Defying the Binary: Relationships Between Jews and Non-Jews
Klaus Hödl, Center for Jewish Studies at University of Graz

As Emory University historian Ellie R. Schainker’s thorough research demonstrates, Ivan Bondarev was one of almost one hundred thousand converts from Judaism to Christianity in Imperial Russia during the nineteenth century. He abandoned his faith in 1867 while serving as a soldier in the Russian Army. After being discharged from the military, he settled in the Bialystok region. Due to a medical impairment, he had difficulty eking out a living and establishing permanent residency. He drifted from one job to another and constantly relocated. His social life was similarly restless and volatile. Bondarev socialized with Jews and non-Jews, and although—as a Christian—he never went to a synagogue, he kept tzizit and a Jewish prayer book in his pocket.1 There seemed to be no religious or ethnic boundaries that Bondarev did not cross.

Bondarev lacked distinguishing features that would have allowed others to categorize him as unequivocally Jewish or non-Jewish. One could also say that he shared so many traits with people comprising his immediate social environment that differences between them receded beyond recognition. Bondarev defied the numerous laws, decrees, and ordinances issued by religious and state authorities to keep Jews and non-Jews separate and distinguishable. He was, in other words, similar to all of them. This similarity proved to be highly troublesome to officials, because it called into question normative rules. It also caused confusion among ordinary people, because it posed a radical challenge to how they conceived of their social environment. People usually comprehend their surroundings through binary categorizations.2 According to some scholars, such as the late Harvard evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould, the disposition toward bifurcating classifications “may lie deep within the architecture of the human mind.”3 Dichotomous reasoning thus seems to be an anthropological constant that is difficult, if not impossible, to discard.4 In keeping with this tendency, the absence of classificatory traits allowing for binary categorizations (often) confounds people’s sense of order.

Thinking in dichotomous terms resonates in the works of historians, particularly in the case of historiographical work on the Jewish past, as well. We can see dichotomies of this sort above all in conventional historical accounts that dominated Jewish studies until the 1970s.5 According to traditional Jewish historiography’s central premise, Jews largely lived
in isolation from non-Jews, and the contacts they did have tended to be restricted to business matters. In the last third of the twentieth century, a growing number of scholars, however, began to revise this proposition. The greater part of them emphasized multifarious exchanges between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures. Other historians documented multitudinous individual Jewish and non-Jewish interactions. In depicting the cultures, experiences and lifeways of Jews and non-Jews as interrelated and mutually constituted, both the “exchange” and “interaction” historians, as I wish to subdivide the new generation of scholars with respect to their respective focus of research, have brought Jewish historiography in line with epistemological concepts and methodological approaches of so-called general history. With respect to conventional historians’ dichotomous perspective, however, the exchange and interaction historians showed little innovative ambitions. Instead, they retained the binary view of Jewish and non-Jewish relations.

As I see it, there are two major reasons for its perpetuation. The first reason is related to many exchange historians’ hesitancy to follow through on their revision of the traditional historical narrative. Although they amassed extensive evidence on Jewish and non-Jewish cultural entanglement, they did not draw consequential inferences from their analysis, such as questioning the importance of interethnic and interreligious boundaries and thereby Jewish and non-Jewish polarization. Debra Kaplan, a historian at Bar Ilan University, may serve as an exemplary representative of this group of scholars. Despite the many references to Jewish and non-Jewish cultural involvement that she unearthed in the course of her research, Kaplan maintains that “Jews were still seen as others by their Christian neighbors, and they continued to see Christians as other . . . . All of the exchanges and parallels that historians have traced did not eradicate the very real boundaries that were imposed by authorities from both faiths.”

This insistence on a sharp division between Jews and non-Jews, despite much evidence to the contrary, has further repercussions. It complicates, for instance, the recognition of individual friendships and mutual trust between representatives of the two groups. But such intimacy between them and feelings of confidence in one another did, in fact, exist. Another reason for the perseverance of the Jewish and non-Jewish binary seems to be linked to interaction historians’ documentation of Jewish and non-Jewish togetherness. They have garnered so vast an amount of data of various forms of Jewish and non-Jewish intimacy that differences between the two groups ostensibly appear to fade away, or at least forfeit their salience. Without conspicuous, dichotomous differences, scholars often feel at a loss as to how to assert a distinctive profile of Jewishness. They lack, in other words, an analytical
approach that conceptualizes differences between Jews and non-Jews as gradual rather than fundamental. As a default response to the insufficient theoretical groundwork from which they could draw, these interaction historians retain the Jewish and non-Jewish dichotomy.

