Universitätsverlag Potsdam

Article published in:

PaRDeS
JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES IN GERMANY

INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN
JEWISH STUDIES AND HABSBURG STUDIES

(2023) No. 29
UNIVERSITÄTSVERLAG POTSDAM
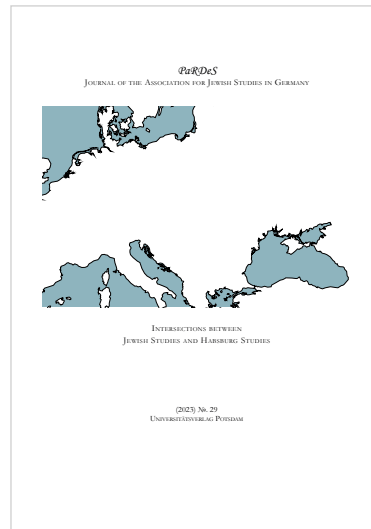
Blurring the Boundaries of Jewishness: Exploring Jewish-non-Jewish Neighborliness and Similarity

by Klaus Hödl

Abstract

In this essay I argue that while research in Jewish studies over the last several decades has done much to erode the historical narrative of Jewish/non-Jewish separation and detachment, it has also raised various questions pertaining to the outcome of Jewish/non-Jewish interactions and coexistence as well as the contours of Jewish difference. I contend that employing the concepts of conviviality, ethnic/religious/national indifference, and similarity will greatly facilitate answering these questions.

1   Current State of Jewish Historiography

Until well into the late 20th century, and with few exceptions, historians of Jewish history maintained the view that over long stretches of the past, the greater part of Ashkenazic Jews in Europe had been largely isolated, both culturally and socially, from the non-Jewish environments in which they lived. Contacts between Jews and non-Jews, according to this line of thinking, were restricted primarily to professional activities.[1] It was only in the late 1970s that a new generation of Jewish studies scholars began to question the historiographical narrative that insisted on Jewish-non-Jewish separation.[2] Since

---

[1]   Jacob Katz, *Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle Ages* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 22.

[2]   See Jacob Goldberg, "Poles and Jews in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Rejection and Acceptance," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 22 (1974): 248–282, here 259; Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Francesca Bregoli, "Introduction. Connecting Histories: Jews and Their Others in Early Modern Europe," in *Connecting Histories. Jews and Their Others in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Francesca Bregoli and David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 1–19, here 10. Scholarly focus on Jewish and non-Jewish connectedness derived from

the development of this competing narrative, a consensus has emerged among scholars that relationships between Jews and non-Jews were shaped by frequent, sometimes close, contacts over long phases of their history.[3] These scholars thus largely contend that research on Jews should also include their interdependencies with non-Jews.[4]

The work of numerous scholars in Jewish studies focusing their attention on interactions between Jews and non-Jews has not only qualified, but also in many cases corrected the narrative that portrayed Jews and non-Jews as living culturally and socially separated from one another.[5] In the course of their work, researchers have faced various questions. Two sets of questions appear to be of particular relevance:

(1) How did contacts between Jews and non-Jews influence their mutual relations? Did these contacts contribute to revising prejudices that non-Jews held against Jews (or vice versa)? Or did the proximity between the two accelerate the rise of antisemitic stereotypes?

(2) How can we circumscribe (non-religious) Jewishness in the face of manifold Jewish-non-Jewish similarities? What is distinct about Jewishness? What actually separates Jewishness from non-Jewishness?

I contend that these questions have not yet been satisfactorily answered, thereby reducing the innovative strength of the new historiographical focus

---

historiography's – and, with some delay, Jewish studies' – turn to everyday history and microhistory. See Andrew I. Port, "History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences,* ed. James D. Wright, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2015), 108–13, here 111. Francesca Trivellato, "Microhistoria/Microhistoire/Microhistory," *French Politics, Culture & Society* 33:1 (2015): 122–134, here 123.

