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ABSTRACT
Building on current research into space and religion, this article explores how religious identity is negotiated in the small Modern Orthodox Jewish community in the Norwegian city of Trondheim. The focus is on Jews who question the synagogue as an Orthodox site with its strict definitions of who has access to the religious services and sections of the synagogue, which reflects the ongoing construction of Jewish identity among Jews in Trondheim. Three significant factors constitute this negotiation: loyalty towards the first generations of Jewish immigrants who established the Orthodox tradition in Trondheim and founded an Orthodox congregation, the desire to create a congregation that lives up to the contemporary ideal of gender equality, the desire to be affiliated with a congregation for those who identify as Jews. This article argues that the way religious space is contested has much to say about the way Jewish identity is currently understood in the Nordic countries. A focus on space and place also proves useful when analysing religious identity in Europe more generally.

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Introduction

This study presents a spatial perspective of the connection between religion and identity construction in the wake of 'the spatial turn' that has occurred in the social sciences (Soja 1989) and in Jewish Studies in the late 1990s (Pinto 1996, 6). Since space has been recognized as a field of interest, research has focused on the way the spatial dimension within physical contexts influences social life. Empirical studies that emphasise social structures centre on the way actors have unconsciously or consciously enacted given physical structural conditions (Kilde 2008, 200–201). Other approaches point out that spatial arrangements have been intentionally changed and reinterpreted by the actors, in order to reflect their visions, culture, and identity better (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 26). Other research falls somewhere in between this intentional transformative

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ideal and the unconscious enacting of structural prescriptions (Ammerman 2014, 57; Christensen et al. 2018, 301). By attending to the interplay of structure and agency, this study examines the kinds of agency afforded to or denied Jews as they negotiate their identity within the spatial context of the synagogue in Trondheim, a medium-sized city in central Norway.

In line with the spatial approach to religion and identity, the present study describes how the actors and their actions challenge the internal social dynamic by contesting the synagogue's forms and activities. The synagogue belongs to the tiny congregation in Trondheim (*Det jødiske samfunn i Trondheim*) which counts 137 members (year 2021) out of the 1,400 Jews in the whole of Norway (see European Jewish Congress, n.d.). It is one of two Jewish congregations in Norway—the other is in Oslo—both of which are Orthodox. One of the differences between the two synagogues is that the congregation in Trondheim has never had a rabbi. Jewish authorities, board members, and other members in leadership positions have had the responsibility of conducting services and other rituals. The contestations about the synagogue—who has access to the different sites in the synagogue during the services, how the Jewish authorities in the congregation facilitate rites of passage for those who identify as Jews, and the decision about who can be counted in the service—prompt the important question of the meaning the 'Jewish place' has for the understanding of being a Jew. The connection between place and Jewish identity is particularly relevant when most members identify as cultural rather than religious Jews and when there are no other congregations to choose from in the area.

The present study is based on the narratives of 21 female and male participants (10 women, 11 men), which centre on spatial performance and arrangements in the present and past, both for those who often and for those who rarely attend the synagogue. While questions of agency remain largely in the background, the study shows that the synagogue in Trondheim challenges both Jewish men's and women's identification with religion and also the ethnic-cultural Jewish community in Trondheim. I argue that examining the social contextualising of space—how the synagogue is used, remembered, and perceived by members of the congregation—adds a new and rich dimension to the ongoing construction of Jewish identity.

Religious identity and spatiality in Jewish contexts

Highlighting the spatiality of Jewish identity reveals how power operates throughout Jewish spatial environments in different situations and contexts (Brauch, Lipphardt, and Nocke 2008, 3). The gendered practices within an Orthodox congregation are expressed through traditionally defined actions in the synagogue that have been transmitted from generation to generation. Orthodox Judaism's definition of who a Jew is, and certain obligations

connected to being a Jewish man or a Jewish woman, regulates who takes part in religious rituals and in particular ritual actions. According to Jewish law (*halakha*), men not born of a Jewish mother or men who have not undergone conversion under the supervision of a recognized Orthodox authority cannot fully take part in performing the services. Jewish scholars have pointed out that the performativity embedded in the synagogue reflects hierarchical power relations (Adler 1999, 62; Plaskow 1991, 62; Ross 2004, 29–30). The different ritual roles for each gender prescribed by *halakha* stipulate that men and women have to sit separately and that women will not be counted in the minimum quorum of ten adult men required to perform the main parts of the service (*minyan*) or called to the pulpit to read from the biblical scriptures and pray for the deceased (*kaddish*). As the Jewish scholar Judith Plaskow puts it, "Excluded from public religious life, subject to special regulation, women are perceived as Other" (Plaskow 1983, 7).

