

Caroline Cormier

# Putting History in Its Place

The Spatial Exclusion of Jews in Nazi Berlin, 1933–1939

## Abstract

Drawing on over 150 oral history testimonies and other personal memory sources, this article illustrates how accounts from Holocaust survivors can shed new light on the ways that spaces of everyday life changed for Berlin's Jews under the Nazi regime. By targeting these spaces and slowly demarcating them as 'Aryan' or 'Jewish', the Nazi regime defined who belonged – and who did not – to the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Recalling the changes to their immediate spatial environments, including their homes and neighbourhoods, Holocaust survivors emphasise that these transformations were highly visible processes, manifested in everyday spaces across Berlin. By engaging with the complex postwar afterlives of these spaces, scholars can put history in its contemporary place – in the neighbourhoods, on the streets, and outside the front doors of apartments in the city many German Jews once considered home.

## Introduction

The building at Schwäbische Straße 3 looks identical to dozens of other grey apartment buildings in the Bavarian Quarter of Berlin. Inside the front entrance hangs a *Stiller Portier* – a so-called silent porter: a house directory that could at one time be found in the entranceway of almost every Berlin apartment building.<sup>1</sup> A simple panel with a wooden frame lists the names of the building's Jewish residents expelled during the Nazi era: Hedwig Bachmann, Alfred Fürst, Karl Gotthelf, Sofie Guttmann, Ida Lewinsky, Emma Lewy, Marianne Lewy, Jaque Nahaum, Alfred Wachsmann, Jenny Wachsmann, Gerhard Winter, Else Winter, and Rudolf Winter. All thirteen were deported between 1942 and 1943 along with over 6000 other Jews from the district of Schöneberg, either to Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, Riga, or Sachsenhausen.<sup>2</sup> In 1996, two residents of the building, Gisela Storandt and Arvid Erlenmeyer, collaborated to research, fundraise, and erect this particular memorial.<sup>3</sup> The

1 The directory usually appeared behind a framed glass panel and provided information about which resident(s) could be found in which apartment. Since apartment blocks in Berlin often had a front house and several backhouses, these directories were particularly useful for directing visitors. The tradition of the silent porter largely disappeared after the electric doorbell system became commonplace in the mid-1900s.

2 Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces. Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*, Boston 2011, 206.

3 Uta Grüttner, *Schwäbische Straße 3. Bewohner gedenken ihrer deportierten jüdischen Nachbarn. Stiller Portier gegen das Vergessen*, in: *Berliner Zeitung*, 26 November 1996. Available online: <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/16785792> (22 June 2018). It should be noted that not all residents were in support of this initiative. When Storandt previously hung a version of the list of deported residents on two separate occasions, the lists disappeared just days later. Eventually another neighbour, Arvid Erlenmeyer, began to help as well, drafting a letter to circulate through the house. In the end, thirteen occupants supported the cause. In another article, journalist Jens Rübsam wrote about the various reasons that the residents supported the memorial. For instance, Erlenmeyer, whose father had been stationed with the Luftwaffe in Hungary, viewed the memorial plaque as a "a piece of atonement". Lilli Ernsthaft, a Jew who survived the war in the Jewish hospital in Berlin and returned to her old apartment after the war, stated firmly, "I believe that this only concerns the non-Jews". See Jens Rübsam, *Schweigen über die Vergangenheit*, in: *taz* am Wochenende, 23 November 1996. Available online: <http://www.taz.de/!1427059/> (22 June 2018).

silent porter memorial at Schwäbische Straße 3 is just one example of many local initiatives to mark the places where Berlin's Jews once lived.<sup>4</sup> Each of these memorials represents an attempt to reinscribe the history of these buildings and their former residents into the physical cityscape. This little-known memorial tucked away inside the entrance of Schwäbische Straße 3 stands as a physical reminder that such sites can be an important point of entry to understanding the history of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

Streets like Schwäbische Straße can be found throughout Berlin, lined with buildings that conceal lesser-known aspects of the Nazi era. Adjacent to these buildings are the everyday spaces where Jewish life in Berlin once flourished, including supermarkets, parks, cinemas, cafés, and restaurants, to name just a few. From 1933 onwards, the Nazi administration worked diligently to rescind the citizenship rights of Jews and to slowly exclude the Jewish population from the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) envisioned for the future Third Reich. They issued hundreds of laws, directives, and proclamations against Jews, many of which defined who was to be included or excluded from this new national community.<sup>6</sup> These exclusionary policies took root in everyday spaces of the city and amounted to a reversal of more than a century of Jewish integration and acculturation.<sup>7</sup>

The broader processes through which Jews were displaced from Berlin have been the subject of a number of excellent historical studies, which revealed clear links between the regime's plans for social and urban development and the persecution of the Jews.<sup>8</sup> These studies relied primarily on a wealth of Nazi-era sources to further understand the displacement of Jews under the regime. For example, the records from Albert Speer's Office of the Generalbauinspektor shed light on the official policies for the spatial reorganisation of Berlin, particularly in relation to the building of the world capital city Germania.<sup>9</sup> These collections contain documents that clearly demonstrate Nazi efforts to relocate and remove Jews from the city: maps of the city declared to be *judenrein* (free of Jews), plans for the redevelopment of Berlin, and lists of addresses of Jewish homes that were to be cleared in an effort to house 'Aryans' displaced by aerial bombing. With the official Berlin address books, Berlin's former

4 Other examples include the now famous "Stolpersteine" (stumbling stones) created by Gunther Demnig as well as Christian Boltanski's "Missing House" located on Große Hamburger Straße in the Mitte district of Berlin.

5 In fact, this quiet residential street captured the imagination of Pascale Hugues, a French news correspondent who would come to write a book about the former residents of the street, ranging from the thirteen Jewish residents who survived the Nazi regime to the secretary of the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

6 For example, in the year after Hitler came to power, a total of 319 laws and regulations were passed relating to Jews. These laws pushed Jews out of organisations, professions, and other aspects of public life and provided the basis for the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which explicitly stripped Jews of their German citizenship and all rights associated with it.

7 See Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair. Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, New York 1998. Kaplan's excellent work shows how 'ordinary Germans' played a crucial role in the processes that led Jews toward "social death" or, as she defined it, "their subjection, their excommunication from the 'legitimate social or moral community' and their relegation to a perpetual state of dishonor". Ibid, 5. The social death of Jews in Nazi Germany occurred as part of everyday interactions in everyday places, a process in which ordinary Germans regularly participated. Kaplan's work also showed the way in which German Jews attempted to adjust and navigate these new situations. My dissertation builds on this observation, showing how Jews adapted their everyday lives according to the increasing spatial constraints they faced both in their homes and neighbourhoods.

8 See for example Paul Jaskot, *Anti-Semitic Policy in Albert Speer's Plans for the Rebuilding of Berlin*, in: *The Art Bulletin* 78 (1996) 4, 622-632; Susanne Willems, *Der entsiedelte Jude. Albert Speers Wohnungsmarktpolitik für den Berliner Hauptstadtbau*, Berlin 2002.

