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Forced Accommodation for Jews in the Context of the Deportations at the Düsseldorf Abattoir (1939 – 1944)

Abstract: During the period 1941 to 1944, the former Düsseldorf abattoir served as an assembly camp for almost 6,000 Jewish men, women and children from the administrative district of Düsseldorf prior to their deportation. Their deportation was the end of a long process of disenfranchisement and social isolation, the penultimate stage of which was eviction from their own or rented housing and confinement in forced accommodation: a ‘*Judenhaus*’ (‘Jews house’, a tenement building where Jews were housed), communal accommodation or a camp. This paper investigates for the first time the background to and the process of ‘residential segregation’ in this region. It names the various actors of local municipal authorities and the NSDAP involved and uses examples to describe the situation faced by those who were persecuted.

Introduction

Around 8,000 people persecuted for being Jewish were deported from the Düsseldorf administrative district to the ghettos, concentration and extermination camps in German-occupied East Central Europe between 1941 and 1944. This corresponded to around a third of the Jewish population in the region, based on the year 1933.¹ For almost 6,000 of these people, the Düsseldorf abattoir served as the central assembly camp for the whole of the administrative district. Like many other such assembly camps in the German Reich, the Düsseldorf abattoir was set up as a transit camp only on a temporary basis. Regular slaughtering operations were not interrupted during the process. The Gestapo worked closely with the abattoir’s management to organize the ‘*Schleusung*’ (‘channeling’) of the Jews who were brought here, which means they were registered and deprived

¹ In 1933, with around four million inhabitants, the Düsseldorf administrative district was one of the most densely populated administrative districts in the German Reich, with the major cities of Duisburg, Essen, Gladbach-Rheydt (now: Mönchengladbach), Krefeld, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Oberhausen and Wuppertal. The proportion of (registered) Jews in the total population of the administrative district was 0.6 percent.

of their remaining possessions and signed a waiver relinquishing their assets.² The would-be deportees spent no more than 24 hours at the site. After the rigmarole, they had to stay a night in the cattle market hall, which was dirty and had no heating. Seven deportations in total led to the ghettos in Łódź, Minsk, Riga, Izbica, and Theresienstadt, or to work camps run by the Todt Organization in Lenne and Zeitz. Only around 400 people survived their deportation.³

The site of the former abattoir is now home to the campus of the Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences. At the site of the former assembly camp, in the cattle market hall, the Alter Schlachthof Memorial Centre now researches these crimes and commemorates those who were deported and murdered. The events that took place on the site are documented in a permanent exhibition. How the deportations took place, and which players from which authorities and agencies had a significant involvement in them, are the central questions asked.

Not only is the fate that awaited the deportees in the ghettos researched and documented, but also what these people experienced prior to their deportation. Deportation was merely the culmination of a series of discriminatory measures and interventions to which the Jewish population had been subjected since 1933. Following bans on exercising certain professions, 'Aryanization', and exclusion from social and cultural life, Jews were driven out of their own (or rented) homes and placed in forced accommodation. There were different types of forced accommodation in which Jews were housed prior to their deportation, which are differentiated as follows:

'*Judenhäuser*' ('Jews houses')⁴: These houses were established in residential buildings (formerly) belonging to Jewish owners.

² For a definition of the term '*Schleusung*' see Akim Jah: *Die Deportation der Juden aus Berlin. Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik und das Sammellager Große Hamburger Straße*, Berlin: be.bra, 2013, 136–137.

³ See, in detail, Joachim Schröder: *Alter Schlachthof Memorial Centre. Exhibition Catalogue*, Düsseldorf: Droste, 2019; Bastian Fleermann and Hildegard Jakobs: *Düsseldorfer Deportationen*, Düsseldorf: Droste, 2015; Holger Berschel: *Bürokratie und Terror. Das Judenreferat der Gestapo Düsseldorf 1935–1945*, Essen: Klartext, 2001.

⁴ Use of the Nazi term '*Judenhaus*' is inconsistent within existing research. More recent works avoid this term altogether and refer to 'ghetto houses' – a term which, however, insinuates proximity to the living conditions in the ghettos in German-occupied East Central Europe. The term '*Judenhaus*' will be retained in the following for now. A comprehensive account of the subject is not yet available, but there are numerous regional works, based on the work of Gerhard Botz: *Wohnungspolitik und Judendeportation in Wien 1938–1945. Zur Funktion des Antisemitismus als Ersatz nationalsozialistischer Sozialpolitik*, Vienna/Salzburg: Geyer-Edition, 1975, and Marlis

Sammelunterkünfte (communal accommodations) and residential camps: The term Sammelunterkunft is used here to describe buildings that were not previously residential buildings, such as administrative buildings of the Jewish Communities or former department stores. Residential camps were barracks used and set up especially for Jews, such as the Holbeckshof camp in Essen or the Much camp in Siegerland.⁵

Assembly camps: These camps, often set up in buildings of the Jewish Communities or in (public) halls or other big 'suitable' buildings were established for the immediate preparation of the deportations (for example, the Große Hamburger Straße camp in Berlin and the assembly camp at the Düsseldorf abattoir).

The first two types served to segregate Jews from the rest of society and keep them together under surveillance in certain locations. As a rule, they existed for at least several months and were permanently occupied, sometimes with a high turnover. However, in the assembly camps set up for immediate preparation for deportation, people did not usually stay for longer than one or a few days.⁶ This paper looks at the first two types, 'Judenhäuser' and communal accommodation/residential camps in the administrative district of Düsseldorf.

As it turned out, confinement in forced accommodation was usually the last step prior to deportation. How much such forced accommodation there was in the city or in the administrative district of Düsseldorf is not yet known; the subject is still largely unexplored at a regional level.⁷ Nor is it known in detail how

Buchholz: *Die hannoverschen Juden Häuser. Zur Situation der Juden in der Zeit der Ghettoisierung und Verfolgung 1941 bis 1945*, Hildesheim: A. Lax, 1987.