Scholarly attention given to space when considering Jewish identity has historically centred on women's spatial religious marginality in Orthodox Judaism (Davidman 1991; Sered 1992) and on the way the home is vital for producing space for ritual innovation and identity construction. Considering agency, several empirical studies of Orthodox communities point out that women are not passive targets of religious structures but perform agency through ritual observance within the framework of the religious tradition (see Hartman 2007; Manning 1999). Orit Avishai's study of the way Orthodox wives in Israel experience menstrual purity (*niddah*) supports this suggestion while also indicating that Orthodox women are not strategic agents (Avishai 2008, 410). Avishai understands traditional women's observance as a path to achieving Orthodox subjecthood in the context of threatened symbolic boundaries between Orthodox and secular Jewish identities (ibid). Another study suggests that women negotiate—sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly—men's times and spaces by placing rituals exclusive for women in the home or in the synagogue (Neriya-Ben Shahar 2019, 482).

Few studies focus on the synagogue building and the question whether its physical structures mould or constrain Jewish identity. However, some consideration has been given to the way social relations, processes, and institutions relating to synagogues are gendered. These studies have captured important spatial implications for males and females in the framework of the synagogue to enact public performances of religion. Gordon Dale's study of the transnational network of Jewish prayer groups (partnership *minyan*) finds that Orthodox women's experiences outside the synagogue are incongruent with their more bounded status which is normative in traditional Orthodox worship. The prayer groups represent dramatic spatial changes for men and women when the participation of Orthodox women in worship provides space for them to gain a physical voice in the synagogue. Earlier, men held the outward-projecting voice. In the prayer group, women

were placed in the inward-receiving role (Dale 2015, 45). Other female participants who believe in the authority of *halakha* and value their identity as Conservative Jews have a need to expand the traditional synagogue and gain a position in the worship community. Ayala Emmett's study points out that women in the conservative branch of Judaism have changed the synagogue space by introducing the prayer shawl for females in services (Emmett 2007, 84–85).

The studies of Jewish observance focusing entirely on the Nordic Jewish context address the way identity is spatially mediated in the small Orthodox congregations in largely secular and predominantly Lutheran or Christian countries (Buckser 2003; Narrowe 2020; Vuola 2019). These studies state that the gender-divided meetings in Orthodox communities have long traditions at the same time as the community members have been integrated into the gender-equality norms and ideals of the surrounding society. In Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, for the most part, female Jews in Orthodox congregations have traditionally been active outside the synagogue and the services but have restricted their activities to community halls and charity work. In the Nordic context, Jewish men and women are challenging religious structures in specifically Jewish spatial contexts (Buckser 2003, 164; Narrowe 2020; Vuola 2019, 65). In Finland, Elina Vuola found that gender-separate space in the synagogue is for the most part accepted. The women do not demand drastic changes and argue that they are not oppressed or limited as women. However, they balance their commitment to the religious tradition at the same time as they define the boundaries of Orthodox Judaism for themselves (Vuola 2019, 71–72). Morton Narrowe, the rabbi in the Conservative congregation in Stockholm, reports that his congregation has changed its practices over the last 25 to 30 years in the Great Synagogue (*Stora Synagogan*) to what he calls gender-neutral services (Narrowe 2020, 102). During this process, both females and males have both supported and opposed the changes. As Jews try to define their own identity, they are confronted with the decision of the congregation and the rabbi about the gender-divided service space, on the one hand, and the access of non-Jewish spouses and children to the religious rituals in the synagogue, on the other hand. Andrew Buckser describes how the tensions, particularly concerning the formal and visible ritual activities of the synagogue, especially the rites of passage, have implications for Jewish identity in Copenhagen, as the Orthodox standard often contrasts with the egalitarianism of contemporary Danish culture (Buckser 2003, 89–92).

Theoretical approach

The studies referred to in research on the framework of religious buildings are in line with British geographer Doreen Massey's theoretical accounts claiming that space, like place, is unfinished and thus in the process of being produced

(Massey 2005, 9). Massey views space as "social relations stretched out over time" (Massey 1994, 2). Similarly, historian of religion Kim Knott does not concentrate on the ontological conception of the sacred, but on the human processes of making a space sacred (Knott 2005, 169). Massey's and Knott's relational approach alerts scholars to multiple socialities of space. In Massey's approach, gender is interlinked and implicitly interrelated with space. In her study of gender and space, she states that women's mobility in the Western world and its impact on the spatial organisation of society have posed a threat to the settled patriarchal order (Massey 1994, 11). This perspective on space offers ways of conceptualising and understanding the spatialisation of power relationships between genders. In her concept of religious location, and especially in her spatial methodology for the study of religion, Knott points out the influence of power relations. Ritual action, which she considers as spatial practice, is seen as a relationship between space and power because of the way place is used (Knott 2005, 158).