9 See the following collections held at the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde for references: R4606 (Generalbauinspektor für die Reichshauptstadt) and R113 (Reichsstelle für Raumordnung). The Landesarchiv in Berlin also has substantial material relating to the Generalbauinspektor der Reichshauptstadt (1937-1941), which can be found in the collection entitled *Der Stadtpräsident der Reichshauptstadt Berlin* (A Pr. Br. Rep 057 Nr. 939).

residents can be traced throughout the 1930s and into the early 1940s.<sup>10</sup> Census data from 1939 makes it possible to locate the individuals and their families who lived in Nazi Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Transport lists can help determine final addresses of Jewish residents and the asset declaration forms (*Vermögenserklärung*) that Jews were forced to fill out prior to leaving their homes or being deported offer a glimpse into what was left of Jewish households.<sup>12</sup> While this is by no means a comprehensive list of available sources available to historians studying the spatial reorganisation of Berlin under the Nazi regime, these examples illustrate the mechanised and bureaucratic process of data collection and the official plans for the city's redevelopment. Most importantly, these sources clearly document how the Nazi regime sought to exclude Berlin's Jews from their homes and neighbourhoods.

Absent from these documents, however, is the voice of the individual Jew whose daily life was impacted by these spatial policies. While thousands of voices of those who were exiled from Berlin or murdered by the Nazi regime can never be recovered, there is much to be learned from existing survivor accounts about the ways Jews navigated everyday spaces during this period. Exploring the spaces that are preserved in postwar accounts of the Nazi regime can reveal places of exclusion (and sometimes inclusion) beyond those listed in official Nazi documents. Personal memory sources also demonstrate that the creation of sites of exclusion was not always intentional. For instance, Nazi parades and the appearance of the *Stürmerkasten* (more on this shortly) in the streets caused Jews to reroute their daily lives to avoid interacting with these open displays of antisemitism. In other cases, even in the earliest days of the Nazi regime, social relationships within Berlin apartment buildings began to change as many non-Jews blatantly refused to acknowledge their Jewish neighbours in the building stairwells and on the neighbourhood streets. Particularly at the beginning of the Nazi era, these were not defined as official sites of exclusion by the Nazi administration. However, excerpts from survivors' memoirs and testimonies show that these spaces were also integral to the increasing isolation of Berlin's Jewish population. Without Jewish memory sources, these spaces and the social relations that they contained might be erased from the annals of history.

This article explores how historians can make use of memory sources, particularly personal sources, including diaries, letters, memoirs, photographs, and written and oral testimonies and interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday spaces where Jews lived in Berlin between 1933 and the outbreak of the war on 1 September 1939. Using examples drawn from over 150 oral history testimonies as well as other personal sources, this article illustrates how accounts from Holocaust survivors can shed new light on the ways that the spaces of everyday life

10 The city's official address books from the years between 1799 and 1943 have been digitised by the Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin and are available online: <https://www.zlb.de/besondere-angebote/berliner-adressbuecher.html> (22 June 2018).

11 These files can be seen, along with a detailed inventory of the microfilm edition of the census, at the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), MF 466; see also United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG 14.013M, German 'Minority Census', 1938–1939.

12 Both of these sources can be found at the Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA) in Potsdam. The BLHA contains all of the asset declaration forms that were filled out by Berlin's Jews in 1941 and 1942 and submitted to the Office of the Oberfinanzpräsident, as well as the deportation lists of the 179 transports that left from Berlin beginning in October 1941.

changed for Berlin's Jews under the Nazi regime.<sup>13</sup> Focussing on the neighbourhood and the home enables historians to engage directly with the redefinition and destruction of spaces that provided a sense of belonging to many of Berlin's Jews. By targeting these spaces and slowly demarcating them as either Aryan or Jewish, the Nazi regime defined in spatial terms who belonged and who did not to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Recounting the changes to their immediate spatial environments, Holocaust survivors have emphasised that the effects of the Nazi regime and antisemitism writ large were not hidden away. They were highly visible processes that were manifested in everyday spaces across the city of Berlin. Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours alike witnessed these changes and, in some cases, non-Jews actively participated in or, at the very least, watched the spatial exclusion of their Jewish counterparts in everyday spaces, including in their apartment buildings and neighbourhoods.<sup>14</sup>

### Encountering National Socialism in the Streets

As soon as Hitler came to power on 30 January 1933, thousands of Nazi supporters took to the streets of Berlin to show their unbridled enthusiasm for the new regime. By torchlight, they marched past the Reich Chancellery, through the Brandenburg Gate, and down Unter den Linden. While the Nazi press boasted of numbers ranging anywhere between 500,000 and 700,000, more conservative estimates ranged between 20,000 and 60,000.<sup>15</sup> The next day, similar marches took place across Germany, and again in Berlin. Drawing on just one example, historian Richard Evans described how the National Socialist German Students' League organised a march that culminated in front of the Berlin Stock Exchange, which had been touted by a right-wing newspaper as "the 'Mecca' of German Jewry". Participants stood outside shouting "Juda verrecke!" (Jews perish).<sup>16</sup> These initial marches foreshadowed the displays of pomp and pageantry that came to characterise the Nazi era. After January 1933, public squares and streets were often filled with uniformed masses and red and black seas of swastika flags. These visual spectacles were also accompanied by sounds intended to reinforce Nazi ideals. Songs and speeches were central to these assemblies and were broadcast on national radio. In her work on Nazi soundscapes,

13 The oral history testimonies that form the basis of this project come from several different collections: The University of Southern California Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive; The Wiener Library of Holocaust and Genocide Studies' Association of Jewish Refugees audio-visual Holocaust Testimony Archives; Refugee Voices Project (WL-AJR/RV); Yale University's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies (FVAHT); and the Oral History Collection at the Frank and Anita Ekstein Holocaust Resource Collection at the Sarah and Chaim Neuberger Holocaust Education Centre in Toronto (OHC-CNHEC). In this paper and in my broader work on the subject, I also rely on other personal memory sources, including diaries, letters, memoirs, photographs, trial documents, and written testimonies, which shed light on the everyday spatial experiences and reflections of Jews who lived in Nazi-era Berlin.

14 Within the field of geography, there has been substantial debate about how to best define the concept of a neighbourhood. The definition that I rely on in this paper and in my dissertation follows Deborah Martin, who drew on additional literature from the field to arrive at a useful working definition: "Neighbourhoods are a particular kind of place: locations where human activity is centered upon social reproduction; or daily household activities, social interactions, and engagement with political and economic structures. Neighbourhoods derive their meaning or salience from individual or group values and attachments, which develop through daily life and interactions. Neighbourhoods, like places, are 'where everyday life is situated' [as quoted in Andrew Merrifield, *Place and Space. A Lefebvrian Reconciliation*, in: *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (1993), 522, original emphasis]". Deborah Martin, *Enacting Neighbourhood*, in: *Urban Geography* 24 (2003) 5, 361-385, here 365.

15 Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, New York 2014, 310.

16 *Ibid.*, 312.

historian Carolyn Birdsall argued that such spectacles were an effective mechanism “for reinforcing the group identity of existing party members, but also for establishing a broader social legitimation and popular participation in the projected *Volks-gemeinschaft*”.<sup>17</sup> As Nazi flags framed the main streets and antisemitism began to seep into everyday spaces, many Jews responded by adjusting their everyday spatial patterns.

