Virtual and Real-Life Spaces of Jewish Europe in the 21st Century

Virtual and Real-Life Spaces of Jewish Europe in the 21st Century

Edited by
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Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör

Foreword: The Virtuality of Jewish Europe

In May 2022, our Universities of Gothenburg and Southampton hosted a conference, with Diana Pinto and Ruth Ellen Gruber as keynote speakers, on "A Jewish Europe? Virtual and Real-Life Spaces in the 21st Century". At the time of the conference, the world was slowly being released from the grasp of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19. While we were all in one way or another affected by two years of a mainly digitized reality, its impact on the presence and shape of Jewish culture in Europe seemed a particularly worthwhile topic to approach. Not because digital elements of Judaism or indeed pandemic effects on Jewish practices have not been studied. They have, and in doing so, researchers have highlighted the flexibility and resilience of the Jewish religion.[1] Our interest was linked to a longer trajectory of cultural processes in relation to European Jewish post-Shoah presence. The pandemic undoubtedly presented challenges on how to be Jewish, but it also underlined and intensified Europe's already existent "virtual Jewishness": museums, memorial sites, cultural events, interfaith dialogues, and art – present in both virtual and real life (IRL) forms, co-constructed by Jews and non-Jews.[2] And as the digital landscape became many people's only reality from 2020 to 2022, we saw the meaning of virtuality shift and stretch.

Indeed, the digitized world and its evolving possibilities have catapulted us long past the societal tendency to label all things virtual as fake. Scholars have even argued that the concept of virtuality should not be conflated with digitized fora: it is, as Pinto suggested over thirty years ago, a creative process, not a digital platform.[3] In bridging her conceptualization of Europe's co-constructed "Jewish Spaces" with the digitized reality imposed by the pandemic, our conference aimed to explore if and how the notion of virtuality can inform on the continuity of an integrated European Jewish life. In short, we endeavored to find the hope alluded to in Gruber's and Pinto's work in the Jewish (and human) experience of being in a crisis, thereby turning the question mark in our original conference title into an exclamation mark.

1 Harriet Hartman (ed.), "COVID-19 and contemporary Jewry", *Contemporary Jewry* 41/1 (2021).

2 Introduced in Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

3 Diana Pinto, *The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 1999); Victoria Grace Walden, "What is 'virtual Holocaust memory'?", *Memory Studies* 15/4 (2022): 621–33.

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Since then, another crisis has unfolded for European Jews (and non-Jews) in the last few years. Following Hamas's terror attack and kidnapping of Israeli inhabitants on October 7, 2023, and Israel's war on Hamas and Hezbollah within Palestinian and Lebanese territories, antisemitism has risen dramatically across Europe.[4] Jews are – yet again – uncertain about Europe as their home. On a much smaller (but for many of our writers no less personal) scale, some of the original conference papers that were to be used to explore all things virtual in this book were suddenly turned on their heads in the increasingly antisemitic (and Islamophobic) climate. Case studies developed and changed, altering results from the late 2010s and the first years of the 2020s. Our contributors have had to readjust and refocus, and ultimately rethink the very cornerstone of this book: Can the hopefulness inherent to the concept of virtuality have any bearing on today's Europe? Can "authenticity", or indeed "reality", be useful ideas to help understand how Jewish spaces, and the Jewish/non-Jewish relations they are meant to facilitate, face the challenges of the 2020s?

This book is an attempt to answer these questions. Based on case studies of digital tools, platforms and processes, and physical places, both of heritage and in the urban landscape, it merges theoretical aims with some very personal experiences. As a whole, this edited volume aims to evaluate and clarify the meaning of virtuality, expanding its original conceptualization as introduced by Gruber and Pinto. To do this, it brings together experts – both established scholars and younger colleagues – in anthropology, ethnology, heritage studies, history, literature, and cultural studies, who have written both essays and academic studies exploring the relationship between virtuality and real life. Given the situation we collectively found ourselves in following the events of October 7, with our work (and our personal selves) affected by this "polycrisis",[5] this book will not only push and develop the conceptual foundation for Jewish/non-Jewish spaces to catch up with our digital world, but it will also stand as a testament to the challenges Jews, non-Jews, and scholars in Jewish studies have to navigate in today's Europe in order to simply continue (to study) Jewish/non-Jewish relations.

To set the stage for this volume, the keynotes given by both Gruber and Pinto at the conference in 2022 form the introduction. In these two chapters, Gruber and Pinto revisit their conceptualizations of virtual Jewishness and Jewish Spaces and suggest how best to view these in light of both digitization and the rise of

4 Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitic Incidents in the Wake of Hamas' War on Israel", May 20, 2024, accessed January 14, 2025, https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/global-antisemitic-incidents-wake-hamas-war-israel.

5 See Dekel Peretz's chapter, "From Lockdown to Warzone: The Digital Turn in Jewish -Muslim Encounters.", in this current volume.

right-wing, popular movements. The main body of the book is divided into three sections: digital practices, heritage, and public space, in which contributions connect to Gruber's and Pinto's hopes and worries. In the first part, Kyra Schulman, Alla Marchenko, and Dekel Peretz explore digital landscapes – a memorialization project connected to Łomża, Ukrainian and Polish personal accounts on Facebook and Instagram, and German Jewish-Muslim dialogues on digital platforms – and discuss how online environments affect, enhance, and hinder Jewish/non-Jewish relations, especially in times of crisis and increased political entrenchment. The potential of virtual reality for the continued relevance of the European Jewish past for American Jewry, the physical and digital afterlife of cemeteries in formerly German parts of Poland, and cross-temporal remains of Jewish experiences of the medieval ShUM communities (Speyer, Worms and Mainz) are investigated by Libby Langsner, Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach, and Susanne Urban in the second section on heritage. Here, virtuality is presented as a mnemonic practice that encourages the continuous presence of a Jewish past as years pass and natural landscapes in and relations to European Jewish history change. This way, virtuality in spaces of heritage is not only understood as a digital practice but also perceived as an (in)tangible memory of the past that ensures the rootedness of European Jewish life. And, in the third section on public space, Susanne Korbel, Karin Brygger and Maja Hultman, and Marcela Menachem Zoufalá look into an urban street sign in Vienna, museums and cultural events in Stockholm, and scholarly endeavors in Israel and the Czech Republic, and find that the presence of Jews and Jewish history in European public landscapes is aided by digital sociability and believed crucial for democratic processes, but nonetheless stand reduced or questioned in the wake of October 7. Finally, in the concluding dialogue, we – Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör – discuss the book's collective understanding, use, and development of Gruber's and Pinto's meanings of virtuality for spaces of Jewish history and memory, and Jewish/non-Jewish relations. In likeness with everyday lives of most Jewish individuals around the globe today, October 7 runs like a red thread through the book, against which the promises of Jewish/non-Jewish encounters in digital spaces, spaces of heritage, and public spaces reel and sometimes falter. Yet, as some contributions emphasize, virtuality, as a (non-)digital arena of relational possibilities that was and is envisioned to ensure the continuity of the history, memory, and contemporary life of Europe's Jewry, and thus the Jewishness of Europe, can also be achieved amidst skyrocketing antisemitism.

This book rests upon many shoulders. As editors, we would first and foremost like to thank our contributors for the hard work they have put into this volume. The open access publication was made possible by grants from Per Lagercrantz fond at the University of Gothenburg and Sven och Dagmar Saléns stiftelse. Thank

you also to our editors Julia Brauch and Verena Deutsch at De Gruyter, who have been nothing less than enthusiastic and supportive throughout the whole process. Copy-editor Johnny McFayden deserves a special mention for his thorough and generous work, which was highly appreciated by editors and contributors alike. Karin Brygger, poet and co-author of Chapter 11, graciously allowed us to use her art for the cover.[6] The conference held back in 2022 was supported by the Wetter-Gren Foundations (ESh2021-0001), Riksbankens jubileumsfond (F22-0014), the Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations via a donation made in memory of Jack and Gretel Habel, refugees from Nazi Germany, and the European Association for Jewish Studies. Angie Sohlberg and Klas Grinell at the Centre for European Research at the University of Gothenburg were instrumental for the conference's success. The chapters written by Kyra Schulman, Dekel Peretz, and Susanne Korbel are based on previous publications in our special issue "European Virtual Jewish Spaces" in *Contemporary Jewry*.[7]

January 29, 2025
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Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör

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6 To view and read more about her Scrolls Project, see Karin Brygger, "The Scrolls Project: A performance working in the intersection of writing, movement, and Jewish Studies", *Mobile Culture Studies. The Journal* 8 (2024): 123–36.

7 Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör (eds.), "European Virtual Jewish Spaces", *Contemporary Jewry* 44/2 (2024): 245–367.

Part I: **Introduction**

Ruth Ellen Gruber

Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 Years after *Virtually Jewish*

In the 20 years since the publication of my book *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (in 2002), the concept I introduced has taken on a life of its own in ways I could not foresee. Though I wrote of a "virtual Jewish world" in a specific way – as an "intense, visible, vivid [Jewish] presence in places where few Jews live today" – others have taken the terminology I introduced and run with it in different directions.[1]

"Virtually Jewish" to some extent has become shorthand for describing ways in which non-Jews and the non-Jewish world enact, interact with, embrace, appropriate, question, and sometimes abuse (if not attack) the concept and manifold realities of Judaism and Jewishness. Some commentators, however, have interpreted the term "virtual" as a pejorative or as a shorthand synonym for "fake". Some have – inaccurately – attributed to my own views a dismissive attitude toward non-Jewish engagement with or interest in Jewish culture or see me as having somehow disparaged people I have described as "virtual Jews" and their activities. In an April 2022 article in Tablet Magazine about Ukrainian Jewish refugees in Germany, the imagery in *Virtually Jewish* was presented as being that "in which living, breathing Jews are mainly regarded in contemporary Europe as objects of historical fascination".[2]

Other terminology, too, has emerged in the past two decades as outside researchers, participant observers, philanthropic foundations, journalists, and also

1 For this, which was a verbal presentation at a conference that dealt with my evolving experiences and ideas, I drew directly and indirectly on material that had appeared in various publications I had authored over the years. Besides *Virtually Jewish*, these included most notably the chapter "Real Imaginary Spaces and Places: Virtual, Actual, and Otherwise", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York/London: Berghahn Books, 2017); the chapter "Jewish. Jewish? 'Jewish' Jewish!", in *Jewish Revival Inside Out: Remaking Jewishness in a Transnational Age*, ed. Daniel Monterescu and Rachel Werczberger (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2022); the forum essay, "Beyond Virtual Jewishness: Monuments to Jewish Experience in Eastern Europe", and my responses to essays written in response to my piece, in *Framing Jewish Culture: Boundaries and Representations*, ed. Simon J. Bronner (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014); and the essay "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99/4 (2009).

2 Marina Sapritsky-Nahum, "Germany Wants Jews", *Tablet Magazine*, April 27, 2022, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/germany-wants-jews.

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local Jews and non-Jews themselves examine and try to make sense out of shifting paradigms and generational and other changes that contribute to the formation or at least the evolution of what I have come to call "new authenticities" and indeed new realities. Because, yes, the concepts of "real" and "authentic", while problematic, are and have been intrinsic in the evolution, if not the revival, of the way that Jews and others think of themselves and of the concept of what is, was, and even should be "Jewish". In many ways, and for all the changes, the description of my concept of "Virtually Jewish" that was provided more than a decade ago by the Polish writer and Jewish activist Konstanty Gebert and sociologist Helena Datner rings more true than ever: "a place where Jewish culture is no longer Jewish property, but rather an open field in which anybody can use the props – and [use them] as they see fit".[3]

Often overlooked in all these discussions, however, was my punning use of the term "Virtually Jewish" in reference to the fluid cyberspace concept of "virtual" identities, worlds, and communities that already, even 20 years ago, could be found on the Internet. There were already thousands of Jewish web sites, I noted in *Virtually Jewish*, some right out there with names like Virtual Jerusalem and The Virtual Shtetl. "People can enter, move around, and engage in cyber space virtual worlds without physically leaving their desks or quitting their 'real world' identities", I wrote. And I continued:

> Online, however, they can assume other identities, play other roles, and be, or act as if they are, whoever they want. Like virtual worlds on the Internet, various aspects of "Virtual Jewry" are linked together and overlapping. One can approach them either passively, as a mere consumer, or "interactively" as a participant through, for example, performance and interpretation. They may be enriched by input from contemporary Jewish communal, intellectual, institutional, or religious sources, or they may be self-contained within totally non-Jewish contexts.[4]

That all pretty much still holds true. Non-Jewish engagement with Jewish culture can range from intense enrichment to what might be called "cosplay" – though 20 years ago I didn't know that word. But my book came out in a world in which our relationship to cyberspace was quite different from what it is today. Back then, there may have been many Jewish web sites, blogs, and list servs, but there was no social media to speak of, and certainly no social media as we know it today. No Facebook. No Twitter. No YouTube. No Instagram. No TikTok. No Virtual (or

3 Konstanty Gebert and Helena Datner, *Jewish Life in Poland: Achievements, challenges and priorities since the collapse of communism* (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2011).

4 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 21.

Augmented) Reality. Even Skype and MySpace weren't launched until 2003. And, certainly, there was no COVID pandemic that kept us at home and forced us to live *more* of our lives – including our Jewishness – online. All of this has caused an immense change in our thinking, and in our ways of acting and interacting. There's been much talk recently about a developing "metaverse", where *virtual* lives play as important a role as our physical realities. But what is "virtual" these days? What is "real"? And where indeed does authenticity fit in?

Already in the mid-2000s, there was talk of a "virtual diaspora", specifically in reference to the online 3D virtual world known as Second Life, where a first "virtual synagogue", Temple Beth Israel, was established in 2006. This was followed by numerous other Second Life Jewish sites and events, all located in that self-contained virtual world, a sort of parallel universe. Julian Voloj, who founded and edited a Second Life Jewish magazine called 2Life, wrote that Second Life's Jewish community was "more diverse than any Jewish community could be in the real world".[5] He wrote:

> There are also many religious seekers who use Second Life as a tool to explore their own roots, many of them with little or no Jewish educational background; and there are interestingly enough also many non-Jews. While there are Jewish users of Second Life who choose *not* to be Jewish in the virtual space, we find at the same time *non-Jews* for whom Second Life offers the opportunity to explore Judaism in a virtual space.[6]

In an article in 2Life magazine Julian wrote that Second Life Judaism was

> a unique intercultural dialogue within various streams of Judaism, within various Diasporas and Israel, within various age groups and with Jews and non-Jews. Judaism in Second Life is a mélange of different identities, in which age, origin, gender, and even religious affiliation are unimportant. It is an experiment with an uncertain outcome, but with obvious potential for new and creative ways to explore culture, heritage and identity.[7]

In preparing this contribution, I asked Julian about Second Life today. He told me that it still existed, but that 2Life magazine had folded a dozen years ago. He himself, he said, hadn't thought much about Second Life for a long time. He didn't know the fate of the Jewish sites he had documented in 2Life magazine, he said, but he didn't think they still existed. If so, sic transit a pioneering virtual Jewish world. I myself have never dipped into Second Life. But I spend a lot of time online, on platforms, groups, and other online sites that have taken the gamut of

5 Julian Voloj, "Virtual Jewish Topography: The Genesis of Jewish (Second) Life", in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 345–56.

6 Ibid., p. 355.

7 Ibid.

Second Life-style virtual experiences far beyond the confines of that one virtual frame. And I have followed many of the developments on the virtual Jewish universe that I now coordinate – the web site Jewish Heritage Europe.

In the recent pandemic years, Zoom and similar platforms broadened the blurring between "RL" (Real Life) and the virtual even further. Virtual spaces have become lived reality – and creative realities, in the mainstream. These platforms have fostered real time interactivity, bridging living, breathing realities in ways that not only communicate conversations but creatively reach across, or maybe within, time, space, and cyberspace to be the conduit and inspiration for artistic collaboration and to build, or invent, community – and communities. Questions and experiences like these have led me to explore the notions of what I call "new authenticities" and "real imaginary" spaces, where borders (and identities) blur.

This year (2022), I was fortunate to be able to attend a wonderful in-person seder. It was a large group, and there were two rabbis at the table, as well as scholars and artists. The discussion was both deep and entertaining, and all the food was kosher for Pesach, shipped in to a rather remote countryside location. But the previous two years, like many of us, I made do with Zoom – sitting alone in my kitchen, with my bottle of wine and matzo ball soup, but connected – directly connected, face to face – with beloved family members across half a dozen time zones who were virtually sitting at the same table. Next to me, I kept a pile of Haggadahs; it fascinates me to observe both the continuity and changes in them over the centuries. The ones I have range from a facsimile of the Sarajevo Haggadah, handwritten in the 14th century, to one illustrated by the contemporary Italian artist Lele Luzzatto, to the supermarket Haggadah distributed in the US since the 1930s by the Maxwell House coffee company. For one of the seders we used a brand-new Haggadah – rather different from the others. It was one specifically formulated for use at Zoom seders, and one of my cousins had downloaded it from her synagogue's web site and posted it to the Zoom chat so we all could see it.

One of my Haggadahs is the New Venice Haggadah, published in 2021 and illustrated with etchings created by eight international Jewish artists who took part in a residency program in the historic Venice Ghetto. Imposed in 1516, this was the first officially mandated closed and segregated district where Jews were forced to live; a Jewish place and space par excellence. Like Krakow's old Jewish district Kazimierz, the Venice Ghetto today remains an extraordinary complex of Jewish built heritage, with a Jewish museum and five jewel-like synagogues hidden behind anonymous walls. Very, very few Jews, however, live in the Venice Ghetto today. Fewer than 400 Jews live in all of Venice as a whole; their numbers – even in COVID times – are dwarfed hundreds, maybe even thousands, of times over by the number of Jewish tourists each year. On the main Ghetto square, the most visible Jewish presence besides the museum, a couple of souvenir shops, a Holocaust memorial, and a ko-

sher restaurant and hotel in the former Jewish old age home, is now an import – a Chabad House. The artists who contributed to the New Venice Haggadah were invited by the Beit Venezia cultural organization to create their works as a sort of update and commentary to a famous Haggadah published in Venice in 1609, when Venice was a capital of Hebrew publishing. The New Venice Haggadah, Beit Venezia says, is "informed by the spirit of the 'original' while being consummately fresh, contemporary and innovative". Beit Venezia calls itself "A meeting space for artists, scholars, students and the general public, Jews and non-Jews". Against all odds, it says, the Venice Ghetto historically became a "cosmopolitan crossroads of different Jewish communities and an influential site of cultural exchange between Jews and non-Jews".[8]

Inevitably at Passover, I think back to earlier seders in my life. Most were what one might term "traditional", even "conventional"; not overly orthodox, but enjoyed each year with friends and family, the same family that in 2020 and 2021 I Zoomed with in *unconventional* seders that are now, in many ways, a new norm. One seder stands out, though, as – like the new Zoom realities – an example of creation. It was more than 40 years ago, in Warsaw, when I was a news correspondent there. I actually remember little about it, except for one moment. I don't even remember who was the host or who was the leader. But we must have been a group of ten or twelve people – I do remember there was a long table. Most, like me, were young adults, but there was an older couple, someone's parents, I guess. At one point the leader of the seder asked a question: Had anyone present been at a seder before? As I recall, the older couple raised their hands, but I, the American, was the only other person at the table to do so.

*

Among the people who have been very important to me over the years in my own consideration of the concepts of Jewish identity and of Jewish space are Diana Pinto and Stanisław and Monika Krajewski. My first encounter with Staszek and Monika was really the first time that I began thinking seriously about Jewish identity. As an American growing up in post-World War II suburbia, I rarely, if ever, had cause to consider this. I was (and am) Jewish, I was (and am) American, and I could and still cannot separate these entwined strands of who I am. Looking back, our meeting was a seminal experience in what has become my career, not to mention, I think, in our lives. It was on the eve of Yom Kippur in 1980, only a few months before the Warsaw seder that I mentioned. I was a foreign correspondent with United Press International, in Warsaw to cover the birth of the Solidarity movement.

8 "The New Venice Haggadah", *Beit Venezia*, https://beitvenezia.org/the-new-venice-haggadah/.

I'm not observant, but it was Yom Kippur, and I looked for somewhere to mark the holy day. At that time there was no functioning synagogue in Warsaw; the Nożyk synagogue, the only surviving synagogue in the city out of hundreds that had been there before the Holocaust, was empty and dilapidated. I did find a shabby room nearby, where a group of Jews had gathered. Most were elderly Holocaust survivors, but there were a few my age, and a couple of toddlers. There was no rabbi in Poland at the time, so everyone was more or less praying on their own. At one point the little kids were running around, making noise, and the old people vigorously shushed them up. "How can you shush them up?", I thought. "These are the future!".

Afterward, Staszek, Monika, and another young woman came up and asked who I was. When I told them, they appealed to me: "You're a *real* Jew", they said. And they asked me to come home with them and tell them what they should be doing to keep the holiday. When I protested that I was not observant, did not speak Hebrew, keep kosher, or even go much to synagogue, their response was, "No, but you have known all your life you are Jewish, and we are just finding out". So I went home with them. It was a powerful reminder of the present that their tiny apartment was located in a prefab apartment house built in the 1960s on the ruins of the destroyed Warsaw Ghetto – not far from where the magnificent POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews stands today. Later, they brought me into the so-called Jewish Flying University, a semi-clandestine group of Jews – and non-Jews – who were teaching themselves not simply Jewish ritual, traditions, and history but also, in a poignant way, the Jewish intangibles, the collective memories, the quirks of language and even sometimes of physical or facial expression that even assimilated Jews often retain.

They were *creating* something *new*; new Jewish identities; new ways of expressing them; new authenticities; they weren't *re-creating* the past. Those then-young people, my generation, became the anchors of what was to become, from the 1990s, the post-communist Jewish revival in Poland; and they are, more than three decades beyond that, now its old guard. It is their children and grandchildren now who are setting the parameters of Jewish definitions and practice. They are *real* Jews. But I vividly recall how members of the Holocaust-survivor generation distrusted those newly emerging, questioning, Jews, the Jews claiming or reclaiming long hidden or suppressed identity. The survivors, simply, did not recognize them as Jews. Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, called them a fraud, a literary fiction. "The Jewish people is dead, and

you have simply thought yourselves up, looking for originality and exoticism", he told one of them in the early 1990s.[9]

*

The young emerging Jews I met in Warsaw 30 and 40 years ago were filling in their own way what came to be called the Jewish space in Europe. The concept of Jewish space was elaborated by Diana Pinto, and the way she first articulated it in the mid-1990s struck home to me in a very powerful way, putting a name to a phenomenon I had been observing on the ground, grasping at what to call it or how to define it. At that time, Diana used the term "Jewish space" to describe the place occupied by Jews, Jewish culture, and Jewish memory within mainstream European society, regardless of the size or activity of the local Jewish population. "There is a Jewish space in Europe that will exist even in the absence of Jews", she stated at a conference in Prague on Planning for the Future of European Jewry in 1995. "The Jewish thing", she said, "is becoming Universal".

At that time, I was traveling widely in Europe, documenting Jewish heritage sites and chronicling the post-Holocaust, post-communist revival and development of Jewish life. As I traveled, I had become fascinated by how, along with efforts to revive Jewish communal life and reclaim and reassert Jewish identity, as my friends were doing in Poland, this "Jewish space" in Europe was also often being "filled" by the activities of non-Jews. "Filling the Jewish Space in Europe", was in fact the title of my first lengthy examination of this phenomenon, a report I wrote for the American Jewish Committee in 1996.[10] I described how non-Jewish people documented synagogue buildings, Jewish cemeteries, and other abandoned Jewish heritage sites and spearheaded restoration projects; they formed klezmer bands and opened Jewish museums; they used Jewish themes in artworks, theatre performances, and literary compositions; they administered, taught, and studied in academic Jewish studies programs; they created the infrastructure for Jewish-themed tourism, opened "Jewish-style" cafes and restaurants – and much more. It was this phenomenon – the non-Jewish filling of the Jewish space – that formed what I later referred to as a "virtual Jewishness", or a "virtual Jewish world", peopled by "virtual Jews" who create, perform, enact, or engage with Jewish culture from an outsider perspective, often in, and often *as a result of*, the absence of local Jewish populations.

9 Konstanty Gebert, "Jewish Identities in Poland: New, Old and Imaginary", in *Jewish Identities in the New Europe*, ed. Jonathan Webber (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1994), p. 165.

10 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Filling the Jewish Space in Europe* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1996).

Over the years, these and related issues have inspired considerable debate, debate that has encompassed discussions of issues ranging from whether an overarching "Jewish space" actually *does* exist in Europe, to a more narrow focus on what entails more clearly defined "Jewish spaces" and specific "Jewish places", to what may or may not be regarded as "actually Jewish" amid constantly evolving local circumstances. As part of this, scholars, researchers, and others have explored the idea of "Jewish space" from within the Jewish world, too, investigating the relevance of space and place as environments and experiences shaped by Jews within living Jewish culture, communities, identity, and society. And also examining how the Jewish world engages with and reacts to the non-Jews in the scene. What, though, is meant when we say a place – or space – is "Jewish" or has a "Jewish character"? For synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, the definition is obvious. But function and religion, even historic designation, are just part of the equation. Elsewhere, clichéd or stereotyped visions, harking back to the bygone days of the old-world shtetl or to the Mitteleuropean intellectual coffee house, or even to Holocaust victims in so-called "striped pajamas", persist. But these too are only part of the story.

"Jewish" has much broader connotations that span a wide spectrum. Does "Jewish" mean Intellectual? Commercial? Dynamic? Educated? Artistic? Creative? Multicultural? Rich? Poor? Foreign? Assimilated? Excluded? Exclusive? Quaint? Israeli? Old-fashioned? Pre-War? Religious? Secular? Yiddish? Victim? Communist? Dead and Gone? "Other"? Does "Jewish" mean someone who believes in and practices Judaism, and, if so, what form of Judaism and what degree of practice? Or does it mean simply a person who can trace his or her genealogy back to Jewish ancestors – but how far back, and does it matter if the ancestors are on the maternal or paternal side? Does "Jewish" refer to kosher food produced under a *mashgiach*'s supervision or to any dish created according to an Ashkenazic, Sephardic, or Israeli recipe, or to commercial hybrids with such made-up names as "Rabbi's Pocket" or "Cheese Soup of Jealous Sarah" that are served in new, sometimes highly commercialized "Jewish" cafes and restaurants but mix meat and dairy and even may include pork? I loved it that at one point the "U Fryzjera" restaurant in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, which did (and still does) serve forbidden meat, treated its choice with self-reflexive humor: its printed menu once marked dishes as "Jewish" and "not Jewish" – and also marked some of them as "non-Jewish, non-kosher, yet also recommended". Does "Jewish" mean something sepia-toned and nostalgic that harkens back to the pre-war past, or something that is "cool", here and now? Does it mean "Israeli" (and all those fraught and loaded connotations)? Does it mean Holocaust victim? Or all of the above? Or more?

Back in the 1930s the Polish-Jewish literary critic Artur Sandauer coined the useful (but rather little-known) term "allosemitism" to describe the idea of Jews as the perpetual "Other". Allosemitism can embrace both positive and negative feelings toward Jews – everything, as the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman put it, "from love and respect to outright condemnation and genocidal hatred".[11] At root is the idea that, good or bad, Jews are different from the non-Jewish mainstream and thus unable to be dealt with in the same way or measured by the same yardstick. Diana Pinto's own evolving work has continued to influence these discussions. In later writings, she described Jewish space as a cultural but also material space of encounter between Jews and non-Jews – "an open cultural and even political agora where Jews intermingle with others *qua* Jews, and not just as citizens. It is a virtual space, present anywhere Jews and non-Jews interact on Jewish themes or where a Jewish voice can make itself felt".[12]

These words were echoed remarkably closely, years later, by Beit Venezia in Venice, which I mentioned before. An organization melding the physical site of the Venice Ghetto and its history with current creativity, its stated goals are to connect the Jewish and non-Jewish world: that is, "to promote Jewish thought and culture and serve as a bridge between people of all cultures and religions" (About us", Beit Venezia, www.beitvenezia.org). For me, despite the passage of years and the emergence of wide-ranging discussions, Diana's original formulation of "Jewish space" as something universal, something that exists regardless of the presence of Jews, still remains extremely powerful: and it continues most strongly to influence my own thinking. But, as I noted earlier, the evolution of cyberspace and the online rise of social media and platforms like Zoom have changed the game, moving the goalposts and blurring the boundaries.

Writing in 1975, long before the advent of the Internet or even cellphones, the Italian semiologist and author Umberto Eco anticipated blurred boundaries, in his essay "Travels in Hyperreality", an essay that also has had an influence on my thinking. He wrote of times and places where "[a]bsolute unreality is offered as real presence" and where "the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred [. . .] and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of 'fullness'".[13] Again, what is unreality today and what is a real presence?

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11 Zigmunt Bauman. *Jews and Other Europeans, Old and New*. London: JPR Policy Debate, Institute for Jewish Policy Research. June 2008, p. 3.

12 Diana Pinto, "The Jewish Challenges in the New Europe", in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: Germany and Israel Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York/London: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 239–52.

13 Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, [1976] 1986), p. 8.

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Over the past three decades and more a key and constant focus for me has revolved around what undoubtedly embody "real presence" – that is issues related to Jewish monuments and built, or material, heritage – Jewish brick and mortar *places*. In a way, that's where I began. The seeds of my interest in all the evolving elements I've explored were sown more than 40 years ago, when I visited a score of far-flung synagogues in Romania, touring with the then Chief Rabbi at Hanukkah in the frigid December of 1978. My first book, *Jewish Heritage Travel*, first came out in 1992 and was an attempt to put back on the map as many as possible of these often abandoned and long-forgotten places in central and eastern Europe.[14] After the Holocaust and under communism, Jewish heritage and history were virtually taboo topics in much of communist Europe. The recognition of these haunted Jewish places and their transformation, either physically or subjectively, into lived or living Jewish *spaces* is an underlying theme to just about all that I do and have done in the field. That's been even more relevant in recent years, as I have developed and also coordinate the web site Jewish Heritage Europe (www.jewish-heritage-europe.eu), an expanding portal to news, views, and resources on Jewish built heritage, which I'm proud to say is marking its 10th anniversary this year (2022).

In one of my books, I described the surviving Jewish physical sites in parts of Europe as symbolic mezuzahs.[15] A mezuzah on the doorpost marks the home of a Jew. On the doorposts of houses across parts of Europe, you could often – and still can in some places – find the grooves or scars where mezuzahs had been removed or painted over during or after the Shoah. To me, these scars, often faint and sometimes nearly invisible, form symbolic mezuzahs that indicate a house where Jews *once lived*. In my book, I extrapolated further, positing that the surviving physical relics of pre-war Jewish life – synagogue buildings, Jewish cemeteries – even if abandoned, unmarked, in ruined condition, or transformed out of recognition for other use, also serve as symbolic mezuzahs to mark not just houses but towns, villages, cities, and even entire countries where Jews once lived and do not live (or scarcely live) now. I didn't have the terminology at the time – it was before I encountered Diana Pinto – but these physical sites not only inhabit Jewish space, but they anchor it. They are tangible talismans to the broken past and, increasingly they are tangible gateways to recovery and recognition, by Jews and non-Jews alike.

14 The latest (fourth) edition is *National Geographic Jewish Heritage Europe: A Guide to Eastern Europe* (Washington: National Geographic, 2007).

15 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Upon the Doorposts of Thy House: Jewish Life in East-Central Europe, Yesterday and Today* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994).

At a conference on the future of Jewish heritage in Europe that was held in Prague in 2004, the British scholar Jonathan Webber said that "Heritage has a function in shaping and reshaping Jewish identity, both from inside and as seen by others". This is true. Throughout my career I've been both an observer and a protagonist in a process that is sometimes called "Jewish archaeology" – the recovery, restoration, and recognition of tangible, physical sites – as well as of memory and the historic record. My father was an archaeologist, so the importance of tangible traces, of literally "touching the past", and the importance of using material remains to learn from and teach about the past, was engrained in me from childhood.

There are, in fact, many ways now that this is being done, both formally and as a way of fostering public awareness. The process is very uneven, but Jewish heritage sites are increasingly recognized as "sites of memory" – even if sometimes sites of contested memory. They are also sites – tools – of learning, of teaching. And they are sites that – like Beit Venezia's vision for the Venice Ghetto – serve as the agora-like space (or place) of encounter between Jews and non-Jews that Diana Pinto described. There are Jewish studies university programs; vast web resources, and a wide variety of Jewish-themed books and publications dedicated to the physical realities of Jewish heritage – including guidebooks and travel apps that put Jewish heritage and history not only on the map, but in the pockets of tourists and local people alike. Synagogues and old Jewish quarters host exhibitions and festivals – some on Jewish themes, but others not. The annual European Days of Jewish Culture, established more than 20 years ago, is aimed at local – mainly non-Jewish – residents and features hundreds of well attended events anchored by Jewish heritage sites in more than two dozen countries. Many Jewish heritage sites, particularly in post-communist Europe, still stand tragically derelict, but many that I once found ruined have been restored over the past 30 years. Many of those now form civic or cultural venues, including Jewish museums and research centers. And with the revival of Jewish life in post-communist Europe some are even now used again for worship.

But what happens when there is no physical site to restore? No tangible talisman to connect with the past? Here, too, the virtual comes into play, once again challenging the concepts of reality and taking us on journeys through space – virtual space – and time. Thousands of synagogues and prayer houses were destroyed during World War II; and even after the war ended hundreds more were either destroyed, left derelict and abandoned, or converted for other use that often totally obscured their original identity. The online database Historic Synagogues of Europe, a joint project between the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and the Center for Jewish Art at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, lists more than

3,400 synagogue buildings that still stand and provides information on their current status and use: fewer than 800 are used as synagogues.

For decades, photographs, plans, the occasional film record (and memories) were almost the only witnesses of how the destroyed, ruined, or transformed sanctuaries looked, both inside and out. There is a long history of making *physical* models of lost synagogues. But starting in the 1990s, new technologies including Computer Aided Design (CAD) have been bringing a wide range of synagogues to life – to a form of life, that is, thanks to 3D virtual reconstruction. Some of these reconstructions are static, often extremely detailed computer-generated images; some are interactive. A number of them can be "visited" online, allowing us to enter, walk around at will, inside and out and also, with a simple click, access historical and other information about the building. Two standout new projects, one in Poland and one in Hungary, feature extraordinarily detailed digital models and interactive 3D virtual tours of more than a dozen synagogues and a few other heritage sites. Some projects are even now linked to smartphone apps or other forms of augmented reality, allowing you to stand in RL (Real Life) and engage at the same time digitally – but also physically – with the Jewish past and Jewish space. These stem from different goals, ranging from academic and architectural studies to commemoration and the preservation of memory, to the promotion and enhancement of virtual tourism. Likewise, a variety of public and private institutions and individuals are involved in the creation of such reconstructions: universities and architecture departments, students, artists, Jewish institutions, and more.

I want to conclude by discussing a moment last September (2021) when elements of both universal and specific Jewish space converged at a Jewish place. I found the congruencies at the time remarkable, but in the context of this paper, they are even more so. It was in Bratislava, during the visit to the city by Pope Francis. Francis met with representatives of the Slovak Jewish community in one of the most significant and symbolic places of Jewish history in the country: Bratislava's Rybné Square, the site where the grand, twin-towered Neolog synagogue stood next to the Roman Catholic cathedral until the communist regime destroyed it the late 1960s; it's the site today of the country's main Holocaust memorial. "I have come as a pilgrim, to visit this place and be moved by it", the pope said. The square, he said, "keeps alive the memory of a rich history".[16]

16 See the pope's speech: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210913-bratislava-comunitaebraica.html. Also see the Jewish Heritage Europe post: "Slovakia: Pope Francis met with Slovak Jews in a highly symbolic place: the site where Bratislava's grand Neolog synagogue stood until the communist regime destroyed it the late 1960s. Now

The Neolog synagogue was built alongside the cathedral in 1893. It was demolished when the communist regime built a major bridge and highway right through what had been the historic Jewish quarter of the city, razing most of the district – in his speech, the pope described this as "an effort to eradicate every trace of the community". With the fall of communism in 1989, young activists painted a big picture of the synagogue right on the pavement of Rybné Square where it had stood, with the angry caption "Here there stood a synagogue!". A few years later, a memorial to the more than 100,000 Slovak Jews murdered in the Holocaust was built on the spot. It incorporates a silhouette of the destroyed building. Years later, in 2012, a two-thirds scale replica of the synagogue, made of scaffolding and canvas, was erected on the spot temporarily as part of a memorial project sponsored by the Slovak-Israel Chamber of Commerce. And in 2019, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the destruction of the synagogue, the Bratislava Jewish community unveiled a virtual reconstruction of the synagogue, which also included an on-site exhibit in the square itself that incorporated digital augmented reality. Online, you can virtually "visit" the synagogue, inside and out, and you can also virtually visit the streets and neighborhood surrounding it. The visuals are accompanied by a soundtrack – street sounds as well as cantorial singing. And by clicking on certain delineated spots you can learn about the history of the synagogue and the community as well as some of the personalities who contributed to its construction.

Today, Rybné Square is not just the site of commemorations marking the Holocaust, but it also forms the backdrop for celebrations of Jewish life by the local Jewish community – such as annual public menorah lightings at Hanukkah. "Though the synagogue on this site was torn down, the community remains present", the pope said in his speech. "A community alive and open to dialogue. In this place, our histories meet once more". The pope clearly recognized the power and symbolism of a Jewish *place*, that is nonetheless set within expansive and perhaps expanding Jewish *space*.

I'm not sure I want the pope to have the last word here. So I'll just say a little more about Jewish Heritage Europe. Since going live online in February 2012, the web site has become a go-to clearing house for both current news and a wealth of

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the site is a both a Holocaust memorial and site of Hanukkah celebrations", September 17, 2021, https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2021/09/17/slovakia-pope/.

resources, including a growing inventory of Jewish heritage in cyberspace. Moreover, it tackles a range of intangible issues and concepts. What is Jewish heritage and what is its relevance? What are the strategies and challenges? What is the role of the arts and photography? Of technology and education?

And, importantly, another key question: Who all is Jewish heritage for?

Diana Pinto

Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe

If Ruth Ellen Gruber mentioned that she was not an academic, I can add that I am not even involved in Jewish heritage, Jewish culture, or in reporting on the very exciting developments in this field in the last quarter of a century. At heart I am an intellectual historian whose life work has been devoted to analyzing and spreading the "virtues" of pluralist democracy (its enemies would call it a "virus") in a postwar European perspective.

I do take credit for having coined the term "Jewish Spaces" but as always, one is never sure what happens to such a "child" once it is let loose in the public agora.[1] So it is perhaps useful to return to my original intentions when I looked at the new European Jewish presence in those buoyant and hopeful times. I was attempting at the time to examine the Jewish past, the Jewish present, and above all the Jewish future in what appeared back then as the ground-shaking fall of the Berlin Wall. I must be honest with you. My interest in "things Jewish" stemmed from my greater interest in "things European" or "Western". Confronting the long Jewish past and the Holocaust while planning a Jewish future were for me the key tenets for the building of a successful pluralist democratic life across the continent with voluntary Jews (since everyone could now leave and there were no longer any captive Jews) free at last to live their Jewish lives (whatever their content) in a reappraised past.

Jewish Spaces were thus meant to confront both the immense post-Holocaust Jewish absence and the far smaller post-war Jewish presence. Their specificity in the European context stemmed from the fact that unlike Israel which was its own Jewish Space and America where there were sufficient numbers of Jews to fill most positions in Jewish fields, Europe did not have enough Jews "to go around". Rather than seeing this as a uniquely post-Holocaust tragedy, I sought to define this situation as one full of possibilities. Namely, Jews and non-Jews could build such spaces together in a mutually beneficial intellectual and cultural interaction, that would place Jewish rooted themes inside (and no longer at the margins) of Europe's ever more pluralist societies. In such a reading, democratically "sick" countries were the ones who either chose not to confront the long past and the Holocaust, preferring to distort it or give priority to national and nationalistic narratives over historical truth. When I outlined the rise of "Jewish Spaces", such

1 I first introduced the concept of "Jewish Spaces" in "A New Jewish Identity for Post-1989 Europe", *JPR Policy Paper* 1 (1996): 1–15.

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sick nations seemed to be on the way out or at least ostensibly willing to reform themselves. We all knew that the path would not be easy but most believed that it was heading upwards toward historical truth and justice.

I need not tell you that we are hardly living in such a world today. Ruth's reference to an "augmented reality" struck me as the perfect description of a continent now at war, but also a continent where extreme right-wing rhetoric and parties, in power or vociferously on the margins outside with their populist accents, have become "normalized", no longer mere eccentric voices on the fringe. We now live in an augmented reality where Jews, the Holocaust, Nazism, are terms which are bandied about with nonchalance and ill will, and not just on social media in an ongoing historical revisionism which confuses past and present, or worse still *misuses* these references to suit its often shady present-oriented agendas.

This would be bad enough but it is only half the story. The other half is even more painful for a pluralistic democratic Jew like me: the rise of ever more strident ethno-nationalist voices not just in many European extreme right wings, but also within Israel. There are now ever more democratically deluded and religiously and culturally intolerant actors within a badly fractured Jewish world, where one can find today staunch supporters for Orban's illiberal democracy, for Trump's political stands, and even Israelis who do not totally condemn Putin's actions, while seeking to destroy the very underpinnings of democratic pluralism (in Israel the stakes concern the independence of the judiciary). Jews on this count espouse the same fractures as the worlds in which they live. They are not necessarily a light unto nations or always yardsticks with which to measure the positive values and developments of their own countries.

One example of such a democratic crisis was more than visible in 2022 in the country where I live, France. Eric Zemmour, who always actively assumed his Jewish religious and cultural identity, was the extreme/extreme right-wing French presidential candidate in the primaries to the Presidential election. He was so extreme in his ethnonationalist and historically revisionist positions that he made Marine Le Pen look like a social democrat. The only reason I mention him is that while he only obtained 7% of the votes in the national first round, he managed to garner nearly 54% of the votes of the French Jews who had moved to Israel. Zemmour was the candidate who dared claim that Vichy France had saved its Jews, and that there was a good chance that Captain Dreyfus was indeed guilty of treason and that one would never really know the full story. Need I say more?

Historical revisionism, like racism, is a beautifully shared evil around the globe, and one that you as professionals in the realms of Jewish Studies must be constantly aware of, lest its errors and shadows touch your own fields. You may ask yourselves at this point what these Cassandra-like lamentations have to do

with the ongoing life, creativity, expansion, and overall success story of Europe's Jewish Spaces in which most of you thrive both professionally and culturally. Why stress such obvious news headlines? Well, I want you to consider these few examples as a wake-up call for your best civic instincts and a plea to recast the Jewish Spaces in which you thrive into more "*engagé*" cores of the endangered pluralist world we all cherish. I do not mean by this to turn them into warring camps. I just want you to be actively aware that today's Jewish Spaces live on the razor's edge of both Jewish and non-Jewish democratic controversies and even attacks. To this one must also add the inevitable consequences of all institutional successes: a growing professionalization, bureaucratization, compartmentalization, and the rise of institutional rivalries and of course personal clashes and ambitions, not to mention national prerogatives.

But allow me to return to my own original understanding of what the Jewish Spaces I had coined were meant to represent in a post-1989 Europe. I had argued back then (and still do) that Jewish Spaces were the prime symbol of a renewed Europe that could also contribute significantly to a recomposed Jewish world whose two main poles were of course Israel and America. How so?

As the locus of the longest Jewish diasporic settlement, and also as the locus of the Holocaust, Europe, I felt, needed Jewish references and Jewish *topoi* in order to understand and come to terms with its own complex pluralist past. Such spaces were not *ends in themselves* but above all starting points for other pluralist understandings of Europe's many religious and cultural minorities. They were not to become professional or identity ghettos but central agoras for wider European debates. My idea was to turn the minority status of the European Jewish experience into an *asset* rather than a weakness. Europe, by the few Jews present in its midst, but also because of the need to reassess Jewish references in its past, was ideally suited to create Jewish Spaces in which Jews and non-Jews alike could embark in egalitarian terms in the research and dissemination of Jewish knowledge and identity. With a major proviso: there had always been students of Judaica and Jewish life in Europe, but these topics were dealt within the framework of non-Jewish epistemological concerns, Christian at first and later propelled by the (anti- or post-Christian) universalism of the Enlightenment. The new Jewish Spaces instead were to be based on a Jewish understanding of the Jewish past and its interaction with the wider European context. Jews as authors and co-authors, no longer as subjects of non-Jewish investigation, would ideally help define the perimeters of such Jewish Spaces where non-Jews, as equals, could also bring in their contributions, queries, and understandings. Not an easy balance when facing equally demanding Jewish communities with their own fears, needs and agendas, and intrinsic suspicions at having non-Jews "meddle" in their narratives. This brings me to my central point: an examination of what I consider to be

rarely stated issues and also questions concerning the value and importance of Jewish Spaces today for the *wider societies* in whose midst they have been erected.

In raising such doubts, I do not mean in the slightest to cast shadows on the very real success stories of Europe's Jewish Spaces throughout the continent. Several contributions in this volume celebrate such positive outcomes. But, now more than a quarter of a century after I coined the term "Jewish Spaces", there is room for some future oriented thinking with respect to these successes, which like all successes can carry their own unintended consequences.

Perhaps the first question that comes to mind is quite simple. Should "Jewish Spaces" in Europe serve as a buffer or protective barrier against the onslaught of antisemitic, conspiratorial, and political attacks leveled against Jews, and other minorities? Or should they remain neutral, by claiming that their mission is not to be involved in politics? This was already a burning question for me in the very early 2000s when I realized during a leisurely coffee break that a young non-Jewish museum curator in a Jewish museum in Western Europe was militantly anti-Israeli and quite indifferent to the growing antisemitic attacks on "living Jews" (as possible ersatz for Israel), mainly at the hands of the extreme left-wing groups plus Islamic movements. It was as if her brain were neatly divided between her job and her own political activism. Hers was a minoritarian position, but it did make me ask the question, given the general silence that seemed to dominate the newly emergent Jewish Spaces, as if an inevitably confusing present had no place in a world devoted to the pious study of the past.

Conversely, should such spaces also stand up for national settings or contexts that are unfairly labeled as "antisemitic" by fringe Jewish groups in ever more strident social media? If so, how? Can and should non-Jews and Jews in their midst take more public stands *together* when blatant lies and misinterpretations are bandied about? There is a further dimension to this dilemma. How should Jewish and non-Jewish actors in such Jewish Spaces handle the ever more vociferous public rifts inside Israeli society? Should they continue to consider Israel as a threatened little democracy inside a sea of Muslim hatred, thus deserving steadfast non-critical support? Or should they apply to an ever-strong state with growing ties to the authoritarian regimes of the Arab world the same criteria as in Western democracies? This is no theoretical question. Israeli critics do not feel at ease inside most European Jewish Spaces and in turn actors in such spaces do not feel at ease taking such radical Israeli voices into account.

Is the reference to the "educational importance" of these spaces sufficient given the world we live in currently where the past is just as swamped by lies, false news, misinformation, and malignant manipulation as the present? Who could have imagined that the Foreign Minister of Russia would announce that Hit-

ler was in part Jewish and that, as a consequence, Zelensky was a full-fledged Nazi? Or that pro-Putin Jews could actually exist? In this Orwellian world, can Jewish Spaces continue their nicely institutionalized life as before or should their members take more visible stands, *qua* specialists and citizens? You may, of course, disagree with me on these issues, but I do hope they will at least spur your own decisions.

Politics aside, allow me to briefly present some controversial institutional questions concerning Jewish Spaces today with respect to the three key institutional settings I had defined when I coined the term: Jewish Studies programs, Jewish museums, and Holocaust memorials. In raising these questions, I am acutely aware of the fact that non-Jews in these spaces do not feel comfortable in taking positions on Jewish topics lest they be accused of "meddling" in what is "none of their business". But between wishing not to "meddle" and thinking of work in Jewish spaces as a 9-to-5 routine job, with no repercussions on one's civic life, there is a major difference. So let me point to some structural problems.

Jewish Studies

The importance and expansion of this field has gone well beyond the wildest dreams of those who first envisioned such a university level Jewish presence across the European continent. At least two generations, perhaps even three, of specialists have been trained since the 1990s, all embarked on fulfilling careers.

My worry: What are the links between Jewish Studies and mainstream studies in each university? Can one skip such exposure to Jewish themes while obtaining general degrees in literature and history or politics or any other relevant subject? In other words, are Jewish Studies an "aside" trajectory or are they integrally interwoven (at least in terms of their main topics) into the wider curriculum? Conversely, what links exist between Jewish Studies and other new "identity" studies in current post-colonial studies? Is the context one of cross-fertilization or latent (or not so latent) combat? This is where calmer non-Jewish voices can make a difference, on the assumption that other minorities have the same notion of their "Spaces".

Friends and colleagues who are at the center of many Jewish Studies programs have often told me that they have a not insignificant number of Muslim students, many hijab wearing women. But they have also told me that they do not ask these students their reasons for taking courses in the field. Here I obviously speak as someone who has no academic appointment, but somewhere I consider such a perfectly ethical stance somewhat of a pity. By asking such questions or

even handing out a general questionnaire to all students at the end of the course, on how greater knowledge of the Jewish past impacted their understanding of Europe, one can perhaps begin to build unexpected bridges. I remember once giving a lecture on the questions Napoleon asked of the French Jews during the Sanhedrin. The Muslim students in attendance were astounded when reading the questions, for they had never realized just what kind of "identity" sacrifices had been asked of the Jews back then in the name of "emancipation" in order to become French citizens. The debates that followed were fascinating. It was the first time such Muslim students realized how external to political society Jews had been historically, and as one of them told me later, just how monstruous, *given the Jewish hopes and sacrifices made in the past*, the Holocaust had been.

I worry that such crucial issues are not necessarily addressed, bridges not built as one goes about doing one's professional work, in a situation of bland university-wide intellectual acceptance possibly hiding fundamental indifference. And since Jewish topics remain controversial, I can easily imagine that they can be kept in a bubble of their own, to the contentment of both insiders and outsiders.

Jewish Museums

Their building, expansion, restoration, and creation even at the smallest regional levels has been cause for major celebration and rightly so. Who would have thought back in the 1990s that publicity for special exhibitions inside Jewish museums would be so visible inside the Metros, U-Bahns, and Tubes of Europe? No country can afford not to have such museums or "Jewish routes" across its historical lands. But nagging questions remain: are they "status symbols" or genuine contributions to the wider social fabric?

My worry: What is the interaction between Jewish museums and their older and more prestigious national equivalents? Has the Jewish past been removed from collective responsibility since everyone can point to a Jewish museum "down the road" and therefore avoid treating national historical or artistic questions that should be enriched by the Jewish reference? Is there a ghetto-like (even when most pleasant) effect to such museums?

I can point to innumerable examples of this dilemma. In Paris in 2022, the *Musée Carnavalet*, the museum of the history of the city, devoted a major exhibition to Marcel Proust's Paris on the centennial of his death. In tracing his life, Proust's maternal Jewish identity and his many Jewish friends were barely evoked. Only his distant "Jewish origins" were mentioned. Right after the Carna-

valet exhibition closed, the MAHJ, Paris's Jewish museum, opened its own major exhibition on Proust with the title "Proust on his mother's side" (a reference to his first volume of *La Recherche, Du côté de chez Swann*) in which his Jewishness was dealt with extensively. Few people know to what an extent Proust was well versed in Biblical and Talmudic studies, how he was an early defender of Dreyfus (unlike his anti-Dreyfusard father), and even close to French Zionists.

With respect to these two exhibitions, most Jews saw both, but far fewer non-Jews made the trip to the Jewish museum to see the latter. Thus was a stereophonic dimension lost which in my view should have underpinned the very idea of a culturally open and enriching Jewish space. The same could be said about the Loevy exhibition in the Jewish Museum Berlin back in 2003 which traced the history and end of the Jewish foundry family that had cast the letters "*Dem Deutschen Volke*" on the Reichstag as well as the Quadriga on the then German Embassy in St. Petersburg. The exhibition was fascinating from all sorts of angles: esthetic, cultural, but above all political. It came with two counter-intuitive endings. The destiny of the brother and sister who were the last heirs of the family diverged. The daughter remained Jewish, married a cantor and moved to Britain in time, and the museum showed her British Jewish descendants. The son who had married a Protestant, not only changed his name but also managed to have it changed on his thesis, and was able to pursue a career in Nazi Germany, while slowly developing hidden Zionist thoughts. He was brutally killed by the Gestapo for having offered shelter to one of the conspirators of the July 1944 assassination attempt against Hitler.

The story of the Loevy family, their professional success as casters and their downfall lay at the very heart of late 19th- and 20th-century German history. In my opinion the exhibition should have taken place in the Reichstag itself (parts of it could also have become permanent displays) or in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum*, and not relegated to a Jewish "subculture". It was shown, instead, in the Jewish Museum Berlin, where most international visitors were unable to appreciate it since all the explanations were in German. In saying this I am in no way casting a shadow on the wonderful curators of the Jewish Museum, but asking how their German equivalents did not deem it appropriate to either co-sponsor or have the exhibition circulate elsewhere. A very important Jewish chapter inside German history was thus overlooked.

One final example: when the newly redesigned Rijksmuseum re-opened in Amsterdam, it made the choice to present works of art in the context of daily lives. For the "17th century" rooms, no mention whatsoever was made of the Marranos who returned to Judaism in Amsterdam or for that matter of Baruch Spinoza – how interesting it would have been to see the equipment with which he ground lenses to earn his living. The assumption was quite simple. One could

learn everything about this key Jewish presence, by going to the Jewish museum down the road. One further proof of the divorce of knowledge, rather than its creative fusion.

Holocaust Memorials

One of the major triumphs of the 1990s occurred when the Holocaust was brought to light in its own intrinsic essence, rather than going unmentioned, forgotten or diluted in other tales of national suffering, or canceled in Communist universalist narratives. Not just the narrative of the Holocaust but also its implications in terms of the visible voids (even if at times covered up) it left in mainly Central and Eastern European societies. By and large most European countries, many in Eastern Europe after some nudging, managed to rectify their previous readings or became aware of their own misinterpretations, and made great efforts to "get it right" – I am thinking in particular of contemporary Lithuania. No mean feat, even if in some cases it took decades, with, as in Poland today, at times clear regressions.

