

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Jewish-Muslim Friendship Networks: A Study of Intergenerational Boundary Work in Postwar Germany

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## Abstract

This article presents a little-known story of Jewish-Muslim coexistence in Germany after World War Two. Using an ethnographic case study of Frankfurt am Main's train-station district (Bahnhofsviertel), the analysis investigates long-term and partially forgotten Jewish-Muslim narratives, relations, and neighborhood encounters, paying particular attention to the changing political, spatial, and temporal dimensions that have blurred or closed symbolic boundaries between Jews and Muslims since the late 1960s. Bringing together the scholarship on symbolic boundaries and urban diversity, the theoretical discussion contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the variegated processes of Jewish-Muslim boundary-making and un-making over time, as well as the macro- and micro-level influences which shape these negotiations and outcomes. Studying Jewish-Muslim relations at the neighborhood level by adopting a boundary-related approach brings out more clearly the tensions over groupism and fluidity in theoretical debates and removes the current exceptionalism around Jewish-Muslim themes, making them more easily compared with other boundary processes within everyday life.

**Keywords:** symbolic boundaries; boundary maintenance; conviviality; urban diversity; Jewish-Muslim encounters; ethnography; Germany

## Introduction

When Yitzhak<sup>1</sup>, a retired Jewish (Ashkenazi) businessman, walks on Münchener Straße in Frankfurt am Main's Bahnhofsviertel (train-station district) today, Muslim shopkeepers and residents occasionally shout in Turkish, "*Nasilsin, patron?*" ("How are you, boss?"), to which he replies "*aslan gibi, abi*" (Strong like a lion, brother).

<sup>1</sup>All names, and other identifiers, including some locations and media references are changed or omitted to ensure anonymity.

Yitzhak's family came from Poland after the Shoah and since the 1950s they have run several intergenerational business enterprises in the Bahnhofsviertel, in which 90 percent of the employees have been Muslims. When members of the sizeable Turkish community of the Bahnhofsviertel saw him in the early 1990s, they would say to each other: "Look! This Yahudi [Jew] has saved our brother's life." Shortly after the end of the first Gulf War, a Turkish teenager, Chevdet, entered Yitzhak's shop crying. Chevdet, now a software engineer, had been working for Yitzhak as an errand boy, often doing his homework in the shop. This time, however, he was begging Yitzhak to save his father's life, who had suffered a cracked skull from a motorbike accident around his village near Konya, Turkey. His only chance of survival was an emergency operation in Frankfurt. What followed involved a medical airlift from the Turkish NATO military base in İncirlik to the ADAC (General German Automobile Club) headquarters in Nurnberg, a 22,000 deutsche mark deposit from Yitzhak, and hundreds of landline calls between Turkey and Germany. After the successful rescue flight and hospitalization in Frankfurt, Chevdet's father survived, and his family repaid the money to Yitzhak within three weeks. He was not worried about the loan, saying, "The Turks are hardworking people. They know the meaning of respect."

After this episode, Yitzhak's popularity increased in the Bahnhofsviertel. One Turkish interlocutor summarized it as follows: "If there were elections today, nobody could beat [Yitzhak]. All Turks would vote for him." Yitzhak, who was somewhat embarrassed about this person-centric story, was eager to stress, "It didn't matter whether it was a Turk, a Muslim, or a Jew. It was about a fourteen-year-old boy crying about his dying father." He downplayed these Jewish-Muslim boundaries and identities by saying that the long-term cooperation and friendship was "not necessarily a Jewish-Muslim thing. My brother and I just saw that they were good kids, living on this damned street with so many drugs, junkies, and criminals. It didn't matter if they were Turks or not. They were just good boys." Yitzhak's son insisted that his father "would have done it for anyone," regardless of faith. For him, the episode was an example of his father's personality and of the specific time of the 1980s and 1990s, when such interpersonal relations and support were more common than today. In fact, this seemingly positive story of a rescue in which a Jew helps a Muslim bothered him in the sense that he would have preferred the focus be less on the Jewish-Muslim aspect and more on the story's human angle.

The Bahnhofsviertel offers many such accounts, past and present, of cooperation, business mediation, or assistance in dealing with state authorities within the long-term Jewish-Muslim friendship networks of Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel, which provides the backdrop to this investigation into Jewish-Muslim boundary work. Bringing together the scholarship on symbolic boundaries, conviviality, and urban diversity, the theoretical discussion will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the variegated processes of Jewish-Muslim boundary-making and un-making over time, as well as the macro- and micro-level influences that shape the negotiations and outcomes involved. By using Frankfurt's train-station district (Bahnhofsviertel) as an ethnographic case study, the analysis investigates long-term and partly forgotten Jewish-Muslim narratives, encounters, and neighborhood networks, paying particular attention to the changing political, spatial, and temporal dimensions that have blurred or closed symbolic boundaries between Jews and Muslims since the 1960s. The explored dynamics within and findings from the Jewish-Muslim friendship networks are not generalizable, but they do constitute an effective auxiliary

case study. It reveals long-term historical developments, and the usefulness of a boundary approach to a specific local analysis of urban diversity, to revise the polarized macro-debates around the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict and the Jewish-Muslim antagonism thesis.

I begin by setting out the historical context of Jewish-Muslim relations in pre-World War Two Europe, and then introduce the research field and the recent local-urban turn in the study of Jewish-Muslim relations. This is followed by a theoretical debate regarding urban conviviality and symbolic boundaries. In the remaining sections, I shall describe my methodology and case study of the *Bahnhofsviertel*, including its Jewish-Muslim friendship networks. I will discuss the empirical findings around: (1) the blurring of boundaries through notions of “growing up together,” local politics, mutual protection, (including the aftermath of 7 October 2023 and the ongoing Israel-Gaza War), and religious-, culture-, and Holocaust-related discourses; (2) external boundary closure through discourses regarding the “territorial takeover” by outsiders and associated moral orders; and (3) internal boundary closures within the Jewish-Muslim networks themselves, influenced by transnational tensions and stereotypes of the Other. Introducing a boundary approach to the local study of Jewish-Muslim relations at the neighborhood level brings out more clearly the tensions surrounding groupism and fluidity in the theoretical debates, and removes the current exceptionalism concerning Jewish-Muslim themes, facilitating their comparison with other boundary processes within everyday urban life.

During the empirical description, I employ the terms “Jewish” and “Muslim” only for those network members and respondents who self-defined as Muslim or Jewish in religious, cultural, or ethnic terms (which often included national identifications such as a “Turkish,” “Moroccan,” “Russian,” or “Polish”). I am aware of the analytical challenges where either an over-emphasis on the Jewish-Muslim identity aspects or their neglect can skew an analysis, and I have carefully balanced and double-checked them in this study. My investigation found that Jewish-Muslim histories and identities are not independent of each other, but coincide, situationally switch, and at times exceed the static ideas of ethnic and religious identities that pitch them against each other in contemporary Germany and beyond. In so doing, this article contributes to recent scholarly attempts to “overcome the sharp disciplinary and methodological divides that work to separate research on Jewish and Muslim histories in immigrant quarters” within the European context (Everett and Gidley 2018: 195).

### Jewish-Muslim Encounters in Europe before the Second World War

Historical accounts of medieval Spain, the Russian Empire and Baltic Sea countries, Morocco, and Palestine have already shed light on intertwined Jewish-Muslim histories, cultures, and practices (Jonker 2020). This research has produced important insights into long-term patterns of “creative coexistence,” “cultural symbiosis,” and joined experiences of marginalization (Baer 2020; Meri 2016). European colonialism in particular alienated Jewish and Muslim neighbors in the Middle East and North Africa through the alteration of long-term interreligious exchange relations toward political antagonism and mutual suspicion (Meddeb *et al.* 2013).

The highly glorified, yet fairly authentic vernacular memory of a so-called golden age of Jewish-Muslim conviviality prior to the European intervention still resonates today, and as this study will show this has implications for everyday Jewish-Muslim encounters in Germany. Becker showed how questions of Jews and Muslims as the Other in (pre-)modern Europe are deeply interconnected with both being “deemed impure” and “threatening to Christianity and emergent nation-state projects” (2024: 4).

Therefore, to better understand Jewish-Muslim boundary work in contemporary Germany it is important to situate it within the extensive history of minority exclusion and persecution in pre-World War Two Germany. In particular, it is important to take into consideration the perceived absence of Muslims within the European collective memory (Baer 2020; Jonker 2020; Steinke 2017), since it bears resemblance of how religious minorities are presented and treated in Germany today. Contrary to this perceived absence, Turkish, Arab, South Asian, and other Muslim groups were already present in Germany before and during World War Two and the Holocaust, and they formed close-knit relations with Jewish communities there. This convivial encounter has been forgotten today, since it does not “fit the necessary conditions to be included in the postwar German social contract [and memorial culture],” which is defined by a majority-guilt and reconciliation, and a public discourse centered on Jewish victimhood (Özyürek 2023: 17). The majority of historical research has narrowly focused on the cooperation between the grand mufti of Jerusalem, Al-Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and the Nazis, insinuating a Muslim affinity to authoritarian rule and antisemitism (Baer 2020). Yet the small but vibrant Muslim community in Berlin entertained close relations with and supported Jews during Nazi persecution. For Steinke (2017: 12–26) such accounts are an important antidote to the common portrayal of Muslims as uninterested in the Holocaust and Jewish life in Germany. Instead, he shows how Muslim students were welcomed into Jewish families in Berlin due to minority sympathies, while Jews attended mosque events during which jokes and other critical commentaries about the rising Nazi Party were exchanged.