5 There had already been a comprehensive camp system in the German Reich since 1938, set up by various agencies, into which Jews were conscripted for forced labor, or retrained. See Wolfgang Gruner: *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz deutscher Juden. Zur Zwangsarbeit als Element der Verfolgung 1938–1943*, Berlin: Metropol, 1997, 217–272. The (work) camps referred to here were set up from 1941/1942 onwards, in the run-up to the pending deportations, cf. *ibid.*, 249–272.

6 In individual cases, there are also overlaps between type 2) and type 3) (for example, in Munich, Milbertshofen camp, Cologne, Fort V in Müngersdorf).

7 However, some information can be found in local studies, for example Stefan Rohrbacher: *Juden in Neuss*, Neuss: Galerie Küppers, 1986, 210; Günther Erckens: *Juden in Mönchengladbach. Jüdisches Leben in den früheren Gemeinden M. Gladbach, Rheyd, Odenkirchen, Giesenkirchen-Schelsen, Rheindahlen, Wickerath und Wanlo*, volume 1, Mönchengladbach: Stadtarchiv, 1988, 736–746; Claudia Flümann: "... doch nicht bei uns in Krefeld!" *Arisierung, Enteignung, Wiedergutmachung in der Samt- und Seidenstadt, 1933 bis 1963*, Essen: Klartext, 2015, 243–254. For Düsseldorf, only brief passages from Bastian Fleermann: "Vom Pogrom zum Abtransport. Die Situation der Juden im Reg. Bez. Düsseldorf zwischen November 1938 bis April 1941", in Angela Genger and Hildegard Jakobs (eds.): *Düsseldorf. Getto Litzmannstadt. 1941*, Essen: Klartext, 2010; important preparatory work was done in Düsseldorf by Dr. Barbara Suchy, who, with the help of surviving house books, drew up a list of apartments in which Jewish residents of Düsseldorf had

the multi-layered process of ‘evicting’ the Jewish population and keeping them together in forced accommodation took place in the region, and which players from which agencies and authorities were involved.

Identifying and documenting forced accommodation has a significant value in terms of remembrance culture as these places offer starting points for historical and political educational and remembrance work. In three research seminars to date, students at the Department of Social/Cultural Sciences did research on the history of ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in the region. The prospective social workers and social education workers, who will be active in a wide variety of social settings in their future professions, were now confronted with a very special, historical social setting, and attempted to find answers to the following questions: Where was such forced accommodation in the region? What did ‘being sent to a ‘*Judenhaus*’ mean for the people concerned? What were the living conditions like? How long did the people live here? The findings of the research seminars have been incorporated into this paper. This paper is intended to provide initial answers to the questions raised but should still be considered a work in progress.⁸

‘Aryanization’ of Jewish Housing: Legal Basis and Developments

There were two aspects to the Nazi expropriation and eviction policy in the area of housing. Firstly, the Nazi rulers were involved in expropriating or ‘Aryanizing’ Jewish-owned property, where the intention was to transfer the resulting profits to government coffers. Secondly, the Nazis sought to separate Jews from the rest of society: Jewish and non-Jewish tenants were not to live under the same roof, and non-Jewish tenants were not to live in apartments owned by Jewish land-

lived. Dr. Suchy also kindly provided the author with an (unpublished) paper on a ‘*Judenhaus*’ in Düsseldorf.

⁸ The initial clues as to the location of much of the forced accommodation were the surviving deportation lists available online in the Arolsen Archives, which often include the last addresses of the deportees (Collection 1.2.1.1). This information is supplemented by other sources, such as the house books already mentioned, and other sources. Reports on the seminars (with my colleague Alexander Flohé, Düsseldorf University of Applied Sciences) can be found at <https://www.erinnerungsort-duesseldorf.de>. The ongoing research project at the Alter Schlachthof Memorial Centre on forced accommodation in the region was also supported by research carried out by historian Dr. Mareen Heying, to whom sincere thanks is expressed at this point.

lords. Hovering over these measures, as before, was the declared overall aim of inducing even more Jews to emigrate.⁹

The systematic expropriation of 'Jewish housing' began virtually at the same time as the "elimination of the Jews from German economic life"¹⁰ – as per the wording of the decree issued on November 12, 1938, immediately after the November pogroms. It prohibited Jews from exercising any managerial or business activity from January 1, 1939 onwards. It was followed on December 3, 1938 by the *Verordnung über den Einsatz jüdischen Vermögens*¹¹ (Decree on the Utilization of Jewish Property). This decree forced Jewish owners to sell their businesses, property, jewelry, etc.

In his subsequent decree of December 28, 1938,¹² the Reich's Minister of Economics, Hermann Göring, referring to an "order from the Führer", emphasized that the "Aryanization" of Jewish housing, i.e. the dispossession of Jewish house and apartment owners, but also, in a broader sense, the expulsion of Jewish tenants from buildings belonging to non-Jewish owners, was to take place last. This was to avoid chaotic circumstances caused by too many Jews becoming homeless. At the same time, "Jewish-owned" property could serve as collateral for financing the emigration of destitute Jews, for example. Jewish tenants in buildings owned by non-Jews were to be evicted and moved into houses owned by Jews. Jews who were married to non-Jews were exempt from these regulations in two cases: if the husband was 'Aryan', or if the husband was Jewish and there were children. Overall the intention was to avoid a concentration of large numbers of such forced accommodation or a "ghettoization" in certain parts of the city – Hitler was obviously concerned about German and international opinion here.¹³

9 Saul Friedländer: *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Die Jahre der Verfolgung 1933–1939*, volume 1, Munich: Beck, 1998, 310. Re. 'Wohnraumarisierung' (residential segregation), cf., in addition to the works of Buchholz and Botz (footnote 5), Wolf Gruner: "Die Grundstücke der 'Reichsfeinde'. Zur 'Arisierung' von Immobilien durch Städte und Gemeinden 1938–1945", in *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Wirkung des Holocaust*, 2000, 125–156; Michaela Raggam-Blesch: "'Sammelwohnungen' für Jüdinnen und Juden als Zwischenstation vor der Deportation, Wien 1938–1942", in *Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands (DÖW)*, *Annual Report*, Vienna, 2018, 81–100.

