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Special Issue Article

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF Cultural Studies

European Journal of Cultural Studies
2025, Vol. 28(1) 40–59
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DOI: 10.1177/13675494241311092
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Urban renewal, contested memories and the politics of cultural production: The case of Jewish–Muslim encounters in Germany

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Abstract

Through the case study of Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel (train-station district), this article investigates how a new generation of Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs resists the preconceived community labels through discourses of hybridity, shared interests and ambivalent experiences of being a minority in Germany, in a way which resembles Stuart Hall's idea of new ethnicities on the margins. The analysis then employs recent insights from memory studies to the emerging field of Jewish-Muslim encounters to unpack the existing tensions between micro-level, neighbourhood memories and macro-level imaginations and socio-political constructions of Jewish and Muslim minority identities. While empirical studies have focused on convivial practices within multi-ethnic neighbourhoods, this analysis, however, illustrates how taken-for-granted ideas of such spaces are produced and contested through different examples of Jewish-Muslim encounters. In doing so, the article contributes to the debate on the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Europe by showing the potential for and limitations of the creation of Jewish-Muslim conviviality within urban gentrification projects, with their tendencies to replace local histories and (Jewish and Muslim) perspectives from below.

Keywords

Cultural politics, Germany, Jewish–Muslim encounters, memory studies, new ethnicities

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Introduction

> '[The restaurant] *Fusion* became known as the place where chicken was sold for 11,50 Euros, even when you got it for 3,00 Euros around the corner [. . .] But no one ever said that this is a new Jewish shop. It was simply the place where a chicken sandwich sells for 11,50 Euros. This is how Muslims talk in the Bahnhofsviertel. No one cared whether they were Jewish. No one gave a damn about that [. . .]. Religious identity was absolutely secondary' (Muslim artist and resident, Bahnhofsviertel, August 2022).

Contributing to the emerging research field of Jewish–Muslim encounters in post-World War II Europe (Gidley et al., 2024), this article adds a new analytical layer to this debate by focusing on the social construction of Jewish–Muslim boundaries at the neighbourhood level, in particular within cultural and commercial fields in Germany. Frankfurt am Main's Bahnhofsviertel (train station district), with its Muslim and Jewish commercial, cultural and religious enterprises, overlapping histories of migration (Emmerich, 2024b) and increasing co-option by Frankfurt's city council as an example of 'lived' diversity and local peace building, constitutes an interesting case study. Train station districts in metropolitan cities are frequently associated with disorder and deviance, being inhabited by marginalised and stigmatised population groups such as undocumented workers, low-income migrants, homeless people, addicts and sex workers (Lukas and Coomann, 2021). Given their strategic locations and symbolic representations as the gateways to city centres, policymakers and private investors try to increase the appeal of these neighbourhoods by creating new apartments, hotels, shopping malls, cultural spaces and gastronomies, as well as tourist attractions, leading to urban regeneration and gentrification (Üblacker and Lukas, 2023). Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel has been shaped by neoliberal urban policies (Janke and Häfner, 2018; Künkel, 2021) and is increasingly portrayed as a cultural neighbourhood where differences and conflicts 'work themselves out' through free-flowing and creative encounters. However, these developments around gentrification and city-marketing did not replace the 'deviant' characteristics of the neighbourhood (Benkel, 2010), defined by one of Europe's largest open heroin and 'crack' scenes, as well as knife and gun violence, frequently topping Germany's crime statistics.

Through case studies of, for example, Jewish and Muslim restaurants, shops, art projects, public *iftar* celebrations or local memory politics, the article investigates these narratives of conviviality and collective efforts to maintain local peace. In this context, I explore the role of various Muslim and Jewish influencers, seemingly free agents who have managed to disassociate themselves from community labels and who navigate across various cultural and religious scenes with different degrees of 'success'. The article therefore reconstructs the transformation of Jewish–Muslim relations from an inclusive interreligious and interethnic solidarity movement and youth empowerment project created by a small group of vanguard Jewish and Muslim influencers since the 1980s, to an increasingly exclusive cultural and commercial enterprise, which is entangled in Frankfurt's (conservative) cultural politics, the quest for representations of modern Jewish life, the socio-economic redevelopment of the Bahnhofsviertel and various (extra-) local events.

The analysis, data collection and neighbourhood ethnography, conducted between 2021 and 2023 on Jewish–Muslim relational work (including the aftermath of 7 October 2023

and ongoing Israel-Gaza War), has been informed by more than 50 local stakeholders (e.g. politicians, civil servants and journalists), neighbourhood influencers and cultural entrepreneurs, business people and real estate agents, religious authorities, school teachers, individuals from welfare and social organisations and various other local residents. I have also used historical archives, exhibitions, policy reports and social media and newspaper content, taken part in charity events, attended a feminist reading and a fashion show with different kinds of Jewish–Muslim interactive themes, and visited Jewish and Muslim-owned hotels, restaurants and bars. I also attended local and international exhibitions in the neighbourhood related to Jewish–Muslim encounters, and hung out at certain small corner shops (kiosks) and cafes. The analysis thus contributes to the small but growing number of ethnographic studies within super-diverse neighbourhoods that focus on Jewish–Muslim relations in Germany (Emmerich, 2024a; Atshan and Galor, 2020; Becker, 2019).

During the empirical discussion, I employ the terms 'Jewish' and 'Muslim' only for those respondents who self-defined as Muslim or Jewish in religious, cultural or ethnic terms (which often included national identifications such 'Turkish', 'Moroccan', 'Russian' or 'Polish'). I am aware of the analytical challenges where either an overemphasis on the Jewish–Muslim identity aspects or their neglect can skew the analysis, which therefore has to be carefully balanced and double-checked. The names of individuals, locations and organisations and other identifiers have been changed or omitted to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The article starts by setting out the research field and the recent local, urban turn for the study of Jewish–Muslim relations and theoretical debates regarding urban multiculture, new ethnicities and memory studies, before outlining a brief history of the Bahnhofsviertel in relations to Jews and Muslims (Emmerich, 2023a, 2023b).

