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The Dynamics of Jewish Space(s): Jewish Agency, Individual, Collective and the Creating, Maintenance or Discarding of Jewish Dominated Jewish Spaces

Jews, Jewish structures, places of worship and places for social and cultural gatherings in Cologne in the present must be understood against their historical backdrop. The historical backdrop must not be limited to the current borders of Germany: the majority of all Jews[1] who live in Germany have either immigrated themselves, or they have at least one parent who immigrated to Germany. Migration underpins the heterogeneity of the Jewish population, its diverse religious and cultural praxes, the on-going negotiations and power struggles about issues ranging from who is a Jew, to what *nussach* (religious ritual) should be followed in the synagogue, which *minhag* (religious custom), or more like, which *minhagim* (religious customs) is/are deemed relevant, if the praxis should be Eastern European style Orthodox, German style Liberal, if Israeli components can be included, what features of the praxes of Jews from the countries of the former Soviet Union can be included, how and if styles can be mixed and blended – and how to negotiate the boundary to the non-Jewish surroundings.

This heterogeneity and the resulting negotiations are not limited to the religious arena: for this reason, this chapter seeks to reappraise the notion 'Jewish space' and shift the attention to a Jewish space, or more like intersecting Jewish spaces, which Jews created or co-created, in which they are power holders, and where they control the boundaries. This can lead to the discarding of a Jewish space if the boundary cannot be fixed, and that what is within the boundary became too unattractive.[2] Negotiations about the boundary are underpinned by politics of belonging, differences in political opinion, different emphases in terms of engagement within the Jewish sphere and socio-political activism beyond it, different takes on the State of Israel and, in broad terms, the Middle East conflict, and, last but not least issues of living in Germany. In other words, Jews in Germany are a 'mixed bunch,' and Cologne, which is central in this case study is no exemption. The situation in Cologne can be seen as offering trends, which occur in variations across the country. The essay is set up chronologically, moving from the post-Shoah period to the present: or, one could say, it moves from utter destruction and frail beginnings to a flourishing, self-confident, and well-established present.

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1 In terms of Jews by way of self-definition.

2 Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (Long Grove, 1998 [1969]), 9–38.

What's up with the Jewish space?

This attempt wishes to reappraise the concept of 'Jewish space.'[3] Diana Pinto conceptualized the Jewish space (in Europe) as an arena for all things Jewish, in which Jews, and non-Jews, meet and create 'things Jewish.'[4] Whatever that means in praxis is contentious: Ian Levenson and Sandra H. Lustig agree with Pinto's flexible notion and see the Jewish space as a space for all things Jewish, while Y. Michal Bodemann cautions against this flexibility.[5] Bodemann stressed in *In den Wogen der Erinnerung* (In the Drift of Memories) how the (official) Jewish community in post-war West Germany constitutes an invention of the German, non-Jewish imagination; he emphasizes how German non-Jews created 'Judaizing milieus' and Jewish spaces, which were about Jews but without Jews. Ruth Ellen Gruber argued along similar lines in *Virtually Jewish*.[6] She locates similar structures across Europe, which Bodemann's emphasizes in his German case study – and which Geneviève Zubrzycki uncovered in her case study of philosemitism in Poland, as well as Magdalena Waligorska regarding *Klezmer's Afterlife*.[7] Specific aspects of Jewish heritage have been reappropriated by the non-Jewish majority post-Shoah, they serve specific political purposes, and, I would argue, they mitigate the feelings of loss, guilt, and mourning concerning the murdered Jews: the loss is not total if one keeps *this* – *their* – heritage alive. In this case the Jewish space is a space where Jews are being revalorized as having been desirable (now dead) carriers of culture, and as part of a desirable national culture, which is incomplete without Jews and yet, which functions just fine without living Jews. If the latter are visible, it is for specific events, and in specific roles.[8] This not to say that Jews were unaware of their purpose, yet, due to their tiny numbers, negotiations, not to say rebellions, remain unduly complicated.

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3 Part of this chapter is based on the presentation "The Dynamics of the Jewish Space," given at the German Studies Association annual conference, 2007, and on chapter 1 of my PhD dissertation, "Shades of Jewishness: The Creation and Maintenance of a Liberal Jewish Community in Post-Shoah Germany," University of St. Andrews, 2009. However, the research work has been on-going so dynamics that occurred after 2009 have been amended. https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/872.

4 Diana Pinto, "The Jewish Space in Europe," in *Turning the Kaleidoscope. Perspectives on European Jewry*, ed. Sandra Lustig, and Ian Leveson (New York/Oxford, 2006), 179–188.

5 Y. Michal Bodemann, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung: Jüdische Existenz in Deutschland* (München, 2002). Y. Michal Bodemann, "A Jewish Cultural Renascence in Germany?," in *Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry*, ed. S. Lustig, and I. Levenson (New York/Oxford, 2006), 164–175.

6 Ruth Ellen Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Los Angeles, 2002).

7 See Genevieve Zubrzycki, "Nationalism, 'Philosemitism,' and Symbolic Boundary-Making in Contemporary Poland," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58.1 (2015): 66–98; and in Magdalena Waligorska, *Klezmer's Afterlife: An Ethnography of the Jewish Music Revival in Poland and Germany* (Oxford, 2013).

8 Y. Michal Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater: Die jüdische Gemeinschaft und ihre Deutsche Erfindung* (Hamburg, 1996); and Anthony D. Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat: Eine deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (München, 2007).

At present, living Jews demand a reappraisal of the Jewish space in the widest sense, and furthermore, they demand a discussion of the figure of the Jew,[9] which serves as a smoke screen for wishes, desires, and nightmares at the same time,[10] and which turns 'the Jew' into a perpetual other who is never genuinely local.[11] The current demand of living Jews (in Germany and beyond) must be seen in historical perspective, and in relations to their increased amount. Counterintuitively, Jews have been immigrating to Germany since 1945, the increase of the Jewish population owes to immigration and not to natural increase. It holds true that Jews were – and often remain – at the receiving end of a lop-sided power relationship because they are a small minority in any European country. Yet, they showed a vitality that is surprising in the face of the destruction of European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s.[12] Bodemann,[13] Anthony D. Kauders,[14] and Jeffrey M. Peck[15] underlined that Jews in Germany were initially pre-occupied with economic survival, and more so, that 'making money' served as a morally pertinent reason to remain in Germany.[16] Yet, with time passing by, and the Second Generation coming of age a dynamic manifested that had been kept behind doors as early empirical research by Harry Maor and Alphons Silbermann reveals:[17]

> [...] the Jews of Germany and the Jewish displaced persons in particular, had begun to form an armoured cocoon shielding themselves against an alien and hostile world, the world of their murders and tormentors, a world that they had rejected, and that had initially rejected them. Within that cocoon, Jews married and raised children, established nursing homes and schools and a large web of personal, social, and economic relations, and more complex communal structures. It is my contention that this armoured cocoon was the precondition for a renascence of communal Jewish

9 Elad Lapidot, and Hannah Tzuberi, "Jewish Friends: Contemporary Figures of the Jew," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27.2 (2020): 103–107.

10 Dani Kranz, "Ein Plädoyer für den Alloismus: Historische Kontinuitäten, Zeitgeist und transkultureller Antisemitismus," in *Flucht ins Autoritäre – Rechtsextreme Dynamiken in der Mitte der Gesellschaft*, ed. Oliver Decker, and Elmar Brähler (Leipzig, 2018), 177–192.

11 Zygmunt Bauman, "Allosemitism. Premodern, Modern, Postmodern," in *Modernity, Culture, and "the Jew*,*"* ed. Bryan Cheyette, and Laura Marcus (Cambridge, 1998), 143–156.

12 Raul Hillberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Eastford, 2019 [1961]).

13 Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater*, see note 8, and Bodemann, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung*, see note 5.

14 Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat*, see note 8, and Kauders, "West German Jewry: Guilt, Power, and Pluralism. Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History," *Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 1 (2010): 15–33.