One of Gerald Jayson’s first memories of the Nazi period were the massive demonstrations that often passed by his childhood home on Brunnenstraße.<sup>18</sup> “Brunnenstrasse was a main street, not like Unter den Linden, but they marched through it to get to the centre [...] enormous crowds of Nazis screaming ‘*Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer*.’ Just like a football crowd, except not in a football stadium.” As a young boy, he recalled, his parents once punished him for standing at the window watching one of these marches. When asked about the first time he became aware of antisemitism, Gerald once again pointed to the streets near his home: “I remember my parents saying that we couldn’t walk on the same sidewalk when an Aryan came. We had to step off of it.”<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere, Rudolf Leavor’s recollections emphasize how marches instilled fear in them about being in the same space as Nazi supporters:

“They [the SA and the SS] would march on the main road, quite near our house. They looked quite fierce. They had strong uniforms, boots that went up to their knees, armbands, leather belts, and possibly truncheons under their belts. They would march along, singing songs. And they would put the fear of God into me. The first, once or twice, this happened, it was an event to go and see. Later on, when they marched, I retreated into the flat and didn’t want to know. It was frightening, just to see them marching.”<sup>20</sup>

When they saw these marches, Jews often hid in doorways or alleys to avoid unnecessary confrontation.<sup>21</sup> In some cases, they even began to take new (often longer) routes to and from their destinations in an effort to avoid these kinds of demonstrations entirely.<sup>22</sup> Such examples demonstrate that Jews felt increasingly unwelcome in public spaces, how they attempted to navigate the streets after the Nazis came to power, and how this exclusion remained central to their memories of the period.

The antisemitic ideas that were integral to the Nazi agenda physically manifested themselves in the streetscape of Berlin in other ways. Many survivors recall the emergence of the so-called *Stürmerkasten* in the streets of Berlin.<sup>23</sup> The *Stürmerkasten* were public stands featuring copies of Julius Streicher’s infamous antisemitic tabloid, *Der Stürmer*, and were a vehicle for displaying antisemitism in everyday public

17 Carolyn Birdsall, *Nazi Soundscapes. Sound, Technology and Urban Space in Germany, 1933–1945*, Chicago 2012, 54.

18 While some oral history collections containing the testimonies of Holocaust survivors allow for the publication of the full names of the interviewee (e.g. the WL-AJR and the OHC-CNHEC), others seek to preserve their anonymity by using only the first name and the first initial of the interviewee’s surname to identify them (e.g. the FVAHT). In some instances, in all archives, survivors have not consented to having their full names published. I have adhered to the policies of each archive here and have respected the interviewee’s preferences for privacy where applicable.

19 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 26, Gerald Jayson.

20 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 49, Rudolf Leavor.

21 FVAHT, T-119, Gina E. Holocaust Testimony. In her testimony, Gina explained: “I saw them [the Nazis] marching and sometimes we would run into a nearby place to hide because we were afraid of them.”

22 See for example FVAHT, T-227, Janet B. Holocaust Testimony. In her account, Janet B. explained: “As a rule, when there were parades and stuff like that, we just stayed out of sight.”

23 FVAHT, T-1764, Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony, and T-4044, Leon G. Holocaust Testimony; LBI, ME 216/MM48, Ann Lewis, *Emigration* (unpublished 1988). Available online: <http://www.lbi.org/digibaec/results/?qtype=pid&term=390843> (22 June 2018).

spaces.<sup>24</sup> *Stürmerkasten* could be found all over Berlin: on street corners, at bus stops and newsstands, and in parks and marketplaces. Cases were built by local *Sturmabteilung* (SA) units and were publicized through design competitions and organized dedication ceremonies.<sup>25</sup> Issues contained vile caricatures and diatribes against the Jews and each individual page was bordered by the antisemitic slogan that the Nazis so often used: *‘Die Juden sind unser Unglück!’* (“The Jews are our misfortune!”). Later on, the paper served as a mechanism through which readers could anonymously denounce their neighbours through published letters, often including the names, home addresses, and photographs of the targeted individuals.<sup>26</sup> *Stürmerkasten* put the newspaper’s propaganda and antisemitic diatribes on display in the streets of Berlin. This was, as Dennis Showalter argues, a method by which antisemitism could reach the masses and “overcome the image of the Jew next door – the living, breathing acquaintance or associate whose simple existence appears to deny that negative stereotype”.<sup>27</sup>

Berlin’s Jews were forced to confront these display cases on a regular basis. Their recollections often highlight how these antisemitic installations changed their experiences within the city’s streets. Ann Lewis, for instance, recount growing up in 1930s Berlin and the changes she witnessed as a child, writing:

“The first change I noticed after the election – apart from all the Brownshirts (SA) and swastika flags on the streets – was that we no longer got our usual newspaper to our house [...] Soon showcases appeared in the streets displaying copies of *Der Stürmer*, a dreadful rag specialising in the worst type of antisemitic propaganda, published by the SS [sic]. I was told not to look at the paper and only did so once. I was shocked by what I saw and in the future I took good care to turn my head away whenever I passed one of the showcases.”<sup>28</sup>

In another case, Leon G. described his feelings towards these new additions to the local landscape: “I remember that some newspapers could be read in the street behind a glass. The Jews were always the main target of those newspapers. They were full of caricatures of Jews with long noses. I was quite affected by this and I avoided walking by these displays whenever I could.”<sup>29</sup> The installation of the *Stürmerkasten* brought the antisemitic and exclusionary practices of the Nazi regime to the streets of Berlin. By making caricatures of Jews part of the city’s landscape, these display cases demonised Jewish residents and began pushing them out of everyday spaces as they were forced to confront public displays of antisemitism in streets across the city.

24 *Der Stürmer* was not an official publication. It was a tabloid-like newspaper published by Julius Streicher that Hitler strongly supported. Circulation of *Der Stürmer* exploded in the 1930s. The paper sold about 25,000 copies per week in 1933 and rose to over 700,000 by the late 1930s. Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, Boston 2003, 228.

25 *Ibid.*, 229.

26 *Ibid.*, 230.

27 Dennis Showalter, *Little Man What Now? Der Stürmer in the Weimar Republic*, Hamden 1982, 105.

28 Lewis, *Emigration*, 251.

29 FVAHT, T-4044, Leon G. Holocaust Testimony. In another testimony, Louis C. also discussed the wide distribution of *Der Stürmer* around Berlin, explaining how the *Stürmerkasten* were painted black and/or disappeared in 1936 for a brief hiatus during the Olympic Games in Berlin. They reappeared in the weeks afterwards with even more antisemitic content. FVAHT, T-353, Louis C. Holocaust Testimony.

## Spaces of Exclusion on the Neighbourhood Scale

The new regime reified the visible contours of the desired national community – a community that was to be devoid of Jews.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the spatial patterns that framed everyday life in Berlin neighbourhoods were fundamentally changed under the Nazi regime. Recent trends in the field of Holocaust studies have pointed to the importance of space in understanding how urban spaces could serve to deepen divisions between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours, but also provide important mechanisms for survival. An attentiveness to survivors' discussions of the changing everyday spatial and social relations in Berlin after 1933 shows how the exclusion of Jews from the national community was not only a top-down exercise: It also quickly found a place in apartment buildings and in neighbourhood spaces throughout the city.