These Jewish-Muslim encounters in the interwar period consisted of overlapping friendship circles and personal networks and, according to Jonker, “transcend [ed] borders, geographies, religious traditions and conventional expectations to achieve cross-border cooperation” (2020: 3). She maintained, “After the war, the network[s] existed only in the memories of those who had survived it; the magnanimous dream of a cosmopolitan group of avant-garde people ready to change the world had evaporated” (ibid.). This article follows this pioneering line of inquiry and investigates newly emerging Jewish-Muslim networks in post-World War Two Germany, although my results diverge from Jonker’s.

### Jewish-Muslim Conviviality and Its Discontents

Scholarly interest in Jewish-Muslim relations has recently increased in Europe. It is concerned with the polarized macro-debates around the Israel-Palestine conflict and the new or imported antisemitism of Muslim migrants. This includes perceptions that ethnic neighborhoods are becoming no-go areas for Jews, and that some segments within Jewish communities hold anti-Muslim sentiments and support the far-right. From 2000 onwards, Muslim antisemitism became a matter of

grave concern among governments and policymakers since it was linked to the Second Intifada, as well as to assertive protests against Israel and securitization discourses in the post-9/11 era. This led to increased funding for the prevention of antisemitism and de-radicalization programs directly focused on Muslims<sup>2</sup> (Özyürek 2023). In Germany, policymakers and church leaders have used debates around the new antisemitism, especially after the so-called 2015 refugee crisis, to emphasize that the majoritarian society has largely dealt with its complicity during the Nazi regime through introspection and self-criticism and now demands that Muslims do the same by renouncing antisemitism and eschewing anti-democratic sentiments (Klinkhammer 2011; Özyürek 2019). Within this polarized public sphere and quasi-“permanent domestic conflict” (Kranz 2022) over Jewish-Muslim relations, minority coalition-building and debates around shared victimhood have been extremely divisive and have been scrutinized.

According to Everett and Gidley, these antagonistic macro-debates, which are not based on empirical research, simply obscure the “banality of everyday life experiences” of Jews and Muslims in European neighborhoods (2018: 174). After 1945, Muslims and Jews belonged largely to diasporic communities, and approximately 95 percent of Jews in Germany have had migrant backgrounds (Cazés 2022). They interact with each other in neighborhoods such as in Barbès in Paris, the East End of London, Berlin Kreuzberg, or Frankfurt’s Bahnhofsviertel, which harbored several waves of migration, producing entangled histories, presents, and futures. Such mundane neighborhood conviviality, according to Gilroy, uncovers “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural [and urban diversity] an ordinary feature of social life. Convivial relations are alive with a radical openness that ... makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention toward the always-unpredictable mechanisms of identification” (2004: xi). In this context, Everett and Gidley (2018) draw attention to a more convivial phase in France and the UK between the 1980s and the late 1990s within the public imagination, one where Jewish-Muslim relations played an important, yet less politicized role. Similarly, in Germany Jewish community leaders publicly defended Muslim minority victims in the wake of neo-Nazi attacks during the 1990s, linking antisemitism with anti-Muslim racism. Muslim activists during this period campaigned for minority rights with banners such as, “We do not want to be the Jews of tomorrow” without public reprisals Yurdakul 2006: 52). Related to these past accounts of Jewish-Muslim alliances around shared interests and joint experiences of discrimination, scholars have recently looked at organized interfaith activities to elucidate the institutional logic of Jewish-Muslim exchanges in Germany. They have focused on challenges (e.g., resource deficits), adversities (e.g., new antisemitism and competitive victimhood), and communality (e.g., shared interests around dietary requirements, circumcision, or public visibility) (Menachem Zoufalá, Dyduch, and Glöckner 2021; Nagel and Peretz 2022). Other studies have taken the urban space as a starting point for investigations into an emerging and localized cosmopolitan habitus (Becker 2019)

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<sup>2</sup>The great majority of antisemitic assaults are committed by members and groups from within Germany’s white majoritarian society. Through his research in Berlin, Ranan (2018) offers an anti-alarmist account regarding the new antisemitism and the role of the Israel-Palestine conflict. He maintains that the concern of German politicians and the media is exaggerated, especially when put alongside the far more severe and underreported context of far-right attacks and anti-Muslim racism.

that is shared by a new generation of Jewish and Muslim activists, challenging the macro-narratives around antagonistic representation, the new antisemitism, and dangerous neighborhoods.

However, mundane, everyday social interactions and solidarities can be excluding and conflictual, being linked with boundary-making processes in which cultural, religious, or ethnic discourses play a prominent role (Back and Sinha 2016; Karner and Parker 2011; Solomos and Back 1996). Nowicka and Vertovec stressed that conviviality encompasses “simultaneously conflict and friendliness” and consists of “practices and situations of boundary markings and crossings” (2014: 349). In the field of Jewish-Muslim neighborhood encounters, Everett and Gidley showed in their pioneering ethnographies of Paris and London how such tensions are played out at the local level (2018). This became visible in convivial business interactions and co-working situations, but also in episodes of negative representations of “the Other,” which echoes Vigneswaran’s (2014) field research in Johannesburg. Vigneswaran stressed the need to expand our analysis to understand convivial practices such as providing protection through “extreme” case studies and places that are defined by structural strain, violence, and racialized hierarchies. These findings are also important in a place like Frankfurt’s Bahnhofsviertel, where Jewish-Muslim networks have been formed, and they protect each other within a context of highly unequal power relations, gang violence, substance abuse, an absent state, and several waves of migration, producing new forms of exclusion and inclusion. In sum, the recent “local-urban turn” of the study of Jewish-Muslim encounters is important to improve our understanding of mundane neighborhood relations beyond interfaith and activist accounts. As the following section shows, scholarship on symbolic boundaries has much to offer this endeavor.

### Jewish-Muslim Boundary Work

Since Fredrik Barth’s (1968) pioneering investigation into ethnic group formation, collective identities have been seen, not as primordially fixed, but as socially constructed and maintained via symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries in this context are outcomes of the classificatory negotiations of actors in the social world that have: (1) categorical and classificatory dimensions (e.g., us versus them); and (2) cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Lamont 2015; Wimmer 2008a). Depending on the structural environment, available resources, and networks, actors may employ different strategies to alter symbolic boundaries regarding their political importance, social closure or openness, and durability over time (Alba 2005; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Wimmer 2008a; Zolberg and Woon 1999; Zubrzycki 2022; Koenig 2023). My empirical description of Jewish-Muslim boundary work will mainly focus on ethnic boundary negotiations, conceptualizing Jewish and Muslim relations along ethnic lines that include religious, cultural, and historical identifications. Following Weber’s (1978) understanding of ethnicity and Hall’s (2006) conception of new ethnicities of the margins, I define (Jewish and Muslim) ethnic boundaries in the sense of, and as an expression of, subjective belonging through and emphasis on shared cultural, linguistic, religious, and historical origins, lifestyles, memories, and social practices.

According to Rampton, different aspects of ethnic boundaries can become “interactionally relevant at different times according to varying situational needs

and pressures, and ... are negotiated rather than fixed, gaining their significance from the character of the particular interactions in which they are activated" (1995: 486). To understand when such an aspect of a (Jewish-Muslim) boundary is closed, crossed, or blurred, empirical research has paid special attention to analyzing the structural and institutional order and the distribution of power and resources within particular social spaces or networks (Wimmer 2008b). Boundary work and changes may be pursued over a long period of time at the macro-level but can also occur at short intervals; for instance, as individuals navigate their daily lives through encounters or conversations. In this context, scholarship on neighborhood diversity in the UK has shown that cohabitation in diversifying neighborhoods requires convivial labor, which itself requires constant boundary work (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2022; Wessendorf 2020; Wise 2009). Although interethnic boundary work seems desirable to ensure convivial practices in everyday life, I will also focus here on moments of closure, when convivial interactions between members of Jewish-Muslim networks sustain or reinforce boundaries, via non-convivial labor, due to changes at the micro- and macro-levels.

Recent academic attempts to combine research on urban conviviality and diversity with boundary studies have played out differently in dissimilar national frameworks. Unlike Britain, France, or the United States, Germany, despite decades of labor migration there, has only recently been seen as a country of immigration. Religion, which partly absorbed culture and ethnicity as the strongest identity-marker in Germany, has constituted a so-called "bright boundary," especially for Muslim minorities after 9/11 (Alba 2005). Kuppinger called the maintenance of bright boundaries a specific "German quest or obsession to define, label, and re-label" migrant groups and their children, which "signifies a concern with maintaining clear boundaries between 'us' versus 'them'" (2015: 15). Özyürek described her own experience when she moved to Germany with her family, finding themselves "absorbed into already existing categories ... Germany made me 'a Turk' and 'a Muslim' and my partner simply 'a Jew,' groups seen as categorically different and in opposition to each other in ways neither of us had ever experienced in the US or in Turkey" (2023: x). The increasing importance of symbolic boundaries as religious categories since 9/11, where Israelis, Russians, or Eastern Europeans are made into Jews, and Palestinians, Turks, or Moroccans into Muslims, contributed to a monolithic and ambivalent German domestic debate in which Jews and Muslims are pitched against each other as part of an ongoing process of Othering (Kranz 2022). This article focuses on the local neighborhood level to critically investigate under which structural and political circumstances and temporal episodes Jewish-Muslim encounters shift or blur boundaries, and when they become exclusive or contracted. I will show that religion need not be the most important category when it comes to local boundary work.