15 Jeffrey M. Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (Piscataway, 2006).

16 Kauders, "West German Jewry," see note 14.

17 Alphons Silbermann, "Zur sozial-kulturellen Situation der jüdischen Gemeinden in Deutschland: Bemerkungen und Fragen der geistigen Wiedergutmachung," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 12 (1960): 204–223. Harry Maor, "Über den Wiederaufbau der jüdischen Gemeinden in Deutschland seit 1945," unpublished PhD dissertation, Philosophy Department, University of Mainz, 1961. Available at http://harrymaor.com/download.htm#item1, accessed October 23, 2006.

life in Germany; when the cocoon began to burst in the mid-1980s, it had created the precondi-
tions for a new vitality of Jewish life beyond the stagnation of the previous forty years.[18]

This chapter will stress that Jews have been agentic throughout, despite an unequal
power relationship that went/goes against them, and which, as Bodemann argued
turned them into actors in the German theatre of memories (*Gedächtnistheater*).[19] In
the same vein, while an increase of the number of Jews, and a Jewish renaissance is
politically wanted by the German, non-Jewish side it is too simplistic to talk about a
"reforestation"[20] of Jews by way of immigration from countries of the former Soviet
Union (FSU). Soviet, and post-Soviet Jews did take active decisions to migrate, and
they did have at least some choice in their destination country: Israel would have
been an option for all of them, based on the Israeli Law of Return (1950/1970).[21]
Agency is also clearly expressed with Israelis: they chose to leave the only Jewish
majority country to immigrate to Germany; their motivation to immigrate might be
positively impacted by exchange programs and cultural diplomacy.[22] By this token,
and considering Jews as active actors and agents, this essay will chronicle the Jew-
ish spaces – that is Jewish founded, driven, and dominate spaces – that emerged in
Cologne post-1945 as a case study at city scale. In other words, my concerns are
Jewish spaces for and by Jews, and not Jewish spaces or Judaizing milieus:[23] these
exist in Cologne too. One might talk of parallel Jewish spaces vs. Jewish themed
spaces; but, again, my concern lies with Jewish space(s).

Beginnings after the destruction

About 500,000 Jews lived on German territories at the beginning of the Nazi rule.[24]
Antisemitism intensified after the Nazis rose to power, it was enshrined in Nazi pol-
icy and law (*Nürnberger Gesetze*), and acted upon. In 1945, about 2,000 German
Jews[25] returned to Berlin from concentration camps; others had survived by way of

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18 Bodemann, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung*, see note 5, 166.

19 Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater*, see note 8.

20 Hannah Tzuberi, "'Reforesting' Jews: The German State and the Construction of 'New German
Judaism,'" *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 27.3 (2020): 199–224.

21 Yvonne Schütze, "Warum Deutschland und nicht Israel? " *BIOS* 2 (1997): 186–208.

22 Dani Kranz, "Towards an Emerging Distinction between State and People: Israeli Diasporas be-
tween Self-Management and Coveted Citizens," *Migration Letters* 17.1 (2020): 91–101.

23 Bodemann, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung*, see note 5.

24 Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater*, see note 8; Erica Burgauer, "Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland
(BRD und DDR) 1945–1990," unpublished PhD dissertation. Faculty of Philosophy, University of
Zurich, 1992; Maor, "Über den Wiederaufbau," see note 17.

25 Peck, *Being Jewish*, see note 15, 9.

intermarriage, and in hiding. Sixty to seventy Jews had survived in Cologne.[26] The estimate for the American and British zones lies at 10,000 to 20,000 surviving German Jews;[27] Cologne was part of the British zone. These German Jews were joined by a substantially higher number of survivors from Eastern Europe of between 200,000[28] to 250,000,[29] who had become Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs); they did not come with the intention to settle, they wanted to transit through Germany as quickly as possible to leave for the US and Palestine/Israel.

For the most part, the DPs lived in (transit) camps until their emigration; some slipped away to the cities and started making a living there.[30] With the foundation of the State of Israel and changes in US immigration policy the camps emptied out quickly.[31] The number of DPs had dropped to 20,000 upon closure of the last camp.[32] The first statistics of the *Zentralwohlfahrstelle der Juden in Deutschland* (*ZWST*, Central Welfare Offices of the Jews in Germany) bear witness to two specifics: only a 15,952 Jews had remained in West Germany and West Berlin, and the age structure indicated mainly elderly Jews had stayed,[33] evidencing that the increase of Jews in West Germany owed to immigration throughout.

Cilly Kugelmann, herself a child of Eastern European Shoah survivors, outlines that the identity and ideology of DPs and German Jews differed.[34] The identity of DPs was defined by their experience as survivors, and the complete destruction of their communities in Eastern Europe. These communities were often Orthodox in practice, and differed from those of their German counterparts, which were oftentimes

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26 Günther B. Ginzel, and Sonja Güntner, *"Zu Hause in Köln ... "* (Vienna, 1998), 95.

27 Jael Geis, *Übrig sein: Leben danach, Deutsche Juden in der Britischen und Amerikanischen Zone* (Berlin, 2000), 15.

28 Peck, *Being Jewish*, see note 15, 9.

29 Geis, *Übrig sein*, see note 27, 16.

30 Geis, *Übrig sein*, see note 27, and Jay H. Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*, 1945–1953 (Cambridge, 2005). The film *Shalom Peter Schwartz* (Dir. Yael Reuveny, 2013) reconstructs the life-history of Peter Schwartz who slipped away and blended into the (East) German mainstream, while *Aida's Secrets* (Dir. Alon, and Shaul Schwarz, 2017) shows the complicated intergroup relations between Jewish DPs, and non-Jewish DPs in the camps.

31 Angelika Königseder, and Juliane Wetzel, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal: Die jüdischen DPs (Displaced Persons) im Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994).

32 Königseder, and Wetzel, *Lebensmut im Wartesaal*, see 31.

33 Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland. N.d. Mitgliederstatistik (ZWST) 1955–1985 (Überblick), https://www.zwst.org/medialibrary/pdf/ZWST_Mitgliederstatistik_1955-1985.pdf.

34 Cilly Kugelmann, "Die Identität osteuropäischer Juden in der Bundesrepublik," in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha Brumlik, et al. (Frankfurt am Main, 1988), 177–181; Cilly Kugelmann, "The Identity and Ideology of Jewish Displaces Persons," in *Germans, Jews and Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany*, ed. Y. Michal Bodemann (Ann Arbor, 1996), 65–76.

Liberal.[35] Yet, these existing variations need to be treated with caution, because perceptions, power structures, and judgement played into the intergroup relation: Bodemann mentions a secular Yiddish speaking culture of Polish Jews,[36] while Samuel J. Spinner analyzed *Jewish Primitivism*[37] that is the zeitgeist perception of "primitive" Jews as savage tribesmen from the point of view of Jewish intellectuals, of whom a significant amount were German Jews or German-speaking Jews. The sociologist Alphons Silbermann, himself a German Jew who returned to Germany, asked as early as 1960 what Jewish cultural heritage in Germany means in these circumstances, what role Israel, the imagined Israel, plays[38] – and what form of religious service can be established. Eventually, the Orthodox form of practice won out. The idea was that any Jews could attend the service, as a Liberally practicing Jew can attend an Orthodox service, but not vice versa. In practice that meant that not every Jew – by way of self-definition – could attend as some Jews lacked papers, others had converted to Christianity to survive, yet others had Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers, or their conversions to Judaism were not recognized.[39] Besides this difference in the interpretation of the *Halacha*, the Jewish religious law, intermarriage caused frictions throughout:[40] my research participants in Cologne held different opinions on this as on various matters across all generations, indicating that the heterogeneity ranged from intimacy to macro levels.

Structuring the Jewish community

The differences within the Jewish in-group led to a two-tier system in terms of organisations. DPs founded different institutions from German Jews.[41] It took until 1950 to form the Central Council of the Jews of Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*); the structure prevails to date but has lost power since the mid-1970s.[42] The Central Council represents the member communities of the *Einheitsgemeinde* (Unified Community): in most cases these communities follow the interpretations of Orthodox Judaism. In some cases, Liberal or Reform communities are also members

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35 The pre-*Shoah* Liberal practice differed from the current practice in Germany or the US. In Cologne, men and women sat separately in the Liberal synagogue.

36 Bodemann, *Gedächtnistheater*, see note 8.

37 Samuel J. Spinner, *Jewish Primitivism* (Stanford, 2021).

38 Silbermann, "Zur sozial-kulturellen Situation," see note 17; Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat*, see note 8.

39 Barbara Steiner, *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen: Konversion von Deutschen zum Judentum nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2015).

40 Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat*, see note 8.

41 Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany*, see note 30.