[3] See Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

[4] See Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

[5] See Maria Cieśla, "Jewish Shtetl or Christian Town? The Jews in Small Towns in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 17th and 18th Centuries," in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context,* eds. Alina Gromova, Felix Heinert, and Sebastian Voigt (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), 63–81; Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in Post-Reformation Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66–67; Daniel J. Schroeter, "The Changing Landscape in Muslim-Jewish Relations in the Modern Middle East and North Africa," in *Modernity, Minority, and the Public Sphere: Jews and Christians in the Middle East,* eds. S. R. Goldstein-Sabbah and H. L. Murre-van den Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 39–67.

outlined above. I see the reason for this lacuna as lying primarily in historians' emphasis on Jewish-non-Jewish differences instead of commonalities, and consequently their categorization of Jews and non-Jews as two distinct social/cultural/religious entities. Rectifying this shortcoming necessitates the employment of methodological approaches that shift scholars' perspective from Jewish-non-Jewish distinctness to their interrelatedness.

In the following pages, I elaborate on a few approaches. Instead of providing answers to the questions discussed above, I expand on methodological tools, the use of which I consider eminently promising for adequately addressing the questions. Some of the approaches are also indicative of the fruitful rapport between Jewish studies and Habsburg studies. Others, such as the concept of *conviviality,* allow not only for an analysis of Jewish and non-Jewish neighborliness, but also demonstrate how we can productively investigate the coexistence of various ethnic/cultural group, as it was the case in the Habsburg monarchy.

2   What Fosters Jewish and Non-Jewish Neighborliness?

Historians have dealt with the first set of questions, concerning contacts between Jews and non-Jews, from different angles.[6] One of the central endeavors of their work has been to explain why non-Jews who had good neighborly relationships with Jews sometimes committed acts of violence against their neighbors at certain historical moments, robbing and sometimes even murdering them.[7] Pertinent research has without doubt raised our awareness of the dynamics and intricacies of Jewish/non-Jewish closeness, but it has, on the other hand, scarcely augmented our understanding of the preconditions of this proximity. I contend, however, that a more convincing analysis of research findings, resulting in a more thorough comprehension of practices facilitating Jewish/non-Jewish neighborliness, is key to answering this first set of questions.

---

[6]   See Eugene M. Avrutin, "Jewish Neighbourly Relations and Imperial Russian Legal Culture," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 9:1 (2010): 1–16; Glenn Dynner, *Yankel's Tavern Jews, Liquor, and Life in the Kingdom of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[7]   See Jeffrey S. Kopstein and Jason Wittenberg, *Intimate Violence: Anti-Jewish Pogroms on the Eve of the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbours: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland, 1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

I propose a two-step approach to this issue. In the first step, researchers would be called upon to theorize and provide reasons for the absence of anti-Jewish aggression and violence in a given locale, with the objective of ascertaining whether this absence was due to agreeable, maybe even cordial relations between Jews and non-Jews, or to a particular political regime that kept anti-Jewish tensions and enmity at bay. The analytical instrument to be used for such an investigation has to a large extent been developed and validated by scholars in Habsburg studies, who have worked on interethnic relations in multiethnic East-Central Europe in the late 19th century, which is often framed as a period of acute nationalism. By investigating everyday experiences of its ethnically diverse population, these scholars have determined that ordinary people hardly paid attention to their neighbors', co-workers', or acquaintances' national identification. Whereas nationalistic discourses strongly influenced contemporary politics and scholarly research, they had only little impact on the mindset of common people. There seemed to be a sharp divide between the culture of the written word, i.e., organized political campaigns and academic debates, and the logic of day-to-day life.[8]

Due to these intriguing findings, *indifference,* be it national, religious, cultural, or other, quickly became an important analytical tool for research on intercultural encounters in humanities and social sciences. Jewish studies scholars, however, have been hesitant to employ it in their work. A major

