‘We were turned into Jews’: Space, subjectivation, and resistance in occupied Paris

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Recent geographical scholarship has shown that the persecution and extermination of European Jews during the Holocaust was associated with profound spatial transformations at every scale, from the body to the continent. Yet, the embodied spatial experience of Jews throughout persecution and the way it affected their subjectivity, particularly as they kept living and surviving in the ordinary city, has been understudied. In this paper, we draw on the diaries of six Parisian Jews written during the Holocaust to explore the process of subject formation, or subjectivation, as antisemitic measures transform their daily life and experience of public space in the city. We focus in particular on two techniques of control that sought to produce particular kinds of subjects by working on the relationship between bodies and their surrounding milieus: *signage* and *body writing.* Relying on understandings of subjectivation as contested, contingent, and multiple we show that, first, ‘ideal’ subject formation relied on techniques involving both bodily inscription and differentiation as well as the resignification of urban space; and second, that such efforts were resisted and taken up only partially by both Jewish and non-Jewish Parisians, resulting in incomplete and contested attempts at subjection.

Keywords: Holocaust; persecution; subjectivation; signage; body-writing

Introduction

Following the early ground-breaking work of Andrew Charlesworth’s on Holocaust landscapes (1992, 2004), the field of Holocaust studies has recently taken a spatial turn, borrowing concepts and tools from geography, as exemplified by the edited collections: *Hitler’s Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich* (Giaccaria & Minca, 2016) and *Geographies of the Holocaust* (Knowles et al., 2014). These collections illustrate two of the current major perspectives taken by geographers while studying the Holocaust, alongside the landscape approach initiated by Charlesworth and extended by Tim Cole (2016). The first of these is broadly theoretical and largely inspired by

biopolitical theory, in particular Giorgio Agamben's (1998) conception of Auschwitz as 'the most absolute biopolitical space to have been realized' (p. 168) and, as such, as a threshold of modernity (Minca, 2007). Building on this line of thought, Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (2011a, 2011b, 2016) argued that the Nazi geopolitical and biopolitical project for the creation of new vital space for the German people, which was theorized as *Lebensraum* (literally 'living space'), necessitated new representations of social space which required the removal of undesirables from the space of the Reich and ultimately resulted in genocide. Giaccaria and Minca's quest for a 'spatial theory of the Third Reich' is part of a line of inquiry that 'directly engag[es] with the specific relationship between spatial theory, Nazi ideology and its geopolitical and genocidal practices' (2016, pp. 2–3), encompassing the many facets of Nazi power and the history of science and urban planning under the Third Reich.

In contrast, the second of these perspectives makes empirical uses of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), spatial analysis, and geovisualization, in the vein of the spatial humanities, to uncover spatial patterns within the Holocaust. This is the approach adopted by the Holocaust Geographies Collaborative, an interdisciplinary research group who undertook a series of case studies using spatial analytical methods to study the geography and the chronology of the Holocaust at different scales (Beorn et al., 2010; Knowles et al., 2014).

Together, these diverse geographical approaches to the Holocaust have shown that the persecution and extermination of Jews from Europe in the mid-twentieth century was associated with profound spatial transformations at virtually every scale, from the body to the continent (Knowles et al., 2014). Yet, geographers have so far largely focused on the perpetrator's perspectives, while the spatial experiences and the spatial strategies of victims of the Holocaust remain understudied (Cole, 2020). The few

existing exceptions have shown the value of focusing on the embodied experience of Holocaust places in order to understand how they have been imbued with meaning (see in particular Gigliotti, 2009 for her pioneering work on deportation and on the embodied experience of the cattle car's enclosed space; see also Cole, 2016; Walke, 2015). In light of this state of geographical engagements with the Holocaust, Tim Cole (2020) has encouraged scholars to engage with the materiality of Holocaust spaces and places, to study victims' agency, and to explore 'the relationships between the systemic and the individual across […] genocidal landscapes' (p. 343).