### Jewish-Muslim Life in Frankfurt's Bahnhofsviertel

Frankfurt has more than 120,000 Muslims, probably the highest percentage in Germany (proportional to the relatively small city population of 750,000). Before the Shoah, Frankfurt was one of the world's leading centers for Jewish culture and theology, and about seven thousand Jews reside there today.<sup>3</sup> The Bahnhofsviertel

<sup>3</sup>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](http://www.rat-der-religionen.de) (accessed 16 May 2024). After the Holocaust, the

plays a special role in Frankfurt's urban diversity and Jewish-Muslim life. Its dynamism is manifested in terms of geographical size and demography as the second smallest and most transitional neighborhood in Frankfurt, with 3,552 residents in 2019, of whom 65 percent have migrant biographies (Erfurt 2021). In the 1950s and 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 new business ventures in the Bahnhofsviertel (e.g., in the fur trade, gastronomy, entertainment), while slowly rebuilding Jewish life. Historical accounts held by the Fritz Bauer Institute and Frankfurt's Institut für Stadtgeschichte (Institute for Urban History) document DPs settling in the Bahnhofsviertel after World War Two. A contemporary witness who worked there recalled, "Every second place was owned by one of my co-religionists [Glaubensbrüder].... All bars were owned by Jews" (Freimüller 2020: 203). The author Michel Bergmann, who grew up in the Bahnhofsviertel, wrote about Yiddish life there in the 1950s in his autobiographical novel, *Machloikes* (2011).

Starting in the early 1960s, the Bahnhofsviertel was reshaped by the arrival of Muslim labor migrants who, through steady investment, contributed to the neighborhood's progress. The history of these Muslim migrants has been documented by the Jewish Museum and the Institute for Urban History through exhibitions, publications, and historical walking tours. Since the 1970s, parts of the Bahnhofsviertel around Münchener Straße have been distinguished by thriving Muslim ethnic businesses, with shops, restaurants, and mosques. In the past it was referred to as "Little Istanbul on the [river] Main." In the same area there are still a few Jewish shops, restaurants, hotels, and bars, and until recently there was a bakery that sold kosher bread certified by the rabbi of the Westend synagogue. Hence, the Bahnhofsviertel has been shaped by overlapping histories of migration and the cultural and economic coexistence of Jews and Muslims, as well as ethnic and religious diversity. Since the 2000s, ongoing urban regeneration and gentrification processes, including Jewish and Muslim restaurants, bars, a small music scene, and neighborhood tourism, have created new Jewish-Muslim alliances, further reshaping the area. However, these developments around gentrification and city-marketing have failed to counter the neighborhood's notoriety as the site of one of Europe's largest heroin and crack scenes, gang, knife, and gun violence, and prostitution; it has frequently generated Germany's highest crime statistics (Benkel 2010). The Bahnhofsviertel has also received a large number of international refugees over the last decade, which has had implications for Jewish-Muslim encounters and boundary processes.

### Researching Jewish-Muslim Relations in a Diverse Neighborhood

Although Jewish (DP) and Muslim (migrant) trajectories are well-documented, urban historians and social scientists from the Fritz Bauer Institute, Frankfurt's Institute for Urban History, and the Goethe University have confirmed that the

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Jewish population was minuscule, estimated at around thirty thousand, of which the majority were Displaced Persons from Eastern Europe. This changed with the mass migration after the end of the Cold War and the arrival of young Israelis, both Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Kranz 2015). Today, Germany is home to around 225,000 Jews and 4.5 million Muslims.



history of long-term links and interactions between Jews and Muslims in the Bahnhofsviertel, from after the Shoah until today, has been neglected due to the lack of time, resources, and public interest.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike the earlier-cited historical scholarship, the contemporary social science literature on Jewish-Muslim relations has looked mainly at single interfaith or intercultural events and short timeframes, which has sidelined consideration of long-term boundary processes and intergenerational dynamics. This narrow focus mirrors a similar emphasis in studies of urban diversity, which have mainly analyzed pragmatic, short-term, and fleeting encounters among strangers, creating a temporal sense of community (Simpson 2011). Yet, Tyler's research on intergenerational care and friendship constellations across minority-majority divides in the UK highlights the "length, depth and precious quality of these relationships," and she found her interlocutors felt a deep sense of connectivity across generations. The next generation thereby becomes "the bridge that connects adults across ethnic, national and religious differences who live 'not far away' in the same street or even just next door" (2017: 1900). In this way, research on long-term boundary processes between Jews and Muslims across generations reveals the moments of blurring, crossing, and closing through different episodes of urban life that my own study explores.

Between 2021 and 2024, I employed a historically grounded, ethnographic, and life-history methodology to capture and reconstruct the long-term boundary processes of Jewish-Muslim encounters and experiences, including the life trajectories of people who grew up in or had accounts of the Bahnhofsviertel. During my fieldwork I identified long-term members of Jewish-Muslim networks, including Yitzhak and Chevdet introduced earlier, and met with them individually and together to learn how boundaries have been blurred and contracted over time, relating to issues that affect the neighborhood's residents, businesses, politics, and cultural activities. The loosely defined Jewish-Muslim intergenerational networks I studied were made up of children and grandchildren of Jewish DPs and Muslim labor migrants, but also post-Soviet Jewish refugees (Kontingentflüchtlinge). While later network formations are ethnically more diverse, the oldest network, which started in the 1970s with a "membership" with ages ranging from forty to seventy, consisted mainly of male descendants of DPs and Turkish labor migrants, but there were also individuals from Iran, Azerbaijan, Morocco, and Afghanistan. I was particularly attentive to the issue of ethnic diversity, including people's interactions with the substantial Syrian, Afghani, Bangladeshi, and Ukrainian newcomer and refugee communities. Not all network members still live in the Bahnhofsviertel, but they nonetheless return for professional commitments, errands, and meetings in established shops and other familiar spaces.

My investigation has also been informed by local stakeholders (e.g., politicians, civil servants, and journalists), neighborhood influencers, and cultural entrepreneurs,

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<sup>4</sup>More recently, local historians have engaged with the multidirectional memory debate (Rothberg 2009) to reach more diverse audiences in Frankfurt, especially Muslim students. In doing so, educational initiatives have started to draw connections between forced labor under the Nazis, DPs, refugees from the GDR, labor migrants, and Muslim refugees. "Showing these overlapping narratives," according to a local historian in Frankfurt, "is very interesting for students with a migrant background." The Jewish Museum's historical app "Invisible Places" highlights spaces where "memories of Jews coincide" with accounts of labor migrants, including Muslims, after 1945.

businesspeople and real-estate agents, religious authorities, schoolteachers, people from welfare and social organizations, and various other local residents who were either part of or knowledgeable about these networks and pertinent historical episodes. The fieldwork has been immersive, including much time spent in local shops, bars, restaurants, and cultural and religious institutions. Also important have been ad-hoc interactions with interlocutors, acquaintances, and strangers on the streets, where I could ask about and observe boundary work in action, including recurring themes, word choices, intonations, and bystander reactions (e.g., regarding the daily pavement-cleaning routine of a local Muslim businessman in front of his Jewish neighbor). I also went on official city-led and, more importantly, informal walking-tours with former and current residents who told me about the changing ownership histories of Jewish and Muslim shops, storefronts, and buildings. I consulted historical archives, exhibition materials, policy reports, and social media and newspapers to enhance my understanding of symbolic boundary processes in the Bahnhofsviertel.

### Jewish-Muslim Boundary Crossing and Blurring in the Bahnhofsviertel

I now turn to investigated and documented boundary processes involving Jewish-Muslim networks in the Bahnhofsviertel. I will start by describing those processes of boundary-blurring and crossing through shared biographical narratives around local community and mutual protection, language fusion, religious capital, or Holocaust-related knowledge, which were essential for the maintenance of long-term Jewish-Muslim relations in the neighborhood. While variegated forms of boundary-blurring among the Jewish-Muslim networks have been recorded, the second part of my empirical analysis shows that boundary closure against external Others such as newcomers and certain post-modern discourses have also played a prominent role. Finally, I will focus on those internal boundary contractions between members of the established Jewish-Muslim networks of the Bahnhofsviertel that were entangled with local, national, and transnational dynamics.

#### Growing Up Together

Yitzhak (age sixty-nine), Jakub (seventy-one), Ahmet (fifty-eight), Mustafa (fifty-five), and Chevet (fifty) have known each other for more than forty years. Their relationships started when the two Muslim teenagers Ahmet and Mustafa asked Jakub, a Jewish vendor, for a 300-mark micro-loan in the early 1980s to expand their flea market business. During a joint lunch on Münchener Straße in August 2022, Jakub recalled, “It was fun [to support them], and we wanted to reward their motivation and work ethic.... Imagine if they went to their own people [*Landsleute*], or to the Germans to ask for money. They would have been kicked out of the door immediately.” Mustafa agreed: “My uncles wouldn’t support us back then,” while Ahmet’s father would not buy schoolbooks for him and his siblings, which Yitzhak did instead. In that moment, Mustafa said, “Yitzhak and Jakub were our Jewish *abis* [Turkish for older brothers] of Münchener Straße.” He further stressed, “We went to the worst school and lived in an overcrowded house. We were nobodies [*Hosenkacker*], but they treated us with dignity.” Yitzhak reinforced this sentiment of mutual care when he shared a conversation with a rabbi, who asked

him where he would leave his children in case of a family emergency. Without hesitation Yitzhak replied: “To the Turks [implying Mustafa and Ahmet’s families]. They would always let me in, even at 3 a.m.” Chevdet has been babysitting his children for many years.