---

[8]   Pieter M. Judson, "Inventing Germans: Class, Nationality and Colonial Fantasy at the Margins of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Social Analysis* 33 (1993): 47–67, here 53; Pieter M. Judson and Tara Zahra, "Introduction," *Austrian History Yearbook* 43 (2012): 21–27; Tara Zahra, "Imagined Non-Communities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69:1 (2020): 93–119; Lucean N. Leustean, "Eastern Orthodoxy and National Indifference in Habsburg Bukovina, 1774–1873," *Nations and Nationalism* 24:4 (2018): 1117–1141; James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008). The use of national indifference, both as an analytical instrument and descriptive category, has not been limited to historical studies pertaining to the Habsburg monarchy, but has been applied to historical research on other parts of Europe and beyond as well. See for example Maarten van Ginderachter and Jon Fox, eds., *National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019); Catherine Gibson and Irina Paert, "Apostasy in the Baltic Provinces: Religious and National Indifference in Imperial Russia," *Past & Present* 255:1 (2022): 233–278; Karsten Brüggemann and Katja Wezel, "Nationally Indifferent or Ardent Nationalists? On the Options for Being German in Russia's Baltic Provinces, 1905–17," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* XX:1 (2019): 39–62; Leone Musgrave, "Mountain Alternatives in Eurasia's Age of Revolution: North Caucasia's 'National Indifference', Anticolonial Islam, and 'Greater War', 1917–18," *Revolutionary Russia* 32:1 (2019): 59–85.

reason for their tentativeness may lie in *indifference's* oblivion of "othering". The use of *indifference* in exploring Jewish history and culture by default disvalues the notion of Jewish particularity, which has been an idea central to the field of Jewish studies.

While the deployment of the category of *indifference* enables scholars to determine people's disregard of their fellow citizens' sense of belonging, it does not allow them to assess the practices that brought about such casualness and, consequently, Jewish/non-Jewish neighborliness. For this purpose, researchers must, in the second step, draw upon another methodological concept. The concept that I consider important in this context and wish to introduce in this essay is *conviviality,* which is usually attributed to Paul Gilroy's 2004 *After Empire.*[9] In the years that followed its publication, the concept has been employed and further developed by sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers. As is the case with *indifference, conviviality* – as a theoretical concept – has not yet gained purchase in Jewish studies.

In general, the term conviviality refers to the largely peaceful coexistence of people. As a theoretical concept, which has central relevance for this essay, *conviviality* is useful for examining how different cultural groups shape their cooperation with one another.[10] Scholars using this concept are careful not to ignore resulting tensions or even confrontations that sometimes arise because of intercultural/-ethnic contact. They see these tensions, however, as secondary to the activities that create a feeling of connection among people. Nor does *conviviality* refer to processes of social integration, which usually implies a tendency to efface cultural differences, or to the maintenance of a multiculturalism whose starting point is the borders – and thus differences – between cultural groups. *Conviviality* makes possible an innovative perspective on intercultural relationships, while also providing information on how a community can emerge from an ethnically heterogeneous environment.[11] *Conviviality* is not about dealing with cultural differences, but rather about analyzing a largely conflict-free interethnic coexistence, in this case

---

[9]   Paul Gilroy, *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

[10]   Amanda Wise and Greg Noble, "Convivialities: A Comparison," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 37:5 (2016): 423–431, here 423.

[11]   Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham, "Conviviality in everyday multiculturalism: Some brief comparisons between Singapore and Sydney," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 17:4 (2014): 406–430, here 407.

regarding practices facilitating Jewish/non-Jewish neighborliness. Although there is consensus among researchers that these practices do not stem from planned and organized efforts to avoid conflict, it is not yet entirely clear what other activities are also possibly at work.[12] Inferring from their significance to people's everyday life and their feeling of inter-cultural connectedness, I argue that these practices primarily have to do with daily habits and related activities.[13]

Evidence of such habits as well as attitudes of (religious/ethnic) indifference and Jewish/non-Jewish conviviality can be found in criminal records. Interrogation protocols, for example, often abound with references to inter-ethnic interactions. Other sources to be reviewed in this context are ego documents, such as diaries, memoirs, letters, and similar notes. They usually contain manifold indications and descriptions of Jewish/non-Jewish everyday encounters.