The subsequent empirical discussion will first analyse several contemporary Jewish–Muslim themes within urban regeneration and merchandise, as well as the concept of a Jewish–Muslim safe space within a multicultural migrant neighbourhood. I will then show how creative grassroots initiatives involving Jewish–Muslim collaborations were partially co-opted by cultural institutions and absorbed during the gentrification phase of the Bahnhofsviertel. The discussion then turns to the critical responses by local residents, activating alternative memories, the existence of messy Jewish–Muslim alliances and several normative neighbourhood conflicts, which contradict the ongoing fabrication of Jewish–Muslim conviviality themes from above. Finally, the introduction and analytical discussion of the concept of new ethnicities from the margins contribute to more detailed explanations of how discourses of Jewish–Muslim conviviality can lead to the creation of Jewish–Muslim alliances in Germany and several important cultural innovations, but also to contestation through diverging local memories, messy collaborations and changes at the national and international level. Through this analysis, the article thus sheds more light on the opportunities and limitations regarding the creation of Jewish–Muslim conviviality within urban renewal projects as well as their tendencies to replace local histories and (Jewish and Muslim) perspectives from below.

Recent debates in the study of Jewish–Muslim relations

Scholarly interest in Jewish–Muslim relations has recently increased in Europe, often questioning the polarised macro-debates around the Israel–Palestine conflict, the new or

imported antisemitism of Muslim migrants, including perceptions of ethnic neighbourhoods becoming no-go areas for Jews, and anti-Muslim sentiments and support for the far-right by some segments within Jewish communities. However, these tense macro-narratives are rarely based on empirical research, and according to Gidley and Everett (2022), they obscure the 'banality of everyday life experiences' and of the mundane and long-standing intercultural, interethnic and interreligious relationships between Jews and Muslims in Europe. After World War II, Muslims and Jews belonged largely to diasporic communities which are transnationally embedded. They often interact with each other in neighbourhoods like those in Brussels, Barbès in Paris, Brick Lane in East London, Berlin's Kreuzberg or Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel, which have all harboured several waves of migration and thereby produced entangled histories, presents and futures.

In Germany,[1] debates around the new antisemitism, especially after the so-called 2015 refugee crisis and 2023 Israel-Gaza War, are used by policymakers and church leaders to emphasise that the majoritarian society has largely dealt with its complicity during the Nazi regime through introspection and self-criticism, and now demands Muslims do the same by renouncing antisemitism and anti-democratic sentiments (Özyürek, 2023; Emmerich, 2022a). Within this polarised public sphere and quasi 'permanent domestic conflict' (Kranz, 2022) over Jewish–Muslim relations, attempts at Jewish–Muslim minority coalition-building and debates around joint victimhood have been extremely divisive and have been scrutinised in the recent past. These social and political tensions are further exacerbated by discussions around Holocaust comparisons, contested definitions of antisemitism and post-colonial critiques of the state of Israel. Moreover, the return of religious categories since 9/11, when Israelis, Russians or eastern Europeans were made into Jews, and Palestinians, Turks or Moroccans into Muslims, contributed to the monolithic character of the public discourse. As an outcome of this ambivalent domestic debate within Germany, Jews and Muslims are being pitched against each other within an ongoing process of othering.[2]

Related to these past accounts of Jewish–Muslim alliances around shared interests and joint experiences of discrimination, scholars have recently looked at organised interfaith activities to research the institutional logic of Jewish–Muslim exchanges, focusing on the challenges (e.g. resource deficits), adversaries (e.g. new antisemitism and competitive victimhood) and communality (e.g. shared interests around dietary requirements, circumcision and public visibility) (Nagel and Peretz, 2022). In this context, research on interfaith, Jewish–Muslim dialogue and activism over the last ten years also indicates a shift away from adversity and the Israel–Palestine conflict towards communality and shared visions in the local context. This was a partial result of changing opportunity structures (and increased funding), which improved the prospects of identifying common causes but was also accompanied by more restrictive vetting mechanisms around participation (Emmerich, 2023c; Nagel and Peretz, 2022). In Germany, Becker (2019) has analysed urban spaces as a starting point for her investigation into an emerging and 'localised cosmopolitan habitus' in Berlin, which is shared by a new generation of Jewish–Muslim activists challenging the macro-narratives around representation, new antisemitism and dangerous neighbourhoods. This recent 'local-urban turn' for the study of Jewish–Muslim encounters is important to improve our understanding of mundane neighbourhood relations and contributes to the Germany-specific, academic debate of the so-called

post-migrant society, in which established cultural, ethnic, religious and national identities, hierarchies and resources are being renegotiated (Foroutan, 2015).

New ethnicities, urban regeneration and memory studies

New research agendas have been developed as a response to multicultural policies in Europe since the 1980s and 1990s, which perceived group identities and social minorities as fixed and bounded entities, fuelling popular misconceptions of ghettoization and culture wars (Vertovec, 2007). Most prominently, Stuart Hall (2021[1988]:252–253) researched the emergence of new hybrid alliances and emergence of new ethnicities between second- and third-generation Black, Asian and white British youth. These new ethnicities of the margins reflect a novel type of identity politics that 'engages rather than suppresses difference and which depends, in part, on the cultural construction of new ethnic identities', built on increasing awareness of 'difference and diversity'. New ethnicities hence stand in stark contrast to the construction of nationalist and majoritarian identities, which have been created through 'marginalising, dispossessing, displacing and forgetting other ethnicities'.

These insights have been applied to the study of Jewish–Muslim encounters. Through ethnographic studies in Paris and London, Everett and Gidley (2018) showed that diasporic networks and hybrid identities emerged among Jewish and Muslim artists, filmmakers and musicians during the 1990s. Examples include the Jewish-run magazine *Radical Diaspora Culture* which organised 'East End Sound Clashes' featuring both Jewish and Muslim musicians in London, and the life stories of three young adults with Arab, Jewish and African roots in the suburbs of Paris, which were told in the 1995 film *La Haine*. More recently, Becker (2024: 3) has discussed Hall's theory of 'new ethnicities' in great detail, in order to 'rethink the knot of religious-racialized-ethnic othering that has served to set both Muslims and Jews apart from the European mainstream'. In doing so, she studied the ways 'Muslim and Jewish Berliners [. . .] contest essentialized understandings of their identities and marginalized sociocultural locations'. This scholarship makes an important intervention by stressing the 'universalizing capacity [of new ethnicities] to turn the table on superimposed identifications – of the essentialized, racialized other in national visions of coherence and order – to the emancipatory potential of plural identities developed within the societal margins'.