These long-term Jewish-Muslim networks were defined by a deep sense of mutual trust, respect, and learning, where Muslim teenagers saw the potential in the Jewish businessmen, acquiring valuable life skills and other opportunities. Similarly, Yitzhak and Jakub saw a younger version of themselves in these teenagers during the 1950s, when the welfare and school systems were less attentive to the needs of minorities and migrants. We will see that this sort of expressed boundary blurring through joint minority sentiments was less pronounced regarding newer migrants to the neighborhood. Levi, another Jewish interlocutor (age thirty-six) who runs a successful Bahnhofsviertel-based third-generation company, noted, “Muslims saw that this [neighborhood] was all under Jewish ownership. So they adopted and learned from us, which created this invisible [Jewish-Muslim] bond.” Jewish-Muslim boundaries in this context were blurred through expressions of long-term unity and familiarity such as “we all grew up” and “grew old together” (“*sind zusammen aufgewachsen*”), “brotherhood” (“*Verbrüderung*”), or “special symbiosis.” These discourses and boundary blurring practices indicate a remarkable historical trend, resembling boundary blurring and shifting during Jewish-Muslim encounters in the interwar period as well as the documented “cultural symbiosis” in medieval Spain. Yitzhak recalled how he drank tea in local mosques, had conversations in Turkish barbershops, went on synagogue visits with Ahmet, played table tennis with Muslim teenagers, and was invited to wedding or birthday celebrations. He hoped that his children would learn from him, as he had learned from his father and Muslim friends on Münchener Straße, how to greet and treat everyone with respect regardless of their social backgrounds. Growing up with these neighborhood stories, the children of these Jewish-Muslim network pioneers knew each other, belonged to the same sports clubs, worked in Jewish enterprises through their fathers’ connections, went to similar schools, and were influenced by the legacy of these relationships in various ways. Jakub’s daughter, for instance, works in interfaith dialogue together with local Jewish and Muslim institutions, while Mustafa’s son has a Jewish girlfriend and plays table tennis for Makkabi Frankfurt. The biographical accounts of Jewish-Muslim friendship networks and notions of “growing up together” contain various nostalgic sentiments and memories of a more convivial phase with softer boundaries, which now seems to have been erased from public imaginations of Jewish-Muslim relations.

### *Language Fusion and Crossing*

By working for several Jewish family businesses in the Bahnhofsviertel over ten years in the 1980s and 1990s, Ahmet started to learn Yiddish, and was soon known as one of the few “Yiddish-speaking Turks” of the Bahnhofsviertel. Some respondents still remembered him as “the Muslim who spoke better Yiddish than many Jews.” Similarly, Yitzhak, Noah, and other Jewish interlocutors acquired basic proficiencies in Turkish and Arabic. During our meetings (including at a synagogue), Yitzhak would joyously exclaim Turkish phrases and religious terms such as Allah Akbar,

Alhamdulillah, or Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim (in the name of God, the merciful and compassionate) to express his emotions and to greet his surroundings. The role of Turkish in business interactions was stressed when Yitzhak said, “*birçok müşteriler Turki yek*” [I had many Turkish customers]... These [language] skills are important when you deal with Turks on a daily basis.” Depending on whether Jewish or Muslim customers entered the shop, Yitzhak and Ahmet would attend to them in Yiddish, Turkish, or Arabic. One time, a rabbi transiting from Canada entered the shop, and Ahmet talked to him in Yiddish. The rabbi inquired about his background, insisting that Ahmed must be a Jew from Turkey, eventually uttering in disbelief, “Look at this *Bengel* [boy]. It’s impossible that you are not a Jew. In Canada, we try to teach Yiddish to our children, [unsuccessfully], and, here a Muslim can speak it.” Ahmet reflected with some pride in his voice that “the Canadian Chacham [Torah scholar] was shocked (*fix und fertig*) and almost fainted (*wär fast umgekippt*).” These accounts mirror earlier studies of multi-ethnic market traders in London who blurred boundaries by acquiring “literacy in the life-worlds of a diverse customer base” (Rhys-Taylor 2013: 400). Such multilingual environments and proficiencies, including Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, German, English, Turkish, Arabic, or Farsi, were common among my interlocutors in the Bahnhofsviertel, and they mirror strategies of boundary crossing within multi-ethnic networks elsewhere (Rampton 1995). These skills were partially transmitted to the next generation. A female salesperson (age twenty-one) from a long-standing Ashkenazi business family learned Turkish and Arabic, which were useful in her commercial transactions and convivial relations on the street. There are other Muslim interlocutors who have never heard of Yiddish and confuse it with Hebrew, which indicates the former’s tangible decline today.

Boundary-blurring through language-crossing was also visible in ethnic slurs and banter within the Jewish-Muslim friendship groups in the Bahnhofsviertel, as is illustrated in the following conversation from the summer of 2022. Hakan (thirty), a Kurdish salesperson, told his friends about a recent road trip through Turkey. Noah (twenty-nine) interrupted him by asking whether he went “on a camel or what?” Earlier, when Hakan arrived, Noah greeted him by saying, “We also tolerate Kurds, you know that?” When Hakan left, Noah shouted after him “the stupid Kurd forgot his water bottle.” At this point, Emre (twenty-five), a Turkish Sunni Muslim, uttered somewhat in shock: “You are the most racist Jew I know of.” Within many of these intergenerational networks, I could observe a constant usage of ethnic banter, including cultural and religious remarks, which my respondents compared to the perceived hyper-sensitivity and taboo around ethnic banter, especially the usage of “Jew” or “Jewish,” by “the Almans” (Turkish slang for “typical Germans”). That Jewish and Muslim interlocutors crossed language boundaries using ethnic codes and jocular abuse, and by learning the language of the other indicated trust and shared knowledge. According to Rampton, this constitutes “a process of delicate political negotiation” among minorities (1995: 501). Other studies differentiate between convivial practices and moments of boundary closure through banter and stereotyping that “upset the delicate choreography of mundane conviviality” (Everett and Gidley 2018: 188). However, my own findings on Jewish-Muslim encounters involving frequent jocular abuse and language-fusion among Jewish, Muslim, and other minorities in the Bahnhofsviertel established that such boundary work constitutes an important and inseparable part of convivial labor and the micro-politics of belonging and blurring within these Jewish-Muslim networks.

### No Politics in the Neighborhood

Previous studies of mundane Jewish-Muslim neighborhood relations in France and the UK highlighted certain boundary-blurring strategies that emphasized the local context, such as: “On Brick Lane [East London], we do business not politics” (Everett and Gidley 2018: 186), or how the Israel-Palestine conflict was “a taboo topic” within a Jewish-Muslim company in Paris (Everett 2020: 144). This resembles my own observations in the Bahnhofsviertel. “Those who make such [divisive] politics,” according to Mustafa, “don’t know a single Jew. But those who know each other would never support such politics, since they see each other as family.” During my fieldwork, local references such as, “I am a Frankfurter,” or “Bahnhofsviertler” were used to blur ethnic and religious boundaries and ease moments of (national and transnational) tension around Jewish-Muslim topics. After 7 October 2023 and the beginning of the Israel-Gaza War, Jewish and Muslim businessowners, mosque leaders, and local residents were quick in expressing their solidarity with all victims, condemning antisemitism and racism and emphasizing the non-political, inclusive, multi-ethnic, and interreligious character of the neighborhood. During a visit to a café on Münchener Straße, I briefly observed how such boundary-blurring was practiced. While a Jewish interlocutor, Jakub, who has family members in Israel, was engaged in a conversation with Moroccan and Turkish owners and customers, Fadi, a young Palestinian, entered the café. The Moroccan owner greeted him and introduced him as “Oh, my cousin from Palestine is joining us.” Jakub, who felt he had to respond to Fadi’s entry, said, “He’s my family, too.” After realizing that Jakub is Jewish, Fadi replied, “It’s all bad, isn’t it? Politics is always terrible.” The Moroccan shopkeeper intervened, explaining “It has always been the law [*Grundgesetz*] that we don’t talk about religion and politics on Münchener Straße,” which resonated with other customers in the café (“No one cares about that, here”). The atmosphere, though, remained somewhat tense, which led to another intervention by a regular customer from East Africa, who urged everyone to get a DNA test: “I am part-Jewish. Fifty-two percent Ethiopian Jew, in fact, which I only found out recently.”

Given the vast religious, ethnic, and ideological diversity in the Bahnhofsviertel, especially among Muslims, an official and frequently encountered neighborhood mantra was that global politics and transnational conflicts should not be talked about, since doing so would push away customers. This, however, did not always square with actual practice, since people were fond of talking about politics. Rather than not speaking about it at all, Yitzhak explained the importance of adjusting one’s speech, knowing one’s audience, and having a sense for the situation: “You, of course, talk about politics in a different way with a friend, family member, or intellectual than with a local gangster or a Turk in the Bahnhofsviertel.” Moreover, given the vast intra-Muslim religious, ethnic, and political diversity on Münchener Straße—including supporters of Turkish nationalist, Islamist, socialist, or Kurdish independence parties, South Asian and North African enterprises, Turkish-speaking Christians from Armenia, Jewish and Muslim business families from the former Soviet Union with Russian as their lingua franca—Jewish-Muslim boundaries appeared naturally more blurred and less exceptional, as suggested by the national framing of these symbolic boundaries.