3   How Are We to Define Jewishness?

As mentioned, recent historical analyses of contacts between Jews and non-Jews revised the view of a largely closed Jewish world. These studies also revealed extensive cultural commonalities between Jews and non-Jews. These commonalities tend to render indeterminate the contours of Jewish difference (beyond the realm of religion) and raise the question: how are we to define and describe Jewishness, despite the numerous Jewish/non-Jewish cultural overlaps and interdependencies?

In recent years, numerous historians have addressed this issue from a variety of perspectives and have arrived at different conclusions. These conclusions range from Debra Kaplan's thesis that, despite innumerable interactions between Jews and non-Jews, boundaries between them (and thus a Jewish distinctness) continued to exist,[14] to the concept of Jewish connectedness, which is currently receiving increased scholarly attention in Jewish

---

[12]   On this aspect see Eric Laurier, Angus Whyte, and Kathy Buckner, "Neighbouring as an Occasioned Activity," *Space & Culture* 5:4 (2002): 346–367.

[13]   Sivamohan Valluvan, "Conviviality and Multiculture: A Post-integration Sociology of Multi-ethnic Interaction," *Young* 24:3 (2016): 204–221, here 207. In this context, individual, albeit communally experienced, events do not play a role.

[14]   Debra Kaplan, "Jews in Early Modern Europe: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *History Compass* 10:2 (2012): 191–206, here 196.

studies.[15] As diverse as these various approaches are, almost all of them have one thing in common: they assume a binary between Jewish and non-Jewish. Only a handful of scholars has questioned this dichotomous perspective, and even fewer have theorized the reason for its prevalence. One of them, the historian Helmut Walser Smith, has given a plausible explanation: In a 1999 study on the relationships between Jewish cattle traders and non-Jewish farmers, Smith points to a lack of theoretical approaches that allow us to recognize both Jewish/non-Jewish similarities *and* distinctness.[16]

Since the publication of Smith's article, almost a quarter-century has passed and various attempts to dissipate the tension between Jewish/non-Jewish commonalities and the notion of Jewish distinctness or particularity have been made. But, as far as I am aware, only one analytical approach has proven successful in bypassing dichotomous categorizations of Jewish and non-Jewish, and thereby reconciling Jewish difference with Jewish/non-Jewish similarities. Elisheva Baumgarten has promoted this approach. She achieves this step by conceiving of Jewish/non-Jewish not as strict opposites, but as "two continuums."[17] This is to say that Jewish/non-Jewish differences must not be considered dichotomous, but rather they bear a relation to each other.[18] As a result of her pioneering work, we are no longer in a position in which we must contend with the question of how to preserve Jewish particularity in the face of multiple similarities.

I consider Baumgarten's approach seminal and groundbreaking, but I also think that slight modifications of her theory would prove fruitful. While Baumgarten, as her use of the term "minority" seems to suggest, employs Jewish/non-Jewish distinctions as a point of departure in her analysis,[19] I would focus first and foremost on historical evidence of common ground between Jews and non-Jews and outline Jewish distinctiveness only within the context

---

[15]   Francesca Bregoli and David Ruderman, eds, *Connecting Histories. Jews and Their Others in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

[16]   Helmut Walter Smith, "The Discourse of Usury: Relations between Christians and Jews in the German Countryside, 1880–1914," *Central European History* 32:3 (1999): 255–276, here 270.

[17]   Elisheva Baumgarten, "'A separate people'? Some directions for comparative research on medieval women," *Journal of Medieval History* 34:2 (2008): 212–228, here 214.