My worry: What is the future of these commemorative spaces of Jewish absence? Can we envision a time when compulsory visits, national remembrances, and feelings of contrition will slowly dwindle in the face of other more recent or immediate horrors as the Holocaust, like all meta-events, slowly sinks into the past? Who will be tending the restored cemeteries in the future and in the name of what ideal? How many times will gorgeous synagogues be *re*-restored in the coming decades? And by whom, decades down the line?

This is a burning symbolic issue in Ukraine where what were once the shtetls of the "Shoah by bullets" have now become new places of Russian horror and death wrought on living Ukrainians (some of whom, Jews). Not to mention the Holocaust memorials that were partially destroyed by Russian missiles such as in Kharkiv or on the edges of Babyn Yar. Are we heading toward a *palimpsest of suffering*, whereby past horrors are overlaid with current ones irrespective of the differences in quantity or "quality"?

On this count we may be at a conceptual crossroads. In the wake of the centrality Jews were accorded in national repentances through Holocaust commemorations, other groups across the Western world – Blacks, Muslims, Roma, colonized indigenous peoples – began demanding that their suffering also be recognized in what many Jewish activists feared would become a competition of suffering.

There is, however, a major difference between a "competition of suffering" and a "palimpsest of suffering". The former can be integrated into a historical narrative that incorporates Jews, but not just Jews alone, and makes the clear argument that such a competition is scandalous since all suffering must be respected and honored. Keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive in no way infringes on the suffering of other groups. There should be no historical "zero-sum" game. There is room for all in this narrative of horror. In my opinion, Jewish Spaces should pursue such a line of thought.

A "palimpsest of suffering" is a far more complex and delicate concept which contains its own inherent turning points, for it implies that the horrors of the past are *written over* by the horrors of the present, which will then be overwritten by future horrors. This is how humanity has managed to survive millennia of accumulated horrors by "feeling them less" with the passage of time. Will the Holocaust reach this point, in a foreseeable future, to be remembered and ritualized within the Jewish world, which still remembers the Fall of the First and Second Temples, or the near murder of all Persian Jews in Esther's Megillah? Can one imagine an ongoing Jewish religious grief over the Holocaust, while "everyone else" considers it as an ever more distant historical event? The recent Russian aggression against Ukraine seems to confirm such a "to each epoch its horrors" vision, for until 2022, Ukraine was not exactly considered one of the best pupils of the Holocaust commemoration class. Incidentally, it is important to note that the Jewish world has also participated in this palimpsest of suffering. Its nearly unanimous pro-Ukrainian stance in the war shows that present tragedies do take top priority to the commemoration of the horrors of the past. A new chapter is thus created in the realm of Jewish Spaces that contain within themselves universal spaces.

From a "Never Again" to a "Still Going On"

It could very well be that Jewish Spaces in the future, whether in universities, in museums, or in Holocaust Memorials will find their long term mission by moving beyond the increasingly meaningless "never again" toward a "still going on" by becoming early warning stations, precisely because of what happened to the Jews in their long history, with respect to the temptation of marginalization, violence, and expulsion of human groups. Without in any way minimizing the Holocaust, Jewish and non-Jewish voices can unite in such a two-pronged realm which can become an important aspect of future Jewish Spaces.

The questions I have raised here are by no means easy to confront. There are so many variables involved in each national setting that no approach suits all. Perhaps even more importantly, progress does not take place in a nice upward curve, but in dialectical spirals. Every shared Jewish memory or historical commemoration carries its own complexity and its own tensions.

I shall end this chapter with a very concrete example which took place in April 2023, one year after the conference. I am referring to the commemorations (in the plural) which took place in Warsaw on April 19, 2023, to mark the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Insurrection. They vividly point to the inherent problems linked to the notion of a single "Jewish Space".

There were two ceremonies, one official and the other informal. The first took place in front of the grey memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Insurrection, with the Polin Museum as a backdrop. It was held in the courtyard of the museum, therefore at the heart of Warsaw's Jewish Space of memory but in front of a museum meant to extol 1,000 years of Jewish life, rather than the years of extermination in Poland. The official ceremony was led by the President of Poland and his two guests, the President of Israel and the President of Germany – the first time an official representative of Germany was invited to participate in the commemoration. (When then Chancellor Willy Brandt memorably knelt in front of the Memorial in 1970, he did so in a private capacity and at a different moment of the year.) The 2023 official ceremony, which was attended by official Jews such as the Chief Rabbi of Poland and older members of the community, had a solemn national and above all military character. There were drums and clarions as an official roll call was made of the heroes of the uprising as well as the leaders of the Catholic underground who had helped Jews in hiding. Both were installed in the official pantheon of Polish heroism. For the highly nationalist Polish government, such a roll call was the best proof that Poland had integrated its Jewish heroes inside its national history, as full-fledged Polish patriots deserving full military honors. The accent was on their noble positive acts as well as of those who had helped them. In terms of Polish history, this was no mean feat. Polish nationalists (the ancestors of those in power today) and the Home Army during the war had been less than open, often frankly hostile, to any active unified resistance with the Jews against the Nazis. The Jews were not part of the Polish history of martyrology; they were considered separate and not part of the "true" nation. Nor should one forget the record of Polish denunciations and collaboration with the Nazis against the Jews – historical truths that the current government continues to deny as an "anti-Polish" attack. During Communist rule, Jews were not entitled to a special place in its ideological history: the Jewish three million were englobed in the six million Poles who had died during World

War II. After the end of Communist rule, as Poles sought to commemorate their own suffering, they did so as a zero-sum game with respect to Jewish suffering, casting an unpalatable light on the centrality of the Holocaust in international terms.

In the "glass half full" reading of history, one could consider that the ceremony made significant steps forward with respect to the past: it included the Jewish fighters into the roll call of Polish national heroes *without denying them their Jewishness*. In his speech, the Polish President accepted the fact that they belonged to the long Jewish narrative from Masada to the present, but he stressed that they were also the children of Polish history, literature, poetry – something that was rarely if ever mentioned in nationalist circles in the past. President Duda thus transcended the zero-sum game approach. That he did so within his own brand of nationalist politics marked a symbolic turning point. Critics can argue that he entered the Jewish Space on his own nationalist terms. His camp would argue that they expanded their understanding of Polish honor to include active Jews, thus underscoring the Polish-Jewish co-existence and even symbiosis that lay at the heart of Polin's museum mission. In other words, he accommodated Polish history to fit *one of the narratives* of Poland's Jewish Space.

The second informal commemoration took place practically at the same time. This commemoration was attended by the most vocal and visible Polish Jews active in progressive civil society and staunch political opponents of the right-wing government. The ceremony was also attended as always by non-Jewish friends who shared the same commitment to an open past and future. It also centered on a Jewish Space of memory beginning at the Mila 18 plaque where the insurrection began and heading out to the marble memorial at Umschlagplatz from where the Ghetto Jews were deported. As a symbol, living daffodils were carried along with the paper daffodils that have become the symbol of the Ghetto insurrection commemoration throughout Polish society, and which were particularly visible during the day not just in Warsaw but also in other Polish cities.

The boycotting of the official commemoration had its own pedigree, based on Marek Edelman's (one of the very few survivors of the insurrection and the only one to have continued to live in Poland) refusal to participate in the Polish Communist ceremonies with their subsuming of the Jews into the anonymous victorious "proletariat". The informal ceremony boycotted the official ceremony on multiple counts: first, because of the nationalist government's refusal to accept honest historical research on the role played by ordinary Poles in the abetting of the Final Solution, choosing to paint an idealized version of Polish-Jewish relations during the black years. Secondly, because of the right-wing policies that had curbed democratic life and civil society under the Polish version of illiberal democracy and the destruction of judicial independence. Thirdly, for most of the

participants, Polish racist treatment of Syrian, Afghan, and other migrants, and the closing off of the Byelorussian border, proved that the country had not learned any of the lessons of the past, with the exception of its hospitality toward the Ukrainians, perceived as brothers not "others". For this group, and on these three counts, the official commemoration was irrelevant and belonged to the "glass half empty" category.

For anyone trying to think about the future of Jewish Spaces, these two commemorations provide a formidable dilemma. Should one laud the attempt to fuse a nationalist vision with a new positive Jewish content in the name of a partially transcended past with the glorification of dead heroes subsumed in a widened national narrative? Or should one follow living Jews in their political stances linked to the present and the future? Can one, should one, try to reconcile both visions? Are they reconcilable in the long run? Do they form two sides of an active Jewish Space? And what if any positions should Jews and non-Jews take on these crucial political issues? In the best of possible worlds, these two commemorations would be seen as laying the groundwork for a solid bridge in the ongoing fraught Polish-Jewish relations. But they can also become amputated stumps leading nowhere in terms of possible future dialogue. I cannot give clear answers but can only raise questions on the interactions between national histories and specific identities. Obviously this issue does not concern Jews alone. But it may be that Jewish Spaces can be avantgardes in this interaction.

Conclusion

Since 2023 we have entered a new epoch that has little in common with the optimistic 1990s or even with the more distraught decades linked to the Islamic terrorism that followed. We are now witnessing a redrawing of the international map and the need for the West to stick together in face of an ever more frightening Russia and its internal European acolytes. The Jewish Spaces that were inaugurated 30 years ago have multiplied, spawning ever more diversified institutions. But in an epoch of national lies, bullying, threats, identity selfishness, and the major rewriting of the past with war as an apotheosis, Jews and non-Jews who populate Europe's Jewish Spaces must ask themselves tough questions of just what they are doing and in the name of what values and for whom. We must all go back to the original pluralist democratic ideal, and fight for it to the hilt for we have lost the comfort zone that accompanied the decades of pious commemoration in a setting of peace.

We must also distinguish between what remain open Jewish Spaces (of which Ukraine has given ample examples) and those that are "closed" in which today's court Jews, and their colleagues, be they in Byelorussia or in Russia itself, pretend to carry forth Jewish life and commemoration by accepting existential compromises that go against the very ideals such spaces were meant to represent. Jewish Spaces must thus reinvent themselves in a time of raw violence and war and if properly advocated by Jews and non-Jews together, can offer an important springboard for the value battles ahead.

Post-Scriptum

The attacks of October 7th in Israel followed by the war in Gaza, and above all the reactions they provoked in the Western world, have added another layer of complexity to the very idea of a Jewish space. Israel and the Jewish people have experienced at first hand both the "competition of suffering" and the "palimpsest of suffering" I had described above. When I wrote my text, I could never have imagined that both dangers could hit the Jewish world simultaneously. Mine had been a reflection on how the Jewish story could impact other sufferings in other lands. Instead, the trauma of the terrorist attacks in Israel was relativized by an ever-growing shock at what happened in Gaza. Gaza's siege, its ruins and the displaced Palestinians were equated in many minds with the fate of the Jews during World War II, minus the death camps. But the notion of "genocide" was bandied about in a clear desire to cover the Holocaust with Israel's deeds, in a planetary palimpsest that has left the Jewish world in shock and fear. It is still unclear how Europe's Jewish Spaces (and America's as well) will weather this storm. It could very well be that the importance of these Jewish Spaces will turn out to have been historically time-bound. In the future, one cannot exclude that the world by 'moving on' to other sufferings, and especially to those of the Palestinians, will turn against Jews and Israelis alike, perceiving them as once upon a time victims now showing their 'true colors.' Their "Spaces" no longer serving either as an educational or political/moral function. Those who inhabit such Spaces professionally must prepare themselves for such a transformation, by ensuring that the past not be confused with the present or the future, in order words by holding the fort of Jewish memory against those who seek to destroy it. This is a civic/moral commitment that transcends the halls of academia—in other words, an existential choice.

Part II: **Digital Practices**

Kyra Schulman

Technological Heterotopianism: How a Case Study of a Holocaust Digital Mapping Project of Łomża, Poland Served as a Guide for Reconciliation in Polish-Jewish Relations

When I first arrived in Łomża in 2019 with the descendants of Łomża Holocaust survivor Nachman Podróżnik – having been effectively living in Podróżnik's Łomża as described in his Holocaust memoir for the past year as I digitally mapped his city – I was shocked to not recognize any of it. The Talmud Torah where he taught was a tennis court. The family home on Stary-Rynek was an ice-cream shop, several doors down from which stood Lech Kołakowski's offices, a *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS; or Law and Justice, the right-wing political party) member with a seat on the SEJM. Podróżnik's in-law's movie theatre had been demolished and its bricks used to build a communist party house turned teacher's training college. The Jewish cemetery on Boczna street was in disarray, headstones damaged, graffitied, and displaced. For the Podróżnik family this "homecoming" trip, from the outset, seemed to reaffirm that they had no place in modern-day Łomża. The city did not remember them, and they did not recognize it.

In this chapter, I explore how the digital Holocaust memorial map I created of Łomża in collaboration with Łomża history teacher Marcin Mikołajczyk and his history club students, as well as with the council of local Łomża public historians, ultimately, after much back-and-forth negotiation, served as a tool for Polish-Jewish reconciliation. The digital world played the mediator between the two groups, leading in November 2022 to today's citizens of Łomża collectively gathering to remember its lost Jews and the Podróżnik family finding their place and recognition in today's Łomża. In this piece, I ask why the virtual setting was so effective in guiding the reconciliation process. What was the virtual terrain able to offer us that the physical terrain could not? What, in turn, could the virtual map teach us about memorial practices and heritage production in the aftermath of mass atrocities?

The Podróżnik family first approached me about a project on Jewish Łomża in 2018. They had recently published Podróżnik's Holocaust survival memoir, *The Counterfeit Poles*. Throughout the memoir, Podróżnik meticulously notes the names of everyone he remembered from Łomża, citing addresses where they lived and worked. For a number of these people, I discovered that Podróżnik's

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account was the only remaining testament of their lives. The family asked me to research and identify these individuals. Reading the memoir, I was struck by Podróżnik's keen attention to urban space and apparent drive to anchor as many murdered Jews as possible to sites they occupied in Łomża. It was as if he was trying to return them home, re-establish their sense of belonging in the spaces from which they had been removed. Thanks to his detailed testimony, I created a digital, interactive map of Łomża that cartographically represents Podróżnik's city.[1]

The map is in English and Polish. It includes color-coded markers that correspond to sites of Jewish life and destruction, as well as sites of local resistance and collaboration in the Holocaust. The points on the map were derived predominantly from Podróżnik's memoir, but also from Podróżnik family letters, visual history testimonies, Yad Vashem pages of testimony, International Tracing Service files, the Łomża Yizkor book, and interwar telephone directories. Map users can click on the markers to explore Łomża and meet its former inhabitants. At some markers, visitors can hear directly from these inhabitants through video testimonies. At other markers, they can read passages from post-war memoirs detailing the events that occurred there (See Fig. 1). The virtual Łomża is represented on three maps: a present-day map, a 1942 Nazi map, and a 1940 Soviet map. I geo-rectified the two historic maps onto the present-day map and made the layers transparent, so that all three can be viewed simultaneously.

After I completed a first version of the map, we travelled to Łomża. In spite of the map, on arrival, we could not have felt more lost. Fortunately, we soon met Mikołajczyk who gave us a tour of his Łomża. I reached out to Mikołajczyk having heard about his work for the Forum for Dialogue, a program whose aim is to foster dialogue on Polish-Jewish relations by providing monetary and community-based support for teachers and activists across Poland to conduct projects in their communities. Mikołajczyk founded a history club at his school that wrote a tour guide to Jewish Łomża and used the Forum's funding to publish their findings in a booklet entitled *Śladami Żydów Łomżyńskich* (In the Footsteps of the Jews of Łomża). The first edition was published in 2012 with the goal of building "tolerant attitudes based on expertise knowledge in the area of multiculturalism and an understanding of human rights".[2]

Mikołajczyk's goal was, in no small part, a response to the fact that Łomża is a largely homogeneous town with ultra-conservative voting tendencies driven by

1 To view the map visit: https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/show/lomza-map.

2 III Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Żołnierzy Obwodu Łomżyńskiego AK, *Śladami Żydów Łomżyńskich* (2012). Thereafter, SZL (2012) or SZL (2019) for the 2019 edition.

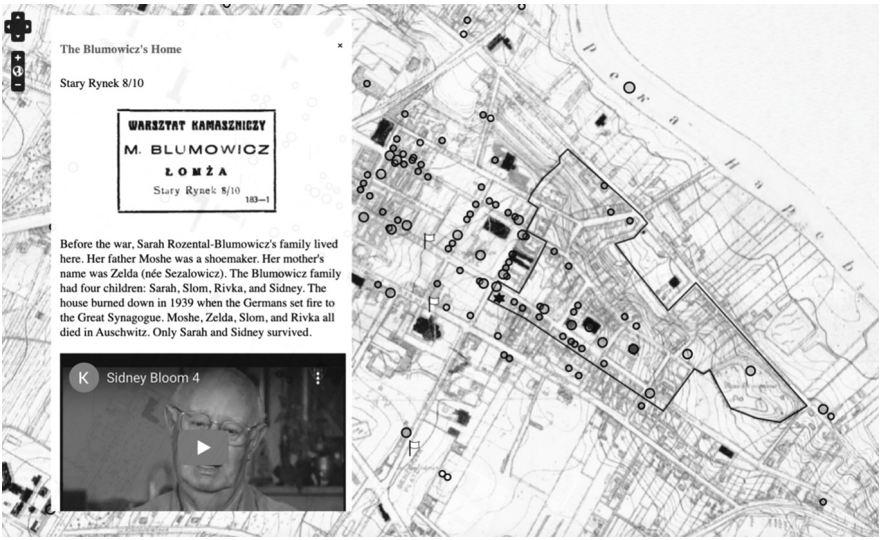


Fig. 1: A screen shot of the Łomża map opened to the Blumowicz family home at 8/10 Stary-Rynek.

a desire to keep it that way. This was made clear in 2010 when local PiS politician Kołakowski closed an asylum center for Chechen refugees.[3] When we met with Mikołajczyk, he explained that he wanted to expand the project and write an updated guide with his students in an afterschool history club but was struggling to find local support. This was not altogether surprising given the then recent proposal by PiS for a "Holocaust Law" that would effectively make it illegal to discuss the question of Polish collaboration. The proposed law, now voided, was a response to the publication of Jan Gross's *Neighbors* where Gross recounts how Catholic Poles murdered 1,600 of their Jewish neighbors in July 1941. This pogrom occurred in Jedwabne, a town only 20 kilometers from Łomża, in turn, casting a shadow over the region, which for many became synonymous with the collaboration scandal. After meeting with Mikołajczyk, the Podróżniks wanted to help him, seeing this as an opportunity to advance Holocaust education in the region. They offered to fund a new publication. In return, they asked that Mikołajczyk and his

3 Szalanska et al., "Public policy towards immigrants in Poland's shrinking cities", *International Migration* 61/1 (2023). The authors note how Ukrainian refugees have been more openly welcomed as they do "not differ from Poles in terms of external appearance and culture, so for the Łomża community, it is easier to accept their presence than the presence of Chechens".

students pay homage to Podróżnik and his family in it, and work with me to incorporate my digital maps and website as pedagogical tools for future students and, by extension, the Łomża community at large. Mikołajczyk agreed.

However, when we began working together to combine our research and knowledge on the digital map, we struggled to find common ground. Our difficulties were fueled by our different motivations driving our involvement in the project. The Podróżniks, whom I represented, wanted the project to serve as a tool to remember Łomża's murdered Jews and the spaces they called home, as well as to prevent the repetition of genocidal mistakes in the future. They also hoped the project would help them to re-establish a connection with their ancestral home. Mikołajczyk wanted the project to serve as a means to build a more tolerant and accepting Łomża in the present based on a lost multicultural Łomżian past. He wanted to do so without stirring conflict. The two groups disagreed as to who should be the primary recipients of the project. The Podróżniks prioritized Łomża's murdered Jews and their descendants. Mikołajczyk prioritized Łomża's present-day citizens. For the project to work, we had to find a way to negotiate our simultaneous, and sometimes contradictory, care of the living and the dead, Jews and Poles, Jewish and Łomżian heritage.

In my article for *Contemporary Jewry*, I focused on the points of contention that arose over the course of our collaboration.[4] These points emerged, as I concluded, because both sides were originally thinking in zero-sum game terms. We diverged on which map to use as the base on which to plot our points for the project. We disagreed on the "Jedwabne question": whether the map should include an arrow pointing to the site of the pogrom in the neighboring town, and the narrative facts of the massacre. Lastly, we favored adding points of different natures to the map: religious or secular sites and still existing or destroyed ones. While we initially found ourselves fighting over virtual space on the digital map, in what sometimes felt like a pseudo-technological dystopia, to claim ownership of sites in pixelated form, we soon discovered that a digital topography could provide opportunities to settle our differences and work towards a common goal of mutual respect and understanding – in short, reconciliation. Contestation and reconciliation should be understood in this chapter as two sides of the same coin. Our reconciliation was built on the scaffolding of our contests for space. Contestation served as the building block for reconciliation. Put differently, the contestations over space we discovered in our collaboration worked themselves out on

4 Kyra Schulman, "Memory Space: A Case Study of a Holocaust Digital Mapping Project of Łomża, Poland", *Contemporary Jewry* 44 (2024): pp. 261–80.

the screen and reflected a model of reconciliation we could imitate off screen: one that could never have been realized on a non-virtual platform.

Contributions to the Literature and Theoretical Framing

Drawing from my experience as a researcher, and often intermediary – particularly as the primary mapmaker – between Nachman's descendants and Mikołajczyk, his students, public historians, and the broader Łomża community, this chapter seeks to add to the current literature on digital memory studies and its intersection with the future of Polish-Jewish relations. It intends to do so by introducing a concept of technological heterotopianism to the conversation. Proponents of technological utopianism contend that with the addition of new technologies society will move closer to a utopian existence, a more perfect world. Digital public history scholars have argued projects, like ours, provide opportunities that, at the very least, ark towards a more utopian existence, as academic and non-academic actors can collectively engage "in a process of co-creation through digital means, a form of citizen's digital history for the public and with the public".[5] This is not what we experienced in creating the map. The process for us often better resembled a land scramble than a project of "co-creation" particularly as we fought over who should be included within "citizen" and "public". Conversely, we also did not find ourselves trapped in a technological dystopia of the kind scholars like Andrew Hoskins have warned.[6] We were somewhere in the middle in line with interpretations scholars like Antony Rowland and Matthew Boswell have proposed whereby technology is understood as a tool that can provide opportunities for memory production, even if the results are far from perfect.[7] Foucault defined heterotopias as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted".[8] The virtual topography, like a heterotopia, is an unreal space, but one that provides an oppor-

5 Serge Noiret, Mark Tebeau, and Gerben Zaagsma, *Handbook of Digital Public History* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), p. 15.

6 Andrew Hoskins, *Digital Memory Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

7 Antony Rowland and Matthew Boswell, *Virtual Holocaust Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

8 Michel Foucault, "Of other spaces: Utopias and heterotopias", *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (1984): 3.

tunity to imagine a place of progress and a path towards improved Polish-Jewish relations.

It can do so, as I hope to demonstrate, by placing Polish and Jewish actors in conversation with each other on more equal terms in heritage production. Ruth Ellen Gruber and Erica Lehrer represent two lines of thought in this production. Gruber studies a phenomenon in many post-communist, Eastern European countries whereby non-Jews, increasingly interested in Jewish culture, developed Jewish-themed restaurants, festivals, exhibitions, and educational programs. She describes the influx of Jewish heritage production as a "parallel universe" where non-Jews "study, teach, perform, produce, and consume in a virtual Jewish world of their own creation [. . .] creating the sort of 'museum Judaism' where Jews themselves need have no place, except perhaps as artifacts".[9] Writing over a decade later, Lehrer understands the phenomenon to be the product of greater Polish-Jewish collaboration than Gruber credits. In a case study of Kaźmierz, she traces how non-Jewish "heritage brokers" in post-communist Poland "have played essential roles in cultivating 'Jewish space,' where both Jews and non-Jewish Poles could begin to reimagine themselves in plural, interconnected ways".[10] Today's Jewish Kaźmierz is a "result of two overlapping subaltern memory projects – a local Polish one and a foreign Jewish one imported by tourism".[11] Under both interpretations, the production of Jewish memory is unequally shared. This is in part because Jews and Poles, by and large, do not live on these sites today as neighbors. The digital verse, by contrast, places Poles and Jews on the same (web) page and, accordingly, as Gruber highlights, "have changed the game, moving the goalposts and blurring the boundaries".[12]

Currently in Poland, Jewish and Catholic Poles do not even attend the same memorial ceremonies. In her contribution to this volume, Diana Pinto discusses how two ceremonies commemorating the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Warsaw Ghetto Insurrection were held in Warsaw: the official government ceremony led by President Duda in front of the POLIN Museum, and the unofficial ceremony organized by vocal Polish Jews in opposition to the government, its understanding of history, and its failure to learn from that history as it committed

9 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 50.

10 Erica Lehrer, "Jewish Heritage, Pluralism, and Milieux de Mémoire: The Case of Kraków's Kazmierz", in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), p. 172.

11 Ibid., p. 171.

12 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 Years after *Virtually Jewish*", p. 15, in this current volume.

rights abuses in the present.[13] In a "glass half full" reading of the day's events, Pinto marks a turning point in official Polish treatment of Jewish history, which had traditionally taken a zero-sum game approach subsuming Jewish suffering in the Holocaust under the banner of Polish wartime suffering without addressing the genocidal particularities of the former. At the 2023 official ceremony, diverging from the government-sponsored monolithic telling of history many have come to expect, President Duda appeared to "transcend the zero-sum game approach" by including Jews in the Polish national narrative "without denying their Judaism". In his speech, he described how Jews and Poles "lived on the same soil for almost one thousand years, one could say: under one roof. Throughout different epochs in history but staying together".[14] He praised the Jewish Ghetto fighters for having learned their resistance lessons from Jewish history in the form of the Maccabees and Polish history in the example of Konstanty Julian Ordon. While this was certainly progress, in terms of Duda's more inclusive historical lens, for many, Duda's failure to extend that more universalist, and humanistic, lens to the present day – particularly regarding his treatment of Syrian and Afghani migrants trapped at the Belorussian border – suggested a need for an alternative ceremony. This ceremony began 300 meters away at the ghetto fighters' bunker at Miła 18 and ended another 250 meters further at the Umschlagplatz monument. As in our project, different motivations, politics, and audiences guided these two ceremonies. However, thanks to the digital topography we built, in our case, we managed to create a single memorial in a shared virtual space that could hold our often-conflicting aims and politics at once. The mapping project suggests hope for Pinto's "glass half full" interpretation thanks to the boundary blurring, Gruber highlights, that the virtual world provides.

In what follows, I interrogate to what extent virtual space can provide a solution to problems of contested memory in physical space and, in turn, serve as a tool for reconciliation between effected communities in the aftermath of mass atrocities. I do so by adopting Foucault's definition of a heterotopia – as a counter-site that is simultaneously "represented, contested, and inverted" – as a theoretical framework.[15] In section one, I interrogate how the materiality of the virtual world can expand our representational possibilities. In section two, I explore how virtual memorials can help to contest a monolithic telling of history that dominates physical memorials. Finally, in section three, I show how digital

13 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", in this current volume.

14 Andrzej Duda, "Nigdy nie zgodzę się na oczernianie Polski", *Oficjalna strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, January 29, 2018, https://www.president.pl/news/president-says-poles-did-not-take-part-in-holocaust-condemns-hatred,36626.

15 Foucault, "Of other spaces", p. 3.

topographies can invert the rules of space and spatial ownership in ways that enable us to find common ground. The mirror, for Foucault, represented the heterotopia par excellence. He described the experience of standing in front of a mirror where the mirror:

> [M]akes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.[16]

The Łomża digital map serves as a mirror of its own kind. On a literal level, the map reflects Łomża from its past to its present. It represents real space while simultaneously providing a terrain on which to counter harmful and divisive politics. For the Podróżnik family, the map of Łomża reflects on the memory of the murdered Jews. It also allows them to reflect their sense of attachment to Łomża onto the modern-day city. For Mikołajczyk, it reflects the possibility of creating a more tolerant, multi-cultural society in the present. For all the project collaborators, the digital space transformed over the course of the project to provide a terrain on which to imagine possible futures in Polish-Jewish relations beyond conflict and competition.

Representing Infinite Memory Spaces

The first quality of a heterotopia is that it represents real spaces. In physical space there is a limit to how much can be remembered and thus represented. Scarcity, in turn, becomes the mediator in a real-estate battle for memory space where parties curate spaces to fit their agendas. This is not the case in virtual space, where there is virtually no memory limit. That is to say that a virtual topography can provide endless representational possibilities that ensure all parties can shape their own image in accordance with their agendas without occluding another's. Scarcity ceases to be the mediator. Virtual plenitude replaces it. It was for this reason that the virtual world was so appealing to us in the first place. In writing his memoir, Podróżnik aimed to represent the "six million who could not tell their own stories".[17] We could do that in virtual space.

There were complications when we began our collaboration. These complications resulted from the fact that we were all thinking in terms of physical space where the rules of scarcity apply. In turn, we each favored including different

16 Ibid, p. 4.

17 Nathan Drew, *The Counterfeit Poles* (Minneapolis, MN: Wise Ink, 2018), dedication.

sites that we felt best represented our intentions for the project. We diverged in our curatorial approaches, particularly in how to deal with the question of materiality – what sites were lost and what sites remained – and the rhetorical consequences of representing one over the other on the shared memorial map. We understood sites of memory, or *lieux de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora defined them, to mean "complex things. At once natural and artificial, simple and ambiguous, concrete and abstract".[18] The Podróżniks favored the natural, simple, and concrete in order to demonstrate a continuity between today's Łomża and Podróżnik's lost Łomża. Mikołajczyk favored the artificial, ambiguous, and abstract in order to avoid unnecessary conflict that could arise from even insinuating the existence of Polish opportunism or collaboration in the Holocaust on the ground. We discovered these divergences as we observed the physical walking tours we created of Jewish Łomża that we planned to combine to create the shared virtual memorial map. Our problems, we would soon diagnose, extended from our decision to begin our memorial planning in the physical and convert it to the virtual.

On the walking tour Mikołajczyk and his students created, they favored memory sites of absence.[19] Mikołajczyk, for his part, wanted to demonstrate that Łomża had once been a multicultural city where people with very different customs and religious practices lived but, importantly, without stirring unproductive divisions at home. The sites included the ghetto, the synagogue, the marketplace on Stary-Rynek, the Beit Midrash, the Talmud Torah, the Yeshiva, the two Jewish cemeteries, the Jewish orphanage, and the Jewish hospital. Most of these sites either no longer existed or, in the case of the cemeteries, were heavily damaged. Only the Jewish orphanage and the Jewish hospital remained. The orphanage is now private housing, the only private dwelling included. The hospital is Mikołajczyk's school. As the beginning and ending point of the tour, it serves as the "bridge between the past and the need to commemorate Jewish inhabitants of Łomża".[20]

By contrast, the Podróżniks' walking tour was almost entirely composed of "bridges". The family wanted to demonstrate a continuity between Podróżnik's and present-day Łomża; one that would allow them to anchor his survival story in the present-day city, and, accordingly, stress the familial connection and attachment. We went to the river Narew where Podróżnik swam. We walked to Jakub Waga Park where Podróżnik and his wife walked. We visited the family's cinema, or at least the bricks that once made up its exterior. We walked by the

18 Pierre Nora, *The Realms of Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.

19 See SZL (2012).

20 Forum for Leaders of Dialogue, "Marcin Mikołajczyk": http://dialog.org.pl/liderzy-dialogu/en/lider/marcin-mikolajczyk-2/.

former homes of many of the people Podróżnik listed in his memoir, such as the Młotek family home at 20 Długa Street, which remains a residential site. A number of other present-day residential sites made the tour route including Tobiasz's fur shop, the Lasko family home, and the Bengelsdorf factory, all on Długa Street.

Given that the tours of key *lieux de mémoire* were set in real space and drawn on printed maps, the representational possibilities were limited. This, in turn, encouraged us to curate sites of memory that best represented our agendas and allowed us to use scarcity as an excuse for excluding sites that did not. The solution to our problem was to lean into the virtual medium and allow it to play the mediator in a way only a virtual topography can. Eyal Weizman introduced the concept of the "threshold of detectability" whereby both that which is physically there and that which is absent carry a material weight. That material weight, whether absent or present, serves as proof that something existed. Weizman demonstrates this concept using the example of an aerial photograph taken of an Auschwitz gas chamber. In the photograph, the holes on the roof of Crematorium II hover "between being identifiable and not", materially present and absent.[21] David Irving used this "absence of evidence" in the English High Court of Justice to deny the Holocaust. However, as Weizman, drawing on the case's expert witness Robert Jan van Pelt's work, argued "the absence of evidence was certainly not evidence of an absence".[22] In a court of law it could be, as the material and immaterial are both afforded weight in argument. While the case of our map was quite different, and by no means was anybody in our collaboration suggesting any form of Holocaust denial, we, nonetheless, had to contend with the fact that the absence of certain kinds of material evidence could, if left unexplained or mediated, shape the narrative to serve external negationist agendas.

Once we plotted the places visited on our physical tours onto our shared virtual space, we, furthermore, could see that our sites collectively hovered between a similar presence-absence dichotomy to the one Weizman describes in the Auschwitz photograph. On the screen, however, all the sites just looked like pixels. We used this to our advantage. The virtual map would serve as a materiality mediator creating an equality between our preferred sites of memory in pixelated form. In turn, the still existing sites from the Podróżniks' tour served as bridges, not only between Podróżnik's Łomża and present-day Łomża, but also between the virtual and physical world. Conversely, the immaterial sites found materiality again on the digital sphere. This changed the nature and the stakes of our memo-

21 Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), p. 20.
22 Eyal Weizman, "Introduction", in Ibid, p. 364.

rial practices challenging us to rethink our priorities. Concerns from the physical world continued to carry over in the virtual. For instance, we still had to consider the consequences of including residential homes. Locals might see their homes represented on the map, which could raise questions about its provenance. However, the fact that the still existing residential homes appeared in the same materiality as the no longer existing sites changed the way we digested the material. The Podróżniks could still feel as if they had a bridge into modern-day Łomża, while Mikołajczyk's very real concerns about raising conflict on the ground could be relieved, precisely by the fact that the virtual topography was not on the ground. It represented the ground, but it did not occupy it. This distinction was important. The map itself could only cast a shadow memory over the physical realm. In turn, we could place an infinite number of Łomża's murdered Jews on the map, marking the no longer standing Golabek family home on Senatorska Street alongside the still standing Ostrov family home on Dworna Street. In this way, the digital topography succeeded in reconciling Polish-Jewish memory practices and the anxieties that drove them in one memorial while representing an infinite number of Łomża's Jews.

Contesting Concrete Memory

The second quality of a heterotopia, for Foucault, is that it contests real space. Our virtual memorial space did this by contesting nationalist motivated historical narratives on the ground while simultaneously providing us a space to work on reconciling our points of contention. Perhaps our greatest point of conflict in the project was over the inclusion of Jedwabne on our virtual map and, particularly, the narrative attached to it. In his memoir, Podróżnik recalled the aftermath of the pogrom:

> Refugees from other towns began to arrive in the ghetto. These were the remaining few who somehow managed to escape the massacres and slaughters in their own towns and make it to our city. We found out from them that in Jedwabne 1,500 people were burned alive in a stable.[23]

Mikołajczyk had his concerns. The subject of Jedwabne was divisive, as the event that instigated the proposal of the 2018 "Holocaust Law". Mikołajczyk, responding to pressures on the ground, favored using the Polish *Instytut Pamieci Narodowej* (IPN; the Institute of National Remembrances) report's account of the total

23 Drew, *Counterfeit Poles*, p. 21.

murdered, 340 Jews, while the Podróżniks favored using Jan Gross's estimated 1,600 murdered. The idea of citing an IPN report for the Podróżniks was out of the question. The IPN, or "ministry of memory" as it has been mockingly called, with its pro-PiS leanings, has a stated mission of protecting "the reputation of the Republic of Poland and the Polish Nation".[24] It seemed we were at a dead-end. However, the virtual topography, given its quality to contest all that exists in the real, provided a means for reconciliation that would allow us to continue to share a memorial space without having to share a narrative.

In finding a solution, we were guided by the work of post-colonial scholars who have attempted to reread Nora's *lieux de mémoire* project in a way that expands the national narrative. In *Postcolonial Realms of Memory*, the editors compiled a collection of essays to discover and interrogate *lieux de mémoire* "around which cohere traces of colonial memory".[25] The project was a direct response to Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–92) and the fact that, blinded by a methodological nationalism, he failed to account for colonial realms of memory. As the collection's editors explain in their introduction, Nora's seminal work has "become emblematic of a certain French incapacity and/or unwillingness to engage with the inherent and increasingly undeniable imbrication of the colonial in the *roman national*".[26] By adding new points of memory to the national narrative, the scholars worked to expand and contest it. We tried to do the same for Poland by similarly expanding the kinds of *lieux de mémoire* included on the map and thus contesting the history on the ground.

In physical space, there can of course be multiple viewpoints, multiple readings of history, and multiple interpretations thereof. However, they are not all afforded equal influence and rarely appear in the same place, particularly in memorial form. It is, in no small part, for this reason that two memorials took place in Warsaw for the ghetto uprising's 80th anniversary and not one. At first, it seemed as if in the case of Jedwabne we were going to have to settle for a two-memorial solution as well.

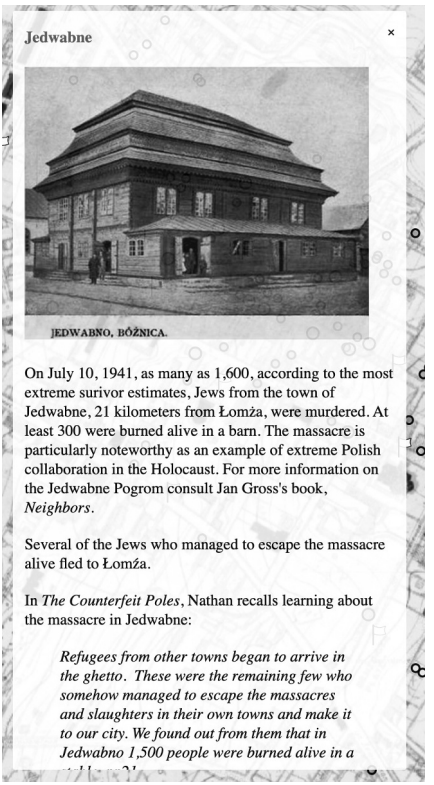
We had always planned to have both a Polish and English language map in order to broaden the audience of the memorial. We decided to use this to our advantage. Recognizing that different communities would be visiting the respective maps – Poles, and mainly Łomżians, the Polish map, and an international community largely composed of Jews, the English map – we worked, as public history scholar Sheila Brennan advises for such projects, to "place [the likely]

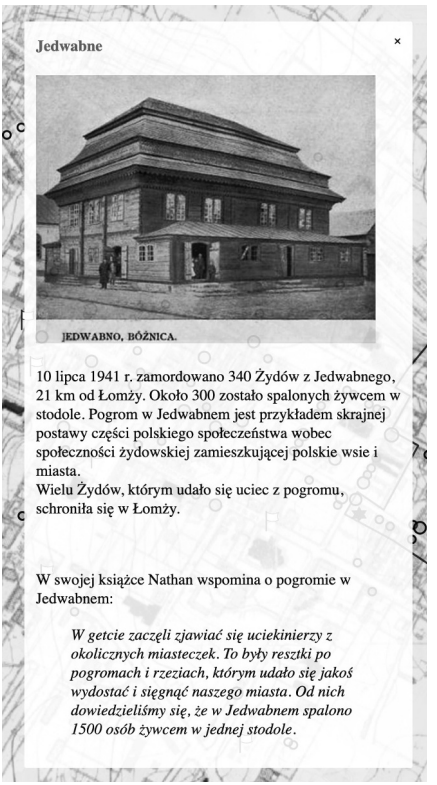
24 See Polish Journal of Laws of 2016, item 1575.

25 Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), p. 2.

26 Ibid., pp. 5–6.

communities [. . .] at their core".[27] That is to say that we prioritized the needs, and concerns, of our two publics (See Figs. 2-3 for our solution). On the Polish language map, we provided the IPN's conservative estimate of 340 murdered Jews. Next to this, however, we agreed to include the quote from Podróżnik's memoir where he cited that 1,500 Jews were murdered. There would be no mention of Gross's *Neighbors*. These decisions were made so as not to create excessive and unnecessary divisions, particularly ones that might harm those living in Łomża today. We then used the English language map to contest the historical under-





Figs. 2–3: The Polish (https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/fullscreen/lomza-map-326#records/600) and English (https://counterfeitpoles.com/neatline/fullscreen/lomza-map#records/235) language maps for the Jedwabne marker.

27 Shiela Brennan, "Public, First", in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. 354–67.

standing in Poland. Here, we cited Gross's estimate of 1,600 murdered. We urged viewers to read *Neighbors* and learn about the controversy behind it. We also provided passages from two English language survivor accounts from Łomża who remembered the pogrom in their neighboring town.

The two-map solution was a concession in so far as we were separating what would likely be Jewish and Polish audiences onto different maps. However, we chose to view it as a steppingstone towards reconciliation rather than a step back. The virtual space gave us the opportunity to come together in spite of our divergences, thanks in part, to its malleable nature whereby points on the map and accompanying descriptions can be altered with ease. The fact that points could be added or removed with a single click, by contrast to if we were building the memorial in stone, relieved some of the anxiety and sense of permanence. In this way, virtual memory appeared less daunting, even as it maintained a connection to the real world and the associated stakes. Our narratives could diverge, but they would do so on the same webpage, on virtually identical maps. They would simultaneously contest each other and, to different degrees, an accepted nationalist telling of the Jedwabne pogrom. This would enable us to maintain continued dialogue with the goal to one day combine the two maps into one. The virtual topography came to resemble a space apart where we could contest the logics of the physical world that would push us towards two memorials and two groups.

Inverting the Rules of Space and Space Ownership

The final quality of a heterotopia for Foucault was that it inverts real spaces. Our digital topography inverts the rules of space and spatial ownership in ways that enabled our groups to find common ground and reconciliation. In *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg uses a spatial lexicon to describe processes of memory. He does so by employing terms to describe it such as "borders", "directionality", "occupations", and "real estate". Space becomes a semantic network that threads through his analysis. Rothberg asks his readers to understand memory as a "malleable discursive space", shaped by the dynamics of multidirectional memory. The digital world, it seemed, could serve as a different kind of "malleable discursive space" as it does not necessarily have to rely on tactics of "negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" that Rothberg argues create multidirec-

tional memory.[28] Such tactics may be necessary in the physical world where there is inherently limited space, but not on a virtual topography where it is *virtually* limitless. That is to say that ownership is not necessarily a binary in virtual space as it is in physical space where one owns a space, and another does not. On the virtual map, two people could claim full ownership of the same site, or city, on equal terms and work side by side to shape the memory it reflects without occluding the other's work.

In the case of Polish-Jewish relations, Lehrer observed that "Polish-Jewish reconciliation has not been necessary, as the two groups no longer inhabit the same geographical space".[29] Even if reconciliation efforts were to take place, particularly through heritage production on the ground, the collaboration would necessarily be on unequal terms from the start, as one group would occupy, and possibly even own, the space and the other would not. This was the case in our project. Mikołajczyk and his students lived in Łomża. The Podróżniks lived in America. Seen through the lens of Gruber's and Lehrer's analyses of Jewish memory production in Poland, the best-case scenario would be a shared heritage production, most comparable to a short-term lease where the Podróżniks would visit Łomża once a year to offer home improvement suggestions based on inherited knowledge and Mikołajczyk and his students would decide what to keep. For instance, we had an early discussion about installing a plaque on the tennis court for Mikołajczyk's school, the former site of the Talmud Torah, in honor of Podróżnik, who had been a physical education instructor there. The Podróżniks raised the idea. Mikołajczyk heard it. The Podróżniks returned to America. The idea was forgotten.

On the virtual topography, however, we built a space where the rules of ownership and spatial occupation were inverted. We did this by creating an anachronic memorial. We were guided here by historian Charles Romney, who has encouraged public historians to embrace "multiple chronologies, unstable chronologies, or contested chronologies", as a means to "enhance the interpretation of our urban past".[30] Instead of choosing a single map background we picked three representing three historical periods. By layering them on top of each other and altering the visibility settings to make each transparent, it became impossible to temporally locate the represented Łomża. While for much of the project it had seemed as if the Podróżniks owned a lost Łomża of the past and Mikołajczyk and

28 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 5.

29 Lehrer, "Jewish Heritage", p. 178.

30 Charles Romney, "New City Guides and Anachronic Public History", *The Public Historian* 37/4 (2015): 29.

his students owned the city in the present, on the virtual ground, neither party had a clear home court advantage. Everyone had to find their bearings on entering the anachronic board. Both parties' claims to ownership of Łomża were represented without denying the others. It followed that when we fought over the memory plotted on the virtual space, we did so as neighbors with equal rights to the map. In turn, we could negotiate the finer points of our contestations in a shared Łomża.

Back through the Looking Glass

Until this point, I have focused on the ways in which the mapping project enabled our two parties to find a kind of reconciliation in the virtual world. I discussed the reflection in the mirror of Foucault's heterotopia. But how did this reflect onto the material world, the object in the mirror? In what remains, I interrogate the effect of our virtual reconciliation on the involved communities and how it guided reconciliation in real space. These effects became particularly clear as we prepared for, and ultimately participated in, the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the Łomża ghetto in November 2022. For the occasion, we stepped out of our collective virtual Łomża and onto its material streets. What followed was open exchange. It did not always go smoothly. There were certainly uncomfortable moments. However, the shared world we had projected onto the virtual map seemed to be making its way back through the looking glass in positive ways.

The first glimpse of the reflection in reverse came almost a year into our collaboration. Mikołajczyk asked me to write a piece for the physical tour guide that would be distributed around Łomża and officially launched at the 80th anniversary events. I wrote a piece entitled "A Walk with Nathan and Helen" where I guided readers through Podróżnik's Łomża. The sites were chosen because they remained, in both Nachman's Łomża and today's Łomża, places associated with a shared humanity. Whether Jewish or Catholic, these sites served, or continue to serve, for all Łomża's citizens as places of home, learning, socializing, and communal fun. For instance, the tour took visitors to 5 Stary-Rynek where Podróżnik and his wife married in 1938. Today, the building is an ice-cream shop. The point was to highlight how despite the passage of time, today's Łomżians and Podróżnik likely shared happy associations with the space. In turn, these sites served as bridges not only between the past and the present, but also between people. Mikołajczyk also made room for me to introduce questions of collaboration that lightly pushed the boundaries of PiS-sponsored narrative gatekeeping. Next to the sites of shared humanity, I included sites of inhumanity, like Swinsky-Rynek,

"where Nazis and their collaborators rounded-up Jews to be murdered".[31] I simultaneously worked to center today's citizens of Łomża in an image Mikołajczyk would appreciate of multiculturalism. At the 80th anniversary activities, Mikołajczyk shared with a crowd that the addition of my article was "particularly important to [him]" because it provided "a new look . . . let's say, not Polish, so to speak . . . [but a] completely new dimension".[32]

The second sign the reflection was affording opportunities for reconciliation in the physical world came on October 28, 2022, when Mikołajczyk with the help of the Muzeum Północno-Mazowieckie organized a public event on Podróżnik's memoir. Attendees included students from Mikołajczyk's school familiar with the map, as well as interested locals who could take an extended Friday lunch break. The auditorium was full. The program included talks from Mikołajczyk on his guidebook, Podróżnik's son on his parents' survival, historian Adam Sokołowski on Łomża Jewry, and me on the map. The community was engaged. Mikołajczyk's students asked thoughtful questions to Podróżnik's son about how it felt to return to Łomża, his connections to Judaism and Poland. There also were more uncomfortable, or confusing, encounters. One man came from Jedwabne to ask Podróżnik's son if he knew a certain Jewish family. Another man asked him if he knew about the Poles who risked their lives to save Jews. After several moments of discomfort, however, the man switched his tone to explain that he knew some Poles had "reported on" Jews in hiding. He wanted to hear Podróżnik's son's feelings on the matter. The son replied simply. There was collaboration and aid. His father experienced both and was lucky enough to have survived, in no small part, thanks to the aid. The questions continued. The hard work we had done on the virtual map seemed to have opened the door for respectful dialogue in the Łomża town center.

On the last day of the anniversary events, we attended a concert at the Łomża Philharmonic in memory of the ghetto's liquidation. The concert demonstrated not only that we had achieved a level of respect and dialogue through our collaboration, but also that we could share culture and joy, even if at times tinged with discomfort. The program for the evening starred Dariusz Stanisław Wójcik, an opera singer, who goes by the stage name Davidek. Davidek is not Jewish but describes himself as fascinated by Jewish culture. On stage, he plays a Jew often dressed in a tallit and kippah. That evening, the concert hall was packed. The program included songs in Yiddish and Hebrew – *Tumbalalaika* and *Hatikvah* were

31 See SZL (2019).

32 "Pozorowana tożsamość", Muzeum Północno-Mazowieckie, Instytucja kultury Miasta Łomża oraz III Liceum Ogólnokształcące w Łomży, Hala Kultury, October 28, 2022.

crowd favorites – as well as music from the *Schindler's List* soundtrack performed by the Łomża Philharmonic. Interspersed between the musical numbers, members of the Łomża community read poetry and excerpts from Holocaust testimonies. The performance had its moments of discomfort. All the men wore kippahs, but few succeeded in keeping them balanced on their heads for long; bows at the end of each number proved a hurdle. Davidek made exaggerated gesticulations, leaning into the Jewish caricature. Nonetheless, there was something special going on here. The Łomża community had assembled to listen, learn, and have fun. When we first arrived in Łomża in 2019, we never could have imagined this.

As an effectively enacted heterotopia, the digital memorial map provides a terrain on which to imagine possible futures beyond conflict and competition by representing, contesting, and inverting our realities. This technological heterotopianism can guide our heritage production and memorialization efforts in more productive and inclusive ways. Our project is only a micro example and one that was conducted between an open-minded Jewish family and a sympathetic Polish educator with his intellectually curious and compassionate students – conditions that were certainly not in place for the 80th anniversary events Pinto discusses nor in the majority of cases Gruber and Lehrer confront. Yet, the fact that we could make this project work in a town 20 kilometers from the epicenter of the collaboration scandal, I contend, should give us hope for building common ground. The map, ultimately, can only serve as reconciliation mediator if we are willing to engage on it. Importantly, in doing so, it seems, many of our anxieties around heritage production and memorialization could be addressed and relieved.

After Davidek's concert, the Podróżniks, Mikołajczyk, local friends, and I went to dinner. We ate pulled pork sandwiches on challah. The sandwich seemed to sum up our project representing two worlds coming together: Polish and Jewish. It was not perfect, and in the case of the sandwich certainly not kosher, but it was progress. As we left the restaurant, a friend of Mikołajczyk's wanted to take photographs of the group. "Now all the Polish men", she called. She ushered Podróżnik's son and grandson into the frame.

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Four Women in Social Media: Representing Jewishness in Poland and Ukraine

Introduction

A worldwide phenomenon of social media popularity, existing in parallel to the real world, is connected to the fluid nature of contemporary life – marked by dynamic social connections, geographical mobility, evolving value systems, and, equally importantly, concepts of openness and closedness. Online platforms offer individuals the opportunity to express their belonging to various communities, as well as their religious and political views. In essence, crafting a distinct social media profile around a particular aspect of one's identity (e.g., scholar, woman, mother of ten children, etc.) is a conscious strategy employed by individuals to garner attention, typically reflected in the number of followers and reactions to their posts.

In a similar vein, interactions with representatives of minority groups on a larger scale demonstrate an interest in these groups within society, at least in certain segments. Prominent social media examples representing Jews in Poland and Ukraine, two countries under the same umbrella of Eastern Europe, connected by complex Jewish history and the rupture of Jewish life during the Holocaust, could serve as platforms for discussions about the similarities and differences in treating Jews as "the synonym of alien, bizarre, hostile, and scary".[1] The surge of interest in Jewish culture and history, along with a notable revival of Jewish life – often facilitated by non-Jewish inhabitants of the region in the absence of Jews – was captured by Ruth Ellen Gruber more than 20 years ago through the concept "virtually Jewish".[2] Recent years have brought challenges in delineating the boundaries between the real and the virtual, as well as the benefits of the revival of Jewish life in the physical world, evident in both Poland and Ukraine. The question of "Jewishness", or "the fact of belonging to the group of people whose traditional religion is Judaism",[3] has now become a point of online declarations,

1 Alina Cała, *Jew. The Eternal Enemy? The History of Antisemitism in Poland* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), p. 47.

2 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

3 See "Jewishness", *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995–2025), https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/Jewishness.

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where it is supposed to be easy to check by others and thus it gives no to little space to falsification, especially in the case of popular public personalities.

In this chapter, I aim to address the following questions:

1. What is encompassed in the portrayal of "Jewishness" on the social media platforms of four personalities in Poland and Ukraine who identify themselves as Jewish?
2. What does the popularity of certain cases of interplay indicate about the status and perception of Judaism/Jewish culture in contemporary Poland and Ukraine?

This area of research – ethno-religious belonging, social media representation, and its impacts on society – is new and dynamic. Recent research on Instagram underscores the importance of ethno-racial identity characteristics in online self-presentations, including externally imposed characteristics.[4] Social psychology highlights the existence of in-group favoritism, wherein individuals tend to favor others with characteristics similar to their own. This phenomenon could be leveraged as a marketing tool on social media.[5] Highlighting the experiences of minority groups could promote greater visibility and awareness of these groups in society, as well as facilitate agency and identity-building for individuals with minority ethnic identities.[6]

Years of repression of freedom of speech and religion in the Soviet Union (where Ukraine was located) and its neighboring Socialist bloc (with Poland as a key element) made belonging to certain minorities not only inconvenient but also an unwanted topic for a long time. The emergence and development of blogs whose authors speak openly about their Jewishness signal the development of "Jewish spaces" – meeting points for both Jews and non-Jews alike, a concept offered by Diana Pinto.[7] In this regard, a social media page led by a Jewish creator (author) becomes a "Jewish space" when it attracts wider audiences, implying

4 Nadia A. J. D. Bij de Vaate, Jolanda Veldhuis, and Elli A. Konijn, "Ethno-racial identity and digitalisation in self-presentation: a large-scale Instagram content analysis", *Behaviour & Information Technology* 42 (2023): 2210–25.