The Concept of Similarity in Jewish Studies

The central thesis of my paper addresses the two difficulties exchange and interaction historians face in their research and, closely related to them, the issue of the Jewish and non-Jewish binary. I argue that the fairly new cultural studies concept of “similarity” serves as an analytical approach that helps to recognize the vast field of cultural practices and meanings Jews and non-Jews share without disregarding the boundaries between them. The model of similarity emphasizes cultural commonalities between different groups or individuals and thereby abolishes dichotomous juxtapositions. Concomitantly, it allows for a discussion of divisions and differences. These differences, however, are considered gradual rather than fundamental. The identification of similarities with non-Jews thus releases Jews from their foreignness without robbing them of their distinctiveness.

The concept of similarity has been developed over the last few years at the German universities of Tübingen and Konstanz in cooperation with Anil Bhatti from New Delhi. Similarity turns our scholarly attention to cultural overlaps, to shared conceptions of cultural processes. Even though this procedure seems anything but novel, but rather characteristic of many cultural studies methods, it does take on a decisively innovative dimension within the framework of similarity. In contrast to other approaches, similarity does not conceive of cultural overlaps as the outcome of two or more groups’ negotiation regarding the question of whether, or what, they had in common. Such an understanding of cultural overlaps would imply the groups’ principal difference from each other, irrespective of their cultures’ selected intersections. According to the model of similarity, cultural resemblances are the product of moment-like perceptions. It is this unexpected awareness of commonalities with the cultural counterpart that disrupts a person’s notion of his/her fundamental otherness.

Such similarities between Jews and non-Jews came paradigmatically to the fore on the occasion of Emperor Francis’s return to Vienna from Paris in 1814, after Napoleon had been exiled to Elba. The Viennese population, including Jews, enthusiastically celebrated his arrival. The festivities lacked particular organizational work and were a largely spontaneous expression of people’s identification with Austria. The astounding aspect of the whole scene concerns the fact that the various ethnic groups taking part in the celebration displayed “the
existence of a distinctive and shared culture of imagery, slogans, and ritual practices around the idea of empire.” During the festivities, they felt unified because of their shared conception of Austria’s exceptionality, which they expressed in strikingly similar terms, and not because they had agreed beforehand on what they had in common and should show publicly.

Because it is a relatively new concept, scholars of different disciplines have only begun to investigate the applicability of the model of similarity for their research. In Jewish studies, similarity has yet to be employed and find acceptance as a theoretical framework. I firmly believe that this concept will prove fruitful for research into the history and culture of Jews, as it helps illuminate aspects of everyday life of Jews that research has hitherto neglected or overlooked. The employment of similarity thus opens up the history of Jews to new readings and allows us to finally overcome the theoretical constraints of conventional historiography.

**Shortcomings of the Concept of Similarity**

To be sure, the application of similarity is not the first effort to displace dichotomous juxtapositions in the broad field of cultural studies, but I maintain that this model has the potential to surpass previous attempts. Nevertheless, as I see it, the concept of similarity has also various shortcomings. Unless scholars address them head-on, the innovative potential of similarity cannot be fully utilized. These shortcomings concern, for example, similarity’s ephemerality. The transitory character of similarity makes it difficult to render an appropriate experience accessible to historians. Similarity’s utmost subjective dimension likewise complicates its traceability. Another problematic aspect of similarity concerns its neglect of long-term consequences. According to the proponents of the model of similarity, a person’s awareness of commonalities with someone else suffices to deconstruct the notion of fundamental differences between them. The question of whether or to what extent this moment-like awareness affects their future relations appears to be of no relevance in this context. Closely connected with this point is the issue of similarity’s explication. Scholars working with similarity seem to disregard the questions of why a perception of similarity occurs and which circumstances prove conducive to its actualization.

In the following, I outline a procedure for addressing the aforementioned deficiency. I begin my deliberations with brief references to the wide range of studies on Jewish and non-Jewish encounters conducted over the last few decades. Subsequently, I point out a methodological and epistemological link between these studies and an exploration of Jewish
everyday life, before I continue with a short overview of the “contact hypothesis” and its use in Jewish studies. I argue that the application of the contact hypothesis makes it possible to explain why experiences of similarity take place. I conclude my article with a few instances of similarity.

**Jewish and Non-Jewish Togetherness**

Even though the new conceptual premises that have structured research in “things Jewish” over the last few decades have left the Jewish and non-Jewish dichotomy intact, they have nonetheless decidedly altered many scholars’ conception of Jewish history and thus the state of Jewish studies in general. Researchers who question the benefits of exploring the history of Jews in the broader societal context and taking the intricate ties between Jews and non-Jews into account have become rare. It seems that the days have vanished when historians, as Emanuel Ringelblum bemoaned in the 1930s, composed narratives as if a “Chinese wall” separated Jews and non-Jews. Ringelblum castigated his Polish colleagues for depicting Jews and non-Jews as locked “in a permanent state of endless conflict, if not actual war.” Over the last few decades a plethora of findings on close, sometimes even intimate, Jewish and non-Jewish interactions have been brought to light that discredit research on Jewish history as decisively distinct from general history.