Massey's relational concept of space does not reject the importance of the uniqueness of place. The history of a place has references to broader and more local social relations. The mixture of accumulated history differentiates place geographically and therefore produces distinct social effects. However, differing entities and agencies in place and time make space a source of conflict. Massey's "imaginative opening up of space" (2005, 120) implies constant negotiation of place (ibid, 140). The current construction and role of a place can be challenged in the interactions between human agency and non-human entities. On the other hand, negotiations of space often prove to be fertile ground for changes and for the emergence of new spatial forms.

Bearing in mind the spatialisation of interrelations and intergender relationships, sociologist Martina Löw sees Massey's concept of space as a relational arrangement. However, she argues, as I do, that the distinction between space and place remains unclear (Löw 2016, ix). Space is in opposition to place and the relational arrangement of living beings and social goods. Through actions, the relational arrangement takes place in spatial formations (ibid). To explain the interaction of spatiality Löw offers a fruitful and detailed description of the dual concept of space, which proves useful for religious groups. Space is constituted through two distinct processes which Löw calls "spacing" and "operation of synthesis" (Löw 2016, 189). While 'spacing' refers to the placement of goods, people, and information, 'operation of synthesis' refers to the linking of spatial elements into one unified space through imagination, perception, and remembrance (ibid, 189). In the co-creation of space through placing and synthesis, spaces display *atmospheres* which can be understood as sensual and emotional qualities which in turn influence action (Löw 2016, 187). The two analytical terms 'spacing' and 'synthesis' seem to be particularly useful for analysing the contestation of space in the Trondheim synagogue. The concepts do not only take into

consideration the relations between material objects, imaginations, and histories, but also the question how vital the emotional experiences connected to a place are for the sense of belonging of ethnic cultural communities.

Methodological definition of field setting and sample

The methodology for this study included the selection of individual experiences of concrete events, meetings, and people, together with the placement of experiences in time and space. This revealed patterns, structures, and themes in the narratives (Riessman 1993, 1–7). Bringing narrativity to Jewish identity provides the conceptual strengths that produce a tighter, more historically sensitive coupling of identity and agency (Somers 1994, 635). The performative identity of the narratives revealed the tension between the commitment to Jewish tradition and Jewish agency. Narratives about ethnic behaviour include affiliation to the congregation, ritual performance, and other activities Jews in Trondheim collectively perform in the synagogue building or in the graveyard. These narratives construct and signify the changing social, historical, and spatial embeddedness of the Jewish actors. This article argues that there are three distinct narratives imbued with different spatial implications that account for the way Jews in Trondheim see themselves and assess other Jews and the way these perceptions, together with gender status, have an impact on relationships to the synagogue building.

The life-history interviews were conducted mostly through fieldwork in Trondheim during the summer and autumn of 2019 and during the autumn of 2020, some weeks before and after the annual Trondheim Jewish Cultural Festival; one interview was conducted in 2021. The study comprises semi-structured in-depth interviews with 21 self-identified Jews, conducted in Norwegian.[1] All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The informants' details were made anonymous. Nvivo7 software was used to code and analyse the data. Interview extracts were translated into English by me. The recruiting of interviewees did not include festival participants. I used my personal network in combination with snowball sampling and suggestions from the leader of the Jewish congregation in Trondheim to find interviewees; they reflect a variety of age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, geographical origins, and levels of Jewish networks. I have been particularly sensitive to in-group and out-group distinctions, such as active versus inactive, observant versus non-observant, and Norwegian versus immigrant (see also Lamine 2013, 157).

Old and new Jewish spatiality

The Jews in Trondheim have always been a tiny minority during the 140 years they have been settled in the city (Reitan 2005, 40). The history of Jewish

affiliation in Trondheim is the history of a space in flux. Before they formally formed a congregation, the 100 Jews who lived in Trondheim had established their first synagogue in 1899 and, in 1902, the congregation purchased land for the Jewish section in Lademoen Churchyard (Mendelsohn 2019, 300). Two decades later, the Jewish Orthodox community could afford a relocation that was more appropriate for the growing membership of 200 male and female members (Reitan 2005, 67–68). The congregation bought the building of a former train station that they transformed into a synagogue in 1925, with seating for 270 people (Mendelsohn 2019, 374–375, 682). The new, larger building made it possible to establish several facilities: accommodation for the rabbi and the housekeeper, a community hall, meeting-rooms, a study room and, in the backyard, a place for a hut (*sukkah*), constructed for use during the Jewish festival of Sukkot. Once the synagogue was built, the rules of Orthodox Judaism and the congregation's male leadership generated a display of male power through spacing. A partition (*mechitza*) was put in place to separate men and women for prayer and services. This means that, when it came to the rooms in the synagogue not used for ritual, males and females could be grouped for social and cultural events, but for services, the smaller, more distant section under the roof was dedicated to women's observance.