5 Siddik Bozkurt, David Gligor, and Linda Hollebeek, "Ethnicity's effect on social media-based comment intention: Comparing minority and majority consumers", *Psychology & Marketing* 38 (2021).

6 Jiyar Aghapouri and Avin Ahmadi, "The representation and reconstruction of ethno-national identity on social media by Kurdish women in Rojhelat, Kurdistan-Iran", *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 21/2 (2021): 121–2.

7 Diana Pinto, "The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity", in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University: Public Lectures 1996–1999* (Budapest: Central European University, 2000), p. 197.

non-Jewish visitors. Here, the concept of "virtually Jewish" gets new meanings – being engaged as a non-Jewish follower of a Jewish creator on a virtual platform, and being virtually present as a real-life Jew, adjusting to the needs and curiosities of non-Jewish audiences. Such a platform is still a "Jewish space", as emphasized by Pinto earlier in this book, while Jews as authors define the boundaries of their page – in topics, structure, regularity of activities, etc.

An overview of the Jewish real and virtual worlds in Poland and Ukraine reveals that Jews constitute a tiny minority in both countries, comprising less than 1% of the population. The last Polish census conducted in 2021 uncovered that there are more than 17,000 people in Poland (out of 37.75 million inhabitants) who identify themselves as Jews.[8] A well-known demographer, Sergio DellaPergola, calculated around 45,000 Jews in Ukraine (out of 44.13 million inhabitants) in 2020.[9]

The whole topic of being publicly Jewish has connotations of certain anxiety in both Poland and Ukraine – as something underprivileged and connected to traumas of persecutions. Years of Soviet repressions after World War II and emphasis on the common fate of all Soviet citizens erased public discussions about separate ethnic minorities, leaving room for private, sometimes secret, gatherings of people – e.g., commemorating the massacre of Jews in Babyn Yar. Poland, formally not belonging to the Soviet Union, was a satellite state of it with a similar strategy of nation-building without paying attention to ethnic minorities. Both countries had to deal with their own problems of the void and the return of Jewish property after World War II, many of which remain unsolved even today. In this regard, being publicly Jewish and advancing topics connected to Jewishness is a groundbreaking shift in both societies.

There are several bloggers both in Poland and Ukraine who correspond to the concept of "virtually Jewish" – while not being Jewish themselves, they engage with Jewish topics. An example from Poland is a popular Instagram account in Polish by Urszula Rybicka called "Żydoteka" (13,100 followers), positioned as "the first Polish media about Jewish literature".[10] An example from Ukraine is Helena Shot, founder of the Yiddish Vinkl project in both English and Yiddish

8 *Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna i ekonomiczna ludności Polski w świetle wyników NSP 2021* [The condition and demographic, social and economic structure of the Polish population in the light of the National Census 2021] (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2023), p. 115.

9 Sergio DellaPergola, "World Jewish Population 2020", in *The American Jewish Year Book 2020*, ed. Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin, vol. 120 (Cham, SUI: Springer, 2020), pp. 300–2.

10 Instagram, "Zydoteka", accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/zydoteka/.

(1,825 followers on Instagram).[11] While most bloggers connected to Poland write in Polish, bloggers in Ukraine often choose between Ukrainian and Russian. This question became vital due to the weaponizing of Russian as an instrument of cultural warfare by Russia against Ukraine, and correspondent statements by Russian officials about Ukrainian as a non-existent language. In this regard, it is important to note the various initiatives around translating Jewish religious texts into Ukrainian (instead of the common use of Russian translations) since the Russian invasion.[12] At the same time, I assume that Russian propaganda about Ukraine as a state that needs to be "de-Nazified" has put an extra burden on the Jewish bloggers in Ukraine, including in their choice of language.

Public Jewishness on social media is connected to a general trend of greater popularity of blogging among women than men. In other words, "Jewish spaces" in this research are also places initiated and organized by women. However, having mostly women as Jewish bloggers raises questions about the place of the topics they cover within the social hierarchy, as well as their possible distance from political and socially significant issues in society.[13] For instance, 90% of profiles labelled "the most influential" belong to men in Ukraine, with an additional emphasis on the importance of war in their posts,[14] while 90% of Instagram profiles labelled "the most popular" belong to women.[15] This leads us to a question about the case selection for this research.

Methodology and Cases of Analysis

In this research, I aimed to analyze cases of public personalities who write about Judaism and Jews, define themselves as Jews, and relate either to Poland or Ukraine. Moreover, I aimed to include different social media platforms, namely

11 Instagram, "Yiddish vinkl", accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/yiddish_vinkl/.

12 A known example of a translator into Ukrainian is Michal Stamova with 1,700 followers on her Facebook page, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100008591657550.

13 Lenka Vochocová, "Witty divas, nice mothers and tough girls in a sexist world: experiences and strategies of female influencers in online political debates", *Media, Culture & Society* 40/4 (2017): 3.

14 Sofia Broitman, "The 11 most influential bloggers in Ukraine have been named", *Lux FM*, accessed May 19, 2024, https://lux.fm/nazvali-11-najvplivovishih-blogeriv-ukrayini_n135728.

15 Alina Melnyk, "Top 10 Instagram bloggers in Ukraine", *Comments.ua*, September 20, 2023, accessed May 19, 2024, https://stars.comments.ua/ua/news/person/top-10-instagram-blogeriv-ukraini-scho-vidomo-pro-populyarnih-blogeriv-u-instagram-718390.html.

Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Facebook is the most popular platform in both Poland and Ukraine, specifically for people in the 25–34 year old age group. Instagram similarly has popularity among this age group, but also among those aged 18–24 years old, while TikTok appeals to the youngest generation, up to 25 years old. In terms of content, Facebook is focused on more informative posts, Instagram on images, and TikTok on brief videos and more entertaining content. At the same time, TikTok has been specifically found to be connected to the spreading of misinformation about the Russian war in Ukraine, which broadens its influence beyond entertainment.[16]

My preliminary Internet search, as well as my existing knowledge in the field and consultations with colleagues, led me to select four cases for this analysis, two in Poland and two in Ukraine:

1. Miriam Synger, the most popular Jewish creator in Poland, with 73,400 followers on her Instagram account "jestem_zydowka" ("I am a Jewess", in Polish).[17] Miriam identifies herself as an Orthodox Jewish blogger and educator, intending to deliver her messages in Polish for non-Jewish audiences in Poland. In her public interviews, Miriam spoke about the inherited importance of sharing a written word.[18] Growing up secular, Miriam chose a religious path at a certain point in her life. Miriam has five kids, and she places emphasis on their everyday life in her blog. One of Miriam's side activities is hand-made jewelry, which she advertises through her blog. Miriam lives in Krakow.
2. Golda Tencer is a known Jewish activist and leader in Poland. Golda, born in 1949 in post-war Poland, is a unique memory keeper who lived in Poland during the 1968–72 anti-Zionist campaign, and the ensuing anti-Jewish harassment and correspondent mass emigration from Poland.[19] She is the head of

16 Olga Robinson, Adam Robinson, and Shayan Sardarizadeh, "Ukraine war: How TikTok fakes pushed Russian lies to millions", *BBC Verify*, December 15, 2023, accessed May 19, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67687449.

17 Instagram, "jestem_zydowka", accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/jestem_zydowka/.

18 Marta Szarejko, "Ludziom coś się nie składa. Rozmowa z Miriam Synger" [Something is wrong with people. A talk with Miriam Synger], *Dwutygodnik* 251 (2018): 11, accessed October 14, 2024, https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/8106-ludziom-sie-cos-nie-sklada.html.

19 The anti-Jewish political campaign in Poland was connected to the politics of the Soviet Union that withdrew all diplomatic ties with Israel after its successes in the Six-Day War in 1967. The campaign in Poland forced no less than 13,000 people with Jewish backgrounds to leave Poland. This painful time was discussed in some interviews with Golda Tencer, for example: "Gołda Tencer i jej historia jak z filmu: 'Wszyscy moi przyjaciele wyjechali, zostały puste domy'" [Golda Tencer and her history as if in a movie: "All my friends left, only empty houses were left"], *Dzień*

several organizations and initiatives in Warsaw: the Jewish Theater in Warsaw, the "Shalom" Foundation, the Centre for Yiddish Culture, and the Festival for Jewish Culture "Warszawa Singera". She has about 8,000 followers on Facebook, communicating in Polish for a Polish-speaking audience. Golda is also an actress and a singer.[20]

3. Vlada Nedak is an executive director of "Project Kesher Ukraine", an international organization that focuses on Jewish women's empowerment, and a Ukrainian Jewish community leader. On her Facebook page, where Vlada has 1,500 followers, she describes herself as a head of civic organizations who supports women and helps to connect businesses with the civic sector.[21] Vlada lives with her family in Kryvyi Rig, a large industrial city in Central Ukraine, sharing mostly professional content in Ukrainian for her audience in Ukraine.[22]
4. Nusia Verkhovska is a popular Jewish blogger from Odesa, Ukraine, with 29,000 followers on her TikTok account "nusia_jewish_odessa".[23] Nadia is one of the heads of the Jewish Museum of Odesa "Migdal-Shorashim" ("Tower of Roots", in Hebrew). She identifies herself as an Orthodox Jew aiming to inform others about Jewish traditions and Judaism in a playful manner, adapted to the typically forms, formats, and audience expectations of TikTok content. Nusia delivers her messages in Russian, attracting a wide Russian-speaking audience (including Russians in Russia), while at the same time emphasizing her strong support of Ukraine and towards her own city of Odesa. In this regard, reactions to Nusia's blog are probably the most emotionally charged among our four case studies, as the commenters offer varied and different perspectives on Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Of the individuals mentioned above, most of the women belong to the same age group (around 30–40 years old), with the exception of Golda Tencer, who repre-

dobry. TVN (2020), accessed May 19, 2024, https://dziendobry.tvn.pl/gwiazdy/golda-tencer-i-jej-filmowa-historia-wszyscy-moi-przyjaciele-wyjechali-zostaly-puste-domy-da309227-ls5329224.

20 Facebook page of Golda Tencer, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1499558332.

21 As of 2024, Vlada has also launched a new podcast, "Tvoie. Moie" ("Yours. Mine", in Ukrainian), on YouTube, where she invites guests to discuss various topics from an intergenerational perspective: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCEC9YSzPyzC6L2xELkVkH3Q/videos, accessed October 8, 2024.

22 Facebook page of Vlada Nedak, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/nedakvlada.

23 TikTok profile of Nusia Verkhovska, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.tiktok.com/@nusia_jewish_odessa.

sents a different generational perspective on social media and publicity in general. All four women have different platforms for public representation, and I selected the most popular platform for each case. Each page chosen for this research is publicly accessible.

I employ a qualitative content analysis of their introductions on their respective social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) and any available public interviews, as well as on their most popular posts during 2022–3. The main aim of the analysis is to analyze existing patterns of representing Jewishness on social media in both Poland and Ukraine and the outcomes of these patterns in their respective societies. I consider whether it is possible to speak about certain Eastern European trends more generally, or if it is more relevant to talk about unique situations and the role of public Jewishness therein.

I initially selected a two-year period in order to allow for a full calendar cycle and eliminate any random pauses or periods of reduced activity on each platform. However, the period of research itself encompassed some challenging developments: the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War II, which made Poland the main international hub for refugees from Ukraine, including Jewish refugees; as well as the attack by the terrorist group Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the response of Israel in Gaza, which fueled considerable anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic sentiment internationally, without much differentiation between the two in the virtual world. Being a contemporary Jewish blogger posed new challenges and raised questions about the functions of each Jewish space, its relation to the past and the present, the personal, the communal, and the political.

Research Results

The whole dataset consists of 1,117 posts, with the largest share of posts being by Golda Tencer (538), and then relatively comparable shares of posts by Nusia Verkhovska (232), Miriam Synger (178), and Vlada Nedak (169). Notably, 87% of Golda's[24] posts are related to Jewish topics, similar to 81% of posts by Nusia, while this is relevant for 70% of Miriam's posts, and 46% of posts by Vlada. These number provide diversity in terms of both the intensity and focus on Jewish topics by each personality.

Each of the four personalities has a distinct profile picture displaying their face; Vlada and Golda appear more professional, whereas Miriam and Nusia look

24 For the convenience of readers, henceforth I will mostly refer to each personality by their first name.

more theatrical. This general perception is also evident in both the format and content of their respective social media pages:

1. Most of the posts by Miriam and Nusia include images of themselves. Miriam consistently wears a headscarf, or a shawl styled as a turban, underscoring her identity as a married Orthodox woman. Similarly, Nusia appears in her blog wearing hats or a wig, aligning with Orthodox Jewish customs.
2. Golda's posts predominantly highlight her professional activities, showcasing photos from related events. She rarely posts personal images unless they are event-specific. Vlada takes a middle-ground approach, sharing both personal photos and event-related images, each accompanied by professional insights. Neither Golda nor Vlada emphasize their Jewish identity through clothing, with only occasional exceptions, such as when Vlada is wrapped in an Israeli flag to discuss topics related to Israel.
3. Both Miriam and Nusia explicitly reference their Jewish identity in their account names, reinforcing their cultural and religious connection.

Generally, the activities of all four women are intertwined with Jewish tradition and Jewishness, albeit in varying ways. It is noteworthy that greetings for Jewish holidays are a common theme across all four cases, indicating both their involvement in celebrations and the audience's potential interest in understanding the significance of these events. In the case of Vlada, holidays serve a pretext for sharing some Jewish stories connected to her family. At the same time, Miriam and Nusia extensively cover general topics related to Jews and Judaism, often addressing questions from their readers. They both identify as Orthodox Jews, being remarried with children from previous marriages; they both became religious during the courses of their lives, implying they have an extensive knowledge of the secular world. Nusia's posts often delve into private relationships and marriage, in most cases infused with humor, setting her apart from the other three cases.

Identity Matters: Being Publicly Jewish in Poland and Ukraine

Despite the particular characteristics of each woman in my research, I grouped their Jewishness-related posts under certain similar categories: professional activities and social initiatives; Judaism; Jewish culture; historical events; identification with the place they live in while being Jewish; current war reflections; personal Jewish story; antisemitism; and Israel (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Number of posts by categories of Jewishness, 2022–3.

	Antisemitism	Israel	Jewish story	Current war	Identification with place	History, Holocaust	General Jewish culture	Judaism	Professional activities
Vlada Nedak		5	9	10	5		8		87
Miriam Synger	9	5			32		34	37	13
Golda Tencer			30			63	3		411
Nusia Verkhovska	4	3		32	11		30	78	18

Importantly, professional activities connected to Jewish life take the leading place in terms of the number of mentions, mostly due to the rich cultural initiatives connected to Golda Tencer, but characteristic for all four women. The other category typical for all cases is connected to Jewish culture (in its wider meaning – holidays, food, everyday life). It should be stressed that Golda's professional activities refer to the domain of culture, so she tends not to discuss general questions in that domain. Interestingly, questions related to the domain of Judaism are discussed exclusively by Miriam and Nusia. In both cases, their declared religiosity plays a beneficial role for their blogging activities, making both women experts in Judaism "from the inside".

While Vlada and Golda have occasional posts connected to their own Jewish heritage or Jewish lifestyle, Miriam and Nusia write about their Jewish life on a regular basis. This represents a paradox of the contemporary digital world – praising modesty and being discreet about personal matters as the highest value for Jewish observant women, the so-called "Woman of Valor",[25] alongside the international success of public blogs with open discussions on any topic led by these women. However, this is not something connected specifically to Eastern Europe, but rather a global trend of interest in mass media and social media in a specific segment of Judaism labelled as Orthodox or even Ultra-Orthodox.[26] This surge of interest is influenced by the globalization of streaming services, the rise of so-called lifestyle blogging (which showcases the daily lives of individuals), originating in the US, and the increasing number of internet users across all segments of the Jewish world, including Ultra-Orthodox communities. I interpret the popularity of blogs about Orthodox Judaism globally as a fascination with something unknown and relatively closed, which implies certain exoticization of Jews as the "Others". A particular niche in this regard is occupied by representatives of the Chabad-Lubavitch group, known for its outreach activities.[27] Interestingly, in terms of this research, it is only Nusia who belongs to the Chabad-Lubavitch community, although she does not speak extensively about it. Simultaneously, the fascination with Jewish culture as an attempt to distance oneself from the mono-

25 Karen E. H. Skinazi, *Women of Valor. Orthodox Jewish Troll Fighters, Crime Writers, and Rock Stars in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), pp. 217–22.

26 Chavie Lieber, "Orthodox Jews Are Finally Having Their Pop Culture Moment", *The Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2023, accessed May 19, 2024, https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/television/orthodox-jews-pop-culture-tv-37c0a1d2.

27 Oren Golan and Nurit Stadler, "Building the sacred community online: the dual use of the Internet by Chabad", *Media, Culture & Society* 38/1 (2015): 15.

lithic Catholic majority is one of the visible developments in contemporary Polish society.[28]

Questions of antisemitism and identification with the place where they live were also mostly discussed by Miriam and Nusia, which could be interpreted as a blogging tendency to discuss somewhat catchy and possibly divisive topics. Interestingly, the topic of the Holocaust was raised only by Golda, hinting once again at her special role as a memory keeper. Predictably, the war in Ukraine was discussed by the women from Ukraine, who experienced it firsthand – and this may have, understandably, made a profound impact on their identification as Jews from Ukraine.

Nusia published many posts in relation to her hometown of Odesa, emphasizing her aforementioned attachment to the city.[29] An indicative example of the topics touched upon is the discussion of the so-called "Odesa language". It is implied that the significant Jewish presence throughout the city's history resulted in many Yiddish additions and the insertion of a degree of Jewish humor into local communication. Moreover, Nusia highlighted certain facts from Odesa's history and advertised her museum. Nusia created many posts about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, taking a clear pro-Ukrainian position and having discussions with the Russian supporters among her audience. She characterized both herself and her daughter as "Ukrainian", made reference to Ukrainian symbols, and described how her family missed being in Ukraine during their forced resettlement in Germany in 2022. She explained that her preference for Germany over Israel, as a shelter during the war, was due to the relative closeness of Germany to Ukraine and her long-term plans to live again in Ukraine, implying that it would be harder to return home from Israel than from Germany. It is indicative that Nusia stopped her blog after the resettlement and resumed it only after her return to Odesa.

Vlada stayed in her hometown of Kryvyi Rig and played an active role in providing humanitarian aid to people in the region. Interestingly, the number of her posts about supporting Ukraine equals the number of her posts about supporting Israel in relation to the events of October 7, 2023, and their aftermath. Describing both lands as "the land of my ancestors' past" (Israel) and "the land of my kids' future" (Ukraine), her self-identification with Ukraine is pronounced several times: "I am Ukrainian" (similar to Nusia's use of this descriptor mentioned

28 Genevieve Zubrzycki, *Resurrecting the Jew: Nationalism, Philosemitism, and Poland's Jewish Revival* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022), pp. 115–20.

29 Odesa has played an important role in Jewish history since its foundation in 1794, being a centre for Jewish manufacture, literature, and art, as well as the birthplace of Zionism.

above). Her Jewish identity was manifested indirectly, through references to her family's Jewish history, mentions of Jewish holidays, and leading the Jewish organization "Project Kesher Ukraine".

Unlike the Ukrainian cases mentioned above, where Russian aggression endangered the existence of Ukraine and precipitated changes in many people's attitudes towards the subject of Ukrainian identity, the Polish cases did not require any such similar emphasis on Polish identity. For instance, Golda does not make any statements of her identification with Poland – this fact would perhaps be too obvious for one of the most important keepers of Jewish memory and culture. Golda's attachment to Jewish culture in Poland is seen both in her professional activities and in her family stories, as discussed in numerous interviews.

Miriam, who tried life in Israel and returned to Poland, demonstrates her identification as both Jewish and Polish. This self-definition is reflected in her book cover: "I am Jewess: Diary of a Religious Feminist, Patriot, and Polish mother of many kids".[30] The concept of a "Polish mother" is a deeply embedded cultural code in Polish culture, implying the full dedication of a woman to her children and her country. It is worth mentioning in this context that Miriam's second book (published in 2024) is a children's book in Polish – "Ruth's Diary". Miriam has discussed the topic of being Jewish in Poland in great detail – having an observant family, observing Shabbat and kashrut, and celebrating Jewish holidays in a Catholic country. She also wrote a few posts about the contemporary antisemitism she has faced as a Jewish blogger in Poland, once again emphasizing her attachment to Poland as her only home. In a few posts Miriam also mentioned her specific relationship to Germany: having a German father and a German partner as the father of her first child. Such posts generated significant interest and diverse reactions from Miriam's audience, which I attribute to fulfilling her role as a blogger.

The topic of Israel was discussed at least once by all women in the research, except for Golda. At the same time, Golda was among the organizers of the initiative "Empty Shabbat table" in Warsaw in November 2023, which was dedicated to raising international awareness about the people kidnapped from Israel. Her silence on social media could be attributed to various personal reasons, her own complex life story in a socialist Poland during the anti-Zionist campaigns, as well as by the surge of anti-Zionism online.

30 Miriam Synger, *Jestem Żydówka* (Krakow: Znak, 2023).

What Attracted the Audience of Each "Jewish Space"?

Vlada has consistently emphasized her commitment to being an "agent of positive change" in Ukraine, focusing extensively on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. Her most popular post, dated February 25, 2022, reflects her deeply personal response to her 18-year-old son's decision to remain in Kyiv at the onset of the Russian invasion (305 reactions). This post captures the inner conflict between her roles as both a protective (Jewish) mother and a proud Ukrainian citizen, deeply admiring her son's courage in such turbulent times.

Another popular post, dated July 10, 2022, marked her receipt of an MA degree from the Business School at the Ukrainian Catholic University (235 reactions). For many, this post stood as a testament to the importance of education for women of all ages and backgrounds, and reinforced Vlada's own advocacy for personal and professional growth.

On September 8, 2023, Vlada's third most popular post drew attention to the physical impact of the ongoing war, describing damage to her apartment window in Kryvyi Rig (170 reactions). The reactions to this post highlight the solidarity of her followers and their shared indignation against the aggressor. These personal posts, though not directly related to Vlada's social initiatives, reveal how her audience is drawn to her more intimate reflections. Through her personal lens, she explores broader social themes of motherhood, civic pride, educational aspirations, and a strong sense of community.

Meanwhile, Nusia's most popular videos on TikTok, primarily measured by views, spotlight similar themes. Her top video posted during the period of this research documented the Hanukkah celebrations in Odesa on December 10, 2023, amassing 186,400 views. Its popularity was likely amplified by antisemitic comments questioning the appropriateness of public Jewish celebrations in war-torn, predominantly Christian Orthodox Ukraine.

Nusia's second most viewed video, posted on May 14, 2023, delves into the subject of commonly used Jewish words in Odesa, drawing 97,800 views. This video hints at the linguistic and cultural nostalgia of Yiddish in Odesa, a reflection of the city's unique heritage. Finally, her "love story" video from February 11, 2022, garnered 76,600 views by breaking stereotypes about Orthodox Jewish women; in this case, it highlighted her marriage after having two children from a previous relationship.

Miriam's posts evoke similarly complex themes. Her most popular post, which generated 7,414 reactions on December 2, 2023, envisioned an idealized homeland for Jews, free from violence – a poignant message against the backdrop

of mounting international pressure on Israel. Another post, garnering 7,123 reactions, humorously explored the ways Hebrew names can sound peculiar in Poland, echoing the cross-linguistic themes Nusia touched on earlier. Her third most popular post, titled "What do I think about the situation in Israel?" (October 9, 2023, with 6,821 reactions), was striking in its ambiguity; here, Miriam chose to remain silent, perhaps reflecting her audience's expectations and a preference for diplomacy over controversy. Miriam's most viral video, "Don't be afraid of me", posted on June 4, 2023, with 430,000 views, is a response to the antisemitic stereotypes she faces in Poland: "You may sleep calmly", she states. "I won't take your house or your money. Just let me exist as a Jew". This encapsulates her social media presence, where she often engages with challenging topics surrounding Jewish identity in Poland and her own relationship with Israel.

For Golda, the theme of family plays a central role in her most popular posts. Her top post, featuring a simple photo of her mother with the caption "Mom", dated May 26, 2022, received 675 reactions. Similarly, posts celebrating her son David's birthday on September 26, 2022 (571 reactions), and a photograph of her grandmother on January 22, 2022 (515 reactions), showcase her role as a memory keeper, particularly poignant around International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Golda's role as the "A Yidishe Mame" is underscored by these posts, reflecting a cultural archetype in Jewish culture: the devoted, protective mother, managing both household and broader social roles. By contrast, Miriam Synger's book highlights the concept of the "Polish Mom", capturing her unique connection to Poland and her primarily Polish audience.

Manifestations of "Jewishness" and "Jewish Spaces"

Evidently, Nusia and Miriam engage with more controversial topics, contrasting with the professional and less contentious content shared by Vlada and Golda. This difference can be attributed to both platform choices and the bloggers' objectives: while Nusia and Miriam aim to reach a broader audience, Vlada and Golda focus on strengthening their reputations and deepening connections with their existing followers. Nusia's choice of TikTok, a platform popular among younger users, aligns with her goal of reaching a wider demographic. Observing the specificities and commonalities of each blog reveals two distinct expressions of popular Jewishness on social media.

The first is a *secular, community-oriented popular Jewishness*, characterized by family stories, professional achievements, and broad community engagement. Golda Tencer and Vlada Nedak exemplify this form.

- Golda's role as a memory keeper is strongly associated with preserving Jewish heritage and cultural memory, especially of pre-war Jewish life in Warsaw. Her social media presence is vibrant, filled with reports on Jewish events, interviews, and public gatherings. By engaging the wider Polish community interested in Jewish history and culture, as well as the local Jewish community, she builds a bridge between Poland's present and its Jewish past.
- Vlada's focus on female leadership showcases a dynamic Jewish space that promotes empowerment and social initiatives, particularly for women across Ukraine. Through sharing Jewish family stories and personal reflections, Vlada fosters a connection to personal history and encourages community involvement. While Golda's professional endeavors are deeply rooted in Jewish culture – such as directing a Jewish theater and overseeing a Yiddish center – Vlada, though she leads a Jewish organization, participates in Jewish heritage events but integrates a broader array of social issues in her work.

The second form is a *religious, individual-oriented popular Jewishness* that serves as a means of exploring Orthodox Judaism. This is embodied by Miriam Synger and Nusia Verkhovska, each offering unique insights into Jewish life and belief.

- Miriam's blog invites followers to explore Jewish culture and Judaism through her personal perspective, addressing complex social issues. Her online presence engages mostly non-Jewish Poles, as she navigates her Jewish heritage, secular background, and sociological expertise. Miriam's content often resonates with a diverse audience and attracts interest due to her openness about both Jewish and non-Jewish life in Poland.
- Nusia's platform combines humor and entertainment to explain aspects of Judaism, engaging a non-Jewish audience and attracting Russian-speaking viewers beyond Ukraine. Her interactive content covers Jewish traditions, holidays, and family life while firmly supporting a pro-Ukrainian stance amidst the ongoing Russian invasion. This stance draws controversial comments from pro-Russian followers, especially as she addresses antisemitism, Israel, and challenges common stereotypes about Jews.

In both secular and religious expressions, Nusia and Miriam often tackle contentious topics like antisemitism and Israel, while Vlada and Golda focus on heritage and leadership, showcasing the diversity within Jewish voices on social media.

Conclusion

This research identifies two distinct forms of popular Jewishness within the Jewish spaces of Eastern Europe, as represented by four women from Poland and Ukraine, moving beyond a simple division between Ukrainian Jewish and Polish Jewish spaces. The first form, *secular community-oriented Jewishness*, addresses communal needs and fosters awareness and agency, while the second, *religious individually-oriented Jewishness*, expresses Judaism and Jewish traditions through personal experiences and lifestyle. The presence of these patterns reflects similar social processes in both countries: a curiosity about certain aspects of Judaism and an interest in Jewish culture, adapted to be accessible and relevant in the Polish and Ukrainian contexts. In some instances, this reflects a fascination with the unique or "exotic" features of Jewish culture, and in others, it emphasizes a desire to build awareness about both the historical and contemporary presence of Jewish communities in the region.

Notably, each influencer's physical location contributes significantly to their sense of geographical attachment within their respective Jewish space. The Ukrainian representatives are deeply rooted in their cities, such as Odesa and Kryvyi Rig, expressing a strong identification with these locations, particularly in the context of the Russian invasion, which has reinforced their connection to Ukraine. This manifests across various forms of content, from serious reflections to more casual, entertaining posts. In contrast, the Polish cases are embedded within the cultural landscape of Poland, with Golda's connection specifically tied to Jewish cultural life in Warsaw.

The popularity of *religious individually-oriented Jewishness* on social media may indicate a broad interest among non-Jews in the perceived authenticity of religious expressions, with religious Jewishness seen as a genuine lens through which Jewish identity is viewed. Conversely, the popularity of *secular community-oriented popular Jewishness* suggests a potential for greater audience identification with creators who bridge, rather than separate, individual experiences within these Jewish spaces. The coexistence of both forms of popular Jewishness in Eastern Europe reflects simultaneous social processes: an appreciation of shared human experiences alongside a fascination with cultural differences.

It is important to acknowledge that the two Orthodox Jewish women examined here are unique within the religious world and attract attention because of their role as bloggers, which is less common in this domain. While this study focuses on the representations of popular Jewishness online, it does not encompass less popular forms within both the secular and religious realms.

Ultimately, this research captures and contextualizes popular trends at a specific moment, posing questions about the roles and functions of Jewish spaces in

contemporary Eastern Europe. These spaces interact with broader societal issues and the connections between past and present conflicts. The ongoing war in Ukraine has inevitably overshadowed many of these questions for Ukrainian Jews, pushing their relationship with Ukraine to the forefront of public discussions. Meanwhile, in Poland, Jewish topics often assume a more "safe space" within the cultural sphere or everyday life, with a degree of distance from current political debates and the situation in Israel.

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Dekel Peretz

From Lockdown to Warzone: The Digital Turn in Jewish–Muslim Encounters

Introduction

At the outset of this edited volume, Ruth Ellen Gruber introduced "Jewish virtuality" as an "intense, visible, vivid presence in places where few Jews live today". She raised the question of how the concept of "Jewish virtuality", which she coined over 20 years ago, has been affected by the rise of cyberspace virtual worlds and social media.[1] Rapid digitalization, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, has blurred the boundaries between "real" and "virtual", redefining "authentic" human connection. Our roles as not only consumers but also co-creators of social media content adds another layer to the way we view the world – that is, through the lens of social media platforms. These media platforms enable more varied representations of "Jewish virtuality", which reach new audiences. Digital virtual spaces on online communication platforms can bridge physical distances and transcend man-made and natural borders, challenging our concept of presence and sharing space.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the world, many countries imposed social distancing measures to prevent the transmission of the disease, resulting in virtual spaces and social media becoming an integral part of the public sphere, commerce, and leisure. In addition, religious organizations were compelled to adopt digital formats for their activities to maintain communal life. Congregations had to redefine the meaning of communal space and address the ensuing theological implications while adapting religious services to the limitations and capabilities of video communication platforms. These internal communal changes were the focus of prior studies examining the digitalization of religion during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the effect of digitalization on interfaith activities has been widely ignored in the research. This chapter examines the consequences and possibilities of the digitalization of interfaith encounters by focusing on frameworks that promote Jewish–Muslim dialogue in Germany.

In the four years since the COVID-19 crisis triggered transformative digitalization, the world has been subjected to several political, economic, environmental, and military crises. The following chapter pays special attention to the role that

1 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 Years after *Virtually Jewish*", in this current volume.

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mediatized encounters and virtual spaces play in times of crisis, or rather, of polycrisis – that is, overlapping and interconnected crises.[2] Because this chapter focuses on Muslim–Jewish encounters, it discusses the crises most relevant to this topic beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, namely the Israel-Gaza War of 2021, and the October 7 War, which started in 2023 and is ongoing at the time of writing. The chapter examines how these crises, with their global repercussions, translate to "local" virtual encounters and the mediatization of these encounters vis-à-vis national discourses.

The chapter also considers the intricate connection, made earlier in this book by Diana Pinto, between "Jewish Spaces" and the promotion of liberal democracy, which the extreme right and populism have placed under considerable stress during this polycrisis.[3] Pinto's "Jewish Spaces" and Gruber's "virtual Jewishness" both describe the long-term consequences of the European crises of the 20th century culminating in the Shoah. They depict the spaces of encounter, interaction, appropriation, performance, and contention between Jews and non-Jews trying to bridge the gap left behind by the Shoah. In this spirit, federal, state, and municipal policymakers promote encounters between ethnic and religious groups, especially when their relationship is perceived as inimical, as an important means of dismantling stereotypes and fostering social cohesion. This chapter examines what happens when encounters are transplanted into cyberspace with the explicit mission to expand "Jewish Spaces" into Muslim–Jewish spaces, which, as the chapter will show, are rarely exclusive but rather loaded with hope and meaning for society at large.

After discussing the literature and methodology of the research, the chapter explains the proposed distinction between two forms of interfaith digitalization established during the COVID-19 pandemic: mediatized interfaith encounters broadcast on social media channels, and interfaith dialogues conducted in ephemeral virtual spaces on online communication platforms. The final sections follow this categorization in demonstrating how the digitalization of Jewish–Muslim encounters changed during the October 7 War.

2 Adam Tooze, "Zeitenwende oder Polykrise? Das Modell Deutschland auf dem Prüfstand", *Willy Brandt Lecture* 36 (2022); Scott Janzwood and Thomas Homer-Dixon, "What Is a Global Polycrisis?", *Discussion Paper 2022–4* (2022), https://cascadeinstitute.org/technical-paper/what-is-a-global-polycrisis/.

3 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", in this current volume.

Literature, Methodology, and Terminology

The digitalization of religion did not start with the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic forced a radical shift in mindset: "The threat of the 'internet' [. . .] has been transformed into an opportunity, creating a robust sphere of new-media aimed at cultivating religious life and religious 'publics' online".[4] Researchers observing this shift within Jewish communities in real time have focused mainly on the effects of social distancing on the wellbeing of various demographic and socioeconomic groups within the Jewish community,[5] as well as the influence of virtual spaces on Jewish communal frameworks.[6] Interfaith activities – that is, organized meetings held between people who consider themselves to be representatives of two or more religious groups and based on a programmatic approach assuming religious differences[7] – are also an important aspect of communal religious life.

The few studies on interfaith work conducted during the pandemic acknowledge the importance of such activities but seldom present empirical research on their digitalization.[8] The pandemic was a unique global crisis that forced clergy and practitioners of all religions to react simultaneously. There was some direct correspondence between religious leaders in the UK.[9] However, the exchange was not a digital innovation but rather a result of long-lasting associations stemming from an established interfaith landscape. Research on interfaith in Italy has differentiated between some aspects of dialogue requiring physical exchanges

4 Lea Taragin-Zeller and Edward Kessler, "'It's Not Doctrine, This Is Just How It Is Happening!' Religious Creativity in the Time of COVID-19", *Religions* 12 (2021): 747.

5 Graham Wright et al., "Lonely in Lockdown: Predictors of Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties Among Jewish Young Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Contemporary Jewry* 41 (2021); Fides A. del Castillo, Hazel T. Biana, and Jeremiah Joven B. Joaquin, "ChurchInAction: The Role of Religious Interventions in Times of COVID-19", *Journal of Public Health* 42 (2020).

6 Levi Cooper, "Kaddish During COVID: Mourning Rituals During a Pandemic", *Contemporary Jewry* 41 (2021); Sharon Livne and Margalit Bejarano, "'It's Important to Hear a Human Voice,' Jews under COVID-19: An Oral History Project", *Contemporary Jewry* 41 (2021); Laura Yares and Sharon Avni, "'Saturday Night Seder' and the Affordances of Cultural Arts during COVID-19", *Contemporary Jewry* 41 (2021).

7 Alexander-Kenneth Nagel, "Enacting Diversity: Boundary Work and Performative Dynamics in Interreligious Activities", in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Vol. 10: Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Giuseppe Giordan and Andrew P. Lynch (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019), p. 112; Ruth Tsuria, "The Space Between Us: Considering Online Media for Interreligious Dialogue", *Religion* 50 (2020): 438.

8 E.g., Jeff C. G. Corpuz, "Religions in Action: The Role of Interreligious Dialogue during the COVID-19 Pandemic", *Journal of Public Health* 43 (2021).

9 Taragin-Zeller and Kessler, "It's Not Doctrine".

that were more difficult to transfer to the virtual field and encounters that were more amenable to digitalization.[10] The focus on the translatability of physical space into virtual space is intriguing and is extended in this chapter's analysis of virtual spaces on online communication platforms.

Due to the fleeting nature of such encounters, the abovementioned studies are based solely on interviews. In contrast, the research for this chapter also incorporated participant observation, offering further insight into lived experiences of laypeople. During the first few months of the pandemic, I conducted participant observations in two formats of Jewish–Muslim dialogue held in virtual spaces. One of these formats started before the pandemic with in-person meetings, whereas the other started online during the pandemic. I continued my participant observation after the participants transitioned or returned to in-person or hybrid meetings. I also conducted six interviews with four Jewish and two Muslim organizers of these events. This dataset is complemented by participant observations conducted during the first few months of the October 7 War. I attended eight in-person interfaith events initiated by policy makers, three interfaith dialogue events in virtual spaces, and one hybrid film screening in Berlin, which included an online discussion with the filmmakers in Israel and Gaza. Here, I also conducted more participant observations during the in-person encounters that developed out of the initial dialogue in virtual spaces.

The focus on community and the translatability of physical spaces into the virtual world ignores the fact that interfaith dialogue also serves diplomatic goals[11] conveyed through the media. Since the media has been radically transformed by digitalization, the mediatization of interfaith encounters should be explored separately from the virtual spaces that digital technology enables. In digital religion studies, "mediatization highlights how the Internet serves as a media institution informing popular conceptions of religion, thus shaping the religious discourse in the public sphere".[12] Considering the historical and contemporary significance of the figures of the Jew and the Muslim in shaping European conceptions of alterity and shared European identity,[13] the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish dialogue is

10 Andrea Casavecchia, Chiara Carbone, and Alba F. Canta, "Living Interfaith Dialogue during the Lockdown: The Role of Women in the Italian Case", *Religions* 14 (2023).

11 Marianne Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue", in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 203–4.

12 Heidi A. Campbell, "Surveying Theoretical Approaches within Digital Religion Studies", *New Media and Society* 19 (2017): 21.

13 James Renton and Ben Gidley, "Introduction: The Shared Story of Europe's Ideas of the Muslim and the Jew – A Diachronic Framework", in *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europa: A Shared Story?*, ed. James Renton and Ben Gidley (London: Palgrave, 2017), pp. 1–21.

entangled with wider discourses on collective identity that go beyond religion: "Media representations and policy debates perpetuate tropes of alterity which revolve in particular around questions of integration, migration and national identity, often pitching 'new' and 'established' minorities against each other".[14] Gidley and Everett demonstrate how these narratives oscillate between roseate historic conviviality and lachrymose interpretations. While the former emphasizes historic conviviality, the latter highlights Muslim antisemitism and Jewish Islamophobia, with the Israel-Palestine conflict looming in the background.[15]

With the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, and Israel's bloody retribution, the Israel-Palestine conflict has jumped to the foreground of public discourse around the globe, and narratives of animosity between Jews and Muslims have become prevalent. My research on the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish encounters is based on an analysis of German language formats that have a representative character and are streamed, recorded, and presented on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Spotify, where they are accessible forever, at least theoretically. The research presented in this chapter did not explore comments, hashtags, and talkbacks on social media platforms because the database was relatively limited, at least for the material created during the pandemic. Interviews conducted with Jews and Muslims who were involved in the creation of some of these formats are incorporated into the analysis. By extending my research on virtual spaces and the mediatization of interfaith encounters from the COVID-19 pandemic[16] to the initial phase of the October 7 War, this chapter analyzes the long-term impact of the pandemic induced digital turn on interfaith activities. As discussed earlier, the COVID-19 crisis has converged and overlapped with new crises and conflicts in what Tooze branded as "the polycrisis". According to Tooze, the crises might appear to be separated by space and time, but in their essence, they form a polycrisis of globalization.[17] It is hence not surprising that digital virtual spaces and mediatization that enable geography and physicality to be transcended are concomitant of the polycrisis.

14 Ben Gidley and Samuel Sami Everett, "Introduction", in *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion, Vol. 13: Jews and Muslims in Europe: Between Discourse and Experience*, ed. Samuel Sami Everett and Ben Gidley (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022), p. 1.

15 Ibid, pp. 4–6.

16 Alexander-Kenneth Nagel and Dekel Peretz, "Precarious Companionship: Discourses of Adversity and Commonality in Jewish-Muslim Dialogue Initiatives in Germany", in ibid; Dekel Peretz, "The Mediatization of Jewish–Muslim Dialogue in Germany Amid COVID-19", *Contemporary Jewry* 44 (2024). Parts of these publications have been included verbatim in this chapter.

17 Tooze, "Zeitenwende oder Polykrise?", p. 23.

The Mediatization of Interfaith Encounters

Despite social media's reputation for disruption, enabling grassroots discursive interventions through independent content creation, most of the content for the online dialogues observed during the COVID-19 pandemic was created by Jewish, interfaith, and cultural institutions, as well as the Federal Foreign Office. Independent grassroots formats were the exception. Accordingly, the mediatization process during the pandemic did not seem to offer "a profound challenge to the control which religious institutions exercise over the communication of religious symbols in public discourse".[18] A possible reason for the dominance of institutional players is that videos that stand out from the crowd require high-quality camera equipment and editing. However, as demonstrated below, social media platforms and consumption habits had radically changed by the time of the October 7 War, allowing non-institutional players to seriously challenge mainstream institutions and media. Streaming panel discussions via video communication platforms was very common in the initial lockdown phases of the pandemic but decreased in popularity as regulations were relaxed and people began to feel "Zoomed out". Podcasts enabled greater participation compared to video content because they were cheaper to produce. Nonetheless, independent productions were short-lived during the pandemic compared to podcasts that circulated during the October 7 War – many from outside Germany and in English. This might be due to the change of theme, from the realm of religion and Muslim–Jewish dialogue to the realm of politics with a focus on Palestine-Israel. Further, the theme of Jewish–Muslim/Israeli–Palestinian relations then became the epicenter of the crisis.

Rapid digitalization was needed for institutional survival when in-person gatherings were prohibited. Organizations' funding agreements required them to hold a certain number of public events. As the pandemic hit, they could only meet their obligations by adopting online formats. Some organizations attempted to implement planned in-person programming and especially panel discussions with hardly any adaptation to their mediatization. Others saw digitalization as an opportunity to reach out to new audiences and revamp the public's perception of their organization. For example, a Christian-Muslim-Jewish interfaith organization whose public image centered on an older generation of male clergy created

18 Mia Lövheim, "A Voice of Their Own: Young Muslim Women, Blogs, and Religion", in *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*, ed. Hjarvard Stig and Mia Lövheim (Gothenburg: Nordicom, 2012), p. 132.

enduring alternative representations through a podcast featuring young, female representatives of the Abrahamic faiths.

The professed purpose of most of the digital interfaith formats under study was political education and antisemitism prevention. Jewish institutions perceived combating antisemitism, specifically among Muslims, as the primary goal of Jewish–Muslim dialogue. Cultural institutions and student organizations advocated the acceptance of social and cultural diversity, challenging the pressure to integrate into an ostensible majority culture (*Leitkultur*). Social media's main advantage over in-person events is its potential national reach. Furthermore, Jews account for less than 0.2%, and Muslims for approximately 6.5%, of the German population.[19] Encounters outside urban centers, where Jews and Muslims tend to concentrate, are extremely rare, especially considering the minuscule proportion of Jews in the population.

The absence of Jews in post-Shoah Europe was the impetus for Pinto's conceptualization of "Jewish Spaces" as an opportunity for Jews and non-Jews to co-create spaces for the pluralization of society by challenging national narratives. She emphasizes that the Jewish minority experience should be perceived as an asset.[20] The mediatization of Jewish–Muslim encounters as a conversation between minorities further popularizes this asset. It is immensely useful for bringing Jewish and Muslim voices and faces to the German countryside and thus further promoting this democratization process, especially through schoolteachers' integration of such content in educational material. My interlocutors observed that teachers were the main group that approached them on social media to consult on issues pertaining to their respective religions.

Another advantage of mediatization is that it allows for the "personalization of religion" and accentuation of personal experience.[21] One of my interlocutors compared her work in a program bringing Muslim theologians and rabbis together to schools to her interfaith podcast. Both actions are meant to educate people about contemporary religious practices; however, when Jewish and Muslim

19 Sergio DellaPergola and Daniel Staetsky, *Jews in Europe at the Turn of the Millennium: Population Trends and Estimates* (London: Jewish Policy Research Institute (JPR), European Jewish Demography Unit, 2020), p. 31; Katrin Pfündel, Anja Stichs, and Kerstin Tanis, *Muslimisches Leben in Deutschland 2020: Studie im Auftrag der Deutschen Islam Konferenz* (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), Forschungszentrum Migration, Integration und Asyl (FZ), 2021). German government censuses do not record religion. Muslims are estimated based on migration from countries whose population is predominantly Muslim. While statistics on community membership serve as a basis for calculations of Jewish populations, estimates vary in accordance with different definitions of who is Jewish.

20 Pinto, "Jewish Spaces", p. 23.

21 Lövheim, "A Voice of Their Own", p. 131.

clerics visit a classroom, the occasion is very official. She is perceived as a representative of her religion, whereas in her podcast, she feels free to speak as an individual. She and her co-podcasters often reiterate in their shows that religions are not monolithic but rather internally diverse, meaning that the hosts express their personal opinions and do not profess to speak for Islam, Judaism, or Christianity as a whole. The podcast is important for her as an alternative to what she considers the mainstream media's othering of Muslims and to social media content created by fundamentalist groups to recruit alienated youth. Based on my conversations with Muslim youths and parents, distrust in mainstream media has become more pronounced since the October 7 War and has been accompanied by a feeling that Muslims are generally suspected of harboring antidemocratic fundamentalist sentiments.

The institutional backing of online formats and their long shelf life led to the careful screening of participants' social media accounts when institutional reputations were on the line. Conservative Jewish institutions venturing into Jewish–Muslim dialogue wanted fresh faces and a feeling of engaging "ordinary people" instead of the usual community representatives in the dialogue. However, they were fearful of what they perceived as skeletons in the closet of Muslim guests, such as support for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, and ties to Islamic fundamentalist organizations. Institutional representatives were also cognizant that "ordinary people" are more likely than religious officials to say controversial things during a livestream. The goal of their mediatized dialogue formats was to present a harmonic performance of Muslim-Jewish conviviality, not heated debates on conflictual issues. Furthermore, the shift toward recorded dialogue formats severely limited the participation of "ordinary people". Muslim participants who had already agreed to participate in an in-person dialogue voiced fears of repercussions for themselves in their immediate communities or for their families living under dictatorships in countries hostile to Israel.

Cultural institutions also made extensive use of panel discussions, although these were often humorful and entailed pointedly political and social criticism. Occasionally, they created videos of poetic and aesthetic performances incorporating Jewish and Muslim protagonists. Jewish–Muslim dialogue was represented as a coalition built on a shared criticism of integrational pressures in Germany, expressed in the concept of *Leitkultur* (i.e., "core culture"), which limits the space for multidimensional identities. Religion, music, cuisine, and other cultural aspects were presented as extremely hybridized. Power asymmetries between the Christian majority society and Jewish and Muslim minorities were playfully inverted. The coalition of Jews and Muslims (and occasionally other minorities and intersectional allies) aspired to counter the divisive politics of the extreme right.

The right-wing terrorist attacks in Halle (October 2019) and Hanau (February 2020) were fresh in their minds.

The mediatization of interfaith encounter makes it more difficult for Jews and Muslims to have open and sincere conversations. As a result, these productions tend towards *performative harmony*. Considering the centrality of harmony in these mediatized interfaith encounter events, they may lack the prerequisite conditions established by Tsuria to be considered dialogue events: honesty, trust, and openness.[22] They do not "entail the chance of being challenged and the risk of becoming changed".[23] The value of mediatized interfaith encounters is on the symbolic level as *diplomatic interreligious dialogue*,[24] with an increased level of popularization and politicization.[25] Tsuria's conclusion that online discussion forums and user interactions with interfaith media should not be viewed as dialogue but "as part of a discourse, in which power, identity, and the negotiation of norms play a significant role",[26] is true for the content and not just the context of interfaith mediatization.

Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue in Digital Virtual Spaces During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The prior section dealt with the mediatization of interfaith on social media. This section discusses organized dialogue events held in digital virtual spaces – that is, using video communication platforms – that are not recorded and are therefore ephemeral in nature. Setting up a virtual space is relatively simple and inexpensive. Another advantage of these spaces is the possibility of transregional and international participation. This is particularly important because Jewish and Muslim populations in Germany tend to be concentrated in urban centers, and especially in Berlin. Nevertheless, my observation was that Muslim–Jewish dialogue events were more likely to attract transregional participants when the organizers or presenters had existing transregional networks. The question of gender was important for organizers of virtual spaces as well as transregional networks providing support for religious women, who suffer from "double mar-

22 Tsuria, "The Space Between Us", p. 441.

23 Martha Th. Frederiks, "Kenosis as a Model for Interreligious Dialogue", *Missiology: An International Review* 33 (2005): 215.

24 Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue", pp. 203–4.

25 Nagel and Peretz, "Precarious Companionship", pp. 115–16.

26 Tsuria, "The Space Between Us", p. 450.

ginalization": isolation within both their broader religious communities and feminist movements.[27]

Intersectional solidarity was a major motivation for my interlocutors' creation of exclusively bilateral dialogue formats between Jews and Muslims. Interfaith dialogue often focuses on the relationship between Christianity and other religions.[28] My Jewish and Muslim interlocutors were sensitive to the power dynamics (i.e., Christian hegemony) that guided trialogue interfaith meetings, which were mostly initiated by Christians and occurred in Christian spaces for a Christian audience with the topics determined by the Christian hosts. In these forums, my Jewish interlocutors often felt instrumentalized, and their Muslim counterparts attacked. Jewish interlocutors felt uncomfortable with Christians purposefully blurring differences between Judaism and Christianity – in the name of what can be called a *contrived siblinghood* – to "repatriate" Jews in Germany. The opportunity for dialogue is thus undermined by the enforcing of Christian projections, which fails to provide space for Jewish and Muslim Others to reveal their genuine selves.[29] Researchers have used the term "Christonormativity" to describe the invisibility and dominance of Christian privilege in Europe and the United States. Christonormativity describes how Christian traditions and perspectives define the social norms while Othering non-Christian practices. This does not contradict the state's purported advocacy of religious tolerance and diversity. Since the term draws on concepts such as heteronormativity, color-blind racism, and post-feminism, it emphasizes its intersectional implications with other forms of oppression and marginalization.[30]

My interlocutors perceived virtual spaces as an important tool for claiming space by challenging both Christian and male dominance in interfaith dialogue. Digital virtual spaces are supposedly neutral and lack religious symbols, although such symbols may appear in the physical surroundings of participants' private homes, thus shaping the character of the space. Gender could be explicitly thematized and present throughout the event by indicating participants' preferred pronouns alongside their written names. Attire plays an important role in in-person interfaith dialogue. Panelists appear in attire signaling their hierarchical position

27 Casavecchia, Carbone, and Canta, "Living Interfaith Dialogue", p. 3.

28 Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue", p. 202.

29 Ibid, p. 208.

30 Abby L. Ferber, "The Culture of Privilege: Color-Blindness, Postfeminism, and Christonormativity", *Journal of Social Issues* 68 (2012); Armin Langer, "Christonormativity as Religious Neutrality: A Critique of the Concept of State Religious Neutrality in Germany", in *Religious Freedom and the Law: Emerging Contexts for Freedom for and from Religion*, ed. Brett G. Scharffs, Asher Maoz, and Ashley Isaacson Woolley (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 182–95.

and denominational affiliation, thus accentuating differences between participants and religions. Virtual spaces tend to be informal, with participants often joining from the privacy of their homes – especially during the pandemic – without the designations of office, thus creating an atmosphere conducive to the "personalization of religion".

Yet, creating exclusive virtual spaces for bilateral Jewish–Muslim dialogue free from Christian hegemony proved to be difficult. The simultaneous digitalization of religious life during the pandemic created "an immediate religious free market for all".[31] Participants in online dialogue meetings were not required to disclose their religion. For these virtual events, the threshold for non-Jews and non-Muslims to participate was perhaps lower than in the case of in-person events, when these are presented as Jewish–Muslim dialogue events. Interventions by Christian participants added divisive tension. However, the possibility of confrontation in virtual space indicates a willingness among participants to accommodate differences and even hostility. This is a major difference from the tendency of mediatized dialogue frameworks to performative harmony. Digital virtual spaces enable open, uncensored conversation – the prerequisite for trust-building dialogue.

While technology was crucial to transcending spatial distance, the atmosphere in virtual spaces seemed to be an extension of the physical spaces that community leaders had created beforehand and not something newly created by the technology. It is important to note here that in my fieldwork, I did not find ongoing Muslim–Jewish dialogue formats of male-led religious communities during the lockdowns, or in-person dialogues after the lockdown had ended. The digital virtual spaces I visited had mostly Jewish participants, followed by Christians and finally Muslims. According to a Jewish community leader I spoke with, Jews have more experience with dialogue formats due to the roots of interfaith dialogue in the pivotal change in the church's relationship with Judaism and its commitment to dialogue after the Shoah.[32] While Jewish organizations involved in the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish dialogue perceive it as a tool for combating antisemitism among Muslims, individual Jews participating in such dialogues in-person or virtually are sometimes motivated by feelings of guilt or complicity in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Interfaith frameworks allow them to distance themselves from the conflict and send signals of conviviality to a supposed Muslim audience or society at large. Muslim participants had other motives for participation. The same Jewish community leader noted that the Muslim population of Germany is immense,

31 Taragin-Zeller and Kessler, "It's Not Doctrine".

32 Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue", p. 197.

diverse, and, for the most part, less emotionally distressed by the conflict than Jewish participants, at least prior to the October 7 War.