In Poland and Russia, Jewish and non-Jewish entanglement was particularly pronounced. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent opening of many archives in Eastern Europe to researchers has provided access to a wide array of hitherto unexplored archival documents. Their findings in turn put proponents of an exclusionary Jewish history on the defensive. Most present-day historians no longer doubt that Jews and non-Jews frequently lived in close proximity to one another, and have come to the realization that non-Jews perceived Jews as ordinary neighbors rather than ‘other’ or strangers. Jews and non-Jews shared so many spaces and were so intensely involved with each other that it seems impossible to clearly separate them.

But even an exploration of periods about which we know comparatively little (due to scarce historical sources), such as the thirteenth century, has unearthed evidence of interfaith contacts. A particularly interesting example entails encounters among Jewish and Christian women. This topic had been largely neglected until a few years ago, even though William C. Jordan published a groundbreaking study as early as the late 1970s on the lending of “consumption loans” by Jewish to Christian women in northern France. Such financial
transactions between women were not limited to the Picardy, but are also documented in England, as Victoria Hoyle illustrates in her remarkable 2008 study. Her analysis of the plea rolls of the Exchequer of the Jews demonstrates that the borrowing and lending of money brought Jewish and Christian women in contact with one another and provided them the opportunity to discover and discuss shared interests that permeated religious boundaries.\textsuperscript{33}

For various reasons Jewish women were in a more propitious position to maintain interfaith contact than their male counterparts because, as historian Monica H. Green argues, they spoke the same vernacular language as Christians and were less educated than Jewish men. This means that the overwhelming majority of Jewish women did not know Hebrew and could not read the Bible.\textsuperscript{34} Consequently, their activities were less bound by religious scriptures than those of men and therefore less affected by religious ordinances meant to erect barriers between people of different faiths.\textsuperscript{35}

Another field that encouraged encounters between Jewish and non-Jewish women in the thirteenth century and thus speaks to their shared interests across religious demarcations is medicine, particularly midwifery and wet-nursing. Even though there were limitations with regard to consulting physicians of a different faith, both for Jews and their Christian neighbors, the desire to cure ailments with the help of medical practitioners, irrespective of religious affiliation, was stronger than the perceived need to observe rules enacted for the purpose of preventing such contacts.\textsuperscript{36} In addition to the arena of medicine, evidence of such defiant behavior exists in many other areas of interfaith encounters. We see this defiance above all in the economic realm. The statement of R. Yehiel of Paris during the infamous 1240 trial of the Talmud amounted to a public admission of these kinds of interactions. Yehiel asserted that, although the Talmud prohibited Jews from conducting business with gentiles during Jewish holidays and even on some days preceding these festivities, they nevertheless engaged in trade with Christians. “‘Go now into the Jews’ streets and see how many do business with them [the Gentiles] even on the holiday itself,’” Yehiel told his Christian detractors.\textsuperscript{37}

The daily encounters and interactions between Jews and non-Jews are not only indicative of joint experiences, but they also affected their thinking and mentalities. Jewish and Christian women came to share an expanding scope of attitudes and beliefs, even with regard to the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{38} Their thoughts and feelings were influenced by traditions and lore that stemmed not just from their own religious communities. These indications of cultural connectivity correspond well with the fact that in their outer appearances Jewish women...
differed little, if at all, from Christian women—neither in illustration\textsuperscript{39} nor in real life.\textsuperscript{40} Whereas Jewish men were depicted with “characteristic” physical features and costume, it was for the most part impossible to distinguish Jewish from Christian women.

**Interconnectedness and Everyday Life**

The references to Jewish and Christian women’s encounters in the thirteenth century underscore the importance of exploring everyday life for the purpose of tracing interfaith contacts. It is above all the daily practices of ordinary people that reveal the permeability of the religious divide. This permeability of Jewish and non-Jewish boundaries proves true not only for northern Europe in the High Middle Ages, but also for other geographic areas and periods.\textsuperscript{41} Two principal reasons account for this. Both are intimately related to the methodological and epistemological premises of studying the everyday.