World War II depleted Trondheim's Jewish community as a result of the Nazi genocide. Half of the Jewish population from Norway's central and northern parts were killed (Bruland 2010, 243; Reitan 2005, 131). The synagogue was a terrible sight for the Jews who had managed to escape to Sweden and decided to return to Trondheim after the war. The Germans had badly damaged the synagogue and the inventory was gone. With strong efforts and financial help from outside, they succeeded to restore the building. Only two years after the end of the war, the synagogue was rededicated. Years of wear and tear, in combination with the small Jewish population in Trondheim being unable to cover the maintenance expenses, made it difficult for the community to keep the synagogue building in good repair during the last decades of the twentieth century. In 1999, the congregation received funds from the Norwegian Government's restitution fund to compensate for the loss of Jewish property during the Shoah. The funding provided the opportunity not only to renovate the building, but also to renew it according to the newer generations' ethno-cultural considerations of what it means to be a Jew in the twenty-first century. Within the framework of these differences, the congregation decided to change the synagogue into a multi-functional building that could reflect different religious, cultural, and social activities and also allow for external activities such as providing information to the surrounding society. The Jewish community refurbished the building and built a new community hall, kitchen, and library and comprehensively renovated the museum. The

congregation still operates as fully Orthodox. The religious services are only held monthly because it is difficult to assemble a *minyan* every week. Shabbat and high day services take place without any spatial separation of men and women.

Symbolic Jewish ethnicity

Contemporary Jewish culture in Trondheim is affected by the broad patterns of modern social life. While their ethnic identification is becoming more and more volitional, there is no single answer to protect or reinforce the distinctive group identity. Fredrik Barth argues that ethnicity is less about a fixed historical culture and more the result of human action: it is "the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (Barth 1969, 14–15). The American sociologist Herbert Gans argues that the decline in religious observance among Jews in the US has resulted in a "symbolic ethnicity", "a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country" (Gans 1979, 9). Jews in this study have a feeling of being Jewish and attach importance to different aspects of their cultural tradition, but, as Gans also points out, they have "a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior" (ibid). As they have experienced a waning allegiance to a religious ritual collective and as few rely upon regular ritual practice, similar to Gans's (1979, 1994) concept of symbolic identity, they have gained more identification as an ethnic-cultural community (Liebman 2003, 343). The personally significant ways in which the participants understand and conceptualise their Jewish individuality are expressed in the participants' narratives about important collective actions from the past or present connected to religious and social arrangements when many of them took place in the synagogue.

The congregation's diverse group draws the boundaries around the community broadly—religiously and nationally. The Trondheim congregation's official line is Orthodox, but intermarriage is the norm, circumcision is negotiated, and not all children with a Jewish father or mother attend the educational programme or the coming-of-age rituals (*bat* and *bar mitzva*). The mixed assembly comprises recent immigrants to Norway from Israel, the US, and Eastern and Western Europe, descendants of the early East-European Jewish settlers, converts by marriage, and children of intermarriages who regard themselves as Jewish (Høeg 2022). Among the different religious positions are Jews who do not set foot in the synagogue for religious rituals but take part in burials in the Jewish cemetery (Høeg 2023). In addition to being present at burials, those in the main group of affiliated people attend the annual Jewish festival in Trondheim from time to time. Those in the third group are deeply involved in the Jewish community and regularly participate in the services and the social/cultural activities the

community offers. Apart from this small group of affiliated people, more or less 20 individuals, male and female, the rest of the participants' identity corresponds to what Gans calls "symbolic religious identity"—minimalist Jewish observance but a sense of belonging to the Jewish peoplehood (1994, 585–586). Despite individual diversities, the norm is to maintain formal membership of the congregation.

Another characteristic of the connection to the community during the last decades of the twentieth century is that females, both converts and Jewish-born, started to attend the traditional male space: the Sabbath service. They were also active in the traditional women's arena—the "Women's International Zionist Organization" (WIZO) and other cultural and social fora in the Jewish community, such as the museum (Sundar 2001). However, within this religious/cultural plurality, officially framed by Orthodoxy, some members of the synagogue, male and female, have taken the initiative to change the synagogue's spatial arrangement gradually. Consequently, they practise rules for content and actions in the synagogue that are more associated with the liberal than with the Orthodox branch of Judaism. Parallel to these changes, some of them, and other members, are celebrating diversity and facilitating for those who observe more in line with Orthodox Judaism. The changes within a diverse group reflect the fact that the synagogue space constitutes a contested, sometimes shifting, plurality. The different positions on egalitarian and non-gendered space and practices also indicate that these pluralities can be painful.