To us, Cole's call echoed recent critical research in geography examining the relationships between subjectivity and space which has drawn on theoretical and conceptual frameworks ranging from feminist understandings of embodiment (Grosz, 1994) to non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008) and assemblage thinking (Ruddick, 2010). Each of these approaches, in their own ways, seeks to decenter discourse, language, and conscious reflection as foundational loci or determinants of subjectivities, and explore instead the mutually constitutive and emergent relations between materiality and meaning, subjects and objects, and bodies and their surrounding milieus. Viewed as something of a corrective for (perhaps sometimes more perceived than real) logocentric tendencies accompanying the cultural turn in geography, this conception of the subject calls attention to the spatial configurations and material-semiotic dynamics of subjective, lived experience. Here, the process of subject formation, or subjectivation, is understood as contingent upon individual and collective bodies coming into contact with specific conjunctures or assemblages of actors, human and more-than-human, that together produce, reinforce, intensify, and maintain particular ways of perceiving and being in the world. While assemblages can be more or less stable and durable, such approaches typically attend carefully to the virtual and actual

tendencies towards disruption and instability that are constitutive of all assemblages. From this perspective, the analytical imperative is to understand the dynamic relation between subject formation and transformation, between fixity and flow. Subjectivity is thus conceived of as at best a provisional achievement.

In this paper, we pursue this line of inquiry into subjectivity and space with a particular focus on two techniques of control during the Nazi occupation of Paris that sought to produce particular kinds of subjects by working on the relationship between bodies and their surrounding milieus: *signage* and *body writing* (or inscription). Drawing on post-structuralist and feminist understandings of subjectivity, we approach anti-Jewish placards and other types of signs in the urban environment as semiotic-material mediators mobilized by the Nazis and their allies to imbue particular spaces with meaning and thus enrol Parisians as antisemitic subjects. Our analysis follows research on signage and subjectivity in geography (cf. Campbell et al., 2021; Gabriel, 2011), but addresses a limitation identified in that work, the challenge of moving beyond analysis of lingering *traces* of subject formation and connecting such traces to 'actual living human subjects' (Campbell et al., 2021, p. 290). We take up this challenge below by examining the diaries of Parisian Jews written during the occupation, seeking to gain further insight into how idealized subjectivities become – or do not become – actualized subjects. This task takes us beyond analysis of signage to also consider how the Nazis attempted to produce particular Jewish and antisemitic subjects through what feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has called 'body writing'. Through processes of inscription upon Jewish bodies such as the infamous 'yellow star,' we argue that the Nazis sought to imbricate those bodies into 'network[s] of meaning and social significance' (Grosz, 1994, p. 116) that accorded with the Nazis' genocidal aims.

Diaries written by Jews are a particularly fitting and quite unique type of source for exploring processes of subjectivation during the Holocaust as experienced first-hand. Indeed, they count among the fairly limited number of documents conveying Jewish voices and experiences produced *during* the Holocaust. As such, they contrast with the many testimonies and memoirs written or recorded after the end of World War II—oftentimes decades after the war— which tend to focus on iconic aspects of the Holocaust (such as deportation, the camps, hiding, and rescue) while oftentimes leaving little room for the description of everyday life during the war. Hence, diaries have long been used by Holocaust scholars who are interested in the lives and perspectives of Jews during World War II (for some recent examples, see Augustyns, 2019; Garbarini, 2006; Sémelin, 2013). Such authors have investigated various aspects of Jewish wartime daily experiences, including their cultural and emotional lives. Additionally, and more importantly in the context of our study, James Young (1987) has argued that diaries written during the Holocaust have the potential to teach us much about the subjective personal experiences of the writer as they were being shaped, especially since (self)writing and persecution occurred simultaneously. Similar arguments have been made by historians beyond Holocaust studies who have used diaries, by 'virtue of being serial narratives and ongoing engagements of the self through time' (Hellbeck, 2004, p. 628), to investigate the social meaning of daily routines, and to provide insights into subjectivity in history (Paperno, 2004). Thus, in our quest to better understand the politics of subjectivation in the context of antisemitic regulations and persecution, we relied on a combination of open-coding and close-reading techniques of the diaries[1] of

[1] Each of these diaries has been originally written and subsequently published in French. We have used these published versions for our analysis. For Berr's and Mesnil-Amar's diaries, which have been translated to and published in English, the excerpts quoted here come from these official translations. For all other quotes, translations are our own.

six Parisian Jews who described and commented on their daily life under German occupation.

Before turning to the diaries, we begin with some contextual information regarding the Parisian Jewish population in the mid-twentieth century followed by a brief presentation of the identity of our diarists. We then continue with an exploration of the ways the production of subjectivities, Jewish and others, is apparent in the daily entries of our diarists. Throughout our analysis, our understandings of subjectivation as contested, contingent, and multiple help us recognize two important points for understanding subject formation in German-occupied Paris: first, 'ideal' subject formation relied on techniques involving both bodily inscription and differentiation and the resignification of urban space; and second, such efforts were resisted and taken up only partially by both Jewish and non-Jewish Parisians, resulting in incomplete and contested attempts at subjection. We develop these two points while focusing successively on two modes of subjectivation: signage and body writings.