Spaces that Jewish Berliners once frequented suddenly became off-limits, isolating them further from their non-Jewish neighbours. According to Ruldolf R., who had grown up in the district of Pankow, the city as he knew it began to change as Jews were gradually prohibited from accessing a wide variety of spaces: "Every week there were new laws and the general mood always changed. No pets were allowed, sitting on benches was forbidden, Jews could only shop at certain stores [...] There were signs everywhere: 'Jews and dogs not wanted.'" <sup>31</sup> Some of these newly defined constraints were a product of official policies or laws, while others were the result of individual owners' initiatives to exclude Jews. "Before long we had to stop going to Konditorei Wolters, a nice café not far from our house," Ann Lewis recalled in her memoir, "because the proprietors intimated that they no longer wished to serve Jews, and a nearby cinema put up a card in its entrance saying 'Jews are not wanted here.'" <sup>32</sup> Others remembered a wide array of other spaces in which they were not welcome, including resort areas, public swimming pools, and city parks. <sup>33</sup> Slowly, much of the city became off-limits. Some Berlin Jews, like Gerald Jayson, continued to stake their claim in public spaces. In their youth, Gerald and his friends used to spend time at the Humboldthain in Berlin. Together with his friends, Gerald would go sledding on the hills, play tennis in the summers, and skate in the winter months. That is, until one day a sign appeared that said 'Juden verboten'. <sup>34</sup> In his testimony, he explained how he and his friends still went sometimes, in spite of the sign, but that they were always nervous about being caught. While there was some level of resistance to the exclusion of Jews from the everyday city spaces they frequented, Nazi restrictions on access to these sites often entrenched divisions between those who belonged within the spaces of the national community and those who did not. As a result of this spatial exclusion, many Jews began to feel increasingly isolated. In her memoirs about her life in Berlin, Lotte Fairbrook aptly described this sense of loss: "It was as though I was hanging in mid-air, as one thread after another of the fabric tore, the fabric that

30 Tim Cole and Alberto Giordano used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mathematical sociology to examine the spaces that were used for the segregation of the Jewish population as well as the places that Jews still had access to and where they could potentially interact with the non-Jewish population living in adjacent city spaces. Tim Cole/Alberto Giordano, *On Place and Space. Calculating Social and Spatial Networks in the Budapest Ghetto*, in: *Transactions in GIS* 15 (2011) 1, 143-170.

31 FVAHT, T-3415, Rudolf R. Holocaust Testimony. This description is echoed in many survivor testimonies found in both the FVAHT and WL-AJR/RVP.

32 Lewis, *Emigration*, 251-252.

33 Albert Meirer, *Berlin Jews. Deprived of Rights, Impoverished, and Branded*, in: Beater Meyer/Hermann Simon/Chana Schutz (ed.), *Jews in Nazi Berlin. From Kristallnacht to Liberation*, Chicago 2016, 86.

34 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 26, Gerald Jayson.

held and protected me in my surroundings. I did not belong in Berlin, to Germany anymore; yet there was no sense of belonging anywhere else either.”<sup>35</sup> The exclusion of Jews from these spaces only intensified. On 28 November 1938, a nationwide police decree banned Jews from “entering certain districts [...] or show[ing] themselves in public at certain times”.<sup>36</sup> In an interpretation of this law decreed by Berlin’s Chief of Police on 3 December 1938, this prohibition was extended to cafés and restaurants, theatres, cinemas, and museums.<sup>37</sup>

Other spaces of Jewish life were also targets of antisemitism, such as businesses and homes. Oftentimes, these spaces were vandalised with the word *Jude* or with the Star of David, publicly marking them as Jewish. Sonja S. recalled the marking of her father’s textile business as Jewish as a turning point in her family’s life in Berlin:

“One morning my father went to his store, he found that someone had written ‘Jewish pig’ on the shop window. He was outraged because he hadn’t expected this. My father, mother, brother, and I spent the whole day scratching the paint off from the window. The next day a huge Jewish star had been painted instead. We had to scratch that off, too. It was humiliating for my family.”<sup>38</sup>

Not only did this act of vandalism target Sonia’s family’s business, it also showed how the regime and its supporters eagerly injected elements of fear and public humiliation into their agenda of excluding Jews. Sonja stated that the store was completely destroyed during the November Pogrom and her father was forced to close the business. Countless survivor accounts contain stories like Sonja’s. Jewish stores were physically labelled as being Jewish through acts of vandalism in the months and days leading up to the violence of the November Pogrom, identifying these spaces as targets for the violence perpetrated by SA troops and local citizens. The destruction of these businesses is another way that the Nazis succeeded in physically removing Jewish spaces from Berlin’s neighbourhoods and communities. The labelling and subsequent destruction of Jewish businesses under the Nazi regime was detrimental to the livelihood of Jews across the city. It also erased another type of space that facilitated regular interactions between Jews and non-Jews.<sup>39</sup>

Jewish homes were also labelled as Jewish spaces and vandalised in an effort to further isolate Berlin’s Jews. Marianne D. remembered coming home from school one day in 1937 to discover that someone had painted a big Star of David on the front door of her family’s apartment.<sup>40</sup> Afterward, she recalled, their non-Jewish neigh-

35 LBI, ME974/MMII21-22, Lotte Fairbrook, Chapter 23. *Belonging Nowhere on This Planet*, in: *Dear Family. Memoirs* (unpublished 1976), Volume 7, Part III, *Married Life in Germany*, Chapters 16-23, 57. Available online: [http://digital.cjh.org:80/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=979653&silolibrary=GEN01](http://digital.cjh.org:80/R/?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=979653&silolibrary=GEN01) (22 June 2018).

36 Polizeiverordnung über das Auftreten der Juden in der Öffentlichkeit, 28 November 1938, in: *Reichsgesetzblatt*, Jahrgang 1938, Teil I, 1676. Available online: <http://alex.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/alex?aid=dra&datum=1938&page=1854&size=45> (22 June 2018).

37 Olaf Matthes/Christina Ewald, *The Banning of Jews from Visiting Museums* (translated by Insa Kummer), in: *Key Documents of German-Jewish History*, 2 August 2017. Available online: <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:article-200.en.v1> (22 June 2018).

38 FVAHT, T-3723, Sonja S. Holocaust Testimony.

39 See Christoph Kreuzmüller, *Final Sale in Berlin. The Destruction of Jewish Commercial Activity, 1930–1945*, translated by Jane Paulick and Jefferson Chase, New York 2015. Another useful resource on this subject is the catalogue of a 2012 exhibition entitled *Final Sale. The End of Jewish Owned Businesses in Nazi Berlin*, which outlined sixteen examples from the overall findings of research carried out by staff and students at the Department of Modern German History at Berlin’s Humboldt University, in co-operation with the historical society Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin e.V. The full catalogue is available online: [https://issuu.com/vv\\_www/docs/katalogvv\\_\\_engl\\_web\\_130dpi](https://issuu.com/vv_www/docs/katalogvv__engl_web_130dpi) (22 June 2018).