As historians of the German *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday history) or the Italian microhistory claim,\textsuperscript{42} an investigation of mundane, repetitious activities carried out by average people reveals that they possessed a degree of agency. While traditional Jewish historiography overwhelmingly considered Jews as passive historical objects, their fate determined by so-called majority populations, an exploration of Jewish everyday life reveals that ordinary Jews were strongly involved in framing their immediate surroundings.\textsuperscript{43} Jews played an active part in shaping relations with non-Jews, although in most cases the societal structure of power put them in a weaker position than their non-Jewish neighbors. A study of the everyday thus conceives of Jews (and non-Jews) as historical actors whose practices were only in part determined by given structures, institutions, and power relations.\textsuperscript{44} Their so-called *Eigensinn* (obstinacy) played a significant role as well.\textsuperscript{45} They possessed, as Maureen Healy translates this German term, a “sliver of autonomy . . . that allow[ed] them . . . to navigate below the structures that older social history relied on.”\textsuperscript{46} Daily life was thus less tractable than authorities thought or wished it to be, and thereby opened up the opportunity to engage in relations prohibited by various enactments.

The second reason for the importance of microhistorical studies in highlighting Jewish and non-Jewish togetherness is related to the very content of the everyday. It is constituted by the thick web of people’s relations with their proximity.\textsuperscript{47} As research in the recent past has convincingly shown, Jews and non-Jews frequently lived side by side.\textsuperscript{48} Jews and non-Jews were part of the respective other’s lifeways. Exploring the everyday experiences of Jews is thus tantamount to investigating their relationships with non-Jews.
In summary, I argue that a practice of scrutinizing the quotidian lays the foundation for a counter-narrative to an “exclusive Jewish history.” It reveals and explains Jews’ and non-Jews’ micro-resistances to, and creativity in, evading legal measures targeting their disentanglement. A microhistorical approach makes clear that descriptions of Jewish and non-Jewish relations based overwhelmingly on polemical literature, laws, and ordinances fall short of drawing an accurate picture of the past.  

The Contact Hypothesis

As I mentioned above, the focus on the entanglement of Jews and non-Jews has increased our knowledge of the interconnectedness of their cultures and of their manifold personal contacts. In the previous sections of this essay, I have shed some light on the second aspect, the interfaith and cross-cultural encounters of people. The many findings related to their intermingling provide the factual basis for the proposition that Jews did not lead separate lives, but largely lived in close proximity to their non-Jewish social surroundings. But what else do we learn from the exploration of Jewish daily existence? The question remains regarding the relevance of these interactions for the Jewish past, when we take into consideration anti-Jewish violence that has recurred periodically and embedded itself in Jewish collective memory, affecting Jewish and non-Jewish rapport even in times of seemingly peaceful relations. In other words, one might assume that an emphasis on Jewish and non-Jewish entanglement is a rather marginal topic in the face of persistent anti-Jewish prejudices and outbursts, above all of the fact that Jewish and non-Jewish interactions seemed to have little or no effect on the reduction of anti-Jewish stereotypes, as the example of the slaughter of Jews in the Polish town of Jedwabne in 1941 demonstrates. Jan T. Gross explicitly states in his book on the pogrom that the murderers and the victims had “good neighborly relations” before the massacre. Yet, despite their experiences of togetherness, biases and hostile feelings against Jews persevered. Monika Sznajderman, just to mention another example, describes the attitude of non-Jewish Poles toward Jewish Poles in the context of the Nazi persecution of the latter as “indifference resulting from an ever-present feeling of foreignness.”

Irrespective of such examples, however, I wish to argue that for various reasons research on cross-cultural encounters and individual interactions does indeed matter and must not be dismissed. First of all, because it complements the picture of the Jewish past and shows that
Jewish and non-Jewish relations were not just fraught with hostility and persecution. Secondly, and closely related to the first aspect, it specifies the conditions under which contacts may or may not improve the mutual understanding of Jews and non-Jews. Thereby, it contributes significantly to the study of antisemitism, i.e., to a field whose scholars usually tend to be reluctant to explore Jewish and non-Jewish entanglement and thus forfeit an opportunity to gain further insight into the operation of Judeophobia. Another reason for investigating personal interactions lies in the fact that they provide the very context from which historians can retrieve findings of similarity. And such similarities, as I pointed out at the beginning of this essay, allow the composition of historical accounts without binary classifications. Research on Jewish and non-Jewish contacts thus provides scholars with the factual fodder for a narrative that goes beyond a ‘customary’ treatment of cross-cultural relations. From this perspective, studies of Jewish and non-Jewish encounters and interactions are important undertakings.

In the following, I discuss the contact hypothesis at some length. My approach here is motivated by my understanding of the concept of similarity as partly inchoate, at least for its use by historians. I contend, as I mentioned above, that the contact hypothesis can help mitigate some of these deficiencies.