42 Kauders, "West German Jewry," see note 14.

of the *Einheitsgemeinde*. As it stands, two rabbinical conferences, the Orthodox (founded in 2003) and the General Rabbinical Conference (founded 2005) exist, indicating the present, and public heterogeneity of Jewish practices. Cologne, and its Jewish structures is part of these dynamics, as the graphic of the Jewish spaces of the city, which I composed as part of my PhD dissertation in 2009, indicates (Fig. 1).[43]

The *Synagogengemeinde Köln* (*SGK*) remains an important Jewish space in Cologne, it is part of the *Einheitsgemeinde*. The Jewish groups that created spaces beyond the *SGK* offer insights into the dynamics of the Jewish space of the city. These Jewish groups and their Jewish spaces allow unravelling creation, maintenance, and decay functions, and the fixation of boundaries in the process of negotiating "the stuff within the boundary" of the groups.[44] I will chronicle the groups in situ starting in the early 1980s with the *Jüdische Gruppe* (Jewish Group, founded late-1970s, discarded), and move on to the *Jüdisches Forum* (Jewish Forum, founded in 1991, discarded), the Liberal Jewish community (founded in 1996) and then sketch some of later developments, *A Groisse Liebe* (A Big Love, founded in 2005, discarded), and move to current dynamics, which are driven by Jews of the Third Generation as well as their co-generationalists.[45] Owing to a higher mobility but more so the structures of mobile communication and social media that intersected with their coming of age, paired with national connection points that support the existing difference and dynamic the third generation – as an age cohort – has not founded any new fixed groups and/or religious Jewish community or permanent Jewish spaces. Typically, things moved online and then to social media that is available 24/7 via mobile internet. Alongside the groups in Cologne, I will introduce some of the key characters who are or have been active in the Jewish social groups for the Second Generation, and offer clues as to why Jews of the third generation-age cohort have not founded fixed groups like Second Generations.

43 Kranz, Dani. *Shades of Jewishness: The Creation and Maintenance of a Jewish Community in Post-Shoah Germany* (St Andrews, 2009). Open Access, https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/handle/10023/872.

44 Barth, "Introduction," in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, see note 2, 15.

45 Third Generation Jews are grandchildren of survivors, their co-generationalists are Jews of the same age groups, who might, or might not be grandchildren of survivors. They can be FSU Jews who immigrated to Germany with their families or Israelis who came to Germany, for example. While the biographical differences exist between members of this generation, the barriers between them are not as insurmountable as with their parents' generation. If third generation is not capitalized, I refer to the age cohort in general, if capitalized it is limited to Third Generation as in the grandchildren of survivors who were born and raised in Germany.
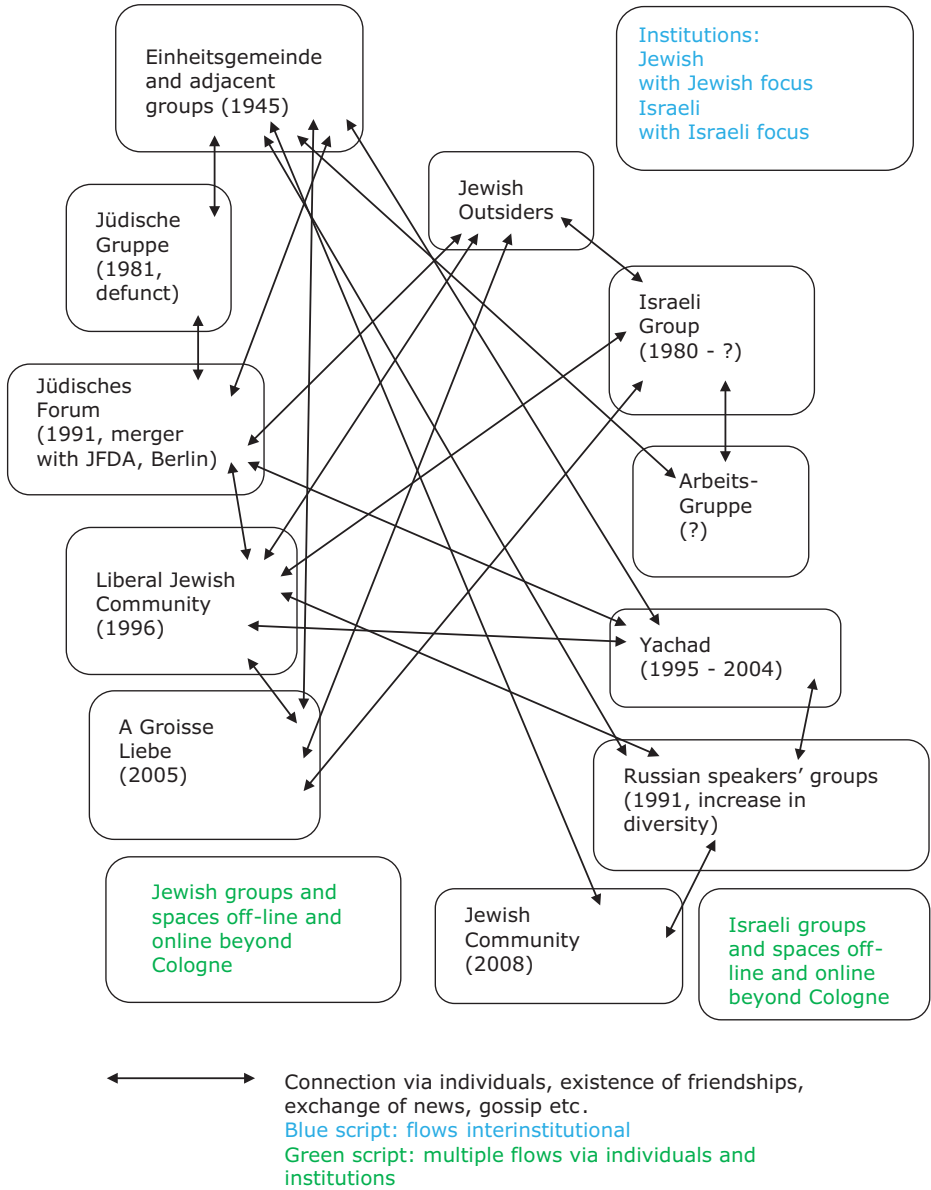
Fig. 1: The Jewish spaces in Cologne, 2009.

Cracks in the façade

The increasing number of publications since the 1990s indicate that the Jewish space (in terms of the Jewish dominated spaces in focus here, and in terms of Jewish spaces where non-Jews do Jewish) gained in a dynamic not seen since 1933.[46] With time, publications became more diverse and varied in scope, in particular scholars of the Jewish present – Jewish and non-Jewish alike – allowed for an appreciation of existing Jewish diversity:[47] the diversity that the sociologists Alphons Silbermann[48] and Harry Maor[49] had found behind closed doors, was now out in the open, and differences in religious practice, political opinion, or social mores found their way into broad daylight.

In the fieldwork amongst Jews in Cologne, the aftermaths of one specific event changed the Jewish space. This event was the first Lebanon War in 1982. Its justification was rejected by parts of the German left and left-wing Jews of the Second Generation. The massacres perpetrated by the Lebanese Phalangist Militia on Palestinian refugees without the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) intervening caused uproar against the conduct of the IDF in Israel,[50] and sent shockwaves through Germany's official Jewish community. The *Einheitsgemeinde* had always been supportive of Israel; left-wing Second Generations criticised Israeli conduct publicly: the façade cracked. However, these Jewish left-wingers had to realize that their public criticism of Israel fed into antisemitic propaganda as voiced by non-Jewish left-wingers in Germany:[51] secondary antisemitism with an Israel focus gained in prominence.

The cracks in the Jewish façade had repercussions on a local level. The formation of the groups of the Second Generation indicates the shift to an extended Jewish space because the singular Jewish space of the *Einheitsgemeinde* and its auxiliaries did not suffice anymore. According to Jews in Cologne, different opinions about the Lebanon war, and being Jewish in Germany, were voiced. The opinions diverged to an extent that those critical of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, the war, and concerned about

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46 These sources are typically not part of the canon of Judaic or Jewish Studies in Germany. These remain past-centered (Kranz and Ross 2022). Dani Kranz, and Sarah M. Ross, „Jüdische Selbstermächtigung in der deutschen Wissenschaftslandschaft: Tektonische Verschiebungen in der Judaistik und Jüdische Studien nach 1990", in *Weitergaben und Wirkungen der Shoah in Erziehungs- und Bildungsverhältnissen der Gegenwartsgesellschaft* ed. Marina Chernivsky, and Friederike Lorenz (Leverkusen, 2022), 1–22.

47 Dani Kranz, "The Quest for Jewish Anthropology in Germany post-1945," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies.* Forthcoming.

48 Silbermann, "Zur sozial-kulturellen Situation," see note 17.

49 Maor, "Über den Wiederaufbau," see note 17.

50 The Kahan Commission was formed to inquire into the massacres. The IDF was found "indirectly responsible" for the massacres, because they had had knowledge of the Phalangists entering the refugee camps (MFA 1984).

51 Shila Khasani, "Eine Minderheit in der Minderheit: Das Engagement der linksorientierten Juden in der Frankfurter Jüdischen Gruppe," *Trumah* 14 (2005): 55–74.

living in Germany (as opposed to just sojourning in Germany) formed a group with like-minded Jews. This was the first group outside of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, and for Jewish Cologne it was a harbinger of things to come.