10 Reichsgesetzblatt I, 1938, 1580.

11 Reichsgesetzblatt I, 1938, 1709.

12 Published in Susanne Heim (ed.): *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland*, volume 2, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009, Doc. 215, 583–584.

13 Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden*, volume 1, 310–313.

Even before December 1938, the steadily worsening antisemitic climate and the increasing economic difficulties associated with this had led to Jewish tenants having to leave larger apartments in order to find new, often smaller living accommodation in buildings owned by Jewish landlords. This is evidenced by the house books that have survived in the Düsseldorf Municipal Archives, with the help of which the movements of Jewish tenants into and out of individual houses can be easily traced.¹⁴

The 'residential segregation' and confinement of Jews in forced accommodation only really gathered pace with the *Gesetz über die Mietverhältnisse mit Juden* (Law on Leases Contracted with Jews) adopted on April 30, 1939,¹⁵ and its implementing decree issued by the Reich Ministry of Labor [sic!] and the Reich Ministry of the Interior on May 4, 1939.¹⁶ The law abolished protection for Jewish tenants. However, an 'Aryan' landlord could only terminate a Jewish tenant's lease if he had obtained a certificate from the relevant municipal authority stating that alternative accommodation was available.¹⁷ Jewish landlords were also forced to declare empty or unused rooms. Jews who had been made homeless could then be moved into these rooms even against the landlord's will or the will of the tenants themselves. The Düsseldorf-based Nazi newspaper *Rheinische Landeszeitung* explained:

Since a household cannot comprise both German compatriots and Jews, the option has been created to remove Jews from German residences even against their will. Then again, Jews occupying an excessive amount of living space in proportion to their population, while many German compatriots and their families are still without accommodation, or have to make do with unsatisfactory accommodation, cannot be justified. Hence the need to accommodate those Jews, who have to be removed from German apartments, and who do not wish to, or are unable to avail themselves of the opportunity to emigrate, in Jewish houses, in order to take advantage of the space available to Jews in these houses – which in some cases is particularly abundant – by taking in other Jewish families.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cf. for example, the house books of the 'Judenhäuser' at Adersstraße 8, Rochusstraße 57 or Teutonenstraße 9 in the Düsseldorf Municipal Archives (Collection: 'house books'). For Vienna, this process is described by Raggam-Blesch, *Sammelwohnungen*, 87.

¹⁵ Reichsgesetzblatt I, 1939, 864–865. Also in 0–1–4–12314, sheets 5–9, Düsseldorf Municipal Archives (referred to in the following as StAD).

¹⁶ Ministerialblatt des Reiches und Preußischen Ministeriums des Innern No. 19 of April 10, 1939, 996–997 (also: 0–1–12314, sheet 49–50, StAD).

¹⁷ Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich*, volume 1, 313.

¹⁸ *Rheinische Landeszeitung*, May 4, 1939: "Keine Juden in deutschen Wohnungen". Translation by the author.

The antisemitic motivation of both the Nazi rulers and the editor, who considered it inadmissible that Jewish men and women were provided with housing that was unspecified in size, but allegedly “abundant”, is clearly apparent here. In order to promote the bringing together of Jews in buildings belonging to Jewish owners, subletting to Jews was facilitated to a large extent. Jews were subsequently allowed to conclude subletting agreements even without the permission of the (Jewish) landlord – at the same time, they could only rent to Jewish subletters. The *Rheinische Landeszeitung* goes on to say:

Having said that, the municipal authority has been given broad powers enabling it to house Jews subject to eviction as planned. In addition to the power to impose the conclusion of tenancy and subletting agreements between Jews, the municipal authority also has the right to demand the registration of any rooms that are let to Jews, or which may be eligible for accommodating Jews.¹⁹

Municipal leaders, i.e. mayors, were charged with implementing the *Gesetz über die Mietverhältnisse mit Juden* and also with the utilization of the apartments that became available. In carrying out this task, they were to “liaise appropriately with the competent party authority in order to ensure that the measures proceed in an orderly manner”.²⁰ The fundamental idea of the statutory regulations was to group Jews together in certain houses. In the process, houses that were already predominantly inhabited by Jews were to be preferentially designated as ‘*Judenhäuser*’: “However, the designation of these houses was not to lead to an undesirable formation of ghettos.”²¹

Identification of ‘Jewish Housing’

The municipal leaders were charged with implementing the law, but the agencies who then put these laws into practice were quite different in the cities and local authorities. As the surviving records show, there was an exchange of information between individual towns and cities as to which authorities had been charged with implementing the law.²² In Mönchengladbach, for example, the mayor assigned this task to the municipal police department.²³ In the regional capital,

¹⁹ Ibid. Translation by the author.

²⁰ Rheinische Landeszeitung, May 10, 1939: “Judenhäuser – aber keine Ghattobildung”. Translation by the author.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Cf. 0–1–4–12314, sheet 31 (Essen), sheet 56 (Bielefeld), StAD.

²³ Erckens, Juden in Mönchengladbach, volume 1, 737.

