann, professor emeritus of Eastern European History at the University of Basel, was member of the board of trustees and one of the main advocates in the foundation of the institute.
4. Stefanie Mahrer, *Handwerk der Moderne: Jüdische Uhrmacher und Uhrenunternehmer im Neuenburger Jura 1800–1914* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2012).
5. Van Rahden, “History in the House of the Hangman,” 183.
6. Sönke Bauck and Thomas Maier, “Entangled History,” *InterAmerican Wiki: Terms—Concepts—Critical Perspectives*.
7. Mahrer, *Handwerk der Moderne*.
8. Stefanie Mahrer, *Salman Schocken: Topographien eines Lebens* (Berlin: Neofelis, 2021). The research project was funded by, among others, the Gerald Westheimer Career Development Fellowship.
9. <https://forced-academic-migration.net/datapublications/datapublications.p/293.m/26/bertha-ottenstein>
10. The research on forced academic migration is funded by the Swiss National Research foundation with a five-year PRIMA-grant (PR00P1\_179819/1).
11. See, among others, Sven Eppinger, *Das Schicksal der jüdischen Dermatologen Deutschlands in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Mabuse-Verlag, 2001), 273.
12. See, among others, Michael Grüttner and Sven Kinast, “Die Vertreibung von Wissenschaftlern aus den deutschen Universitäten 1933–1945,” *Vierteljahrszeitschrift für Zeitgeschichte* 55, no. 1 (2007): 123–86.
13. Eppinger, *Schicksal der Jüdischen Dermatologen*, 278.
14. Pierre Bourdieu, “Die biographische Illusion,” in *Praktische Vernunft: Zur Theorie des Handelns*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 75–83.
15. A. J. La Vopa, *Fichte: The Self and the Calling of Philosophy, 1762–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 8.
16. Simone Lässig, “Introduction: Biography in Modern History—Modern Historiography in Biog-

- raphy,” in *Biography between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography*, ed. Volker R. Berghahn and Simone Lässig (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 20.
17. Margit Szöllösi-Janze, “Lebens-Geschichte—Wissenschafts-Geschichte: Vom Nutzen der Biographie für Geschichtswissenschaft und Wissenschaftsgeschichte,” *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 23 (2000): 17–35.
  18. Eugenia Roldán Vera and Eckhardt Fuchs, “Introduction: The Transnational in the History of Education,” in *The Transnational in the History of Education*, ed. Eckhardt Fuchs and Eugenia Roldán Vera (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 24.
  19. See [www.forced-academic-migration.net](http://www.forced-academic-migration.net).
  20. Nodegoat is a web-based research environment for the humanities developed by LAB1100: <https://nodegoat.net>.
  21. Florian Windhager et al., “A Synoptic Visualization Framework for the Multi-Perspective Study of Biography and Prosopography Data,” Proceedings of the 2nd IEEE VIS Workshop on Visualization for the Digital Humanities (VIS4DH’17), Phoenix, AZ, USA, 2 October 2017, accessed 27 October 2020 from [http://vis4dh.dbvis.de/papers/2017/A\\_percent20Synoptic\\_percent20Visualization\\_percent20Framework\\_percent20for\\_percent20the\\_percent20Multi-Perspective\\_percent20Study\\_percent20of\\_percent20Biography\\_percent20and\\_percent20Prosopography\\_percent20Data.pdf](http://vis4dh.dbvis.de/papers/2017/A_percent20Synoptic_percent20Visualization_percent20Framework_percent20for_percent20the_percent20Multi-Perspective_percent20Study_percent20of_percent20Biography_percent20and_percent20Prosopography_percent20Data.pdf).
  22. <https://forced-academic-migration.net/datapublications/datapublications.p/293.m/tag/Berta+Ottenstein>. I would like to extend my gratitude to Aleksandra Petrović, who collected and entered all the data and helped to set up the filters.
  23. All biographical information is based on the unpublished medical dissertation of Anja Schmialek, “Professor Dr. Bertha Ottenstein (1891–1956): Erste habilitierte Dermatologin Deutschlands; Leben und Werk” (PhD diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, 1995).
  24. By way of comparison, the state of Baden allowed female enrollment in 1900; Prussia, however, only followed suit in 1909.
  25. Andrea Abele-Brehm, *Festvortrag zum dies academicus aus Anlass des 260. Jahrestages der Gründung der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg am 4. November. 100 Jahre Akademische Frauenbildung in Bayern und Erlangen—Rückblick und Perspektiven: Erlanger Universitätsreden* (Erlangen: Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, 2004), 7.
  26. Copies of this letter can be found in her personal file at the archive of the University of Istanbul. Here paraphrased from Arın Namal, “Deutschlandweit die erste Dozentin im Fach Dermatologie: Berta Ottenstein (Nürnberg, 1891—Concord, 1956); Ihr Wirken in der Türkei,” in *Die Frau im Judentum: Jüdische Frauen in der Medizin*, ed. Caris-Petra Heidel (Frankfurt am Main: Mabuse-Verlag, 2014), 12:186.
  27. Marchionini’s wife was Jewish, and because he refused to divorce her, he lost his position in Germany.
  28. For Ottenstein’s *Habilitation* in context, see Ute Scherb, “*Ich stehe in der Sonne und fühle, wie meine Flügel wachsen*”: Studentinnen und Wissenschaftlerinnen an der Freiburger Universität von 1900 bis in die Gegenwart (Königstein: Helmer, 2002), 125–34.
  29. Regine Erichsen, “Das türkische Exil als Geschichte von Frauen und ihr Beitrag zum Wissenschaftstransfer in die Türkei von 1933 bis 1945,” *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 28, no. 4 (2005): 342.
  30. Katharina Prager and Irene Messinger, eds., *Doing Gender in Exile: Geschlechterverhältnisse, Konstruktionen und Netzwerke in Bewegung* (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2019), 8.
  31. Brigitte Bailer, “Die besondere Situation für Frauen in Flucht und Vertreibung,” *Jahrbuch Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes* (2018): 163.
  32. See Heike Klapdor, “Überlebensstrategie statt Lebensentwurf: Frauen in der Emigration,” in *Frauen und Exil: Zwischen Anpassung und Selbstbehauptung*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn and Inge Stephan (Munich: Ed. Text + Kritik, 1993), 12–30.
  33. See Bailer, “Die besondere Situation,” 163.