Mayan, who was at that point in time in her early thirties, still narrated the events vividly more than twenty years later, when I met her during my PhD field-work in the early and mid-2000s. She recounts how she went to protest against the war in Lebanon with her best friend, a non-Jewish German. The protest took place after Sabra and Shatila. She heard members of the German left shout: "Israel perpetrates a Holocaust against the Palestinians," and: "Sharon is Israel's Hitler." A stout left-winger herself, Mayan felt unable to stay in the protest, and went home with her friend to explain what upset her. "I talked to her the whole night. I explained to her how this is not a Holocaust, how Sharon is not Hitler. I talked and talked. She did not understand me. By the end of the night, I had lost my best friend." She and other left-wing Jews in Germany felt that they needed a (Jewish) space where "we can be amongst ourselves," a space where she felt she did not need to explain herself, a space based on similarities. These similarities can be summarised as the experience of being Jewish in Germany, and more precisely as being secular, left-wing, and Jewish in the Second Generation in Germany, and not in sync with the *Einheitsgemeinde*. The Jewish space that came into being, the *Jewish Group* was – nearly – exclusively Jewish, with boundaries that were strictly policed. Individuals with a left political view and a critical acceptance of Israel and its politics were allowed in. Similar groups existed in all major cities in West Germany, with Frankfurt am Main and Berlin having the most influential of these *Jewish Groups*; owing to the small number of Jews in Germany the group members knew each other across West Germany.[52] The *Jüdischen Gruppen* (plural: Jewish Groups) can be defined as the first expressions of Jewish identity praxes that lay beyond the hegemony of the *Einheitsgemeinde*: These Jews were critical, but supportive of Israel, and these Jews did not count matrilineal descent, and/or conversion of children as Jewish fathers as the sole criteria for being Jewish , but considered being Jewish as an act of self-definition; their definition of Jewishness lay beyond Jewish religious law.

The Jewish group in Cologne was small: prior to the immigration from countries of the FSU in the 1990s and early 2000s the *SGK* had about 1,500 members. The development from the *Jüdische Gruppe* to the Liberal Jewish community took about fifteen years, and it happened via Jewish spaces that were discarded on the way. The developments of the 1980s and 1990s indicated a new dynamic of Jewish life in Germany, which prefigured the arrival of Jews from the FSU.[53] Membership of the

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52 Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1997).
53 Bodemann, "A Jewish Cultural Renascence in Germany?", see note 5; for a case study of Berlin, see Alexander Jungmann, *Jüdisches Leben in Berlin: Der aktuelle Wandel in einer metropolitanen Diasporagemeinschaft* (Bielefeld, 2007).

Einheitsgemeinde remained at 30,000 members nationally. Bodemann estimates that only forty percent to sixty percent of all Jews in Berlin were members (personal communication, 2005). In Cologne it might have been seventy percent of all those who could be members, because the *SGK* and its adjacent structures was the only permanent Jewish space, turning it into a meeting point of Jews beyond religion. The dynamic that had developed in the 1980s, changed with the large-scale arrival of Jews from countries of the FSU: these Jews had yet a different relationship to Germany, the Shoah, and their Jewishness than the existing Jewish fractions in Germany.[54] Also, they had a different idea about what a Jewish community should be, and what it should be there for.

The breakdown of the communist bloc and its effects on the Jewish community in Germany

In 1989, the communist bloc collapsed and with it the Berlin wall. Within a year Germany would be reunited, and the law of the Federal Republic of Germany applied now to both parts of the country. Before formal reunification, a number of Jews from the collapsing USSR had left for the GDR, which had invited them to immigrate due to increasing antisemitism that went hand in hand with the collapse of organisational structures.[55] The last resolution of the parliament of the GDR was to ensure that Jewish immigration would not be stopped with the reunification of the two Germanies. The West German government had initially rejected this proposal but relented after a huge public outcry.[56]

The number of immigrants by far exceeded the expectations of the German state, and the *Einheitsgemeinde*. The total of the 'Russian Jews' or 'Russian speaking Jews' stood at 219,604 in 2004,[57] when the legal framework was changed.[58] The *Einheitsgemeinde* reached more than 100,000 members at its height in the late 2000s. Its membership has been declining since, as the growth of the Jewish population hinges on immigration: the Jewish community, like German society in general, is aging. The disparity between the number of *Kontingentflüchtlinge*, and the membership

54 Franziska Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2001).

55 Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland*, see note 54, 44.

56 Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland*, see note 54, 45–46.

57 Sonja Haug, and Peter Schimany, (2005). *Jüdische Zuwanderer in Deutschland: ein Überblick über den Stand der Forschung*. Working Paper, 3 (Nürnberg: Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge [BAMF] Forschungszentrum Migration, Integration und Asyl [FZ], 2005), https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-352438.

58 Joseph Cronin, Russian Speaking Jewish in Germany's Jewish Communities, 1990–2005 (Cham, 2019).

of the *Einheitsgemeinde* bases on three factors. First, USSR law treated Jews as a nationality, and it did not follow matrilineality. This runs contrary to the *Einheitsgemeinde*, which applies the halachic rule of matrilineality to define Jewish status, and thus eligibility for membership. Second, not all individuals who were included in the total were Jews: non-Jewish spouses are also included in the total. Third, not all of those who were eligible wanted to be members. Beyond these issues, not all Jews had papers to prove they were Jews: Jews were discriminated against in the USSR, leading to the obliteration of proof of Jewishness.[59]

The strict application of the *Halacha* led to exclusions from the *Einheitsgemeinde*, and bitterness amongst some FSU incomers. They had experienced antisemitism in their native country, upon immigration to Germany they did not qualify as Jews. Anette Vesper, and Alphons Silbermann engage exclusively with Russian Jews in Cologne.[60] Vesper found that the approaches to being Jewish were influenced by two factors: being *halachically* Jewish, and the state-favoured atheism of the USSR. *Halachic* Jews and those with two Jewish parents had a stronger attachment to being Jewish. These Jews had been recognized as Jews by the Jewish communities in their native countries too. Children of intermarriages indicated a lesser attachment to religious Judaism.[61] Given the small size of Vesper's sample and her access through the *SGK*,[62] a bias prevails: Jewishness in the social sphere, or self-definitions of non-*SGK*-FSU-Jews are beyond her study. Children of intermarriage had[63] and have[64] a difficult standing in the *Einheitsgemeinde* in general, and the treatment of the non-Jewish parent did not help to make them feel homely. Alienation could occur: these Jews (of self-definition) were immigrants to German and wanted as Jews, but not as Russians, and they were strangers in the Jewish communities.

Ivan, a Russian Jewish incomer who lived in Cologne in the 1990s and 2000s, terminated his membership of the *SGK* in Cologne. He recounted that his children

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59 Becker, *Ankommen in Deutschland*, see note 54.

60 Annette Vesper, "Migrationsmotive und Selbstverständnis russischer Juden und ihrer Familien in Köln: Eine ethnologische Fallstudie," unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Ethnology, University of Cologne, 1995; and Annette Vesper, "Das Ringen und Selbstverständnis und Identität: Russische Juden in Köln," in *"Zuhause in Köln … "* ed. Günther B. Ginzel, and Sonja Güntner (Vienna, 1998), 75–82. Alphons Silbermann, "Partizipation und Integration von Jüdischen Immigranten aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion – eine Fallstudie aus der Synagogen-Gemeinde Köln," *Menorah* (1999): 61–73.

61 I do not agree with Vesper's findings on this matter. From my research it seems that non-*halachic* Jews had been turned away by the *Einheitsgemeinde* and this led to a rejection of the *Einheitsgemeinde*. The result was a withdrawal into a private Judaism, (Liberal) conversion, or political activism. Complete detachment from Judaism as a religion might have occurred, but I have not come across a detachment from Jewishness.

62 Vesper, "Migrationsmotive und Selbstverständnis," see note 59, 20.

63 Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat*, see note 8.

64 Lea Wohl-von Haselberg, ed. *Hybride juedische Identitaeten: Gemischte Familien und patrilineare Juden* (Berlin, 2015). Ruth Zeifert, *Nicht ganz koscher: Vaterjuden in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2017).

who are non-*halachic* Jews were told by the leader of the youth group that they were not wanted because "you are not Jews." The local *Chabad* rabbi mentioned he believes that some of the "Russians will learn proper [Orthodox] practising" and that some of them showed a huge interest in Jewish religion, and a Jewish way of life regardless of if they had a Jewish mother or a Jewish father. The main rabbi of the community only answered vaguely with "this [community] is a living organism" to the question how the integration of FSU Jews. In other words, when I conducted my PhD fieldwork between 2004 and 2006, the topic was still so hot, that rabbis, and community officials, remained opaque to foreclose potential misgivings.