However, beyond this undoubtedly 'emancipatory potential', new ethnic alliances are also entangled with racist discourses and rarely undo social hierarchies by themselves (Hall, 2021[1988]), which produces various ambivalent moments, urban paradoxes and creative tension. Scholars pointed out that everyday exclusionary practices based on racism and, as in this study, anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism co-exist with conviviality, urban diversity and new ethnicities alike (Back and Sinha, 2016) and are often linked to the persistent of ethnocentric discourses and economic resources (Karner and Parker, 2011). In the field of Jewish–Muslim neighbourhood encounters, Everett and Gidley (2018) showed how such tensions in business interactions and co-working situations were partially facilitated by linguistic, ethnic and religious similarities, but also accompanied by episodes of negative representations of 'the other'. Vigneswaran's (2014) research in Johannesburg stressed the need to expand our analysis to understand

convivial practices in places that are defined by structural strain, violence and racialised hierarchies. This is important for Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel, where Jewish–Muslim encounters are constructed within a space of highly unequal power relations, crime and many waves of migration, unleashing new forms of exclusion and inclusion.

The article will therefore not just focus on convivial practices, ambivalences and the creation of new ethnicities within super-diverse neighbourhoods, but will also look at how ideas of such spaces are produced, remembered and contested. Given the tension between the empirical realities of urban life and the normative imaginations of an ideal urban diversity, local policymakers, community leaders and local residents have to reduce the complexity within their messages, reforms and initiatives, as well as in their search for suitable partners. This research thus investigates how discourses of new ethnicities in relation to Jewish and Muslim encounters have, by now, been incorporated in and co-opted for urban redevelopment, commerce and city marketing, as well as by the Jewish and Muslim communities themselves. Following Mavrommatis' (2011) study of how London-Brixton was transformed from a place of severe marginality into a trendy, cosmopolitan neighbourhood, I ask how 'local gentrification[. . .] selectively accommodates differences while simultaneously displacing local populations [and their histories]'. In the context of the Spanish city of Valencia, Fioravanti and Moncusí-Ferré (2023) analysed how local policymakers together with social activists and the private sector promoted 'aestheticized memories' of an 'unconflicted representation of interculturality'. These developments are interlinked with urban regeneration plans and tourist branding, and stand in stark contrast to past memories of marginality, stigma and violence. Marketing and political narratives can thus be reproduced, appropriated and resisted by social activists and local residents, for instance, by emphasising alternative histories or the relevance of migration and minority identities for the local community. Collective memories, shared experiences, and local narratives of belonging may, in this context, also be used to establish ideas of who belongs and who does not in a neighbourhood like the Bahnhofsviertel (Blokland, 2017), and hence facilitate the construction of community boundaries and the mobilisation of local traders and residents for internal cohesion and against outside intervention (Vitale, 2019). This article therefore pays special attention to such hegemonic representations regarding Jewish–Muslim relations and community-building narratives within the public sphere and urban redevelopment projects, to show how they match or diverge from subaltern narratives of Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel.

Jewish–Muslim life and the urban regeneration of Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel

Frankfurt is one of the most diverse cities in Germany. It has more than 120,000 Muslims, most likely one of the highest percentages in Germany, when considered as a proportion of the comparatively small city population of 750,000. The city has significant Muslim representation in its local parliament (Magistrat) and other representative bodies. Frankfurt is also, at times, referred to as the 'the most Jewish city' ('jüdischste Stadt') in contemporary Germany and had the first and only Jewish mayor (Oberbürgermeister) since the Shoah, Peter Feldman, who served between 2012 and 2022, and was until

recently married to a Muslim. Before the Second World War, Frankfurt had been one of the world's leading centres of Jewish culture and theology. Around 7000 Jews[3] reside in Frankfurt today, which has been deeply influenced by Jewish institutions, politicians across party divides and various protests about Jewish as well as other minority concerns. Hence, the prominent urban narrative of Frankfurt's unique Jewish identity and the responsibility that comes with this towards other vulnerable minorities may impact on Jewish–Muslim encounters at the neighbourhood level.

The Bahnhofsviertel occupies an important role regarding Frankfurt's self-perception as a multicultural city. Its dynamism and diversity are manifested in its geographical size and demography as the second smallest neighbourhood in Frankfurt, with 3552 residents (2019), of whom 65% have migrant biographies (Erfurt, 2021). The Bahnhofsviertel was created at the end of the nineteenth century and was linked to the opening of what at the time was Europe's largest central train station in 1888. The area quickly developed into an affluent residential neighbourhood for the upper and middle class, with high-end hotels, cafes, restaurants and prestigious buildings with more than 10,000 residents. This changed after World War II, when the neighbourhood experienced a steady socio-economic and demographic decline due to endemic violence and regular encounters between criminals and police forces, which soon gave the Bahnhofsviertel the reputation of being 'klein Chikago' ('little Chicago') (Lorei and Kirn, 1968: 139-40), defined by brothels, the drugs trade and homelessness (Künkel, 2021).

The Jewish and Muslim presence in the Bahnhofsviertel has been well documented. From 1945 until the 1960s, Jewish displaced persons (DPs) from Poland and other eastern European countries, who were stranded in Frankfurt on their way to Israel or the United States, started business endeavours in the fur trade, gastronomy, pubs and entertainment in the Bahnhofsviertel. According to Lorei and Kirn (1968: 73), the Bahnhofsviertel was initially dominated by those who had been subject to forced labour under the Nazis and by DPs, who worked as street vendors and middlemen in the informal economy, organised along kinship lines. One DP who worked in the Bahnhofsviertel recalled that 'Every second place was owned by one of my co-religionists [Glaubensbrüder] [. . .] All bars were in Jewish ownership' (Freimüller 2020:203). The popular Jewish-owned pub, the Fischer-Stube, was frequently mentioned in the media, being somewhere petty criminals, larger crime bosses, American soldiers and sex workers, including the later murdered Rosemarie Nitribitt, spent their time (Janke and Häfner, 2018: 149–150). Historical sources also mentioned Ben Hassan, who led a group of 30 Arabs, controlling the marihuana trade in the Bahnhofsviertel between 1945 and 1947 (Lorei and Kirn, 1968: 73).