40 FVAHT, T-2331, Marianne D. Holocaust Testimony. Later, in 1940, a law was passed requiring Jewish homes to have a Star of David affixed to the front of the building.

bours all stopped speaking to her and her family. Margot L., who was a teenager in the mid-1930s and worked as a teacher's assistant at a Jewish kindergarten in Berlin until 1943, remembered graffiti appearing on a wall adjacent to her family's first-floor apartment. Writing about her experiences in revisiting her former apartment in Berlin over fifty years after the war, she remembered waking up a few days after Hitler came to power and looking out of her bedroom window: "My bedroom at that time looked out over a wall smeared with slogans calling for action like: Deutschland erwache, Juden verrecke (Germany awake, Jews perish). The Jews are our misfortune. The symbol of swastikas mingled with the Waffen SS Insignia. I can remember every single detail of that wall."<sup>41</sup> As the places where Jews lived were identified and vandalised, the relationship between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbours who lived under the same roof changed as well.

Survivors' recollections indicated that these changes began as early as 31 January 1933 and intensified throughout the 1930s. In one example, Susi Linton grew up as an only child in the Moabit district of Berlin in a first-floor apartment on Levetzowstraße with her parents. Her father was a veteran of the First World War but returned to his role as a teacher after the war. She recalled that her parents had a busy social life, mixing well with their non-Jewish neighbours and colleagues. In her testimony, she described the changing atmosphere and, specifically, how the relationships between her family and their friends changed:

"Gradually, it sort of dawned on us that we were not accepted. All the colleagues of my father kept away. They were friends, they used to visit us. We used to visit them. That finished. That non-Jewish people were socializing with Jewish people, that finished too. Because the people were in a trance, like they were hypnotized. They were frightened. They were frightened to be seen going into a Jewish home, so they stopped. So, in a way, we were very isolated."<sup>42</sup>

Susi's testimony demonstrates that Jews experienced exclusion even before it was enshrined in law in 1935 through the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws. These laws not only institutionalised many of the racial ideals encapsulated in Nazi ideology, they also effectively stripped Jews of their citizenship rights.<sup>43</sup> Widening the gap between Jews and non-Jews, they defined who was to be considered a Jew, as well as the kinds of relations that were possible between Jews and non-Jews within particular spaces. For example, they banned Jews from marrying or having intimate relations with non-Jews and prohibited the employment of Jewish women under the age of 45 in non-Jewish households. However, many Jewish survivors indicated in postwar memory sources that their neighbours began treating them differently almost immediately after Hitler came to power, creating a sense of social isolation within the very buildings and neighbourhoods in which they lived.

Robert Rosen recounted that the days after Hitler came to power marked a clear break in relations between Jews and non-Jews in his Berlin apartment building. His parents had always had many non-Jewish friends who lived in the building, but he recalled as an eleven-year-old boy the sudden hostility they faced in the days immediately following 30 January 1933:

"Our neighbours stayed away from us. They didn't know us the next day. A neighbor that my father was friends with for years and played cards with

41 Margot L., *Never Look Back*, in: Association of Jewish Ex-Berliners, 'What's Up?' Newsletter 21 (August 1994).

42 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 78, Susi Linton.

43 Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1933–1945*, New York 2009, 44.

every week, the next day after Hitler came to power, he put his Brown uniform on, and he didn't know my father anymore. Actually, he was our next-door neighbour."<sup>44</sup>

The increasing antagonism that Robert's family faced within their building, coupled with the financial difficulties after Robert's father lost his job and decided to return to his hometown in Poland, meant that by 1935 they had given up their apartment and moved in with his mother's sister elsewhere in Berlin. This aunt had six children of her own, and the four-room apartment was quite crowded. They managed to spare a single room for Robert, his mother, brother, and grandmother until they left a few days before the war broke out in 1939 to reunite with their father in Chrzanów, Poland. Robert's account clearly shows how the increasing social isolation and economic deprivation of Jews forced his family to relocate into a smaller, more crowded living space.

Rose Ruschin had similar recollections of the changing attitude of the neighbours in her Charlottenburg apartment building in 1933:

"On the day that Hitler came to power I remember going down the stairs with my father. He was going to work; I was going to school. My father greeted a neighbor of ours who had always treated us very kindly: 'Good morning, how are you?' He spit at my father and called him a dirty Jew. For me, this was more or less the beginning of the Hitler era."<sup>45</sup>

Within Berlin apartment buildings, divisions between Jews and non-Jews became clearly delineated, even for those who doubted the longevity of Hitler's government. Eva G. remembered her first experience with Nazism, standing on the balcony of their Wilmersdorf apartment, watching Hitler and his supporters march by in January 1933. At the time, her father believed that the regime would be a short-lived abnormality. Eva's recollections, however, underscore how quickly a new reality set in: "My closest friends lived right above us in the apartment house and they were more in our apartment than anywhere else. The day after Hitler marched by, they didn't know me anymore. Thankfully, though, they never denounced us or you wouldn't see me here today."<sup>46</sup>

Other survivors, many of whom were children in Berlin during the 1930s, recalled that playmates started taunting them and that they were forbidden from playing with other kids in the neighbourhood. Bruno G., for example, remembered that the children on his street used to all play together before Hitler came to power. After January 1933, however, they began calling out: "Pig Jew. *Judenschwein*. Why don't you go back to Palestine?"<sup>47</sup> As an eight-year-old, Bruno had trouble making sense of this change. He remembered, however, that they were no longer able to play together soon after this incident. Referring to an upstairs neighbour that had previously been friends with his father, Rudolf R. recalled a similar situation from his childhood: "I used to play with his son in the streets or in the park nearby. Once when we wanted to ask my friend to come play with us, our neighbour said, 'Go away, my Klaus may no longer play with you, you dirty Jews.'"<sup>48</sup> This was one of the first changes Rudolf noticed after the Nazis took power. He recalled that, at age eleven, he did not understand what it was all about. Many survivors recounted the changes they saw in their own lives as children. Playmates and play spaces were central to the memories of

44 OHC-CNHEC, Interview 341, Robert Rosen.

45 OHC-CNHEC, Interview 360, Rose Ruschin.

46 FVAHT, T-4392, Eva G. Holocaust Testimony.

47 FVAHT, T-1764, Bruno G. Holocaust Testimony.

48 FVAHT, T-3415, Rudolf R. Holocaust Testimony.

their lives in Nazi Berlin. Often, these playmates were neighbouring children, and the spaces in which they interacted were close to the home. The abrupt disintegration of these relationships illuminates one way that Nazi ideals permeated social relations on the scale of neighbourhood.

A large number of survivor testimonies indicate that relationships with their neighbours were transformed abruptly, leaving many Jews with a growing sense of unease and a distrust of those living nearby. These changing relationships were signs that, through the reorganisation of urban space in Berlin, antisemitism became embedded in the rhythms of everyday life, disrupting or dissolving relations between Jews and 'Aryans' within these quotidian spaces. Nazi ideology was reproduced on the level of individual social intimacy, redefining relationships between neighbours in apartment buildings and on the street. Although the exclusion of Jews from the national community took place in a variety of ways, it is through its spatial manifestation that it transformed from being a merely discursive or state-level practice and trickled down to an experiential one. It penetrated everyday spaces and impacted everyday relationships and social networks that once structured a cohesive city life. Soon Jews and 'Aryans' alike began to understand that Jews were to be seen as outsiders – as a threat to the national community.