Jewish life and Jewish diarists in occupied Paris

On the eve of World War II, 300,000 to 330,000 Jews lived in France. About two third of them lived in Paris where they constituted the largest Jewish community of Western Europe. However, historians have reluctantly used the expression 'Jewish community' when talking about the Jews of France because of their great heterogeneity (Kaspi, 1997, p. 17; Poznanski, 2012, p. 21). On one hand, about 90,000 of them, and about one fourth of the Jews of Paris, were descendants of old Jewish families who had lived in France for many generations and thus were French nationals; these Jews were frequently referred to as 'Israelites'. In addition, 60,000 Jews in France, and about 50,000 in Paris, were foreign-born Jews who had been naturalized French. For the most part, these French Jews were well integrated with the rest of French society and felt as

an integral part of the French nation, especially as many had fought with France during World War I. Overall, the French Israelites fully embraced the ideals of the French Republic and considered their religion as a private matter. Many of them belonged to the middle bourgeoisie, or even sometimes to the upper-class, and they worked in a diverse array of professions, for instance as antique dealers, business owners, liberal practitioners, or state officials. In Paris, they tended to live in the upper-class neighbourhoods of the West or, for those who came from the Sephardic communities of the Southwest of France, in the 9th *arrondissement*. On the other hand, about half of the Jews of France, and the same proportion of Jews living in Paris, were foreigners. Many of them came from Central and Eastern Europe after the first World War, in particular from Poland, Hungary and Romania, as antisemitism was on the rise in their countries and economic opportunities seemed more favourable in France. Others arrived from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, after Hitler had come to power. For the most part, they were lower-class manual workers, many of them from the textile industry, and lived in working-class neighbourhoods in the centre and east of Paris. Oftentimes they spoke Yiddish, or when they spoke French their accent revealed their foreign origins. In addition to these Ashkenazi Jews, Sephardic Jews had also immigrated to France before WWII. In the 1930s, Paris was home of about 15,000 of them, including a small Judeo-Spanish, or Ladino, speaking community who came from the Western part of the Ottoman empire at the end of the 19th century (Weinberg, 1974, p. 21). Overall, foreign Jews, especially those who immigrated the most recently, were much less integrated with French society than the Israelites and were frequently confronted with xenophobia. Of course, this simplistic categorization does not account for the diversity and the porosity of these groups, and one should acknowledge the heterogeneity of identities of the Israelites, naturalized French, and foreign Jews populations.

The identity of our six Jewish diarists reflects in part the diversity of the Jewish Parisian population(s). Albert Grunberg, a Romanian hairdresser in his forties who arrived in France before World War I and later obtained French nationality, starts writing in December 1942 when he is forced to go into hiding above his shop and stops writing upon the liberation of Paris. Jacques Biélinky, a middle age French journalist and art critic of Russian origin, describes the life of Paris in great detail between July 1940 and his arrest and deportation in December 1942. Hélène Berr, an Israelite student in her twenties who volunteers in a Jewish assistance organization, describes her daily life and social relations between April 1942 and her arrest in February 1944. Aline-Mathilde Fathaud, a Polish Jew born in the early 1920s who left Paris and her studies in the summer of 1941 in an attempt to escape persecutions, writes throughout the duration of war from various cities of south France. Yves Lejoyeux, a French high schooler from the Parisian suburb, retells his life between his hometown and Paris, where he goes to school, from 1938 until the liberation of Paris. Finally, Jacqueline Mesnil-Amar, who belonged to an old French family, started writing in July 1944 after her husband, who was part of a Jewish partisan organization, was arrested by the Nazis and her diary ends more than a year after the liberation of Paris. We selected these diaries using the *Écrits de Guerre et d'Occupation* (EGO 1939-1945) database, searching for journals and diaries discussing racial persecution and written by Jews who were in Paris, at least in part, during the Occupation period.[2] As the brief descriptions we provided show, our

[2] The EGO 1939-1945 database is a scientific project which aims to 'provide an exhaustive inventory of all the testimonies, stories, notebooks, diaries and memoirs, concerning France and the French during the Second World War, published from 1939 to the present day' and enables researchers to create coherent and near exhaustive corpuses. It is publicly accessible at http://www.ego.1939-1945.crhq.cnrs.fr. Although the six diaries we studied were all of the ones we found that fit our criteria while searching the database in the spring of 2020, other relevant published diaries might exist, especially since the EGO 1939-1945 is an ongoing project.