Mediatization of Muslim–Jewish Encounters During the October 7 War

The Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing bombing and invasion of Gaza by Israeli forces invoked a global state of emergency. This was accompanied by a sharp rise in antisemitic incidents as well as anti-Muslim hate crime in Germany.[33] With tensions rising, Berlin state politicians initially banned pro-Palestinian demonstrations, thus continuing a policy first introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the bout of fighting between Israel and Hamas in May–June of 2021, demonstrations in Berlin were dispersed, and individuals were detained for alleged antisemitic hate speech. However, the official rationale given for the repressive measures was the violation of COVID-19 regulations.[34] This precedent led to broad restriction of pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Berlin in the following years, with antisemitism and glorifications of violence cited as official justification for the restrictions replacing COVID-19 regulations.[35] This demonstrates the interconnection of crises from the perspective of policy-making. Demonstrations also became a major scene for the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish encounters during the October 7 War.

In addition to carceral measures, policy makers employed interfaith dialogue to try to regain control of the situation, or at least signal potency to the public. They secured funds for combating antisemitism and created forums bringing together religious leaders and civil society organizations dealing with deradicalization and democracy education as well as organizations monitoring and combating antisemitism. On the symbolic level, this *diplomatic interreligious dialogue* was

33 Ofek e.V., "Beratung im Krisenmodus: Update zur Beratungsstatistik von OFEK e.V. im 1. Halbjahr nach dem 7. Oktober 2023" (2024), https://ofek-beratung.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/240417-OFEK-sechs-Monate-nach-7-Oktober-%E2%80%93-Auswertung.pdf; CLAIM – Allianz gegen Islam- und Muslimfeindlichkeit, *Zivilgesellschaftliches Lagebild Antimuslimischer Rassismus: Antimuslimische Vorfälle in Deutschland 2023* (Berlin: Teilseiend e.V., 2024), pp. 27–8, https://www.claim-allianz.de/content/uploads/2024/06/20240620_lagebild-amr_2023_claim.pdf?x84807.

34 See https://www.zeit.de/news/2021-05/14/demo-mit-palaestina-flaggen-verstoesse-gegen-corona-auflagen; https://taz.de/Pro-Palaestina-Demos-weltweit/!5772473/.

35 E.g., https://www.hrw.org/de/news/2022/05/25/berlin-verbietet-demonstrationen-zum-nakbatag.

meant to transmit media-effective pictures of local conviviality and interfaith solidarity – especially between Muslims and Jews – to prevent geopolitical conflict spilling into the streets of Berlin. These official pictures were mainly circulated in traditional media. In contrast, on social media, other images circulated that focused on grassroots *dialogue of action* "in the awareness of a shared responsibility: where people suffer, injustice happens, or nature is harmed, religions must take action".[36]

While institutions led the mediatization of Jewish–Muslim dialogue during the COVID-19 pandemic, this role was quickly assumed by grassroots organizations during the October 7 War. This turn was accompanied by a shift from performative harmony to *performative disharmony*. Due to the rushed nature of the mediatization of interfaith dialogue during the pandemic, little consideration was given to the discursive practices of social media – that is, new formats, religious/cultural norms, and the linguistic choices and strategies of these different mediums.[37] Performative harmony was conducive to rebranding the use of the Internet from a threat to an opportunity. The disruptive and polarizing nature of social media was widely ignored. Performative disharmony manifested through images of Muslim-Jewish solidarity in opposition to official German politics, such as the police repression of pro-Palestinian demonstrations, the vilification of symbols of solidarity with Palestine such as the Palestinian *kefiyyeh*, and calls for Germany to suspend military and diplomatic support for Israel's warfare. Jewish-identifying symbols that explicitly proclaim solidarity with Palestine became common at pro-Palestinian demonstrations. These items, including T-shirts, banners, and watermelon *kippot* in the colors of the Palestinian flag, were also, if not predominantly, displayed by Jews who would have not worn *kippot* or identified religiously otherwise in an easily recognizable performance of Jewishness.

The visualization of Jewish presence at demonstrations served to counter the media portrayal of pro-Palestinian demonstrations as per se hostile to Jews and that Muslims and Jews were incapable of occupying the same space making certain neighborhoods no-go areas for Jews. In addition, conversations with my interlocutors revealed that reliance on mainstream media – which young Muslims perceive as criminalizing them – has reached a low point since the outbreak of the October 7 War. In parallel, the presence of Muslim media outlets and Internet influencers has strengthened during the war, and they have integrated further into the media landscape. Anne Sophie Lamine described a similar process in

36 Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue", p. 202.
37 Tsuria, "The Space Between Us", p. 449.

France after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack.[38] Social media made it possible to receive news directly from Gaza and to be exposed to personal stories that gave a face to the rising number of civilian casualties. In this process, Jews started following Muslim influencers who shared their political cause and vice versa. Accounts such as Standing Together that bring together Jewish-Muslim/Israeli-Palestinian perspectives also gained in popularity. Jewish voices critical of Israel's politics were also widely shared – possibly with the hope that the Jewish authorship of social media content will guard the sharer against accusations of antisemitism. While Jewish and Muslim bridgebuilders on domestic issues led the merging of social media bubbles during the pandemic,[39] it was now the Israel-Palestinian conflict that was driving the integration of Jewish and Muslim counter-publics.

The growing emphasis on simple visual iconography that is quickly understood is connected to the rapid technological changes that have occurred since the pandemic and altered social media consumption preferences. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have gained popularity. They enable quick photo and video editing and dissemination of small collections of photos or short videos, making full-length videos widely redundant. The production cost of social media content radically decreased, resulting in activists and influencers crowding out the institutional players who had dominated the scene in the early stages of the pandemic. Pictures and videos of the police detention of Jews, identified as such through *kippot* or slogans, at demonstrations became new icons of Jewish-Muslim solidarity. They aim to demonstrate the paradoxes of Germany's *Staatsräson* – an unfaltering support of the security of Israel as a proxy for all Jews as reparations for German responsibility for the atrocities of the Shoah.[40] Calls on Germany to reconsider its position in light of the growing civilian casualties in Gaza might be expressed by a minority of Jews in Germany. Yet, it is another example of the ongoing diversification and decentralization of Jewish representation, changing attitudes towards Zionism, and the prioritization of coalition-building with other minorities in Germany.[41]

38 Anne Sophie Lamine, "Cultivating a Common World from a Specific Place: The Case of Muslim Internet Media Outlets in France", in *Exploring Islam Beyond Orientalism and Occidentalism*, ed. Christel Gärtner and Heidemarie Winkel (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2021), pp. 252–3.

39 Peretz, "The Mediatization of Jewish-Muslim Dialogue", pp. 312–13.

40 See https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/984870/79547ce7fca4d17deedd8bf400ee7e44/WD-3-134-23-pdf.

41 Dekel Peretz, "Generation Enraged: The Journal Jalta as a Mouthpiece for Young Jews in Germany", *European Judaism* 56 (2023).

In critical interfaith media during the pandemic, coalition-building centered on opposition to German *Leitkultur*. This was replaced during the October 7 War by a scrutiny of German *Staatsräson*. Both terms refer to a supposed shared value system that migrants – and especially Muslim migrants – should adopt. This use of *Leitkultur* gained popularity after the influx of migrants from Syria in 2015. For Bassam Tibi, who coined the term *Leitkultur* in 1996, engaging with antisemitism among migrants, especially in relation to Israel, is an important aspect of the *Leitkultur* debate. However, he lamented the political instrumentalization of the term.[42] The shift towards the term *Staatsräson* foregrounds the relationship between Germany and Israel as focal point of German memory culture as an identity-forming national narrative. While a thorough comparison of the terms is beyond the scope of this chapter, the transition between them in the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish encounters demonstrates an important shift: from the domestic sphere and a mutual stand against the far right and for diversity during the pandemic, to the geopolitical sphere and Germany's foreign policy during the October 7 War.

Another example of the transition from the domestic to the geopolitical can be drawn from a comparison between coalition building during the Israel-Gaza War of 2021 and the October 7 War. In 2021, an online petition with the hashtag "undivided" (#wirlassenunsnichttrennen) was signed by many Jewish, Muslim, and interfaith initiatives.[43] Interest in the petition was so great that the flyer, designed as a single frame on social media, was hardly able to contain the names of all the initiatives and organizations endorsing the petition. Further, the organizers rejected many initiatives from officially joining the petition due to a lack of space on the flyer. At the time, the petition demonstrated a new path for Jewish-Muslim coalition-building by removing agreement on the Israel-Palestinian conflict as a prerequisite. It condemned antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism, while emphasizing that disagreements on geopolitical affairs should be respected and not be allowed to jeopardize domestic alliances. A similar initiative launched shortly after the beginning of the October 7 War was endorsed by far fewer organizations.[44] At this point, geopolitics returned to the foreground. The slogan "undivided" was now used by Jewish initiatives at demonstrations to express international solidarity with Palestine. This reflects broader demographic changes that occurred in cities such as Berlin, where migrants from not only Muslim coun-

42 Bassam Tibi, *Islamische Zuwanderung und Ihre Folgen: Der Neue Antisemitismus, Sicherheit und die "neuen Deutschen"*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2017).

43 See https://ausarten.org/wir-lassen-uns-nicht-trennen/.

44 See https://ausarten.org/we-are-the-next-generation-of-muslims-and-jews-we-are-our-only-hope/.

tries but also other EU countries, North America, and South America expressed their discontent with German national discourse and memory culture, which positions Jews as the main historical and contemporary minority.

Digital Virtual Spaces During the October 7 War

After discussing mediatization during the October 7 War, this section addresses the role of digital virtual spaces in this crisis. Interfaith meetings organized by policymakers were not only media opportunities but also spaces for in-person exchange. There were forums of different sizes and compositions. The smaller, more homogeneous ones primarily brought together practitioners of interfaith, who for the most part already knew one another. This created a safe space for participants to share their feelings since the start of the war, express solidarity or bemoan the polarization and deterioration of such solidarity in everyday life. It also created an opportunity for interfaith practitioners to communicate their needs to policymakers and help sharpen their sensibilities to the emotional complexities of Muslims and Jews in Berlin. A major question on the table was whether Jewish–Muslim dialogue is even possible while the war continues.

Shortly after the beginning of the war, one policymaker brought together a handful of Jewish and Muslim leaders – among them Palestinians and Israelis – from a neighborhood in which many Jews and Muslims live. Participants of the same faith already had standing relationships, but they had no or very little interaction with the participants of the other faith. Hence, it took considerable backchanneling to convince them to meet, with the war raging and the wounds wide open. The meetings were initially held online, partly because of the urgency of action but also because meeting online was a way to overcome participants' reluctance to meet, or to be seen meeting, the supposed enemy. Although the participants expected very little to come out of the online meeting, they commented during the proceedings about the atmosphere being surprisingly open and empathic. They also allowed themselves to show vulnerability. Palestinian and Israeli participants shared their personal losses and worries of further escalation. They realized, through their shared but separate suffering, that they had much more in common than they had expected. Further, the Muslims in the meeting were extremely aggravated and ashamed to hear that Jews were apprehensive about coming to Jewish spaces in the neighborhood because they feared being attacked by Muslims. They suggested organizing public solidarity vigils to assist Jews in reinstating their religious practice in the neighborhood. The Jewish participants acknowledged the frustration of Palestinians that they could not express

their grief in public. Finally, these conversations included a difficult but inspiring search for connection with a divine source in dark times.

The digital virtual space that was created out of the need to bridge distrust and fear of hostility ended up giving the participants hope in an otherwise forlorn global crisis. After a few further meetings in virtual spaces, participants visited one another's religious spaces, which were within a few minutes' walk of each other, for the first time. Their relationships grew, and they jointly organized a public in-person interfaith event, which was attended by many Jews and Muslims in search of hope. For many of the Jewish participants, it was the first timed they attended an interfaith event. In peaceful times, the event would probably have been perceived as mere diplomacy, but now, it provided attendees strength and belief in their newly founded path of joint Jewish-Muslim action.

In another virtual meeting I attended, activists came together to discuss the security needs of Jewish and Muslim communities. Muslim participants felt threatened by the police and hoped to develop new formats for participative security on a grassroots level in conversation with Jews, who are also objects of the securitization discourse, albeit in a different manner. The participants were predominantly women from different parts of Germany. Again, the virtual space provided a unique setting for emotional connection and expressions of vulnerability. Muslim participants shared their disappointment with what they considered to be the state's divisive role in the spillover of the war to Germany's streets and the playing off of Jewish and Muslim minorities against each other. They talked about how their sweet little boys are now perceived as public enemy number one, and how their girls – born and raised in Germany – now feel excluded from German society due to the mainstream media's portrayal of Muslims. They expressed this estrangement by speaking in terms of "us" and "them". Their worries for the safety of their elderly fathers during their mosque visits revealed what statistics of the rise in anti-Muslim hate crimes during the October 7 War later confirmed.[45]

The capacity of virtual spaces to foster hope was underscored in a screening of the video-dance documentary "Chance to Meet". The documentary was completed three months before the October 7 War began. It tells the story of relationships between Gazans and Jewish Israelis that were initiated and deepened during the COVID-19 lockdowns. They established connections through virtual spaces and made TikTok videos together from their separate homes. According to the director, Ohad Nave, once the war started, they realized that their film about meeting in cyberspace could provide a "chance" for others to meet too. Via online com-

45 CLAIM, *Antimuslimischer Rassismus*, pp. 27–8.

munication platforms, film participants from Israel and Gaza were brought into a Berlin loft, where an international crowd of about 50 people, among them many Jewish Israelis, were gathered. At the end of the film, Israeli participants shared their feelings with the filmmakers, thanking them for giving them a glimmer of hope to hold onto in their ocean of despair. One participant shared that the film and virtual encounter was "the most human thing" he had experienced in a long time. The Gazan participant – who, for a time, was imprisoned by Hamas for his relationship with Israelis – said that many people were surprised to see that Israelis and Palestinians could still work together despite the war. He addressed the power hierarchies between Gazans and Israelis in co-creating hybrid projects but emphasized that "we can't start from a perfect place".

The three examples of encounters in virtual spaces during the October 7 War demonstrate the power of such spaces to bridge mistrust. Despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of possibly threatening physical presence, the meetings enabled vulnerability and fostered empathy. Virtual spaces are less prone to visual documentation by the media and are thus resistant to being instrumentalized for representation. Relationships can continue growing into friendships in digital virtual spaces or move into real life meetings and events. Jewish–Muslim/Israeli–Palestinian encounters in virtual spaces were a source of hope and inspiration for the participants. Further, they were an important catalyst for shaking off paralysis and moving to joint action.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminated the transformative impact of digitalization on the Jewish and non-Jewish co-creation of "Jewish Spaces" and "Jewish virtuality", particularly in the context of recent geopolitical crises, which are perceived as an ongoing polycrisis. The COVID-19 pandemic served as a pivotal catalyst for digitalization. It prompted a re-evaluation of physicality and communal spaces, leading to innovative adaptations in religious practices and interfaith engagements. The chapter distinguished between mediatized interfaith encounters that are broadcast on social media and interfaith and intercultural dialogue that occurs in ephemeral virtual spaces on online communication platforms. As the chapter navigated the crises of the past four years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent October 7 War, it illustrated a shift in the dynamics of Jewish–Muslim interactions.

Mediatized interfaith encounters during the pandemic were led by well-funded institutions. They focused on combating antisemitism and discrimination.

Their permanent nature and possibility for wide dissemination when recorded led to performative harmony being prioritized over genuine dialogue. The main advantage of the mediatization of Muslim–Jewish encounters was the possibility of nationwide outreach, bringing minority positions and especially direct conversation between minorities to places where there are few Jews or Muslims. The effects of this popularization and diversified politization of these new forms of mediatized "Jewish virtuality" were amplified through their integration in educational programs.

The mediatization of encounters changed dramatically during the October 7 War. New social media channels and the focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict enabled grassroots movements to supplant institutional narratives. This corresponded to a shift from a diplomatic dialogue with a domestic focus in support of national cohesion to a dialogue of action focusing on geopolitics in opposition to German foreign policy and the targeting of minorities by law enforcement agencies. Performative disharmony became an important characteristic of the mediatization of Jewish–Muslim encounters. On the one hand, social media channels strengthened discourses of animosity between Muslims and Jews, bringing scenes of violence between these two groups to people's social media feeds. On the other hand, these channels shared portrayals of joint Muslim-Jewish solidarity and resistance in Germany, Israel, and Palestine.

Digital virtual spaces gained popularity during the pandemic as spaces for overcoming isolation and fostering solidarity. They were an important tool for alleviating double marginalization through transregional intersectional networks. Mitigating Christonormativity, power asymmetries, and patriarchal structures was an important goal of the creation of virtual spaces, pursuing the same goals Pinto ascribed to "Jewish Spaces" in upholding liberal democracies. Moreover, the analysis of virtual spaces during the ongoing war elucidates their potential as safe havens for fostering empathy and understanding amid distrust and animosity. Participants reported feelings of vulnerability and hope, revealing the capacity of digital interactions to galvanize community solidarity and mutual support, which are crucial in navigating the complexities of contemporary crises. Both aspects of the digitalization of interfaith encounters – mediatization and dialogue in virtual spaces – present an opportunity to include minorities in redefining collective identities and foster intercultural understanding in an increasingly polarized world, ultimately enriching the fabric of superdiverse societies.

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Part III: **Heritage**

Libby Langsner

Nostalgia Networks: Virtual Jewish Heritage and the European American Jewish Experience

Introduction

The European Jewish American imagination and community have certainly shaped the United States and the world at large. However, the current European American Jewish community is far more diverse and distanced from its roots, with many today finding their origins increasingly more distant. I hope to explore how the digital realm, particularly virtual reality technologies, can serve as a bridge for American Jewish identity to reconnect with European Jewish history and culture, using built heritage as a vessel for this reconnection. While working in the Jewish heritage field, I became particularly interested in virtual reality (VR) as a means to preserve Jewish heritage and connect American Jewish audiences with these spaces. Virtual reality is "the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment that can be interacted with in a seemingly real or physical way by a person using special electronic equipment, such as a helmet with a screen inside or gloves fitted with sensors".[1] Virtual reality allows users to enter digitally generated spaces and create their own paths within them. With the rise of 3D modeling of Jewish heritage spaces, virtual reality naturally lends itself to utilizing these scans to create immersive, three-dimensional environments of European synagogues, making them more accessible globally. For this paper, I will particularly address the American Jewish population with European heritage.

Challenges Connecting the American Jewish Community with European Jewish Heritage

While there are many assessments of how virtual reality may change our lives, I would like to investigate how VR affects identity and memory and apply these

1 "What Is Virtual reality? Definition from TechTarget", accessed June 15, 2024, https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/virtual-reality.

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concepts to the European American Jewish community, bridging the gap between the US and European Jewish heritage and culture. Samuel Greengard writes, "At the heart of VR is a basic concept: it's possible to be anyone – including a different version of ourselves".[2] For the European American Jewish population disconnected from their roots, VR poses an opportunity for American Jews to connect with Jewish heritage on a visceral level from the comfort of their own home. As Diana Pinto states in her contribution to this volume, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", "the need to reassess Jewish references in its past [. . .] was ideally suited to create Jewish Spaces in which Jews and non-Jews alike could embark in egalitarian terms in the research and dissemination of Jewish knowledge and identity".[3] This paper investigates how virtual reality technologies can address the need to reassess Jewish references in the past and expand Jewish knowledge and European American Jews' conception of their own identity.

I noticed this gap between the American Jewish community and their European roots firsthand as the 2020 Jewish Heritage Program fellow at the World Monuments Fund. The Program works to preserve built Jewish heritage all over the world. In my role, I met with many American Jewish philanthropic organizations to discuss this work, and there was one interaction I will never forget. I gave my usual *spiel* about visiting my grandfather's synagogue in Reghin, Romania, and how this trip triggered my interest in European Jewish heritage. Walking through the synagogue while gaining insight into the building's condition, current use, and its significance to Jewish life and the city's fabric resonated with me. I felt connected to my grandfather, walking down the aisles of the synagogue. Still, it also boded a deep well of concern for the state of the building and its lack of contextualization and commemoration of the Jewish community it once harbored. I also felt I had to bring attention to the current state of Jewish heritage sites, particularly in Romania. On a particular call, I asked a Jewish attendee where her family was from in Europe, to which she replied, "Oh, somewhere in Russia, I think". This was not a particularly unique or surprising conversation. The question of why Jewish Heritage in Europe mattered became a central question for my day-to-day work, raising funds for its preservation. While my personal story regarding heritage had its effect, I realized I needed a more cost-effective and subjective tool for those who did not see the importance of these sites to feel a connection to these physical spaces without hopping on a transatlantic flight. What I found to be a key component in these conversations was also

2 Samuel Greengard, *Virtual Reality* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), p. 162.

3 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", p. 23, in this current volume.

revitalizing a kind of nostalgia, one for an old European world whose traces can still be discovered in Manhattan's Lower East Side. My hope through the use of VR technologies is to refer back to Pinto's reference to Jewish spaces, to use them to disseminate knowledge so that American Jews feel more connected and less alien to European Jewish heritage sites and form these connections to help shape their own understanding of Jewish identity in a broader historical context.

With the advent of VR, I hoped to create a further impetus to call American Jews to do this work so they would have the opportunity to discover this heritage themselves without the obstacles of cost and accessibility that limit physical heritage travel. With current technology, one can discover where their family is from and the synagogue they frequented without leaving their living room. So, my immediate thought was to ask: What does this mean for American Jews? How can we use site-specific technologies to enable them to reconnect to their European past?

I must acknowledge the work of Vladimir Levin from Hebrew University and The Center for Jewish Art, who have made a tremendous contribution to documenting Jewish-built heritage. Without Dr. Levin's efforts, I could not discuss my topic today. I would also like to thank Jason Guberman of the American Sephardic Foundation and Pavel Katz of the Jewish Heritage Network for taking the time to speak with me to shape my research and contribute to this chapter. They have set the field's standard, and for that, I am grateful.

American Jewish Nostalgia for the Eastern European Jewish Past

The connection between American Jews and the nostalgia towards Europe can be found in many historical examples. With VR, one can reinvoke this intrigue and connection, but it is worth noting this nostalgia does not exist in a vacuum. The study of European Jewish nostalgia can be found in recent literature, such as Dara Horn's best-selling book *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*, Rachel B. Gross's *Beyond the Synagogue: American Jewish Nostalgia as Religion*, and Markus Krah's *American Jewry and the Re-Invention of the East European Jewish Past*. For the purposes of this chapter, I will use Svetlana Boym's definition of nostalgia: "Nostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a

romance with one's own fantasy".[4] Therefore, it is evident that nostalgia needs creativity and fantasy to exist – both elements factor largely in the person's memory and virtual reality experience. Memory is made from both an external object and from how the mind structures it,[5] and VR projects a new landscape and conjures elements from the past that the user has in their head – whether real or fantasy. Elements of creativity and imagination are critical for understanding the history of American Jewish nostalgia and how American Jews construct their identity. Such conclusions can also be found in more general American memory formation and politics analyses. In Alison Landesberg's *Prosthetic Memory*, she states that "[. . .] memory was invoked as a strategy for consolidating important new group identities" in the US.[6] Ultimately, fantasy and memory – key elements of nostalgia – have played a crucial role in shaping American Jewish identity. As such, VR experiences of Jewish heritage can effectively evoke a sense of identity through these concepts.

The nostalgia towards the European Jewish world often united the Jewish community as several models of American Judaism emerged.[7] As Markus Krah notes, "The mid-decades of the twentieth century witnessed an unprecedented, almost obsessive occupation of American Jews with the Eastern European past".[8] As European Jews immigrated to America, looking to the past grounded them to face the opportunities and struggles in the US.[9] Krah goes on to discuss how the community constructed narratives to form and understand their identity. He states, "Narratives play an important role in the construction of communal memory; rituals and other practices are other cultural factors in how a community establishes, expresses, and preserves a collective memory".[10] Thus, the American Jewish interest in heritage sites must be seen as a tool for the community to express and preserve communal memory. Dara Horn also notes how the American Jewish community perpetuated myths about their origin story to evade explicit discussions about antisemitism in the US.[11] This further emphasizes how central

4 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xiii.

5 Jose Van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 34.

6 Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 4.

7 Markus Krah, *American Jewry and the Re-Invention of the East European Jewish Past* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), p. 6.

8 Ibid., p. 3.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 15.

11 Dara Horn, *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present*, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2021), p. 95.

narrative formation and memory are to the Jewish American identity. In the face of digitization and virtuality, this narrative formation is further expanded on and given a subjective dimension, thus forging both one's personal identity and that of the community. These historical examples synthesize how European heritage is utilized to create identity and community in a Jewish-American context, underscoring how the virtual space harkens back to this long-established reasoning for investigating one's European past.

Recent trends on social media by American Jewish accounts have also started a resurgence of interest in the Eastern European past. For example, the New York-based Instagram page Old Jewish Men created a retail site that features a Ralph Lifshitz collection – using the Polo Ralph Lauren Logo but with the designer's European last name by birth.[12] This reclamation of the unassimilated name and choice to present it proudly on clothing is not only a wonderfully funny joke but, I would argue, an assertion to take up space and reclaim a group of young American Jews' European Jewish heritage. It is an embrace of the complicated history of generations, a dialogue between those who felt no choice but to assimilate, and a generation reclaiming their Jewish European roots. By embracing the Lifshitz name, the European American Jew demands space in public so that our names, no matter how *yiddishe* they are or hard to pronounce, are heard. The motion of this trend, I believe, will lead to more interest in not only the physical heritage sites of these groups' familial history but also a renewed interest in those stewarding these sites and their future. Additionally, I argue that this represents a desire to embrace the most authentic version of our identity, unfettered by antisemitism or the need to anglicize our European Jewish identity.

As evidenced by Rachel B. Gross's *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice*, she stipulates that the nostalgic narratives that construct identity and collective memory in the American Jewish community also serve a spiritual purpose beyond a cultural one.[13] She notes how American Jews' increased interest in American Synagogues relates to wanting to connect with the European Jewish communities who first built these spaces upon arrival to the US – and this through-line between the European past and American present is heavily drawn out to the public in these spaces.[14] This is yet another advantage of VR from the first-person perspective, as one can, quite literally, be in the position of those who

12 See "RALPH LIFSHITZ", *Old Jewish Men*, accessed December 20, 2024, https://www.oldjewishmen.net/lifshitz-collection.

13 Rachel B. Gross, *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), pp. 3–4.

14 Ibid., pp. 79–80.

built these synagogues and, with the ability to add multimedia, demonstrate how they were built in an interactive and subjectively controlled experience.

Digital Jewish Heritage

Experts in the field of digital culture heritage have also echoed the sentiment that narrative memory accompanied by new digitization technologies creates more compelling experiences for the geographically distant American Jewish audience. I had the pleasure of interviewing Jason Guberman, who heads several organizations related to Jewish digital heritage mapping based in the US, such as Diarna, which focuses on MENA countries, and Bateinu, which includes Jewish sites worldwide. Jason frequently interviews American Jews, and agrees that American Jews are becoming increasingly interested in their European heritage and lineage.[15] The caveat, he stated, is that American Jews are simply unfamiliar with these countries today, where these sites are located, and the sheer scale of the heritage that exists.[16] Therefore, the potential and desire to connect American Jews with these existing spaces and non-existent spaces is great, both fueling the imagination and demonstrating the power of these sites on the American Jewish psyche. He said, "What I think has been most critical for Diarna is that it is place-based oral histories. When we conduct oral history interviews, we're not just asking for remembrances of different stories, but we're rooting them in the synagogues and cemeteries and schools, the shrine can connect to their lives".[17] Given the overwhelmingly positive response to Diarna's website, having nostalgia for these places grounded in a virtual setting has spurred interest and yielded more users. Ultimately, this highlights another advantage of VR: its ability to connect information visually and audibly, providing context and depth to these spaces in a way that simply clicking through online pictures cannot.

Although these initiatives focused on MENA Jewish communities in the US and MENA sites, I believe the results of Jason's work demonstrate a broader need for American Jews to connect with Jewish heritage sites. This also points to how interacting with these heritage sites in virtual reality makes them easier to conceive and appreciate. Furthermore, when enmeshed with multimedia content, this approach could serve as an ideal starting point for American Jews to reconnect with and rediscover the European elements of their Jewish identity.

15 This is from an interview I conducted with Jason Guberman in 2021.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.

While the accessibility of VR makes it a wonderful tool for the European American Jewish community to connect, one must acknowledge it is a bit of a double-edged sword. VR is relatively inexpensive, with some headsets available for around 30 US dollars. Additionally, VR has components that help support those with mobility, visual, and audio impairments, and it may be one of the few ways these individuals can interact with these physical spaces. This widens the audience who can "visit" these sites by offering a more cost-effective and inclusive experience that they can take at their own pace. A valid counterpart to the inclusion of VR in the heritage sphere is that it may discourage people from traveling and visiting these sites in person, potentially harming the income of the communities and individuals stewarding these sites. However, I would argue that the benefit far outweighs the potential drawback of VR, as increasing the visibility of these sites also increases visitorship. In 2019, the Belarusian-Jewish Cultural Center held a VR exhibition of multiple synagogues, and the result of such a project was that more people wanted to visit these sites for themselves.[18] While this is a local European example, I think it demonstrates how VR has the potential to spark an interest and make something more accessible than it is in its current state. Given the increasing use of digital media in our world, people are more used to zooming in on the details of images and exploring information at their own pace. Similarly, VR makes this kind of exploration possible in a way that it is not in-person; however, as advanced as VR is, it does not capture the scale, and also, more importantly, it does not have the interpersonal interaction that comes with visiting these spaces. For many American Jews, who are physically and communally distant from these spaces, the VR experience cannot replace interacting with the community present at these sites. Therefore, I do not think it poses a significant threat to deteriorating visitorships to Jewish heritage sites; conversely, it has the opposite effect.

Conclusion

In the American European Jewish imagination, connecting to heritage sites can reinvigorate one's connection to one's background and spark nostalgia, creating a new connection with the past. In John Suler's explanation of how the digital world affects our psyche, he states: "The digital world allows individuals to

18 See "Exploring Jewish Cultural Heritage with VR – Our Case", *Exposit*, September 21, 2022, https://www.exposit.com/blog/rethinking-jewish-cultural-heritage-using-vr-exposit-client-first-hand-experience/.

narrowly or fully depict aspects of their 'real' identities from their in-person lifestyles, to establish their online selves de novo as fantasy creations, or to construct something in between as a mixture of a genuine and imagined self".[19] Thus, the digital space of a synagogue or a city creates an idyllic environment for an American Jew, potentially disconnected from their own European heritage, to combine their identity's nostalgic and contemporary aspects. The heritage site becomes a site of transformation, where one's Jewish identity can be reaffirmed in a specific geography and history. The digital world allows them to function in the way visiting a modern-day site cannot; they can walk through these places as their ancestors may have before, unfettered by contemporary politics and limitations of time, thus allowing them to see themselves more deeply and connect to their identity. "The many different types of online environments can lead to a decentered, disassociated, and multiplied expression of self", and this decentering is exactly why digitization in built space can be an extremely powerful tool in reimaging the past but living it as a modern individual.[20] Suler continues, "The more readily people can immerse themselves into an online domain, the more quickly it becomes a transitional space, an extension of their minds".[21] Digitization of built heritage is also powerful because it is intuitive – walking through a space, especially one like a synagogue familiar to a Jewish user, can be easier and more accessible than navigating a website with endless options.

Personally, navigating digitized Jewish heritage sites as an Eastern European American Jew has been particularly rewarding and identity-affirming. Not only have I been able to see the depth and range of these sites in a short period, but digital heritage has also allowed me and researchers working on these sites to discover more about them. For example, in the summer of 2022, I had the honor and privilege to volunteer at the restoration of the oldest Jewish cemetery in Romania in Alba Iulia. The volunteers met with the team, which had done a digital typography map of the entire site and found a raised site in one section of the synagogue that would lead to future restoration. My personal connection to and interest in Jewish heritage in Romania initially drove me to volunteer. However, the potential for further discovery of these sites through digital heritage tools deepened my commitment to their preservation and research.

The intuitive nature of such digital experiences can better enable American Jews to feel the scale of these spaces and understand how they function. For

19 John Suler, "The *Dimensions of Cyberpsychology Architecture," in Boundaries of the Self and Reality Online: Implications of Digitally Constructed Realities*, ed. Jayne Gackenbach and Jonathan Bown (London, Academic Press, 2017), p. 2.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, p. 6.

American Jews who have always used imagination to understand who they are in the US and the context of the greater Jewish diaspora, allowing the user to be at the center of the experience via virtual reality and undergoing the experience alone, one can better construct an understanding of themselves with elements of the Eastern European Jewish past. These digital nostalgia networks allow American Jews to more closely identify with their nostalgic history in the present and potentially shape a new reality where Europe and the United States do not seem to be separated by an ocean, a reality that can exist in the virtual sphere.

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Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach

Doubly Foreign: Jewish Cemeteries in the Formerly German Space in Poland

The western voivodeships of present-day Poland, which were part of Germany until 1945, remain on the geographical periphery of the Jewish histories of both Germany and Poland. In the wake of World War II and its aftermath, the populations of what are today the Lebus and West Pomerania voivodeships were almost entirely displaced through both forced and voluntary migration. This chapter, through the lens of a Jewish cemetery documentation project, seeks to assess the current status of German Jewish heritage in contemporary Poland. It highlights the groups for whom these burial sites and their heritage are significant and attempts to explore these meanings beyond local and national contexts in order to address broader international questions of authenticity and the virtuality of memory.

The question is whether looking at this peripherality in relation to centers such as Warsaw or Krakow, and its location on the Polish-German border, can bring new ideas to the discussion of authenticity and virtuality in the sense proposed by Ruth Ellen Gruber,[1] or to the debate about democracy and Jewish spaces in Europe in the sense proposed by Diana Pinto;[2] or whether these two approaches are worth applying in the context of borderlands and peripheries.

Jewish Cemeteries as Authentic Spaces

A cemetery is a physical space with defined boundaries that can be located on a map; it has its owner, rules, and regulations. Beneath the ground lie human remains and above the ground information about them. In the case of many of the Jewish cemeteries in the middle part of western Poland, which are the subject of this chapter, this information can still be found engraved on tombstones, on cemetery walls, or on fragments of these.

1 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99/4 (2009): 487–504.

2 Diana Pinto, "Jewish Spaces and Their Future", in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 280–5.

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The human remains and surviving commemorative stones imbue the cemetery with authenticity as a physical space, serving as a burial site for real people. Where gravestones are no longer preserved, the cemetery may take on the character of an archaeological or forensic space, both of which are also about exploring authentic realms.[3] Reading the names and brief details of those commemorated on the gravestones creates a bridge between the place and the biographical histories of individuals. In the following pages, I will outline the various groups interested in connecting these individual and collective pasts with the present.

In her observations on the contemporary practice of Jewish culture in Europe, Ruth Ellen Gruber focuses on two aspects of authenticity. First, she relates it to Jewish traditions cultivated by Jews and points to the artificiality and virtuality of the practice of using elements of Jewish culture by non-Jews in post-Holocaust Europe. On the other hand, she writes about the so-called "new authenticity", pointing out that the current interest in Jewish culture among non-Jews also has the value of a new and living tradition, which she describes using the example of Krakow: "The Jewish Krakow scene in itself is real, an authentic, living phenomenon, even though it may not be 'authentically Jewish' according to traditional definitions of 'Jews', 'Jewish', or 'Judaism'".[4]

The authenticity we are dealing with in the case of Jewish cemeteries is linked to another understanding of authenticity: as a real place. At the same time – in the field of the culture of memory – we can observe different practices related to cemeteries and reflect on their authenticity in Gruber's sense.

Jewish cemeteries are often the last authentic sites bearing witness to a Jewish presence in a given town or region. This is particularly true in areas where the percentage of Jewish inhabitants was relatively low and where no synagogue or other religious building survived that could be openly identified with Jewish history. A middle part of western Poland, which belonged until 1945 to the province of Brandenburg, is one such region: until 1945 it was the eastern part of Germany where the Jewish population oscillated at around 1% to 2%. It is also an area that saw an almost complete population exchange after 1945, when Germans had to move westwards to reach their country's redrawn border; and when Poles from different parts of Poland and territories of historical Poland resettled there.

Given such a fundamentally transformed region, Jewish cultural heritage fell between the cracks of German oblivion (the oppressors were no longer present in the region), Polish disinterest, and the absence of Jewish descendants who had

3 On the discussion of historical authenticity see, e.g., Martin Sabrow and Achim Saupe (eds.), *Historische Authentizität* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2016).

4 Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish", p. 492.

either emigrated abroad or who had perished in the Holocaust. For Poles, the cemetery heritage of mostly German Jews seemed foreign and not worth preserving for many decades. It is only since the 1980s that interest in the region's Jewish past has grown more broadly. This is evidenced, for example, by the photographic documentation of cemeteries, their systematic registration and by their legal protection as monuments by provincial offices for the protection of monuments.

From Brandenburg as the Eastern Part of the Prussian State to the Division of the Region as a Result of the Treaty of Potsdam (1945)

Jews had settled in the area of historical Brandenburg since the Middle Ages, but were repeatedly expelled from the Brandenburg March. Some of them found refuge in the royal towns of neighboring Poland, such as Skwierzyna or Międzyrzecz, which became part of Prussia in 1793 and also belonged to Germany after the First World War. A new period in the history of Jews in Brandenburg began in 1671 when the Elector Frederick William arranged for 50 Jewish families expelled from Vienna to settle in Brandenburg. From this settlement, but also from other migration movements in Central and Eastern Europe, Jewish communities emerged and continued to exist until the time of National Socialism.[5]

The most important feature of the history of this area in the 20th century is the almost complete replacement of the population after the shifting of the border in 1945.[6] Germans were forced to leave the region in the last phase of the Second World War and during the early post-war years. By this time their Jewish neighbors were no longer in the region. From 1933 they had been forced to emigrate (many moved to Berlin in the 1930s) or had been murdered during the Holocaust. Some of their cemeteries were desecrated but most survived the Second World War. However, there was no one who regarded them as something of their own and cared for them.

The expulsion of the German population after the Second World War and the arrival of new inhabitants from the Polish eastern borderlands and other parts of Poland have shaped the culture of remembrance in the region to this day. New

5 Irene Diekmann (ed.), *Jüdisches Brandenburg. Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2010).

6 Beata Halicka, *The Polish Wild West: Forced Migration and Cultural Appropriation in the Polish-German Borderlands, 1945–1948* (London: Routledge, 2020).

settlers from different parts of Poland arrived in these areas and the period of Polonization of these formerly German areas began. Efforts were made to erase all traces of the earlier German culture. Today there is no significant centre of Jewish life in the area.

The region was and is still characterized by its rural character and the existence of small towns. This is of historical significance: the area has no major urban, industrial, or academic centers, which has resulted in limited opportunities for professional and economic development for the Jews living here. Today, the area is characterized by a relatively low level of civil society development, which translates into a poor culture of remembrance.

Jewish Cemeteries as "Doubly Foreign" Heritage

When it comes to the treatment of cemeteries in the new territories of Poland – both German and Jewish – after 1945, several phases can be distinguished. After the war, the cemeteries were initially left to their own devices. Local residents in many cases re-used the building materials, mainly bricks. The gravestones were used by stonemasons to make new tombstones. In 1959, the Law on Cemeteries and Burial of the Dead came into force.[7] This law said that a cemetery could be closed 40 years after the last burial. However, a cemetery could be liquidated sooner if the area were to serve a public utility, the defense of the state, or the implementation of national economic plans. In the 1960s and 1970s, using the provisions of the law, Jewish cemeteries were deliberately and legally liquidated, a process sometimes referred to as "cleaning".[8] On the other hand, there are differences when it comes to the survival of Jewish or German cemeteries in these areas, as described by Yechiel Weizman:

> Polish authorities lacked a clear policy toward German Jewish religious traces. Cemeteries and synagogues that had belonged to the German Jews were usually discussed together with

7 Ustawa z dnia 31 stycznia 1959 r. o cmentarzach i chowaniu zmarłych. Dz.U. 1959 nr 11 poz. 62 [Law of January 31, 1959, on cemeteries and the burial of the dead. Journal of Laws 1959, no. 11, item 62], accessed June 16, 2024, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19590110062.

8 This was the case, for example, with the 14th-century cemetery in Słubice (formerly Frankfurt [Oder]) and the cemetery in Rzepin (formerly Reppen), both of which were destroyed as a result of the same administrative decision. See Eckard Reiß and Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach (ed.), *Makom tov – der gute Ort. Jüdischer Friedhof Frankfurt (Oder)/Słubice* (Berlin: Vergangenheitsverlag, 2012).

> other Polish Jewish sites, but occasionally they were treated differently, perceived more as part of the material German Christian heritage rather than a solely Jewish one. Many German Jewish cemeteries resembled German ones in their artistic and architectural form; both in the style and form of the headstones and the German inscription, it was sometimes difficult to differentiate between them.[9]

Weizman writes about "The Other Jewish Heritage"[10] in the post-German territories. By this he means a heritage different from the heritage of Polish Jews in historical Poland. I would say that from the perspective of the new inhabitants of the new territories of Poland, we are dealing with a heritage that is doubly foreign: it belongs to the German heritage[11] left behind and at the same time stands out within it as a Jewish heritage. And these were not "our Jews", but mainly German Jews.

Since the 1980s, and especially since the period after the 1989 transition, there has been a new treatment of Jewish cemeteries and Jewish heritage in Poland. Jewish cemeteries are no longer being deliberately and consciously liquidated: there is a beginning to their documentation, marking,[12] and care[13] instead. At the same time, there has been a process of natural deterioration of the stone and obliteration of inscriptions.

9 Yechiel Weizman, *Unsettled Heritage. Living next to Poland's material Jewish traces after the Holocaust* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022), p. 45.

10 Weizmann, *Unsettled Heritage*, p. 43.

11 There is a vast literature on German heritage in post-war Poland. See, e.g., Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wroclaw during the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

12 Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach, Die Kennzeichnung jüdischer Friedhöfe in Polen. Zentralgesteuerte und lokale Praktiken der Sichtbarmachung, in: *Zwischen Gefährdung, Gedenken und Vermittlungsarbeit – Jüdische Friedhöfe nach der Shoah*, ed. by Helge-Fabien Hertz und Katrin Keßler (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2025).

13 In Skwierzyna in 2002, students from the local high school together with German students from the Mauritius Gymnasium in Büren near Paderborn carried out cleaning work at the local Jewish cemetery. The teacher in charge from Poland was Andrzej Kirmiel. See Andrzej Kirmiel, "Żydowskie ślady na Środkowym Nadodrzu", *Nadwarciański Rocznik Historyczno-Archiwalny* 14 (2007): 139–42 (at p. 141), https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2007-t-n14/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2007-t-n14-s139-142/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2007-t-n14-s139-142.pdf.

A German-Polish Project for the Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries in the Historical Part of Brandenburg

In a research project which the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder) conducted between 2019 and 2021 in cooperation with Potsdam University and Jagiellonian University in Krakow, we compiled a (not yet complete) documentation of Jewish cemeteries in the eastern part of the province of Brandenburg. As part of the administrative reform of 1938, the districts of Arnswalde and Friedeberg were transferred to the province of Pomerania. The districts of Schwerin (Fig. 1), Meseritz, and parts of the district of Bomst from the dissolved province of Grenzmark Posen-West Prussia, were incorporated into the province of Mark Brandenburg. The area of historical "East Brandenburg" (Ostbrandenburg), which became part of Poland in 1945, is understood to include the districts of Schwerin, Meseritz, and parts of the district of Bomst, as well as Arnswalde and Friedeberg.[14] It should be remembered that the districts annexed in 1938, until 1793, were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and part of the centuries-old German-Polish borderland where both German and Polish Jews settled.[15]

The preserved cemeteries and individual tombstones are for us a unique source for research into the social history of the region. They provide information on the religious currents of the community, on the extent of assimilation, and on the occupational structure and social affiliations of the dead.[16]

On the eastern periphery of Brandenburg, where there were only a few slightly larger urban centers (Fig. 2 and 3)[17] with a variety of Jewish institutions, relatively few written documents were created and survived. Cemeteries are often the only way to access the forgotten history of this community. In addition, while written

14 Definitions of regional names are described in the following article: Beata Halicka and Matthias Diefenbach, "Neumark/Ostbrandenburg/Ziemia Lubuska", *Online-Lexikon zur Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa* (2018), last modified May 20, 2021, https://ome-lexikon.uni-oldenburg.de/p38427.

15 Andrzej Kirmiel, *Żydzi w Międzyrzeczu* (Międzyrzecz: Muzeum Ziemi Międzyrzeckiej, 2021).

16 Some examples from the region include Leszek Hońdo, *Hebrajska epigrafika nagrobkowa w Polsce* (Krakow: Universitas, 2014).

17 Above all, Landsberg an der Warthe (Gorzów Wielkopolski). Unfortunately, we have no study of the history of the Jewish community in this town. The Jewish cemetery is largely destroyed and only partly documented. There is no initiative to take care of it. See "Verzeichnis der auf dem jüdischen Friedhof in Landsberg/Warthe noch lesbaren deutschen Inschriften" [List of German inscriptions still legible on the Jewish cemetery in Landsberg/Warthe], LBI-Archives, LBI Manuscript Collection, http://archive.org/details/verzeichnisderau1440unse/mode/1up?view=theater.

Fig. 1: Gil Hüttenmeister reads a Hebrew inscription in the Jewish cemetery in Skwierzyna/former Schwerin an der Warthe (Lubuskie Voivodeship), 2021. Photo: Justyna Hrabska.

sources are professionally preserved in archives, the surviving material relics of Jewish cemeteries are under significant threat from environmental influences and vandalism and are becoming fewer and less legible with each passing year. There is a danger that they will all be irretrievably lost in the coming years.

As a first step, we compiled a list of Jewish cemeteries regardless of their degree of preservation. Some of them had already fallen out of use long before the National Socialist period, due to the migrations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In total, we managed to identify 46 Jewish cemeteries. We have now completed the documentation of 23 cemeteries with a total of 680 gravestones or fragments of gravestones. These records are included in the database of the University of Potsdam and are freely accessible to the public.[18] In some of them we are dealing with a few fragments, in others with hundreds of legible *matzevot*.

Taking into account all the 46 cemeteries which we identified, the situation in terms of their degree of preservation is as follows:

I – in 26 of them there are still tombstones, fragments, and traces of cemetery walls (Tab. 1);

18 See "Jüdische Friedhöfe in Polen auf den Gebieten der ehemaligen Provinz Brandenburg" [Jewish cemeteries in Poland on the territories of the former province of Brandenburg], last modified May 2024, https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/juedische-friedhoefe-pl/index.

II – 8 are empty;
III – 9 are built over in various ways and no gravestones or other material traces have survived;
IV – 3 are built over, but the remains of surviving gravestones are collected in some other place in some form of cemetery commemoration.

If one were to combine categories III and IV, there would be 12 cemeteries which have been built over.

Fig. 2: Fragment of a wall with graffiti-covered gravestones, Jewish cemetery in Gorzów Wielkopolski/former Landsberg an der Warthe (Lubuskie Voivodeship), 2021. Photo: Maryla Wojtyszyn.

Thus, in 56% of the cemeteries there are still visible traces, even if very small, indicating that the area was used as a cemetery. In the case of 7% of the cemeteries, even if they have been built over, the local community is aware of its existence through the existence of tombstones shown elsewhere in the locality. Thus, in 63% of the localities, material traces of Jewish presence or memory materialized in the form of a monument have survived.

Of the 46 cemeteries, 18 are marked in various ways, including those that are now completely empty or built over. This represents approximately 39% of all the cemeteries. Thus, to simplify somewhat, we could say that the degree of commemoration of Jewish cemeteries is lower than the degree of preservation of material remains.

In the case of the 26 cemeteries where material remains have been preserved, in none of them are all the *matzevot* standing in their original places. This means that absolutely all the Jewish cemeteries surveyed have been damaged in

Tab. 1: Degree of destruction of Jewish cemeteries in western Poland, on the territory of historical Brandenburg.

Category I	Number of Cemeteries	Percentage
a – all gravestones in situ	0	0%
b – mixed, mostly preserved	6	24%
c – mixed, mostly destroyed	12	46%
d – moving headstones	3	11%
e – only moving fragments	3	11%
f – no gravestones, only borders and pedestals	2	8%
Total	26	100%

some way. Only 6 cemeteries have survived in which most of the *matzevot* and tombstones are still standing in their places. In 12, most are in another location, but some are still in place. In the remaining cemeteries, there are only fragments of tombstones or only grave frames.

Fig. 3: Aedicule by the fence wall, Jewish cemetery in Gorzów Wielkopolski/former Landsberg an der Warthe (Lubuskie Voivodeship), 2022. Photo: Wojciech Derwich.

An important aspect of this work is to restore the memory of individual real persons. Of the 680 documented tombstones or their fragments, we were able to deci-

pher the full name of the person in question in 416 of them. Systematic documentation and translation of inscriptions from Hebrew allow us to identify names which would otherwise be obliterated by time, plants, and moss. This work is even more important because of the inability of most of the inhabitants of these areas to read the Hebrew names, so that without it, these memorials of the local community would remain completely inaccessible.

Meanings Given to Jewish Cemeteries by Different Groups

On the one hand, the Jewish cemeteries described are largely abandoned and forgotten places. On the other hand, it is possible to distinguish different groups for whom these places have different meanings and who carry out different commemorative practices or other individual, private, or public manifestations in connection with them. I would also like to examine how different contemporary groups view the role of Jewish cemeteries. I have identified eight groups which I think are pertinent:

(1) The first group comprises the Polish Jewish Holocaust survivors who came to the Western Territories after 1945 and their descendants living in western Poland today. After the flight and expulsion of the German population, Lower Silesia and Pomerania in particular became an area of settlement for Polish Jews who had survived the Holocaust.[19] Some 90,000 Jews settled in Silesia[20] and 22,000 in Pomerania.[21] By the 1970s, however, they were – in several waves – forced to emi-

19 Markus Nesselrodt, *Dem Holocaust entkommen. Polnische Juden* in der *Sowjetunion, 1939–1946* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); Markus Nesselrodt, "Who, When, and Why? Escaping German Occupation in 1939 versus 1941", in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939–1959). History and Memory of Deportation, Exile and Survival*, ed. Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), pp. 2–29; Lidia Zessin–Jurek, "A Matzeva Amid Crosses: Jewish Exiles in the Polish Memory of Siberia", in *Polish Jews in the Soviet Union (1939–1959),* ed. by Katharina Friedla and Markus Nesselrodt (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2021), pp. 236–260; and Helga Hirsch, *Gehen oder bleiben? Deutsche und polnische Juden in Schlesien und Pommern 1945–1957* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2011).

20 Ewa Waszkiewicz, *Kongregacja Wyznania Mojżeszowego na Dolnym Śląsku na tle polityki wyznaniowej Polskiej Rzeczpospolitej Ludowej 1945–1968* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1999).

21 Achim Wörn, *Der Jischuw an der Oder. Juden in Stettin, 1945–1950* (Marburg: Herder-Institut Verlag, 2021); Eryk Krasucki, *Historia kręci drejdlem. Z dziejów (nie tylko) szczecińskich Żydów* (Łódź: Księży Młyn Dom Wydawniczy, 2018).

grate. Very few Polish Jews settled between Lower Silesia and Szczecin. Only the Jewish community in Żary still exists as a part of the community in Wrocław.[22]

In the case of this group, we are dealing with Polish Jews who find themselves in an area full of traces of German Jews, largely assimilated, with whom they had usually had no contact before. The graves in these cemeteries are not those of their loved ones – they are merely Jewish. From a non-Jewish perspective, we can see them as those who might be affected by these cemeteries, because, after all, they are Jewish. However, they are separated by their origin from different parts of Europe, by the degree of their assimilation, by the language used (also on tombstones) and ultimately by their fate – they survived the Holocaust.

We know that in Silesia they buried their dead in existing Jewish cemeteries. In the area I am describing, we do not have such an example. In Żary, the Jewish cemetery was partly destroyed by Wehrmacht soldiers in the 1940s, and then completely in the post-war years. In 1946, a new Jewish cemetery was established on the site of the liquidated municipal German cemetery. Today, there are perhaps a dozen or so Jews living in Żary and the surrounding area. Their representative and activist, Alicja Skowrońska, appeared until about 2020 at events commemorating the history of Jews in the region. However, this is such a small community of elderly people that it is difficult to speak of them as having an active attitude towards the Jewish heritage of the region.

(2) Jews from the former Soviet republics who immigrated to Germany in the 1990s[23] also live in towns on Germany's border with Poland. The Jewish cemetery in Słubice was the cemetery of the Jewish community in Frankfurt (Oder), as it was one city from its foundation in the 14th century until 1945.[24] The cemetery, first mentioned in a document from 1399, served as a burial ground continuously until the 1940s. In 1999 the cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Słubice commemorated the cemetery on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of its first mention. At that time, a new Jewish community was being formed in Frankfurt, made up of people from the Ukraine and Russia. In 2010 the community was given a plot of land for a new Jewish cemetery in Frankfurt (Oder), which it still uses today. Although the community tries to relate to the history of German Jews in Frankfurt, it has no connection to the cemetery in Słubice.

22 Tomasz Jaworski and Tamara Włodarczyk (eds.), *Żydzi żarscy a specyfika pogranicza polsko-niemieckiego* [The Jews of Żary and the peculiarities of the German-Polish border region] (Żary/Żagań: Muzeum Pogranicza Śląsko-Łużyckiego, 2017).

23 Nadine Fügner, *Jüdische Zuwanderung im Land Brandenburg* (Potsdam: RAA Brandenburg, 2005).

24 Reiß and Abraham-Diefenbach, *Makom tov*.

(3) A much greater presence relating to and providing care for this place is shown by Orthodox Jews from Israel and America, who make a pilgrimage every year in May to the grave of Rabbi Joseph ben Meir Theomim (1727–92) in Słubice, formerly part of Frankfurt (Oder). On this occasion they have the grass mowed and the place prepared for prayers. In 2008, a particularly important ceremony took place. On the 216th anniversary of the birth of Rabbi Theomim, over 40 Orthodox rabbis from all over the world came to Słubice.[25] The day began for them with a ritual bath in Frankfurt's Lake Helenesee and morning prayer at the headquarters of the new Jewish community in Frankfurt (Oder). That year, for the first time, they were able to pray at the newly established rabbi's grave, the location of which had been identified during the search and clean-up of the cemetery in 2007–8.