'Standing on the same floor, we stand a bit randomly'

The ancestors' spatial arrangements play a key role in the interviewees' narratives of the synagogue, with the dominant narrative of the synagogue space in Trondheim being intricately entwined with their past and present. Their relationship to the synagogue is expressed by them attaching the present to the past and vice versa, where the tendency to connect the two time periods marks the changes in the synagogue over time—the way it is now after it was renovated and the way it used to be. Gender-divided actions and spaces are intertwined with narratives of observance of the parental and grandparental generations and the way the interviewees' generation relates to this Jewish heritage. Characteristic of these spatial narratives is that they convey the collective aspects of personal trajectories. Recounted memories of family celebrations in the synagogue include situations and events when they learned how to perform or how to act during religious rituals—always together with other Jews.

Hans, an interviewee and member of the Trondheim congregation, raised the gender issue in relation to the process of spacing in the synagogue—the interior, the attendance of Jews at the services, and Orthodox Judaism. He

belongs to one of the Jewish families that can be traced back to the first migrants who settled in the city at the end of the nineteenth century. Close family members were on the board of the synagogue when the congregation performed strict Orthodox gender-divided rituals. In his own lifetime, during his childhood, his adolescence, and large parts of his adulthood, the synagogue floor was reserved for men. However, throughout his life, the congregation had few observant Jews, which, he mentioned, could be a challenge when trying to form a *minyan*. Included in these rituals is the Friday service. Hans's father was among those who were loyal to the community and to the Orthodox tradition; almost every Friday after work he attended the service, while Hans's mother went home to prepare dinner. After a long period during Hans's adolescence and when he was a student, he had no contact with the synagogue. He returned when he became a father. Together with his wife and children, he took part in activities in the synagogue, eating Sabbath dinner and joining other family occasions during the celebration of the high days. During his active period in the congregation, he has experienced changes in the relational structure in the synagogue. The congregation stopped being a gender-divided ritual community at Sabbath services. He characterised the change as having evolved on its own, without the congregation experiencing conflict or members raising their voices at one another. Through gradual practice, the members of the congregation ended Orthodox Judaism's form of separate observance. Without any formal decision, the synagogue floor and gallery became cross-gendered sites:

> You can say that, if we're to follow Orthodoxy, which we in principle do here, we shouldn't stand together. Today, we're standing on the same floor. (Personal interview, Hans, 1 August 2019)

By 'standing on the same floor', Hans conveys the ideal of gender equality. With this phrase he points to his vision of a Jewish community that practises gender equality in services. Space is not dependent on Orthodox interpretations of the Jewish *halakha*, but rather on an approach towards socially accepted norms of Norwegian secular society. In using this phrase, Hans not only confirms the prevailing ideal in Norwegian society and what the Jewish community has accomplished, but also conveys dissatisfaction with the position assigned to women in Orthodox Judaism.

Adah, another member of the synagogue, made a point about spatial changes within the framework of a modern Orthodox community. Her family, similar to Hans's, belongs to one of the old Jewish families in Trondheim. She considers the way the congregation used to practise religion as not only traditional, but also narrow-minded. She explained that the long-lasting gender-divided observance in Trondheim had been a product of the Eastern European *shtetl* culture to which the Trondheim

Jews once belonged. She herself has experienced another form of spatial organisation of genders in a Jewish community. As a student in Germany, she belonged to a liberal progressive Jewish congregation that had practised having a non-divided synagogue for males and females since the mid-1930s. Her experiences in this community led her to understand that services which were not divided by gender were not new in a European Jewish setting. She saw that Jews in the German congregation, for whom religion was very important, did not regard religious rules as an obstacle to men and women celebrating Sabbath services together on the synagogue floor. She said:

> So, we don't do that in Trondheim. Those who would like to stand up there [in the balcony], they can do it, but we stand a bit here and there. (Personal interview, Adah, 29 July 2019)

Adah demonstrates a new perception of space that was learned during the social process of ritual actions altering the synagogue space. This means that the synagogue's first floor changed from a male symbol to a symbol of mixed genders. However, this symbolism does not apply to the whole synagogue space. Adah sees that the space which was produced does not affect all the attendees' ritual performances. The synagogue offers alternative spaces for those who do not want to be part of a mixed-gender group. She refers to women in the congregation who do not want to accept the new space and thus the new spatial conditions for services. Adah's statement indicates that these women have agency in deciding to leave the first floor and go up to the balcony. This demonstrates that the balcony is still a gendered space for traditional female observance. What is notable in Adah's understanding of the new spatial formation is that Jewish men do not have the same option. The new institutionalised pattern of ritual performance no longer leaves a separate space for men. According to Adah and her experiences of the new spatial community, men must accept the new social space and be part of the inclusive arrangement.