The contact hypothesis was formulated by Gordon W. Allport in his book *The Nature of Prejudice* (1954). It “states that interracial contact informs the participating members of each racial group that one race is inherently no better or worse than another; hence, contact acts to break down prejudice.” Its erosion is primarily caused by cognitive processes resulting from interpersonal encounters. They expand knowledge of the respective other and thereby generate tolerance.

In promising a way to lower tensions between different ethnic groups and ameliorate the relations between them, the contact hypothesis drew the attention of politicians and urban planners in the second half of the twentieth century. They sought to increase the number and size of public spaces in cityscapes. For various reasons, the result of this policy did not meet the expectations sparked by the contact hypothesis. One central reason seems to be that planners neglected to recognize people as agents in their own right whose practices are not entirely determined by their surroundings and political rulers. I mentioned this aspect in reference to Michel de Certeau, who claimed that people frequently refrain from using territories in the manner for which they are designed. For instance, people may transform public spaces intended to serve as contact zones into transit areas where pedestrians pass...
without consciously noting each other, or boisterous youths may occupy these spaces and render them inhospitable for other people.\textsuperscript{56}

The contact hypothesis failed not only when tested in the field; its flaws also came to the fore in a variety of studies reassessing its methodological approaches, for example its heavy reliance on clinical experiments conducted above all by social psychologists. As has become clear, the outcome of such research differs, sometimes strongly, from that of mundane everyday practices.\textsuperscript{57} Consequently, many studies that for decades were recognized as confirming the contact hypothesis are now considered of little value. Another aspect indicative of the weakness of the contact hypothesis concerns its teleological character. It does not take into account that prejudices may solidify rather than erode through encounters. Yet, this phenomenon occurs more often than imagined.\textsuperscript{58}

Besides its methodological as well as theoretical shortcomings and its failure to prove its validity in actual life, a third variant of criticism of the contact hypothesis has been levelled at its very core, the assertion that interpersonal contacts do affect people’s attitude toward strangers. This premise is far from being confirmed. There is ample evidence, for example, that some people retain their biases despite multifarious contacts with members of groups they disrespect for hearsay reasons.\textsuperscript{59} They simply are unamenable to someone else’s life-story. Other people may be positively influenced by contacts with foreigners and shed their prejudices, but only against those members of the stereotyped group with whom they interact personally.\textsuperscript{60} And yet others harbor prejudices, but do not express them in public, behave politely, observe codes of civility, and even display tolerance. Due to their agreeable conduct, they remain below the radar of scholars who investigate biased thinking. Nothing can be said about the impact of interpersonal encounters on their attitudes. In consideration of the complexity of human interactions, Gill Valentine consistently criticizes the “naïve assumption that contacts with ‘others’ translates into respect for difference.”\textsuperscript{61} According to her argument, only “meaningful contacts” rather than mere proximity correct prejudices.\textsuperscript{62} Yet, where exactly and under what circumstances such meaningful contacts take place is difficult to determine. There is now wide consensus among scholars that streets, parks, and other public spaces, once considered paradigmatic sites of contact generating a sense of togetherness, fail to serve this purpose.\textsuperscript{63} Some researchers have therefore shifted their attention to so-called micro-publics, i.e., spaces where people consistently meet and engage in multiple interactions. Schools, leisure clubs, and other institutions people frequent on a regular basis represent such micro-publics.\textsuperscript{64} They differ from streets in that people spend
much time with one another, consciously collaborate in order to accomplish common goals, and thereby become emotionally involved with each other. This affective aspect seems to play a decisive role in overcoming or reducing prejudices, by far outweighing cognitive processes in its importance.\textsuperscript{65}

In summarizing the studies reassessing the contact hypothesis, I wish to stress three aspects that also indicate how the study of antisemitism might benefit from an investigation of Jewish and non-Jewish personal contacts. First, encounters per se represent no causative factors for reducing prejudices. They might provoke the opposite outcome as well. If people, each identifying with a different group, are in contact with one another, they might shed their prejudices against individuals they meet in person, but not against others of the same group. This insight may explain why many anti-Semites claim that they know individual Jews whom they appreciate as friends, but at the same time rage against Jews in general.\textsuperscript{66}

The second aspect concerns the issue of emotional involvement. As mentioned above, the fostering of affective relations between people of different ethnic background who discriminate against or are suspicious of each other seems to be more instrumental for abandoning a jaundiced view than gaining knowledge of the respective other’s culture. This phenomenon may be a reason why some people who went to school during the Nazi rise to power in Germany report that they experienced only little, if any, personal antisemitism.\textsuperscript{67} Their relations with fellow students had grown over years, were underpinned by positive feelings, and could not be easily disrupted by ideology-driven decrees. This finding may likewise explain why in nineteenth-century nationalism-torn Galician schools frequently served as institutions seemingly bereft of ethnic strife. An illustrative example is the Israelitische Realschule in Brody, a town located on the border of Russia. Jewish, as well as Christian, students visited the school that also employed non-Jews as teachers.\textsuperscript{68} While many other Galician organizations that formerly induced Jewish and non-Jewish interactions fell apart, the Israelitische Realschule defied the increasingly parochial political climate.\textsuperscript{69}

