



Resistance of the Heart Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany in 1943

Gregorij H. von Leitis reads from the award-winning book
by Nathan Stoltzfus

Introductory Lecture: Michael Lahr

Premiered at the Jüdische Kulturverein Berlin (Jewish Cultural Club), November 9, 1999

Only in 2003 the movie "Rosenstrasse" by Margarethe von Trotta helped to make the story of the women involved in the Rosenstrasse Protest known. Until then very few people had heard about the courageous women who had demonstrated against the deportation of their Jewish husbands in the winter of 1943. With their protest they finally forced the Nazis to their knees. Already many years before Margarethe von Trotta's film, the American historian Nathan Stoltzfus did research on this little-known chapter and wrote the impressive book "Resistance of the Heart". In 1996 Stoltzfus' studies were published in English. In 1999 the Hanser Publishing Company in Munich released the German translation. Nathan Stoltzfus did his PhD in 1993 in Harvard and is now teaching modern European history at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Based on numerous interviews and conversations with eye-witnesses, Nathan Stoltzfus pursued the destiny of mixed marriages ("Mischehen") during the National Socialist Regime. He talked with survivors of such mixed marriages, but could also persuade perpetrators to share their stories, for example the former State Secretary in Goebbels' Ministry of Propaganda. Those first hand accounts add immediacy to the vivid reconstruction of the events.

At the beginning of March 1943, the last remaining Jews in Berlin, especially those from so-called mixed marriages, were arrested by the Gestapo and brought to a collection camp in Rosenstrasse near Alexanderplatz, in order to be deported from there. But within hours of the arrests numerous family members and friends of those arrested gathered in front of the building and protested. The majority of the 6,000 protesters were women. In unison they shouted: "Give us back our men!" They withstood the ice-cold weather and were not deterred by police attempts to intimidate them threatening the use of machine guns. Finally the Nazi Regime gave in. The arrested relatives were released. Even 35 men, who already had been deported to Auschwitz, were sent back from this "Hell without return" and survived the Holocaust.

The events of the Rosenstrasse Protest show two things: First of all it was possible to collectively protest during the "Third Reich" – a finding, which shatters the German public to the core even years after the end of World War II. Secondly it becomes clear, how human beings, whose life and existence is profoundly threatened (in this case because of the arrest of the Jewish husbands of Non-Jewish German women) can develop a political consciousness and a sense of their political possibilities through their spontaneous communal acts of resistance. This realization is relevant even today. As the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer summarizes in his foreword for the German paperback edition of Stoltzfus' book: "For those of us born later, the message today from those courageous women, in the face of violence and oppression – even when the situation still seemed so hopeless – is to never give up and not to go along with the allegedly unavoidable."

The **Hessische / Niedersächsische Allgemeine** wrote about the reading on November 16, 1999: „A powerful voice fills the room. On this evening Gregorij H. von Leitis read at the Breitenau memorial in Guxhagen from the recently released book 'Resistance of the Heart' by Nathan Stoltzfus. At times the reading turns into a theatrically staged presentation of this powerful story.“

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