[18]   In clarifying her argument, Baumgarten alludes to medieval Jewish-Christian polemics which, despite their mutual denigration and emphasis on the respective other's contrariness, frequently unfolded on the basis of shared ideas and concepts.

[19]   On the problematic nature of the term minority, see Gershon Hundert, "An Advantage to Peculiarity? The Case of the Polish Commonwealth," *AJS Review* 6 (1981): 21–38.

of mutual Jewish and non-Jewish commonalities.[20] I contend that in this way it is possible to show both Jewish difference as well as Jewish/non-Jewish connections more comprehensively and more clearly. For this purpose, I draw upon *similarity,*[21] a model that has gained prominence lately as the result of interdisciplinary research.

Although researchers in Jewish studies, admittedly with few exceptions,[22] have so far ignored it, similarity is anything but a new concept. Scholars, particularly in the fields of philosophy and literary studies, have employed it to great success since the 1990s. The potential of similarity as a pivotal analytical instrument for investigating Jewish/non-Jewish relations as they occurred in the past, I argue, lies in its replacement of the dichotomy of identity and difference with the category of "both-and-one." Similarity thus provides an eminent framework for exploring and identifying experiences of connection between different people or groups without neglecting differences.[23] These differences, however, are gradual rather than fundamental, i.e., they do not constitute a binary.[24] Thinking in terms of similarity then entails a new ap-

---

[20] The recollections of Anna Robert, who was born in Vienna on July 31, 1909, exemplify what I mean by outlining Jewish distinctiveness within the context of feelings of mutual Jewish and non-Jewish similarities. Anna Robert recounts that when she was a child, her parents, although Jewish, always celebrated Christmas. They even made great effort to obtain a Christmas tree during the deprivation-stricken years of World War I, when such a luxury was very rare in Vienna. As Anna Robert writes in her memoirs, the major reason for their efforts was Mizzi, the non-Jewish maid, who was treated as if she were Anna's sibling. (Anna Robert, In: LBI (Memoirs), ME 899.) In this case, Jewish/non-Jewish (religious) differences were emphasized in a performative way. Yet, they did not prevail over people's sense of connectedness. The differences played out only within the framework of felt togetherness.

[21] Anil Bhatti, "Language, Heterogeneities, Homogeneities and Similarity: Some Reflections," in *Impure Languages, Linguistic and Literary Hybridity in Contemporary Cultures,* eds. Rama Kant Agnihotri, Claudia Benthien, and Tatiana Oranskaia (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2015), 3–28.

[22] See Susanne Korbel, "Spaces of Gendered Jewish and Non-Jewish Encounters: Bed Lodgers, Domestic Workers, and Sex Workers in Vienna, 1900–1930," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 65 (2020): 88–104; Tim Corbett, Caroline Kita, Susanne Korbel, Klaus Hödl, and Dirk Rupnow, "Migration, Integration, and Assimilation: Reassessing Key Concepts in (Jewish) Austrian History," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 54:1 (2021): 1–28; Klaus Hödl, "Defying The Binary: Relationships Between Jews And Non-Jews," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 13:1 (2020): 107–124.

[23] Anil Bhatti, "Plurikulturalität," in *Habsburg neu denken: Vielfalt und Ambivalenz in Zentraleuropa. 30 kulturwissenschaftliche Stichworte,* eds. Johannes Feichtinger and Heidemarie Uhl (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2016), 171–80.