The reference to the affective aspect of encounters also helps to illuminate the growth of antisemitism in Vienna in the late-nineteenth century, when Jews and non-Jews increasingly organized their everyday lives in a way that brought them in closer contact with one another than ever before. Both, for example, enjoyed leisure activities that were in fashion in this period, such as taking strolls, visiting exhibitions of indigenous people or coffeehouses, or attending circus and music hall performances.\textsuperscript{70} In pursuit of recreational pleasures, Jews and non-Jews frequented the same public spaces where they encountered one another and shared
many experiences. Yet, despite their newfound commonalities, they obviously never established the strong emotional ties that might have kept anti-Jewish sentiments in check. At the same time, and this seemed to be particularly detrimental to Jewish and non-Jewish rapport, many organizations that had accepted Jews as members and had consequently given them the opportunity to build emotionally laden relations to non-Jews began to exclude the former. A conspicuous historical landmark of this development was the adoption of the Waidhofer Resolution by student fraternities in 1882. It disqualified Jews from fighting duels on racial grounds. In the late nineteenth century, duels served as a very important means of defending one’s honor. Jews, the resolution stated, had no honor, and therefore were inferior to non-Jews. Consequently, Jews were banned from student fraternities. Other institutions followed suit.

The last point that I must emphasize concerns the unpredictability of the outcome of interpersonal contacts. Some provoke feelings of empathy toward the ‘other’ while some contacts aggravate hostility. There is no linear development. The impact of encounters is highly dependant on the context and the moment in which they take part. It is impossible to claim that contacts per se improve cross-cultural relations.

The Link Between the Contact Hypothesis and the Concept of Similarity

As I mentioned in the introductory section of this article, the model of similarity aims to disrupt binary categorizations, and in this particular case the Jewish and non-Jewish dichotomy. It is a fairly new concept that requires, I contend, additional elaboration. At this stage in its development, the concept poses some problems to historians, and these problems must be tackled before its innovative potential can be fully utilized. In the previous pages, I have sought to address one of the various shortcomings of similarity, namely the lack of an exact explanation regarding its cause. For this purpose, I introduced the contact hypothesis, which frames the conditions under which interpersonal or interethnic encounters generate affective ties between groups or individuals. These affective ties undermine prejudices that people harbor against one another. The bonding process must not be confused with experiences of similarity, however, since it maintains dichotomous perceptions of the respective other. Yet, it often serves as a precondition for the actualization of similarity.

I wish to undergird my argument with a specific example from Vienna during the fin-de-siècle period. It concerns a Jewish bed-lodger named Samuel Schönfeld, who found temporary lodging with a Catholic family. Schönfeld rented a bed in the kitchen of a small
apartment where he sexually abused the daughter of his landlord. The reason that I wish to draw attention to Schönfeld does not, however, relate to his felony (as important as this aspect is in a larger sense). What is pertinent to my investigation here is his presence in the private sphere of a Catholic family. His tenancy conflicts with the predominant historical narrative of Jews in Vienna around 1900. According to this account, Jews largely lived among themselves, and non-Jewish neighbors, let alone Jews in a non-Jewish household, were rather unusual. Schönfeld’s lodging thus represents an extraordinary instance and therefore deserves closer attention.

Against the backdrop of Viennese residency patterns, Schönfeld’s presence as a bed-lodger infringed upon unwritten rules and conventions. This was only possible, I wish to argue, because Schönfeld and his Catholic landlord experienced a high level of familiarity with each other. Their intimacy, as well as the concomitant awareness that their commonalities trumped their differences, emboldened the two men to disregard Jewish and non-Jewish boundaries. Their sense of togetherness even overrode the objections by the landlord’s wife and daughter to sharing the kitchen with Schönfeld. In other words, the landlord and Schönfeld felt similar to one another.

The question about the cause of this feeling of similarity remains open to supposition. The archival documents mention no amicable ties between the two men and therefore provide no conclusive answer. They indicate, however, their occupations. They both worked at the Emperor Franz Joseph Railway, where they regularly interacted with one another. This piece of information appears highly valuable when put in context with the findings of the contact hypothesis. As mentioned above, it claims that encounters at so-called micro-publics, for example workplaces, are conducive to forging strong emotional ties among people, in the particular case among co-workers. These ties have the potential to disrupt ethnic and religious categorizations. There is much reason to assume that their occupation at the railway was a decisive factor underpinning the acquaintance between Schönfeld and his landlord.