Countable and non-countable women

The relatively new institutionalised ritual performance of the community's configuring of space is not without problems. Differing opinions among members were expressed in their narratives about the space. The small group of Jews involved in the congregation were concerned about conflicts regarding gender relations and space. The social contextualising of space raises the question whether they should transmit Modern Orthodoxy or use their agency to change it. The new spatial structure for gender does not satisfy Hans. He was still critical of the way the congregation organises the services and advocated for more change:

> I'm constantly trying to push a bit on "why can't ladies count when we're so few? They should count in the *minyan*." […] Still the ladies don't count; however, we don't count so carefully today. (Personal interview, Hans, 1 August 2019)

Hans does not behave passively. He complements and connects the spatial changes with what he sees as necessary religious change that the congregation needs to undertake. According to Hans, the non-divided gender assembly does not fulfil what is preferable for services in Trondheim. He advocates for services that count men and women equally as members of a *minyan*. For Hans, what takes place in the synagogue's spatial context has not influenced the religious content of the service, nor, consequently, the status of the service. Hans's appeal for a *minyan* that includes women can be interpreted as the need for a stronger egalitarian approach to space, action, and religion. The social construction of the spatial aspect needs a new religious construction of the social aspect.

The interviewees' contesting of place does not necessarily imply a wish to move all aspects of synagogue life in an egalitarian direction. The question of whether women may count also has implications beyond the congregation's theological position. Part of the background for Hans's argument is a small congregation with limited resources. According to Adah, the changes regarding increased women's participation in services and the non-spatial division do not have to negate the synagogue's Orthodox commitment. More specifically, a new symbolic and spatial gender practice of one floor for both sexes does not involve abandoning Orthodox criteria for conducting a service. Although she supports the argument Hans presents, she is of the opinion that the congregation has to move slowly towards legitimating females as countable in the *minyan*. Adah's approach is based on pragmatism, as she pointed out:

> I'm a little split on this. Because in Trondheim there are very many women who do a lot. If the congregation decides women should count in the service, then, I think, maybe, the men might just stop attending. Because, then, we have somehow taken over everything, we women. So, there are several points of view. (Personal interview, Adah, 29 July 2019)

Adah's pragmatic point of view conveys a feminist position. She expresses what she sees as the dilemma the congregation is facing. When she returned from Germany, she encountered a congregation in Trondheim that celebrated Sabbath services where no women attended. When they did, it was during important high day services and they were restricted to the balcony. At that time, Adah argued for equal rights for both genders. Now she argues for maintaining the *minyan* as only consisting of men. This means that there should be limits for women when it comes to who should count in the *minyan*. As she sees it, keeping the Orthodox criterion for the *minyan* may have a positive outcome for the whole congregation—and also for females.

She does not want males to disappear from the services, but to take their part in constituting a Jewish religious community in the city; it is not fair that females must take over all the tasks and duties. What can be seen as a feminist position leads her to argue for equal responsibility, which means that some tasks belong to males.

Dividing the space according to the definition of a Jewish continuum

The relational arrangement of place is also contested when it comes to weddings, funeral services, and the burial ground. This raises the question who should have access to which rooms and sections. Placing goods and people (and placing these in relation to other goods and people) raises the question whether to maintain or change the religious spatiality. Experiences of traditional and new arrangements and interactions activate Jewish identity.

In the narratives, collective events are important for the interviewees in defining themselves as Jews. Traditionally, religious and ethnic identity has been transferred and nurtured by the family. At the present time, the home provides traditional meals, songs, and dances, which their East-European ancestors brought with them to Trondheim, and for some also the Sabbath and the rituals of the high days. This does not mean that the interviewees' narratives are about an upbringing in a family where everyone is familiar with or knows how to act according to the requirements of the Jewish law regarding services, prayers, and other religious actions that take place in the synagogue building. Intermarriage and interfaith families are prevalent in Norwegian Jewish life and thus also in Trondheim. All the interviewees come from families influenced by intermarriage. They have children, fathers, mothers or other relatives who were married to non-Jews and some have non-Jewish spouses themselves. Accordingly, the intermarried non-Jews also have relationships to the synagogue and the interviewees recounted narratives that impart their experiences of the synagogue building.