Silbermann remained true to his empirical finds throughout his career, however inconvenient those were. His study on participation of FSU incomers in the *SGK* was published in 1999. He found that the majority had emigrated for two reasons. Elderly people left for fear of antisemitism, younger ones for economic reasons.[65] The option to practice their religion freely ranked only fifth amongst the reasons for immigration to Germany at the time of Silbermann's research.[66] Overall, the official Jewish community was needed as a bridge to German authorities, and a means to integrate. This attitude resembles the attitude of Jews in Germany in the early post-Shoah period. Günther Ginzel as well as Monika Grübel and Georg Mölich outline that the *SGK* initially had the key function to provide help to Jews in a non-Jewish surrounding.[67] By the time the FSU Jews arrived, the community had redefined itself as a religious community primarily. The members were settled in Germany, they did not require attention from the office of social affairs. Silbermann outlines that the different perception of what the Jewish community should be led to problems amongst those who had been in residence and the FSU incomers, he argued that a consensus would only be reached "if both groups accept each other [in their difference]".[68] Internal sources indicate that the two groups existed at a distance to each other at the time of my initial fieldwork, but approximated each other over time, and certainly with the third generation since the 2010s.[69]

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65 Silbermann, "Partizipation und Integration," see note 59, 67.

66 Published twenty years later, the research of Maja Vataman underlines the generational change that occurred across generations, and the quest for Jewish religion of post-Soviet Jews (Maja Vataman, *Migration – Adoleszenz – Identität: Fallstudien zur Identitätskonstruktion jüdischer Jugendlicher aus der ehemaligen Sowjetunion in Deutschland* (Baden-Baden, 2020)).

67 Günther B. Ginzel, "Phase der Etablierung einer Jüdischen Gemeinde in der Kölner Trümmer Landschaft 1945–1949," in *Köln und das Rheinische Judentum: Festschrift Germania Judaica 1959–1984*, ed. J. Bohnke-Kollwitz, et al. (Cologne, 1984), 445–461. Monika Grübel, and Georg Mölich, "Jüdisches Leben im Rheinland," in *Jüdisches Leben im Rheinland: Vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Monika Grübel, and Georg Mölich (Vienna, 2005), IX–XX.

68 Silbermann, "Partizipation und Integration," see note 59, 63.

69 Dani Kranz, "(Friendly) Strangers in Their Own Land No More: Third Generation Jews and Socio-Political Activism in the Present in Germany," in *The Stranger in Jewish Thought, History and Fiction*, ed. Catherine Bartlett, and Joachim Schlör (Amsterdam, 2021), 113–138.

Jews from the FSU constitute the majority of the members of the *SGK* in Cologne, and in a number of Liberal communities. This means that on a macro-structural level the majority membership has changed for a third time since 1933. Before 1933, German Jews had the majority position, between 1945 and 1991, DPs and their descendants formed the majority, now FSU/post-Soviet Jews make up the majority of all Jews in Germany.

From the *Jüdische Gruppe* to *Jüdisches Forum* to the bridge to tradition

It would be deceiving to relate the foundation of the Liberal Jewish community in Cologne to the influx of FSU Jews. Its key drivers consisted of birth Jews of the Second Generation who felt in need of a space of their own, where they could talk and engage openly. These Jews had to come to the realisation that their opinions about being Jewish in Germany, and about Israel, could be taken out of context, feeding into what they experienced as antisemitic and anti-Israeli discourses in Germany.[70] This overarching problem led to those Jews looking for like-minded people, as Mayan and Ron told me. This like-mindedness was based on individual opinions regarding politics, but at the same time underpinned by biographical similarities. This biographical background was lived out and interpreted differently by the participants of the group, though for all participants their Jewishness lay beyond the confines of the *Halacha* – matrilineality was not then issue.

On an individual level, a significant number of the founding members of the Liberal community were non-*halachic* Jews who had no access to the Orthodox community or Jews, matrilineal and patrilineal, who had non-Jewish partners. These had a difficult standing in the Orthodox practicing *Einheitsgemeinden*,[71] which was made up of survivors and their descendants, and which implemented the *Halacha* also as a boundary measure: interestingly, this implementation, although slightly softened, was going to be replicated in the foundation process of the Liberal community. Ron, a founding member of the *Jüdisches Forum* (Jewish Forum) and the Liberal Jewish community repeatedly described the *Einheitsgemeinde* as insular, as unwilling to engage with its German surrounding. Mayan, a patrilineal Jew, found the non-acceptance of children of Jewish fathers, and the rejection of the non-Jewish spouses, appalling. She, like some others, would undergo conversion in the process

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70 Khasani, "Eine Minderheit in der Minderheit," see note 51.

71 Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat*, see note 8; Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust*, see note 52.

of creating a Liberal Jewish community, which is to say her community of like-minded Jews would also implement the *Halacha* as a boundary.

The issue of descent spans wider than mere matrilineal descent, it extends to issues of kinship, which in turn relates to dealing with the German, non-Jewish, surrounding. This resonates in the acceptance of non-Jewish spouses, and the encouragement to bring non-*halachically* Jewish children along and acquaint them with Jewish religion in the Liberal Jewish community. This does not mean that the engagement with the German, non-Jewish surrounding is free of tensions. Despite the problems the members of the Liberal community seek for a future orientated approach to being Jewish in Germany, they deemed the approach of the *Einheitsgemeinde* as backward looking during my initial fieldwork: with generational changes the *Einheitsgemeinde* changed too, and it has become more inclusive.

The differences in approaches to being Jewish in Germany had been manifesting in the creation of new Jewish groups that occupied the Jewish space since the late 1970s. As outlined before, the reason underlying the exclusive Jewish setting were based on misgivings between Jews and non-Jews concerning politics, and in particular concerning Israel and being taken out of context. As mentioned earlier, Mayan lost her best friend over a protest in 1982. The *Jüdische Gruppe* in Cologne was small, and after a couple of years in the mid-1980s changed in focus. Mayan described this change of focus as a fizzling out, whereas Ron described it as a change in the nature of the group. Politics were now only one issue, while the leaning of the group was more towards Jewish culture in its widest sense. However, this change in focus came with a change of the participants of the group, individuals who had been in it for mere political reasons left, while others joined: this Jewish space changed in content.

Then, in 1991 the first Gulf War occurred. Significant parts of the German left opposed this war. The (officials of the) *Einheitsgemeinde* saw it as justified, as Israel was under threat. As in 1982, the 1991 war had consequences. It deepened existing rifts within the *Einheitsgemeinden*. In Cologne it would lead to the momentum that was needed to re-create the energy that had led to the initial foundation of the *Jüdische Gruppe*. This time around the momentum culminated in the creation of a more durable Jewish space outside of the *Einheitsgemeinde* in Cologne. This space was called *Jüdisches Forum* (Jewish Forum) or short *Forum*. The first event of the *Forum* ran two days after the war in Iraq had started, it attracted an audience too big to accommodate all attendees. Both this event and the *Forum* had been the brainchild of Ron, who had been part of the *Jüdische Gruppe*. Ron had tried his luck as the Head of Cultural Affairs in the *SGK*. His agenda had been too open for the *SGK* "at that point in time." Over the years I heard him repeatedly rage about the *SGK*, although he conceded (in the mid-2000s), nearly twenty years after the first Gulf War: "they've changed. There are other people in power now."

The 1991 foundation of the *Forum* was another attempt to create a space for like-minded Jews to discuss politics, and beyond that engage with the non-Jewish

surrounding. The key to the idea of the *Forum* lies in Ron's stance to seek interaction with his non-Jewish surrounding, and to demand understanding for his own – unapologetic – positionality as an Israeli Jew in Cologne: "I don't hide that I am a Jew or an Israeli." But it was not only Ron who sought this kind of dialogue. Mayan who had been active in the Jewish Group did too, as did Jonathan and James, who are respectively the first head of the Liberal community to be, and its founding father. Besides these four and some more Jews, the *Forum* attracted a following of non-Jews, who sought for a dialogue with Jews. These non-Jews were politically leaning to the left and they embraced an Israel supportive stance too. The common ground, and the wish to interact across the German/Jewish divide, made for an instant success of the *Forum*. The success was rather short-lived, however. An unbridgeable divide between Jews and German non-Jews opened up, which led in turn to the foundation of *Gescher LaMassoret*, the Liberal Jewish community. What had happened in the *Forum* to cause this development?

James felt that the *Forum* was becoming anti-Israeli in its focus, and that again misunderstandings between Jews and non-Jews were unbridgeable. Discussions about politics could become so heated that members walked out. Jewish members felt in the same predicament as they had felt before. Furthermore, the wish for a religious service arose amongst some of the birth Jewish[72] members, and some of the non-Jewish members. These religious services ran initially once a month. They followed the idea of a Liberal service: men and women were equals, vernacular (German) language was included in the service, and the services were short. Some of the Jewish members were appalled by this religious turn. One elderly lady, Sarah,[73] mentioned: "I stopped going when it [the religious turn] started. That wasn't for me anymore, I'm not religious." Sarah was a long-term member of the *SGK* where she does not attend services either. Another synagogue was of no interest to her. A non-Jewish member, Monika,[74] opined: "[I]t turned more and more religious, that wasn't for me anymore. It was like some people wanted to be Jews, and some of the Jews wanted a service, the intellectual debate died at that point." What bothered Monika most was that "it really annoyed me that I was treated differently because I am very good friend with one of the Israelis [Ron]. That was really sick." Monika felt that her friend's Israeliness made him essentially desirable to others in the group, and that his Israeliness rubbed off on her.