(4) Apart from a few isolated examples of Jewish descendants of the dead in cemeteries, I have no knowledge of anyone from this group. Very rarely did we see signs of someone's presence at a grave. And if there were such signs, it was unknown to us who had left them there.

(5) The German expellees after 1945 mainly cherished the memory of the loss of their own homeland, without usually paying attention to the history of the Jews who had also lived there until 1933–45 and were neighbors of them. It was not until the 1970s and 1980s that memorial articles about their Jewish neighbors began to appear in their newspapers. In 1989, a poem by Wilfried Reinicke[26] appeared in one such newspaper:

> When I was born in thirty-six,
> My mother was not helped by our Dr Schlesinger.
> Whether he managed to escape with his life,
> A German like the rest of us?
> [. . .]
> You have sometimes thought about them,
> did you miss them?
> Who tended their graves?
> Where the cemetery was, I remember.[27]

25 Dietrich Schröder, "Gebet für einen großen Rabbiner", *Märkische Oderzeitung*, May 16, 2008, accessed June 16, 2024, http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/images/Images%20157/MOZ%2016052008.pdf.

26 Felix Ackermann, "Das Institut erinnert an Wilfried C. Reinicke", last modified June 16, 2024, http://www.instytut.net/das-institut-erinnert-an-wilfried-c-reinicke/.

27 Wilfried Reinicke, "Moje żydowskie wspomnienia" [My Jewish Memories], trans. P. Schulz, cited in Beata Halicka, *Krosno Odrzańskie. Wspólne dziedzictwo kultury/Crossen an der Oder. Das gemeinsame Kulturerbe* (Skórzyn: Wydawnictwo Instytutowe, 2005), p. 66.

The Germans who are still alive today and who were displaced from the areas that fell to Poland in 1945, are still struggling with problems of guilt and oblivion. Their memoirs are today an important source concerning the history of Jews in small towns on the eastern border of Brandenburg.[28] It is also apparent nowadays that dealing with Jewish history is a political manifestation and is intended to send a message: i.e., we are open to pluralistic, European values, do not continue to associate us with right-wing, parochial conservatism, with which the expellees are often associated.

(6) When documenting Jewish cemeteries in former German territories, we still come across Germans. In the course of our research we met with a group of six pensioners from the vicinity of Berlin and Frankfurt (Oder), who regularly go to clean-up Jewish cemeteries in western Poland. They were informally linked to the organization called Action Reconciliation Service for Peace. Founded in 1958 in West Germany, it has organized workcamps in Jewish cemeteries in the GDR and in Central and Eastern Europe since the 1980s.[29]

In addition, Germans from the generation of children born at the end or after the end of the Second World War, whose parents may have played an active role in the Second World War, are particularly committed.

Two people have played a special role in this group: the artist, Eckehard Ruthenberg (1943–2011), and the epigraphist, Gil Hüttenmeister (born 1938). The former spoke openly about the need to redeem his guilt and the unclear history of his father, who may have taken part in the Holocaust during the Second World War.[30] The second, an acknowledged expert in the reading of Hebrew inscriptions in Germany,[31] has for decades been committed to German-Israeli dialogue and is

28 The short study of the history of the Jewish community in Sulechów (formerly Züllichau) is based largely on documents of this kind available in the archives of the Brandenburg Foundation in Fürstenwalde (near Berlin) run by the organization of former German expellees: Martin Jeske, "Geschichte der Jüdischen Gemeinde in Züllichau (Sulechów)", https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/juedische-friedhoefe-pl/friedhof-sulechow/geschichte-der-gemeinde.

29 See "Aktion Sühnezeichen. Friedendienste", accessed July 4, 2024, https://asf-ev.de/.

30 Eckehart Ruthenberg and Robert Ryss, "Dużych cmentarzy nie kocham. Rozmowa z Eckehartem Ruthenbergiem – berlińskim artystą-plastykiem, badaczem historii cmentarzy żydowskich w byłej NRD i w zachodniej Polsce", *Rocznik Chojeński* 2 (2010): 252–68, accessed June 16, 2024, https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Rocznik_Chojenski/Rocznik_Chojenski-r2010-t2/Rocznik_Chojenski-r2010-t2-s252-268/Rocznik_Chojenski-r2010-t2-s252-268.pdf.

31 Frowald Gil Hüttenmeister, *Abkürzungsverzeichnis hebräischer Grabinschriften* [Index of Abbreviations Used in Hebrew Tombstone-Inscriptions], 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

currently working on the documentation of the largest Jewish cemetery in the region with its approximately 700 inscriptions, in Skwierzyna.[32]

(7) Finally, what was and is the attitude of Polish inhabitants since 1945 to the existing Jewish heritage? Poles, newcomers to this region after 1945, were mostly neighbors of Jews and during the Second World War were witnesses of the Holocaust in the eastern part of Poland. It must therefore be assumed that they were able to recognize Jewish cemeteries with their Hebrew inscriptions and specific symbolism. Whether this resulted in a different treatment of these sites compared to Protestant cemeteries remains to be investigated.

The Poles are certainly responsible for the destruction of cemeteries after 1945.[33] Until the 1980s, it was a time of more or less organized destruction. However, one should bear in mind the specificity of this context. Until the 1970s, Poles did not feel at home here: they explored the area, unsure whether the border would remain on the Oder and Neisse. On the other hand, the documentation drawn up by the offices for the protection of monuments in the 1980s deserves mention, especially the documentation in Gorzów Wielkopolski which was far more detailed than the official guidelines required.[34]

(8) It is only at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of this century that we start to deal with projects of commemoration, cleaning cemeteries, and the writing of the history of Jewish communities. Against this background, Andrzej Kirmiel, a Jagiellonian University history graduate, founder of the Lubuskie Judaica Foundation[35] and currently director of the regional museum in Międzyrzecz,[36]

32 Information about the cemetery in Skwierzyna (Schwerin an der Warthe) and a plan of the gravestones have been published in the database: https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/juedische-friedhoefe-pl/friedhof-skwierzyna, last modified June 16, 2024.

33 Kazimierz Urban, *Cmentarze żydowskie, synagogi i domy modlitwy w Polsce w latach 1944–1966 (wybór materiałów)* (Krakow: Nomos, 2006); Krzysztof Bielawski, *The Destruction of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2024).

34 For example, a digitized "cemetery card" (karta cmentarza) of the Jewish cemetery in Gorzów Wielkopolski, dated December 30, 1983, can be found on the following website: https://zabytek.pl/en/obiekty/gorzow-wielkopolski-cmentarz-zydowski. Parallel and in addition to this required documentation, another documentation which includes photographs of individual gravestones has been compiled and is available in the archive of the monument protection office in Gorzów Wielkopolski. Such detailed documentation exists for Bledzew, Brójce, Cybinka, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Międzyrzecz, Skwierzyna, Sulęcin, Świętojańsko, Trzciel, Trzemeszno Lubuskie, Witnica.

35 The Lubuska Judaica Foundation was established in 2006 in Zielona Góra. It initiated the organization of Jewish Culture Days in this city. In 2008, it organized the placing of a commemorative stone at the site of the former synagogue: https://sztetl.org.pl/en/node/20055, accessed July 4, 2024.

36 See https://muzeum.miedzyrzecz.pl/, accessed July 4, 2024.

stands out, alongside several other activists, such Zbigniew Czarnuch[37] (1930–2024), and a group of local activists which in 1997 worked on the cemetery in Boleszkowice.[38] Andrzej Kirmiel remains the most consistent in his activities, continuing to write books[39] and to initiate new projects. He is currently in charge of creating a new museum dedicated to the regional history of the Jews in the building of the former synagogue in Międzyrzecz.[40]

In describing these groups of people interested in Jewish cemeteries, it is worth considering that at least three groups will soon cease to exist: the Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust, the Germans driven by motives of atonement, and the German expellees. These are the three groups that belong to the generation of people born either at the end of the war or after it, who still feel a direct connection with the history of the Holocaust.

Two other groups are of marginal importance for the region: Jews from the Soviet Union and the former Soviet republics will increasingly identify with their own new history within Germany: they cannot be expected to deal with the complicated history of the shifting of borders and the history of German Jews in Poland. The interest of Orthodox Jews has its own logic and for the local community it is a kind of curiosity connected with the person of certain rabbis buried in the Słubice cemetery.

37 Zbigniew Czarnuch, "Żydzi w Witnicy", *Nadwarciański Rocznik Historyczno-Archiwalny* 15 (2008): 93–115, https://bazhum.muzhp.pl/media/files/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2008-t-n15/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2008-t-n15-s93-115/Nadwarcianski_Rocznik_Historyczno_Archiwalny-r2008-t-n15-s93-115.pdf, accessed July 4, 2024.

38 For documentation of the Jewish cemetery in Boleszkowice: https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/juedische-friedhoefe-pl/friedhof-boleszkowice. The plaque, erected in 1997, informs that on the initiative of the municipal authorities, the Association of Friends of Chwarszczany, Gudzisz, Reczyce, the Provincial Monument Conservator in Gorzów Wielkopolski, the Dębno Forest District, and the Eternal Remembrance Foundation, cleaning work was carried out: https://juedische-friedhoefe.uni-potsdam.de/jf/grabstein_pl.php?lfd=2783, accessed July 4, 2024.

39 Andrzej Kirmiel, *Żydzi w Skwierzynie* [The Jews in Schwerin/Warthe] (Gorzów Wielkopolski: Skwierzyńskie Stowarzyszenie Rozwoju Gospodarczego, 2002); Andrzej Kirmiel, *Trzemieszniańscy Żydzi* [The Jews from Schermeisel] (Sulęcin: Urząd Miejski w Sulęcinie, 2010); Andrzej Kirmiel, *Żydzi w Pszczewie* [The Jews in Betsche] (Wejherowo: Havran Wydawnictwo Domowe, 2017); Maciej Borkowski, Andrzej Kirmiel, and Tamara Włodarczyk (eds.), *Śladami Żydów. Dolny Śląsk, Opolszczyzna, Ziemia Lubuska* [On Jewish traces. Lower Silesia, Opole Land, Lubuskie Land] (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich, 2008).

40 Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach, "Die 'chinesische' Synagoge von Międzyrzecz und das jüdische Erbe in den ehemals deutschen Gebieten Polens", *Value of the Past*, last modified September 12, 2024, https://doi.org/10.58079/12aek.

In my list, I did not mention scientists and tourists. Scholarly research has its own dynamics, and Jewish cemeteries will certainly continue to be the subject of research by scholars of various disciplines. However, this is a topic that should be considered separately from the perspective of the international dynamics of research into Jewish history. As far as tourists are concerned, I have so far found no evidence of their presence or interest in the region I am discussing. In the future, however, it cannot be ruled out that Jewish cemeteries will become a tourist attraction in some places.

In the context of research and commemoration projects, working on and around the theme of the Jewish cemetery is an opportunity to bring together people who can give this work different meanings: expiation, expression of political convictions, and enabling contact with the history of one's own place of residence. The results of these activities, in the form of lasting products, are on the one hand carriers of the memory of the projects themselves and of the places documented, and on the other hand stimuli for further activities and practices, and thus an attempt to keep the sphere of memory in motion – part of that vibrating, fragile world that includes Jewish festivals, the menu of a pub in Kazimierz, or a programme of guided tours of cemeteries and synagogues in other major European cities.

Jewish Cemeteries in Virtual Documentation Projects

The main form that documentation projects for Jewish cemeteries take on today is virtual. Internet databases contain names, photographs, fragments of maps and informative texts. What are the implications of this? What does it mean to add a virtual dimension to the real space of cemeteries?

Sometimes there is a virtual reconstruction of authentic places and an attempt to create a substitute for authenticity in virtual space. Given the environmental factors and the irrevocable weathering of stones, this is also an attempt to preserve these traces for the long term. In the case of Jewish heritage, we are much more likely to see digital reconstructions of synagogues than cemeteries. In the case of cemeteries, various databases are being created which do not aim to give us a virtual walk through a Jewish cemetery as a substitute for an authentic

experience. Their value lies in documentation rather than in enabling us to look at some destroyed or distorted place in its pre-destruction state.[41]

Virtual databases containing personal information are becoming part of a global network of genealogical research which increasingly relies on digital databases. As current genealogical research is often global in nature, the significance of the data collected therein transcends linguistic, national, or ethnic boundaries.[42] In the case of the database created as part of our project, although we do not keep track of its use, on average we are confronted with direct queries on genealogical issues twice a year.[43]

Commemoration

It is not only research and documentation but also the culture of remembrance that is increasingly moving cemeteries into the virtual realm. Due to the definite loss of genealogical continuity in the region, any treatment of the cemetery space becomes, in fact, a movement through virtual space. This is due, firstly, to environmental factors, the erasure and distortion of the inscriptions on the gravestones; secondly, the history of their destruction by humans and by administrative decisions; thirdly and finally, the fact that since the war they have not fulfilled their function of commemorating loved ones and visiting graves, i.e. the emotional function. Recently this has also been influenced by the passage of time, and no longer only by political and historical factors.

Actions to remedy the destruction and disappearance of the aforementioned documentation, to commemorate the dead, to clean the cemetery area, to repair *matzevot*, to produce photographic or artistic documentation, to mark with information boards, and to produce popular book or Internet documentation, are undertaken by local memory actors as well as from outside. The space is thus opened up for action by people with multiple interests.

41 In the case of the synagogues, such work is being carried out by, e.g., scientists and students of the Darmstadt University of Technology: https://www.dg.architektur.tu-darmstadt.de/forschung_ddu/digitale_rekonstruktion_ddu/synagogen/index.de.jsp, accessed July 4, 2024.

42 Izabella Parowicz, "Rediscovering the Roots that Remained Abroad: Challenges and Methods in Teaching Transborder Genealogy", in *Yearbook of Transnational History (Volume 6)*, ed. Thomas Adam (Vancouver: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2023), pp. 167–94.

43 It is possible to contact Anke Geißler-Grünberg, who is coordinating the project of documentation:https://www.uni-potsdam.de/de/hi-neuere-deutsch-juedische-geschichte/anke-geissler-gruenberg-ma, accessed July 4, 2024.

Today, the discovery of the Jewish history of towns and villages in this part of Poland may be part of a national or European trend concerning Jewish themes. On the other hand, in my opinion, it is an integral part of the movement to discover the history of these places before 1945. It is the discovery of German history, the history of people who had to leave their homeland because of the Allied treaties and as a result of the Second World War unleashed by Germany. The history of the Jews is, as it were, another stage in the taming of the history of the place.

In Poland, there is a need to face the history of one's own local space. This is where participating in a project to document Jewish cemeteries can help, which in turn can lead to encounters with Germans and Jews who are also attracted to these places – each in a different way – and create an opportunity for personal engagement.

Jewish Cemeteries as Authentic and Virtual Spaces

Jewish cemeteries in western Poland are tangible remnants of historical Jewish spaces that are now devoid of Jewish communities. Due to this absence and the disconnection from the living (authentic) Jewish presence, these cemeteries have recently become intertwined with virtual spaces, in the bid to preserve memory and foster historical reflection on themes of violence, survival, and loss of heritage.

When we visit Jewish cemeteries in person, we engage with the material remnants of history: gravestones, inscriptions, and human remains. These are the authentic testimonies of lives lived, often the only surviving traces of the rich cultural life of pre-war Jewish communities in this part of Europe. In this sense, cemeteries provide a unique space for personal reflection, as well as for educational initiatives that engage with both the local and more universal tropes of Jewish history and consequences of persecution. But the scope of such educational dynamics is often limited to the local realm: with occasional projects focused on preservation, cleaning, and others forms of social engagement. Over time, Jewish cemeteries are vulnerable to further erosion, vandalism, or neglect. In these cases, virtual documentation can help to fill the gaps left by physical deterioration.

Virtual spaces also offer a complementary mode of engagement. What is unknown or unsaid in the physical cemetery can be reconstructed, added to, or interpreted in new ways. Through digital archives, online projects, and virtual tours, we can expand and enrich the history of these sites, of their subsequent

guardians as well as the people who neglected them, creating another record of the meaning and contested place of Jewish heritage. And going beyond the question of historical responsibility and accounting, virtual spaces may support greater dialogue and networking, fostering connections between geographically dispersed communities and individuals who might otherwise have limited access to these sites.

While this virtual realm can expand our understanding, it also comes with a trade-off: the loss of physical authenticity. The emotional and historical weight of standing in a cemetery, facing an individual gravestone, cannot be fully replicated online. Moreover, virtual spaces are themselves subject to some limitations too, including technological ones – such as the impermanence of digital platforms, the shifting dynamics of algorithms, and the potential obsolescence of databases over time. Users of virtual spaces have limited control over the development of these platforms or the long-term maintenance of their content. This raises important questions about the durability and sustainability of virtual memory projects.

Given the transience of both physical and virtual spaces, the interplay between them highlights the need for a balanced approach, one that preserves the authenticity of physical sites while also embracing the potential of digital technologies to connect, document, and educate across time and space.

Research Perspectives

Neglected Jewish cemeteries – sometimes just a few stones in the woods – even decades after the Holocaust and the abandonment of the area by witnesses and perpetrators, arouse emotions and are the subject of social action and academic research. Doubly foreign, they are tamed as authentic burial sites within the local topography of memory and incorporated into the virtual global topography of memory of murdered Jewish communities.

Although we can outline certain trends, such as the waves of cemetery closures in the 1970s, the renewed interest in Jewish cemeteries in the 1980s, and the projects carried out after 1989, it is important, in my opinion, to focus on individual sites and projects and to illuminate them in their complexity. The documentation of Jewish cemeteries attempts to outline a regional topography and can be a starting point for further research. The area in question is still a field of research for scholars both of Jewish history in the German-Polish borderland and of commemorative practices in an area where there was an almost complete population exchange after the Holocaust.

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Susanne Urban

Speyer, Worms, Mainz (ShUM): Connecting Centuries through Music, Art, and Spirituality

This chapter focuses on the tangible and intangible remains of the alliance ShUM created by the Jewish communities in Mainz, Worms, and Speyer alongside the Rhine. ShUM is an acronym of the first letters of the Hebrew city names: Shpira, Warmaisa, Magenza. These communities had an impact far beyond its blooming days in the mid-14th century and far beyond its geographical scope along the Rhine. Legends, prayers, and liturgies that originated in ShUM have survived centuries. Jewish personalities from the 10th or 13th century are still present in Jewish life and learning. The tangible monuments and cemeteries as well as the intangible heritage reflect the brightest and darkest times of Jewish history in Ashkenaz and are engraved in Jewish memories.

Forethoughts

Jewish places and spaces in Europe are post-Shoah and, often, because of migration, flight, and mass murder or expulsion, often post-Jewish.[1] Some post-Jewish spaces were revived in the past decades when Jews arrived from Eastern Europe and joined the small number of Jews to reopen synagogues and community centers nearby grounds where a former Jewish community had lived. Jewish spaces mirror past and sometimes present Jewish life, spirituality, diversity, and local characteristics.

Many of these sites and spaces remained post-Jewish and were transformed into educational and meeting centers for the local people. It also happens that, as Diana Pinto states in her contribution to this volume, "such spaces were not ends in themselves but above all starting points for other pluralist understandings of

1 See "Thematic Focus: Jewish Space Reloaded!", ed. Eszter B. Gantner and Jay Oppenheim, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23/2 (2014); Richard I. Cohen, *Visualizing and Exhibiting Jewish Space and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Hannah Ewence and Helen Spurling, *Visualizing Jews Through the Ages: Literary and Material Representations of Jewishness and Judaism* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111268132-009

Europe's many religious and cultural minorities".[2] From this thought onwards, post-Jewish spaces are often used for governmental political statements as showcases for democratic values and the fight against antisemitism. This turns into a misuse if such ceremonies are held under governments that are right-wing dominated or taking an authoritarian turn. Indeed, Jewish spaces can be "warning stations" for the present regarding violence and expulsion and, as Pinto underlines, have therefore the power to unite, not only where the Shoah is commemorated, "Jewish and non-Jewish voices".[3]

Some heritage sites and Jewish spaces throughout Europe, however, still present a trivialization of Jewish history with a kitschy note on Shtetl-romanticism, while reducing Jewish life to persecution and victimhood.

This is not true for many Jewish museums, from Paris to Berlin and Frankfurt/Main or Warsaw. Instead of being Holocaust museums disguised as Jewish museums, they focus, for example, on the Jewish history of the city, the region, and the country. The topics are widened from daily life during the centuries to questions of Jewish identities and on questioning aspects from the present such as remembrance culture. These museums create innovative open spaces to rethink Jewish history and to create spaces where Jewish diversity is reflected. The Jewish Museum Frankfurt took up the topic of "Revenge" in Jewish narratives[4] and the Jewish Museum Hohenems on Jewish music ("Jukebox – Jewkbox").[5] In addition, Jewish museums were designed to educate and show the non-Jewish majority aspects of Jewish religion and history and create a commemoration culture within this frame. For years, this has changed, as Jewish museums are also a Jewish space – more so, after October 7, 2023:

> Jewish museums have experienced a new dimension of politicization and new challenges and hostilities, but also rising expectations due to a growing demand for education on antisemitism and the Shoah as a result of the recognition of a widespread antisemitic ideology that is experiencing a dramatic resurgence. The fundamental questions of how to develop the proper coping mechanisms and create a resilient environment within our community are important.[6]

2 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", p. 23, in this current volume.

3 Ibid., p. 29.

4 See https://www.juedischesmuseum.de/en/visit/detail/revenge-history-and-fantasy/.

5 See https://www.jm-hohenems.at/en/exhibitions/past_exhibitions/jukebox-jewkbox.

6 See https://www.aejm.org/events/aejm-annual-conference-2024/.

As Jewish communities are interested in taking part in developing Jewish museums, Ruth Ellen Gruber's concept that "a virtual Jewish world has an intense visible, vivid Jewish presence in places where few Jews live today" has changed.[7]

Innovative Jewish museums change and adapt, reflect and rethink. Some Jewish spaces that are not marking mass graves, killing sites and other sites where only destruction can be recollected, and are Jewish spaces where life was once vivid, are nevertheless designed as memorial sites.[8] These Jewish spaces carry an enormous burden and visitors anticipate being silent, honoring the dead, learning a lesson. These Jewish sites are like a time capsule, frozen at a certain point, not a space where one can be amazed about the richness of Jewishness that had been so lively there or, in cemeteries, see the stones like a book of the community's history.

> After the Holocaust, an unbiased approach [. . .] to European Jewish topography is not easily achieved. As a result of the Holocaust, the predominant focus, especially in European academia, is on spaces of death and remembrance, memorials and museums, voids, and relicts, rather than on living Jews and their spaces and spatial strategies, past and present. [. . .] Focusing on *how* Jewish spaces are produced, we are not so much interested in an ideal objective, the "essence" of Jewish space or the built end-product but rather in the creation of Jewish space and in Jewish spatial experience.[9]

Non-Jewish visitors of Jewish sites too often have little knowledge about Jewish resilience, spirituality, and diversity; not to forget the subconscious or openly antisemitic images that can be found in all strata of societies and accompany the visitors while they are strolling through Jewish spaces.

Jewish spaces in the 21st century should tell stories of the (former) inhabitants; of local, regional history and how Jews and non-Jews interacted, encountered each other, where the painful fracture lines are, where Jewish resilience and resistance against persecutions and pogroms developed. If these narratives are connected to art, music, legends and lively traditions, Jewish spaces offer sensory, tangible experiences and colorful images of the Jewish past and presence.[10]

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7 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 years after *Virtually Jewish*", p. 7, in this current volume.

8 This one can find in, e.g., Germany and Poland, where memorial stones are erected on cemeteries, commemorating the Jews who once lived there. The spaces where Jewish life once existed are often left unmarked. See https://www.memorialmuseums.org/.

9 Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Space. An Approach", in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch and Anna Lipphardt (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 1.

10 Michal Kümper, Barbara Rösch, and Ulrike Schneider, *Makom: Orte und Räume im Judentum: Real, abstrakt, imaginär. Essays* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2007).

Within such processes of creative approaches those responsible for memory and interpretation cross borders between virtual and real-life, and shape authenticity in the present.

A note post-October 7, 2023: We see excessive antisemitic incidents all over Europe and populistic parties that gain ground all over Europe. Antisemitism, rejections of remembrance culture, trivializations and relativizations of the Shoah, as well as rejections of Jewish history as representations of a "white, dominant culture" by those who transformed postcolonial studies into an ideology,[11] are attacks against Jews and Jewish spaces. Targets are post-Jewish spaces, memorials, but also today's Jewish institutions that are, like in Frankfurt, Worms, or Berlin, housed in buildings that were inhabited by a community and/or museums only years after the Shoah. Are there safe Jewish spaces or Jewish museums after 2023? Will there be authentic Jewish life in some decades ahead of us? We cannot answer these questions now. But we see that these spaces have already a place in virtual realities, in social media, and are undergoing a transformation process: they are virtual Jewish spaces based on real spaces. They are regional but universal, they are authentic but virtual.

ShUM: Memory and Resilience

"Verily our teachers in Mainz, Worms, and in Speyer belong to the most learned among the sages, the holy ones of the Most High [. . .] from there goes forth the law to all Israel, [. . .] since the days of their founding, all communities turn to them, on the Rhine and in all the land of Ashkenaz.""[12]

In medieval Hebrew literature, Ashkenaz had a spatial and a cultural meaning. It referred to Western and Central Europe, and later also included Eastern Europe.

ShUM as the medieval Jewish erudite epicentre started with the Jewish community of Mainz (Magenza) in the 10th century. Legends accompany the arrival of the Kalonymos family from Lucca as the founding fathers and mothers of ShUM. Stories about ShUM persist because ShUM in Jewish memory is an outstanding

11 Susanne Urban, "The Shoah, Postcolonialism, and Historikerstreit 2.0: Germany's Past in Its Present", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 16/1 (2022): 83–97.

12 Rabbi Isaac ben Moses (Isaac Or Sarua) cited in Siegmund Salfeld and Alex Bein, "Mainz", in *Germania Judaica, Bd. 1: Von den ältesten Zeiten bis 1238*, ed. Ismar Elbogen, Aron Freimann, and Haim Tykocinski (Breslau: H. & M. Marcus, 1934), p. 186.

place and space, as the cradle of Ashkenazic Jewry and as "Jerusalem on the Rhine".

Meshullam ben Kalonymos, the founder of the Jewish community of Mainz died around 1000/15.[13] When Meshullam arrived from Lucca in Mainz with his and other families, they carried liturgies from Italy, Babylonian scholarship, and mystical thinking in their luggage. Mainz and Worms were the first of the three communities to be connected through families, marriages, and scholarly exchange. When Jews settled in Speyer in 1084, ShUM was completed and reached its first heyday. .[14] In these three episcopal cities, the Jewish communities did not live in ghettos, but in alleys around their synagogues, mikvaot, and community buildings. In Worms and Speyer a ghetto was designated after the black death pogroms of 1349; in Mainz in the 17th century.

Jews in ShUM were pacemakers for the urbanization of the Rhenish centers due to their connections that extended beyond national and cultural borders. Medieval Judaism was urban. Then the Crusades after 1096 wiped out entire communities along the Rhine. Peasants, day laborers, beggars, criminals, clergy assaulted the Jewish quarters. In Speyer, a dozen Jews were killed, in Worms around 800, and in Mainz the estimation is 1,100. Many Jews fought, resisted, or committed suicide rather than await the murderous mob.[15] After the crusades, Jews in ShUM slowly rebuilt their lives, but the experience left a mark: faith and God were questioned, concepts of ascesis developed, and architectural responses were built, like monumental mikvaot and women's shuln.[16] Between the 11th century and 1349, ShUM was again a Jewish centre in Ashkenaz. When in 1348 the plague broke out

13 Elisabeth Hollender, "Meschullam ben Kalonymos der Große", *Beiträge zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte aus dem Salomon Ludwig Steinheim-Institut* 1/2 (1998): 12.

14 On ShUM: Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), *Leuchte des Exils. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Mainz und Bingen* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2016); Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), *Warmaisa. Klein-Jerusalem am Rhein. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Worms* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2020): Hans Berkessel et al. (eds.), *"Mögen diese Pflöcke niemals herausgerissen werden" Kehillah Schpira. Zeugnisse jüdischen Lebens in Speyer* (Mainz: Nünnerich-Asmus-Verlag, 2022); Karl E. Grözinger (ed.), *Jüdische Kultur in den SchUM-Städten. Literatur – Musik – Theater* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014); Fritz Reuter, *Warmaisa. 1000 Jahre Juden in Worms*, 3rd ed. (Worms: Selfpublishing, 2009); Niels Roemer, *German City, Jewish Memory: The Story of Worms* (Waltham: Brandeis University, 2010); Susanne Urban, Gerold Bönnen, and Günter Illner, *Die Ausstellung SchUM am Rhein. Vom Mittelalter zur Moderne. Jüdisches Museum Worms – Raschi-Haus* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 2021). See also https://schumstaedte.de/literatur/. All websites mentioned in this chapter were last accessed on May 1, 2024.

15 Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

16 Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women and Everyday Observance* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Elisheva Baumgarten and Ido

in Marseille and spread north, anti-Jewish pogroms started. Between June and December 1349, Jewish communities from the Rhine to the Netherlands and on to Franconia were massacred as they were held responsible for the plague through conspiracy stories such as the poisoning of wells. The downfall of Ashkenaz also affected ShUM as remaining Jews fled east or south. Nevertheless, ShUM stayed as a role model for architecture, and its scholarship, piyyutim (Jewish liturgical poems), liturgies, local customs, and religious laws have been passed down to this day. ShUM was the cradle and heart of Ashkenaz and a perfect Jewish space – a Jewish arcadia – that made it a place of pilgrimage throughout the centuries. ShUM mirrors, through stories and narratives, that Jewish heritage in specific places reaches beyond sites, that its meanings are not exclusively linked to the original or reconstructed tangible remains but extend into spaces and Jewish memory wherever Ashkenazi culture is alive. A Jewish visitor from the US once told me, after we both found shelter during a heavy rain in the Rashi-Yeshiva near the synagogue:

> ShUM is our ancestral home. It is the basis of everything in Ashkenazi Jewry [. . .] When I open the Hebrew Bible, I see comments from Rashi. When my wife was here with me the first time, we both broke out in tears. It is our source.[17]

Stories entangled with ShUM can help in trying to overcome trauma and building up resilience. The Jews in ShUM demonstrated resilience after each pogrom and destruction throughout the centuries. Jews from Worms or Mainz, who emigrated after 1933, took ShUM, its values, and traditions with them into exile. Some even carried memorabilia like a Kiddush cup with an image of the Worms Synagogue on it in their luggage or hung up a huge tapestry with the medieval house mark of their ancestral home.

ShUM can be seen as a "lieu de mémoire" (a place of memory), following the idea of French historian Pierre Nora in the 1980s.[18] Although this paradigm or theoretical idea has since then been widely reflected, revised, or criticized, it can be connected to ShUM.[19] Although Nora focused his idea on the French nation, it

Noy, *In and Out, Between and Beyond: Jewish Daily Life in Medieval Europe* (Jerusalem: Israel Institute for Advanced Studies, 2021).

17 Exchange with a visitor in Worms (January, 2020).

18 Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Gallimard), abridged translation available in Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, ed. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996–8).

19 Criticism has been formulated from postcolonial views: Etienne Achille, Charles Forsdick, and Lydie Moudileno (eds.), *Postcolonial Realms of Memory: Sites and Symbols in Modern France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

can be transferred to the concept of a collective memory of a social/religious/national group that crystallizes in certain places. Place is not to be understood geographically. Such a place/space represents a special symbolic power that leads to an identity-forming function for the respective group. This is true for ShUM. Whenever and wherever one meets a Jewish person and asks about ShUM, another story is told. Everyone seems to be connected.

It seems what Ruth Ellen Gruber stated is true for ShUM, as it opens up many approaches: "Does 'Jewish' mean intellectual? Commercial? Dynamic? Educated? Artistic? Creative? Multicultural? Rich? Poor? Foreign? Assimilated? Excluded? Exclusive? Quaint? Israeli? Old-fashioned? Pre-War? Religious? Secular? Yiddish? Victim? Communist? Dead and gone? 'Other'?".[20] ShUM is everything at once. ShUM reflects the fact that Jews develop, despite trauma and loss, strength and resilience. ShUM conveys confidence that Jewishness survives. ShUM provides orientation and anchoring at the same time, the space reflects peculiar and unique spirituality.

On July 21, 2021, the medieval monuments and cemeteries in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz were inscribed as the first genuinely European and German Jewish sites in the UNESCO World Heritage list.[21] If this makes them more a global "lieu de mémoire", I have my doubts.

From a Dainty Pillar to Golem

For many years a modest pillar was on display in the women's shul in Worms. Since September 2020 it has been on display in the new exhibition in the Jewish Museum Worms. To understand its meaning, one must go back to the 12th century. Eleazar ben Jehuda Kalonymos (ca. 1165, Speyer–ca. 1230, Worms) in 1190 was appointed as rabbi in Worms where he established a renowned shul and wrote book after book. He was, for instance, the teacher of Rabbi Isaak ben Mose/Or Sarua.[22] From 1220 onwards Eleazar represented Worms at meetings of scholars from the ShUM communities that defined the Takkanot ShUM[23] as binding re-

20 Gruber, "Life after Life", p. 14.

21 For the UNESCO application and additional information, see: https://online.fliphtml5.com/rtymp/gbdd/#p=1; https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1636/; and https://artsandculture.google.com/story/RQXxI7t9n8C-IQ.

22 See Isaac Or Saura: https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/8205-isaac-ben-moses-of-vienna.

23 Rainer Josef Barzen, *Taqqanot Qehillot Šum. Die Rechtssatzungen der jüdischen Gemeinden Mainz, Worms und Speyer im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019).

ligious-legal decisions. Eleazar married Dulcia from Speyer, a cantor's daughter, in 1183. They had a son, Jacob, and two daughters, Bellette and Hannah. This family was urban and emotionally close-knit. They loved learning, teaching, and debating. They were embedded in Jewish traditions and customs and were open to and supportive of the individuality of each other. The family's charisma shone beyond Worms. Dulcia was educated, a female cantor and prayer leader. She taught women to sing and to read, supported less well-off women to afford a wedding, and organized her husband's teaching house. She gave out what are now called microloans and ran a pawnshop. She prepared female bodies for funerals, sewed Torah-scrolls, and she organized the synagogue for holidays. All this we know because she was murdered.[24] In November 1196, the family was attacked in their home "Haus zum Hirschen" at one end of Judengasse in Worms by two criminals. Dulcia and the two daughters were killed, the son injured. Dulcia ran out to get help, but the murderers caught her and hacked her to pieces. Her husband locked the door and survived with his son and pupils, some of them wounded.[25] Why do anti-Jewish massacres often leave the same images? The killers, most likely driven by greed, as Dulcia's business was well-known, were caught by the local authorities, following the German emperor's mandate to protect Jews under his rule. At least one was executed. Eleazar wrote a moving lament for his wife and daughters:

> Her husband trusts her implicitly, she fed and clothed him in dignity / So he could sit among the elders of the land, and provide Torah study and good deeds; / She always treats him well throughout their life together; / Her labor provides him with books, her very name means "pleasant" / [. . .] Zealous in everything (she did), she spun (cords) for (sewing) tefillin and megillot, gut for (stitching together) Torah scrolls; / Quick as a deer she cooks for the young men and attends to the students' needs / [. . .] Known and wise, she serves her creator joyfully.[26]

24 See Dulcia of Worms: https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dulcea-of-worms.

25 Judith R. Baskin, "Dolce of Worms: The Lives and Deaths of an Exemplary Medieval Jewish Woman and her Daughters", in *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Early Modern Period*, ed. Lawrence Fine (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 429–37; Judith R. Baskin, "Dolce of Worms: Women Saints in Judaism", in *Women Saints in World Religions*, ed. Arvin Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 39–70; Ivan G. Marcus, "Mothers, Martyrs, and Moneymakers: Some Jewish Women in Medieval Europe", *Conservative Judaism* 38/3 (1986): 34–45; Kenneth R. Stow, "The Jewish Family in the Rhineland in the High Middle Ages: Form and Function", *The American Historical Review* 92/5 (1987): 1085–110.

26 See Eulogy for Dulcia: https://opensiddur.org/prayers/life-cycle/death/mourning/dulcea-a-woman-of-valor-an-elegy-by-eleazar-of-worms-ca-1196/.

The eulogy is a variation of "Eshet Chayil" ("Praise of the brave woman") from the end of the book of Proverbs; it is sung or recited on Shabbat.[27] Eleazar describes his wife as "pious" or "saintly" and refers to the Hebrew ne'imah, "pleasant", which is linked to the meaning of Dulcia's name in Latin: "pleasant, kind". His daughters he remembered in a separate text, more prose-like:

> Let me relate the life of my older daughter Bellette. She was thirteen years old and as modest as a bride. She had learned all the prayers and songs from her mother [. . .] The maiden followed the example of her beautiful mother [. . .] Bellette was busy about the house and spoke only truth; she served her Creator and spun, sewed, and embroidered. She was imbued with reverence and with love for her Creator; she was without any flaw. Her efforts were directed to Heaven, and she sat to listen to Torah from my mouth. [. . .] Let me talk about the life of my younger daughter [Hannah]. She recited the first part of the Sh'ma prayer every day. She was six years old [. . .] She entertained me, and she sang.[28]

Although Eleazar commemorates his wife and his daughters through the eyes of Jewish male expectations regarding what was back then appropriate female behavior, it is a poem of love and affection. Eleazar did not marry again: "I am stricken by sufferings and by wretchedness; my posterity and my equilibrium have fled from me. [. . .] He will avenge them; where no eye can see, their souls will be wrapped in eternal life".[29]

Then there is the pillar, dainty as a young girl, carved between 1180 and 1230. It was recovered in 1957 from the rubble of the Worms Synagogue destroyed during and after the Nazi pogroms in November 1938.[30] The inscription says: "/ blessed / woman / Bellette, / the lady, / for (her) good / (be) remembered / in the number / of young women". Ornamental works show a tree of life and a palm tree. Were there also pillars for Dulcia and Hannah? Perhaps they were part of a window in the women's shul, built in 1212/13.[31] Were pillars for Dulcia and Hannah destroyed in the pogrom of 1615?

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27 See Eshet Chayil: https://jwa.org/article/background-information-on-eshet-chayil.

28 Baskin, "Dolce of Worms: The Lives and Deaths", p. 437.

29 Ibid., p. 434.

30 See *Fünfzig Jahre Wiedereinweihung der Alten Synagoge zu Worms. Erweiterter Nachdruck der Forschungen von 1961 mit Quellen* (Worms: Worms-Verlag, 2011); Roemer, *German City, Jewish Memory*; Michael Brocke, "Bellette und ihr Pfeiler in der Wormser Frauensynagoge", *Der Wormsgau* 33 (2017): 29–38.

31 Women's shuln offered spaces in which female cantors, prayer leaders, and female community members created their gatherings and sung parallel to the men in the adjacent space. See Elisheva Baumgarten, "Praying separately? Gender in medieval Ashkenazi Synagogues", *Clio. Women, Gender, History* 44 (2016): 44–62, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26485956; Avraham Grossmann, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Medieval Europe* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014).

From Eleazar to Golem: In the Hebrew Bible, Golem is a synonym for "raw material, shapeless mass, imperfect substance" in the Psalms (139:16). Adam for the first twelve hours of his existence was a Golem, a body without a name or soul. Golem takes on a more concrete form in Jewish mysticism after the 11th century. Scholars argued whether Golem counts for a minyan or must go to the mikveh. With the medieval Kabbalah and a commentary on the medieval "Sefer Yetzira" (Book of Creation), Eleazar of Worms made Golem more present in Jewish mysticism.[32] Eleazar wrote that inanimate matter could be brought to life by certain number and letter combinations of the Hebrew alphabet; he repeated this in the "Sefer Hashem" (Book of the Names of God). Was Golem a shield against the outer world, a kind of protecting mass? In the 16th century, according to the legend, Rabbi Judah Löw created Golem to protect the Jewish community in Prague. Bringing Golem to life is the conclusion of the ritual and happens through the power of Hebrew letters. Aleph, Mem, and Tav together form the word "Emet" (truth). These letters are written on Golem's forehead. Another option: scratching the letters into a piece of clay or writing them on parchment and placing it under Golem's tongue. Golem was strong and protected the Jews in Prague. One day Golem became angry and unpredictable, started to destroy houses, and threw rocks around. Rabbi Löw scratched out the Aleph of "Emet". When only Mem and Tav remain, the word means "death". The remains of Golem are said to still be in the inaccessible attic of the Old-New Synagogue in Prague. Time passed; Golem remained. Shortly before the First World War, non-Jew Gustav Meyrink published a novel that is a dark, psychedelic turn-of-the-century crime thriller. The book was a resounding success and Golem also became popular with a non-Jewish audience. German silent movies took up the topic, although not free from antisemitism.[33]

Pop culture took a liking to Golem from the early 1940s onwards. Jewish illustrators in the US created superheroes such as Superman, Batman, Iron Man, or Captain America and Wonder Woman – and their evil counterparts:[34]

> For him [the Jewish illustrator], forming a golem was a sign of hope against all hope in times of despair. It was an expression of a longing that a few magic words and a skilled

32 On Golem, see: https://www.jmberlin.de/en/golem-from-mysticism-to-minecraft; https://www.jmberlin.de/en/golem-catalog-online; https://schumstaedte.de/golem.

33 Omer Bartov, *The "Jew" in Cinema. From "The Golem" to "Don't touch my Holocaust"* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

34 See Jewish Museum Berlin, *Heroes, Freaks, and Super-Rabbis. The Jewish Dimension of Comic Art* (Berlin: Jewish Museum, 2010); Johnny E. Miles, *Superheroes and Their Ancient Jewish Parallels. A Comparative Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2018); and https://www.thedailybeast.com/superman-is-jewish-the-hebrew-roots-of-americas-greatest-superhero.

> hand could produce something – something simple, tumbling, strong – that was free from withering criticism, from the evils, cruelties, and inevitable errors of the great creation.[35]

Letters turn Golem on and off – Superman wears an "S" on his chest. In the movie "Man of Steel" (US, 2013), it is said that the "S" in the language of Krypton, the planet where Superman comes from, means "hope". The Israel national anthem is the "Hatikvah" which means hope. Superman's name that his parents gave him was Kal-El. Kal in Hebrew is "voice" and "vessel". El is the suffix that means "God". Superman is the vessel of God, like Moses. Whereas the baby prophet lay in a reed basket to protect him from the Egyptian pharaoh, Kal-El's parents had put him in a spaceship before the planet was destroyed by evil forces. Both babies are rescued by non-Jews. Both Superman and Golem become rescuers.

Israel's first large-scale computer in 1966 was called Golem. This new Golem was based on a much simpler, and yet at the same time much more complicated system. Instead of 22 elements, he knew only two, the two numbers 0 and 1, which make up the binary number system – and, as philosopher Gershom Scholem added: "[. . .] I would say that the ancient Kabbalists would have been pleased to take note of this simplification of their own system. That's progress! [. . .] Can Golem love? I must leave it to you to answer this question for the new Golem. [. . .] I just say to Golem and its creator: develop peacefully and don't destroy the world. Shalom".[36]

Golem also appeared in the cartoon series *The Simpsons*. In one scene, Golem is throwing up masses of scrolls. Does he have multiple lives? Perhaps he can never be turned off?[37] Are computers, robots, artificial intelligence Golems? Today, Golem can also be female.[38] Golem shows that human creativity and the uncontrollability of created things belong together.

Eleazar, Bellette, Golem: entangled stories that reflect resilience and empowerment. In a commentary from ca. 1200, Eleazar wrote: "When non-Jews attack them, Jews are allowed to defend themselves with weapons. Even on a Shabbat, a Jew is allowed to defend himself".[39]

Golem finally came back to Worms, created from Hebrew letters by American artist Joshua Abarbanel whose artwork was installed close to Bellette's memorial

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35 Michael Chabon, *Die unglaublichen Abenteuer von Kavalier und Clay* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), p. 741.

36 Gershom Scholem, "Der Golem von Prag und der Golem von Rehovot", in *Judaica 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1987), p. 83.

37 On *The Simpsons* and Golem, see: https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Male_Golem.

38 Helene Wecker, *The Golem and the Djinni* (New York: Harper, 2013).

39 H. Fischer, *Die verfassungsrechtliche Stellung der Juden in den deutschen Städten während des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Breslau and Aalen: H. & M. Marcus, [1931] 1969), p. 102.

pillar in the Jewish Museum (Fig. 1). This is in some variation Ruth Ellen Gruber's concept of virtual Jewishness: to transform an idea and a tradition, connected to a specific Jewish space, into some new variation, connected with authenticity of thought and space.[40] Joshua Abarbanel only visited Worms and the Jewish Museum after the COVID-19 pandemic, in October 2023:

> I felt hallowed, haunted, hollowed, and vaunted. Walking down Judengasse towards the synagogue is to journey back through time. There is a desire to listen to the stones of the streets and buildings as if they speak for the people who lived here for centuries before me – eating, sleeping, studying, praying, working, laughing, and crying. There is a sense of mournful prayer, of resilient beauty and erudition, of great joy and tremendous pain, seemingly in the past yet simmering just below the surface today. To be in the museum descending the stairs of the exhibition space down to the basement and to find *Golem* at the bottom is to discover a womb in time. It is also a tomb that is eternal and yet, according to its origins, perhaps only temporary. The work can exist in this space in a way that feels, as my grandparents would have said, *beshert* (meant to be).[41]

Fig. 1: Exhibition space, artwork by Joshua Abarbanel. Photo: © conceptdesign/Susanne Urban: Installation in the Jewish Museum Worms.

40 See Gruber, "Life after Life".

41 Statements made by Joshua Abarbanel via email to the author (April 25, 2024).

> The story of Golem has universal appeal and endures through time because its elemental themes are core to the human experience. The dynamics of the struggle for power, violence, and justice in society are as relevant today as they were one hundred years ago, if not one thousand.[42]

As Joshua has himself connected to Golem, he finished his thoughts as following:

> Actually, it's been difficult for me to get rid of my Golem obsession. Given the resources, I would love to create an even larger version of *Golem*, say 18 meters in metal, to be sited in an outdoor, public area in Worms. My fantasy has children climbing upon it like Lilliputians in *Gulliver's Travels*. In addition to that vision, I would consider incorporating scrolls as the main element in a sculpture made around the theme of the spiral nature of time. Like the Torah that contains story after story laid out sequentially or tangentially, depending on whether the scroll is rolled or unrolled. I wonder what stories would be told if one could read a word or passage through each layer of a rolled Torah? ShUM to me is like an unearthed scroll from some time gone by – in the past, yet somehow also in the future.[43]

Unetane Tokef and Leonard Cohen

The central prayer on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is Unetane Tokef. The daughter of Youth Aliyah-founder Recha Freier,[44] Maayan Landau (1929, Berlin–2018, Jerusalem), admired ShUM as a source of Jewishness and wrote to me in 2016 about how this piyyut emerged in the 11th century:

> Rabbi Amnon of Mainz was a learned, honored, and handsome man. The bishop demanded he should be baptized. Clergymen spoke to him every day; he refused. They pushed him and that's when he said, to be left alone: "I think about it for three days". The way he said it – as if he had doubts! He didn't need anyone to tell him which God he should believe in! When he got home, he didn't eat, he didn't drink; he mourned. All those who loved him came to comfort him, but he refused and wept: "This will take me to the realm of the dead". After three days, the bishop called him. Amnon refused. The bishop ordered his men to take him. When Amnon stood before the bishop, the question was: "Rabbi Amnon, why did you not come to give me your answer?" Amnon said: "The tongue that spoke must be cut". The bishop replied, "Yes, the tongue must be cut, and the feet that did not come must also be cut. And I will torment the soul". The Evil One ordered Amnon to be cut and tortured and then released his battered body on Rosh Hashana. Amnon asked his community to carry him into the synagogue. When the chazan came to a certain place in prayer, Amnon said

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Susanne Urban (ed.), *"Rettet die Kinder!" Die Jugend-Aliyah 1933 bis 2003: Einwanderung und Jugendarbeit in Israel* (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdisches Museum, 2003). On Recha Freier, see: https://www.norden.de/output/download.php?fid=3170.1929.1.pdf.

> the Unetane Tokef, which was written down immediately.[45] He then died and disappeared from the sight of the worshippers. God had probably taken him directly.[46]

A parchment with Unetane Tokef, dated to the 11th century, was found in the Cairo Geniza.[47] Unetane Tokef reflects the annual judgement of God on each Jew individually and that, amidst all uncertainty, God is enduring. It is also about human responsibility and the possibility of individual choices while facing the judgement:

> On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed – how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree.[48]

Unetane Tokef is intellectually and spiritually most challenging:

> The climactic line [. . .] is usually taken as a claim that "repentance, prayer, and charity" can nullify a decree from on high. Surprisingly, these words come at the end of a text that just claimed the opposite: that our fate was already irrevocably determined. Paradoxical! It seems that Unetane Tokef is a masterpiece of theological contradiction, as if to say, "Beware! Everything is written [. . .] but everything can be changed. And remember that your thoughts, your words, and your deeds can save you".[49]

This is when, during the Yom Kippur War in Israel in 1973, the poet and musician Leonard Cohen steps into the picture.[50] In 1973, Cohen lived on the Greek island of Hydra. Matti Friedman, who has compiled the story of Cohen's stay in Israel during the 1973 War impressively uncovered a manuscript by Cohen he had writ-

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45 Tradition says it was Rabbi Kalonymus ben Meschullam (murdered 1096).

46 Email from Maayan Landau to the author (February 14, 2016).

47 For the history of Untane Tokef, see: https://en.yhb.org.il/the-story-of-the-unetaneh-tokef-prayer/.

48 For the full text of Unetane Tokef, see: https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh_Tokef.4?lang=bi.

49 See Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur, "Is Unetane Tokef palatable?", https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/259128.20?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

50 See Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: The Early Years* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020); Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: From This Broken Hill* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022); Michael Posner, *Leonard Cohen, Untold Stories: That's How the Light Gets In* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022); and Sylvie Simmons, *I'm Your Man. The Life of Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: Random House, 2013).

ten after returning from Israel in which he reflected on his stay on various levels: "I am in my myth home, but I have no proof and I cannot debate, and I am in no danger of believing myself. [. . .] Speaking no Hebrew, I enjoy my legitimate silence".[51]

One day a group of Israeli musicians, including Matti Caspi and Ilana Rubin, approached Cohen in a café. He explained he wanted to help secure the harvests, while the Israelis defended the country. It was not harvesting season, and the Israeli musicians told him they were heading to the Sinai Desert to perform on IDF bases:

> After the musicians left the café, one of them made a call to an air force officer. The air force was hemorrhaging planes and pilots at a rate so shocking it was being hidden from the public, but someone there still found time to get a guitar for Leonard Cohen. None of the artists had any idea how bad things were.[52]

In an interview with the leftist "Davar", Cohen said: "A Jew remains a Jew. Now it is war and there is no need for explanations. My name is Cohen, so?"; and he continued: "We just went to little places, like a missile site, and they shined their flashlights at us, and we sang a few songs. Or they gave us a jeep and we walked the path to the front and where we saw a few soldiers waiting for a helicopter or something, we sang a few songs. [. . .] It was very informal, and very intense".[53] While being broadcasted by the IDF channel, one can hear Cohen saying: "These songs are too quiet for the desert. You belong in a room with a woman and something to drink. Where I hope you all will be very soon".[54]

Cohen and his fellow musicians played for an audience confronted with death. He was aware that these songs might be the last the soldiers would hear. Amidst the war he started to write "Lover lover lover (come back to me)" with the lines: "And may the spirit of this song / May it rise up pure and free / May it be a shield for you / A shield against the enemy". Leonard Cohen wanted to protect the soldiers. He, as a Cohen,[55] gave them a priestly blessing. "Men were get-

51 Matti Friedman, *Who By Fire: Leonard Cohen in the Sinai* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2022), pp. 45–6.

52 Ibid., p. 62.

53 On Cohen in Israel, see: https://blog.nli.org.il/en/leonard-cohen-sinai/.

54 Ibid.

55 Cohen is one of the most widespread Jewish family names. Kohen means priest. The family name Cohen, Kahane, Kagan, and more variations are connected to the idea of being a descendant of the priestly family from biblical times. Leonard Cohen was aware of his ancestry and, for instance, at his concert in Israel on September 24, 2009, he spoke Jewish prayers and blessings to the audience. He ended his concert with the priestly blessing: https://forward.com/news/115181/hallelujah-in-tel-aviv-leonard-cohen-energizes-di/.

ting killed. I began to end our show with a new song [. . .] I said to myself: perhaps I can protect some people with this song".[56] IDF-soldier Shlomi Gruner remembered Cohen: "It is [. . .] as if you're walking in the desert and God comes down to you and starts speaking. It was like Moses hearing the voice and I walked towards it. [. . .] A steel helmet on the sand. Sitting on the helmet is a figure with a guitar, singing 'Lover, lover, lover'".[57]

In September 1974, Cohen underlined in an interview: "Wherever you saw soldiers you would just stop and sing [. . .] Everybody is responsible for his brother".[58] Already in March 1974 Cohen had started writing "Who by Fire", his version of Unetane Tokef. The war in 1973 started during Yom Kippur, when liturgies and piyyut from ShUM were sung and recited in synagogues throughout Israel. Services stopped, Israelis went to war, lost loved ones, died, were wounded. In the words of IDF-soldier Amichai Yarchi: "The Yom Kippur of the war was the end of an era and the beginning of a new era".[59]

In 1974, Cohen rewrote Unetane Tokef and adapted it to what he had experienced in Israel in 1973: "And who by fire, who by water. Who in the sunshine, who in the nighttime. Who by high order, who by common trial, [. . .] Who for his greed, who for his hunger. [. . .] Who in mortal chains, who in power. And who shall I say is calling?".