Düsseldorf, the mayor, Dr. Helmut Otto, entrusted the Office for Economic Affairs with the task of implementing the *Gesetz über die Mietverhältnisse mit Juden* on May 23, 1939. Within the municipal Office for Economic Affairs (office 65), this task was assigned to the 'Pricing Authority for Rents and Leases for Residential and Commercial Premises'. The pricing authority was hived off and raised to the rank of a separate office (office 64) after the beginning of the Second World War.²⁴ The former head of the Office for Economic Affairs, Dr. Hermann Binstadt, a staunch Nazi and 'Alter Kämpfer' (early member) of the NSDAP, was put in charge.²⁵ As a few of the surviving records from Office 64 show, a reliable party comrade, former front-line soldier, Dr. Walter Uhrhahn, who was seriously injured during the war, was also responsible for '*Mietverhältnisse mit Juden*' ('leases contracted with Jews').²⁶

The first task was to identify houses owned and rented by Jews. As ordered in the implementing decree of May 4, 1939, the 'Pricing Authority for Rents and Leases' published an announcement in the regional press on June 2, 1939, in which all non-Jewish landlords were asked to register living space rented to Jews by June 15, 1939. All Jewish landlords were required to report: living space rented to 'non-Jews', living space rented to Jews, their own living space, empty living space, and space that became available after May 4, 1939: "Any person who deliberately or negligently fails to register in a timely manner shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment".²⁷

At the same time, the pricing authority also tried to involve the Gestapo, the financial administration, the police and the district leadership of the NSDAP in the laborious work of creating this list. The Gestapo was not involved, however, at least not at this early stage. Inspired by corresponding orders from Berlin and suggestions by the pricing authority, NSDAP district leader, Karl Walter, in a joint meeting with councilor Brückmann and Dr. Hermann Binstadt,²⁸ was particularly interested in the question of closing off individual streets and residential areas to Jews. The pricing authority itself had suggested closing off Königsallee, Scha-

²⁴ 0-1-4-12314, sheet 10, StAD. The individual areas of responsibility of the new office can be found in the city of Düsseldorf 1940 directory: "Pricing and monitoring of rents and leases for residential and commercial premises. Conversion of apartments into premises of a different kind. Procurement of housing for large families, lease agreements with Jews. Consulate matters."

²⁵ Binstadt joined the NSDAP on December 1, 1931. He was decorated on several occasions during the war. Cf. his personnel file: 0-1-5-31096, sheet 432, 452, 470, StAD.

²⁶ Uhrhahn had a doctorate in law, held various offices in the city of Düsseldorf between 1924 and 1955; was denazified in Group V after the war; his leading role in the confinement of Jews in forced accommodation is not evident from his personnel file. Cf. 0-1-5-33793, StAD.

²⁷ 0-1-4-12314, sheet 11, StAD. Translation by the author.

²⁸ It is possible that Dr. Walter Uhrhahn also attended the meeting in his place.

dowstrasse, Jägerhofstrasse, Ernst-vom-Rath-Strasse and the entire Hofgarten district, all located in the city center, to Jews. The NSDAP district leader also wanted to include Schlageterstadt, a housing development in the north of Düsseldorf where mainly NSDAP members lived.²⁹ At the same time, he promised to involve local NSDAP groups in the listing of “Jewish apartments”.³⁰ As it turned out, however, the NSDAP leadership lacked the necessary capacities for such identification work, but it did ask for the completed list to be handed over.³¹

The Düsseldorf Financial Administration, which was also asked for assistance, merely sent the pricing authority a list of the “administrators of foreign real estate residing in Düsseldorf” on June 21, 1939.³² The pricing authority carried out the task of actual identification over the next few weeks, mainly on its own, with help from the landlords’ responses to the request for information, and possibly also with support from the police (residents’ registration office).³³ Some of the 138 Jewish house owners listed in a surviving, undated complete list compiled by the authority were already living abroad or had emigrated. The residents of their houses were both Jewish and non-Jewish. In addition to the two Jewish Community properties at Bilker Straße 25 and Grafenberger Allee 78, there were only twelve properties housing exclusively Jewish tenants, and five others housing almost exclusively Jewish tenants.³⁴ At the same time, thanks to the requests for information, the authority identified a total of 550 apartments with Jewish tenants in “non-Jewish properties”.³⁵

29 File note dated May 30, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 12, StAD. The Schlageterstadt housing development in the district of Golzheim was built during the ‘Productive People’ exhibition in 1937 (known today as Golzheimer Siedlung).

30 Cf. note by administrative staff member Dr. Uhrhahn on a conversation in the NSDAP district administration on May 30, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 14, StAD.

31 Cf. internal note, concerning “rented property with Jews”, after a meeting between Dr. Binstadt and Dr. Uhrhahn at the NSDAP district administration, June 23, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 25, StAD.

32 Cf. Head of Düsseldorf Financial Administration to the city of Düsseldorf, office 64, June 21, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 26, StAD. Why the Financial Administration provided such a list is unclear, a list of Jewish owners was explicitly requested on June 10, 1939 (*ibid.*, sheet 18).

33 This is indicated by a note handwritten by a pricing authority employee (*ibid.*, sheet 20).

34 Cf. “Register of Jewish home owners” (no date), 0–1–4–12316, StAD. Jewish tenants only: Gartenstraße 112, Germaniastraße 28, Goethestraße 12 and 18, Grunerstraße 19, Grupellostraße 8 and 29, Horst-Wessel-Straße 60, Kreutzstraße 58, Reichsstraße 69, Steinstraße 60, Wagnerstraße 7; predominantly Jewish tenants: Karlstraße 95, Geibelstraße 39, Martin-Luther-Platz 19, Steinstraße 82, Teutonenstraße 9 (strangely, Kurfürstenstraße 59, later the largest ‘Judenhaus’ in the city, is not in the register).