What was going on in this *Forum*, a presumably secular intellectual gathering ground for dissenting Jews and non-Jews alike? James claimed it became anti-Israeli, Sarah complained it became too religious, and Monika felt that besides its religious leaning, the *Forum* favoured Israelis. All three hint at a development that

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72 I use the term birth Jew to refer to a person who has at least one Jewish parent, although some individuals with only one Jewish grandparent I met in Cologne self-identified as Jews.

73 Sarah died in the mid-2010s.

74 Monika died in 2009.

was taking place in the *Forum*, which was that it became more religious in its outlook, and that especially the Jewish members were feeling they were in a minority situation similar to that in the German left again. The 'religious' turn was to become a means of creating a boundary, by imperatively invoking the *Halacha* to create certainty.

James expressed this wish openly. He wanted a Liberal Jewish community where only Jews could be members, and where subsequently those non-Jews who felt Jewish enough would need to convert. James wished for a community where boundaries were clearly defined, with non-Jews on the outside and Jews on the inside but that with a Liberal form of service. He wanted what Mayan had described as "a Jewish home," which neither of them could realise in the *Jüdisches Forum*. The sociologist Lynn Rapaport[75] and the psychoanalyst Kurt Grünberg demonstrated in their research work on Jews of the Second Generation in Germany that reactions like these could not be understood without reference to the Shoah. The loss of family and trauma were constantly present, as were unsettling moves between countries, and multiple break points in one's own biography.[76]

The more pronounced openness towards the non-Jewish surrounding led the dissenting Jews to seek out like-minded people to form their own Jewish dominated Jewish space. It turned out that the like-mindedness and similarities between Jews and non-Jews, and moderately religious Jews and Jewish atheists was not enough. The internal differences disabled a clear focus of the *Forum*. The members were simply too different on too many levels, which led to the disintegration of the *Forum* and the creation of a more focussed, and bordered Jewish space in form of the Liberal Jewish community.

While Mayan, Ron, James, and some others went on to create a Liberal Jewish community, and thus deprive the *Forum* of its key drivers, a substantial number of non-religious Jews did not join the Liberal community. They either remained non-practicing members of the *SGK*, or refused to be members of any *Verein* (club), such as Stefan who declared that: "I don't want to be member of any German club." A club, including the *SGK*, or a Jewish space based on definite entry criteria and a rigid boundary was not to his liking.

Despite its internal problems from its foundation in 1991 until the foundation of the Liberal Jewish community in 1996 the *Jüdisches Forum* offered a space to birth Jews and interested non-Jews to gather, discuss, exchange ideas, and find a space for the Jewish parts of their identities. For Jews, *halachic* or not, the interest in the *Forum* already indicated that they had an interest in satisfying their need for a Jewish space with other, like-minded Jews. For the non-Jews, the involvement had different reasons.

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75 Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust*, see note 52; Rapaport, "The Difficulties of Being Jewish in Germany Today," *Trumah* 3 (1992): 189–215.

76 Kurt Grünberg, *Liebe nach Auschwitz: Die Zweite Generation* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000).

According to a long-term observer of Jewish life in Cologne a number of the non-Jews in the *Forum* wanted "to do Jewish on occasion. They wanted to be Jewish without actually being Jews." This observation resonates with Y. Michal Bodemann[77] and Alexander Jungmann's[78] analyses of non-Jews doing Jewish without being Jewish as a means to position themselves as 'different' Germans. In this local case, some of the early non-Jewish members of the *Forum* had developed such a strong connection to being Jewish that they converted. Simone was amongst those who converted. She made *Aliyah*[79] during my PhD fieldwork and has been living in Israel since the late 2000s. Heinz and Rachel who had spent time in Israel with *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* (Action Reconciliation Service for Peace)[80] converted too. They became members of the Liberal community.[81]

Within two years the wish of the Jewish members to introduce religious components into the intellectually biased *Forum* had grown to the point that an *Erev Shabbat* service was run once a month. The introduction of a regular religious component into the previously secular *Forum* led to a first construction of a social boundary within the *Forum*. The majority of the Jewish members aligned themselves with the idea of introducing a service, and to establishing more religious activities beyond the most important holidays. However, Jews and non-Jews could participate in the religious service. Non-Jews were allowed to read psalms, an issue which would become one of the strongest boundaries between Jews and non-Jews in the Liberal Jewish community: only *halachically* recognized Jews are allowed to take an active role in the service. In other words, one cannot do Jewish without being Jewish in *Gescher LaMassoret*.

Gescher LaMassoret – Bridge to tradition

James is widely acknowledged as the founding father of *Gescher*, as the Liberal Jewish community is commonly known. He employed the *Halacha* in the foundation although he privately rejects the idea that only a child of a Jewish mother is Jewish.

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77 Bodemann, *In den Wogen der Erinnerung*, see note 5.

78 Jungmann, *Jüdisches Leben in Berlin*, see note 53.

79 Hebrew: ascend. The immigration of Jews to Israel is referred to as *Aliyah*.

80 *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* was founded in 1959. In 1958, Lothar Kreyssing of the Protestant church had called for an organization that would help to undo the hurt that the Nazis had caused, in particular in Russia, Poland and to Jews. (http://www.asf-ev.de/ueber_uns/asf_ge schichte/gruendungsaufruf/, accessed February 3, 2007). Since then, the organization has sent volunteers to these countries and to Israel. It has furthermore been active in the peace movement in Germany, and pushed for a civic service (http://www.asf-ev.de/ueber_uns/asf_geschichte/die_aktion_ suehnezeichen_im_westen_von_1959_bis_1991/, accessed February 3, 2007).

81 Heinz and Rachel both died in the late 2010s.

James's motives to push for the creation of the Liberal Jewish community were not religious: "I'm an atheist. I found the conversion was a very negative experience." James recounted that he pushed for *Gescher* in order "to destroy the *Forum*," which he felt "had become antisemitic and especially anti-Israeli." He felt that the criticism of Israeli foreign policy eerily echoed the arguments "often heard in Germany, which are more in favour of Palestinian suffering than of Israel." Israel, and the safety of the state of Israel is a matter close to his heart. To him Israel is the secular home for Jews beyond Jewish religion, it is the anchoring point for his Jewish identity. In the *Jüdisches Forum* he felt that not only was this part of his identity under threat but that the State of Israel was vilified. James identifies himself as part of the Jewish people: "I am part of the *B'nei Yisrael* (sons of Israel)." Within the highly charged *Forum* he, a patrilineal Jew, found himself – again- out of a space that could function as a Jewish home. With this impending threat he decided to become active, he wrote a pamphlet lobbying for the foundation of a Liberal Jewish community. This community would be Liberal in practice and allow for an intellectual exchange about Israel, but it would be strictly regulated in its membership, and only allow recognized Jews to be members.

James had been careful to set up boundaries for membership in the community he had lobbied for. The membership would include Jews only. However, James learned quickly that to set up a Jewish community, an affiliation to a Jewish umbrella organisation was needed to obtain infrastructural help. The organisation of choice was the *World Union of Progressive Judaism* (*WUPJ*), which helps with the building of communities, development of leadership, youth work,[82] and various other issues that arise; it helps as well with international ties, and runs conferences and workshops. This organisation would grant the nascent Liberal Jewish community official recognition, and let it appear as more than just a loose gathering such as the *Jüdische Gruppe* or the *Jüdisches Forum*; the *WUPJ* would link it to the wider Jewish world. Yet, it demanded matrilineal descent or conversion, which Mayan and James had resisted so far. The incentive to create their own community led them to do just that. In the process of the creation of *Gescher LaMassoret*, the Bridge to Tradition as James named the community, James, Mayan, and James's late wife underwent *Giyur*. These three, plus Jonathan, Ron, and ten or so others set up *Gescher LaMassoret* in 1996 when "twenty-five members [...] was our dream!"