[24] Albrecht Koschorke, "Similarity: Valences of a post-colonial concept," in *Similarity: A Paradigm for Culture Theory,* eds. Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich (New Delhi: Tulika Book, 2018), 25–34, here 26.

proach to and a new understanding of interethnic interactions, as it orients us toward intercultural togetherness rather than borders and demarcations. Similarity is not prescribed, but is rather constituted in the process of manifold encounters and contacts.[25]

Despite similarity's excellent applicability for highlighting perceptions of togetherness between Jews and non-Jews while at the same time determining Jewish distinction, historians working with the concept will likely encounter some difficulties. The first of these difficulties is related to the property of people's feelings of intercultural/-ethnic connectivity. According to theoreticians of the similarity model, they represent situational experiences, i.e., they are "contingent, ephemeral, unpredictable, [...]."[26] Their transitory nature implies, however, that feelings of connectedness vary depending on a particular situation and in principle can also shift from one moment to the next. This understanding of the concept assumes that people possess an extraordinary capacity for change and adaptation. This assumption then contradicts a large number of studies that argue that people achieve through socialization a more or less stable sense of self that is not in constant flux.[27]

A second problem that arises when employing the concept of similarity has to do with the fact that although the model describes experiences of connectedness between one person and other people or groups, it does not currently

[25] I argue that an awareness of common bond, that in certain situations eclipses religious/ethnic boundaries, can be found throughout history. See for example Victoria Hoyle, "The Bonds that Bind: Moneylending between Anglo-Jewish and Christian Women in the Plea Rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews, 1218–1280," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 119–29; Monica H. Green, "Conversing with the Minority: Relations among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Women in the High Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 105–18; Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "The Marketplace in Balta: Aspects of Economic and Cultural Life," *East European Jewish Affairs* 37 (2007): 277–298, here 292; Glenn Dynner, "Legal Fictions: The Survival of Rural Jewish Tavernkeeping in the Kingdom of Poland," *Jewish Social Studies* 16:2 (2010): 28–66, here 52. Thomas Cohen, "The Death of Abramo of Montecosaro," *Jewish History* 19:3/4 (2005): 278–279; Ariel Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria* (London, 1996); Ulrich Baumann, "'Gell, Raphael, wir gehen heim, mir wo'n heim': Heimaten, Heimat, Idylle, Gewalt: Ein Rückblick auf die Beziehungen von Christen und Juden in Südbadischen Landgemeinden," *Allmende* 17:54/55 (1997): 203–227, here 208.
[26] Aleida Assmann, "Ähnlichkeit als Performanz: Ein neuer Zugang zu Identitätskonstruktionen und Empathie-Regimen," in *Similarity: A Paradigm for Culture Theory,* eds. Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich (New Delhi: Tulika Book, 2018), 159–177, here 168.
[27] Gill Valentine and Joanna Sadgrove, "Biographical Narratives of Encounter: The Significance of Mobility and Emplacement in Shaping Attitudes Towards Difference," *Urban Studies* 51:9 (2014): 249–263, here 259.

account for the reasons why these experiences took place, nor does it examine any possible effects on the relationships of these people. As a result, similarity represents a largely descriptive category that is not useful in elevating the analysis of relationships between Jews and non-Jews from the level of pure description to the level of explanation.

A final shortcoming of the similarity model relates to the question of how we are to ascertain perceptions of similarity. If people do not explicitly articulate their experience of commonality with one or more other people, an outside observer can scarcely access this experience. Historians can usually only garner access to such an experience if it is recorded in ego documents, such as diaries, memoirs, and similar sources. However, the availability of these documents is very limited, and they disclose next to nothing about individuals who find it too difficult to articulate themselves in writing.

To make similarity more accessible, I suggest stripping it of its ephemeral and strictly subjective character and instead making it legible in observable processes. By this, I mean practices such as exercising solidarity,[28] cultivating friendship,[29] or articulating trust between Jews and non-Jews.[30] In order to

---

[28]   Let us consider as a concrete example a skiing holiday that Anna Robert (see footnote 21) participated in. She was a member of a private sports club to which both Jews and non-Jews belonged. At one point, this club organized an excursion to Salzburg to take skiing lessons. Because of the antisemitic atmosphere that prevailed at the resort, the group ended their vacation earlier than planned. The non-Jewish participants thus expressed their solidarity with their Jewish friends and traveled with them back to Vienna. See Anna Robert. In: LBI (Memoirs), ME 899.