*Hardship, Protection, and Gender Discourses*

Despite the recent gentrification, the Bahnhofsviertel is still seen as a problematic and dangerous neighborhood related to the illegal drug trade, violent crime, and prostitution, and this can in some instances blur Jewish-Muslim boundaries and shape ideas of cross-ethnic and interreligious solidarity and protection. Muslim interlocutors in this context described how Jewish shops on Münchener Straße were “safe havens” during their childhood. In the 1980s and 1990s, Chevet and Mustafa had to walk past drug addicts on their way to school and were occasionally attacked. Chevet recalled, “We ran for our lives in these situations to Yitzhak’s shop, where we felt safe and could hide out.” After 7 October 2023, such safe space discussions again became relevant. During the annual neighborhood Iftar in March 2024, a Jewish entrepreneur noted that his Palestinian friends visit his shop for tea on a regular basis, before stating, “I have the best [Muslim] neighbors I could wish for ... they would all protect me.” After some antisemitic graffiti appeared in the Bahnhofsviertel, other Jewish residents recalled that their non-Jewish friends instantly offered protection: “If anything happens, we’ll be with you in two minutes.”

Members of the Jewish-Muslim networks during my fieldwork told many such stories regarding the harsh realities of the Bahnhofsviertel, including fights, knife attacks, life-threatening injuries, gang violence, heroin deals, or police raids, which created moments of togetherness, while downplaying Jewish-Muslim boundaries. When Samuel, a convicted Jewish entrepreneur, was released from prison, Muslim residents of Münchener Straße collected money for him. A Turkish shopkeeper and long-term resident noted, “If you have been inside [prison], we help him. That’s Bahnhofsviertel!” suggesting a unique sense of cross-ethnic solidarity and protection. Similar blurring moments in the form of male banter have been shared among a younger Jewish-Muslim friendship network consisting of two Ashkenazi Jews with Eastern European roots, a Kurd, and two Turks. Emre proudly mentioned that he had been in the news recently. Noah speculated: “You mean during the recent shooting [*Schießerei*] incident or during the police raid [*Razzia*] around the corner?” Jewish-Muslim boundary blurring through conceptions and expressions of shared hardship across generations was further connected to the provision of protection, in particular for women. A female Jewish interlocutor who works in the Bahnhofsviertel assured me, “It’s safe here now. Perhaps because we have been living and working together for so long. If I go home, and a junkie attacks me, the Muslim community will immediately help me.” This was echoed by a Turkish businessman, opposite on the same street, who compared his daily work to the *Ordnungsamt* (public order office), where the Turkish community on Münchner Straße has notably cleaned up the neighborhood for decades. They have provided more safety for Jewish customers and women and indirectly challenged the assumption that pervades the public discourse that the district is a no-go area, but they have also reenforced conservative gender discourses. My research, like the Bahnhofsviertel itself, is strongly influenced by a male perspective. Only about 10 percent of my data comes from conversations with women—strong grounds for follow-up studies. The journalist Michaela Böhm wrote about the gender boundaries in the Bahnhofsviertel: “Münchener Straße is not a place for women. [Women] sit behind the tills, work as hairdressers and in sales, stock up shelves and massage feet, or disappear into the stores to shop for their families. You don’t see them in the cafes. Not in the mosque tearoom and not at Friday prayers” (2019). While boundary

blurring between Jews and Muslims occurs in the Bahnhofsviertel, it often happens via conservative gender discourses, notions of female protection, and gender-based boundary closure.

A historical and multi-layered migrant space like the Bahnhofsviertel thus blurs symbolic boundaries and produces Jewish-Muslim networks and alliances, providing mutual and intergenerational protection and solidarity in the context of persistent structural disadvantages and conservative cultural discourses. On the other hand, it partially confirms the bright boundary hypothesis (Alba 2005), since network actors rarely rejected Jewish and Muslim categories, which partly removed assimilatory pressures and created group-based minority solidarities. Against its negative reputation, the Bahnhofsviertel therefore constitutes a comfortable space for migrants, diasporic communities, and their children, with diverse costumes, rites, languages and, most importantly, shared minority and hardship experiences. One Jewish businessman, whose grandfather started as a cigarette vendor in the Bahnhofsviertel, noted that the area has become a largely Muslim neighborhood: “That is the amazing thing about Bahnhofsviertel. Everyone knows we are Jews, but it is never an issue.... It’s the only place where I feel totally normal, much more so than in those middle-class and German-dominated cultural spaces where I am always made to feel different.”

Themes of Jewish-Muslim minority alliances involving boundary crossing and blurring have been discussed in the literature, predominately in elite, activist, white-collar, and online spaces (Becker 2019; Everett 2020; Nagel and Peretz 2022; Peretz 2024). But as I have shown to this point, such alliances have been formed in local neighborhoods, and this also took place prior to the polarizing events of 9/11. This can be attributed to the proliferation of interreligious and more recently Jewish-Muslim dialogue formats. Jakob paraphrased the notion of a minority alliance: “Jews still have something more in common with Muslims, not just religiously like no pork and these things, but more about values ... and shared feelings of being a minority [*Minderheitsgefühl*], which automatically connect us.” What emerged from these conversations with Jakob and other Jewish interlocutors was a sense of responsibility toward Muslims, of filling informal roles as their mentors and patrons. Ahmet explained that Germans perceived his family “first as Gastarbeiter, then as foreigners, and now as Muslims,” reflecting on a long history of Othering, and yet he never felt so labeled by Yitzhak, his family, or other Jewish acquaintances. Yitzhak also expressed empathy toward Muslims born in Germany: “They never fully arrived, and you treat them differently from the *Bio-Deutsche* [slang for ‘authentic Germans’].” He then recalled a newspaper report in which Germans avoid having Muslims as their neighbors, before saying, “Nobody wants to live next to us [Jews] either.”<sup>5</sup> In this moment, he blurred the Jewish-Muslim boundary by comparing anti-Muslim racism to his own experience as a member of Germany’s Jewish minority. Yitzhak’s efforts to build minority alliances, albeit not always consciously, are being carried forward by his children, for whom the topic of minority coalitions and making minority interests visible has become important. It is part of broader

<sup>5</sup> Ahmet told me why his family ended up living in the Bahnhofsviertel in the 1970s: “We had no choice. We wouldn’t get a place elsewhere. The real estate agent said to my mum that, ‘Unfortunately as a foreigner you won’t get anything in a better neighborhood.’ ‘We’ll give it to a German family,’ except in the Bahnhofsviertel, where the flats were unacceptable (*unzumutbar*) for Germans.... We were treated like shit.”

trends in Jewish-Muslim relations, alliances, activism, and other (post-) migrant-centric counter-discourses over the last decade.

### Religious Capital

Boundary work through religious themes and expressions such as, “We are all children of Abraham,” and comparisons between Judaism and Islam has for generations in the Bahnhofsviertel been a feature of everyday conversations, jokes, forms of courtesy, and mutual learning. One young Jewish interlocutor reflected that “especially Sephardic Jews have a lot in common with Arab Muslims compared to Europeans.” During several neighborhood encounters I witnessed, Jewish and Muslim respondents shared and discussed Jewish religious celebrations in North Africa or greeted the local imam with *Jumma Mubarak* (Friday prayer greetings). On one occasion, Yitzhak called Chevet around the Friday prayer: “Are you finally done praying? When are you joining us?” During that lunch meeting, Yitzhak explained why he would not eat too much before Shabbat: “Ideally you show up quite hungry for that.” Such mundane exchanges over religious and cultural customs were common among the network members, which extended to Ramadan (or Bayram) wishes, knowledge about Jewish holidays and practices, invitations to Jewish and Muslim weddings, as well as exposure to cultural, culinary, and linguistic influences.

Ahmet, for instance, reminisced over the “heartly [*deftige*] kosher [Eastern European] cuisine” of Yitzhak’s mother. “It was all kosher, which I could eat. With German families, I could barely eat anything.” Similarly, one of Frankfurt’s rabbis preferred to shop on Münchener Straße due to its visual and sensual appeal and interpersonal customer service, being greeted with Shalom by various Muslim tailors and vegetable vendors: “Here [on Münchener Straße] you can look, touch, and smell the olives. Muslims understand the meaning of this. When they see you, they ask you what you want, and want to sample. If you do that at REWE [a national supermarket chain], they’ll kick you out.”

Such blurring moments over religious, cultural, and sensory commonalities, including tastes and smells, happened across generations, as this vignette from a Muslim-Jewish friendship group indicates. Adam, who is not observant, described his religious understanding as “Judaism light,” which only matters to him “during some religious holidays.” During our meeting, he mentioned in front of his two Muslim friends that he eats pork occasionally. Muhammed, who does not eat pork, then told the group that he has eaten pork by accident in the past and enjoyed it. Shortly after, Muhammed’s cousin joined us, greeted Adam, and scolded Muhammed for not being in the mosque earlier. “What’s the point when I go out [partying] tonight,” Muhammed replied, making Adam laugh out loud.

For other respondents, religion was seen as a resource to improve relations in the neighborhood, keeping it clean and secure. Adnan, a Turkish businessman who was active in a local mosque and an annual Iftar organization, argued, “Allah says you have to help all people, not just Muslims! *Qurbani* [religious meat offering], for instance, is for all neighbors regardless of being Muslim or not... Jews, Muslims, and Christians are all from Allah ... but with different ways and beliefs, so we can’t impose on each other. First we are *insan* (human) and we have to open the door for every *insan*.” Other interlocutors spoke of a religious, Muslim-Jewish similarity regarding



family values and shared ethical codes. One Jewish resident linked this to his own family and “dynastic” business mentality, where everybody (“from grandparents to grandchildren”) sticks together, which he compared to his Muslim business partners: “The entire [Muslim] family is involved [in the commercial enterprise], which is impressive. We know this [dynamic] from ourselves very well.”