"Who shall I say is calling?" is a repeating line in this song. Is it God who decides over death and life? But does God exist? Who is responsible? Is it mankind or is it the enemy at war who decides? Are we free in our decisions?[60] Cohen was the great-grandson of a Rabbi from Lithuania. "Who by Fire" is a prayer, as Leonard Cohen once confirmed himself.[61] Many non-Jews know this modern version of Unetane Tokef, but few know that it stems from a Jewish liturgy, from ShUM. Today, in liberal synagogues around the world, Cohen's "Who by Fire" is sung on Yom Kippur, after the traditional Unetane Tokef. Or Unetane Tokef is recited to the melody of "Who by Fire". Both piyyut are comforting, and both are a spiritual challenge.

56 Friedman, *Who By Fire*, p. 97.
57 Ibid., p. 134.
58 Ibid., p. 168.
59 Ibid., pp. 176–7.
60 On Cohen's Jewish spirituality mirrored in his songs, see Harry Freedman, *Leonard Cohen. The Mystical Roots of a Genius* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), especially pp. 191–201 on "Who by Fire".
61 Freedman, *Leonard Cohen*, p. 201.

Punchlines from Kalonymos

Jewish rapper and activist Ben Salomo was born as Jonathan Kalmanovich in Israel in 1977 and has lived in Germany since he was a child. Jonathan set out on a spiritual journey when he discovered that his family name went back to the name Kalonymos – which connected him to the dynasty of scholars, rabbis, and poets who founded the Jewish community in Mainz, from which both Eleazar from Worms and the person who wrote Unetane Tokef after Rabbi Amnon's words originated.[62] In August 2021, Jonathan embarked on a journey to ShUM and a documentary was made.[63]

Jonathan – here: the musician, Ben Salomo – does what his ancestors did: he writes and composes about challenges Jews face in society, what religion means, and how to create empowerment. In "Identity" he sings:

> Ben Salomo means son of peace; I cannot be killed. [. . .] If you want to know your future, you must know where your roots lie. Music is my great devotion, without it I would have fallen in times of crisis, I'd have fallen low and would be lying on the ground. She blessed me, the son of peace, for this I remain faithfully at her service, even if I don't earn a Euro.[64]

In 2021, he wrote a song about being a Jew who immigrated to Germany:

> Countless generations, millions of my ancestors have lived here. But this land has not spared them. As hard as they tried, they were not rewarded. How many more memorials are needed, until the last tear drips from our eyes? Jewish life – to be precise: synagogues, museums, as if stuffed, or behind bulletproof glass, ready for the next one planning an attack, waiting for the next massacre, disguised as criticism of Israel – apparently, you're allowed to do that.[65]

In November 2023, Jonathan launched a song facing the wave of antisemitism after October 7, 2023. He mentions Kalonymos as his resilient and resisting ancestors.[66]

In his songs, Jonathan as Ben Salomo underlines what it means to rely on tradition and to hand it over from generation to generation, following the Jewish concept "From generation to generation" ("l'dor va l'dor"). It is first used as a con-

62 See https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9168-kalonymus.

63 See "Was sind schon 1000 Jahre?", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuzCJAF2NoQ.

64 For the song text, see: https://genius.com/Ben-salomo-identitat-lyrics.

65 See https://genius.com/Ben-salomo-deduschka-lyrics.

66 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylc7LlKjkts (minute 01:02). In addition, see the podcast with Ben Salomo, released December 12, 2023, https://www.welt.de/podcasts/welt-talks/article248996436/Mathias-Doepfner-im-Gespraech-mit-Rapper-Ben-Salomo-ueber-den-wachsenden-Antisemitismus.html (after minute 11:00).

cept in the beginning of "Pirkei Avot" (Chapters of the Fathers), when it says that the Torah is passed from one generation to the next. Its variations are found in daily prayers and Psalms and in the book of Exodus. In a way, it is one basis for how to commemorate and not to let memory and learning be interrupted.

Kalonymos is not only a name for him, but an unbroken tradition and inspiration:

> ShUM mirrors how deep Jewish history is rooted in German history and vice versa. This is something that must be told. So many Jewish people are connected to ShUM, and this entanglement is showing that ShUM is a German, a European and a Global Jewish space – for 1,000 years.

Regarding ShUM and its meaning after October 7, 2023, Jonathan with a deep sigh said:

> We see antisemitism is rising and people demand annihilation – now of Jews in Israel. The Crusades eliminated ShUM, as did the Black death pogroms. My grandfather in Rumania was told to "go to Palestine", I am now told, my family and my people shall leave "Palestine". We are ousted, again and again. My music underlines my perspective and I want to help people to know, we have resilience and survive, we are not passive, we fight back. Since October 7, we encountered a lack of empathy. I know Jews who will leave Germany, but they will not leave ShUM, they take it with them, again. These roots remain![67]

What will Remain?

As Diana Pinto writes, we must ask ourselves questions about the future and how to present Jewish heritage. What will be the values and images presented in ShUM?

ShUM reflects continuity of memory despite Jewish discontinuity in these places. ShUM is a unique urban Jewish heritage reflecting the fact that Jewish heritage is European and even global heritage. ShUM is transnational and mobile, transgenerational, timeless, and textual. ShUM is not something closed off in the past, it is alive. It is a Jewish space to find comfort and empowerment. The stories connected to these spaces are powerful, inspirational heritage. They are authentic, they are also virtual or non-tangible as they remain in people's minds and souls.

67 Email from Jonathan Kalmanovich to the author (April 30, 2024).

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Part IV: **Public Spaces**

Susanne Korbel

Jewish Spaces in Present Vienna: A Hebrew Street Sign and the Taste of Authenticity and Virtuality in the Cityscape

Fig. 1: Hebrew Street Sign "Tavorstraße" at Taborstraße 5 in Vienna's Second District © Sebestyén Fiumei.

As I walk down *Taborstraße* in Vienna's second district today (2024), coming from the inner city and the Danube Canal behind me, I spot a Hebrew street sign (Fig. 1). It is located at house number 5, in the immediate vicinity of *Karmeliterplatz*, surrounded by hotels in which the most famous Jewish theatres used to be a century ago. The *Nestroyhof*, one of the most notable (Jewish) theatre buildings itself, is just around the corner. And, probably most notably, *Taborstraße* leads directly to the Viennese Prater, once renowned for Jewish popular entertainment and functioning as a meeting space for Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. Overall, *Leopoldstadt* was and is known as a Jewish neighborhood. Yet, the entire second district in general and *Taborstraße* in particular also represent the ambivalence of Jewish life, history,

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and culture in the metropolis of Central Europe and their spatial construction – in-between lively participation, cultural flourishing and destruction, expulsion, and annihilation. The Hebrew street sign also contributes to this spatial ambiguity. This article is about how this Hebrew street sign shapes the authenticity – defined as existing through continuous change[1] – of the space of *Taborstraße* between real-life conditionality and virtual creation, influenced by negotiations of Jewish history and culture that are currently becoming real in this neighborhood (again) – unfortunately not apart from antisemitism, supposedly disguised as criticism of Israel following October 7, 2023.

On the facade of house number 5 in Vienna's *Taborstraße* the Jewish artist Sebestyén Fiumei placed a Hebrew street sign in 2017. The Hebrew "Tavorstraße" plate nourishes a Jewish taste that spreads from one of the central streets throughout the district. It is an art installation that renders the name of the street in Hebrew (not Yiddish!). The artist understands the Hebrew of the sign as a nod to the backdrop of the metropolis. The sign itself is modelled according to the standard for street nomination in a public space, and is placed where street signs are intended to be hung. What the reality of the space as it appears today does not reveal is the very fact that the street sign, as it is to be seen there, was relocated on October 10, 2017, some 30 meters further towards the Danube from where Fiumei initially placed it at *Taborstraße* 18. The re-placement on house number 5 marked the end of an online debate and initiative that aimed to bring back a Hebrew street sign which was installed and soon after removed in the part of the city renowned as a (former) Jewish space.

In this article, I probe how contemporary Jewish urban spaces are designed, interpreted, and lived. The installation of the Hebrew street sign at *Taborstraße* 5/18 in Vienna's second district, *Leopoldstadt*, in 2017, serves as a case study. I regard this case as an example in which a local and a virtual community, consisting of Jews and non-Jews alike, mutually constructed or added to an urban Jewish space. How does peoples' perceptions of their cities influence contemporary Jewish spaces? What avenues of expression do current examples of space making include? How far do these expressions contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces? First, I introduce the case study. To approach this example of contemporary Jewish space making, I then provide an overview on how spatial considerations found their way into Jewish Studies and which research interests have been investigated since in the course of this Jewish spatial turn. This leads me to argue that the (Jewish) spatial turn is currently drifting towards the virtual sphere, and

1 Francesca Piazzoni, *The Real Fake: Authenticity and the Production of Space* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), p. 4.

beyond just a metaphorical sense, since increasingly relational processes of space making occur, which emerge from or include virtual spaces.

Virtual Activism for a Hebrew Street Sign in Vienna's *Leopoldstadt*

On October 10, 2017, Vienna's – Jewish and non-Jewish – *Leopoldstadt* community achieved their wish: The administration of the city of Vienna (re)installed a Hebrew street sign in the public space of the second district. This sign had initially been erected and quickly afterwards removed the previous summer. But how did it happen that a Hebrew street sign became a focal point for negotiating public Jewish spaces?

To situate these events more adequately, I wish to briefly touch upon the historical context: Vienna's second district, also known as *Leopoldstadt*, was and is renowned as a "Jewish quarter" far beyond the city's borders. It was the historical settlement area of the Jewish community in early modern times and at the turn of the 20th century was home to many synagogues and Jewish institutions – today, it partially is again. The second district of Vienna functioned as a hub for both orthodox and "assimilated" Jews for many reasons. For instance, *Leopoldstadt* also hosted the northern railway station which was, around 1900, the first port of call for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In addition, Vienna's largest synagogue, the *Leopoldstädter Tempel* (the Leopoldstädter Synagogue), was located close to *Taborstraße* there. It added past and present – today through a void and a memory plaque – to the Jewish history and culture of the district.[2] The *Nestroyhof*, the next building to the synagogue, represented Jewish culture at the turn of the 20th century and does so again today, hosting the theater Hamakom "Der Ort" (the place).[3] It was this that earned the district the name *Mazzesinsel* and put it in the heart of modern tourist activities related to Jewish heritage and memory.[4]

It was there, in the *Taborstraße*, where an initially unknown person or group put up a street sign in Hebrew letters in late June 2017. The sign immediately caught the eye of passers-by, drew stares, and turned into the buzz of the district. Generally appreciated by the inhabitants of the neighborhood – Jewish and non-

2 Susanne Korbel, *Auf die Tour! Jüdinnen und Juden in Singspielhalle, Varieté und Kabarett – zwischen Habsburgermonarchie und Amerika* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 2021), p. 64.

3 See Theater Hamakom, "Der Ort", accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.hamakom.at.

4 Ruth Beckermann, *Die Mazzesinsel: Juden in der Leopoldstadt 1918–1938* (Wien: Mandelbaum, 1992).

Jewish alike – discussions about the street sign and the Jewish past and present circulated through the district and were soon featured in local newspapers. Due to the increasing attention it received, it soon emerged that this street sign had not been approved by the *Magistratisches Bezirksamt* (district authority). Despite Austrian authorities usually trying (or, at least, to pretend) to care for Jewish cultural sites and memory initiatives, the city administration "fulfilled their administrative duty" (this might remind the reader of a different historical debate in Austria post-Holocaust history) and removed the street sign on July 17, 2017.[5] The absence was noticed by local residents, and local newspapers began to report on it.

Soon, the removal of the Hebrew street sign just a few weeks after its installation at *Taborstraße* 18 caused protest. The neighborhood formed a group that – in order to facilitate coordination, achieve outreach, and establish a network beyond the district and across the city of Vienna – chose to rely on a virtual presence.[6] Together with people participating online, this pop-up community created an online platform using social media (Facebook and Instagram) and promoted their wish to have "the Yiddish[!] street sign" back. Operating as the Facebook groups "Das Taborstraße-Schild auf Jiddisch soll zurück"[7] and "Taborstraße Straßenschild/תבורשטראסע שלט רחוב",[8] they articulated a strong affiliation with the sign because it reminded the locals of lived historic Jewish spaces, such as the Jewish entertainment mile that had crucially determined Jewish and non-Jewish everyday life in the neighborhood at the beginning of the 20th century.[9] In the course of the online campaign, the community learned that the Hungarian street artist Sebestyén Fiumei (alias Shabi Fiumei)[10] was the

5 See "Rätsel um hebräisches Straßenschild im Zweiten", July 18, 2017, accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.heute.at/s/ratsel-um-hebraisches-strassenschild-im-zweiten-49467599.

6 See the Facebook group "Taborstraßenschild", accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMcqecCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment_id=1073665409841122.

7 See "Das Taborstraße-Schild auf Jiddisch soll zurück", accessed November 13, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067922265410.

8 See "Taborstraße Straßenschild/תבורשטראסע שלט רחוב", accessed November 14, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/Taborshtrase-.

9 Private correspondence with Sebestyén Fiumei (June 19, 2023).

10 The street artist Sebestyén Fiumei is well-known for urban art installations that relate Jewish history to cities' present appearances. For instance, Fiumei also made the sign "Mazzesinsel" in Yiddish letters at Schwedenbrücke in Vienna and Yiddish street signs at Rue de Rosiers in Paris. Recently, Fiumei developed a street sign for Grenadierstraße in Berlin. See his various social media accounts: on Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/shabi.fiumei/; on Twitter, https://twitter.com/shabi_fiumei.

mastermind behind the original installation and had initially placed the sign within view of his apartment window: "Since the house on Tabor Street has been standing there for years without a street sign for some reason, I thought I'd do it myself, add something to it, a little work of art so to speak".[11]

Fig. 2: Flyer, "Invitation to the revival of the street sign".

Following a few brief newspaper articles and some weeks of activism on the Internet, the virtual community finally gained attention from the sphere of communal politics. After contacting both the local community and the artist, politicians Andrea Standl and Adi Hasch, both members of the Green Party, initiated the re-erection of the street sign and called for an event that would bring it back to the *Taborstraße* neighborhood. Supported by Ursula Lichtenegger (Green Party), who operated as head of the *Bezirksvorstehung Leopoldstadt* (district administration) at that time, the reinstallation was framed as the opening of an art installation by Fiumei in an "Enthüllungszeremonie" (unveiling ceremony) on October 10, 2017 (Fig. 2). The official event was widely attended, and members of both Jewish and non-Jewish communities in Vienna participated. For instance, the president of the Viennese Jewish Congregation Oskar Deutsch, vice presidents Chanan Babacsayv and Dezoni Dawaraschwili, and Chief Rabbi Arie Folger, as well as certain politi-

11 Facebook, "Taborstraßenschild".

cians, all contributed to the official unveiling. Local newspapers reported on the event, and the reinstallation was a great success.[12] The artist presented the sign to the district administration and to Deutsch, as the official representative of the Jewish community. Deutsch was quoted to have wished for such a street sign on every street in the second district.[13] Pleased, honored, and inspired by the commitment of the local community, Fiumei stated: "Sometimes it only takes one person to get a piece of art removed, but dozens of others to get it put back up. I think this case was a good example of that. Nevertheless, I was very happy about the support of the local Jewish communities of the 2nd district".[14] Yet, it is important to note that the street sign was placed at *Taborstraße* 5 instead of on the facade of *Taborstraße* 18, the former Hotel National (famous for hosting a vaudeville stage at the turn of the 20th century), where it was initially installed. *Taborstraße* 18 belongs to the hospital of the Brothers of Mercy. When Fiumei claimed that he wished to re-place it on the original building, he was informed that renovations were soon to be made and that he should come back to it "when the building [was] ready for it".[15] Asked for his reasons as to why he wanted to put up a street sign, the artist replied that he considered it to be a nice gesture when, for instance, "a place name is placed not only in the official language of the country, but also in a language that concerns many inhabitants of the place with their culture" – hinting at the well-known examples of various Chinatowns. Yet, as he admitted, "in Austria, on the other hand, such a thing is not always so welcome [. . .] By putting up a street sign, I also wanted to counteract the fact that, ironically, the most Jewish quarter in Vienna is named after an antisemite".[16] Indeed, the second district owes its name to emperor Leopold I, and his role in the expulsion of the Jewish population from the city in 1669/70.[17] In the debates about either renaming or contextualizing historically problematic streets, squares, etc., Fiumei considers himself as "not necessarily taking the position of the renaming proponents": "I am more in favor of counterbalancing", he explains, "I believe that we can learn more about history and society

12 There was also a minor scandal because a politician of the right-wing Freedom party participated and tried to claim the installation as being supported by them (Taborstraße, 2017).

13 Die Taborstraße auf Jiddisch", Wiener Bezirksblatt, October 19, 2017.

14 Private correspondence.

15 Ibid.

16 Fiumei here hints at the vandalism of the bilingual place-name sign of Oberwart, where the Hungarian name Felsőőr was scratched through, and the dispute about bilingual place-name signs in Carinthia.

17 On the *zweite Wiener Gesera*, see Barbara Staudinger, *Gantze Dörffer voll Juden. Juden in Niederösterreich 1496–1670* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2005).

through this", and he anticipates his art as a step towards such critical counterbalancing of spaces.[18]

To conceptualize the interplay between local engagement and the online community, I want to point to another debate on the creation of, naming of, and artistic intervention in public spaces in Vienna: that concerning the antisemitic mayor Karl Lueger and his (still remaining) representation in the contemporary cityscape. Until 2012, a part of Vienna's prominent *Ringstraße* in the very center of the city (the part where the university is located) was named after Lueger (*Luegerring*, today Universitätsring). And still today, a monument – though artistically conceptualized – secures the antisemite's presence in the cityscape. Politicians and academics, but above all the general public – still present in the virtual sphere yet operating primarily on other media back then – have campaigned for the street to be renamed and for the monument to be removed and/or replaced. The former happened in 2012, and the latter is still only happening in the form of a palimpsest-like inscription. As Dirk Rupnow states, this debate on a potential removal and replacement of this monument indicates that "in other countries, streets are renamed and statues removed while Austria remains steadfast".[19] While a detailed discussion of the context and the problems with the *Luegerring* and the *Lueger Denkmal* is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be pointed out that the online documentation of the whole initiative[20] and the discussions that emerged around the controversial monument indicate yet another dynamic not evident in the case of the Hebrew street sign: in the case of the monument, which has not been removed but only contextualized, a local, unknown group eventually sprayed the word "shame" upon it in order to bring its problematic nature back into the public discourse. While the support by the online community helped the Hebrew street sign to be replaced, the dynamics surrounding the Lueger monument discussion highlighted other means of action – namely action in the physical space that then promotes a virtual community to join in.[21]

Since its reinstallation, the Hebrew street sign has become a trademark of Vienna's second district, portrayed in many tourist pictures, and widely seen as a representation of the neighborhood's rich Jewish history. For example, Twitter's ap-

18 Private correspondence.

19 Dirk Rupnow, "Lueger ohne Ende – Zu einer schrägen Debatte", in *ErinnerungsORTE weiter denken. In memoriam Heidemarie Uhl*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, Monika Sommer, Richard Hufschmied, and Karin Liebhart (Vienna: Böhlau, 2023), p. 145.

20 See https://www.luegerplatz.com, accessed November 10, 2023.

21 Martina Teig, "Künstlerische Erinnerungskultur-Projekte im öffentlichen Raum der Stadt Wien", in *ErinnerungsORTE weiter denken. In memoriam Heidemarie Uhl*, ed. Dirk Rupnow, Monika Sommer, Richard Hufschmied, and Karin Liebhart (Vienna: Böhlau, 2023), pp. 72–3.

plication programming interface (Twitter API)[22] data can be used to track how often the street sign, or an image of it, is used as a reference to the second district, its Jewish history, and the current urban atmosphere that surrounds it. Drawing on the data that Twitter users choose to share publicly highlights an increase in references to Jewish history and culture in the second district related to the placement, movement, and finally re-placement of the Hebrew street sign.[23] What is more, the virtual presence initiated another discussion on the Internet concerning the topography of Tabor streets across the globe. The virtual community learned that there is a Tabor street sign to be found, at least, in Jerusalem, and in Brooklyn, New York.[24] Another example of the attention the sign has gained is a video used for urban communication design in which a group of students at the Technical University Vienna placed the Hebrew street sign, then in an abstract and digitalized visualization, at the heart of a video clip on typography in Vienna.[25]

Fiumei also received reactions from both the Jewish and non-Jewish residents and of the various diverse Viennese Austrians. The artist recalled that some "native Austrians" were annoyed by the street sign: "They thought it was foreign because it is not in German. But this is wrong, and this is also what this project wants to demonstrate. Jewish history is not foreign, certainly not in the second district. It belongs to this district; it belongs to Vienna. It is also absurd to believe that the German language is threatened by Yiddish or Hebrew".[26] Despite these backward positions, the artist was happy to see the support and appreciation for the street sign, especially by the heterogenous Jewish communities that were present: "And it was not only the Ashkenazi Jews who thought the project was important; through my former partner, who is from the Caucasian Jewish community of Vienna, I learned to my surprise and delight that the project was also much discussed and appreciated by Caucasian, Bukharian, and Georgian Jewish

22 The Twitter API provides programmatic access to data which has been publicly shared on the site, such as images, hashtags, and written posts about the Hebrew street sign in Vienna. The API helps to "analyze, learn from, and interact with Tweets, Direct Messages, and users". It can be used, for example, to investigate an increase or decrease of mentions, references, comments, and other tweets related to the street sign: see https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-api. For more on the advantages and limitations of such an analysis, see Irving Dongo et al., "Web Scraping versus Twitter API: A Comparison for a Credibility Analysis", *iiWAS '20: Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Information Integration and Web-based Applications & Services* (2020): 263–73.

23 Data collection and analysis based on my open access Twitter API account: API20172023KorbelSusanne.

24 Facebook, "Taborstraßenschild".

25 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UlbtwoDxHPo.

26 Private correspondence.

women in Misrachi Jewish hair salons, for example. And, of course, the recladding was supported by many non-Jewish residents of the neighborhood".[27]

Digital Culture, the Spatial Turn, and a Virtual Sphere in Jewish Studies

In the past decades, Judaism and Jewish culture have been increasingly negotiated, lived, and constructed on the Internet. It is not only that cultural and religious institutions and heritage sites offer activities, participation, and information via online channels.[28] Using the case of a virtual pop-up community, Nathan Abrams, Sally Baker, and B. J. Brown demonstrate that people – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – gather on the Internet and form religious and denominational communities, exchange views about religious practice, discuss exegesis, make music together, read historic and contemporary texts, negotiate cultural installations, and add much more to Jewish cultures and life.[29] Peter Margolis highlights that the Internet functions as an amplifier of the lived world and offers many possibilities for cultural and religious actions to be added to Jewish life.[30] Since the 1980s, the Internet has thus become a space for encounters, both literally and metaphorically, and also provides the necessary infrastructure to create Jewish spaces in the physical world.

Since notions of spatiality have vividly resonated with postmodern mores in the field of Jewish studies, I wish to introduce some of its premises to learn about the entanglement of digital culture and spatial design. Dating back to the 1990s, research has increasingly become interested in the composition, construction, constitution, and making of Jewish places and Jewish spaces, leading to the current heyday of a Jewish spatial turn. Throughout the more than three decades

27 Private correspondence.

28 Ranging everything from the Western Wall to local congregations around the world to music festivals to literature and to archives, museums, libraries, special collections, etc., the online offerings for participation in Jewish religion and culture have grown immeasurably with the rise of the Internet: see Heidi A. Campbell and Drake Fulton, "Bounded Religious Communities' Management of the Challenge of New Media: Baha'i Negotiation with the Internet", in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 185–90.

29 Nathan Abrams, Sally Baker, and B. J. Brown, "Grassroots Religion: Facebook and Offline Post-Denominational Judaism", in *Social Media and Religious Change*, ed. Marie Gillespie, David Eric John Herbert, and Anita Greenhill (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 145.

30 Peter Margolis, "Virtuality. A Theory of Digital Judaism(s)", *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 43/2 (2023): 189–92.

since, investigations of Jewish spatiality have developed in multifarious directions, including religious sites, urban Jewish landscapes, (critical) mappings of memorized Jewish spaces, and interest in (historic) spaces of encounters and spheres of everyday life. Researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, such as religious studies, urban histories, and cultural studies, have expressed interest in heterogenous Jewish spaces.[31] Alongside these varied research interests, a vast number of definitions and approaches to Jewish places and Jewish spaces have developed. Hitherto, they have been discussed broadly, sometimes even controversially or contradictorily.[32] For instance, Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov investigated Jewish spaces through the lens of their constitutions in written text.[33] Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman understood spaces as containers for place making – a process that endows spaces with meaning[34] – while Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke regarded Jewish places as everything that has a physical position in a geographical landscape and a defined Jewish affiliation.[35]

Despite the increasing influence of the Internet, the virtual world, and digital culture – for negotiations of Judaism, Jewish history and culture – and the omnipresence of the metaphor of "digital space", spatial considerations have so far received little attention in the so-called spatial turn.[36] For example, Martina Löw and Gunter Weidenhaus emphasized that spatial references in the context of the scissors of the Internet often decouple debates about reciprocal spatial design into the sheer metaphorical level. Yet, the increasing presence of the virtual aspects or the way virtual negotiations might condense in physical spaces have received less at-

31 Julia Brauch and Anna Lipphardt, "Gelebte Räume – Neue Perspektiven auf jüdische Topographien", in *Jewish Spaces: Die Kategorie Raum im Kontext kultureller Identitäten*, hrsg. v. Petra Ernst und Gerald Lamprecht (Bozen, Innsbruck, Vienna: Studienverlag, 2010), pp. 19–22; Barbara E. Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp. 2–3.

32 Susanne Korbel, Lukas Nievoll, and Thomas Stoppacher, "Introduction: Rethinking Jewish and non-Jewish Relations", *Jewish Culture and History* 21/1 (2020): 2.

33 Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov, "Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space", *Jewish Social Studies* 11/3 (2005): 2.

34 Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman (eds.), *Making Place: Space and Embodiment in the City* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

35 Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Spaces. An Approach", in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt, and Alexandra Nocke (Burlington, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 1–26.

36 Heidi A. Campbell, "Introduction. Studying Jewish Engagement with Digital Media and Culture", in *Digital Judaism. Jewish Negotiations with Digital Media and Culture*, ed. Heidi A. Campbell (London, New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 5–7.

tention.[37] Besides approaches inspired by digital humanities, fewer works have been interested in Jewish spaces and virtuality.[38] According to the historians Miriam Rürup and Simone Lässig, questions regarding relational spaces – spaces as products of social interactions and sociability – are still underrepresented and, in particular, ignored in terms of the virtual world.[39]

When Rürup and Lässig edited the anthology *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, they were among the first to open the spatial turn in Jewish studies toward the digital sphere. In their reflections on what the Jewish spatial turn has achieved hitherto, they included, for instance, Ruth Ellen Gruber's article on reflections on her concept of "virtually Jewish" – a punning reference to the Internet that rather mediates the multifarious understandings of space making and its negotiations, in, beyond, and in-between physical, imagined, virtual, and/or memorized spaces. It is important to note though that with the widely discussed concept "virtually Jewish", Gruber has not the virtual world in mind but suggests that "in post-Holocaust places already now devoid or nearly devoid of living Jews, non-Jewish interest in Jewishness has had this effect", namely, to produce a "virtually Jewish world".[40] Works such as those by Barbara Mann indicate that the virtual sphere also starts to add to physical Jewish spaces, and other approaches have demonstrated that in the virtual sphere Jewish spaces might evolve, as, for example, Joachim Schlör examines with the democratic preservation initiated by a particular Facebook group using social media as an archival

37 Martina Löw and Günther Weidenhaus, "Borders that relate: Conceptualizing boundaries in relational space", *Current Sociology* (2017): 553–70.

38 In particular, research on the Holocaust has resonated with digital humanities approaches and digital as well as critical mapping. See, for example, Anne Kelly Knowls, *Holocaustgeographies*, accessed June 24, 2023, https://holocaustgeographies.org/. On deep mapping in Jewish migration history from the Middle East and North African region, see Piera Rosetto, "Mind the Map: Charting unexplored Territories of invisible migrations from North Africa and Middle East to Italy", *Jewish Culture and History* 23/2 (2022): 172–95.

39 Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup, "Introduction: What Made a Space 'Jewish'? Reconsidering a Category of Modern German History", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017). What is more, Lässig and Rürup highlighted that historical research in Jewish studies has ignored questions concerning spaces. Among the first historical studies of Jewish spaces was a special issue of *East Central Europe* (2015): see therein Erika Zsívós, "Introduction: Historic Jewish Spaces in Central and Eastern European Cities", *East Central Europe* 42 (2015): 139–62.

40 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Real Imaginary Spaces and Places: Virtual, Actual, and Otherwise", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017), p. 300.

space.[41] Finally, the dynamic between real-life spaces and those created on or through the Internet resonated in Maja Hultman's and Joachim Schlör's call for a 2022 conference on "Jewish spaces in past and present Europe", during which they aimed to discuss contemporary Jewish spaces as both "virtual and real-life spaces".[42] So, will "new Jewish spaces" be continuously initiated in the virtual sphere?[43] And how does the virtual contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces today?

The case of Vienna and Hebrew Street Signs in Other European Cities

As in Vienna, Hebrew (and Yiddish) street signs are becoming increasingly common in European cities. Especially in the post-socialist countries, such street signs belong to the phenomenon Gruber described as "virtual Jewishness". The story behind the Viennese street sign is rather different; debates surrounding it demonstrate the wide range "virtual Jewishness" takes, beyond Eastern Europe and post-socialist countries, and also adds to the renewal of Jewish rituals.[44] Before I aim at contextualizing what I consider to be practices of space making, I wish to introduce Fiumei's aim and thoughts regarding the Viennese Hebrew street sign and this particular kind of art installation.

Impressed by the multi-layered processes of spatiality that unfolded alongside the Viennese Hebrew street sign, I was eager to talk about them with the artist. In correspondence with him, I learned that Fiumei specializes in working with languages and shares an interest in urban spaces, especially in what he called "socio-history/ies" of certain neighborhoods. He shared with me that one of the places where he lives is the second district of Vienna (which he actually prefers not to refer to as *Leopoldstadt*):

41 Joachim Schlör, "German-Jewish Family Archives in the (Virtual) Diaspora. Questions of Storage, Ownership and Belonging", *Tsafon – Revue d'études juives du Nord* 11 (2023): 145–7.

42 The call can be accessed via the website of the *European Association for Jewish Studies*, accessed November 10, 2023, https://www.eurojewishstudies.org/conference-grant-programme-reports/report-a-jewish-europe-virtual-and-real-life-spaces-in-the-21st-century/.

43 Diana Pinto, "The Jewish Challenges in the New Europe", in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York: Berghahn, 2002), p. 250.

44 Daniel Belasco (ed.), *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

> Taborstrasse is the main artery of the so-called Mazzesinsel, there is no other street in Vienna that is so closely and intensely connected with the Jewish past, but also with the Jewish present. I was intrigued by the coincidence that the word Tabor also happens to resonate with the religious Jewish residents of the neighborhood. The term Tabor is a wartime loanword that entered the German vocabulary during the Hussite period. Originally, Tabor was the name given by the Taborites, the radical and militant wing of the Hussites, to a place in the open air where they gathered, a camp. The exaltation of Jesus on an unnamed "Mount of Transfiguration" recounted in Mt 17:1–12 EU was placed by the Taborites (as were other Christian groups) on Mount Tabor. Mount Tabor (in Hebrew: Har Tavor) and its surroundings play a central role also in the Tanakh in the Book of Judges, chapter 4 "Deborah Battle".[45]

The collaborative construction of a Jewish space in mutual exchange between a virtual community, local activists, and regional politicians in Vienna's second district ultimately enabled an art intervention in the public space in Vienna that soon had an impact beyond the city's borders. Following the Vienna Hebrew street sign in 2017, Sebestyén Fiumei designed similar signs for installation in Paris and Berlin. As had been the case in Vienna, his signs evoked a range of reactions from the local communities and politicians. All three projects place a Hebrew or Yiddish street sign in surroundings strongly associated with Jewish culture, whether historically or at present. "I think there are quite a few monuments and other objects that remind us of the terrible things that happened in Jewish history, but sometimes I miss things that would remind us of the actual life and stories and people between these tragedies".[46] A crucial part of his art activism is the moment of surprise, as Fiumei told me: "I did all three installations in public spaces without prior permission, this is part of my artistic practice, I want to keep the element of surprise, similar to street art in general, just maybe overcome the vandalism".[47]

In Paris, Fiumei created a Yiddish street sign that reads "Pletzl", which is a reference to the Jewish quarter of the fourth arrondissement in Paris. Comparable to Vienna's *Taborstraße*, Paris's *Rue de Rosiers* holds a specific place in the representation of historic, memorized, and present Jewish culture. The street is known for serving as a space of Jewish and non-Jewish encounters, past and present, as well as being a hub for heterogenous Jewish communities, including Hassidic and orthodox Jews and liberal groups of diverse migration backgrounds from Eastern Europe as well as from the North African regions.[48] Fiumei placed

45 Private correspondence.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Jeanne Brody, "La rue des Rosiers ou la mémoire réappropriée", *Espace populations sociétés* 14/2–3 (1996): 357.

the sign at the heart of *Rue des Rosiers* in 2019[49] "In the Parisian Jewish neighborhood of Pletzl, my project was immediately understood and liked, even the mayor of the arrondissement posted a picture of it on his Instagram profile. It now acts as one of the attractions of the neighborhood, you can even buy fridge magnets of it in the local Judaica stores".[50]

Following the Paris 2019 project, Fiumei began work on a Yiddish street sign for Berlin's *Grenadierstraße* in the centre of the former *Scheunenviertel* (barn quarter), the port of call for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Russian Pale of Settlement in the first decades of the 20th century. Similar to Vienna's *Leopoldstadt* and Paris's Pletzl, in the *Scheunenviertel* a rich Jewish culture was represented, being a sphere where orthodox Jews, new immigrants to the city, and those climbing the social ladder mingled, and where the most prominent spots of Jewish religious and cultural life were found.[51] In a newspaper interview, Fiumei stressed that despite Berlin's abundance of memory culture, one is astonished to find almost no hint of the Jewish history of this street and quarter.[52] With this project, Fiumei aimed to do what he called "memory culture from below". As was the case with the two other installations, he again consciously evaded bureaucracy when he placed his art at today's *Almstadtstraße*, which was called *Grenadierstraße* in earlier days.[53] Yet, "[i]n Berlin it was removed by the authorities, but the neighborhood assured me that they would be interested in installing it". However, due to regulations for artworks in public spaces in Germany that forbid artworks to be placed only temporarily in public spaces, Fiumei is still trying to bring his sign back to the streets. So far, the street sign has been kept in storage by the city administration.

With the installation of the street signs by Fiumei in the three cities (Fig. 3), two aspects of negotiation of contemporary Jewish spaces became evident. On the one hand, discourses around visible Hebrew font and Yiddish culture in urban space overlap; and this is also where the installation of Hebrew street signs inter-

49 Une plaque en yiddish dans la rue des Rosiers", Times of Israel, December 17, 2019, accessed November 10, 2023, https://fr.timesofisrael.com/une-plaque-en-yiddish-dans-la-rue-des-rosiers/.

50 Private correspondence.

51 Anne-Christin Saß, "Reconstructing Jewishness, Deconstructing the Past: Reading Berlin's Scheunenviertel over the Course of the Twentieth Century", in *Space and Spatiality in Modern German-Jewish History*, ed. Simone Lässig and Miriam Rürup (New York: Berghahn, 2017).

52 Masha Malburg, "Erinnerungskultur von unten", *ND Journalismus von Links*, July 26, 2021, accessed June 24, 2023, https://www.nd-aktuell.de/artikel/1154885.jiddisches-strassenschild-erinnerungskultur-von-unten.html.

53 See "גרענאַדירשטראַס, Yiddish Berlin", September 9, 2021, accessed November 10, 2023, https://yiddish.berlin/wp/de/2021/09/.

Fig. 3: Collage of Fiumei's projects in Vienna, Paris, and Berlin by the author.

vene with Human Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan's note that "[t]he cult of the past calls for illusion rather than for authenticity".[54] On the other hand, today's Jewish space making in Europe is intrinsically linked to memory. What is particularly compelling about the Vienna art installation is that the sign is usually referred to as a Yiddish street sign and not a Hebrew one; however, a reader of the languages will immediately notice that it is not a Yiddish transliteration of the German street name. Also, one of the online debates, reflected in comments on the Facebook group, revolved around the fact that the supposed Yiddish transliteration of the street name would be incorrect.[55] And yet, the artist's point was precisely not to transliterate a given name but to add an explicit biblical reference to Mount Tabor: "It was a conscious decision not to simply transliterate the word Tabor into Yiddish (טאבאר), but to use the spelling of the biblical mountain (תבור). I found it a happy coincidence that the name of the street also has an indirect Jewish reference. I wanted to create an association with Mount Tabor. I wanted to point to that association, to reinforce it".[56] The Hebrew street signs are thus apt examples of what Diana Pinto proposes as a description of contemporary Jewish spaces in Europe: "The new Jewish Spaces instead were to be based on a Jewish understanding of the Jewish past [and present, if I may add] and its interaction with the

54 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 195.

55 For example, user Michael Krebs (September 15, 2021) stated "Meiner Meinung nach ist das kein Jiddisch, auf Jiddisch würde es wohl גרענאַדירשטראַס (Taborgasse) lauten". See Facebook, "Taborstraßenschild": https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=pfbid02bZqYR4MBMJhKHvqKwnsPYqVJzQMcqecCf3vZr2R7mYr87dhbeCcaCY7YwpKAm38cl&id=176065299601142&comment_id=1073665409841122, accessed June 24, 2023.

56 Private correspondence.

wider European context. Jews as authors and co-authors, no longer as subjects of non-Jewish investigation, would ideally help define the perimeters of such Jewish Spaces where non-Jews, as equals, could also bring in their contributions, queries, and understandings".[57]

Authenticity and Reality of Virtual Jewish Spaces – Jewish Space Making Today

But how does the street sign initiative fit among and contribute to virtual Viennese Jewish spaces? Vienna, alongside other cities, is obviously the subject of a broad discourse on the Internet today. Hashtag *#JewishVienna*,[58] for example, collects a wide variety of contributions related to research institutions. In particular, the *Vienna Wiesenthal Institute* and the *Jewish Museum*, memorial initiatives, such as *Politics of Remembrance* (POREM) or a project on an apartment building at the *Servitengasse* and its expelled Jewish residents, and private groups that exchange information about former relatives who once lived in Vienna but had to flee or were murdered. Hashtag *#JewishVienna* might also be attributed to posts and contributions by individuals on social media and thus adds to the portrayal of the Jewish spatial perception of the city. Despite such loose affiliations which can be easily added to link interests, I am interested in a more specific form of exchange, influence, and transgression between the virtual and physical space with this case study: namely, how a mutual back and forth between online and physical spaces fosters sociability. In the case of the *Taborstraße* street sign, a real-life and a virtual community together generated an impact on a public space through Facebook and other social media activities that raised the public's awareness and put pressure on the city administration. First, the installation of the street sign can be described as a relational spatial practice that allows for a discussion of how an abstract spatial conception by an informal, non-group-based, non-governmental initiative operating on the Internet took shape in a physical location. Triggered by the removal of the sign, a community popped up using (primarily) Facebook to initially form and then operate, before transgressing their action into the physical space; an art project re-created the Hebrew street sign

57 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", p. 23, in this current volume.

58 Vienna Wisenthal Institute, https://www.vwi.ac.at; POREM Politics of Remembrance, https://porem.univie.ac.at; Servitengasse Verein, https://www.servitengasse1938.at/index.php?id=2; Jewish Museum Vienna, https://www.jmw.at. All accessed June 24, 2023.

Taborstraße, which was then re-installed on October 10, 2017. Finally, as the sign was once more placed in the streets of Vienna, it again impacted discussion and cultural negotiations on the Internet and soon led to artistic installations emerging in other cities that were meant to provoke public reactions to a visible, allegedly officialized lived Jewish culture as amalgamated in city administrations' naming of streets.

So, how does the virtual contribute to the authenticity of Jewish spaces today? By investigating the tensions between reality, authenticity, and virtuality (as this edited volume also does), researchers gain a deeper understanding of how virtual spaces are changing the way we experience and interact with the world around us, both physically and digitally. The urban studies scholar Maria Francesca Piazzoni notes that "authenticity is, above all, about an unresolved tension between permanence and change".[59] Acknowledging the ambiguities that come with the word "authentic", Piazzoni succeeds in describing space making as a continuous process, that is, increasingly influenced by communication and activities bridging physical and virtual spheres. The Hebrew street sign in Vienna is a case in point.

The debate around the removal and reinstallation of the Hebrew street sign in Vienna was a beginning rather than an end of a hybrid way of constructing Jewish urban spaces. Since then, an even more vivid exchange between virtual and physical activities has shaped the perception of the city's Jewish spaces, so to speak. In terms of the discussion of Yiddish culture in the public sphere created in a historic (but also contemporary) Jewish space by (also) non-Jews, Vienna's *Taborstraße* street sign would perfectly fit into examples of "virtual Jewishness". As I aimed to demonstrate with my examination of the intermingling of pop-up virtual and real-life communities, the space-making practice emerging around the *Taborstraße* street sign is an example of a collaboration between a virtual and a local community in which Jews and non-Jews strongly interacted. This dialogue added new layers to the historic Jewish quarter of Vienna and to how people interact in, come into contact with, and perceive the *Leopoldstadt*.

This Viennese example differs from conventional phenomena of space making in so far as the Vienna example did not (only) remain at the level of "virtually" or invention but rather enhanced a mutual and dynamic ongoing exchange between real-life and virtual spaces. The pop-up community-initiated neighborhood activism was in answer to a political debate, first on the Internet and then in the physical space, which then resonated back and forth among a larger global online community. Through their online presence, the group was also able to launch a global search for similar installations and created a huge *Taborstraße*

59 Piazzoni, *The Real Fake*, p. 4.

street sign network. This connected diverse peoples who started to exchange, think, and thus re-create the atmosphere of their district and personal and family memories related to it, to Vienna, or even more generally. They discussed findings and space making in Europe and around the globe. For example, Klezmer festivals are increasingly being set up in Krakow's Kazimierz or in Vilnius and other Eastern European cities,[60] "virtually" and/or as virtual initiatives, and evoke sociability and Jewish/non-Jewish relations, for instance among festival visitors. Additionally, touristic sociability around virtually and virtual created spaces is more and more paradigmatic for today's Europe as it witnesses the heyday of "Holocaust tourism".[61] But the installation of a street sign in Vienna might be added to what Gruber describes as a dynamic transition from "virtually Jewish"[62] – which, as mentioned before, describes the invention of European Jewish spaces by non-Jews – to the virtual; a phenomenon we are, according to Gruber, currently intensively witnessing.

Conclusion: Spaces Meet Digital Formats – Spatial Theory as a Hybrid Undertaking

The Viennese initiative is but one example of a change in Jewish space making – one that also/may include the virtual sphere and online communities. In this article, I investigated Jewish space making as a dialectic and mutual dynamic between real-life spaces and the virtual space. The discussion concerning the *Taborstraße* street sign and the opening event for its reinstallations illuminated a scenario of virtual space making in which Jews and non-Jews alike participated. I suggest considering such examples as new hybrid undertakings in space making and including the virtual sphere (not in Gruber's sense of virtual Jewishness) as an increasingly meaningful component of contemporary space making. Case studies such as the *Taborstraßenschild* initiative and its impact on the making of Jewish space in other European cities reveal new hybrid relational formats of Jewish spatiality in modern Europe, despite the long-standing ban of virtual spaces in the spatial turn. This late inclusion of virtual spaces was not least due to the strict rejection of their inclusion in relational concepts by the concept's founder, Martina Löw, who argued that the

60 Magdalene Waligorska, *Klezmer's afterlife: An ethnography of the Jewish music revival in Poland and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

61 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 99/4 (2009): 498–500.

62 Ibid; Gruber, "Real Imaginary Spaces and Places", pp. 298–310.

Internet is the implication of a spatial metaphor – Löw and Weidenhaus define it as diametrically opposed to spaces. "In short, the Internet is overall not a space, but rather a communication system that embeds spatial metaphors".[63] Regarding consideration of Jewish spatiality, there has been a significant presence in cyberspace for the past decades, and channels of virtual communication have changed a lot since. It has thus become increasingly apparent that there are transitional scenarios of physical space making. Virtual spatial constellations are anchored in physical places and also anchor themselves in and through social relationships, which then, in turn, affect and impact the negotiation in virtual spaces (on the Internet in general, in distinct social media in particular). This becomes apparent when one moves through the streets of Vienna's second district – virtually or physically – and witnesses how people arrange to meet at the Hebrew letter *Taborstraße* sign or come into contact and exchange ideas through the initiative, even globally via the city borders dialogue, which then catalyzes concrete meetings in Vienna. We are thus also seeing, in Diana Pinto's sense, new Jewish spaces as hybrid Jewish spaces[64] – and hybridity in an additional sense as it was described in the postcolonial turn.[65] Yet, as I have argued here, space making is always a relational undertaking. The reality of the space constructed through and around the Hebrew *Taborstraße* sign is currently challenged by antisemitism following the events of October 7, 2023. In the course of 2024, slogans such as "victory to Palestine" or "death to Zionism" have been placed around or just below the street sign, thus also adding to the contemporary space of the *Leopoldstadt*.[66] In addition, not only visual assaults against the Jewish taste of the neighborhood, affiliating it with Zionism and convoluted in a harsh critique on Israeli politics, but also physical attacks are overshadowing the space: in March 2024, a Jewish neighbor was physically attacked for wearing a kippa in the vicinity of the *Taborstraße* sign.[67] This current turn of antisemitism in lived spatial practice thus casts a dark shadow over this seemingly positive example of a Jewish/non-Jewish space-making process in Vienna's *Leopoldstadt*.

63 Löw and Weidenhaus, "Borders that relate", p. 556.

64 Pinto, "The Jewish Challenges", pp. 242–50.

65 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 2004).

66 Agnes Preusser, "Antisemitische Schmierereien in Wien: Fernab des Akzeptablen", *Kurier*, May 2, 2024, accessed July 1, 2024, https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/antisemitische-schmierereien-in-wien-fernab-des-akzeptablen/402880784; Anna Strobl, "Antisemitische Schmierereien an mehreren Hausfassaden in Wien", *Kurier*, May 2, 2024, accessed July 1, 2024, https://kurier.at/chronik/wien/antisemitische-schmierereien-an-hausfassaden-in-der-leopoldstadt/402880457.

67 Parlament Österreich, "Antisemitismus-Ausstellung 'Tacheles reden' mit zehn neuen Videos", accessed July 1, 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/aktuelles/news/Antisemitismus-Ausstellung-Tacheles-reden-mit-zehn-neuen-Videos/.

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Karin Brygger and Maja Hultman

On the Edge of Virtuality: Jewish Spaces after October 7

Introduction

Shortly before Hamas's terror attack on October 7, 2023, which shattered the Jewish world in Israel as well as globally, we began to write an article on the role of the Jewish past in today's Sweden. But the attack and the global response to the ensuing Israel-Hamas war radically changed the conditions for our writing, forcing us to pose new questions and rephrase our purpose. The Jewish world as well as us, who live in it and research it, faced a new reality and a new future. The "new normal" for Jews in European societies is a life radically different and more vulnerable than before. To be sure, Jews have a strong minority status in many countries, with national, EU, and UN legislation protecting Jewish culture, religion, and education. Furthermore, Jewish Studies is well established in universities. The fact that we are writing this article within academia reflects a society which asserts the right to Jewish life. At the same time, the breadth and width of antisemitic and anti-Israel propaganda and violence towards Jews and Jewish institutions around the world in the wake of October 7 and the Israel-Hamas war is overwhelming.[1]

In Europe, memorial sites and statues linked to Jewish history have been vandalized, and antisemitic and anti-Israel graffiti has littered urban landscapes. In light of this, we began to ask ourselves: How has October 7 impacted the presence and role of the Jewish past, evoked in sites of heritage or through cultural events? Diana Pinto's chapter in this book, written before October 7, succinctly recounts two trends that already made Jewish life in Europe difficult before the terror attack: Jewish spaces' navigation of anti-Israel views, sometimes from within their own organizations, and the "competition of suffering" between minority groups in Europe. Since October 7, these trends have exploded in antisemitic magnitude. We now live in a time where Jewish spaces, in Pinto's harrowingly prophetic words, "live on the razor's edge of both Jewish and non-Jewish democratic controversies and even attacks", and need to "reinvent themselves in a time of raw vio-

1 Jamey Keaten and Laurie Kellman, "With antisemitism rising as the Israel-Hamas war rages, Europe's Jews worry", *AP News*, November 26, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024: https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-antisemitism-europe-massacre-war-protests-1d26266dfd9b2b8dd4c795f420abab47.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111268132-011

lence and war".[2] In this chapter, we ask what the terror attack and the spiking antisemitism has exposed about the longevity and integrity of Jewish spaces in Europe. To do so, we define and apply the concept of virtuality on three cultural institutions in Sweden and discuss what they unveil about European Jewish spaces in crisis. We find efforts that both adapt to and resist the new normal. Most importantly, in pinpointing virtual dilemmas that have emerged after October 7, we reveal Jewish spaces to be fragile and flexible, contested as well as resistant, yet unable to respond in ways that unite rather than divide as they face the volatile antisemitism of post-October 7.

Europe and Sweden after October 7

To say that Europe and everyday life for its Jewish inhabitants changed after October 7 is not an understatement. The terror attack by Hamas on Israeli civilians was the deadliest and most violent attack against Jewish people since the Holocaust. According to statistics published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, it was also the third deadliest terror attack in the world since 1970, the year that data on terror attacks started to be recorded.[3] Official statistics show that 1,200 people were murdered, 4,834 people were wounded, and another 240 were taken hostage in Gaza. The torture of women and children, including rape and bodily mutilation, defined the systemic terror that Hamas unleashed on people. Shortly after October 7, Israel attacked Gaza in order to destroy Hamas, bring back the hostages, and demilitarize the territory. The Israel-Hamas war has led to the death of tens of thousands of Palestinians and great humanitarian suffering among the people in Gaza, and as we write this in October 2024, the war has come to involve both Iran and the Hezbollah in Lebanon, with the civil population in the latter country suffering from air attacks. In relation to Europe, the war has incited a new wave of antisemitism.

For European Jews, the terror attack in Israel and the Israel-Hamas war were followed by threats, violence, and crimes against Jews in public spaces, at work,

2 See Diana Pinto's chapter, "Jewish Spaces in a Topsy-Turvy Europe", pp. 23, 33, in this current volume.

3 Daniel Byman et al., "Hamas's October 7 Attack: Visualizing the Data", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, December 19, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/hamass-october-7-attack-visualizing-data.

in state institutions, and in Jewish homes and religious institutions.[4] In Sweden, as in other countries, Hamas's terror attack prompted public celebrations by inhabitants with an Arabic background. Already on October 7, corteges of cars drove through cities in southern Sweden, honking, waving flags, and shouting antisemitic insults. Fireworks and celebrations were enacted on streets and squares.[5] The journalistic website of Doku, which surveys Swedish "Islamism that is dangerous to democracy", counted over 20 vehicles in a car cortege in the town of Kristianstad and listed examples of antisemitic comments posted on the circulation of clips from the celebrations on social media.[6] Barely a month later, the Israeli flag was burned in front of the synagogue in Malmö.[7] As described in the introduction, such hate crimes were not unique to Sweden. According to the Anti-Defamation League, antisemitic attacks have increased a thousandfold across the globe since October 7.[8] Synagogues and Jewish communal centers, cemeteries, Holocaust memorials, and Jewish homes have been vandalized, and Jews have been verbally insulted and violently assaulted across Europe. On top of this, as the Israel-Hamas war continues, anti-Zionist and anti-Israel discourses fill public space, affecting anything from social media to presidential elections.

Unsurprisingly, many Jews express great fear in their daily lives and carry an enhanced worry for verbal or violent attacks. This is exemplified in a survey on the situation for Swedish Jews after October 7, carried out by the Jewish Central Council in Sweden and the analysis company Infostat at the end of 2023. Members of Jewish communities in Helsingborg, Gothenburg, Malmö, and Stockholm responded to the survey and the result showed that half of the respondents said

4 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Jewish People's Experiences and Perceptions of Antisemitism", July 11, 2024, https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2024/experiences-and-perceptions-antisemitism-third-survey.

5 Hannes Lännerholm and Anette Holmqvist, "Hamas blodiga attacker firades i svenska städer", *Expressen*, October 9, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/hamas-blodiga-attacker-firades-i-svenska-stader/; Henrik Sköld, "Efter Hamas attack på Israel: Klipp visar firanden i Sverige", *SVT Nyheter*, October 9, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/skane/videoklipp-pastas-visa-firande-hamas-israel-sverige-sprids-sociala-medier.

6 See "Palestinskt firande i Sverige efter attackerna mot Israel", *Doku*, October 8, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024, https://doku.nu/2023/10/08/palestinskt-firande-i-sverige-efter-attackerna-mot-israel/.

7 Niklas Lindberg, "Israels flagga brändes vid synagogan i Malmö", *Sydsvenskan*, November 4, 2023, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.sydsvenskan.se/2023-11-04/israels-flagga-brandes-vid-synagogan-i-malmo.

8 Anti-Defamation League, "Global Antisemitic Incidents In the Wake of Hamas' War on Israel", May 20, 2024, accessed August 20, 2024, https://www.adl.org/resources/blog/global-antisemitic-incidents-wake-hamas-war-israel.

that although they had previously felt quite safe to live as a person with a Jewish identity in Sweden, that sense of security was abruptly destroyed. Concerns about violence and harassment, and an anxiety for having to reveal one's Jewish identity openly, were some consequences of the new reality. The survey also conveyed a deep pessimism about the future: many expressed a belief or feeling that "everything will get worse".[9] The Jewish community in Gothenburg even encouraged their members to hide their identity in public spaces; to avoid speaking Hebrew and wearing clothes or jewelry that might reveal their identity.[10] A study by The Segerstedt Institute on Swedish Jewish responses to October 7 underlines, among many things, the group's broken faith in Swedish society's ability to keep them safe.[11] In relation to a Jewish public life of heightened fear and repression, how have spaces that commemorate, educate about, or discuss Jewish history and culture, whose very existence depends on encounters and relations between Jews, non-Jews, and non-Jewish societies in public spaces, experienced and reacted to the European world after October 7? This is the premise of our study, and we will explore our results through the prism of virtuality.