Another challenge that similarity poses to scholars employing its concept concerns its traceability. Similarity is the utmost subjective experience. The best sources from which an appropriate experience can be reconstructed are ego documents, or personal documents. However, they are so rare in number that they hardly allow for more general inferences. The range of possible sources to be explored for indications of a similarity experience could be broadened by including material on incidences and processes that, even though lacking an explicitly stated awareness of similarity, are nevertheless strongly suggestive of it. This is the
case with documents on close friendships, intermarriages, specific forms of lived solidarity, and other expressions of togetherness characterized by a sense of shared commonalities in comparison to which differences become secondary. The reading of the biographical notes of the Galician-Ukrainian writer Ivan Franko, composed in the 1870s, may serve as an illuminating example of such an interpretative procedure. In writing about his childhood years, he relates his adventures and undertakings with a Jewish friend, with whom he felt particularly close and shared many interests. They both were aware of their manifold commonalities, but also their differences. Franko mentions, for example, that during Passover, his Christian family bought and ate unleavened bread, thus providing a remarkable example of cross-cultural togetherness lacking unsurmountable divide. However, despite his familiarity with aspects of Jewish culture and acquaintance with Jews, Franko was also afraid of some of them, in particular of a Jewish traveling salesman who has seemingly strange appearance. Yet, the tradesman never figures as a fundamental ‘other’ in the text, but is merely characterized by a peculiar distinctiveness, by a curious difference.

Summary
Within Jewish studies, the shift from a largely exclusive Jewish history to a Jewish and non-Jewish entanglement has complemented—in part even revised—our conception of the Jewish past. New historical accounts devoted to Jewish and non-Jewish interconnectedness have expanded our knowledge of Jewish and non-Jewish cultural reciprocity as well as of personal interactions and cooperation. Surprisingly, however, the novel historiographical focus has not shed the binary divide between Jews and non-Jews. As I wish to argue, this is possible by collating and connecting experiences of similarity.

As promising as the model of similarity seems, I would caution against applying it with unreflected enthusiasm. Various shortcomings still need to be remediated before the concept of similarity can fully meet expectations. I have presented the linkage between similarity and the contact hypothesis as an important step in accomplishing this goal. But even so, the application of the model of similarity opens parts of the Jewish past to new interpretations beyond the Jewish and non-Jewish dichotomy.
Endnotes

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4 It may well be that Gould’s apparent biological explanation of our dichotomous taxonomies is too deterministic, and that our binary conceptualizations, as various studies indeed suggest, are caused by cultural reasons instead. See See Yasumasa Kuroda and Tatsuzo Suzuki, “A Comparative Analysis of Arab Culture: Arabic, Japanese, and American Languages and Values,” *Behaviormetrika* 30 (1991): 40.


7 Among the first historians in the late-twentieth century who deviated from conventional historical narratives and ushered in a new interpretation of Jewish history were above all Ivan

8 This is not to say that there is a sharp demarcation between exchange and interaction historiography. Rather, they serve as ‘ideal’ categories, and much scholarship straddles the division. Christian Hebraism serves as an exemplary field in which the two strands intersect: its representatives aimed at reading Jewish religious texts in the original language. In order to acquire or improve their pertinent language skills, Christian pundits took Hebrew lessons with Jews. Hebraists also employed Jews as proofreaders of their translations into German, borrowed books from Jews, and sought personal contacts with them for various other purposes. There was thus much intellectual and cultural exchange as well as individual interaction. See Debra Kaplan, *Beyond Expulsion: Jews, Christians, and Reformation Strasbourg* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 119–143.


10 One of these far-reaching ramifications concerns the employment of concepts and terms that imply dualistic demarcations. In this context, the term “minority” represents one of various illuminative examples. Apart from its inherent inconsistencies, it is widely used for designating Jews living in non-Jewish surroundings. Frequently, however, the non-Jewish societal environment is highly fragmented, pluralistic, and in no way unified, and consequently cannot be subsumed under the term “majority population.” This fragmentation proves above all true with the history of Jews in early modern Eastern Europe. The non-Jewish population consisted of Armenians, Germans, Poles, Ruthenians, and other groups, and each of them claimed to possess a distinct cultural profile. In these societal surroundings, Vilnius stands out as an example of a particularly diverse city. In addition to Muslim Tatars and Jews, the city was home to five Christian denominations. David Frick, “Jews in Public Places: Further Chapters in the Jewish-Christian Encounter in Seventeenth-Century Vilna,” *Polin* 22 (2010): 215. And although Jews were outnumbered by the latter, it is simply impossible to juxtapose Jews in opposition to them. The various groups harbored different interests and pursued different goals. This constellation caused some collectives to join ranks against other groups at certain moments, while other situations saw them shift this
alignment. There was no static divide between majority and minority. Instead, Jews were heavily involved with non-Jews through various forms of interaction.