In this context, boundary-blurring was occasionally practiced through certain conservative and anti-liberal Jewish-Muslim alliances against the perceived societal advancements of LGBTQI-plus discourses. This resonates with Everett’s (2020) study of Jewish-Muslim business relations in Paris, where those networks were defined by “social conservatism.” Such attitudes were not shared by all network members across the generations, however. Finally, some of the Jewish-Muslim network members shared a tangible aversion toward formal, top-down, interreligious dialogue events organized by the official faith communities, Frankfurt’s Council of Faith and the local municipality: “It’s all show!”; “Nobody wants to cooperate, but to be left alone”; “Once a year, they organize an interreligious concert ... all rubbish (*alles Murks*)!” These networks thus resisted the recent government-incentivized social cohesion programs intended to blur boundaries and prevent antisemitism by bringing Jews and Muslims closer together through events and initiatives.

### *Civilization: Heritage and Cultural Similarities*

Informants often blurred boundaries by referring to Jewish-Muslim historical and transnational conviviality in the Middle East and North Africa, such as during the Ottoman Empire. These accounts mirrored the minority solidarity discourses in the interwar period, but also the content and intention of recent Jewish-Muslim and interreligious dialogue and antisemitism-prevention programs. They work to blur Jewish-Muslim boundaries by activating the convivial potential of forgotten memories and shared histories. What is important to note, though, is that such historical and transnational accounts were discussed in local neighborhoods prior to 9/11 and the subsequent formal formats. For instance, Ahmet, who is from a Turkish Sunni family, linked his long-term friendships with several Jewish families to his parents’ birthplace, Antakya. Close to the Syrian border, the city was defined by its religious diversity, a thriving Jewish community, and centuries of peaceful coexistence among Jews, Muslims, Alevis, Christians, Greeks, and Armenians. Ibrahim, a Moroccan father of three, also mentioned his recent visits to Morocco’s oldest synagogue in Marrakesh, before saying, “Still today, we have Jewish and Arab traders. One attends the synagogue, and the other the mosque, but after that they all sip their peppermint tea together.” My interlocutors in this regard described their mutual openness and commitment to Jewish-Muslim relations by referring to sites of their heritage outside Germany, which they perceived as more inclusive of cultural and religious diversity.

At times, Muslim respondents like Erol contested which Muslim countries or past empire were more hospitable to Jews: “Among all the Muslim nations like Saudi Arabia, Morocco, or Tunisia, Jews had the best life under the Ottomans.” Murat underscored this sentiment, asserting, “Not a single Jew was murdered by us, unlike under you guys [Germans].” He then observed, “When we [Ottomans] took over Jerusalem, our Sultan implemented ‘*kanuni*,’ which basically means law. After that you couldn’t kill a believer of a different faith, which protected the Jews and led to five

hundred years of peace until the Crusaders arrived.” Others recalled how Sephardic Jews fled from Spain to Turkey in the sixteenth century: “They were taken in by the Ottoman Empire, creating a brotherhood between Jews and Muslims in Turkey.” One of my Jewish interlocutors, however, argued instead, “Moroccans are always the best, including historically. There is always a Jewish minister in the [Moroccan] government, and they never hated us [referring to Israel], unlike in other Muslim countries.”

### *Holocaust-Related Knowledge and Encounters*

Public boundaries between Muslims and Jews in Germany are often drawn around presumptions that Muslims lack Holocaust-related knowledge and feelings. During fieldwork, I encountered policymakers, historians, and other local professionals in the Bahnhofsviertel who persistently described Muslims as marginalized and inward-looking, and consequently as possessing “no awareness of the Jewish history and life in the Bahnhofsviertel,” since they “have other issues to deal with and get by in their daily struggles.” Although some of these statements were meant to protect Muslims from the political pressure of historical literacy in the German context, such views deprived Muslims of agency and reproduced stereotypes of Muslim passivity and ignorance. This mirrors the national debate over whether Muslims are “outsiders” to Germany’s remembrance culture and thus unable and unwilling to develop a relation with or interest in the Holocaust and Germany’s Jewish history (Gryglewski 2017). Özyürek argues, “Muslim-background Germans are routinely accused of being unable to relate to Holocaust history, [and] incapable of establishing empathy with its Jewish victims,” which reduces and partially erases “the more than sixty-years-long history of millions of postwar [Muslim] migrants” (2023: 2). Yet, through Yitzhak, Noah, and other Jewish families in the Bahnhofsviertel, my Muslim interlocutors personally knew and frequently interacted with concentration camp survivors and knew of their family histories over several decades. During a walk on Münchener Straße, Ahmet and I passed by a *Stolperstein* (“stumbling stone,” a street memorial for the victims of Nazi extermination) with the following inscription: “Ruldof Mahler, born in Frankfurt 1889, imprisoned in Buchenwald, murdered in Sonnenstein in 1941.” “Yes sadly!” Ahmet remarked, “It was your [German] family, [who killed him].” As a teenager, Ahmet worried that Germans might also murder Muslims. While he received basic history classes and learned what led to World War Two, it was by working and spending time in Yitzhak’s shop (“overhearing the old Jews”) that he shaped his awareness and knowledge about Jewish history, including the Holocaust. Such genuine interest in Jewish life in Germany was palpable in the local search for the history of a specific Jewish family building by Ali, a third-generation Turkish bar manager (age thirty-five), during my fieldwork. Ali’s family’s business had been located in the building for several decades, and he asked Frankfurt’s Historical Institute for information and pictures, which he planned to hang up and illuminate inside the bar. These forms of boundary blurring and shared victimhood identification reject national expectations and performances of “German guilt” in favor of joint-responsibility and Jewish-Muslim solidarity (ibid.).

Next to the local interest in and exposure to Jewish history, interlocutors narrated how Muslim nations protected Jews from prosecution during World War Two.

During a meeting in a Turkish neighborhood mosque on Münchener Straße, Usman, a Muslim respondent from Morocco, who arrived in the Bahnhofsviertel as a young adult in the 1970s, vividly recalled how Jewish shopkeepers expressed their gratitude to Moroccan labor migrants like him. This was due to Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco, who protected Jews from fascism. Usman then mentioned a Jewish woman who ran a pub in the Bahnhofsviertel and had previously escaped to Morocco from the Nazis: “All Moroccans went to her pub. We knew she was Jewish, and she always said to us: ‘If you have money, you can drink. If you don’t have money, you can also drink, here.’” In a moment of intergenerational boundary transmission, Tarek, another Moroccan interlocutor, stressed that his grandfather, who fought against Nazi field marshal Erwin Rommel in North Africa, told him how Jewish refugees arrived in Morocco at around that time. At the end of the war, when his grandfather’s wife became severely ill, a Jewish veterinarian of French military horses treated her with an injection and food. After the war, the grandfather worked for a Jew for twenty-five years. Tarek then turned to his son, who was listening to the conversation, and said, “You saw how many Jewish graves were in Morocco [during their recent visit]. But they don’t tell you that in school [in Germany], do they?”

I had similar conversations with two Turkish barbers about the so-called “Turkish Schindler,” Mehmet Celal Bey, a Turkish diplomat who handed out faked passports to Jews for safe passage to Turkey. For them, this was proof of the historical brotherhood between Jews and Muslims. Our conversation took place 250 meters from the run-down building in which the real Oskar Schindler lived for seventeen years after 1945. Some of my Muslim respondents knew about Schindler’s time in the Bahnhofsviertel, where he lived in relative poverty in a one-bedroom apartment gifted by the Jewish community in Frankfurt. Muslim residents wondered: “How could Germany treat a national hero, who saved so many innocent lives, like that?”; or “The great Schindler was put up in such a tiny [*mickrigen*] house.” Another interlocutor contextualized the current situation of Schindler’s old apartment: “When you go on the street and talk to people who live in this apartment complex now, they are mostly on unemployment benefits and far away from these topics [of memory culture and interfaith dialogue].” Other Jewish and Muslim network members remembered a local Nazi businessman and hotel owner who had evaded denazification and lived in the Bahnhofsviertel in the 1980s and 1990s. Both Jewish and Muslim network members preferred his outright racism to, and compared it with, the more latent structural racism and “hypocrisy” of the wider society. In sum, these local examples of boundary burring and partial crossing around joint-minority experiences and histories clearly reject the current macro-level discourses of Jewish and Muslim antagonism.

### External Boundary Closure between Established People and Newcomers

So far, I have discussed various strategies and moments of boundary-blurring and crossing within long-term Jewish-Muslim friendship networks in the Bahnhofsviertel. In general, this has partially confirmed the results of existing studies within superdiverse neighborhoods and urban conviviality, emphasizing the importance of everyday encounters between equals, without hierarchies, as well as mutual concerns regarding local welfare, safety, and security. My interlocutors did occasionally refer to the loose-knit networks in this study as

“cliques” (*“Cliquen”* in German), suggesting a deep sense of mutual trust and care, but also a degree of exclusivity and boundary closure toward external others and newcomers. Elias and Scotson’s (1994[1965]) work on established-outsider configurations highlighted how social hierarchies are not created exclusively in terms of class, ethnicity, or religion, but also through the duration, negotiation, and social age of particular communities, which produce insider and outsider boundaries. Recently, scholars have scrutinized how constellations of long-term residents, including migrants and their children, have sealed off boundaries through symbolic discourses around moral order, territorial takeover, and rumors, effectively stigmatizing newcomers and securing resources and privileges for themselves (Rosbrook-Thompson and Armstrong 2022; Wessendorf 2020). In Germany, Ceylan has analyzed such complex boundary processes among established Turkish communities and new migrants, including Turkish-speaking Muslims from Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania, and more recently from Syria, spanning half a century and more. (2018).