From the 1960s, the expansion and consolidation of Frankfurt's red-light district coincided with an increase in the drugs and arms trade, illegal gambling, human trafficking, assassinations and the so-called 'pimp wars' (Janke and Häfner, 2018: 92). The best-known and most controversial part of the Jewish presence in the Bahnhofsviertel in this context has been the involvement of a few Jewish DP businessmen in the growth of the red-light district. Most prominently here were Hersch and Chaim Beker, who started as doormen in the nightclubs of the real-estate tycoon and concentration camp survivor, Josef Buchmann. Hersh Beker became known as Frankfurt's 'brothel king' and had close political links to the conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDU).

Beker thus represented the practices of reckless landlords, profit maximisation, poorly-maintained buildings and rundown flats inhabited by undocumented labour migrants, including many Muslim newcomers from Turkey, India, Pakistan, Morocco, Tunisia and former Yugoslavia. Frankfurt benefitted from these exploitative practices, due to revenues related to high rents and tax.

From the late 1960s, the neighbourhood was shaped by the arrival of Muslim labour migrants, who, through steady investment, contributed to the progress and internationalisation of the Bahnhofsviertel. From the 1970s parts of the Bahnhofsviertel, around Münchener Straße, were characterised by thriving Muslim ethnic businesses, with shops, restaurants and mosques, referred to in the past as 'Little Istanbul on the [river] Main'. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Bahnhofsviertel was already a super-diverse neighbourhood, with around 80% 'foreigners' (Janke and Häfner, 2018: 95–97). The district is hence shaped by overlapping histories of migration, cultural and economic co-existence of Jews and Muslims and ethnic and religious diversity.

From the early 2000s onwards, a new political momentum emerged with the aim of regenerating and re-populating the Bahnhofsviertel. The city started a funding programme, including more than 30 million Euros in interest-free loans to investors and urban planners to create new living spaces and attract artists and other urban pioneers (Janke and Häfner, 2018; Künkel, 2021). The state-initiated renewal created several hundred new flats and refurbished apartments, thereby kick-starting the district's unprecedented gentrification and cultural renaissance. However, the numbers of socially-affordable houses and other services for disenfranchised populations were negligible, while property prices multiplied. The initiative *Mixtape Migration*[4], together with Frankfurt's Department for Multicultural Affairs, created several interactive city maps to explore the consequences of 'rising rents and renovation lawsuits [that] are displacing the old-established residents', ethnic economies and intergenerational migration histories.

Due to the gentrification, the Bahnhofsviertel has experienced enormous reputational and economic improvements. According to the *New York Times*, it became the 'Soho of Frankfurt' because of the emergence of trendy cultural, gastro and bar scenes, alongside the established ethnic economies and a flourishing red-light district. Due to the work of creative marketing agencies, civil-society organisations, art galleries and cultural programmes, young professionals and middle-class families started to move into the neighbourhood. Annual events such as the Bahnhofsviertel Night and Bahnhofsviertel Iftar attract large numbers of visitors, while local tour guides (including official city tours) created and marketed the 'oriental charm' of mosques, ethnic markets and rundown migrant quarters, as well as the red-light district and drop-in centres for drug addicts, which were made accessible and promoted through slogans such as 'Unity through Diversity' ('Einheit durch Vielfalt'). During the gentrification phase, the urban poor, addicts and marginalised were not exclusively seen as problematic, but as a specific mark of authenticity, which is effectively commercialised (Künkel, 2021). According to one of my interlocutors, it was the PR hype around the Bahnhofsviertel that created 'these extreme contrasts' ('soziale Kontroversen'), with, for instance, 'the Diakonie [a faith-based welfare organisation for the homeless] right opposite the neighbourhood's only Michelin star restaurant'.

Jewish–Muslim themes in urban regeneration and merchandise

The ongoing gentrification processes since the early 2000s included restaurants, bars and small music venues created by Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs, influencers and other interethnic collaborations. The director of the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt remarked in an interview for the *Journal Frankfurt* in 2019 that an independent Jewish cultural scene outside the sphere of the organised Jewish community of Frankfurt could have only developed in the Bahnhofsviertel. In recent years, Frankfurt's Department of Culture has cooperated with different organisations and private-sector actors to promote tourism in the Bahnhofsviertel, using memories of labour migration, ethnic food experiences as well as modern Jewish and other migrant identities as the cornerstone of the image they seek to project. Within the emerging, creative and business-friendly environment of the Bahnhofsviertel, Jewish and Muslim friendship themes have been featured on food menus, art projects, fashion brands, music performances and social media pages. One Jewish respondent recalled how Muslim staff members prayed in his restaurant basement during Ramadan, while Muslim customers visit, 'sometimes even with a burka', he was eager to stress. 'We also say to each other Schabat Schalom or Ramadan Mubarak, or if someone asks you something, you reply with *inshallah* or say *yalla* which is both Arabic and Hebrew [. . .] Of course we play with this', for example in product advertisements and design.

Everett (2020) observed similar Jewish–Muslim business alliances navigating tensions across lines of difference through trans-ethnic, Mediterranean culinary tastes. Mirroring these observations of recent case studies in London and Paris, the emerging type of Jewish–Muslim cooperation in Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel mobilises discourses of shared Jewish–Muslim histories and friendships in commercial products and marketing slogans such as 'New Tel Aviv Cuisine. Israel Meets Palestine. Traditional Middle Eastern Dishes meet local products [from Frankfurt]'. The Israeli city Tel Aviv, Frankfurt's official partner city, plays an important role in these marketing efforts, being portrayed as free-spirited, inclusive and a polar opposite to contemporary Israel politics and Jerusalem-style orthodoxy. Unsurprisingly, DJs, fashion designers and street artists from Tel Aviv frequently visit and feature in the cultural programmes of the Bahnhofsviertel. A Jewish entrepreneur and pioneer of the commercial construction of Jewish–Muslim friendship themes explained that his work aims to show that 'Israel does not mean anti-Muslim or anti-Palestinian. Before the British drew the border in Palestine, Jews and Muslims lived next to each other in peace'. The transnational Jewish and Muslim friendship marketing slogans are therefore framed by some of my interlocutors as a local contribution to an intercultural dialogue between Jews and Muslims. This could be observed during the Israel-Gaza War in October 2023, when Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs came out with solidarity statements which emphasised the apolitical, inclusive, multi-ethnic and interreligious nature of the Bahnhofsviertel, and envisaged commercial venues and events as safe spaces. In addition, in the context of the 2024 European Parliament Election, a Jewish-led start up in the Bahnhofsviertel appealed to local residents to cast their vote to prevent the Far-Right from winning. This local campaign stressed the multi-ethnic character of the Bahnhofsviertel economy, the