35 Letter from Dr. Binstadt to Mayor Dr. Haidn, July 17, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 36, StAD.

Consequently, there were numerous properties with ‘mixed’ residents, and this ‘problem’ was not easy for the rulers to solve, since the protection for non-Jewish tenants continued to exist even in properties with Jewish owners, so they could not simply be given notice, and neither could Jewish tenants married to non-Jews. Point 7 of the implementing regulation applied here: “The free right of landlords to let remains [...] unaffected”. The law and the implementing regulation had given the city administration the necessary means to forcibly evict Jewish tenants if necessary and to accommodate them in other properties. Which property was now declared a ‘*Judenhaus*’ was selected in the coming months by the pricing authority from the list that had been compiled. In addition, pricing authority employees, in agreement with the Gestapo, inspected all Jewish apartments, especially in buildings owned by Jews, in order to determine how much living space could be used to accommodate Jewish families from ‘Aryan’ houses.³⁶

Like the city administration, the Nazi rulers counted on the fact that the process of evicting Jewish tenants from houses belonging to non-Jewish owners would proceed largely without their intervention, and that they would only occasionally have to resort to coercive measures. This was also recommended in the implementing regulation (point 5), and there is evidence that it worked, at least initially. In the summer of 1939, for instance, the pricing authority refrained from compiling registers of apartments and rooms in “non-Jewish houses”, “as the circumstances are constantly changing due to the departure and relocation of Jewish tenants”.³⁷

By December 1940, the eviction process had progressed further, due to the relocation of Jewish tenants within the city and emigration, which although limited by the start of the war, was still ongoing. There were still around 1,400 Community members in 741 ‘households’, where every furnished room was counted as a household.³⁸ And the eviction process continued to accelerate, as the pricing authority informed the NSDAP district legal department on April 22, 1941. The district legal department wanted “to find a solution to the Jewish housing issue” and to requisition the remaining ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in order to give them to the families of “front line soldiers and workers”:

³⁶ Letter from the pricing authority to the NSDAP district legal department, April 22, 1941, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 60, StAD.

³⁷ Letter from Dr. Binstadt to Mayor Dr. Haidn, July 17, 1939, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 36, StAD.

³⁸ Handwritten note by a pricing authority employee, 0–1–4–12317, sheet 44, StAD.

It is contrary to good common sense that often non-working [sic!] Jews live in palatial apartments, while hard-working compatriots and large families often to have make do with apartments that are damaging to their health.³⁹

The pricing authority then notified that “just recently there has been an increase in changes of apartment by Jewish apartment owners, in that Jews from Aryan houses are moving into Jewish houses, and Jewish apartment owners are taking in Jews as subtenants more than was previously the case”.⁴⁰ The fundamental idea of grouping Jews together in certain houses, by force if necessary, was being put into practice more and more. Notices of termination enforced by order began to play an increasingly important role. As far as can be seen, the executing body was now the Gestapo, which had not been involved previously, and which registered all Jewish tenants in ‘Aryan’ houses.⁴¹ If the Gestapo gave notice of termination, the apartment that had become vacant was immediately reported to the municipal welfare office which was supposed to pass this on to ‘compatriots’ in need.⁴²

Incidentally, as the case of Dr. Ernst Blankenstein, who was in a ‘privileged mixed marriage’ shows, the Gestapo also disregarded the applicable legal provisions here as and when it saw fit. It was a thorn in the side of the Gestapo that Dr. Blankenstein lived with his non-Jewish wife in an apartment “in one of the best residential areas”.⁴³ So although “there was no legal basis for the compulsory implementation of this measure”, as Gestapo official Pütz himself noted, it arranged for the landlord to give Dr. Blankenstein notice to vacate the apartment. And it ordered the couple to move into a very run-down apartment at Grimmstrasse 36, a ‘*Judenhaus*’.

The total number of ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in the city of Düsseldorf, or even in the administrative district of Düsseldorf, has not yet been determined. A conserva-

³⁹ Head of the NSDAP district legal department to the Mayor of Düsseldorf, April 7, 1941, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 59, StAD. Translation by the author. Corresponding letters were apparently also received in other cities in the administrative district, cf. for Mönchengladbach (there in August 1941): Erckens, *Juden in Mönchengladbach*, volume 1, 741.

⁴⁰ Letter from the pricing authority to the NSDAP district legal department, April 22, 1941, 0–1–4–12314, sheet 60, StAD.

⁴¹ Presumably, it arranged for this registration work to be carried out by the Jewish community in Düsseldorf, which ‘cooperated’ out of necessity. The community itself issued an instruction to all members that changes of residence were to be reported to it immediately. Cf. circular from the Board of the Jewish Religious Community, May 9, 1940, 0–1–23–1370, StAD.

⁴² 0–1–4–12317, sheet 48–49, StAD. Police chief constable Kinzel and police commissioner Hürdelbrink were responsible.

⁴³ Note Gestapo Düsseldorf, April 21, 1943, RW 58/3429, sheet 13, NRW regional archives. Translation by the author. Thanks to Frank Sparing (Düsseldorf) for pointing out this file.

tive estimate of around 25 to 30 ‘*Judenhäuser*’ can be assumed for the city area, although not all of them existed for the same length of time. Only those houses that were completely or predominantly occupied by Jewish residents are considered ‘*Judenhäuser*’ here.⁴⁴

Housing Shortage and Deportations

It would be a very comprehensive task to trace in detail the movements of displacement and concentration that began in all cities and communities in the administrative district in the years following the introduction of the *Gesetz über die Mietverhältnisse mit Juden*. They ended the same way in all cases. Smaller towns and communities announced that they were ‘Jew-free’ after the last Jewish residents had been deported or had fled to the nearest large city where Jews were still living, or where there were still larger Jewish communities.⁴⁵ In the larger cities, the number of ‘*Judenhäuser*’ and the number of residents forced to occupy them initially grew. The deportations that began in October 1941 led to a clear stimulation of the whole process.

To what extent, and if at all, the housing shortage that prevailed in the large cities of the Rhein-Ruhr region accelerated the process of forced eviction of the Jewish population cannot yet be assessed. However, it should be assumed that the parties responsible for providing the population with housing in the municipal administrations – Housing Department and Welfare Department – kept an eye on the apartments occupied by Jews, and were very well informed about developments. This is documented in Düsseldorf by a meeting of department heads of the city administration on matters relating to air-raid protection on October 27, 1941 – the day of the first mass deportation from the Düsseldorf administrative district. In connection with aid for victims of bomb damages, Welfare Department Director Otto Buchholz announced “that he would like to negotiate with the Head of the Financial Administration about the purchase of furniture from

⁴⁴ The estimate is based on the few surviving pricing authority file fragments (StAD, 0–1–4–12317) as well as on the transcription of the house books made by Suchy (see footnote 8).