Since the synagogue is, up to a certain point, a Modern Orthodox site, the intermarried non-Jews do not have permission to perform all the actions in the services or other rituals that take place in the synagogue. Consequently, the interviewees are used to distinctions being made between Jews and non-Jews in the synagogue. For someone who identifies with Judaism, coming to accept these practices of Orthodox Judaism's spatial inclusion and exclusion can pose a threat to their Jewish identity, as this interviewee indicated:

> We wanted to get married in the synagogue because I think it would have been nice to be able to honour my cultural heritage and my husband wanted to get married in the synagogue, too. But it didn't work out because there was so much control and there were so many extra things we had to do. We couldn't get married inside the synagogue itself, it would have had to be out in the community hall. (Personal interview, Jenny, 12 August 2019)

Jenny conveyed a desire to express her Jewishness by getting married in the synagogue. The synagogue has traditionally been used as a venue for Jewish weddings. A wedding in the synagogue rather than elsewhere was her primary choice for cultivating her passionate sense of Jewish identity. Jenny did not seek justification to legitimise the congregation's stance on the use of the spaces. She knows the rules of observance and the restrictions for non-Jews. As an interfaith couple, they could not, according to Jewish law and tradition, have a Jewish wedding ceremony conducted by a qualified and legitimate wedding officiant in the synagogue. In this account, initial reservations about accepting the Orthodox rules of observance are tempered by Jenny's choice and her inability to exercise it. As opposed to secular practice, which might bind the community together in a display of multi-ethnic tolerance and cohesion, the Orthodox standard advises her to arrange the wedding ceremony in a place other than the synagogue. When Jenny could not accept Orthodoxy's assessment of the place of non-Jews, she decided to have a non-Jewish wedding ritual in a place other than the synagogue.

The synagogue's principal observed that it would be hard for Jenny to enact her Jewish identity in the synagogue setting. He wanted to compromise with her and her husband by accepting their wish to get married in the synagogue by offering them the community hall instead of the synagogue. The spatial compromise can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid casting people into the stark binary of 'Jew' and 'non-Jew' when the reality seems to be more complex. Offering them space in the community hall, although it was not the space they had requested, may be seen as a step towards inclusion of Jenny's non-Jewish husband and towards letting him be part of the broader Jewish family. Rather than shun interfaith couples, the offering of the community hall marked a celebration of the contributions Jenny had brought to Jewish life and the wish not to lose the couple or their future children from the Jewish community.

The conflict between offering the community hall and Jenny's wish to have the wedding ceremony in the synagogue points to the importance of space as an identity factor. Jenny's narrative demonstrates that space is an active force in constructing Jewish identity. The synagogue and the distinction between community hall and synagogue indicate that being Jewish is a space category and that it is about having access to the space. One could say that space represents the human being and her experiences. Put another way, Jews identify themselves with space and use space to connect with their collective identity. But space includes more than static actions in the past; it needs to be sustained with ongoing actions throughout the life trajectories that represent who people are during certain life stages. The spatial actions are relationships with other human beings in space.

Discussion

A focus on the microcosm of spatiality speaks to and illuminates broad themes in Jewish identity. These themes reveal passionate contestations about attending and performing in the synagogue in the past and present. This does not mean that the Jews' homes have no importance for providing and maintaining Jewish identity. Nor are the other Jewish places in Trondheim—the Jewish burial ground and the burial house at Lademoen and the city's Holocaust memorials—without importance for the feeling of belonging to the ethnic-cultural Jewish community. However, focusing on the link between the action, attendance, and memory demonstrates that the social-relational aspect is interrelated with the dynamics of spatiality and materiality (Massey 2005, 7–8; Knott 2005) with implications for ethnic identity formation.

The terms 'synthesising' and 'spacing' reveal that the relationships between material object, action, and history of place (Löw 2016, 188–189) influence the interviewees' narratives of the synagogue. The spatiality of the construction of Jewish identity has its allegiance with an ethnic-cultural community (Liebman 2003, 343) where the synagogue has a role to play. Taking into consideration that very few among the congregation are observant, they have a relation to services and Jewish religious rites of passage. However, the voluntariness of the Jewish religion in Trondheim does not conflict with other ways of life (Gans 1979, 8) or represent a barrier for dominant secular lifestyles (Gans 1994, 585). The synagogue has become a pluralised religious place through intermarriage, conversion, and Jews with and without a Norwegian national background. There are Jews with non-Jewish spouses who have used and still attend the synagogue and there are Jews who live in single households or as single parents, with siblings or children residing elsewhere. They are likely to gather in the synagogue for cultural events and rites of passage and a small group attends the monthly religious service. That the synagogue has been renovated as a multi-functional building, where the museum is located and where several of the annual Jewish festival arrangements take place, creates a venue which nurtures Jewishness.