[29]   The historian Daniel Jütte describes a remarkable example of Jewish/non-Jewish friendship, in which both parties put feelings of togetherness with members of one's own ethnic or religious group aside in favor of crossing such ostensible boundaries. See Daniel Jütte, "Interfaith Encounters between Jews and Christians in the Early Modern Period and Beyond: Toward a Framework," *American Historical Society* 118:2 (2013): 378–400.

[30]   In a study on Jewish peddlers in the U.S., Hasia R. Diner draws attention to how their encounters with non-Jewish clients "erased linguistic, national, and religious differences as barriers to human interaction. Over time, the peddlers ceased to be alien, as customers noticed what they and the peddlers had in common." The peddlers befriended their non-Jewish customers, spent their nights in the houses of their clients, and they finally developed mutual trust and intimacy. See Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 86. An example of Jewish/non-Jewish similarity set in an everyday situation within a community has been described by Alice Gruenwald, a Viennese-born Jewish woman. In her memoirs, she remembers her grandparents in Mistelbach, a small town of 6,000 inhabitants in Lower Austria. It was home to forty Jewish families who, according to Alice Gruenwald, lived in good relations with their non-Jewish neighbors. When her grandparents celebrated their 50th wed-

serve as evidence of similarity, however, these practices must, when carried out, express a greater connection between people of different ethnic backgrounds, in the particular case between Jews and non-Jews, than between members of the same ethnic group. I wish to illustrate my proposition by referring to the memoirs of the Viennese-born Jewish woman Helen Blank, who survived the Shoah by emigrating to the U.S. shortly before the beginning of World War II. She started her escape at the Viennese railway station where Jewish as well as non-Jewish friends bid her farewell. The latter thus publicly displayed affective ties to Helen at a time when doing so was utmost inopportune, probably even perilous. Personal interethnic bonds thus prevailed over the fear of potential sanctions.[31]

4   Summary

In the last third of the 20th century, a growing number of scholars in Jewish studies turned to micro-historical approaches in their research on Jewish life in the past. Their methodological orientation to everyday life not only revised notions of Jews' societal isolation and separation from non-Jews, but also raised various questions which, as I understand them, have not yet been sufficiently answered. I consider two of these questions, namely: 1) whether and to what extent encounters between Jews and non-Jews promoted a sense of interconnectedness and 2) what constitutes a non-religious Jewish self-understanding in terms of their cultural overlaps, particularly relevant for the field of Jewish studies. I strongly contend that answering these two questions can be greatly facilitated by applying the concepts of *conviviality* and *similarity*. Whereas *conviviality* primarily explores practices that deemphasize fixed categories of belonging and thus allow for an intercultural coexistence, in this case of Jews and non-Jews, *similarity* helps us ascertain experiences of connectedness between them.

ding anniversary, a large part of the non-Jewish population participated in the festivities, lined the way to and crowded the synagogue as well as her grandparents' house. In such moments, the awareness of Jewish and non-Jewish distinctiveness was clearly secondary to a shared sense of community and togetherness. (Alice Gruenwald. In: LBI (Memoirs), ME 897).

[31]   See Helen Blank, Growing up in Vienna. In: LBI (Memoirs), ME 1299. I wish to emphasize at this point that citing Helen Blank's experiences solely serves to illustrate Jewish and non-Jewish similarity under dire conditions. They are exceptional rather than representative of Jewish/non-Jewish relations during the reign of National Socialism in Austria.

Using *conviviality* and *similarity* for analyzing Jewish and non-Jewish ties deconstructs preconceived ideas of Jewishness and questions presumed boundaries between the two groups. Such work is of utmost pertinence to the field of Habsburg studies in that it paradigmatically demonstrates how relations between cultural groups can be investigated without drawing upon contested, maybe even questionable, analytical notions, such as minority/ majority, integration, acculturation, ethnic belonging, and others.