### Being Forced Out of Home

A focus on the home and the neighbourhood sheds light on how Jews experienced processes of displacement under the Nazi regime. Their accounts demonstrate how Jews sought to navigate the ever-shrinking spaces of their homes and their immediate surroundings amidst growing antisemitism. Descriptions of former Jewish homes, including the loss of the belongings within them, moreover provide insight into what Jewish life was like in the 1920s and 1930s. Survivors' accounts of the places they were forced to move from, or the way their homes changed over time as their belongings were gradually confiscated by authorities and they were forced to take in other family members and/or strangers, demonstrate the deterioration of their quality of life and, ultimately, the exclusion of Jews under the Nazi regime.

In many oral history interviews, one of the first questions that the interviewers ask is where the survivors lived and what they remembered about their former homes. Closing her eyes as if to reimagine the space, Susi Linton described her former apartment in Berlin to the interviewer in great detail:

"We had three bedrooms, and then we had a little room, because people had maids in those days, which was off another corridor. And the kitchen was all white tiles, I remember the tiles. Because we didn't have fridges then, so they delivered ice blocks every morning [...] my mother bought nice things for the kitchen and cooking. It was very nice. We had a dining room and what we used to call a 'Herrenzimmer', or what today we'd call a lounge, which meant that my father, being a teacher, had a very big library. He had all Goethe, Schiller, all that, which was quite valuable. So, he had this very big bookcase. Then he had a big *Schreibtisch*, or desk, that matched this. My mother loved flowers and she had a large collection of cacti [...] I can remember a nice home, a nice atmosphere."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> WL-AJR/RV, Interview 78, Susi Linton.

Susi eventually emigrated to England, but her parents were deported to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. Their home and all of its contents were expropriated by the Gestapo; the building itself did not survive the war. Yet rich descriptions of former homes such as Susi can provide a fleeting impression of the everyday lives of Jews in Berlin prior to the destruction of these private spaces under the Nazi regime.

An ever-growing list of Nazi policies aimed at removing Jews from various employment sectors and defining Jews as outside their local and, by extension, national communities. The loss of employment meant that many Jews were forced to find cheaper and often smaller and more crowded living spaces. As early as 1933, the regime enacted laws that forced Jews out of their civil service jobs. Further regulations forced Jews out of various professions, including law, medicine, and education. The loss of a steady income directly impacted the living situations of Jews across Germany. Charles Danson's father, for example, had been a successful doctor with a practice located in the centre of Berlin. Charles grew up in an affluent household in Charlottenburg. In his testimony, he recalled a happy childhood filled with music: "I remember that we had a lot of concerts in our house. Chamber music and things like that. We had – in the Knesebeckstraße where I was born – the most beautiful huge flat. In fact, it was so large that in the music room there were two – two Bechstein grands, and that's where the concerts were."<sup>50</sup> By 1934, when Charles was fourteen, his father's practice shrank "because of the Nazis". As a result, Charles's father could no longer afford their apartment in Knesebeckstraße; the family relocated to a smaller apartment around the corner and emigrated to the United Kingdom two years later.<sup>51</sup> Much to Charles's dismay, the room reserved for the grand pianos was much smaller than in Knesebeckstraße. He remembered clearly that his family could no longer continue hosting concerts in their new apartment.

Ilse Thompson's interview indicates that between 1933 and 1939, many Jews moved apartments on multiple occasions because of the financial duress placed on families due to rising unemployment. Ilse reminisced that in 1934: "We lived in a fancy five room apartment on the top floor of a very fine area in Berlin. We had all new furniture and everything was just so beautiful."<sup>52</sup> After her father lost his job in sales in January 1936, she recalled that they moved into another apartment that was much smaller and located in the inner courtyard in a garden house, which would have been much cheaper: "Apartments at the back of the courtyard were always for poor people, but because so many Jews could no longer work we, too, had become poor."<sup>53</sup> This new apartment had two bedrooms, one of which her mother had to rent out to make ends meet after Ilse's father was arrested and sent to a concentration camp in mid-1936. At that point, her mother started sleeping in the living room, while Ilse and her brother, Hans, shared the maid's room (they of course no longer had a maid). Ilse's account of relocating to a series of increasingly smaller apartments and taking in additional boarders is a common one. In fact,

50 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 20, Charles Danson.

51 In the interview, Charles explained that after the Nazis came to power his father's practice shrank considerably; however, he still had some private Jewish patients that he would see on weekends in their house. While Charles was not aware of this at the time, his father outlined the situation to his sister once she arrived in England. His father was accused of making illegal entries into the poison logbook (at this time doctors had a logbook where they had to enter all poisons or drugs prescribed to their patients). This went to court. He was able to get a non-Jewish lawyer to defend him (a friend of a friend) and was eventually acquitted. His practice, however, had been dismantled and by 1936 he only had a few remaining Jewish patients.

52 OHC-CNHEC, Interview 429, Ilse Thompson.

53 Ibid.

many Jews in Berlin moved residences as many as three or four times between 1933 and 1939.

Changing living spaces, as described in Charles' and Ilse's accounts, highlights the loss of employment, property, and class status of Berlin's Jews throughout the 1930s. Their changing living situations reflect how the spatial policies of the Nazis both targeted the rhythms of everyday public spaces and permeated the walls of homes. Jewish apartments and houses were physically changed as Jews were forced to turn in their valuables to the regime and, in many cases, to abandon their living spaces altogether. For many Jews who made the decision to emigrate or were forced to give up their homes, their testimonies reflect a profound sense of loss.

Hertha Nathorff's memoir, written shortly after she left Berlin and settled in the United States, serves as a prime illustration of just how difficult this process could be.<sup>54</sup> Nathorff's memoir reflects a strong sense of belonging to Germany and, in particular, to Berlin. Nathorff described many happy memories from her Berlin apartment, reminiscing about joyous occasions celebrated with her husband Erich, their family, and friends. She recounted her son's birthdays, wedding anniversaries, and various holiday get-togethers. Both Hertha and Erich were doctors in Berlin. Hertha took a leave of absence when she had her son, but her husband continued to work until just before they emigrated abroad in the spring of 1939. Prior to the November Pogrom, they were convinced that the antisemitism of the Nazi regime would simply pass, and that they would be able to return to their normal lives. However, after the Gestapo came to try to arrest Erich on 9 November 1938, their attitude changed and the pair began debating options for emigration.<sup>55</sup> In early March 1939, they sent their son to England as part of the *Kindertransport*. For Hertha, this was the moment that her home as she knew it began to unravel. When she received a telegram from London notifying her that her son had arrived safely, she wrote that she was happy that her son was now free from harm. She continued: "Now I can begin clearing the apartment, the home in which we already no longer feel at home."<sup>56</sup>

In the pages that followed, she discussed the process of giving away or selling all of her personal belongings while preparing to emigrate: "I give away, I give away, and I give away, almost indiscriminately – furniture, pictures, books, crystal, porcelain. After all, I don't need it anymore."<sup>57</sup> Hertha recounted how the lists they had to submit to local authorities were approved and that the authorities came to seal off most of their apartment and take the remainder of their belongings. As of 6 April 1939, she wrote: "And now we are sleeping on an old sofa and a mattress in a house that was once our home."<sup>58</sup> The only things that remained in the apartment at this point were an old table and a pair of chairs (the rest had been shipped to the Netherlands, which was to be their first stop). The family had lived in their apartment for thirteen years and it was in this very apartment that the family had made their first home. In her journal, Hertha wrote: "Here I was once a doctor, here I was once happy – here I was

54 In 1940, shortly after arriving in the United States with her husband, Hertha Nathorff responded to a memoir contest hosted by Harvard University researchers called *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*. With her submission, she included a ten-page introduction outlining her life story and introducing a diary written on a regular basis between 1933 and 1939. She also wrote a short epilogue in New York on 13 January 1980. Her original submission is contained in: Houghton Library, Harvard University. BMS GER 91, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933* Essay Contest Papers, File No. 162. The remainder of her diary, referenced here, including the epilogue, is contained in: LBI, Hertha Nathorff Collection, 1813–1967 (AR-5207), Memoiren, 1933–1939.