Virtuality as a Concept for Jewish/non-Jewish Relations

Although largely unused in studies on cultural institutions related to a Jewish past, the concept of virtuality has a long history and should, we argue, be incorporated in analyses of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews as they together construct a common future through engagements with Jewish culture and history. This is because the hopefulness and creativity deeply embedded in the concept can serve as a guiding rod in times where antisemitism increases and affects Jewish/non-Jewish relations. When laying the conceptual foundation for this field some thirty years ago, both Ruth Ellen Gruber and Pinto emphasized the virtual

9 Infostat, "Antisemitism i Sverige. I svallvågorna av sjunde oktober", November 20, 2023. https://www.judiskacentralradet.se/single-post/svenska-judars-upplevelse-av-antisemitism-efter-7-oktober

10 Federico Moreno, "Uppmaningen till svenska judar: 'Tala inte hebreiska'", *Expressen*, October 10, 2023, accessed August 24, 2024, https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/uppmaningen-till-svenska-judar-tala-inte-hebreiska/.

11 Mirjam Katzin and Pontus Rudberg, "Konsekvenser av den 7 oktober för judar i Sverige: tankar, emotioner och reflektioner", in *Antisemitism i Sverige efter den 7 oktober: Upplevelser och konsekvenser*, ed. Christer Mattsson, Robin Andersson Malmros, and Morten Sager (Göteborg: Segerstedtinstitutet, 2024), pp. 32–3.

dimension of their respective terms: "virtual Jewishness" and "Jewish Space".[12] Gruber defined virtual Jewishness as an "intense, visible, vivid [Jewish] presence in places where few Jews live today".[13] It is a physical or abstract site that both facilitates and is the very product of non-Jewish cultural interaction with themes related to the European Jewish past destroyed in the Shoah. Here, the virtual notion points to the non-Jewish cultural creation of something that is reached through a dialogue with Jewish history but inevitably is, due to the identity of the creator(s), inherently different from a cultural manifestation constructed by Jews. In her later work, as well as in her chapter in this book, Gruber stresses that even though a virtual Jewishness might seem like a mimicry or simplification of a Jewish past, it is a "new authenticity" or a "real imaginary" space, a non-Jewish cultural expression of

> things, places, and experiences that in themselves are real, with all the trappings of reality, but that are quite different from the "realities" on which they are modeled or that they are attempting to evoke. This process, which can be seen as "creating" something new in itself rather than "re-creating" something that once existed, has led to the formation of its own models, stereotypes, modes of behavior, and even traditions.[14]

In other words, non-Jewish engagement with the Jewish past – be it the opening of restaurants with dishes and milieus emulated on an idea of what Eastern European Jewish life was like before the Shoah,[15] or the embrace of Klezmer music[16] – are not meant to recreate a Jewish presence in Europe as it was before the Second World War but should instead be understood as a new form of culture with a new function. The former developed as a way for Jewish peoples to define and express themselves. Virtual Jewishness, on the other hand, is closely linked to the non-Jewish environment and its products are thus constructed for the cultural and social benefit of non-Jewish societies.

In her discussion on Jewish Spaces, Pinto expands this definition of virtuality beyond newly created cultural expressions linked to Jewish history and presents

12 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Diana Pinto, "A New Jewish Identity For Post-1989 Europe", *JPR Policy Paper* 1 (1996): 1–15.

13 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: Monuments to the Jewish experience in Eastern Europe", in *Jewish Cultural Studies 4: Framing Jewish Culture: Boundaries and Representations*, ed. Simon Bronner (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), p. 336.

14 Ruth Ellen Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New authenticities and real imaginary spaces in Europe", *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 99/4 (2009): 487–504 (at pp. 490–1).

15 Gruber, "Beyond Virtually Jewish: New authenticities", pp. 492–6.

16 Magdalena Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife: An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

it as a space that not only encourages but is defined by Jewish/non-Jewish interaction:

> For it is a virtual space, present anywhere where Jews and non-Jews interact on Jewish themes or where a Jewish voice can make itself heard. It will be a way of being and of living and not a way of commemorating death through the Holocaust. It goes without saying that this space is open to all; it is controlled neither by Jews, nor by non-Jews, but rather it is a meeting point. Jews must learn to navigate in it just as their non-Jewish interlocutors do. Out of these interactions new symbioses will be born, new identities composed while older ones can also be strengthened.[17]

The virtuality of a Jewish space is marked by an active Jewish/non-Jewish relation that is defined by adaptiveness, inclusion, creativity, and life – or in Gruber's words, vividness and intensity – and focused on societal needs for a pluralistic and democratic Europe here and now.[18] Later applications of this lens, most of the time without explicit reference to the virtual dimension, further underline and explore how Jews and non-Jews meeting up around themes of Jewish history, or non-Jewish creations of new forms of a Jewish-inspired culture, hold potential for moral and empathic negotiations, as well as identity processes beyond the Jewish/non-Jewish dichotomy.[19] Based on Gruber's and Pinto's conceptualizations, a space linked to Jewish history and culture is virtual if it helps Jews and non-Jews to reach beyond a consumption of the Jewish past towards an interactive, co-constructive process that welcomes the Jewish minority into mainstream culture, teaches acceptance and empathy for cultural differences, promotes multicultural societies, and even moves people to find similarities across ethnic and religious boundaries. If we bring the concept to its extreme, a fully functioning virtual space should activate its visitors' democratic potential and in this way impact larger society.

Despite these early conceptualizations of virtuality and the inclusive and open society the concept's creators hoped for, the term has often been reduced through a conflation with either digital platforms or reimagined historical pasts.[20] Only the last couple of years have seen a more thorough engagement with Gruber's and Pinto's understanding of virtual spaces. Peter Margolis argues

17 Diana Pinto, *The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 1999).

18 Pinto, "A New Jewish Identity".

19 Erica Lehrer, and Michael Meng, "Introduction", in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Poland*, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), p. 8; Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife*, pp. 8–12.

20 See, for example, this otherwise excellent study: Winson Chu, "'Lodzermensch' and Litzmannstadt: Making 'virtually German' sites in Lodz after 1989", in *Jewish Space in Contemporary Po-*

that online landscapes only become virtual when they advocate for personal choice, novel interpretation, voluntary participation, and individual empowerment, all of them processes that can lead to reevaluations of what it means to be Jewish.[21] Similarly focusing on the creation of new meanings, Victoria Grace Walden comes full circle with Gruber and Pinto and asserts that virtuality should not be conflated with digital forms. While the latter might be one arena for its expression, she notes that virtuality first and foremost demands a person's conscious and bodily engagement and interaction with Jewish present and past cultures and involves actors taking "responsibility for memory".[22] To further explain the virtual process, Gruber, in her chapter in this book, defines it as a "tangible gateway"; a space that exhumes a sensory presence of Jewish history, traditionally salvaged in material forms but nowadays also evoked in digital landscapes.[23] Virtuality, they imply, is to *feel* for and with Jewish actors in the past *and* act on it. In line with this, we understand virtuality as a Jewish/non-Jewish co-constructive, creative, inclusive, and anchored process, which erupts from an emphatic engagement with Jewish history in any kind of space and leads to new meanings or identities. To reach such authentic implications for today's European societies, a virtual process demands creativity, inclusivity, flexibility, intensity, visibility, engagement, and affective immersion from all individuals and institutions involved.

As a consequence, and as a difference from other spatial concepts that contemplate Jewish and non-Jewish relations across time and space, virtuality – or a virtual space – does not take a wide range of possible Jewish/non-Jewish encounters into account. The notion of virtuality intentionally focuses on productive relations that lead to the construction of cultural phenomena linked to Jewish culture and history. It thrives on people's hope for the future, demands the absorption of a person's emotional, mental, and physical capabilities, and believes the best of and for people. And it is understood to lead to not only the promotion of differences but people's embrace of them. Firmly situated in the time and space of its creation – Europe in the 1990s and its confidence in politi-

land, ed. Erica Lehrer and Michael Meng (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 193–207.

21 Peter Margolis, "Virtuality: A theory of digital Judaism(s)", *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 43/2 (2023): 202–3.

22 Victoria Grace Walden, "What is 'virtual Holocaust memory'?", *Memory Studies* 15/4 (2022): 630.

23 See Ruth Ellen Gruber's chapter, "Life after Life: Shifting Virtualities (and Realities) 20 Years after *Virtually Jewish*," p. 16, in this current volume.

cal peace and cultural pluralism[24] – it was not developed to explain less fruitful encounters between non-Jews, Jews, and Jewish history and culture. Since October 7, the positivism underlined by virtuality might seem difficult to attain, if not naïve. Furthermore, Gruber's and Pinto's explanations of less emphatic and less democratic uses of Jewish spaces either still rest on the idea of a non-Jewish actor that engages *with* Jewish history or argue that Jewish spaces are slowly becoming irrelevant and void in today's nationalistic and populistic European societies. As Pinto laments in her chapter in this book, Europe has changed since the 1990s and as October 7 unfolded, we began to ask ourselves, what happens to virtuality's hopeful understanding of Jewish/non-Jewish interaction in relation to the Jewish past when faced with trauma and spiking antisemitism? Are there limits to the relevance of the concept's hopefulness in today's Europe?

Concepts that take a more cynical or postcolonial point of view and understand Jewish spaces as framed and narrated only by and for non-Jews, such as Henryk Halkowski's "Jews by profession" or Judith Coffey's and Vivien Laumann's "goynormativity",[25] position themselves in the other corner. From this point of view, Hannah Tzuberi summarizes the meeting ground between Jews and non-Jews "as bridges for non-Jews *into* Judaism", which results in, she argues, non-Jews engulfing today's German Jewishness.[26] The conceptual gap between virtual Jewish spaces and Jewish spaces created by and for non-Jews is deep; is there a middle-way? We argue that *because* of the high standard virtuality puts on the Jewish/non-Jewish relationship, it can be operationalized into a guiding benchmark with which to test Jewish spaces in times of crises. This way, virtuality – due to its positive, hopeful, and productive understanding of Jewish/non-Jewish interactions – offers a pathway to study contestations of and challenges for spaces that envision such a Jewish/non-Jewish relationship in times of, in Pinto's words, "value battles".[27] By pedestaling virtuality into a standard that democratic European societies should strive for in relation to their Jewish minorities, we can find cracks generated by October 7 and explore how Jewish spaces of virtual Jewishness initially responded to and dealt with the increasingly hostile public landscape.

24 Pinto, "A New Jewish Identity", pp. 2–5.

25 Judith Coffey and Vivien Laumann, *Gojnormativität: Warum wir anders über Antisemitismus sprechen müssen* (Berlin: Verbrecher, 2021). Henryk Halkowski's term is explained in Waligórska, *Klezmer's Afterlife*, pp. 1–2.

26 Hannah Tzuberi, "Between boundary making and philo-Semitic yearnings", in *Jewish Revival Inside Out: Remaking Jewishness in a Transnational Age*, ed. Daniel Monterescu and Rachel Werczberger (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2023), p. 158.

27 Pinto, "Jewish Spaces", p. 33.

Sources and Method

To test the implications of virtuality on the European Jewish new normal, we interviewed representatives from three Swedish Jewish spaces: two museums and one cultural organization. The first space is the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, which has existed since 1987 but went through elaborate changes in exhibition and organizational structure as it was reopened in 2019. At the time of October 7 and its aftermath, the privately-run museum, which answers to a board of members with a Jewish identity, had an interim director, Ann-Sofi Noring, and it was intentionally not in a phase of expansion or transformation. The second museum is the Swedish Holocaust Museum and its director Katherine Hauptmann. It was commissioned by the Swedish government and opened in 2022 as part of the National Historical Museums. Although run by a governmental body, we categorize the Swedish Holocaust Museum as a Jewish space. There are many reasons for this, the first being that it was much longed for by some Jewish individuals, who viewed its realization as the Swedish state's final admission of the horrors of the Holocaust that members of the Swedish Jewry have endured. Furthermore, Jewish actors are consistently invited to set up events under the museum's auspices, and at the time of our interview, people with a Jewish identity worked at the museum. Viewed by some, and in limited ways run as, a space in which people from the Swedish Jewish community are integral to its cultural trajectory, we argue that it should be regarded as a Jewish space insofar as it is based on an interactive, albeit unbalanced, Jewish/non-Jewish relationship. The museum's activities in 2023 and 2024 were generally marked by its ongoing establishment: getting a team together, creating an archive, and working on pedagogical programs and exhibitions. Finally, we interviewed Lizzie Oved Scheja, director of Jewish Culture in Sweden, which is a private organization that has put up cultural events on Jewish-related themes with national and international guests from the media, the arts, and academia since 2012. For comparative reasons, we also contacted The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities via email to ask about their work after October 7.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden in April and May 2024. Asking for their institution's administrative, political, cultural, and personal response to October 7, and from time to time probing for further clarifications, we wanted to give the interviewees as much space as possible to explain their organizational realities following the terror attack. While we have looked for absolute facts on how these three Jewish spaces have handled October 7 and the increasing antisemitism, we have also investigated the narratives that each representative constructs for their spaces. These narratives concern how each space

lives up to the relational and educational functions that all representatives believe them to hold. Importantly, the interviews reveal how the role of and belief in democracy – understood and practiced in different ways – becomes the main framework and strategy for directors still in shock, trying to handle a crisis and meet needs of the audience, while battling an increasing antisemitism. As we will see, the virtuality of these three Jewish spaces was tested on three aspects: visibility, intensity, and inclusivity.

(Not) Business as Usual

From October 7 onwards, the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden were all keen on safeguarding the visibility of their spaces. Here, we understand visibility not only as physical marks – signs, advertisement, or guided tours – that are noticeable to people in the streetscape, but also as a presence in public space, offering people encounters with a Jewish past and present. Although all three Jewish spaces strove to continue with their activities as usual after the terror attack, their visibility was faced with both imposed and selected modifications.

But as a start, no Jewish space closed their doors, not even for a day. Ann-Sofi Noring at the Jewish Museum in Stockholm stressed that

> to put everything down and cancel and not take the, should I say, normal tasks seriously would be at odds with all that we stand for. [. . .] Our strategy has been to continue our activities. To not change too much, because that leads to more worry.

Likewise, Katherine Hauptmann remembered that news of the terror attack and the ensuing car corteges celebrating the massacre of hundreds of Jews "shocked her", and October 7 was thereafter reflected upon by her at the beginning of each planned event at the Swedish Holocaust Museum. Jewish Culture in Sweden also continued with their program of cultural events. Lizzie Oved Scheja explained:

> To close something like that would be . . . You know, no way, no way, no way. There is a responsibility to so many people, and I do not see any other institutions that can fulfill this function in Sweden.

But keeping business as usual was not decided upon without hesitations. Oved Scheja described her first days after the terror attack:

> I lost all words. I lost my language after October 7. I could not do anything. I did not know how to go through with the next event on October 10. But everything was already set and I had to do it. [. . .] Until October 9 in the evening, I lost the words, I lost everything.

Shocked, some temporally at a loss of strategies normally used to work through difficult situations, and in a prolonged "state of emergency",[28] the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden strove to "keep a sort of normalcy"[29] and followed their already staked out paths as the magnitude of October 7 unfolded.

Still, as time passed public programs and internal tasks did change. Although unable to speak about it explicitly, procedures around security intensified in the two museums. Ann-Sofi Noring and Katherine Hauptmann also stressed that October 7 has led to increased cooperation between Jewish spaces, as well as between Jewish spaces and other institutions, in terms of both security and cultural activities. While the emergence of long-term plans across institutional borders was a welcomed outcome, Noring pondered on how the terror attack had affected the everyday tasks of the Jewish Museum in Stockholm during the autumn of 2023 and the first months of 2024. She noted that instead of decreasing the number of public events, "we might have asked ourselves: should we increase our program?". In part thanks to an anonymous donation,[30] the museum's personnel instead turned their efforts towards internal tasks, such as planning for future refurbishment, taking care of existent exhibitions, and moving into new offices.

Oved Scheja also limited the visibility of Jewish Culture in Sweden, but for a partly different purpose. While their advertisement signs across Stockholm were taken down from 2024 onwards, the slowing down of the spring program was done to give the organization a moment to breathe and plan a single event dedicated to October 7. Oved Scheja explained both the sparse spring program and the subsequent "October 7 Forum" to be results of a conscious effort to refocus on the needs of themselves and their audience:

> It is the first conversation in Sweden on such, you know . . . There have been conversations on antisemitism, but they are beating around the bush. We are putting this on the table; October 7 and what it did to us. We have the right to speak about our trauma as well. We are not going to ignore the war in Gaza, we are not going to ignore the Israeli government, but we are speaking about October 7 as a defining factor for Jews. This has not been done in Sweden, as far as I know. First of all, we get also a good delegation to come, interesting people to come. I think people need to listen. Also, our program on Zionism [on April 7, 2024] was totally packed. People are interested. They do not get information from the mainstream media.

28 Interview with Katherine Hauptmann, Stockholm (May 14, 2024).

29 Interview with Ann-Sofi Noring, via Zoom (April 4, 2024).

30 The money would have been donated irrespective of October 7.

Hauptmann similarly contemplated how the Swedish Holocaust Museum might mobilize future public events as a response to the terror attack:

> I'm thinking that we probably need to do something about it in the future. My first thought was that we wouldn't, but we probably will. But it needs . . . We need to learn more and link arms with the right organizations. And we have just talked about having teachers' conferences about what happened in the classroom after October 7 [and] public events on that. I have been convinced when talking to different people that if this is to have any kind of good future, we need to be able to talk about it in a better way and perhaps we [the Swedish Holocaust Museum] should then be one of the actors.

Although striving to meet demands arising from October 7 with various flexibility, with the Jewish Museum in Stockholm possibly affected by its interim directorship, their collective visibility was somewhat tempered. Significantly, it took a lot of time and effort, and in the case of Jewish Culture in Sweden, a decreased visibility, for Jewish spaces to determine, plan, and execute public events on the terror attack and its impact on Jewish everyday life.

In trying to find an appropriate way to continue their work, the three Jewish spaces backtracked to the role each space hopes to play in Swedish society. Representatives hinted at their tasks of educating about and providing a space for Jewish culture and history, but, more importantly, grounded their discussion in qualities we have attached to the concept of virtuality. Hauptmann noted that October 7 has been a catalyst for a "community" with a locus at the Swedish Holocaust Museum. People with a faint Jewish background, mostly relatives to Holocaust survivors, turn to the museum to both explore their ambivalent identity and safekeep their oral histories. Similarly to Jewish Culture in Sweden, the museum has become a hotspot for Jews not linked to official Jewish communities to grapple with the massacre and what it means for them personally. In emphasizing Jewish Culture in Sweden's communal function, Oved Scheja explained that they continued with their activities because:

> [This is a] significant meeting place, a significant platform, for meeting, for conversation, for learning, for exchanging, for dialogue, for both Jews and non-Jews . . .

In stressing the relational and educational roles of Jewish spaces, all institutions found reason to continue doing what they had already planned. Furthermore, creativity and flexibility – two other aspects of virtuality – also prompted Jewish Culture in Sweden and the Swedish Holocaust Museum to start planning for public programs that take October 7 into account. While visibility, for different reasons, was somewhat inhibited over time, it partly connects to Jewish spaces regaining their voices after the initial shock.

(Un)limited by Antisemitism

Antisemitism also impacted the intensity of Jewish spaces, which we define as an unchallenged and unlimited existence in the sector within which it is located. Hauptmann at the Swedish Holocaust Museum listed "digital opinions" and certain organizational constraints as specific outlets of an antisemitism that is partly hidden behind criticism of Israel's military actions in the Israel-Hamas war. Just as Jewish voices asked the museum for a public statement after October 7, anonymous comments posted on its social media accounts demanded to know how the latter "can talk about the Holocaust when children are dying in Gaza". Jewish suffering today *and* in the past was disputed in light of current events. Hauptmann described that

> We have partners that say . . . They . . . Not something they demand from us, but they say that: "no, we cannot . . . For this event that we do together we cannot invite the Israeli ambassador because that would make our suppliers boycott us and then our establishment would founder". There hasn't been an occasion where we would have invited the ambassador anyway, it's not something you do every day, but *that* they tell us this. So, there's also that. That they expect us to take a different stand. [. . .] In this case, it was just a normal partner, they, well . . . Their suppliers, stakeholders and so on, get scared because the connection to us make . . . So I would say that this is a type of antisemitic thought, but it is difficult to respond to in this situation. Yes, it is incredibly . . . I think it is very odd to get such a comment.

In bracketing the memory institution of the Holocaust with Israel's war efforts, digital visitors and partners to the Swedish Holocaust Museum tapped into an anti-Zionist discourse that has existed among the Western Left and Europe's socialist countries since the 1960s and become an inherent ingredient of postcolonial studies since the 1980s.[31] Crucially, anti-Zionism is known to intensify during conflicts between Hamas and Israel, making it the latest outgrowth from the "hydra-headed phenomenon" that is antisemitism.[32] Similarly, the European Jewry has been conscious and anxious about this specific aspect of antisemitism for a long time. Published fifteen years ago, Nick Lambert summarized his investigation on European Jewish intellectuals and their relationship to Europe: "some respondents have a bout of Europanic: what if the EU superstate becomes domi-

31 Bryan Cheyette, "Postcolonialism", in *Key Concepts in the Study of Antisemitism*, ed. Sol Goldberg, Scott Ury, and Kalman Weiser (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 230–8.

32 Danny Ben-Moshe, "The new Anti-Semitism in Europe: The Islamic dimension of, and Jewish belonging in, the EU", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26/2 (2015): 219–36; Ben Cohen, "'The Jews are our Misfortune!' Contemporary antisemitism as a hydra-headed phenomenon", *Israel Affairs* 29/1 (2023): 13–18.

nated by populists hostile to Israel?".[33] Today, European hostility towards Israel has grown all the more complicated, with populists, such as Hungary's Victor Orbán, taking a pro-Israel stance while socialist governments, such as Spain and Norway, support anti-Israel politics. These shifts in the last decade have surely not diminished Jewish fear for the unpredictability and volatility of the anti-Israeli dimension of antisemitism. In Sweden after October 7, the Israeli embassy's participation in cultural events in Stockholm and Israel's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest in Malmö were subjected to public appeals, demonstrations, and boycotts. The spring of 2024 was marked by anti-Israel student protests across Swedish universities, some of them leading to antisemitic attacks against university personnel.[34] The fact that the Swedish Holocaust Museum has been placed inside this pressure-cooker further demonstrates people's inability to see Israel and Jewish history – and the memory of it – as two separate entities.

The Jewish Museum in Stockholm did not receive any similar comments or demands. This highlights the fact that Jews as victims – of both a contemporary terror attack and previous historical events – is a reality incompatible with public discourse after October 7. Hauptmann argued that people seem unable to hold and understand the complexity of the current situation, and their quick turn to antisemitism was difficult to handle:

> The comments we get turn antisemitic quite quickly. I think this is also very . . . problematic to respond to because apart from what people are saying, it proves that it has been something that lies beneath the surface, only it hasn't been as noticeable. And that it goes so quickly [she snaps her fingers], that it comes to this, is something I find far more uncomfortable than I thought it would be, and it makes it difficult to act.

Indeed, the difficulty of the situation for the Swedish Holocaust Museum was palpable during the interview. Throughout the conversation, Hauptmann spoke with confidence, but when she approached issues of antisemitism she faltered, left sentences hanging in the air, and searched for words to explain the situation. She was ambiguous about details and stopped herself from issuing statements that were too strong or emotional, as both excerpts above are examples of. Every word mattered. Each of them seemed heavy with the risk of positioning the museum in the current political landscape or sparking societal discontent. Clearly, Hauptmann's ambivalence to the doings of the Swedish Holocaust Museum

33 Nick Lambert, *Jews and Europe in the Twenty-First Century: Thinking Jewish* (London/Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2008), p. 166.

34 Anders Svensson, "Jag har utsatts för ett antisemitiskt hatbrott", *Dagens Nyheter*, June 11, 2024, accessed June 27, 2024, https://www.dn.se/kultur/anders-persson-jag-har-utsatts-for-ett-antisemitiskt-hatbrott/.

after October 7 was a result of an antisemitism that has grown more complex, more unpredictable, and increasingly difficult to respond to.

As we continued to talk about the antisemitic offences that the Swedish Holocaust Museum had received, we asked if Hauptmann was worried about the future of the museum. She was silent, and then answered:

> Yes, a bit. Yes . . . And it can certainly be that October 7 has amplified it. But it's not only about that. This was also something I felt earlier, a hidden antisemitism. Without accusing anyone. This is more about a structural way of thinking that perhaps . . . Because what I've noticed within the cultural sector, or whatever we like to call it, straight away the different . . . Then someone says: "Right, that museum got that many millions, why is so much money spent on that". It has happened after October 7, but I don't know if it has to do with it. I think it would have been said anyway, because there's an underlying resistance . . . "Now there's too much Jewishness again".

Similarly to the anti-Israel layer of antisemitism that has been noted for years by Jews and scholars in Jewish studies alike, Hauptmann's observations regarding Sweden's structural antisemitism are not new.[35] However, her account offers insight into why the very existence of some Jewish spaces is increasingly contested post-October 7. Contemporary Jewish suffering did not increase people's empathy for the European Jewry's experience as victims of assault, violence, and genocide throughout history. Instead, underlying antisemitic hesitation regarding the presence and role of the museum were drawn to the surface. The complexity of the situation in the Middle East and the trenched political landscape in Sweden, as well as the vulnerability of this newly created Jewish space, gave the museum very little wiggle room to face antisemitism, since any reaction might have impacted its intense presence in the long run.

Democracy and Virtuality

To battle antisemitism, Noring, Hauptmann, and Oved Scheja referred to democracy as their guiding rod. It is no news that Jewish spaces are seen as integral to democracy. They played a strategic role as nation-states proclaimed their democratic adjustment in the post-Soviet era,[36] the memory of the Holocaust serves to

35 Hansalbin Sältenberg, "Anti-Jewish Racism: Exploring the Swedish Racial Regime" (PhD diss., Lund University, 2022).

36 Ljiljana Radonic, "From 'double genocide' to 'the new Jews': Holocaust, genocide and mass violence in post-Communist memorial museums", *Journal of Genocide Research* 20/4 (2018): 510–29.

unite EU countries around a common narrative,[37] and it is hoped, but increasingly questioned, that sites commemorating the Holocaust can inform visitors about democratic ideas.[38] As Pinto points out in her chapter in this book, Jewish spaces have always been placed on a scale where they are to either "serve as a buffer or protective barrier against the onslaught of antisemitic, conspiratorial, and political attacks leveled against Jews, and other minorities", or "remain neutral, claiming that their mission is not to be involved in politics".[39] During our interviews, it became clear that the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden position themselves on this scale and dress their positionality in the idea that democracy is about inclusivity: the inclusion of the Jewish trauma in Sweden's public discourse after October 7, as well as each space's openness to people of all kinds of political views. As we will see, at this specific time in history, these two interpretations of democracy – Jewish spaces as either a buffer against antisemitism or with a neutral mission – are not complementary. Jewish spaces had to tread a narrowing gap between definitions of antisemitism and Jewishness, leading to an inhibited virtuality.

The very first question asked to Hauptmann at the Swedish Holocaust Museum during our interview was "what did you do at the museum the day after October 7?". In her reply, she moved rapidly from talking about her initial shock to people's disappointment of the museum's refusal to post a statement regarding October 7:

> There were many . . . both people and organizations that were frustrated that we did not post a statement on the website, that type of thing. And we discussed it a bit. At the same time, a pretty strong incentive for this museum has been that it is about this history [the Holocaust] in its own right. And I have a great understanding for people wanting us to act politically, but, from a long-term perspective, I also find it important that we don't, precisely because we are a historical museum. It's almost the very same people that earlier did not think that it [the museum] should be political that now wants us to act in that way.

Implicit in Hauptmann's reply is the fact that those who were frustrated with the museum post-October 7 were mainly Jews. In declining to publicly express their sympathy for victims of the terror attack, or indeed take a stand in the Israel-

37 Wolfram Kaiser, "Limits of cultural engineering: Actors and narratives in the European Parliament's House of European History Project", *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55/3 (2017): 529.
38 Andy Pearce, Stuart Foster, and Alice Pettigrew, "Antisemitism and Holocaust education", in *Holocaust Education: Contemporary Challenges and Controversies*, ed. Stuart Foster, Andy Pearce, and Alice Pettigrew (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), pp. 150–70.
39 Pinto, "Jewish Spaces", p. 24.

Hamas war, the museum's role as a community builder contracted, alienating Jews that felt threatened by the increasing antisemitism in Europe.

At the same time, and as explained above, the Swedish Holocaust Museum navigated an antisemitism from partners that both bracketed the museum's focus on the Holocaust with a pro-Israel stance and, without asking if this was the case, imposed restrictions on their collegial relationship. Hauptmann's ambivalence on how to respond to the rise of such a structural antisemitism was mirrored in her several attempts to describe to us why the museum could not meet the needs of and disappointments from, in her words, a group of frustrated individuals. It seems reasonable that her approach to both partners and Swedish Jews was based on the fact that Israel and what counts as Jewish are two different things. While she clearly argued that Jews in Sweden should not be held responsible for Israeli military actions during the Israel-Hamas war, some Jewish individuals and organizations wanted the museum to publicly make the link between Jewish identity and Israel by publishing supportive statements. In refusing to conflate Jewishness with Israel, the openness of the Swedish Holocaust Museum towards this group of Jews was tarnished. Hauptmann's refusal in defining the group as Jewish during the interview further demonstrates the intricateness and potential explosivity of the dented relationship between the museum and the Swedish Jewish community. In our interview, Hauptmann depicted democracy, as well as the museum's infancy, as the very reasons for this virtual contraction:

> It [a political statement] would undermine our credibility in the long run, and I think that it would be bad for the possibility to develop the museum. One could certainly also ask oneself if this is the right decision, but a museum is a long-term enterprise, and one must think with a long-term perspective. [. . .] The museum is one of the institutions in society that must work for all people in the long-term. And offer some sort of continuity. And we are now in a phase of startup. We have no history as an institution to rest upon. We are still building for the future. That's why I think . . . It would have been a difference if I would have worked in another type of institution; I would have been able to act in a different way. But I think it is an unreasonable expectation to put on a museum.

As a freshly inaugurated museum without a permanent venue or a large network of partners, with its outspoken role to offer an educational space for anyone and everyone, including people of any political point of view, and in combating antisemitism by separating Jewishness from Israel, the Swedish Holocaust Museum's post-October 7 inclusivity hinged on silence, the very thing that Swedish Jews claimed to be the source of their sense of national non-belonging after the terror

attack.[40] As a contrast, The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, for example, was publicly very outspoken about antisemitism after October 7, using channels such as social media, interviews, and editorials to shine a light on antisemitism in politics, schools, and universities, as well as "mainstream antisemitism" evoked by cultural profiles, civilian organizations, and governmental bodies.[41] The fact that the Swedish Holocaust Museum is funded by the state seemed to not make any difference in how it understood and acted upon democratic values after October 7. The Jewish Museum in Stockholm, which is funded and run through private means, made the same decision, arguing that "we are not a forum for political debate, and we are not a forum for societal criticism either, but we are also not a space that prohibits such discussions".[42]

Jewish Culture in Sweden interpreted its democratic role differently. As director of a privately funded, cultural institution that does not focus on education but on dialogue and conversation, Oved Scheja believed that democracy is not only about keeping the space open but also about freedom of speech, about providing Jews and non-Jews, but especially Jews, with a public arena to talk about their trauma:

> *Judisk kultur* [Jewish Culture in Sweden] is not political, we are non-affiliated, we are not political. We don't, you know . . . But on the other hand, we do not put our head in the sand. [. . .] I couldn't ignore it. And so, that we are not political doesn't mean we couldn't talk about it. Because there is no way as a Jewish institution that we don't clearly say how

40 Karin Brygger, "Varför fördömer inte det feministiska systerskapet våldet mot judiska kvinnor?", *Dagens Nyheter*, July 30, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.dn.se/kultur/karin-brygger-varfor-fordomer-inte-det-feministiska-systerskapet-valdet-mot-judiska-kvinnor/; Karin Brygger, "Judehatet efter den 7 oktober har nått fasansfulla nivåer", *Sydsvenskan*, April 7, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.sydsvenskan.se/artikel/judehatet-efter-den-7-oktober-har-natt-fasansfulla-nivaer/; Hynek Pallas, "Jag har aldrig upplevt ett konstigare år som antirasist", *Göteborgs-Posten*, October 1, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.gp.se/kultur/kulturdebatt/jag-har-aldrig-upplevt-ett-konstigare-ar-som-antirasist/773f9c01-0e07-4795-8349-35880489022f; Hynek Pallas, "När judar slutar räknas – en årsdagsreflektion över tystnad och antisemitism", *Judisk krönika*, October 3, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://judiskkronika.se/nar-judar-slutar-raknas/.

41 Interview with Charlotte Manderman, via email (August 8, 2024); "Öppet brev till Världskulturmuseerna med anledning av pressmeddelandet om utställningen 'Nakba – palestinska berättelser från 1948'", *Judiska centralrådet i Sverige*, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.judiskacentralradet.se/single-post/öppet-brev-till-världskulturmuseerna-med-anledning-av-pressmeddelandet-om-utställningen-nakba-pale; "Politisk aktivism med antisemitiska undertoner på universiteten", *Judiska centralrådet i Sverige*, November 7, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.judiskacentralradet.se/single-post/politisk-aktivism-med-antisemitiska-undertoner-på-universiteten.

42 Interview with Noring.

> appalled we are by what happened on October 7 and give some strength to our members and friends . . .

Earlier in the interview, Oved Scheja also explained the institution's decision to continue with their set program as a conscious strategy of extending Jewish "support systems" – spaces in which Jews come together for support in the aftermath of the terror attack, such as WhatsApp groups or Facebook groups – *beyond* closed doors:

> There is no such thing in the public space. Because people are afraid. Or people don't feel comfortable enough to go in the street and . . . [. . .] I don't want to create a community centre, I want to create a cultural institution for everybody, not only for Jews. Otherwise, there is no point doing it. If we just sit with each other and discuss with each other behind closed doors . . . There are others that do the same thing, I don't need to do it.

Here, Oved Scheja emphasized that the democratic dimension of this Jewish space is not only about free speech and the presence of Jewish lives and loves in the public arena, but also about its relational function. Offering public events after as well as *on* the terror attack, and inviting non-Jews to participate, was at the very heart of the institution's response to October 7. Even if doing so might have been regarded as provocative by society, and even if security threats amassed – as they did for "The October 7 Forum"[43] – Oved Scheja asserted that

> LOS: "The October 7 Forum." The October 7 happened. The nine eleventh forum . . . The, I don't know . . . If someone thinks it is provocative it means that they deny the right, our right to speak about this trauma.
>
> MH: But don't you think this is happening?
>
> LOS: That they deny it?
>
> MH: Yeah.
>
> LOS: Yes, they deny but that's why we . . . We disagree to that. [. . .] And if people are provoked, I'm very sorry, but you don't have to come.

In Oved Scheja's version of a Jewish space, inclusivity – interpreted as a democratic function – offered resistance to the antisemitic discourse that dominated

43 Matilda Arborelius, "Polisen ökar bevakningen inför judisk konferens", *Dagens Nyheter*, May 24, 2024, accessed August 24, 2024, https://www.dn.se/kultur/polisen-okar-bevakningen-infor-judisk-konferens/.

Swedish public space after October 7, allowing the organization to actively challenge anti-Zionist views.

The museums' interpretation of inclusivity might seem passive in relation to Jewish Culture in Sweden, but we must be careful in comparing these two very different spaces. They operate with different managements, funds, and goals. Furthermore, Hauptmann reminded us during the interview that no museum – or Jewish space, we might add – can please everyone. Her point was evoked by Pinto over ten years ago; Jewish spaces, such as a museum, "cannot give primacy to Jewish 'views', and Jewish activists must learn to accept that this does not make their interlocutors particularly antisemitic".[44] Similarly, when asked if the Swedish Holocaust Museum functions as a "Jewish space", Hauptmann answered: "for some and not for others", adding that people with a strong Jewish identity were not among those feeling most seen by the museum. But as mentioned above, the museum fills a crucial communal role for Jews without relation to either official communities or Jewish ways of life, especially after October 7. Nevertheless, Jews with a strong identity that want to connect to and be seen by the museum in this time of crisis found themselves at odds with the museum's refusal to conflate Jewishness with Israel and its consequential democratic practice of silent neutrality. In this crisis, the Swedish Holocaust Museum's goal of being inclusive of *everyone* was impossible to practice, leading to a constricted virtuality.

The conundrum of both museums – their inability to merge democratic neutrality and relational connectedness – hints at the extent of the crisis that the terror attack and the ensuing war has thrown Europe's Jewish spaces into. Pinto has already warned that "misusing them [Jewish spaces] or nurturing the wrong expectations for any one of them in particular can only upset the finely tuned and delicate equilibrium of society as a whole".[45] While we are not talking about a misuse of space here, the Swedish Holocaust Museum's impossibility to meet certain expectations positioned it involuntarily inside the polarized political framework where they had to defend a separation of Israel and Jewishness while both some Swedish Jews and non-Jewish partners claimed the opposite. In trying to keep their inclusive dimension, both museums, but the Swedish Holocaust Museum in particular, and as one of very few museums in Sweden, could not continue with its foundational apolitical stance.

44 Diana Pinto, "Negotiating Jewish identity in an asemitic age", *Jewish Culture and History* 14/2–3 (2013): 76.

45 Pinto, "Negotiating Jewish identity", p. 77.

"We Have to Continue", But Also: The Price of Virtuality

As we have seen, the virtual dimension of the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden was dented in the wake of October 7. Although there are no consistent patterns to suggest a general shift in Swedish society's attitude towards Jewish spaces, the increasing antisemitism and the conflation of Israel and Jewishness (by both Jews and non-Jews) have made Jewish spaces fear for their future and reduce their public presence. We found efforts to both adapt to and resist the new normal. In continuing to keep open, to complete public programs, and to plan for new events specifically on October 7, Jewish spaces are revealed to be both flexible and fragile, contested as well as resistant. At the same time, we have highlighted how the anti-Israeli dimension of antisemitism and the increased sense of affiliation with Israel among diasporic Jews was either opposed or embraced, leading to the alienation of some Swedish Jews or the increase of antisemitism respectively. In other words, although acting according to (differently defined) democratic values, Jewish spaces came to be regarded (by different groups of people) as either dismissive of Jewish victimhood or politically incorrect. Furthermore, our study shows that virtual dilemmas experienced by the two museums and the cultural organization, such as how visible or inclusive they should be, emerge from an intensification of each space's already fragile circumstances. The interim directorship at the Jewish Museum in Stockholm resulted in a somewhat passive stance since Noring, out of respect for the new director, did not want to affect its shape and role. The recent establishment of the Swedish Holocaust Museum impacted how Hauptmann strived for an apolitical approach in public space. It seems as if the virtuality of Jewish spaces needed perfect circumstances to survive unscathed from the antisemitism unleashed in Europe after October 7, and even if it was, it could not hold back the magnitude of the anti-Israeli dimension of antisemitism.

Indeed, our interviewees hinted at or explicitly described the hesitation, fear, and sorrow that had marked their work since October 7. Concerns about how the aftermath of the terror attack might impact their existence in the long run, or the emotional weight of continuing to run their institution, were prominent in interviews. Noring will remember her time as interim director as "characterized by sorrow". When we asked Oved Scheja what it had been like shouldering a Jewish space after October 7, she answered:

> I have had super serious problems with my shoulder all of the sudden, came out of nowhere. And they did x-ray, and then they did *magnetröntgen* [MRI scan], and then they put me on terrible painkillers, anti-inflammatory. They found that, they asked "what did it

> come from? Did you fall down, did you do this", and I said "no", "did you overwork that", "no, no". So, it is now . . . I just left the painkillers a week ago, and I feel like . . . I feel it, but it is okay. So when you say shouldering, that's very strange because that's exactly what it is . . . But I think that . . . Sure. And sometimes it is difficult and tiring. Sometimes, I have to say, especially at night, I feel like, *jag orkar inte* [I can't take it], I can't, I have to step back. I have to step back, I have to take a pause, I have to rethink, but then the morning comes, and I feel like, no, I have to continue, we have to continue, we need to do that. I cannot imagine us closing down and letting us . . . You know, not being available for our audience.

Clearly, keeping business as usual and responding to emerging needs among visitors took its toll on people working in a Jewish space after October 7. During such a crisis, virtuality is not cheap. It comes with a cost, as employees at the Swedish Holocaust Museum have learnt:

> KH: It has been difficult for some employees. [. . .] Some of them wonder, "can I manage?"
>
> MH: That's another question I have. Without talking about the personnel or on their behalf. What's the workplace been like?
>
> KH: A little . . . One could say that it has been quite an unrest, in different ways. Not least . . . It has been different. It has been very personal for some, some have friends who are directly affected, and I'm talking about both the terror attack and the war, and fighting. Surely people who have difficulties, on one hand with what we do and Jewish traditions and perhaps think that Israel's politics are very problematic and don't know how to relate to it. And I know that for some it has become problematic among one's circle of friends, one has simply lost friends and become disappointed with friends. Some are also worried about themselves, their family, the museum. Naturally, those kinds of thoughts are triggered.

As we finish writing this chapter around the first anniversary of October 7, the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and Jewish Culture in Sweden, as well as ourselves, are still in a state of emergency. In her chapter, Pinto defines Europe before October 7, marked by a normalization of extreme right-wing rhetoric, as "Orwellian" and an "augmented reality", in which Jews and the Holocaust "are terms which are bandied about with nonchalance and ill will".[46] From her point of view, a Europe marked by nationalism, populism, and antisemitism, with the consequential hollowing of pluralism and democracy, is dystopian and fake in comparison to what it could be – and was hoped for in the 1990s. How much more "fake" is Europe now after October 7? Relatedly, if the cultural authenticity of a Jewish space is linked to virtual processes, which today's increasing antisemitism and anti-Zionism have dented and cracked, are Jewish spaces losing their relevance, not because they have changed any of their mission

46 Pinto, "Jewish Spaces", pp. 22, 25.

or work but because a society ridden with antisemitism cannot support them? As this chapter has shown, in trying to navigate post-October 7 Europe according to democratic values, some Jewish spaces have – unwillingly – divided rather than united Jews and non-Jews in Swedish society. We do not know if this wave of antisemitism will scar the longevity and integrity of Jewish spaces permanently. But in employing virtuality and its hopeful approach as a lens, we have been able to pinpoint early signs of a breakdown of Jewish/non-Jewish co-construction of meanings attached to a Jewish past. As Pinto explains, "such Spaces were not *ends in themselves* but above all starting points for other pluralist understandings of Europe's many religious and cultural minorities".[47] Building upon her work, we have shown that Jewish spaces need to be understood as fragile, unstable, and dependent on forces beyond individual, communal, or institutional control. Virtuality's dependency on Jewish/non-Jewish relations makes it vulnerable for and targeted by societal and political changes, particularly as antisemitism increases. Thus, Jewish spaces – the integral place of Jewish history and culture in Europe – never reach a point of acceptance but must be continuously practiced and steadfastly protected. In operationalizing virtuality into a guiding benchmark for productive and societally integral Jewish spaces, this chapter has provided a first-row seat to the emotional toll and hard work elicited during the keeping and failing of "'*engagé*' cores of the endangered pluralist world we all cherish" in the wake of October 7.[48] In the shadow of "Black Sabbath",[49] it is the hopefulness and relational creativity of virtuality that has helped us discover the negative impact of today's increasing antisemitism on Jewish/non-Jewish relations in Jewish spaces, and the latter's ambivalent and heterogeneous responses to it.

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47 Ibid, p. 23.

48 Ibid.

49 "Black Sabbath" is the name given to Hamas's terror attack in Israel on October 7. We have found no information on exactly who or when the name came to be. We have also found other suggestions to name the massacre. The common understanding is that a name is necessary to explain the attack and to give it a place in history. See, for example: "Black Sabbath", October 7, 2024, accessed October 8, 2024, https://oct7th.org/en/; Havi Dreifuss, "Can the Hamas Oct. 7 massacre be compared to the Holocaust?", *The Jerusalem Post*, October 29, 2023, accessed October 8, 2024, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-770704.

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Marcela Menachem Zoufalá

One Year after October 7: Reflections on Shrinking Spaces and Personal Realities

This essay offers a reflection on the year following the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel – a period that has unprecedently shaped my personal and professional engagement with the global landscape of Jewish and Israel Studies. The topics addressed in this work, while appearing disparate at first glance, are interconnected and often even entangled through their shared emergence within these evolving fields. Over the past year, these themes have appeared with more pronounced clarity, revealing dynamics that had long remained beneath the surface, now defined by heightened intensity and significance.

On October 6, we attended Simchat Torah at the Beit Daniel synagogue in northern Tel Aviv. The Reform community offers a space for those who don't necessarily fit within the stricter Orthodox framework of Judaism in Israel. The celebration was vibrant, with dancing and joy, including Rabba Galia, a leading figure, carrying the Torah. Later that evening, we headed to my mother-in-law's apartment in Ramat Gan to spend the night before a scheduled work trip to the south. I was preparing for the European Association of Israel Studies (EAIS) annual conference from October 8–10, which our board was organizing in collaboration with our colleagues at Ben-Gurion University. We planned to leave early, pick up my doctoral student from her hostel in Neve Tzedek, and head to Beer Sheva. This was intended to be the first EAIS conference held in Israel after a decade in Europe.

Before 7 am, the alarm sounded, and my mother-in-law cried out, "Milchama, milchama" (a war), still half-dreaming. We reassured her, assuming it was likely just one missile, and that we should try to go back to sleep. But when another alarm went off ten minutes later, we turned on the TV. Over the past year, I have

Note: This text has received support from two transnational projects. First, it was funded by the EUphony project, part of the Erasmus+ Cooperative Partnerships program, titled "Jews, Muslims, and Roma in 21st Century Metropolises: Reflecting on the Polyphonic Ideal and Social Exclusion as Challenges for European Cohesion" (Grant Number: 2022-1-CZ01-KA220-HED-000089285). Second, a grant from the Faculty of International and Political Studies, as part of the Strategic Programme Excellence Initiative at Jagiellonian University, also provided support.

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often thought about that morning when everything still seemed innocent. My husband and I even exchanged smiles, thinking his mother was overreacting.

As we watched the news, reports began to surface about people from the Gaza envelope communities and kibbutzim pleading for rescue, live on air, many hours after the attack erupted. There were immediate suspicions of kidnappings into Gaza, and the first confirmed number we heard was 35 abducted, eventually rising to 251 people. It was difficult to comprehend what was unfolding, and the situation only became clearer over the following days and weeks. Shortly after, we were offered evacuation spots on a flight to Prague – my Israeli husband, despite not having Czech residency, was quickly added to the list. However, we decided to stay until our original departure date.

In the ensuing days, with friends from the EAIS, we helped arrange the evacuation of some European students and colleagues who had been planning to attend the conference that had now been canceled. Some were deeply shaken, as we were, although it took time to fully understand the extent of our shock. We attempted to donate blood at Ichilov Hospital, but the sheer number of volunteers meant we were turned away. We felt utterly helpless. Meanwhile, terrorists remained hidden in the country, and missiles continued coming in dozens.[1] One of my sisters-in-law left for Cyprus with her two daughters, who couldn't sleep through the nights in their Tel Aviv apartment. My other sister-in-law, with two children under three and another on the way, had no choice but to stay. Their building, too old to have a Mamad (shelter), left them especially vulnerable.

We eventually made it to Prague, fortunate to have booked flights with El Al, as many airlines had already halted operations. My husband, usually the healthiest of us, suddenly developed a high fever and was bedridden for more than a week. As I prepared to begin teaching my course on Israeli society, I was given an unexpected respite – a student-led environmental strike canceled the first week of classes, giving me time to recuperate. I ran into a former student, a refugee from Ukraine, who asked how I was doing. I struggled to respond.

When the time came to give my first lecture, I wondered what I should say. In the end, I spoke non-stop for ninety minutes, recounting everything. After the class, I found myself questioning whether I had shared too much. Shortly afterward, Czech state TV contacted me, asking for live commentary on the situation. They wanted to know when the IDF would enter Gaza and whether Hamas could

1 Between October 7 and October 31, 2023, Hamas launched 8,500 rockets and mortar shells at Israel. See https://acleddata.com/2023/11/08/regional-overview-middle-east-october-2023-the-regional-implications-of-the-israel-gaza-conflict/.

be defeated. I wished I had the answers. Over the following weeks, I continued appearing on television, but the exhaustion began to set in.

Meanwhile, protests erupted on university campuses across the Western world, escalating tensions. Our research on Jewish-Muslim relations in Europe[2] was postponed indefinitely, as events quickly spiraled out of control. The Czech context, though more restrained compared to elsewhere, was not immune to the discourse. On social media, a strange debate emerged: Should analysts and commentators of Jewish background disclose their identity when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? This conversation, driven largely by educated, left-leaning liberals, felt surreal. I eventually withdrew from TV appearances, preoccupied with preparations for a major conference. I also decided not to teach during the summer term – a decision that, I admit, felt like a relief.

On December 21, I received an email from the university's bursary office informing us of an active shooting at our faculty building. We were instructed to barricade ourselves. While I wasn't in the building at the time, hundreds of students, faculty, and staff were. Fourteen people were killed and twenty-five injured.[3] Over the following hours, I received messages from friends and colleagues worldwide. Unsurprisingly, the Jewish ones were the most concerned, their first thoughts drifting toward history and wondering whether this was the beginning of something darker.

The university's response was swift and comprehensive. Psychological support for students and staff was organized with impressive efficiency, and all faculty were required to undergo post-trauma intervention before meeting with students after the Christmas break. It wasn't until then that I realized this was exactly what I had needed after October 7.

Right after Christmas, I hosted a live online interview with Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, a renowned Israeli expert on women's rights who had profoundly influenced my dissertation years ago. I had considered canceling the interview due to the circumstances but ultimately decided to proceed. We discussed the sexual violence committed on October 7 and the long-lasting non-response from the international community and feminist organizations. A social media meme echoed in my mind: "Me too, unless you are a Jew". As an introduction, I quoted an investigative *New York Times* article on the subject in an attempt to offer a balanced per-

2 Marcela Menachem Zoufalá et al., "Introduction: Urban coexistence: Perspectives on Jews and Muslims in the social fabric of Europe", in "Jewish and Muslim Communities in European Urban Spaces: A Comparative Approach", a special Issue of *Ethnicities*, published online November 26, 2024.

3 "Czechia: Shock as 14 Die in University Shooting", *Radio Prague International*, accessed via https://english.radio.cz/czechia-shock-14-die-university-shooting-8803761.

spective from a widely trusted source.[4] The session, part of an open online forum we had established post-October 7 for members of the EAIS, aimed to counter the isolation felt by colleagues at Israeli institutions. The subject matter was deeply disturbing, but we believed it was crucial to raise awareness.

Did Israel "Become Jewish" in Diasporic Terms?

October 7 ushered a long-negated diasporic experience into the Israeli context of the 21st century. Consequently, the boundaries between Israeli and diasporic Jewish self-perceptions have blurred, leading to a convergence of identities. A sense of belonging and ownership – often elusive in diaspora communities – has flourished in Israel, establishing a stable locus of identity not only for Israelis but also for Jews worldwide, including those who have never visited the country or previously expressed any attachment to it.

The post-October 7 development epitomizes a novel reality, marked by the merging of diasporic and Israeli imaginaries alongside a loss of ontological security. In this light, October 7 can be interpreted as a moment when previously latent, "subversive" diasporic undercurrents penetrated Israeli consciousness – once again challenging Israel's ability to integrate and contain these influences.

4 Alissa J. Rubin and Adam Sella, "Screams Without Words: How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7", *The New York Times*, December 28, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/28/world/middleeast/oct-7-attacks-hamas-israel-sexual-violence.html: "Israeli officials say that everywhere Hamas terrorists struck – the rave, the military bases along the Gaza border and the kibbutzim – they brutalized women. A two-month investigation by The Times uncovered painful new details, establishing that the attacks against women were not isolated events but part of a pattern of gender-based violence on Oct. 7. Relying on video footage, photographs, GPS data from mobile phones and interviews with more than 150 people, including witnesses, medical personnel, soldiers and rape counselors, The Times identified at least seven locations where Israeli women and girls appear to have been sexually assaulted or mutilated. Many of the accounts are difficult to bear, and the visual evidence is disturbing to see. The Times viewed photographs of one woman's corpse that emergency responders discovered in the rubble of a besieged kibbutz with dozens of nails driven into her thighs and groin. The Times also viewed a video, provided by the Israeli military, showing two dead Israeli soldiers at a base near Gaza who appeared to have been shot directly in their vaginas".

Battle of Narratives: "This Expression must be *Eliminated*"

Since the beginning of the new semester, I have sought to reflect on recent events in a manuscript submitted to a prestigious peer-reviewed European journal. One of the key paragraphs reads as follows: "The attack perpetrated by Hamas on Israel reignited Holocaust trauma for Jews, both within Israel and globally. The immediate onset of a sense of peril and insecurity, coupled with subsequent feelings of abandonment and isolation, has permeated both Israel and its diasporic communities. The Jewish diaspora finds itself arguably more psychologically connected to Israel than ever before. The traditionally delicate and meticulously defined boundaries between Israel and its diasporas have become less distinct. Jews are now also perceived interchangeably with Israelis, resulting in a natural association of accountability for the actions and policies of the State of Israel. This phenomenon echoes the well-documented historical reality of Jews in Central-Eastern Europe under communist regimes[5] now resurfacing with global significance".