By 2008, when the chapter concerning the creation of *Gescher* for my PhD was written, the community has grown to nearly 100 members; in 2021 it has grown to more than 100. Its services attract guests, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. While the policy of the community is one of openness towards the non-Jewish visitors, their

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82 As with the *SGK*, *Gescher* also offers activities for young members. These activities are not independent of its communities, but run on a national level as the actual number of young Jews in each community remains small.

presence challenges boundaries, it leads to constant tensions as *Gescher* members see their community as a closed Jewish space, a space for Jews, where Jews are in the majority and power holders. Calls to limit the amount of guests, or to keep events internal have been accompanying my fieldwork since day one in 2002. An underlying problem is that any event of *Gescher* is characterised by transience, only a very limited number of individuals are regulars. This means that it is difficult to figure out who is a Jew and who is a non-Jew at the service because any non-member only needs to submit a request to attend a service, and undergo to a security check but they are not checked for Jewish status. In consequence the similarity of biographical back-grounds and values, which was supposed to underpin this setting cannot be taken for granted in praxis. The presence of non-Jews and the issue of conversion of individuals from completely non-Jewish families have been creating problems that resurface in members' meetings, and that have been hotly and vitriolically debated. The ordinary members' meetings are held annually, but in case of urgent matters a meeting can be called at any time. Decisions are taken by democratic majority vote in the meetings. In order to ensure the smooth running of the commu-nity and deal with the regular affairs the board meets monthly. In the spirit of the democratic nature of the Liberal community the board, which consists of five mem-bers who are elected at the ordinary annual meeting, cannot make 'policies' for the community. All policies need to be decided by majority vote in the members' meet-ings. For urgent matters extraordinary members' meetings or *Diskussionsrunden* (discussion rounds) are summoned.

Recurrent issues which are discussed at the members' meeting center around the management of the boundary to the non-Jewish surrounding on two levels. On a first level, it is the boundary to non-Jewish Germans in general. On a second level it is the boundary to how much Germanness is allowed into the Jewish space through the conversion of individuals with completely non-Jewish families who bring with them different experiences to being in Germany and life-stories, which have no similarities to those of birth Jews (even if the similarities of the life-stories of the latter are rather tenuous).

Other Jewish spaces

With the creation of *Gescher*, the *Forum* withered away recounted Yitzhak, who served as one of the chairpersons of the *Forum* in the mid-2000s: "the people who pushed went into *Gescher*." The *Forum* had become reduced to "a mailing list and a monthly newsletter," which was also discarded in the summer of 2007. The *Forum* does not have a webpage, nor does it seek to recruit members, it just lingered when I finished my PhD fieldwork in early 2006; I have not received any information of its existence since 2009. Some of the last remaining members of the *Forum* had

refused to join *Gescher* as they are non-religious, others lost any interest in Jewish matters after the infighting that accompanied the creation of *Gescher*, yet others set up new Jewish spaces that were more to their liking: the dynamic of the Jewish space also meant that spaces were discarded on the way. Sheer goodwill and 'a moment of interest' did not suffice to keep them active.

A Jewish space that followed the *Forum*, but that had a different focus was *A Groisse Liebe* (Yiddish: A Big Love). Set up in May 2005, it sought to attract Jews, and interested non-Jews, who cherish a debate about Israel, Judaism, films, or music in a secular setting: it is less political in focus than the *Forum*, which owes to its initiators. The location of *A Groisse Liebe* moved several times, it always took place in a freely accessibly bistro pub in the center of Cologne. Information about *A Groisse Liebe* could be accessed via its webpage, and any person who wished to do so can join the mailing list via the webpage; neither of these remain, and the big love died away although its initiators stayed in Cologne.

Upon arriving at *A Groisse Liebe* in the summer of 2005, I learned that the attendance was made up of Second Generation Jews who were often members of the *Einheitsgemeinde*. Hardly any First and no Third Generation Jews were around; FSU Jews were not part of this Jewish space, the lingua franca was German even though most of the attendees had immigrated to Germany as children or teenagers. Some of the non-Jewish spouses were present: "most of us are married to non-Jews." Besides the experience of intermarriage, most attendees were non-religious or little religious, the founders of *A Groisse Liebe* attest to being "Jewish atheists." However, unlike James, who felt that a boundary to non-Jews was needed, Stefan and Roland were interested in creating an "open space, where any Jew can come and bring their non-Jewish spouses and mixed children." The majority of the non-practising attendees were members of the *SGK*, they had grown up in this community, and they were children of survivors. They had known each other from childhood and sought the proximity to other Jews with similar experiences in a social space. Non-practicing as they were, they wanted their membership in the *SGK*, to maintain at least some connection to the Jewishness they had grown up with in a symbolic form.[83] This could take curious turns such as with one British born attendee who refuses to obtain German citizenship by way of German descent: "I bought a grave. [...] I want to be buried with my people." I asked what would happen with his non-Jewish wife: "She will be buried on the other sides of the wall" meaning that his wife would be buried on the adjacent, non-Jewish cemetery.

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83 Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2.1 (1979): 1–20; Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity and Symbolic Religiosity: Towards a Comparison of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17.4 (1994): 577–592; Kurt Grünberg, "Szenische Erinnerung der Shoah." Paper presented at "Szenische Erinnerungen der Shoah," Siegmund Freud Institut and University of Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, November 16 and 17, 2008.

In the opinion of these members of the *SGK* overstepping the *Halacha*, marrying a non-Jew, or eating non-kosher food was permissible. Publicly opposing the *Einheitsgemeinde* in general and *SGK* specifically was a step too far though; the same went for public criticism of Israel. This was deemed to weaken the Jewish community, undermining the unwritten law of categorical Jewish cohesion and erode the boundary to the categorical 'other.' Non-Jewish spouses and intimate friends were degoyified, they entered a special category.[84] Problematically, this strategy brought these members of the *SGK* in close a proximity with their German non-Jewish surrounding: if they did not practice, and did not care actively about "the community", how did they construct the boundary to non-Jews? Their membership in a religious community, where also their parents had been members and that distinguishes clearly between Jews and non-Jews supported the construction of an ethnic Jewish identity, without betraying Jewish belonging.[85] Furthermore, it ensured a symbolic Jewish continuity to the living and the dead,[86] which is key to descendants of survivors. It was indeed this categorical belonging that enabled them to overstep the *Halacha* and sustain their Jewishness.

Whereas the foundation of *Gescher* was about setting a boundary, *A Groisse Liebe* was about breaking it down. This worked briefly, although the pressure that was on the *Forum* did not apply to *A Groisse Liebe* because of the existence of *Gescher*. Those Jews who wished for an alternative to the *Einheitsgemeinde* had their own (religious) community. Adjacent groups to either community offered additional Jewish spaces: the *Forum* if they were closer to *Gescher*, or in the shape of *A Groisse Liebe*, if they were closer to the *Einheitsgemeinde*. Neither of the two lasted though, which is also owing to individuals moving away, or in some cases passing away.

Despite its openness neither *A Groisse Liebe* nor the *Forum* attract third generation Jews, nor FSU Jews. The FSU immigrants founded their own Jewish spaces, the prominent were the *Jüdische Gemeinde* (Jewish community), a religious community, and the *Nash Dom* (Our House) a gathering of Russian-speaking pensioners. Younger Russian speakers have been gathering privately in Cologne, a pattern the ethnologist Alina Gromova evidenced for Berlin.[87] The same applies to third generation Jews as an age cohort. These Jews set up loose Jewish spaces, but not lasting ones that resemble physical communities.

During my initial fieldwork, Israelis in Cologne formed a loose Israeli Group, which gathers in private spaces. Although the Israeli population in and around

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84 Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust*, see note 52; Rapaport, "The Difficulties of Being Jewish," see note 74.

85 Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust*, see note 52.

86 Grünberg, "Szenische Erinnerung der Shoah," see note 82.

87 Alina Gromova, *Generation »koscher light«. Urbane Räume und Praxen junger russischsprachiger Juden in Berlin* (Bielefeld, 2013).

Cologne remains small, and much interaction takes place via social media, the *Israeli community North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)*, which counts about 20 families as their core members (personal communication, November 2021) took shape from 2018 onwards; by 2021 it was a legally registered *eingetragener Verein* (registered club), which means it has statutes, a board, it can charge a membership fees – and it can regulate who is in, and who is out. Beyond the mere legal regulation: as with Russian speakers' gatherings, the *Israeli community NRW* is inaccessible to non-Israelis/non-Hebrew speakers: lingua franca is Hebrew. Yet, generational changes also resonate in these groups. During my PhD fieldwork, I was told that the point of the Israeli gathering is "to be less homesick for Israel." During return visits this had changed: while some Israelis who are long-term Cologne residents maintain this notion, younger, and more recent arrivals meet for social gatherings, for Israeli style Purim, or to acquaint their children with spoken Hebrew beyond the confines of their homes. Tellingly, the Israeli long-term residents, and the newer residents hardly intersect in the Israeli/Hebrew spaces.