importance of uniting against racism and aligning with a civil-society organisation which had been created after the Terror Attack in the neighbouring city of Hanau, which killed nine Muslim citizens in 2020. Hence, by embracing the long-standing cultural pluralism and minority contexts of the Bahnhofsviertel, these Jewish and Muslim activists and local residents create a novel 'politics of ethnicity predicated on difference and diversity' (Hall, 2021[1988]).

Emergence of a Jewish–Muslim safe space

Jewish and Muslim cultural collaborations can be traced back to Frankfurt's emerging hip-hop scene with rappers such as Moses Pelham, Hassan Annouri or Azad Azadpour in the 1980s. These Jewish and Muslim artistic entrepreneurs emphasised the importance of the Bahnhofsviertel as a complex, yet inclusive migrant space, while they also addressed attacks on refugee shelters in the early 1990s, using music as a form of migrant empowerment.[5] A Muslim interlocutor who was part of this alternative music industry recalled his collaboration with the daughter of a prominent Jewish community leader, an Iranian businessman and other Jewish and Muslim artists and activists in Frankfurt of the early 1990s: 'It was DIY phase–a very creative global and cultural moment, where you improvised, made music and marketing all by yourself'.

The broader cultural agenda of these Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs was to create new spaces beyond the confines of their supposedly limiting ethnic and religious milieus and German majoritarian culture. The longing for an independent space, according to a Jewish interlocutor, was also an expression of autonomy in relation to organised Jewish life in Frankfurt, which was 'too isolating, living in a little ghetto', as well as opposing the projections of the majoritarian society regarding Jews in Germany. Hence, these pioneers wanted to create a space where people from different backgrounds 'can come together and feel normal'. My respondents emphasised that they never saw themselves as primarily Muslim or Jewish, and in fact they experienced an ambivalent relationship with both the Jewish and Muslim communities in Frankfurt, as well as the white majority society. The cultural entrepreneur, Murat, noted

> 'this shared feeling brought me close to my Jewish friends, who also represented this social difference [Andersartigkeit] [. . .] In the 2000s, we represented an inclusive zeitgeist with our multicultural, and tattooed staff, parties, design and cultural innovations and food, selling hummus, shawarma and babaganuche'

One young female Jewish customer, who was born in Frankfurt, described this feeling of an autonomous space in the Bahnhofsviertel as follows: 'Jewish community life is very different compared to the cultural activities [Kulturbetrieb] and nightlife of the Bahnhofsviertel, where all types of characters mix up, like Jews and Muslims'. She recalled 'one bar where all the guys have Hebrew tattoos and no one knows why [. . .] Then you have many Afghans and Iranians, who work in different bars, but they all know the meaning of Hanukah or Purim'. For her, what is important is this tacit understanding in the Bahnhofsviertel, without a reformative or pedagogical agenda regarding diversity: 'No one would call it interreligious dialogue'. In other

words, my interviewees envisioned a radical free space in which ethnic and religious identities would fade away, new ethnicities emerge and language and cultural boundaries could be crossed through ethnic code-switching, jocular abuse, and by acquiring the language and culture of the other, at least in theory. As a result, these activists resisted being defined, labelled or put in preconceived ethnic or religious categories, which, in the current discourse over German identity, are pitched against each other within an ongoing process of Jewish and Muslim othering.

Public co-option and the limits of conviviality

These early attempts to form lasting, multi-ethnic alliances with creatively important input from Jewish and Muslim activists became incorporated into Frankfurt's cultural institutions, city marketing and gentrification of the Bahnhofsviertel. Already in the early 2000s, the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt approached my respondents in the Museum's quest for representatives of a 'modern Jewish cultural life' outside the organised, and largely religiously (self-)defined official Jewish community of Frankfurt. This was soon accompanied by increasing attention from journalists, local politicians and the Jewish community itself, which made Jewish–Muslim alliances both more difficult and more scrutinised. One respondent, who was part of a particular Jewish–Muslim network, noted that

> 'Frankfurt at that time needed these inclusive Jewish pioneers [e.g. young, successful, and modern Jewish entrepreneurs and influencers], who represented a special and unknown segment in the modern Jewish cultural conception of Germany, namely the edgy Jewish restaurant and bar owners'.

During my fieldwork, Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs became vital parts of the gentrification and redevelopment of the Bahnhofsviertel, which caused tensions around the initially envisioned interethnic and inclusive alliance. According to one Muslim activist in a Jewish–Muslim initiative, the collaboration 'became a modern Jewish polemic, an ostensible multi-cultural space with Jewish shaping, but for tiny, very privileged segments far away from the grassroots reality and local hardships'. From 2010, broader conflicts over neoliberal art development in cooperation with the conservative Economics Department of Frankfurt emerged. These initiatives were supported by some Jewish and Muslim members of the business community in the Bahnhofsviertel, while other respondents strongly rejected these efforts, seeing them as a 'waste of money' and 'cheap marketing' for the city council without any benefit for the local neighbourhood. In this context, a local resident discouragingly maintained that 'there is nothing like a big Jewish–Muslim, inter-cultural family [Völkerfamilie] in the Bahnhofsviertel'. This reference to the divided social spheres in the Bahnhofsviertel, mentioned earlier, is further illustrated by the following example. Although the long-standing Jewish–Muslim enterprise, *United*, with its reputation for promoting interculturality and Jewish–Muslim conviviality, was located next to a local mosque, the owners however have never been inside or interacted with the imam or an ordinary attendee of the congregation. One of my United respondents noted that 'maybe the differences are too big', before continuing:

'it's not about Muslim and Jewish but about secular and religious differences and how we see the world'. After which, he arrived at the conclusion that people in the Bahnhofsviertel mostly stick to their own spaces: 'While I love it that the mosque is there [in front of our bar], even if it is just for aesthetic reasons, I would never go inside on my own. I would be worried that I might disturb their [believers'] privacy'. Similar to his own experience with the Jewish community in Frankfurt, 'mosques also want to be isolated and not open up to non-Muslims'.