⁴⁵ Like the Mayor of Hilden on January 8, 1942, for example, after the last Hilden Jews had been deported to Riga and others had moved to Düsseldorf. Arbeitskreis Stolpersteine Hilden (ed.): “*Steine gegen das Vergessen. Stolpersteine in Hilden*”, Hilden, 2013, 18–19. Available at: <https://docplayer.org/54287642-Steine-gegen-das-vergessen.html>. Last accessed: 14.11.2021.

the Jewish apartments that are now becoming vacant”.⁴⁶ His report, a few days later, said:

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the evacuation of around 1,000 Jews from Düsseldorf, a matter which is probably already generally known. The extent to which housing will be freed up as a result of this cannot yet be determined. What is certain is that the generally cherished hopes are far from being fulfilled. We can expect between 100 and 120 apartments to become vacant. They will initially be offered by the Geheime Staatspolizei [i.e. the political police] to the city administration to house families that have been the victims of air raids.⁴⁷

The Düsseldorf pricing authority kept a file with lists of the Jews “leaving” [sic!] on October 27 to “Litzmannstadt” and November 11, 1941, to Minsk, divided according to districts or city areas and addresses.⁴⁸ Many of the addresses were ‘*Judenhäuser*’, but numerous Jews were still living in ‘mixed’ houses at this time, although often in cramped conditions. The apartments that became vacant were then, as mentioned above, requisitioned by the Gestapo and made available to the Welfare Department for passing on to those in need. On the one hand, this concerned apartments owned by non-Jewish landlords, but on the other hand a whole series of former ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in Düsseldorf were closed or ‘Aryanized’ following the deportation of November 10, 1941, such as the houses at Adersstraße 8, Rochusstraße 57, Reichsstraße 69 and Fürstenwall 198.⁴⁹

The extent to which residents of ‘mixed’ houses were ‘preferentially’ selected when the deportation lists were compiled cannot yet be determined. One thing is for sure: The process of concentrating Jews in fewer and fewer ‘*Judenhäuser*’ and communal accommodation was greatly accelerated by the deportations. This can be illustrated well using the example of a somewhat smaller town like neighboring Neuss. Until the first deportation to the Łódź ghetto on October 27, 1941, the Jews who were still in Neuss had lived in a total of eight ‘*Judenhäuser*’. Three of these houses were closed, i.e. ‘Aryanized’ shortly after the deportation: Büttger Straße 18 (October 27, 1941), Büchel 31 and Drususallee 81 (both on October 30, 1941). The residents who had not yet been deported were distributed among the remaining ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in which the Gestapo had ‘freed up’ living space with

⁴⁶ Minutes of the meeting on matters relating to air-raid protection, October 27, 1941, 0–1–4–474, sheet 13, StAD. Translation by the author.

⁴⁷ Report of November 1, 1941, on the state of care for the homeless, *ibid.*, sheet 50. Translation by the author.

⁴⁸ “Nachweisungen der ‘ausreisenden’ Juden und deren Wohnungen, 1941”, 0–1–4–12317, StAD.

⁴⁹ See the relevant Gestapo forms at the end of the file, *ibid.*

this first deportation, which 18 Jews from Neuss had been forced to join. The next closures took place after the deportation to Riga on December 11, 1941, which affected 24 Jews from Neuss. The ‘*Judenhäuser*’ at Niederwallstraße 15 (December 10, 1941), Kapitelstraße 1 (December 13, 1941) and Kanalstraße 65 (December 17, 1941) were then closed, i. e. ‘Aryanized’. The remaining eleven people lived in the ‘*Judenhäuser*’ at Büchel 5 and Küpperstrasse 2. The property belonging to Emil Lehmann at Büchel 5 was expropriated by the authorities in May 1942, two of the residents were sent to the nursing home in Düsseldorf, two others were sent to Küpperstraße 2, where all the remaining seven Neuss Jews now lived – until they were deported to the Theresienstadt ghetto on July 21, 1942.⁵⁰

As a rule, moving into a ‘*Judenhaus*’ was extremely depressing for those affected, as they usually had to part with most of their possessions and drastically downsize. It was the multiple changes in particular that wore people down, as Richard Kaufmann, the last leader of the Jewish Community in Mönchengladbach, explained in a letter to a friend in March 1942. He had just moved into the ‘*Judenhaus*’ at Hindenburgstraße 360: “I will say nothing about our apartments. Although it is true to say that it is not quite as bad here now as it was when we first moved in. In fact, we would even be satisfied if we didn’t have to change again”.⁵¹ Kaufmann was deported to the Izbica ghetto in the ‘*General-gouvernement*’, German-occupied Poland, on April 22, 1942. What Kaufmann says in his letter about life in the ‘*Judenhaus*’ is not all negative. He talks particularly about the community and the closeness to fellow community members, which he, like many others for sure, found comforting. However, sources can also be quoted that talk about the cramped conditions, the lack of intimacy, the often tetchy atmosphere in the ‘*Judenhäuser*’ where people waited anxiously to see whether or not they would have to join the next deportation.⁵²

At the end of the eviction process, fewer and fewer Jews in mixed marriages were ultimately concentrated in only a few ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in the large cities, although there were exceptions here too that proved the rule. It was, as Victor Klemperer described in his “LTI” study published after the war:

The number of Jews is getting smaller and smaller. Both individually and in groups, the younger ones are disappearing to Poland and Lithuania, and the older ones to Theresienstadt. Very few houses are sufficient to accommodate those that are left in Dresden. This is also expressed in the language used by the Jews; it is no longer necessary to give the full

⁵⁰ Cf. Rohrbacher, *Juden in Neuss*, 210 – 212.