Following this scholarship on established-outsider boundaries, this section explores processes of boundary closure through discourses of territorial takeover, nostalgia, anger, and hurt. Parts of the Bahnhofsviertel have been socio-economically shaped by South Asian migrants and refugees over the last fifteen years, which the established Jewish-Muslim networks have associated with a lack of cleanliness, discipline, and moral order. In contrast, when the area was still dominated by Jews and Turks, it was described as “clean” and “safe.” One Turkish businessman, who became visibly upset about this topic during our interview, told me how he “offered advice to Afghan shopkeepers how to deal with the addicts and drug dealers in front of their shops.” For him, the Afghan and Syrian refugees receive too many welfare benefits and are only interested in “easy money,” which is why they will not work for Turkish enterprises. During the refugee crisis in 2015, the city council put up Afghan refugees in shelters in the Bahnhofsviertel, which for many respondents partially explained why they ended up in the informal economy and the drug trade.

When Ahmet and I walked by a South Asian restaurant in the Bahnhofsviertel, he described the changing commercial landscape: “Look, that was one of our shops [owned by Yitzhak],” after which he described the old interior and sales products. He then remarked, with a degree of sadness, “There are hardly any Turkish shops left, and many fewer Jewish shops.... Now you need to speak Afghani [to get by].” When we passed the supermarket, “*Kabul*,” Ahmet remarked, “You only find Pakistanis, Indian, and Afghanis. That was all Turkish and Jewish previously.” A few days later, Yitzhak, too, commented on the neighborhood’s changing dynamics: “In the past Jews and Turks stuck together, worked together, and formed real friendships. But that time is gone!” By contrast, Afghani and Bengali residents, shopkeepers, and religious authorities I talked with portrayed the established Turkish communities as wealthy, arrogant, and overly focused on affairs in Turkey, and as actively protecting their privileges and trying to kick away the ladder for newcomers.

In another aspect of boundary closure by network members, they depicted newcomers as religious zealots and narrow-minded, which, according to two Jewish respondents, was due to their lack of secular education: “At least, Turks were in German schools, unlike the young Afghans”; “Afghans are much crazier than Turks”; and “They are all Taliban and extremists, with their caps and traditional attire.” Such moments of closure happened across the generations. For instance,

while a group of members of a Jewish-Muslim network with several decades of family ties in the Bahnhofsviertel watched some Afghani teenagers running to the Friday prayer at a nearby South Asia mosque, they commented on their traditional South Asian attire (*kurta* pajamas and skull caps): “Wear some real clothes,” or “Go to the Jumma, but do not dress like that!” Other boundary dynamics could be observed regarding the arrival of Sinti and Roma communities in recent years. After scolding female beggars—“I still don’t have money; you have more much than I do”—my Jewish and Muslim interlocutors complained about organized begging practices: “wearing nice clothes”; or “your son picks you up in a Mercedes in the evening.” This type of boundary work between the established residents and outsiders broke up the static Muslim category, reserving the positively connotated ethnic identification for the long-standing Turkish community members, while employing a negative, religious connotation (in form of a bright boundary) to stigmatize and exclude newcomers from Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Another time, a member of a Jewish-Muslim network bullied a young beggar from the Sinti and Roma community, which caused an internal argument and fears of being cursed through the evil eye, which plays a role in both Judaism and Islam. One Turkish community leader spoke to Frankfurt’s Jewish mayor, Peter Feldmann, to address the “gypsy problem,” while local civil-society groups discussed the issue at length, portraying the Sinti and Roma groups as unwanted outsiders. Research on migrant and train station districts in Duisburg, Munich, and Stuttgart has recorded similar boundary dynamics (Atanisev and Haverkamp 2021; Hüttermann 2018; Kuppinger 2015), but they have not focused on the role of established networks and milieus, whether interreligious, multiethnic, or Jewish-Muslim.

Earlier I explained how nostalgic discourses such as “growing up together” can be empowering and blur boundaries between Jews and Muslims, which speaks to recent scholarship on the role of localized geographical memories “serving to express the collective feeling of loss of [neighborhood] identit[ies]” (Fioravanti and Moncusi-Ferré 2023: 395). However, as I have explained in this section, nostalgic discourses concerned with a “better” and “cleaner” past can also create fears of a territorial takeover and declining privileges, and be used to close boundaries to newly arriving population groups. The boundary closures I investigated were not specific to the established Jewish-Muslim networks but expressed wider dynamics within established-outsider configurations in the Bahnhofsviertel. In doing so, they integrated the Jewish-Muslim networks into an imagined community of “the established,” which at times feels threatened by and suffers from joint hardships caused by crime, drugs, and homelessness, allegedly aggravated by newcomers. The established Jewish-Muslim networks consequently adopted certain time-proven takeover discourses previously employed by the German majoritarian society.

### *Backlash for Being “One of Us”*

Being a member of the Jewish-Muslim network (“becoming one of us”) through boundary work can also come at the price of being excluded from one’s own in-group. Similarly, in interwar Berlin, some segments of the Muslim community saw some of the Jewish interfaith pioneers as “Jewish swindlers” or spies (Baer 2020). Some network members in the Bahnhofsviertel, such as an Afghan staff member who worked for a local Jewish company, were expelled, in his case because he challenged a

local imam for misrepresenting Jews. For decades, Chevdet told Yitzhak, often in an emotional state of mind, how much resistance he faced in his mosque and local community in trying to counter Jewish stereotypes: “You guys don’t know any Jews. But I do, and they are very different.” Chevdet would use his father’s survival story (introduction) to defend Jews (“I tell this story over and again to my Muslim friends to this day”). For Yitzhak, “These boys are the best antidote against those Erdogan-indoctrinated Turks.... The difference with Chevdet and Mustafa is that they were very young and impressionable when they started working with [us] Jews.” This seems to confirm what Mayer and Tiberj (2022) found in their systematic survey in the northern suburb of Paris, Sarcelles, where national-level polarization and moral panics regarding Muslim-led antisemitism and religious antagonism were effectively countered by local Jewish and Muslim residents alike, resulting in an overall positive identification and persistent boundary blurring at the neighborhood level.

### Internal Boundary Closure through Class Hierarchies, Stereotypes, and Transnationalism

This final section will look at certain internal dynamics in the network that involve boundary closures between its Jewish and Muslim members, which have been consistently recorded during this research. Ahmet’s family and the wider community encouraged him to work for Jews, who were seen as “clever” and “good at business”—(“You will learn something from them”). Conversely, Muslim interlocutors would describe themselves in a self-deprecating manner as “simple people” or “nobodies,” which they contrasted with their Jewish friends and employers, who were seen as “respected” people with “university degrees.” One Muslim restaurant owner, for instance, described his customers as “successful Jewish entrepreneurs [*große jüdische Unternehmer*],” who “have built half of Frankfurt’s skyline. Can you imagine? They come to us to eat.” These class boundaries were at times reinforced by Jewish network members, who reminded their Muslim friends about their rural origins in Anatolia, mimicking their German Turkish accents or reproducing certain stereotypes of working-class Muslims obsessed with expensive high-brand cars (“You Turks still have a lot to learn”). To some degree, the market logic of cheap labor, in which the Jewish businesses of the Bahnhofsviertel provided economic opportunities for Muslim workers, reproduced class and ethnic hierarchies.

Jewish historians like Dan Diner have pointed out that Frankfurt’s prominent Jewish real-estate investors, who often started as DPs in the Bahnhofsviertel, have indeed significantly shaped the city (Hank 2013a). A Jewish landlord observed in this regard, “All the Muslims know that these are all Jewish-owned buildings and they admire us for our achievements, since they know our grandparents’ [DP] biographies.” Muslim respondents could recount the various Jewish DP success stories of the Bahnhofsviertel, which they attributed to Jews being more effective in business than Muslims. Ali, a long-term, Yiddish-speaking resident who worked for different Jewish-owned businesses, pointed to a Turkish restaurant on the ground floor of a Jewish-owned building: “When I was a teenager, this building was sold for 125,000 marks, but no Turk bought it. All they did was send money back to Turkey to build their mansions there. The Jews bought it all and now own all the houses here. Why didn’t we [his parent generation] buy it?” He further recalled the humble origins and “difficult situations” of

Jews in the Bahnhofsviertel after 1945, selling cigarettes and sausages: “They only did this for one generation. Name one Jew today who still runs a corner shop or fast-food restaurant [*Imbiss*].” Jewish respondents also admitted that, since Muslims in the Bahnhofsviertel usually know about their Jewish identity, they are treated differently, being asked for discounts or cultural advice about circumcision: (“Muslims expect a certain kind of behavior from a Jewish businessman”). Other respondents admitted that they occasionally concealed their Jewish identity or affiliation to a Jewish employer (“It can become awkward”; “I don’t want to be judged”). Business tensions could also harden boundaries, where ethnic closure and mutually held stereotypes have played a role in the local affairs of the Bahnhofsviertel.