34. Prager and Messinger, *Doing Gender*, 7–8.
35. Atina Grossmann, “‘Neue Frauen’ im Exil: Deutsche Ärztinnen und die Emigration,” in *Deutsch-Jüdische Geschichte als Geschlechtergeschichte: Studien zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kirsten Heinsohn and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), 133–56.
36. See *ibid.*, 136.
37. Atina Grossmann, “German Women Doctors from Berlin to New York: Maternity and Modernity in Weimar and in Exile,” *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 67.
38. This number includes trailing spouses (all females) without working permits.
39. Lord Rutherford, president of the Academic Assistance Council (AAC), the British aid organization for displaced scholars, upon the foundation of the council. Quoted from Norman Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933–1952* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1953), 14.
40. Erichsen, “Das türkische Exil,” 340.
41. *Ibid.*, 337. My translation.
42. I. Izzet Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue of European Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 49.
43. Erichsen, “Das türkische Exil,” 345.
44. Namal, “Erste Dozentin,” 12:189.
45. Letter from Berta Ottenstein to Hulusi Behçet, 14 August 1934, in Archive of Human Resources, Deanery of the Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul University, file Berta Ottenstein. Copy in Namal, “Erste Dozentin,” 12:190.
46. Schmialek, “Bertha Ottenstein,” 38.
47. For a complete list of Ottenstein’s publications, see *ibid.*, 89–98.
48. *Ibid.*, 38.
49. See Erichsen, “Das türkische Exil.”
50. Bahar, *Turkey and the Rescue*, 51, 58.
51. William H. Beveridge, *A Defence of Free Learning* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 130.
52. Isabella Löhr, “Fluchthilfe zur Rettung der Zunft: Die akademische Zwangsmigration in den 1930er-Jahren,” in *Kultur und Beruf in Europa*, ed. Isabella Löhr, Matthias Middell, and Hannes Siegrist (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 270–78; Isabella Löhr, “Solidarity and the Academic Community: The Support Networks for Refugee Scholars in the 1930s,” in “Histories of Transnational Humanitarianism: Between Solidarity and Self-Interest,” special issue of the *Journal of Modern European History* 12, no. 2 (2014): 231–46.
53. John M. VanderLippe, “A Cautious Balance: The Question of Turkey in World War II,” *The Historian* 64, no. 1 (2001): 63–80.
54. *Ibid.*, 53.
55. *Ibid.*, 55–56.
56. *Ibid.*, 62–66.
57. As a side note: Marchionini succeeded as a physician of the diplomatic corps to save over ten thousand Turkish Jews in France.
58. Albrecht Scholz, “Marchionini, Alfred,” in *Enzyklopädie Medizingeschichte*, ed. Werner E. Gerabek et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 890.
59. Letter Berta Ottenstein to Bülowa [Esther von Bülow], 12 May 1947. Copy in Schmialek, “Bertha Ottenstein,” 133.
60. *Ibid.*, 68–69.
61. Letter from Berta Ottenstein to Bülowa [Esther von Bülow], 12 May 1947. Copy in *ibid.*, 133.
62. Eric D. Kohler, “Relicensing Central European Refugee Physicians in the United States: 1933–1945,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 6 (1989): 4.
63. Of these licenses, 6,747 were issued after examination and 7,602 by reciprocity and endorsement of other state licenses or of the certificate of the national board of medical examiners.
64. Donald G. Anderson and Anne Tipner, “Medical Licensure for 1947,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 137, no. 7 (1948): 603.



65. Donald G. Anderson and Anne Tipner, "Medical Licensure Statistics for 1948," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 140, no. 3 (1949): 298.
66. Creighton Barker and Grace Mooney, "Licensing of Foreign Medical Graduates in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 140, no. 1 (1949): 10.
67. For more details, see Sabine Schleiermacher, "Entschädigung von Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus," in *Jüdische Ärztinnen und Ärzte im Nationalsozialismus: Entrechtung, Vertreibung, Ermordung*, ed. Thomas Beddies, Susanne Doetz, and Christoph Kopke (Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 307–10.
68. Schmialek, "Bertha Ottenstein," 72–76.
69. Klapdor, "Überlebensstrategie," 15. My translation.

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