writers start (and stop) writing at different times and under different circumstances, together covering the entirety of the occupation period, and they come from a variety of backgrounds. Nevertheless, they all belong to a relatively bourgeois milieu and are either French Israelites or well-integrated foreign Jews. As such, our analysis seldom accounts for the experience of foreign Jews, except when reported indirectly by our diarists. In that respect, the diary of Biélinky has been particularly useful, because its author carefully reports the reactions of the Jewish population of Paris.[3] Indeed, Biélinky's diary is perhaps closer to a series of journalistic chronicles, with a clear intent to describe and testify about daily life, than to a personal journal containing its writer's state of mind and reflections. Nevertheless, although the other diarists adopt a more subjective and personal tone, discussing personal relationships and conveying the emotional state of the writer, the fact that their writings might serve as historical evidence for future generations, that they are, in a way, testifying, is not lost on them, as is made clear in Berr's diary:

> I have a duty to write because other people must know. Every hour of everyday there is another painful realization that *other folk* do not know, do not even imagine […] So I must write to tell people later on what these times are like. I know many others will have more important lessons to teach, and more terrible facts to reveal […]. I am determined to put down on these pages everything in my head and in my heart. (Sunday, October 10 entry, emphasis in the original text)

And indeed, most of these diaries have been widely read and studied by historians and scholars for various research purposes, as well as in secondary schools history classes.[4] A complete overview of these uses would go well beyond the scope of this article; we will simply note that they have been used in works ranging from historical analysis of

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[3] This element as well as the fact that Biélinky starts writing regularly as soon as July 1940 explains why we quote his diary significantly more than the others.

[4] That is the case of all diaries but that of Fathaud and Lejoyeux, whose diffusions have remained limited.

Jewish life in occupied France (for examples, see Poznanski, 2012; Sémelin, 2013) to literary studies of the identity formation of the Jews of France (Freadman, 2020).

In this article, we use these diaries to scrutinize the Nazis' efforts to produce idealized Jewish and antisemitic subjects, as described by Parisian Jews experiencing those efforts, and to recognize the heterogeneity of responses to these efforts among both Jewish and non-Jewish Parisians.

Signifying space in Occupied Paris

The first few months of the occupation of Paris by the Germans, which started on June 14, 1940, were marked by public displays of antisemitism. The second entry of Biélinky's diary, dated of July 20, 1940, reads: 'antisemitic agitation in Boulogne-sur-Seine.' Many subsequent entries from July and August report antisemitic acts and opinions prominently visible in public spaces. The newspaper '*Au Pilori*' was sold on the streets, including in the *Carreau du Temple*, a market famous for its large number of Jewish businesses, by individuals yelling 'Journal against the Jews' or 'Read *Au Pilori*, antisemite newspaper against the Jews.' The windows of some Jewish stores were smashed, as was the case on August 20th and 21st when Jewish stores on the Champs Elysees were systematically targeted. Antisemitic sentiment was also conveyed in public space through signs and posters. As early as July 25, 1940, Biélinky notes that a café on Chateaudun street displayed posters stating 'Establishment forbidden to Israelites.' Even before antisemitic legislation made use of signage to mark certain spaces as Jewish, as we will see below, some business owners took upon themselves to exclude Jews from their businesses and to clearly mark these spaces not only as non-Jewish but also as Jewish-free. Alongside other anti-Jewish actions, these signs reflected the existence of antisemitic subjects among the population. French

antisemitism was not novel at this time. There was a long tradition of antisemitism in France, as exemplified by the Dreyfus case, and the 1930s witnessed a strong resurgence of this sentiment. However, Nazi and Vichy policies drew upon this existing pool of antisemitism, and fed into it, as we shall see, contributing towards a growing willingness to clearly lay out antisemitic claims in (and to) public space.

The display of anti-Jewish sentiment also forced Parisian Jews to reflect upon their own Jewish subjectivities, in particular as potential targets of antisemitism. Unsurprisingly, this led to a great deal of concern among the Jews of Paris. On August 25, following many of the attacks previously mentioned, Biélinky observes that the Jewish population is 'notably tormented.' Biélinky himself seems to be preoccupied by what is said about the Jews in public space, and he is particularly attuned to any expression of antisemitism in public opinion and in interpersonal conversation. He specifically reports on discussion in queues in front of stores. Overall, however, he seems reassured by the relative scarcity of blatant anti-Jewish sentiments in the general population. On July 24, he notes 'In queues (for milk, meat) bustling conversations, no traces of antisemitism.' On September 13, while noting that everyone complains in queues, he specifies that there is 'never any anti-Semite intervention.'