Action emerges as a crucial element in the relational arrangement of spatial formations (Löw 2016, 187–189). The regulation of the community members' actions in the synagogue that they have been socialised into as a part of Jewish ritual life, and that some had been taught in childhood and have practised throughout their adulthood, conveys that space is an integral component of Jewish identity construction. The synagogue represents accumulated history, which means that the space is made in an ongoing development of time and place (Massey 2005, 121). The Jews' narratives deal with the place as a memory of their forbears and of their own spatial experiences with the synagogue. Accordingly, it is a processual space based on past and present spatial actions accomplished by the Jews themselves and their ancestors. In the synagogue,

actions of a different nature took place and continue to take place. The experience of the place makes it an important background for the rationale of opinions and perceptions about the spatial arrangements and changes. Memory, together with social and physical experiences, involves consultation about the building. The controversy about who has access to which parts of the building and to which rituals shows that the synagogue as a space is incomplete and subject to change (Massey 2005, 11). However, the importance of the place for Jewish identity does not leave this physical environment unchallenged: the symbolic ethnicity questions the spatial Orthodox observances with restrictions for gender and for those who can and cannot take part in a religious Jewish rite of passage. It remains a quintessentially contested place for the members of the Jewish Orthodox congregation.

Gender identity is developed in certain spatial environments with physical borders and openings—environments that change and challenge the construction of identity. The traditional and new spatial forms and arrangements in the synagogue and community hall reveal the way the Jews in Trondheim negotiate disagreements about traditional gender and religious scripts. One point of tension in the ethnic-cultural community is the equality of women within Judaism. For some Jews, their religion and belonging to an ethnic community are more important than challenging religious gender norms to bring about change. Other Jews, with a liberal feminist approach, favour an egalitarian religious practice. For both groups, the action–space–gender nexus poses a challenge: whether gender equality should trump established Orthodox observance. The architecture which was designed in accordance with the traditional gender division in Jewish rituals triggered tensions within several of the interviewees. In terms of being a member of the Jewish community and a Jew in secular Norway, Orthodoxy and gender identities seem to coalesce and confront each other. This process is inextricably linked to the way other Jews territorialise the place as well as the way non-Jews territorialise secular places—how they access, mark, and use the place accordingly. However, the salient option for changing the distinct gender-role division in the synagogue is an important issue for some men and women. Although this is not a representative study, for those who are members of the Orthodox congregation, support of Orthodox practices reveals no strong gender differences. All the women and men in the study had the same concept of an undivided synagogue. When it comes to a *minyan* which is not divided according to gender, two of the male interviewees accounted for their attraction to Orthodox identity and maintenance of the Orthodox concept of a *minyan.* Hans and Adah both challenged preconceptions about the synagogue as a 'masculine' space. Their labelling of physical access and arrangement as 'here and there' and 'standing on the same floor' signals that, more importantly, in terms of the way their actions are perceived, their identity is shaped by others in a relational arrangement.

Much is at stake when it comes to the way the synagogue building is arranged and acted out. The *spacing* involves the architecture and design as they used to be and the changes the building has undergone through successive actions by different characters (Löw 2016, 188). As sociology of space, and particularly sociology of religious space reminds us, the religious place is usually tensional, where social power and authority are asserted and tested (Brenneman and Miller 2016, 88). The narratives demonstrate that the synagogue building is a contested place and that being a Jew in Trondheim and a member of the congregation involves tensions within social and physical experiences of the synagogue as a ritual place. However, the dispute about who should have access to the synagogue and what this access means ritually does not have the power to devalue it. On the contrary, the agency to use experiences, opinions, and wishes for new spatial arrangements of people and actions in the synagogue demonstrates its importance. Hans's and Jenny's narratives of refusal to accept previous attitudes do not motivate them to stop caring for the synagogue. When they did not get their way in arranging the place, they continued their attachment to it.

Note

1. In addition to the narratives collected through life-history interviews, two interviews were conducted with the trustees (*forstander*) of the Jewish congregation in Trondheim (*DJST*): Ralph Dan Buchmann and Henriette Kahn. Henriette Kahn is also the leader of "The Friends of the Jewish Community Trondheim" and on the board of the Jewish Museum in Trondheim (JMT) and the Trondheim Jewish Cultural Festival. These two trustees were interviewed to cover more recent Jewish history and the organisation of the Jewish congregation and Jewish life.

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