⁵¹ Erckens, *Juden in Mönchengladbach*, volume 1, 591. Translation by the author.

⁵² Cf. for example, for Düsseldorf, Mark Roseman: “*Du bist nicht ganz verlassen.*” *Eine Geschichte von Rettung und Widerstand im Nationalsozialismus*, Munich: DVA, 2020, 140.

address of each Jew, only the street number is given of the few houses located in different parts of the city: he lives at number 92, at number 56.⁵³

Living in Communal Accommodation: Department Stores, Community Centers, Barracks

Not only apartment buildings, most of which were privately owned, were used as forced accommodation, but also administrative buildings, former Jewish schools or former department stores. In Düsseldorf, for example, the Reich Association of Jews in Germany building in Bilker Straße served as communal accommodation until the end of March 1942. The residents who had not yet been deported by then were moved to the Jewish nursing home at Grafenberger Allee 78. Turnover among the residents was high here too; places that had become ‘vacant’ after deportations were quickly filled by new arrivals from the surrounding area or from the city. After the deportation to Theresienstadt on July 21, 1942, the Düsseldorf Jewish nursing home was closed. Nursing homes also served as communal accommodation in Wuppertal (Straße der SA 73) and Mönchengladbach-Rheydt (Horst-Wessel-Straße 80).⁵⁴ In the case of Mönchengladbach, it was a former school of domestic science for Jewish women. The school had already been closed in 1937 and even before the introduction of the law on leases contracted with Jews served as communal accommodation for mostly elderly Jews from Rheydt and the surrounding area.⁵⁵ All residents were deported, and the two homes were closed following the deportations to Theresienstadt on July 21 and 25, 1942.

Jewish community centers were also used as communal accommodation in other cities in the administrative district, such as in Mülheim an der Ruhr, for example. The building at Löhstraße 53 was used for various community purposes. After the synagogue had been destroyed, the community held religious services here. Jewish tenants also lived here before the law was introduced, and from 1939 onwards, the building was used as forced accommodation, housing

⁵³ Victor Klemperer: *LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen*, Leipzig: Reclam, 2005²¹ (first ed. 1946), 237. Translation by the author.

⁵⁴ Today respectively: Friedrich-Ebert-Straße.

⁵⁵ House Book Friedrich-Wilhelm-Straße (today Friedrich-Ebert-Straße). Including a letter from senior civil servant Schilling to the Rheydt District Court, March 3, 1966, StA Mönchengladbach.

at least 14 Jews prior to their deportation.⁵⁶ In Essen, a large building at Hindenburgstraße 22 was owned by the Jewish Community. Some of the space was used for Community administration, and for various Jewish groups and associations. From August 1942, however, it was also used as communal accommodation after the Holbeckshof barracks (see below) were closed down.⁵⁷

In Duisburg, the former Winter department store at Baustrasse 34 served as communal accommodation for at least 85 people from the beginning of 1939 until 1942. They lived there under extremely cramped conditions, as Holocaust survivor Herbert Salomon recalled: “In this empty building, they had divided bunks with wooden boards, each of which housed a family in an area measuring 10 – 12 square meters. Beds, couch, stove and some linen were allowed. The inmates [sic] were watched constantly by the Gestapo”.⁵⁸ They had to be in the building at curfew and were only allowed to shop in a single store nearby between 4 and 5 pm. They were not allowed to receive visitors, but members of the *Bund* resistance group managed to get into the building to give some of the residents food and clothes.⁵⁹

Regular barracks were set up for Jews in two cities in the administrative district, Essen and Mönchengladbach,⁶⁰ where those affected sometimes had to live for just a few days, and sometimes for several weeks or months. In Mönchengladbach, the camp was located at Kabelstraße 93. It was the city’s homeless shelter. At least two of the barracks there functioned as forced accommodation for Jews – the earliest admission date was February 24, 1942, and others arrived at the beginning of March 1942. 14 people were deported to the Izbica ghetto in the Lublin district of the ‘*Generalgouvernement*’ via the Düsseldorf abattoir on April 21, 1942, and three others to Theresienstadt on July 25, 1942. None of them survived.⁶¹

⁵⁶ The building was completely destroyed during a bombing raid on June 23, 1943. Today, there is a primary school on the site. Cf. Joachim Schröder: *Spurensuche III – Nachbarschaft, Vertreibung, Erinnerung. ‘Judenhäuser’ im Regierungsbezirk Düsseldorf (1939–1945)*. Available at: www.erinnerungsort-duesseldorf.de. Last accessed: 14.11.2021.

⁵⁷ See the list of people living at the Holsbeckshof barracks, in Hermann Schröter: *Geschichte und Schicksal der Essener Juden. Gedenkbuch für die jüdischen Mitbürger der Stadt Essen*, Essen 1980, 432–458.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Duisburg/Evangelisches Familienbildungswerk (ed.): *Stolpersteine in Duisburg*, volume 1, Duisburg 2005, 36. Translation by the author.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 37; Roseman, *Du bist nicht ganz verlassen*, 140.

⁶⁰ Gruner lists 38 such camps throughout the Reich, including the Holbeckshof camp (and the Much camp mentioned above), but not the camp in Mönchengladbach. Cf. Gruner, *Der Geschlossene Arbeitseinsatz*, 250.

⁶¹ Book of Remembrance (Izbica, Theresienstadt), StA Mönchengladbach.