Established Muslim residents knew precisely who every house in the area belonged to. During a neighborhood walk, one interlocutor, facing a building on Münchener Straße, said: “This is also Jewish. They own around 80 percent of the property in the Bahnhofsviertel.” Another network member linked the success of Jewish landlords to their social capital: “Jews all know each other, but they also all know me,” before he proudly recounted the names of Jewish-owned real-estate companies and politicians. While there was agreement about the substantive Jewish ownership in my sample, the moral assessment of these landlords could range from their being “criminals” and “heartless investors” to “trustworthy,” “[religiously] observant like us,” or “father-like figures” who “never increased the rent.”<sup>6</sup>

The discourse of a territorial takeover, discussed earlier as a strategy of external boundary closure, has also been employed by some of my Jewish interlocutors regarding the arrival of Muslim labor migrants: “In the 1950s and 1960s, there were only Jewish shops and pubs and those of established Germans. Every second shop was Jewish. Then the Turks moved in, and the Jews slowly left the neighborhood.” Similarly, during a group discussion, Noah joked, “When the Turks opened their shops, the mess started.” His long-term friend Emre replied, “It’s always the Turks fault.” Noah then explained, “This building had the last German shop, a fish restaurant, but now it’s foreign.” Emre, who felt somewhat confronted by Noah’s comment, responded with some irony: “Always these Kanaken [a racial slur for people with roots from the Middle East, Northern Africa, and the Balkans].” In these moments, there was a sense of nostalgia among my Jewish interlocutors for a time before Muslims became a dominant presence in the Bahnhofsviertel. This manifested itself in certain racialized descriptions, such as of the lack of white women or German shops and restaurants there (“Only doner kebab shops now”), as well as of negative cultural change.

### Transnational Boundary Closure

Despite local assurances that Jewish-Muslim relations and boundaries remain unaffected and open in the Bahnhofsviertel during recurring episodes of the Israel-

<sup>6</sup>The long-standing debate about Jewish landlords in Frankfurt is not specific to Muslims, but similar to the discourse of a territorial takeover that has been adopted from the wider German society. This could already be observed during the controversy around Rainer Fassbinders’ 1985 play, “*The Trash, the City and the Death*,” in Frankfurt, which featured a wealthy and reckless Jewish real-estate investor based on Ignatz Bubis, the Chairman of Frankfurt’s Jewish community and President of the Central Jewish Council. Bubis commented on the play: “Yes, I do speculate.... Although there are Persian, Christian and Jewish real-estate investors in Frankfurt ... only the Jew is singled out as the symbolic representative of capitalism” (Hank 2013b).

Palestine conflict and other transnational events, my Jewish interlocutors expressed a degree of uncertainty: “We don’t know what happens in the mosques”; or “I have heard rumors that in some corners of the Bahnhofsviertel, antisemitic messages are promoted, but generally it’s a place where it all works well.” In this context Yitzhak argued, “Today, I wouldn’t dare to go inside [the mosque] anymore, especially with what the *hoca* [imam] is preaching these days. All this anti-Jewish propaganda funded by Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Now these young aggressive Muslims don’t want to work anymore and listen to people like Mesut Ozil,<sup>7</sup> who says that he is Turkish and not German anymore.” Yitzhak himself called me out once: “I am a Jew; don’t call me a German.” He personally admires what he called “Turkish pride, which stems for Atatürk, but under Erdoğan it became too extreme [*gekippt*].”

This boundary contraction through transnational discourses is further contextualized in the following statement by Yitzhak: “Anytime between the 1970s and 1990s, Muslims and Jews lived together nicely in the Bahnhofsviertel. There were no issues [*Befindlichkeiten*] like today. The difference is like day and night.” He also recalled that, in the 1980s and 1990s, “you wouldn’t see women wearing a veil in the Bahnhofsviertel, except those grandmother-like figures with their colorful, traditional veils. But this was tradition and had little to do with Islam. Now religion has returned, but back then, ‘a Jew’ or ‘a Muslim’ was not a very dominant category.” Yitzhak essentially described the period prior to 9/11 as more conducive to creating and maintaining blurred boundaries without political polarization or mutual suspicion. However the dominant sentiment of the Bahnhofsviertel as a safe space seems to have remained intact even after 7 October 2023. This attests to the resilience of the neighborhood, while the main threat is from outside, a view I heard in conversations between Jewish and Muslims residents at the local Iftar celebration in April 2024.

## Conclusion

This article has shown how some Jews and Muslims living in Frankfurt’s Bahnhofsviertel have blurred and partially overcome symbolic boundaries by reducing the importance of ethnicity (culture, religion), and emphasizing other principles and identifiers instead. That has been accomplished through a focus on joint-minority identity and victimhood discourses, a sense of local community, and multi-ethnic friendship and business networks, but also through discourses of universalism about humanity, the social cohesion of past empires, and notions of religious conviviality in previous centuries. Bahnhofsviertel-based actors also tried to cross Jewish-Muslim boundaries by learning the language, codes, and habits of the Other, which was associated with upward mobility, conviviality, and good business practice. This, as illustrated in the example of the “Yiddish speaking Muslims,” could result in a remarkable degree of boundary crossing and intergenerational boundary blurring.

Drawing on Elias and Scotson’s (1994[1965]) insider-outsider configurations, this analysis has shown how these long-term Jewish-Muslim networks could also seal off boundaries against newcomer populations through discourses of territorial takeover and of maintaining the moral order to protect their privileges and past achievements.

<sup>7</sup>Mesut Özil, a German footballer, resigned from the national team in July 2018 due to alleged discrimination. During heated debates that preoccupied and polarized the public discourse, the loyalty and patriotism of Özil and Germans with Turkish backgrounds were questioned.



I have further shown how such boundary closures work through conservative gender and anti-liberal discourses. What I observed constitutes a historical change from previous, convivial boundary work compared to, for instance, the cosmopolitan networks of Jewish-Muslim interfaith pioneers in interwar Berlin, which seem to have been more inclusive (Baer 2020; Jonker 2020). My investigation further documented internal boundary closures within the observed networks themselves, which were associated with class differences, transnational tensions, political polarization, and stereotypes. Attempts at boundary crossing and blurring were also linked to social costs, sanctions, and backlashes associated with fears of betrayal and abandonments of cultural heritage.

Informed by historical accounts of Jewish-Muslim interactions in interwar Germany, and by ethnographically uncovering the forgotten urban narratives of Jewish-Muslim encounters and friendship networks from the 1970s onward, this article has demonstrated that within Jewish-Muslim encounters certain processes of boundary closure, crossing, and blurring have been ongoing and relatively constant for a long time. Hence, Jewish-Muslim boundary work, involving historical comparisons, Holocaust-related knowledge and empathy, religious communalities, or joint minority experiences has never been exclusive to elites or religious leaders in formal settings. In fact, the grassroots cooperation and Jewish-Muslim boundary work in marginalized areas such as the Bahnhofsviertel preceded formal and post-9/11 interfaith and intercultural dialogues by several decades, displaying robust ways of communication, long-term conviviality, and tolerance of ambiguities.

Moreover, the recent academic attempts to combine research on urban diversity with boundary studies find things playing out differently in dissimilar national frameworks (Wessendorf 2020). While one may assume that there are resonances between the French and German contexts regarding boundary work in commercial activities and sites of friendship within minority discourses, a deeper comparison finds interesting analytical distinctions. In France, Jewish-Muslim boundary work happens predominately along shared ethnic boundaries such as Maghrebi minority spaces and a collective sense of transnational North African-ness that transcends religious identification and in so doing blurs boundaries between Jews and Muslims (Everett 2020). Such mono-ethnic boundary work and cooperation is seldom feasible in Germany due to the different histories of migration of diverse Jewish and Muslim ethnicities. Research on the German context contributes to this discussion regarding boundary work in multi-ethnic Jewish-Muslim milieus, which includes discourses of the religious Other, historical knowledge, and multi-ethnic localism, as well as universalism.

While religious identifications and bright boundaries have become more prominent via national-level discourses, and have been analytically understood as divisive, in particular between Jews and Muslims since the early 2000s or after 7 October 2023, my study of this locally immersive neighborhood has produced mixed results: First, religion is not always the dominant reference to ascribe Jewishness or Muslimness, and ethnic and other local signifiers can be more important. Second, religious discourses and practices between the two communities produced relatively soft boundaries and a form of social capital with positive connotations. Third, using Elias and Scotson's terms (1994[1965]), established Jewish-Muslim network members have sometimes employed bright boundary framings and boundary closures to exclude newcomers, which breaks up static Jewish and Muslim categories.

At the local level, symbolic boundaries were part of everyday conversations between Jews and Muslims in the Bahnhofsviertel, as manifested in language-crossing and exchanges across religious and cultural boundaries. In this context, ethnic boundaries became constitutive factors and were maintained within the Jewish-Muslim friendship networks, despite temporal blurring, crossing, and questioning. Through several decades of this dynamic and situational boundary work, ethnicity, culture, and religion rarely became major sources of conflict within the micro-cosmos of the Bahnhofsviertel, despite macro-level polarization around Jewish-Muslim antagonism and transnational conflicts, including after 7 October 2023.

Pioneers of the Jewish-Muslim networks, such as Yitzhak and Ahmet, did not necessarily know about or dislike the new generation of Jewish and Muslim entrepreneurs who had recently arrived or emerged in the Bahnhofsviertel, including some of their own children, who proactively blurred boundaries by addressing themes of Jewish-Muslim conviviality in their products, culinary fusions, music, and intercultural events. This development is largely associated with gentrification, a top-down cultural policy that is detached from grassroots realities, but it is also part of the legacy of the neighborhood's long-term Jewish-Muslim networks. Today, the first- and second-generation Jews and Muslims after 1945 are remembered within Germany's public sphere as passive, inward-looking, and unconstructive (especially regarding progress in Jewish-Muslim relations). Policy and media discourses pay attention to new (German-born) generations of post-migrant identity influencers and intercultural activism. Within this narrow framework, the discovery of the intergenerational boundary transmission of Jewish-Muslim themes and forgotten stories of neighborhood conviviality since the 1970s is a significant insight. It returns some dignity and recognition to these early intercultural and interreligious pioneers and anti-heroes of a bottom-up, long-term, and vernacular Jewish-Muslim dialogue.

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