When the journal sent back the responses, an anonymous reviewer's reaction left me stunned. The paragraph I quoted above met with strong resistance. They wrote:

> It seems to me that it concedes too much/tends to align too much with the racist ideological narrative of Israel. In reality, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, Jewish communities strongly distance themselves from Israel and its policies and do not identify with the Zionist state. We too, as scholars and social scientists, must not make two very different realities such as Jewish belonging and the state of Israel coincide. Furthermore, what does it mean "Israel and its diasporas"!? Diaspora from where!? The population of Israel immigrated to Israel from other countries, almost always "Western" countries, more often from Europe/Eastern Europe, not the other way around. That is, there is no "Israeli diaspora". This expression must be eliminated and changed from the entire text [. . .] as it is socio-historically incorrect.[6]

The overwhelmingly emotional response, which notably overlooked nearly half of Israel's population with Middle Eastern or North African roots, surprisingly passed through the editorial board of this esteemed journal. I believed I was merely articulating what seemed obvious, reflecting both my own observations

5 Joanna Dyduch, Marcela Menachem Zoufalá, and Olaf Glöckner, "Israel Studies in Poland, Czech Republic, and Germany: Paths of Development, Dynamics, and Directions of Changes". *Journal of Israeli History* 41 (2): 241–83.

6 Blind peer-review comments on an anonymized submitted article.

and the sentiments openly shared within my global social circles.[7] Many felt a sense of ambiguity, deep frustration, and anger toward the Israeli government, yet they remained connected to Israel as a country and its society.

The reviewer, however, correctly identified the growing phenomenon of distancing, which has been intensifying over time, particularly – but not exclusively – in the United States. Similar trends can be observed in Czechia, especially through the activities of groups loosely affiliated with the Jewish Voice for Solidarity (JVS).[8] In June, an anonymous group launched the so-called Declaration of Independence of the Diaspora,[9] whose content echoes John Lennon's song *Imagine*. The Declaration advocates for the dissolution of nation-states, including Israel. While radical, this call is far from being novel, either globally or for this specific group.

The polarization within the global Jewish community is undeniably pronounced, and differing reactions to the events of October 7 have further deepened this divide. However, for many, this internal division is seen as an intrinsic aspect of Jewish identity. Despite these cleavages, the State of Israel remains a centre of gravity for both its supporters and its critics, regardless of their ethno-religious backgrounds. Israel is often fetishized, with a burning need for individuals and groups to position themselves in relation to it. In this sense, Israel serves as a vital backdrop, providing a space for both alignment and opposition. It acts as a catalyst for the formation and evolution of identities, whether in positive or negative terms.

One of the findings of my research on changing Jewish self-perception in Central Europe was showing how the rise in xenophobia and Islamophobia during the so-called refugee crisis led Czech Jews to identify with Muslims, heightening their own awareness of being a minority. In some instances, this deepened the divide between them and broader society, further reinforcing their Jewish identity.[10]

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7 Cf. Anna Štičková, "Být Židovkou a Queer po 7. Říjnu". *Revue Prostor* (2024), accessed February 6, 2025, https://revueprostor.cz/zidovka-queer-7-rijen.

8 Marcela Menachem Zoufalá, "Ethno-religious Othering as a Reason Behind the Central European Jewish Distancing from Israel", in *Being Jewish in 21st Century Central Europe*, ed. Haim Fireberg, Olaf Glöckner, and Marcela Menachem Zoufalá (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), p. 189.

9 See Declaration of Independence of Diaspora (2024): https://vimeo.com/976299705?fbclid=IwY2xjawF4jqtleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHfCOCos3OmAJ23n7gETLsoaW1pgm7umo9y9kTbr9dz4u6APa9_CgxRAr9Q_aem_MyOjilSZ0NSvOu9pkazM8w.

10 Marcela Menachem Zoufalá, "Ambivalence, Dilemmas, and Aporias of Contemporary Czech Jewish Lived Experience", in *United in Diversity: Contemporary European Jewry in an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Marcela Menachem Zoufalá and Olaf Glöckner (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), pp. 161–80.

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) report, published at the end of September 2024, highlights the emergence of new "xenophobic, anti-Muslim narratives and attitudes across the EU" as a consequence of the war in Gaza. The report states that many European Muslims now feel "physically threatened" as well as "marginalized, alienated, and out of place".[11] These sentiments may be triggered, among other factors, by the widespread expressions of support and solidarity with Israel from European governments following the events of October 7. Muslims who identify predominantly with Palestinians may perceive that European concern for the victims in Gaza is overshadowed by greater empathy for Jewish victims, further intensifying their sense of exclusion.

As mentioned above, in the aftermath of the so-called refugee crisis, many Jews identified with Muslim minorities, reporting an increasing sense of estrangement from the majority population. During the war in Gaza, European Muslims similarly experienced a shift in their self-perception, which became increasingly shaped by the Palestinian cause. These evolving projections and affiliations have profound implications, with the potential to influence not only the trajectories of the Jewish and Muslim communities but also broader European societal dynamics.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to resonate globally, influencing the interactions between Jews and Muslims as if the "lachrymose narrative"[12] has materialized in the aftermath of those October events, shaping their relationships on a more profound level. Besides the mentioned triggering of intergenerational Holocaust trauma, the Arab world has experienced a shared sense of mourning and outrage in response to the devastating images emerging from the Gaza Strip and a deepening humanitarian crisis. The perceived helplessness of distant, predominantly virtual observers closely monitoring the unfolding events in the Middle East via online platforms has served as a driving force for widespread global demonstrations and protests.

11 European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), "Welcome to Barbieland: European Sentiment in the Year of Wars and Elections" (2024), https://ecfr.eu/publication/welcome-to-barbieland-european-sentiment-in-the-year-of-wars-and-elections/#beyond-white-europe.

12 Ben Gidley and Samuel Sami Everett, "Introduction: Jews and Muslims in Europe. Between Discourse and Experience", in *Jews and Muslims in Europe: Between Discourse and Experience*, ed. Ben Gidley and Samuel Sami Everett (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 1–21 (at p. 5).

Parallel Silencing of Muslims and Jews

In the aftermath of the described events, two parallel silencing[13] trends emerged for both Muslim and Jewish communities. Jews, as mentioned above, are increasingly perceived as synonymous with Israelis, creating an automatic link between Jewish identity and responsibility for the actions and policies of the Israeli state. The requirement for sustained acknowledgment of the situation in Gaza has become imperative, especially for those seeking to publicly commemorate the events of October 7.

Muslims, in parallel, whether organized groups or individuals, have been frequently pressured to publicly condemn the October 7 massacre. In certain countries, failure to do so led to threats of institutional or financial repercussions or media campaigns targeting those who either refrained from condemning the Hamas attack or did not do so with sufficient vigor.

For both Jewish and Muslim minorities, the situation is not unprecedented; what distinguishes the current moment is the degree of urgency and visibility. Muslims encountered comparable experiences of scrutiny and collective blame following events like 9/11, which aggravated anti-Muslim hatred globally. Similarly, Jewish communities throughout the 20th century have often faced the reality that, regardless of their individual relationship to Jewishness or, more recently, the State of Israel, they would be reminded of their origin. This persistent, predominantly negative outer categorization underscores the shared lived experiences of minority communities that navigate circumstances of suspicion, stereotypization, and politicization on a daily basis.

Between Ostracization and Instrumentalization

Both communities have been subject to long-term politicization and instrumentalization. For instance, Jews have often been co-opted as a symbolic endorsement, or "kosher stamp", by right-wing political groups and figures such as Marine Le Pen and Viktor Orbán.[14] Often, we encounter the tendency that is represented by

13 Marcela Menachem Zoufalá, "Parallel or Entangled Silencing? Jewish and Muslim Experiences Post-October 7", *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 77 (2025): 187–208.

14 Ivan Kalmar, "Islamophobia and Anti-Antisemitism: The Case of Hungary and the 'Soros Plot'", *Patterns of Prejudice* 54/1–2 (2020): 182–98 (at p. 185).

exploitative reference to "Judeo-Christian values" casting Muslims as adversaries of Jews in order to stigmatize them.[15]

Similarly, in recent years, the concept of liberal Islam in Europe has also frequently found itself embraced by right-wing circles, a phenomenon that has the potential to undermine these initiatives in the eyes of mainstream populations. Needless to emphasize that representatives of liberal Islam often live under constant threat to their lives, additionally facing accusations of conspiratorial collaboration with the United States and Israel. They are seen as "bad" Muslims not only by the more conservative (or radical) Islamic circles but also by progressive non-affiliated bubbles that would be, under different circumstances, their natural partners.

One of the liberal Islam representatives is Ahmad Mansour, an Israeli-German psychologist, and publicist of Arab-Palestinian origin, renowned for his work against radicalization, combating "honor"-related crimes and discrimination, and addressing antisemitism within the Islamic community, who articulated this complex dynamic in a text published in October 2023:

> Personally, I experience antisemitism at work, in schools, in asylum facilities, and in prisons. This hatred is not acting silently; it is no longer covert; it has become self-confident, clear, and visible. Due to my public statements on Israel and my work in combatting antisemitism, I regularly receive threats, encounter defamation, and was even spat on in the streets of Berlin, at the heart of Germany. Allegedly, I am a Zionist, a traitor, and a Mossad agent; a right-wing extremist, and an Uncle Tom Arab who wants to find favour with the Germans and the Jews. Attacks certainly come not just from Palestinians, but primarily from supporters of the extreme left spectrum.[16]

Eminent for establishing the progressive Ibn-Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin, Seyran Ateş, a lawyer and human rights activist, publicly condemned the Hamas attack on Israel via her social media channels. Ateş and her team have been subjected to continual police protection since the mosque's establishment in 2017. During our February research workshop,[17] Imam Ateş attributed direct threats against her and her initiatives exclusively to radical Islamist circles. The mosque, allowing inclusive prayers for both men and women, fostering an LGBTQ+-friendly environment, and prohibiting face-covering veils like the burqa and

15 Anya Topolski, "The Dangerous Discourse of the 'Judaeo-Christian' Myth: Masking the Race-Religion Constellation in Europe", *Patterns of Prejudice* 54/1–2 (2020): 71–90 (at p. 71).

16 Ahmad Mansour, "Germany's Cancel Culture and Limitations of Debate", *European Review* 31/5 (2023): 489–97.

17 Research workshop in Berlin: https://www.mmz-potsdam.de/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/2024/jews-muslims-and-roma-in-the-21st-century-metropolises.

niqab within its premises, prompted the Egyptian Fatwa Council at Al-Azhar University to issue a fatwa against the mosque.[18]

The parallel testimonies of Ateş and Mansour offer critical insights into the complex challenges faced by promoters of liberal Islam. Their efforts are frequently politicized, reflecting the wider dynamics of power and representation. Moreover, the negative experiences of individuals within a minority group that is itself defined as a minority – potentially labelled as "intra-Muslim bigotry" or similarly as "intra-Muslim racism"[19] – can be meaningfully analyzed through an intersectional lens. This approach transcends the conventional, binary framing of Muslim-Jewish conflict, revealing deeper layers of marginalization and agency within the broader socio-political landscape.

Anticipating Harms: Academic Freedom vs. Vulnerable Minorities

During a workshop in Heidelberg hosted by project ENCOUNTERS[20] on Jewish-Muslim relations in Europe, an intriguing discussion emerged regarding the scholarly treatment of Muslim antisemitism in European contexts. One participant highlighted polemics within academic circles about whether Muslim antisemitism should even be considered a relevant research topic. These debates are often situated within the framework of ethical considerations, such as those outlined in the 2021 *Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice* by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA). The guidelines state:

> In certain political contexts, some groups, for example, religious or ethnic minorities, may be particularly vulnerable and it may be necessary to withhold data from publication, archiving, or even to refrain from working with them at all.[21]

Several examples of such challenges were discussed. One participant recounted their experiences in US academia, describing how any critical examination of

18 "Berlin's Liberal Mosque: Egyptian Fatwa Against German Mosque That Allows Women and Men to Pray Together", *The Guardian*, June 25, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/25/ibn-rushd-goethe-mosque-berlin-seyran-ates-egypt-fatwa-burqa-niqab.

19 Intra-Muslim Racism: https://ing.org/intra-muslim-racism/.

20 Project ENCOUNTERS: https://www.mmg.mpg.de/640536/encounters-ora-joint-research-project.

21 Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA), "Ethical Guidelines 2021 for Good Research Practice" (2021), https://www.theasa.org/downloads/ethics/asa_ethicsgl_2021.pdf.

Muslim antisemitism, even from a strictly historical perspective, was often perceived as controversial and barely acceptable, even if it did not touch on contemporary issues.

This brought to mind a similar account shared by a colleague, a seasoned scholar specializing in European antisemitism. The scholar had submitted a paper presenting research that compared levels of antisemitism between two distinct groups of European Muslim immigrants with shared territorial and religious backgrounds. The peer-reviewer labeled the work "covertly Islamophobic" and "Arabophobic", accusing the scholar of "cherry-picking" data.

After reading the article, my assessment was quite the opposite. The study employed a large sample of combined qualitative and quantitative data, that convincingly showed that each group in focus has divergent attitudes toward Jews, ranging from positive to negative. The study illustrated the diverse opinions among immigrants, portraying them as individuals with a plurality of voices. By highlighting these differences, the research dismantled the monolithic perception of Muslims as a homogenous group, a stereotype that often underpins anti-Muslim prejudice. Furthermore, the paper criticized the institutions of European countries for failing to provide adequate integration support for immigrants. This might, as a consequence, encourage solidarity, empathy, and a better understanding of the particular groups. One of the paper's conclusions directly refuted the Islamophobic conviction that Islamist extremism is widespread among immigrants. Additionally, it clearly demonstrated that the overwhelming majority of immigrants aim to integrate into European societies.

In my view, the research design, tone, and findings were balanced and impartial. However, reflecting on the Heidelberg workshop, I realized that the controversy likely stemmed not from the article's content but from its choice of focus. The very act of addressing Muslim antisemitism as a topic of study appears to have been perceived as inherently problematic, regardless of the scholarly merit of the work.

In this context, French *laïcité* comes to mind. Its secular values of liberty, equality, and fraternity/sorority represent, for me personally, the pinnacle of human achievement. However, it is evident that the concepts and categories underlying policies that restrict the collection of data on individuals or groups based on religion or ethnicity can impede inquiry into the complex aspects of the human condition.

A suitable compromise in this highly sensitive area may be found in the recent, intensive efforts by the European Union (EU) and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to promote the collection of so-called "equality data" across mem-

ber states.[22] These initiatives aim to implement comparable mechanisms within national frameworks that not only enhance research findings and provide a broader perspective but also firmly prioritize the highest ethical standards, taking into account the rights, dignity, and potential stigmatization of vulnerable minorities.

Another perspective worth considering is whether the perceived contentiousness of the research topic stems not solely from the vulnerability of the subject group (in this case, Muslims) but also from growing resistance to what some scholars describe as the disproportionate emphasis on Jewish suffering.[23] This discourse, reappearing in the context of post-October 7 debates, echoes elements of the well-documented "Holocaust fatigue", wherein public and academic engagement with Jewish historical trauma encounters criticism or diminishing receptivity.[24] By exploring the potential presence of this argument within the turbulent landscape of volatile emotions, we would likely enter the realm of competitive victimhood – a phenomenon gaining momentum not only within the social sciences at large, but specifically within the framework of Jewish-Muslim relations as exemplified by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conference in Prague 2024

In 2022, the European Association of Israel Studies (EAIS) was approached by its older sister, the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), with a request to co-organize the annual conference in 2024. For the AIS, this would mark their 40th annual conference – a significant milestone to be celebrated with their first European event. After careful consideration, Charles University in Prague was identified as an ideal venue, due to the university's reputation and, not least, due to the relatively low levels of antisemitism in Czechia. As a board member of the EAIS, I was enthusiastic about bringing this proposal to the leadership of the Faculty of Arts, where I am based. The faculty welcomed the proposal from both associations, and preparations began with a broader team of EAIS and AIS colleagues.

22 European Union (EU) and Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), "Guidance Note on the Collection and Use of Equality Data Based on Racial or Ethnic Origin" (2022), https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-02/guidance_note_on_the_collection_and_use_of_equality_data_based_on_racial_or_ethnic_origin_final.pdf.

23 Adam Sutcliffe, "Who Counts? Anti-Antisemitism and the Racial Politics of Emotion", *Ethnicities* (2024).

24 Arlene Stein, "Too Much Memory? Holocaust Fatigue in the Era of the Victim", in *Reluctant Witnesses: Survivors, Their Children, and the Rise of Holocaust Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

The urgency of convening in 2024 became more pronounced after the cancellation of the 2023 EAIS conference, which was scheduled to take place in Israel but was called off due to the attack. In light of these devastating events, there was a strong sense of necessity to gather and reconnect. As a colleague from Ben-Gurion University, who had been responsible for organizing the 2023 conference, expressed, "We needed to close the circle by coming to Prague". The therapeutic value of this first post-October Israel Studies conference was apparent to many of us. The submitted abstracts conveyed a deep sense of importance, reflecting the emotional toll and the collective need to process the events.

Following the tragic shooting at the Faculty of Arts building in December, concerns emerged that the faculty might reconsider hosting the conference, given the heightened security risks. Despite these valid concerns, the dean's collegium remained firm in its commitment to hosting the event, even going so far as to request police protection. The Czech police responded with a high level of professionalism, and we held several meetings with the head of the perimeter unit as well as with the counter-terrorism and extremism department. Further, we worked closely with the university's security team,[25] which had been strengthened in the wake of the December incident. However, due to the aforementioned security environment, it became necessary to additionally hire a private security company, which significantly increased the conference's overall costs.

Despite all these extensive measures, our overwhelming sense of responsibility for the safety of over 550 active speakers remained. Members of the organizing team based at North American campuses shared alarming testimonies about the escalating situation. Some had even been assigned personal bodyguards for walking through their campuses. During the spring, we gathered a significant amount of information from the security sector – information we hoped we would never need to use. During one of our meetings, we discussed how many minutes a police dog can search for explosives before getting tired. We learned that it is only twenty. The conference venue was scheduled to be searched for explosives early in the morning on the first day and potentially every morning thereafter, depending on the situation.

Our nervosity escalated when we found out that a lecture by Ilan Pappé was scheduled just four days before our conference at the same venue. This lecture was only disclosed with 48 hours' notice. While Pappé's visit to Prague was not his first and had been previously announced, the sudden revelation of the venue came as a surprise to us, intensifying the already high levels of concern.

25 CUNI security team: https://www.ukforum.cz/en/main-categories/news/9319-cu-security-creating-a-safety-culture-is-very-important.

We were dealing with two, possibly distinct security threats, each requiring different – and at times, contradictory – responses. One potential risk was a pro-Palestinian demonstration on the first morning during participant registration, when hundreds of attendees would be waiting in line outside the building. In this case, we needed to bring everyone inside as quickly as possible. At the same time, if a credible threat lurked among the crowd, relying on rushed checks or cursory questioning would be insufficient. These two parallel scenarios consumed much of our time and imagination as we prepared for all contingencies.

When asked by security experts to assess which panels posed the highest potential risk, we regrettably had to say that our keynote session was likely among them. This was not only due to its significance as the most attended and prominent time slot but also because of the sensitive nature of the topic. We had chosen an innovative format for the keynote, featuring a dialogical discussion between two distinguished speakers: Ilan Troen, a founding figure in the field of Israel Studies, and Mohammad Darawshe, the director of Givat Haviva's Center for a Shared Society.[26] Both speakers, who have dedicated significant parts of their personal and professional lives to fostering Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel, tragically lost family members in the October 7 terror attack. The very idea of a functioning partnership between Jews and Arabs is a symbolic threat to terrorist organizations, for whom any movement toward normalization or convivencia is seen as a betrayal of their cause.[27]

Following this logic, and given the diverse makeup of our active participants, including a significant number of Arabs, Palestinians, and Druze – the majority of whom were traveling from Israel – it was clear that their panels and roundtables also represented high-security risks. One notable aspect is worth mentioning in this context. In the Call for Papers, we took a bold step by introducing a new submission category: "Israel and Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Diaspora". This category was conceived before October 7, yet we could not have anticipated how timely and relevant it would become.

Virtually Invisible

It is somewhat ironic that this conference, originally intended to amplify the study of Israel in Central-Eastern Europe and, given its global participation, to resonate internationally, soon shifted in focus. By the spring term, we realized

26 Givat Haviva, "Shared Society, Shared future", https://www.givathaviva.org/.

27 This environment is also convincingly depicted in Lizzy Doron's intriguing book, *Who the Fuck is Kafka?* (Munich: dtv, 2015).

that the greatest achievement would be if the conference could simply take place at all. Following security recommendations, we vanished from the digital sphere: no program, no venue, and no names of participants or institutions were to be found online. This virtual invisibility became symbolic of our efforts to navigate the complex and uncertain environment we faced.

Ultimately, the keynote session titled "On the Potential of Listening to Each Other: An Exploration of The New Momentum in Israel and Beyond"[28] – along with the entire conference – proved to be a tremendous success. Remarkably, none of our participants experienced any physical or psychological harm, which we regarded as nothing short of a small miracle.

Eventually, despite a year and a half of preparatory work, the only public attention the conference received was a brief article in a Czech journal focused on critical social issues. The article's reductive premediated description of the event oscillated between criticizing the lack of transparency or rather limited information disclosed due to security protocols and selectively mentioning a few paper titles as evidence of an alleged lack of balanced perspectives. Notably absent from the coverage was any acknowledgment that this was the largest conference on Israel Studies to date, featuring 163 panels and participants from across Europe, Israel, Ukraine, North America, India, Japan, and Brazil, as well as a keynote designed to foster intercommunal dialogue.

Israel Studies as a "Jewish Space"

One of the reviewers of this essay posed a thought-provoking question: To what extent can Israel Studies be considered a "Jewish space"?

For context, this essay – and my involvement in this project – was preceded by the participation in the highly inspiring event "A Jewish Europe? Virtual and Real-Life Spaces in 21st Century Europe", held in 2022 in Sweden and co-organized by the University of Gothenburg and the University of Southampton. The convenors of this conference, who also served as editors of its written outcomes, Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör, argued in their introductory chapter that academic Jewish Studies can be considered a "Jewish space"[29] in the sense originally coined by Diana Pinto.[30]

28 See the AIS-EAIS conference program, Prague (2024), https://aisisraelstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/8.-Conference-Program-Book.pdf.

29 Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör, "Introducing a Virtual Approach to European Jewish Spaces in the Twenty-First Century", *Contemporary Jewry* 44 (2024): 245–59 (at p. 258).

30 Diana Pinto, "A New Jewish Identity for Post-1989 Europe", *JPR Policy Paper* 1 (1996), 1–15.

To this day, a growing body of scholarship explores not only the development of Israel Studies but also the overlaps with Jewish Studies, their (un)intentional merging, the positioning of Israel Studies within Middle Eastern Studies, and the geopolitical motivations and challenges of these seemingly distinct but interconnected domains.[31] However, the broader question posed by the reviewer – to what extent is Israel Studies a "Jewish space"? – offers an opportunity to touch upon Diana Pinto's ideas, which have significantly shaped discourse on Jewish life in post-1990 Europe.

Protected Safe Spaces

In the Call for Papers for the AIS-EAIS conference, the convenors committed to work tirelessly to create a "safe space where diverse scholarship is included and respected". As mentioned earlier, in the context of security measures, the Prague event was attended not only by Israeli and American Jewish speakers but also by Arab, Palestinian, and many non-Jewish and non-Arab scholars from around the world. Although discussions were often intense – reflecting the attempts of reconciling conflicting individual and collective narratives – the omnipresent spirit remained welcoming and mutually supportive.

In line with Pinto's vision of a "Jewish space" as embracing, pluralistic, open to all, and democratic, Israel Studies strives to uphold this ethos within the limited, well-protected spaces where genuine academic dialogue can thrive. Despite facing accusations of being used instrumentally for hasbara (public diplomacy) purposes, the field has developed a multifaceted language of expression that accommodates a wide range of conflicting perspectives and radical ideas while preserving the delicate balance of open and safe discourse. Although Pinto's ideal of "Jewish spaces" has (yet again) to materialize in Europe, we can observe an "Israel Studies space" rising despite – or perhaps because of – the demanding circumstances.

31 Cf. Johannes Becke, "Methodological Canaanism: The Case for a Rupture Between Jewish Studies and Israel Studies", in *Jewish Studies and Israel Studies in the Twenty-First Century: Intersections and Prospects*, ed. Christian Wiese and Katharina Herold (Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2019), pp. 199–217; Johannes Becke, Michael Brenner, and Daniel Mahla (eds.), *Israel-Studien Geschichte – Methoden – Paradigmen* (Munich: Zentrum für Israel-Studien, LMU München, 2020); Ilan S. Troen, "Israel as a Field of Study: Historic Overview", in *The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society*, ed. Reuven Y. Hazan, Alan Dowty, Menachem Hofnung, and Gideon Rahat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 19–35.

The difficult, authentic, and deeply personal dialogue between Ilan and Mohammad, alongside contributions from other panelists, not only exemplifies a thriving "Jewish space" but also encourages us to reimagine Europe at its peak – emerging boldly from the current dark times.

Post Scriptum

There is no doubt that the recent period has been marked by profound transformations in both the academic and personal spheres of those engaged with Jewish and Israel Studies. The events of October 7 not only reignited historical traumas but also intensified longstanding fractures – both within Israeli Jewish and diasporic communities and in their interactions with respective local and international circles. The evolving, often fluid, discourses surrounding Jewish identity, diaspora relations, and academic freedom – as briefly examined in this chapter – attest to the persistent entanglement of historical memory, contemporary geopolitics, and personal lived experiences.

At the same time, the volatile landscape of Jewish-Muslim relations in Europe, coupled with the apparent instrumentalization of minority communities in political narratives – manifested through processes of collective othering – unveils ambiguous undercurrents that merit further exploration. As polarization intensifies in academic and public debates, we urgently need in-depth, historically grounded discussions that resist oversimplified binaries. The Prague conference, despite unprecedented challenges, ultimately embodied this imperative by creating a space – no matter how fragile – for encounters and intellectual exchange in a moment of deep uncertainty.

The narrative battles, the demands for (in)visibility, and the burden of representation indicate broader societal shifts in an increasingly fragmented world. The reflections in this essay emphasize the importance of maintaining academic integrity in the face of pressures and agendas while humbly acknowledging the myth of neutrality. Recognizing the complexity of people's lived experiences helps maintain both rigor and empathy in scholarship. Given that spaces for open discussion may be shrinking, it is more vital than ever to encourage critical inquiry and genuine, all-embracing conversations.

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Part V: **Conclusion**

Maja Hultman and Joachim Schlör

Epilogue: Virtual Jewish Spaces for the Future

JS

When I think about the two key notions of our project, "Europe as a Jewish space" and "Virtually Jewish", the first image that comes to my mind is that of several long walks with Diana Pinto, through Berlin sometime in the summer of 1998 and through Budapest in the spring of 2002. Walking has always been an important part of my research. I walked through Tel-Aviv, trying to understand how this city has been created by wave after wave of Jewish immigration, mainly from Europe, but also from the Middle East and North Africa, how elements of former – diasporic – experiences have contributed to the particular atmosphere of this first "all-Jewish city". I walked through Odessa, trying to find out more about the pre-history of Tel-Aviv and learning about the amazing variety of Jewish experiences in Russian, Ukrainian, Yiddish, and Hebrew that once had a home in that "pearl of the Black Sea". And of course, for more than 30 years now, I have been walking the streets of Berlin, trying to come to terms with its ambivalent role in Jewish history – the birthplace of Jewish enlightenment, the central place for all Jewish fantasies (from Assimilation to Zionism) of the 19th century, the theatre of a Jewish renaissance and of the fight against antisemitism – and, perversely, the site of the Wannsee conference and the deportations starting in 1941.

The Holocaust has left a deep void in many European cities. In the period of our walks, two different but clearly related developments took place in Berlin but also in Warsaw and Kraków, in Vienna and in Prague, in Budapest and elsewhere. While new forms of a place-based memorial culture have tried to document the lost presence of Jewish culture and history, re-inscribing that past in a kind of virtual enactment through memorials and publications, at the same time new cultural initiatives brought forgotten sounds and sights back (?) to the streets of those cities, "re-inventing" (as Ruth Ellen Gruber has called it)[1] Jewish culture in Europe. These different forms of virtuality have sometimes been described as artificial and superimposed, but both Gruber and Pinto have identified a creative force in them, a kind of joint Jewish and non-Jewish effort to remember the past

1 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111268132-013

and to create a new future. We know today that the optimism of these years was rather premature, to say the least, but I still think that it was grounded in reality. It was fascinating for me to see how Diana Pinto formed her thoughts about "the new European Jewish presence in those buoyant and hopeful times" while walking through the open arena that Berlin offered then.

MH

Some twenty-five years later, and as part of our conference in 2022, we – you and I, and the presenters – walked the streets of Gothenburg to learn about its Jewish history. We gathered in the chilly but sunny Swedish spring outside the ochre-colored classicist façade of Gothenburg's Museum of Art, learning that funds and art collections from Jewish philanthropists had made it a reality. We visited the Holocaust memorial at the moat and looked at the casted interior spaces of seven pairs of worn-out shoes to remind us of the trauma of the Holocaust that many Swedish Jews carry. The tour ended at the city's synagogue, where the guide pointed out Viking-inspired decoration. As we together walked the streets of Gothenburg, we were also invited to participate in Karin Brygger's art project.[2] In individually writing our thoughts on a scroll, the mold of our walk was pressed onto paper, which in turn flowed behind us and into the street as it was increasingly unrolled. Our walk took up Gothenburg's literary and literal space, thus embodying Jewish presence in the city. Looking back at it now, that walk casts itself as the very enactment of our intention for the conference and this book: it presented Europe as a vivid Jewish space and invited those of us who are not Jewish to participate in its intensive, creative process. Despite the analogue fashion of the art project, one could even say that the walk made Gothenburg's streets, and perhaps even us non-Jewish participants, "Virtually Jewish".

Similarly, the chapters written by Susanne Urban and Susanne Korbel both underline the power of artistic creativity and its sensory experiences in evolving Jewish spaces of memory beyond the "frozen", Jewish victimhood appointed to many European sites of heritage. While contemporary Jewish life in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz might not hold the richness and vividness of these medieval ShUM communities and today's Vienna is very different from the pre-Shoah Austrian capital, histories, legends, and prayers from the past are still alive, evoked in museum exhibitions, popular music, and urban art both locally and globally.

2 Karin Brygger, "The Scrolls Project: A performance working in the intersection of writing, movement, and Jewish Studies", *Mobile Culture Studies. The Journal* 8 (2024): 123–36.

As such, Urban defines the Jewish memory of ShUM as "transnational and mobile, transgenerational, timeless"; characteristics that we often find in descriptions of virtual realities. Indeed, the memories of ShUM can be understood as an intangible virtual *and* authentic Jewish space "as they remain in people's minds and souls". They are virtual because they are based on histories of people that have been pulled out of the German context yet ground and unite Jews across the world in a common European Jewish past. They are authentic because they offer "comfort and empowerment" to Jews today. As creative outlets of these memories are replanted into museums in ShUM for both Jewish and non-Jewish visitors to experience, Jewish life in all shades can be showcased and remembered. Likewise underscoring that art that uses the vitality and strength of Jewish history in shaping Jewish spaces holds much potential for Jewish/non-Jewish relations, Korbel describes how an artist's interpretation of the Jewishness of an Austrian street name, activistly put up as a street sign without municipal allowance, became a common cause and site of gathering for Jews and non-Jews alike, both online and on the streets of Vienna. In likeness with our common stroll with the scrolls in Gothenburg in 2022, these two chapters present the vitality of Jewish history as a powerful basis for Jews and non-Jews to encounter each other *authentically* beyond the many tangible sites of destruction, often formed into memorial spaces of Jewish victimhood, that remain across Europe since the Holocaust.

But as crisis after crisis have unfolded since the beginning of the 2020s, would you say that this hopefulness inherent to the concept of virtuality has any bearing in today's Europe?

JS

Your question brings us back to the need – often mentioned by the reviewers of the contributions to this volume – to define "virtuality". Very basically, the Cambridge dictionary describes it as "the fact of existing, but not in a way that is physically real, or a thing that is imagined or considered rather than being real" – which obviously demands a definition of "reality" as well. In our context, I have earlier tried to ask questions, for example, of Tel Aviv: What is "real" here – the street that my feet are walking, or the feeling that this is a place where an immigrant from Odessa in 1924 or from Berlin in 1936 could finally walk freely? What is "real" in the sight of Berlin's Neue Synagoge – Centrum Judaicum on Oranienburger Straße today? The information (which we need to have) that this building which served as a synagogue since 1866 was demolished but not destroyed in 1938, bombed in 1943, and survived in ruins until 1988 when reconstruction

began? Or the very sensitive form of reconstruction that leaves all the signs of destruction visible and marks the wide-open space which has been left for future generations to decide? In that sense, the partial reconstruction contains virtuality in the form of hope. It is not "perfect", since, as the dictionary continues to explain, "any attempt to produce something in reality leads to imperfection". Virtuality, to quote the Merriam-Webster dictionary, has to do or is even synonymous with "essence", but only potentially; it refers to a potential existence of something. The digital revolution of recent years with its (mostly) positive aspects of worldwide connections, improved accessibility, and creative opportunities has added a new dimension to our awareness of virtuality. In concrete terms, during the pandemic synagogue services were transmitted online and made "visits" to such places virtually possible; academic lectures and conferences on Zoom or Teams reached participant numbers far beyond the usual audiences in a classroom; virtual maps helped researchers to reconstruct Jewish spaces in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East, using archival records that are now available online. This is clearly a sign of progress, and neither the pandemic nor the terror attacks, against both Jews in Europe and Israelis in Israel, have put an end to this progress, maybe on the contrary. Thousands of researchers worldwide have signed a resolution that speaks out against the boycott of Israeli academic institutions and individuals. Yes, of course, there is a huge wave of antisemitism and hate-speech "out there", but there are new opportunities to counter violence and hatred at the same time and with the same instruments.

The second opponent to "virtuality" is "authenticity". Critical commentators have stated that, for example, Klezmer music played in early 1990s Kraków by non-Jewish musicians to a non-Jewish audience very obviously lacked authenticity. But this view ignores the fact that some of the musicians have indeed Jewish roots and only re-discovered them through music; that such Klezmer festivals brought an international public to the city, including American or Israeli Jews in search of their origins, and turned the attention of the public to those Jewish institutions that still existed and were in need of support; and, finally, that those concerts (and exhibitions and publications) have served as a kind of time-bridge that will be able to preserve the contents of such cultural activities for the future (and for future Jewish communities). That is still true today, and your example of our walking experiences in Gothenburg confirms this very vividly. There is no way to go back to the past. What has been destroyed remains part of the history of these places. But we have seen signs and documents of new Jewish life in Sweden, and we see other such examples in the contributions to our volume. I don't know whether those walks have made us "Virtually Jewish". Let's say they have made both Jews and non-Jews aware of the importance of both the historical and the present and future existence of Jewish culture in Europe, and also aware of

the necessity of positive and constructive Jewish/non-Jewish relations, religious or secular.

As you say, the digital world has brought about a new relationship between "virtuality" and "authenticity". If we don't treat authenticity as a fetish but instead allow (with the help of all that the digital sphere offers) a more open and, in cases, even playful approach, new such spaces may appear. Here is the synagogue that fulfills its function as it has done for centuries. Next to it is a church, or a mosque, with its own internal function. Is it not interesting, for us, what happens between them, ideally in the form of a Christian-Jewish or Muslim-Jewish dialogue? Here is an archive that allows us to research the former places of settlement of a Jewish community somewhere in Galicia or Bukovina. Is it not interesting for us to see how their lives related to that of their neighbors? And to learn what they took along when they emigrated to Sweden or Germany?

And, to continue our discussion, what are possible theoretical approaches that could help us to understand this relationship? In what ways can Walter Benjamin's notion of the "aura" of works of art, something unique to the original (authentic) product that gets lost in the process of technical reproduction, be helpful, and does it still hold?

MH

Yes, let's dig deeper into the meaning(s) of "authenticity" and see how it might finetune our definition of virtuality – as an imperfect, open, playful and co-constructive dialogue – of Jewish spaces. As you have already pointed out, the reinvention of Jewish traditions and customs in today's Europe can, perhaps cynically or with a lack of hope in the future of Jewish Europe, be regarded as a non-Jewish colonial engulfment of remnants from a butchered minority's culture. From this point of view, cultural expressions such as language, music, clothes, and food developed and used by the pre-1939 European Jewry are regarded as original, grounded in and inherent to historically local – and expelled or murdered – Jewish populations, which in turn prompts a polarized view of the reincarnations arising at the end of the 20th century as copies or fakes of a lost past. The "aura", which Benjamin defined as the aesthetic (and somewhat metaphysical, ethereal, or divine) authority of an original work of art,[3] cannot be reproduced, leaving Jewish-styled restaurants, klezmer performances, and, in Ger-

3 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (London: Penguin, [1935] 2008).

many, liberal theological centers as nothing more than a non-Jewish enactment "of a specific kind of Jews" that fails to take into account "traces of a past, that are repugnant and must be repudiated, and yet, in light of past atrocities, must be tolerated".[4] Based on such curated, commodified, instrumental, and pliable characteristics, Jewish spaces, which are developed in, by, and for national discourses in Europe, are anything but authentic.[5]

This approach to authenticity is closely connected to Benjamin's essentialist reading of aura as an intrinsic, objective, and quantifiable value attached to an entity as it is molded into art. In trying to explain the appeal of certain places, tourism studies and urban studies have followed suit, emphasizing authenticity as the opposite to a generic and standardized landscape. They see authenticity as akin to people-centered processes that are related to an historically continued custom, an unaltered materiality, or an uninterrupted lifestyle.[6] And contrary to the skepticism outlined above, a positive view on the authenticity of Jewish spaces can be approached from this positivist point of view. In her chapter, Magdalena Abraham-Diefenbach explains the digital documentation of tombstones in cemeteries of Jewish communities murdered in the Holocaust as "an attempt to create a substitute for authenticity in virtual space". It is about the preservation of a space that according to Halakha, and despite not being in active use, never stops being Jewish – bodies and Torah scrolls buried in a Jewish cemetery can never be moved – but nonetheless might be broken down by erosion, vandalism, or indeed the loss of memory. While this digital process is not akin to a continued, ethno-religious use of the on-site cemetery, impossible as it is with its owners and users long gone and without any new local Jewish inhabitants to take over, it ensures the survival of a once rich Jewish life in Europe. Nevertheless, Abraham-Diefenbach is cautious about "the loss of physical authenticity" – the historically attached, emotional experience that arises when standing in front of a tombstone – that a turn to Jewish spaces in the digital realm might lead to. While the authentic outlines of a historical site's physicality, the remnant that remains closest to the site's original function, can be digitally saved, its digital representation

4 Hannah Tzuberi, "'Reforesting' Jews: The German state and the construction of 'New German Judaism'", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27/3 (2020): 223–4.

5 The characteristics are borrowed from Taylor Dotson, who argues for their inauthentic quality in relation to virtual spaces: Taylor Dotson, "Authentic virtual others? The promise of post-modern technologies", *AI & Society* 29 (2014): 11–21.

6 See, for example: Ali A. Alraouf, "Regenerating urban traditions in Bahrain. Learning from Bab-Al-Bahrain: The authentic fake", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 8/1–2 (2010): 50–68; Mustapha El Moussaoui, "Spatial transformation – The importance of a bottom-up approach in creating authentic public spaces", *Architecture* 4/1 (2023): 14–23.

is virtual – mobile, transnational, flawed as a memorial space yet also open for further, future functions – and might not elicit the same bodily and affective response.

Libby Langsner digs deeper into the potential for authentic affectivity that digitized Jewish spaces carry. She posits that VR (virtual reality) representations of heritage sites can spark a renewed interest for the European Jewish pasts of American Jews. Yes, Langsner continues, walking through a virtually restored synagogue might not do more than offer a nostalgic experience of the past, but this can also be seen as an end in itself, since nostalgia is crucial for Jewish identity processes and might "shape a new reality where Europe and the United States do not seem to be separated by an ocean". Similarly, Abraham-Diefenbach believes that digital representations of Jewish spaces might support dialogue between dispersed communities and in this way enhance the relevance of the European Jewish past for today's world Jewry. Here, authenticity is not used as a benchmark for material or cultural longevity but, as Andreas Wesener argues, a constructivist concept that has less to do with historic roots and everything to do with the realization of self.[7] For Jews in the United States, Israel, or elsewhere, and as demonstrated in Kyra Schulman's chapter, digital interfaces of European heritage sites can function as spaces of reconnection to European Jewish history and thus (re)establish Europe as a geographical container (or "third pillar", as Pinto described it at the end of the 1990s)[8] of today's Jewish identity. While this definition brushes close to John Urry's life-long investigation into the modern tourist's desire to visually consume their destination, transforming space into an object rather than a subject,[9] coming full circle with the critical, colonial lens described above, it also opens up the concept of "authenticity" for a relational, rather than an essential, approach. This fits neatly into the therapeutic understanding of the AM (Authentic Movement) Model, which believes that bodily movements in the presence of a silent witness can release and communicate a person's premediated – authentic – emotions. Yael Barkai demonstrates that students of this model highly appreciate its intrapersonal and interpersonal characteristics: while the self-awareness it generates is regarded as the model's most meaningful activity, the trust, affirmation, openness, and attentiveness of being a

7 Andreas Wesener, "'This place feels authentic': Exploring experiences of authenticity of place in relation to the urban built environment in the Jewellery Quarter, Birmingham", *Journal of Urban Design* 21/1 (2016): 67–83.

8 Diana Pinto, *The Third Pillar? Towards a European Jewish Identity* (Budapest: Central European University, 1999).

9 See, for example: John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990); John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995).

witness also gain high scores.[10] In other words, authenticity – of self, including in and through an absolute or abstract space – is not the result of a predefined list of static values but produced through human interaction. Echoing your earlier discussion, the authenticity of a still-standing synagogue, ruins from a Jewish cemetery, a museum that highlights Jewish history, or a digital interface commemorating Europe's murdered Jews should be linked to the ability of each space to facilitate the development of (Jewish or non-Jewish) understanding or expression of self *through* the presence of a living, breathing Other. This way, the process of virtuality holds potential for (Jewish or non-Jewish) self to be authentic (singular and relational) while physically or metaphysically experiencing the Jewish past and present in a Jewish Space.[11] The question is: is this potential realized in the digital world?

Most say no. Discussions on authenticity in relation to, for example, a virtual reality (VR) and a virtual influencer (VI) reveal them as constructs shaped by the consumer's socially predetermined perception of a referent entity.[12] As such, today's cyberworlds, such as massive multiplayer online simulations (OASIS), are creatively informed by colonial and imperial hegemonies, inhibiting ethnic minorities from using their own cultural expressions to represent themselves.[13] While it seems that people with an identity that aligns to the white, Western world have a better chance of using digital platforms to express themselves, that expression is in itself not necessarily authentic. As noted above, authenticity is produced in the presence of an Other and Taylor Dotson argues that "it is through constraint that Reality becomes cognitively present".[14] Virtual simulations that adhere to a majority's cultural perceptions are not likely to impose such an authentic interaction on its users. In the wake of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, Krista Susman carries a hope that digital interfaces can act as merely a skin between self and Other as they engage in dialogue, but she also determines that the digital social room's removal of sensations, embodiment, and concreteness in-

10 Yael Barkai, "On the Authentic Movement Model: A space for creation – a place to be", *American Journal of Dance Therapy* 44/1 (2022): 4–20.

11 Victoria Grace Walden discusses this without mentioning authenticity: Victoria Grace Walden, "What is 'virtual Holocaust memory'?", *Memory Studies* 15/4 (2022): 621–33.

12 Bernadett Koles et al., "The authentic virtual influencer: Authenticity manifestations in the metaverse", *Journal of Business Research* 170 (2024): 114325; Rambabu Lavuri and Umair Akram, "Role of virtual reality authentic experience on affective responses: Moderating role virtual reality attachment", *Journal of Ecotourism* (2023): 1–19.

13 Jennifer Williams, "The erasure of virtual blackness: An ideation about authentic black hairstyles in speculative digital environments", *Journal of Future Studies* 24/2 (2019): 37–46.

14 Dotson, "Authentic virtual others", p. 17.

hibits the human touch needed to encounter each other "as *whole persons*".[15] Digital landscapes need to force their users "to confront the burdens and inconveniences of reality" in order to offer authentic encounters with another individual, ethnicity, or culture.[16] Clearly, the living, breathing Other is not easily transferable into digital form, and if it is, it can still be stereotyped, reduced, controlled, dodged, ignored, and excluded. On the other hand, Urban, Korbel, Abraham-Diefenbach, and Schulman all emphasize that it is the relationship between digital social interfaces and the tangibility of real space – museums, streets, cemeteries, and venues – that anchors the memory (or "virtuality") of Jewish pasts in Europe and produces curiosity-driven, and sometimes awkward, interactions between Jews and non-Jews.

The concepts of virtuality and authenticity both focus on encounters with human beings and cultures to go beyond mere nods to the other's existence. Both underline the importance of deep engagement with that which is different to the self, and the notion of authenticity in particular emphasizes the need to acknowledge this otherness with respect and empathy in order for it (and the self) to stay true to itself. These processes are based on a hopeful and creative understanding of human interaction. They do not shy away from burdens of the past, such as the Holocaust, or present challenges, such as today's increasing antisemitism, but believe that they can be overcome only as Jews and non-Jews truly meet each other, in whatever shape, form, or platform. Based on the other contributions to this book, do you think that such positive manifestations of Jewish/non-Jewish encounters exist in relation to Europe's Jewish past and present, especially after the crises of the last few years? Is there space for burdens and inconveniences to be shared among Jews and non-Jews in trust, openness, playfulness, and imperfection? Or are we presently seeing a Jewish world shrinking away from such virtual processes and authentic expressions?

JS

This has provided us with some very relevant background, and it clearly helps us to place our discussion about Jewish virtual spaces and Jewish/non-Jewish encounters in the wider context of those new developments in communication. I

15 Krista Susman, "Between the tiles: The psychology of the virtual room. Appropriating and subverting the digital sphere for authentic and meaningful encounter", *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies* 20/4 (2021): 331.

16 Dotson, "Authentic virtual others", p. 19.

have learned at least two things that are indeed important for our project. The key notion is human interaction, both directly – people sitting in a coffeehouse or a university classroom and talking to each other, working together for the restauration and documentation of a cemetery, creating cultural heritage projects, and fostering dialogue – and through the intermission of a journey, a place, a sight, a document, or even a technological tool. And, secondly, all those new and (well, partly) exciting technical facilities that create virtuality are useless when they lose contact to what the historian in me still wants to call reality. And here I think that our field of Jewish Studies and Jewish/non-Jewish relations is faced with new challenges. Particularly, the so-called "social" media have shown their huge and seemingly uncontrollable potential to spread ugliness and hatred. Hate preachers of all kinds, including Islamist and right-wing populists, have discovered TikTok and similar platforms to reach out to younger generations; even "Queers for Palestine" or "Feminists for Palestine" celebrate Hamas as freedom fighters and ignore – or even deny – the massacres of October 7, not just on the streets of our cities but also through all those channels that have once been hailed as new fora for an open alley of free communication. So-called "pro-Palestinian" activists (who, often enough, have no basic knowledge of or deep interest in Palestine) desecrate a memorial in Berlin that is dedicated to the only public protest against the deportation of Jews in Nazi Germany, claiming that "Jews are committing genocide".[17] Freedom of speech has become a kind of license to shout down anyone with a different opinion and most of all those among us who defend Israel's right to exist and to defend herself. All this has also led to a split within the diverse Jewish communities in most European countries where some intellectuals (understandably, to a degree) fear that measures taken against antisemitism might lead to a problematic reduction of the freedom of speech, while – in my observation – a large majority has indeed begun to shrink away from public exposure and seek comfort in the Jewish house alone. And that is a huge difference to the optimistic outlook in Diana Pinto's and Ruth Ellen Gruber's work written in the 1990s and early 2000s.

But of course, I know that such a complaint is futile when it is not accompanied by some kind of positive counteractivity. And yes, I do think that the examples gathered in this book stand for "positive manifestations of Jewish/non-Jewish encounters" and will still be valid once some kind of settlement – "solution" seems too far away a word – for the conflict in the Middle East will have been found and the wave of right-wing populism has calmed down. There are three

17 "NS-Denkmal in der Rosenstraße beschmiert", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, August 28, 2024, https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/politik/berliner-denkmal-antisemitisch-beschmiert/.

larger areas of activity that we could identify – heritage, digital practices, and public spaces. The area that obviously offers the most in common ground is the heritage sector – which is, at first glance, not such an optimistic statement. Projects in this sector are, by force, oriented towards the past. But the contributions in this book show how useful initiatives, supported by digital approaches, can develop a more future-oriented potential.

In the field of digital practices, we see an interesting development, where projects that look into the past find ways to explore not just memory spaces, but also the contemporary public space as an area for research and for dialogue. In her contribution, Schulman discusses how a digital project, the construction of a Holocaust memorial map of the Polish city of Łomża, based on the memoirs of a survivor, served as a tool for Polish-Jewish reconciliation. The detailed field report describes the difficult processes of negotiation between two groups of researchers and the local population and works out how and why this digital approach has been successful: "What was the virtual terrain able to offer us that the physical terrain could not?". The joint work on the map, on the inter-relation between past and present and between the physical and the virtual representations, has created a platform for dialogue. Alla Marchenko contributes to a new area of research that brings together questions of ethno-religious belonging, practices and effects of social media representation, and their impacts on society. She asks how new and digital forms of "being publicly Jewish", represented by four female personalities on different social media platforms, contribute to the changes of the status and the perception of Judaism and Jewish culture in contemporary Poland and Ukraine. She identifies two distinct expressions, on the one hand a secular, community-oriented popular Jewishness, characterized by family stories, professional achievements, and broad community engagement, on the other hand a religious, individual-oriented popular Jewishness that serves as a means of exploring "orthodox" Judaism – in each case made accessible by individuals with their particular personalities. Dekel Peretz takes this (at least partly) inner-Jewish dialogue one step further and discusses two forms of interfaith digitization established during the COVID-19 pandemic: mediatized interfaith encounters broadcast on social media channels, and interfaith dialogues conducted in ephemeral virtual spaces on online communication platforms. While Muslim-Jewish dialogue in digital virtual rooms during the pandemic has created new spaces for overcoming isolation and fostering solidarity and tools for alleviating double marginalization, power asymmetries, patriarchal structures, and a joint response to Christian hegemony and ideas of a German "Leitkultur", this dialogue has obviously become much more difficult after October 7, 2023, and its aftermath.

The same is true for the topics of our final contributions. Marcela Menachem Zoufalá discusses, in a very personal and ethnographic approach, several seem-

ingly disparate but deeply interconnected events – the news of the massacre that reached her while she was in Tel-Aviv, preparing for a conference by the Association for Israel Studies to be held on October 8–10 at Ben Gurion University; the emerging "battle of narratives" about Israel and Palestine, Jews and Muslims, and its impact on academic debates and publications; and, finally, the conference of the European Association for Israel Studies in Prague 2024 which, for security reasons, "vanished from the digital sphere" nearly completely. In a remarkable act of resilience, the organizers responded with the creation of a new submission category, "Israel and Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Diaspora", and a keynote lecture with the programmatic title "On the Potential of Listening to Each Other: An Exploration of The New Momentum in Israel and Beyond". Finally, Karin Brygger and you return to the two main concepts that have been the central inspiration for this whole book, Pinto's discussion of a Jewish space in Europe and Gruber's idea of virtuality: The virtuality of a Jewish space is marked by an active Jewish/non-Jewish relation that is defined by adaptiveness, inclusion, creativity and life – or in Gruber's words, vividness and intensity – and focused on societal needs for a pluralistic and democratic Europe here and now. This programmatic approach, which indeed sums up the key intention of us as editors, is tested in a case study of three Swedish Jewish spaces, the Jewish Museum in Stockholm, the Swedish Holocaust Museum, and a private organization, Jewish Culture in Sweden. The responses of all three institutions to the events of October 7, 2023, the fear of rising antisemitism, and the ensuing public debates show in great detail that Jewish spaces in Europe are fragile, unstable and dependent on forces beyond individual, communal, or institutional control. They must indeed be continuously practiced and steadfastly protected in order to secure and to develop the integral place of Jewish history and culture in Europe.

MH

Throughout this book, virtual Jewish spaces in Europe have received many faces. Are these different aspects all examples of real and authentic Jewish/non-Jewish relations? No. Our contributors highlight the presence of Jewish history and its potential for Jewish/non-Jewish encounters in spaces of heritage, the digital, and the public as closely linked to socio-political developments, fragile in the face of increasing antisemitism, as well as natural and memory developments linked to the very passing of time. Jewish history sometimes emerges as a thorny landscape carefully, and perhaps even fearfully, navigated by Jews and non-Jews as they try to relate to each other. Awkward or uncomfortable, even antagonistic, encounters

have been demonstrated in some of the chapters. The pandemic and October 7, two among many crises that have affected Europe since the turn of the 21st century, seem to have dented people's ability to tolerate and appreciate the Jewish (and Muslim) Other. But several studies in this book also make abundantly clear that the virtual presence of Jewishness, in people's memory and on digital interfaces, made tangible through exhibitions and interfaith dialogues, holds immense potential for supporting experiences, activities, and events that anchor the European Jewish past and contemporary Jewish culture as a vital arena for identity processes and self-expressions. Our contributors have given examples of these creative and relational processes. While many of Europe's Jews are scarred by the antisemitic eruption that followed Hamas's terror attack on Israel, some limiting their public and online presence as a consequence,[18] art, music, digital tools and interfaces, academic conferences, public events, museums, streets, and city walks continue to invite Jews and non-Jews to share burdens, experience the world together, and co-construct a more inclusive society.

Still, the question of Europe as a safe home vividly resonates in the European Jewish consciousness since October 7. Europe's societies still battle how to approach the presence and role of Jewish history and culture in respectful, empathetic, open, uncomfortable (to national majorities), and relational ways. But in excavating the many meanings of virtuality, authenticity, and reality in relation to Europe's Jewish spaces, contributions to this book have collectively searched for and found a remnant of Gruber's and Pinto's original hope. The question mark that followed "Jewish Europe" in our original conference title should indeed be turned into an exclamation mark, if only for the sake of reminding us of the never-ending work that needs to be done to safekeep its existence.

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