Yet other Jewish spaces I encountered during my initial fieldwork collapsed completely: *Yachad* (Hebrew: together), the gathering of gay and lesbian Jews became dysfunctional. Social media contacts, and national groups such as *Keshet* took its place; LGBTQI* Jews as well as other third, and maybe forth, generation Jews are more mobile than previous generations. Owing to a higher mobility, but in particular to mobile communication and social media they set up Jewish spaces online, or they set up a temporary physical space, but they do not set up fixed, local communities like the generations before.

Conclusion: Jewish spaces in Cologne post-Shoah

Since its reopening the Orthodox synagogue of the *Einheitsgemeinde*, the *SGK*, was the center point of Jewish life in Cologne, loved by some, ignored by others, derided by yet others. In the 1980s, with the coming of age the Second Generation of post-Shoah Jews in Germany, this community became too small to accommodate the existing diversity. Break away members and non-members met with like-minded *halachic* and non-*halachic* Jews to form the politically informed *Jüdische Gruppen*. In Cologne the *Jüdische Gruppe* developed into the *Jüdische Forum*, and from the *Forum* grew *Gescher LaMassoret*. As adjacent Jewish spaces, the *Forum* and *A Groisse Liebe* filled in for specific parameters beyond the communities. These developments show that the boundaries to the non-Jewish surrounding are constantly being negotiated by Jews in Cologne, and that Jewish spaces are wanted and needed that are Jewish dominated. In particular, this dynamic indicates that the different experiences that individual Jews bring with them, lead to the creation of new Jewish spaces. For a group to sustain itself the overlaps need to be significant

enough; they need to amount to a critical mass of like-mindedness/homophilous qualities – and they need to provide the members with rights, which they can exercise,[88] and which they can implement to regulate membership and to sustain a boundary to individuals on the outside, and to other groups.

At the point of revisiting output written in 2007 and 2008, some of the developments feel historical, as so much more dynamic, cacophony, but also self-confidence defines Jewish life in Germany: one is not shy anymore to show differences, and the issues that led to the set up and collapse of Jewish spaces seem normal now. The nuances depicted in ethnographic details for this period seem small to an outside observer were crucial within Jewish Cologne, and they have a lasting impact. Being Jewish in Cologne as in Germany as a whole remains anything but neutral despite changes, and different expressions of Jewishness need to be (carefully) negotiated.

Closed spaces with strong boundaries such as the *Einheitsgemeinde* and *Gescher* remain focal points; Jewish spaces that cater to a specific language community came into existence, but they do not challenge the power structures. Jews beyond the Second Generation and FSU Jews of the same generation do not seem to feel the need for more fixed communities. The third generation grew up with more Jewish diversity than the generation before them, a diversity that was public, as the façade had already been cracked. Any of their efforts are temporary in spatial dimension and benefit strongly from digital infrastructures. These changes can be seen in another graphic, for which I would need a tool that allows me to show dynamics and movement on a sheet of paper. The local Jewish space in Cologne is connected to other Jewish spaces at regional, national, and transnational levels; the speed of the connections between the spaces and the flows have accelerated.

On a city scale, the dynamics of the Jewish space in Cologne indicate some threads that run through its different communities, groups, and gatherings. Individuals attend more than one Jewish space within the overall Jewish space, and express different parts of their Jewish identities in each. The major drivers of the Jewish spaces are age, intra-ethnic subcategory, native language, country of birth and youth, as well as life-style choices such as preference for a specific form of Jewish practice, marriage/partnership choices, and *halachic* or non-*halachic* descent. This means that features of homogeneity and homophily run through the groups that maintain themselves. The homogeneity refers to intra-ethnic subcategory, native language, and country of birth and youth. The homophily refers to life-style choices and the attitudes that underpin them. All of these feed into the identity of each of the individuals I have met over the years. These create a matrix from which unique identities are formed. It is here where the social and personal component of the Jewish identity of each individual intersect, and where collective and individual Jewish agency are expressed to create, maintain, and discard Jewish (dominated) spaces.

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88 Don Handelman, "The Organization of Ethnicity," *Ethnic Groups* 3.3 (1977): 187–200.
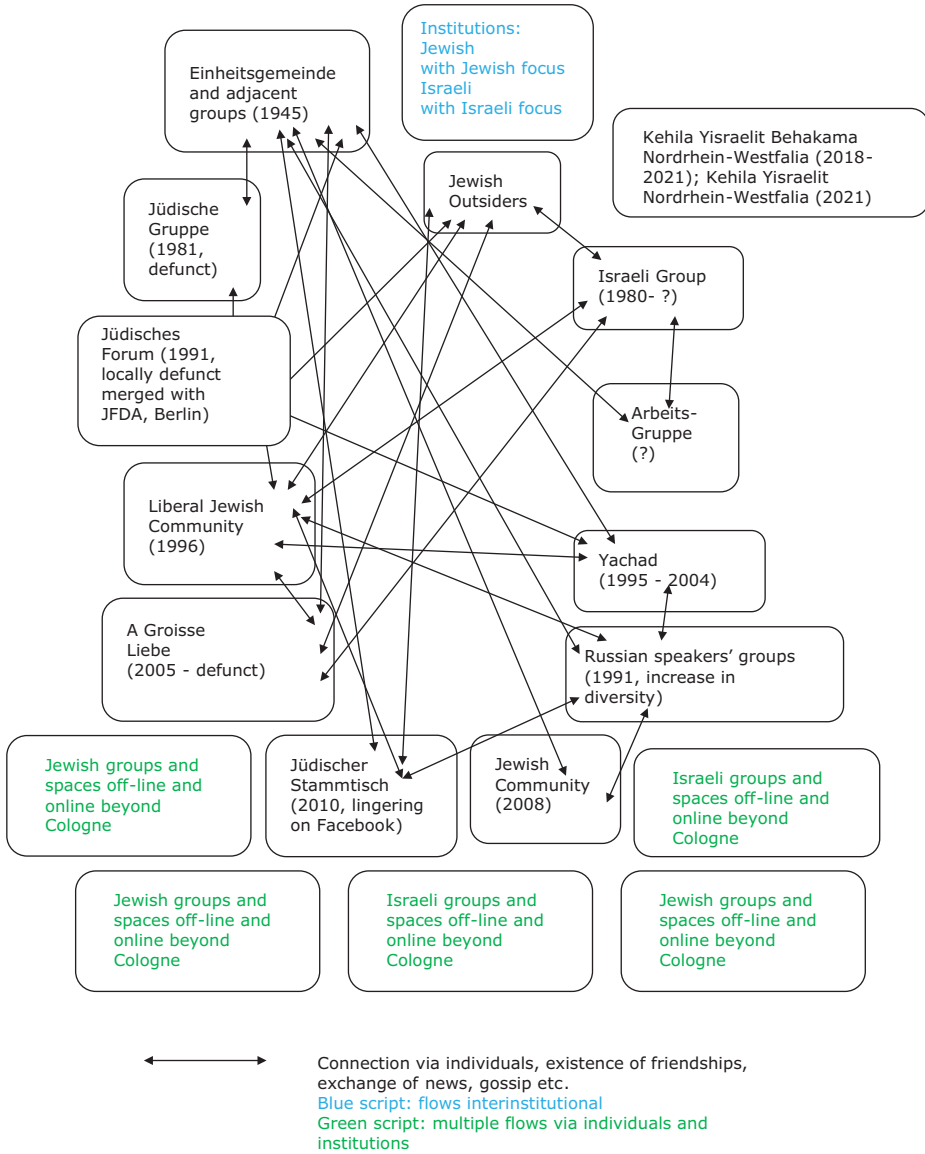
Einheitsgemeinde and adjacent groups (1945)

Institutions:
Jewish
with Jewish focus
Israeli
with Israeli focus

Kehila Yisraelit Behakama Nordrhein-Westfalia (2018-2021); Kehila Yisraelit Nordrhein-Westfalia (2021)

Jüdische Gruppe (1981, defunct)

Jewish Outsiders

Israeli Group (1980- ?)

Jüdisches Forum (1991, locally defunct merged with JFDA, Berlin)

Arbeits-Gruppe (?)

Liberal Jewish Community (1996)

Yachad (1995 - 2004)

A Groisse Liebe (2005 - defunct)

Russian speakers' groups (1991, increase in diversity)

Jewish groups and spaces off-line and online beyond Cologne

Jüdischer Stammtisch (2010, lingering on Facebook)

Jewish Community (2008)

Israeli groups and spaces off-line and online beyond Cologne

Jewish groups and spaces off-line and online beyond Cologne

Israeli groups and spaces off-line and online beyond Cologne

Jewish groups and spaces off-line and online beyond Cologne

Connection via individuals, existence of friendships, exchange of news, gossip etc.
Blue script: flows interinstitutional
Green script: multiple flows via individuals and institutions

Fig. 2: The Jewish space in Cologne, 2021.