Subaltern histories

So far, the article has shown how Jewish and Muslim safe spaces and alliances have been created and subsequently incorporated into the urban gentrification and redevelopment of the Bahnhofsviertel. This section will look closer at some of the critical responses by local residents and their memories, which partially contradict the ongoing fabrication of Jewish–Muslim conviviality themes from above. Following Zubrzycki's (2017: 57) analysis of the re-invention of Jewish life in Poland, this section will pay close attention 'to the extent to which forgotten histories [of the Bahnhofsviertel] are [re-]discovered, named, and animated'. For instance, while transnational friendship discourses and Muslim–Jewish conviviality topics are promoted, the overlapping and long-term Jewish–Muslim histories, robust friendship networks and narratives, which have shaped the Bahnhofsviertel since the 1970s, remain untouched cultural reservoirs (Emmerich, 2024b). During my fieldwork, some of the Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs creatively played with the complex, violent, criminal and informal past (and present) of the Bahnhofsviertel in their marketing and media statements. For instance, a Jewish café, which used the name of a Jewish–American gangster of the so-called 'koshernostra', created a 'cultural experience' and sold New York-style pastrami sandwiches. This was echoed in statements by local actors such as 'Everybody knows each other here, even the people from the underworld'. A Jewish businessowner, whose grandfather started the family shop in the Bahnhofsviertel in the 1960s, recalled that 20 years ago his customers were 'prostitutes, pimps and criminals, but now new customers, such as lawyers, bankers and architects, are coming as well'.

In 2022, the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt organised the popular exhibition 'Revenge' in cooperation with the Jewish activist and curator Max Czollek, which featured the life stories of several American gangsters in the koshernostra. A local Jewish historian who attended the exhibition remarked that 'after the Shoah we had something similar [to the koshernostra] in the Bahnhofsviertel', before admitting that 'the museum does not want to touch it, due to the fear of antisemitism'. Going beyond the accepted triangle of Jewish representations of antisemitism, Israel and the Holocaust is 'always ambivalent in Germany. This is why the focus is on the koshernostra, deliberately far away in New York and Chicago, and not in the Bahnhofsviertel around the corner'. During a related event in the Jewish Museum in May 2022 on Jewish gangsters in the US in the 1920s, the host and popular musician Stefan Hantel, better known as Shantel, who has used Jewish and Muslim cultural elements in his music, mocked the largely middle-class audience for its ostensible 'thirst for these seedy topics'. During the question and answer session, a seventy-year-old man, who was the son of a DP family,

expressed his discontent when he emotionally criticised the event organisers, saying they should neither mock nor idealise the lives of these Jews and not compare them to the Italian mafia, which, for him, meant attempting to build intergenerational criminal empires. Jews, on the other hand, only engaged in such subversive activities for one generation, and instantly invested in the educational capital of their children. After talking about the koshernostra advertisement in the Bahnhofsviertel, another Jewish respondent addressed what he called a 'heikles Thema' ('sensitive topic'), lowering his voice during our meeting.

> 'In the 1970s, quite a few Israeli gangsters and heroin smugglers showed up in the Bahnhofsviertel. They had a different mentality, similar to the Arab gangs. These Israeli and Arab gangsters had no political differences. Whenever I saw them, I would cross to the other side of the road'.

Hence, the cultural events, city marketing and commercial productions of the Bahnhofsviertel tend to promote a sanitised and distant version of Jewish DP and Muslim migrant histories.

However, Jewish and Muslim residents drew on a local history that was often defined by hardship, discrimination and inequality, but also on discourses of nostalgia. While the new wave of inter-cultural, Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs started to set foot in the Bahnhofsviertel, creating innovative products, exciting venues and unusual partnerships, this research was able to document how certain segments of the established and conservative Jewish and Muslim business community was rather critical of the recent efforts to generate a local peace. Ignatz, a successful Jewish businessman in his mid-seventies, showed his resentment towards the recent gentrification in the following comment:

> 'Now you can buy cay [Turkish for tea]-tea everywhere, which means essentially people buying something called "tea-tea". How stupid is that. There is nothing new about it. We [Jews and Muslims] drank cay together in the Bahnhofsviertel all the time'.

In addition, a former mosque chairman recalled driving around with Hersh Beker to find a new mosque building, while a Turkish shopkeeper described his Jewish landlord as

> 'a father-like figure, who "never increased the rent". In addition, a female manager of a red-light establishment, whose building was owned by a Jewish family, recalled that "the Jews made the red-light district big: Siegler, Beker, Salzman, or Buchmann. These were kings back around 1967. The Americans were still here. These were better times". A Jewish businessowner also recalled that when the criminal group, Hells Angels, were still patrolling the streets in the Bahnhofsviertel, it was much safer'.

In this context, Muslim interlocutors described Jewish shops on Münchener Straße as 'safe havens' during their childhood. In the 1980s and 1990s, Hassan explained how he and his friends had to walk past drug addicts on their way to school and were occasionally attacked. He then recalled that 'We ran for our lives in these situations to [a particular Jewish-owned] shop, where we felt save and could hide out'. This was echoed by a Turkish businessman, who compared his daily work to the Ordnungsamt (public order

office), where in particular the Turkish community on Münchner Straße has cleaned up the neighbourhood for decades, providing more safety for Jewish customers and women, and indirectly challenging the pervasive image of the district as a no-go area within the public discourse. Through their own memories of long-term convivial relations in the Bahnhofsviertel, established Muslim and Jewish residents and entrepreneurs resisted the recent government-incentivised cultural programmes, and creative marketing initiatives that aimed at bringing Jews and Muslims closer together.