The camp in Essen was set up in April 1942 in the district of Steele and was the starting and assembly point for the deportation of Jews from Essen, before they were brought to the Düsseldorf abattoir. After several houses in the city had been damaged by Allied bombing raids in April 1942, and numerous people had lost their homes, the pressure on ‘*Judenhäuser*’ in the city increased considerably.⁶² Eventually, the city of Essen decided to evacuate numerous ‘*Judenhäuser*’ and to house their residents in empty barracks on the grounds of the former Deimelsberg colliery, which had previously been used for French prisoners of war. The camp consisted of nine wooden barracks, was surrounded with barbed wire, and guarded by members of the SA. The inmates were allowed to leave the camp during the day, but in the evenings and at night they were subject to a curfew like all other Jews. The barracks were divided into several rooms. Where five prisoners of war had previously lived, up to 15 Jews were now crammed into one space.⁶³

The camp’s residents’ cards that have been preserved contain around 350 names. These residents were deported in three waves: the first were deported to Izbica on April 21/22, 1942 – they were first taken to the main train station in Essen,⁶⁴ from there to the Düsseldorf abattoir, and then transported from the freight station the following morning. No one survived this deportation. On June 15, 1942, a further 65 Jews from Essen were deported to Sobibór and murdered as soon as they arrived there. On July 20, 1942, the Gestapo deported a further 191 people; they also had to go firstly to the Düsseldorf abattoir, from where they boarded trains the following morning, this time for Theresienstadt. Among them was 72-year old Leopold Sternberg, who wrote a farewell letter to his children from the Holbeckshof barracks:

Yes, dear children, you meant well for us, you had the best of intentions to enhance our twilight years, but it has all turned out differently. Mother drew the better lot, she has been resting in the ground for two and half years now, and is spared all of the misery.

⁶² Cf. Letter from Gestapo Essen to Gestapo Düsseldorf, April 14, 1942, regarding bomb damage in Essen due to air raids (April 12/13, 1942), 1.2.3.0/82164583/ITS Digital Archive, Arolsen Archives.

⁶³ Cf. Schröter, *Geschichte und Schicksal der Essener Juden*, 54 (with incorrect date, intended date: May 1, 1942).

⁶⁴ Imo Moszkowicz, an Auschwitz survivor who later became known as a director, describes the harrowing scene of parting with his mother and three siblings at Essen central station. He was also housed in Holbeckshof. Imo Moszkowicz: *Der grauende Morgen*, Regensburg: Boer, 1996, 42–43.

[...] Last night the list was read out, Aunt Fanny and I are on it. [...] I send heartfelt kisses to you all and hereby bid you farewell, Your Father and Grandfather.⁶⁵

The Holbeckshof camp was closed on August 5, 1942. The few remaining Jews in Essen, who were still serving the war effort and therefore spared deportation, were distributed among only a few *'Judenhäuser'*, including primarily the buildings at Gänsemarkt 18, Maschinenstraße 19, Hindenburgstraße 22 and Weberstraße 8.

Traces: Former *'Judenhäuser'* and Communal Accommodation in Remembrance Culture

The former *'Judenhäuser'* and communal accommodation have left only few traces. This may come as a surprise, since they existed in all cities and even in smaller towns. The concentration in specific areas of increasingly disenfranchised Jewish neighbors happened right 'next door', in public, in front of everyone's eyes. One reason for forgetting may be that the monstrosity of what followed the confinement of Jews in forced accommodation, namely their deportation to the ghettos and death camps, overshadowed everything that had gone before. Certainly after the war many people did not want to be reminded that persecution had taken place right on their own doorstep. Not to mention those who themselves had profited from the displacement and robbery of the Jews, and lived in apartments and buildings that had previously belonged to or were occupied by Jews, perhaps even with furniture and household effects acquired at auction.⁶⁶

Many of the former *'Judenhäuser'* and spaces of communal accommodation no longer exist because they did not survive the bombings in the Second World War or the demolition frenzy in the 1950s and 1960s. They were replaced by new buildings, office blocks, nurseries and even parking lots. Others still stand, without major changes, and yet nothing is usually known about their history. In our research seminars, students interviewed passers-by, local residents and neighbors. It was a rare exception when they met someone who knew something about the existence of the *'Judenhäuser'* at that time. Inquiries among current

⁶⁵ Letter from Leopold Sternberg from the Holbeckshof barracks, July 12/13, 1942, AR 0918, old synagogue Essen. Translation by the author.

⁶⁶ Cf., for example, regionally: Wolfgang Dreßen (ed.): *Betrifft: "Aktion 3": Deutsche verwerten jüdische Nachbarn. Dokumente zur Arisierung*, Berlin: Aufbau, 1998.

owners rarely led to positive responses, either because they were afraid of public discussion or even restitution claims, or because they had no interest in the subject.

Only a few buildings formerly used as forced accommodation have commemorative plaques.⁶⁷ *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones), which have become popular in German remembrance culture, are in most cities laid in front of the last voluntary places where victims of Nazi persecution resided, i.e. not in front of former '*Judenhäuser*' (only if the person in question had lived there prior to 1939). How, and whether, such forced accommodation will be remembered at all in the future is open to debate and was also discussed in the university seminar. A group of students wanted to fill the gap they felt by creating an interactive website on which at least the previously known '*Judenhäuser*' in Düsseldorf could be marked on a city map.⁶⁸ The process of concentrating the Jews, at the end of which was their assembly at the Düsseldorf abattoir and their deportation to the ghettos and death camps, is illustrated here in a particularly vivid way. The forced accommodation is thereby snatched from the jaws of oblivion, and at the same time it should inspire further research: on the local circumstances in the administrative district, on the players and profiteers involved in the 'residential segregation' process, and on the living conditions in the individual spaces of communal accommodation about which we still know far too little.

⁶⁷ Cf., for example, Küppersstraße 2 in Neuss, or Klosterstraße 1 in Kleve ('Former Finance Office'), the latter of which has already been the subject of antisemitic graffiti on several occasions.

⁶⁸ So far, only the prototype is available online: <http://steffiveenstra.de/judenhaeuser.html>. Last accessed: 14.11.2021. A website is planned that will record all the '*Judenhäuser*' and communal accommodation in the Düsseldorf administrative district.