11 Marion Kaplan, for instance, maintains that Jewish and non-Jewish Germans could develop friendships, but they usually represented so-called “differentiated friendships,” i.e., they connected individuals according to common intellectual interest, common careers, and other shared features. In principle, Jews and non-Jews remained distinctive and apart, despite mutual contacts. See Marion Kaplan, “Friendship on the Margins: Jewish Social Relations in Imperial Germany,” *Central European History* 34, no. 4 (2001): 500.


14 In this context, Helmut Walter-Smith perceptively concludes: “What historians may need, then, is a theory of difference that can account for what Jews (and perhaps some Christians) felt to be underlying similarities.” See idem, “The Discourse of Usury: Relations Between Christians and Jews in the German Countryside, 1880–1914,” *Central European History* 32, no. 3 (1999): 270.


19 Aleida Assmann, “Similarity as Performance: A New Approach to Identity Construction Regimes,” in Anil Bhatti and Dorothee Kimmich, eds., *Similarity: A Paradigm This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License


25 This is not to say that all historical accounts delineating Jews as an isolated minority have fallen into academic disrepute. Traditional historiography’s view that Jews lived apart from non-Jews still has its proponents. See for example Robert Blobaum, ed., Antisemitism and Its Opponents in Modern Poland (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 2.


historical periods, we must pose the question of how to describe them adequately. There is no consensus among scholars regarding which notions best designate such encounters. Since cultural connectivity is always complex and multifaceted, the vocabulary that scholars employ is dependent upon what aspects of these interactions they endeavor to stress. Some terms represent geometric metaphors, such as “intersections” and “convergences.” This usage is fraught with problems, however, since they imply that cultural systems touch each other only sporadically, thus retaining the idea of their distinctiveness. See Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler, “Introduction,” in *Entangled Histories: Knowledge, Authority, and Jewish Culture in the Thirteenth Century*, eds. Elisheva Baumgarten, Ruth Mazo Karras, and Katelyn Mesler (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 4. Other designations, such as “embeddedness,” seem to neglect the dynamic dimension characteristic of cultural exchanges. See Jürgen Kocka, “Comparison and Beyond,” *History and Theory* 42, no.1 (2003): 42. They express a static condition. Against this background, the use of concepts focusing on longer historical processes, such as “connected history,” or *histoire croisée* (intertwined history), seems to be more adequate. See, respectively, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 735–762, and Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, eds., *Transferts: les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe siecle)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les civilizations, 1988). A term that has come into much favor among scholars more recently is “entanglement.” More than other designations, the notion of entanglement takes the complex, even contradictory relations between Jews and non-Jews, their “hostile as well as tolerant encounters,” into account.

Baumgarten, et al., “Introduction,” 4. Yet, as I wish to argue, entanglement differs from other notions indicating cross-cultural relations only in minor ways. Similar to the aforementioned terms, entanglement also maintains dichotomous juxtapositions.


38 Baumgarten, “‘A Separate People,’” 219.


42 *Alltagsgeschichte* and “microhistory” share significant characteristics but in some respects differ from each other. See Andrew I. Port, “History from Below, the History of Everyday Life, and Microhistory,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* 11 (2015): 108–113. In this text, they are used as mutually interchangeable.


Port, “History from Below,” 110.


See Brian Morris, “What We Talk about When We Talk about ‘Walking in the City,’” \textit{Cultural Studies} 18, no. 5 (2004): 677–682.

S. Houston, R. Wright, M. Ellis, S. Holloway, and M. Hudson, “Places of Possibility: Where Mixed Race Partners Meet,” \textit{Progress in Human Geography} 29 (2005): 700–717. A concrete example of the very present are the Kamenné Namestie and Hlavne Namieste squares in Bratislava, the Slovakian capital. Once designed and used as bustling public...
spaces, they have been changed into drab transit zones with “almost no permanent users.”


67 See the memories of Ernst L. Biberstein, who was born November 11, 1929 in Breslau/Wroclaw and went to the city’s Friedrichsgymnasium. Email correspondence, November 7, 2017.


69 Kuzmany, Brody, 329.


73 Wiener Straf-und Landesarchiv A11 (272) 1909.

Rozenblit, Die Juden Wiens 1867–1914: Assimilation und Identität (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1997). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.
Böhlau Verlag, 1989), 83.