Messy alliances

The final section of this article will look at some of the more complex, multi-ethnic alliances and business practices I encountered during fieldwork to better understand the messy construction and framing of new ethnicities. The Jewish–Muslim construction of the Bahnhofsviertel as a post-migrant and super-diverse neighbourhood, for example, has not addressed the messy character of cultural, religious or commercial alliances and in particular their exclusionary practices. The research therefore studied the ways in which Jewish and Muslim businesses and cultural religious institutions maintained good relations with Frankfurt's Jewish mayor, Peter Feldman, promoted the exhibitions of the Jewish Museum and community, and contributed to hosting Frankfurt's cultural week, for which they invited Jewish and Muslim DJs, and held the annual day of religion in the Town Hall. However, the same actors could also advertise and sell the products of gangster rappers and support political parties with specific views on the Israel–Palestine issue and Jewish–Muslim relations. The most prominent rapper associated with the Bahnhofsviertel is Aykut Anhan, better known as Haftbefehl (arrest warrant), a German national with Kurdish and Turkish parents, who emphasised the creative power of multi-ethnic alliances and the harsh realities within post-migrant milieus. Haftbefehl has a long connection to the Bahnhofsviertel and is featured in the social media content, and anecdotes of the local business and creative community. For instance, Haftbefehl is a customer of one of the neighbourhood's oldest Jewish shops, which is also visited by one of Frankfurt's rabbis on a regular basis.

However, the Jewish rapper Ben Salomo, who gave a talk in Frankfurt in 2022 on 'Antisemitism in German gangster rap', warned of Haftbefehl's antisemitic lyrics, and was echoed in various newspaper articles. In a social media post, which was shared by some influencers in the Bahnhofsviertel, Haftbefehl responded:

> 'I am not judging anyone by their religion, ethnicity or skin colour. It doesn't exist [in our post-migrant milieu] [. . .] We are Kanaken [a racial slur for people with roots from the Middle East and Northern Africa], Balkans, Kartoffeln [slang for Germans] Schwarze [Blacks], Zigeuner [gipsy], Ölaugen [racial slur referring to the slightly yellowish sclera in dark-skinned people] and Juden [Jews]. In the song line ['I dealt cocaine to the Jews at Frankfurt's stock exchange'], which apparently makes me an antisemite, I was young and dealt in drugs in the Bahnhofsviertel, where some of my regular customers were Jews'.

A local Jewish resident recalled that teenagers in the Bahnhofsviertel 'are obsessed with Haftbefehl. They might not think too much about the antisemitic content but are drawn

by his gangster allure'. A Muslim entrepreneur in the Bahnhofsviertel, known for his interreligious efforts and close links with Jewish institutions, defended his own relationship with Haftbefehl: 'You have to think differently', implying that the polite society, upper-middle-class mindset does not resonate in the Bahnhofsviertel. 'When I first listened to Haftbefehl, I was shocked, but then I understood his social message, and his provocation is great PR [. . .] I assure you that no one became an antisemite through him'. According to Everett and Gidley (2018:188), these stereotyping practices within interethnic neighbourhood alliances 'upset the delicate choreography of mundane conviviality'. However, my findings on Jewish–Muslim encounters on the frequent jocular abuse and language fusion among Jewish and Muslim minorities in the Bahnhofsviertel showed that such boundary work constitutes an inseparable part of the micro-politics of belonging within these local networks.

For instance, Noah, a Jewish businessman, grew up in Bahnhofsviertel and is part of the multi-ethnic alliance that aims to improve the image of the neighbourhood. Recently he started to collaborate closely with Ibrahim, a well-connected Muslim urban pioneer. However, when I met Noah, he voiced his suspicion towards Muslims:

> 'You can't trust Arabs, due to their pro-Palestine stance. It's better to work with Russians. Kurds are OK, and with Turks it depends, as long as they are not religious. Ibrahim is not a real Muslim. He sells alcohol and drinks himself. It's okay to cooperate with him'.

There were plenty of examples of these ambivalences and tensions during the social navigation of Bahnhofsviertel pioneers, where racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, sexism etc. co-exist(ed) with convivial encounters, friendships and collaborations.

Ethnic closures, moral concerns and normative conflicts

While Jewish–Muslim relations are constructed as part of the overall diversity and cohesion narrative within the Bahnhofsviertel, a closer look reveals moments of rapture. Business disputes, envy and fame, ethnic and kinship economies, overpriced products, city marketing and tour guides where Jewish and Muslim themes and relations played a role were voiced during my fieldwork as a source of tension. Such incidents and examples were, though, shared reluctantly by my respondents on the Jewish–Muslim scene, who were well aware that these accounts counter their own world-views and business models centred on agency, choice and fluid concepts of identity. This echoes Becker's (2024: 15) hopeful account of new ethnic politics from the periphery, where 'Muslim and Jewish Europeans identify their shared positionality as strangers, uniting in the societal margins in order to transform the core'. The feeling of the Bahnhofsviertel as 'a united human family' and creative laboratory for new ethnicities also changed during extra-local events such as the recent tensions in the Middle East or the conspiracy rumours during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tensions also existed in local business networks regarding disagreements over morality. A Jewish businessman disassociated himself from a particular collaboration out of protest, due to an individual in the leadership who vocally promoted the red-light district ('Everyone knows that we [Jews] have nothing to do with this [redlight district]'). His reservation was supported by some conservative

members of the Muslim Turkish community and the local mosque. However, other Muslim actors defended the controversial promotion of the red-light district and demonstrated a multiplicity of views: ‘We can’t create a homogeneous neighbourhood’, with one insider of the red-light district maintaining that ‘the biggest annual pay day is the first day after Ramadan’.