55 Ibid, 42.

56 Ibid, 52.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid, 54.

at home...<sup>59</sup> In the days before they finally left Germany, the apartment became a place that no longer felt like home to Hertha: “I am ‘living’ in our empty apartment. The empty rooms are depressing. It is all so empty. So ‘has-been.’<sup>60</sup> Both Hertha and Erich Nathorff were fortunate to be able to escape Nazi Germany and to be reunited with their son in the United States. However, in the process they lost not only their physical home, but also the life they had built within it.

### Reclaiming Space

In almost every interview conducted with Holocaust survivors from Berlin reviewed in this study, the interviewer asked whether the interviewee ever returned to the city. The answers to this question were as varied as the individual’s experiences during the Nazi era. Some were vehemently opposed to returning to the city from which they were expelled, while many others returned either of their own accord (to live or to visit) or came back for short seven-day stays organised through an invitation programme arranged by the Berlin Senate (originally the West Berlin Senate) in 1969.<sup>61</sup> These mixed reactions are not surprising, but the responses often offer a glimpse into the eyewitnesses’ contemporary understandings of the homes and neighbourhoods that they were once a part of. The responses of survivors indicate that these spaces formed an important part of their life under the Nazi regime and also played a critical role in their postwar memories of Berlin.

Eva Evans’ interview with the Association of Jewish Refugees in London, where she now lives, is illustrative. The interviewer asked: “So where would you say is your Heimat?”<sup>62</sup> Her response: “My Heimat? Yes, I would still say it’s in Berlin, but it’s in Berlin in a house, which is not there anymore. I can remember it exactly, but it’s gone. So maybe I would say that I haven’t got a Heimat anymore, because what feelings I had about it has been ruined.”<sup>63</sup> She went on to explain some of her interactions with the city as a child, including regular Sunday walks in the Grunewald forest with her father – an event that she repeated when she last visited Berlin with a long-time friend. But to Eva, Berlin had become unrecognisable: “The city never looked the same. I couldn’t recognize any of it [...] I wouldn’t say that any of it moves me. I’m pleased to see it, yes, but it doesn’t give me any inner feeling. It’s dead now, as far as I am concerned.”<sup>64</sup> Other survivors had or have more difficulty facing the past in the physical landscape of Berlin. Marianne D., who travelled with her daughter to Berlin at the invitation of the Senate, had to leave after just a few days because, in her words,

59 Ibid, 56.

60 Ibid.

61 The original invitation was distributed to ex-Berliners through West German embassies around the world and published in the New York-based magazine *Aufbau* on 20 June 1969. The invitation explained that the West Berlin Senate recognised that the majority of the reparation and compensation cases would conclude by the end of the year and that the city wanted “to carry on the fundamental idea of the West German Restitution Legislation in a meaningful manner and give former citizens the opportunity to make their own judgment and relations with the present city”. The programme still operates today, with around 35,000 survivors and their families having participated to date.

62 The term *Heimat* is often translated into English as “home” or “homeland”; however, there is no direct translation. In German, the term conveys more than just a physical space. It also denotes a more personal relationship – generally a positive one – with a certain space, whether it be a neighbourhood, city, or country. Like many other spatial terms, the Nazis inverted these ideas, primarily the love for and attachment to the homeland, to exclude those who were considered to be a threat to its integrity and security.

63 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 127, Eva Evans.

64 Ibid.

“I just had the most miserable time and all the memories appeared again. I was just devastated. After five days, I left. I just couldn’t take it anymore.”<sup>65</sup>

For others, returning to the city from which they had been expelled provided an opportunity to directly engage with the very spaces they were once excluded from. These return visits sometimes provided closure to Jewish survivors. Ruth Price, for example, highlighted the importance of returning to the sites of her childhood as part of her 1992 visit organised by the Berlin Senate. For her, returning to Berlin was essential:

“I had many dreams, the same dream over and over again, that I was visiting Berlin, and visiting these places that I am talking about now, and of course, when I would wake up, I was disappointed to find it had only been a dream. And then eventually the time came when I was able to visit Berlin at the invitation of the Berlin Senate and I was able to visit these places. I never had that dream again. It really sort of completely satisfied me. It was just what I had hoped for, for many, many years. Very little had changed.”<sup>66</sup>

Nelly G. recalled returning to a park in her former neighbourhood with her son to restage the last photo she had of her and her late father, taken in 1938. While there, she took an additional step in reclaiming a space that had personal significance for her:

“In the park where I played as a child, I remember the first signs appearing on the benches that said ‘Jews forbidden.’ When we went back, I kept sitting on that bench. Getting up. Sitting on the bench again and getting up. Finally I just sat there and said: ‘I’m sitting on this bench’. It was a good feeling.”<sup>67</sup> Survivors like Ruth and Nelly saw returning to Berlin as a significant milestone in coming to terms with their respective pasts. For Ruth, it was a longstanding desire to see the places where she had grown up. For Nelly, it was a chance to connect with her childhood memories – and her father – in a more tangible way. Their words – and those of the other former residents of Berlin referenced in this article – demonstrate the historiographic value of attending to memory sources in order to identify the intersection between spatial history and memory. Engaging with these rich memory sources becomes increasingly important as the number of living Holocaust survivors continues to decline. Historians can gain a more robust understanding of everyday Jewish life in Nazi Germany through a careful analysis of how certain spaces are animated within Holocaust testimonies and, more specifically, how embodied or haptic experiences of the city in the postwar period can act as triggers of pre-war and wartime memories for many survivors.<sup>68</sup> These glimpses offer a deeper understanding of how everyday

65 FVAHT, T-2331, Marianne D. Holocaust Testimony. The exact year of her return is not made clear in her testimony. It would have been after 1969, as this was the official start date of the programme, and before 1994, when her testimony was recorded.

66 WL-AJR/RV, Interview 68, Ruth Price.

67 FVAHT, T-4441, Nelly G. Holocaust Testimony. The events surrounding the production of the photograph are explained earlier in the interview. Nelly’s father left for the United States in 1938. Nelly remembered that, in 1937, she was playing in the park when her father and a friend came along. Fondly she recalled: “You could see he was so proud of me. I was so proud of him. This is the only picture I have of my father and I.” Her father went to the United States and acquired affidavits for his wife and daughter. He returned to Belgium (which was neutral at the time) and thought that Nelly and her mother would join him there. Things did not pan out that way. He ended up stuck in Belgium. Only Nelly and her mother made it to the United States in the end. Her father was murdered in Sobibor.

68 Tim Cole discussed Holocaust survivor’s postwar experiences of key sites at Auschwitz, including crematoria, barracks, and the gate that stands at the entrance to the camp. In his work, he has done an excellent job articulating the ways in which a dynamic relationship between landscape and memory can be detected in oral history interviews, documentary films, and memoirs of return. Tim Cole, *Crematoria, Barracks, Gateway. Survivors’ Return Visits to the Memory Landscapes of Auschwitz*, in: *History and Memory* 25 (Fall/Winter 2013) 2, 102-131.

life unfolded – and was disrupted – in these city spaces under the Nazi regime, allowing for a comprehensive and responsible reinscription of the history of these sites and their former residents in the urban landscape.

### Conclusion: Putting History in its Place

Over two decades ago, in an article regarding their research on the Budapest ghetto, historians Tim Cole and Graham Smith identified the Holocaust as “the most remarkable blank-spot in geographical research”.<sup>69</sup> Heralding what they termed “the power of geography” for understanding the events of the Holocaust, Cole and Smith encouraged scholars to take a closer look at the spaces and spatial processes behind the historical transformations of this event.<sup>70</sup> Since the mid-1990s, collaborative and interdisciplinary efforts have underscored the fact that the Holocaust was, indeed, “a profoundly geographical event, rooted in specific places, times, and landscapes”.<sup>71</sup> These efforts paved the way for an increasing number of historical inquiries that explore how the events of the Holocaust were located in, and impacted by, various sites and scales.<sup>72</sup> In 2016, Tim Cole and Henry Greenspan highlighted the need for historians to become more attuned to how space and place play a fundamental role in the ways that Holocaust survivors engage with the past and retell their experiences in the present.<sup>73</sup>

Personal memory sources offer a significant access point through which historians can gain a deeper understanding of everyday life and the spaces in which it occurred. Memoirs, testimonies, and other such reflections on the past show how Jews were forced to renegotiate their relations to the ever-changing urban environment – an environment defined and redefined by exclusionary policies and practices. Focussing on sites of everyday life – and how they were remembered – allows for the inclusion of multiple stories and perspectives in the retelling of the Nazi past, highlighting the differences in how the regime looked from place to place, and from person to person. Survivor testimonies, both written and oral, demonstrate how Hitler’s

69 Tim Cole/Graham Smith, Ghettoization and the Holocaust. Budapest 1944, in: *Journal of Historical Geography* 22 (1995) 1, 300-316. At the time of their writing, there were already several notable works that captured some elements of the spatiality of the Holocaust, including Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Holocaust*, London 1982, and autobiographical works that captured a sense of place, such as Primo Levi, *The Reawakening*, translated by Stuart Woolf, London 1965.

70 *Ibid.*, 301.

71 Waitman Beorn/Tim Cole/Simone Gigliotti/Alberto Giordano/Anna Holian/Paul B. Jaskot/Anne Kelly Knowles/Marc Masurovsky/Erik B. Steiner, *Geographies of the Holocaust*, in: *Geographical Review* 99 (2009), 563-574.

72 Anne Knowles/Tim Cole/Alberto Giordano (ed.), *Geographies of the Holocaust*, Bloomington 2014. This particular book came out of a working group that formed in 2007 at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

73 See for example Tim Cole, (Re)placing the Past. Spatial Strategies of Retelling Difficult Stories, in: *The Oral History Review* 42 (2015) 1, 30-49. Another useful source is a documented 2016 conversation between Tim Cole and Henry Greenspan on the Oxford University Press blog: Andrew Schaffer, *Movement and Memory. An Email Exchange with Henry Greenspan and Tim Cole*, in: the Oxford University Press’s *Academic Insights for the Thinking World Blog* (22 January 2016), available online: <https://blog.oup.com/2016/01/hank-greenspan-tim-cole-part-1/> (22 June 2018). For more on the intersection between oral history and analyses of space and place, see: Ashley Ward, *Reclaiming Place through Remembrance. Using Oral Histories in Geographic Research*, in: *Historical Geography* 40 (2012), 133-145; Mark Riley/David Harvey, *Talking Geography. On Oral History and the Practice of Geography*, in: *Social and Cultural Geography* 8 (2007), 345-351; Gavin J. Andrews/Robin Kearns/Pia Kontos/Viv Wilson, ‘Their Finest Hours’. Older People, Oral Histories, and the Historical Geography of Social Life, in: *Social and Cultural Geography* 7 (2006), 153-177; and David Harvey/Mark Riley, *Narrating Landscape. The Potential of Oral History for Landscape Archaeology*, in: *Public Archaeology* (2005), 19-32.

rise to power emboldened antisemitism in both private and public spaces throughout the city of Berlin. Attention to these seemingly mundane living spaces brings the life of individual Jews who lived in Berlin into focus and provides an important framework for understanding everyday life in the city, including the neighbourhoods, streets, and homes, where Jews and their families lived prior to and during the Nazi era. It also provides an opportunity to include voices of individuals who may not have been represented in the written record to date.

The inclusion of personal memory sources into studies about the geographies of the Nazi past creates new openings for historians by providing “a recollection about the self, about relationships with others, and a place – insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods”.<sup>74</sup> By conducting a spatial analysis of the oral and written testimonies of Jews who lived through the Nazi regime, these spaces become an active and central part of the research process as opposed to serving only as a setting. Above all, these sources demonstrate how Berlin’s Jews attempted to navigate a city that was being spatially reorganised to support a vision of a national community in which they no longer had a place.

An examination of the rich descriptions of their former neighbourhoods and homes provided by Holocaust survivors also demonstrates that the histories of these spaces continue to evolve in the postwar era. The quotidian spaces of Jewish life featured prominently in the retelling of their lives, serving as an external stimulus to access and reclaim memories of these sites of exclusion, and as a basis for contemporary private and public commemorative initiatives. Without engaging with the complex and diverse postwar afterlives of these spaces hidden in plain sight within narratives about Berlin’s Nazi past, it becomes impossible to put history in its place in the neighbourhoods, on the streets, and outside the front doors of apartments in the city many Jews in Germany once considered to be home.

<sup>74</sup> Andrews/Kearns et al., ‘Their Finest Hours’, 161.

Caroline Cormier  
Historian, University of Toronto  
[caroline.cormier@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:caroline.cormier@mail.utoronto.ca)

Quotation: Caroline Cormier, Putting History in Its Place. The Spatial Exclusion of Jews in Nazi Berlin, 1933–1939, in S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. 5 (2018) 1, 82–99.

DOI: 10.23777/sn.0118/art\_ccor01  
<http://doi.org/cqtq>

Article

Copy Editor: Tim Corbett

**S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.**  
ISSN 2408-9192

Board of Editors of VWI's International Academic Advisory Board:  
Peter Black/Robert Knight/Irina Sherbakova

5 (2018) 1  
DOI: 10.23777/sn.0118  
<http://doi.org/csf6>

Editors: Éva Kovács/Béla Rásky/Marianne Windsperger  
Web-Editor: Sandro Fasching  
Webmaster: Bálint Kovács  
Layout of PDF: Hans Ljung

S:I.M.O.N. is the semi-annual e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

The Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) is funded by:

 Federal Ministry  
Education, Science  
and Research



 Federal Chancellery

© 2018 by the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), S:I.M.O.N., the authors, and translators, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author(s) and usage right holders.

For permission please contact [simon@vwi.ac.at](mailto:simon@vwi.ac.at)