During Ramadan 2022 I attended a public street *iftar*, which was usually attended by Frankfurt’s Jewish mayor and various other religious, political, business and academic stakeholders. Muslim businessowners organised the Bahnhofsviertel *iftar*, while several Jewish businesses supported the event through donations. At the religious function, various Jewish–Muslim friendship themes were promoted, and the local media reported the event, presenting it as a symbol of intercultural tolerance and neighbourhood cohesion: ‘Today, Muslims, Jews, Christians and others are celebrating together the breaking of the fast’, as a Muslim organiser noted, followed by brief political speeches against racism, xenophobia and antisemitism. At a closer look, however, the *iftar* revealed tensions and moments of religious and ethnic closure in the neighbourhood over the collaboration with the transnational mosque association or the mayor using it as a political platform. The sale of alcohol close by was criticised by conservative segments of the local mosque, while the *iftar* itself took place right in front of one of Frankfurt’s oldest gay sex shops. A mosque representative later explained that ‘we have to be pragmatic. It is the reality of the Bahnhofsviertel, and we have to do it for good local relations. So of course our imam attends and gives his blessing’. Hence, despite the plethora of normative polarisations and conflicts in the Bahnhofsviertel, which, according to persistent assumptions around ghettoization and classical notions of multiculturalism, should lead to ethnic closure and withdrawal, my results resonate with Vacca et al.’s (2022: 3113) study, in which disenfranchised minority actors ‘strategically maintain diverse and far-flung networks, choose forms of elective belonging in local contexts, and mobilise different social ties for different, specialised types of support’.

Conclusion

Through the case study of Frankfurt’s Bahnhofsviertel, this article has been able to demonstrate how a new generation of Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs partially resisted preconceived community labels through discourses of hybridity, shared interests and experiences of being a minority in Germany. Jewish and Muslim cultural, commercial and culinary collaborations in this particular local context revealed several multicultural, interethnic and religious processes, which resemble the idea of ‘new ethnicities’ living on the margins (Hall, 2021[1988]). The research was therefore able to document a brief phase of bottom-up, cultural production in Frankfurt from the late 1980s onwards, which embraced these novel articulations of Jewish and Muslim identity politics with the radical aim of undoing symbolic group boundaries within an ever-increasing ‘diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities’ (Hall, 2021[1988]: 249). From the early 2000s, however, with the intensified political polarisation and securitisation of Muslim and Jewish minority identities in the wake of 9/11, as well as emerging discourses of Jewish and Muslim (self-)representation accompanied by neoliberal policies and gentrification, the bottom-up Jewish–Muslim entrepreneurial and cultural alliances were increasingly absorbed into macro-political projects, and commercial enterprises.

Introducing the concept of new ethnicities in the context of this research can help to explain how references and discourses to the vernacular and subaltern memory of a local neighbourhood enable entrepreneurs and local residents to create strong community bonds by hybridising certain elements of their religious and ethnic identity. These productive dynamics underline the observed fluidity between religious and ethnic identity, hybridity and the creation of new ethnicities and cultural innovation, which is negotiated in the Bahnhofsviertel. These effects of new ethnic alliances and the process of hybridisation are important not only in terms of the representation of minority identities and tolerance towards others but also for gradually developing a novel convivial practice and a local 'grammar of responsibility'. Hence, the emergence and maintenance of new ethnic alliances, products and lifestyles, which are influenced by the national and international political context, and the role of key neighbourhood brokers, will produce periods of cultural innovation and engagement, but also resistance (Tosi and Vitale, 2009).

By employing recent insights from memory studies to the emerging field of Jewish–Muslim encounters, the investigation has been able to unpack the existing tensions between micro-level, neighbourhood memories and macro-level imaginations and political constructions of the same space, Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel, thereby revealing the historical erasures and entanglements of Jewish and Muslim minority identities. While there was a clear trend of using Jewish and Muslim themes for political campaigns, public relations and commercial, including tourist, interests, without touching upon the marginality and complexity of the neighbourhood at the pan-city level, the neglected Jewish and Muslim histories and long-term encounters were part of local, everyday conversations among residents in the Bahnhofsviertel. This was manifested in nostalgic memories of informal Jewish and Muslim commercial activities and exchanges over religion, culture and politics. By looking at how the dominant narratives of the Bahnhofsviertel were used, negotiated and resisted, the article speaks to the recent debate in memory studies regarding diverse urban localities, in which long-term residents and pioneers of new conceptions of ethnic identity formed bottom-up alliances, and at times addressed the conflictual dimensions of local history, migration trajectories and minority identities. In doing so, the article has contributed to the debate on the relationship between Jews and Muslims in Europe by showing the limitations regarding the creation of Jewish–Muslim conviviality within urban gentrification projects, with their tendencies to replace local histories and (Jewish and Muslim) perspectives from below.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the participants and organisers of the Encounters Project International Meeting (2023) at Humboldt University Berlin and the Encounters Workshop (2023) at the University of Strasbourg, as well as the members of the ENCOUNTERS (Muslim-Jewish Encounter, Diversity & Distance in Urban Europe: Religion, Culture and Social Model) project, the editor of the special issue and the EJCS editorial team, and the anonymous EJCS reviewers. Please note that all translations from German are my own.

Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The research leading to this article has been funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG): (ENCOUNTER-ES-T011114-1).

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Notes

1. After the Holocaust, Germany's Jewish population was estimated at around 30,000, of which the majority were displaced persons from eastern Europe. This changed with mass migration after the end of the Cold War, as well as the arrival of young Israelis, both Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Kranz, 2015). Today, Germany has around 225,000 Jews and 4.5 million Muslims (Emmerich, 2022b).
2. Historical scholarship has shed light on Jewish–Muslim relations in the Weimar Republic, highlighting the analytical absence of Muslims in the pre-war European memory, and similarities with today's representation and treatment of religious minorities in Germany. Contrary to the perceived absence, Turkish, Arab, South Asian and other Muslim groups were already present before and during World War II and the Holocaust, and maintained close convivial ties with Jewish communities in Germany (Baer, 2020; Jonker, 2020).
3. The numbers regarding the size of the local Jewish and Muslim communities were obtained from Frankfurt's Council of Faith: www.rat-der-religionen.de.
4. https://mixtapemigration.de/en/
5. In September 2022, the urban magazine *Journal Frankfurt* re-visited Frankfurt's rap history over the last 30 years under the cover story, 'Hip-Hop 3.0 – Oldschool und Newschool in Frankfurt'. See: https://epaper.journal-frankfurt.de/de/profiles/2b503af5acea-journal-kiosk/editions/journal-09-22

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