By September 1940, these few—but very visible—public displays of popular antisemitism started to dwindle. On September 1, Biélinky notes that the anti-Jewish posters have disappeared from the café on Chateaudun street.[5] Historian Renée Poznanski (2002) contends that, by the end of September 1940, 'popular antisemitism, in its violent forms, remained the province of the Germans and a handful of isolated

[5] Other signs on cafes are however added later, as mentioned by Biélinky in February 1941 as well as in September 1942, after Jews are officially banned from most public establishments and amenities by the ninth German ordinance of July 8, 1942.

fanatics' (p. 299). Institutional antisemitism, however, was only beginning to invade public spaces. The first German ordinance concerning anti-Jewish measures, dated September 27, 1940, ordered a census of all Jews, forbade Jews who fled the occupied zone to come back, and prescribed that 'every business, whose owner is Jewish, shall be designated as a 'Jewish Business' by a specific poster in French and German language' (Klarsfeld, 2001, pp. 26–28). By November 1940, yellow posters with the words '*Judisches Geschaft / Entreprise Juive*' were ostensibly displayed on the storefront of about 4,700 such Parisian businesses (Joly, 2018, p. 46).

To understand the ways that signs, and in particular these yellow posters, were deployed in Nazi-occupied Paris and the implications of such interventions for Parisians, we turn to the material-semiotic perspective of assemblage thinking. From this perspective, signs are irreducible to either passive objects or dematerialized values or representations. A placard hung in a Jewish shop window mediates urban space and the subjects who occupy it in a process of fixing sense or value in and through a material medium; from the poststructuralist approach informing our analysis, this process of fixing is fraught and often contested. Researchers have shown that signs both shape and reveal the development and enactment of multiple subjectivities (Campbell et al., 2021; Hermer & Hunt, 1996). More specifically, in their analysis of subjectivity in urban parks, Campbell, McMillen, and Svendsen demonstrate that, on one hand, official signage typically aims to construct an 'ideal […] subject' (2021, p. 277), while on the other hand alternative subjectivities are expressed through other types of signs, and 'ideal' subjectivities are contested through amendments (e.g. graffiti, or in our case, additional unofficial signs) to official signs. They also recognize that these multiple subjectivities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that 'people can inhabit these different subject positions in multiple ways at different places and times' (2019, p. 15).

We now return to our diaries to delve into the ways the posters designating Jewish shops affected Jewish subjectivities.

The prospect of having to display the yellow poster clearly identifying their store as 'Jewish' provoked ambivalent reactions from Jewish shop owners, in part, as we will see below, depending on their own experience of Jewish subjectivity. For some, having to display the posters was a source of worry. On October 5, Biélinky writes that the ordinance provoked 'great emotion among Jewish storekeepers.' On October 20, Lejoyeux writes:

> Small posters '*Judisches Geschaft*' 'Jewish businesses', in black lettering on yellow background blossom in Jewish businesses. At the market in [the Parisian suburb town of] les Pavillons-sous-Bois […], there are a lot of empty spots, these are the ones of Jewish fairground stallholder. Some left for the free zone, others are afraid. Some, although rare, keep coming and display the mandatory poster.

For others, as Biélinky remarks on October 14, it is rather meaningless: 'around [the Parisian market] *le Carreau du Temple*, the many Jewish storekeepers are by no means moved by the yellow posters.' In these developments we see traces of Foucault's (1982) claim that the 'form of power which makes individuals subjects' – here through signage – 'imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize, and which others have to recognize in him' (p. 781). These two sides of subjectivation are clearly both at play here, as is the unevenness in terms of efficacy, of such efforts to impose these 'laws of truth'. The reactions of Jewish store owners described above reveal how some of them struggled with the acknowledgement and disclosure of their Jewish identity. But, as we will now see, the usage of signage also began to transform the way that Parisians – Jews and non-Jews, patrons of Jewish stores and passers-by – saw the city around them.

Throughout his fall 1940's entries, Biélinky mentions the yellow posters very frequently. On multiple occasions, he notes that the yellow paper, although 'very visible' by the door, does not have a negative effect on business. To the contrary, several Jewish shop owners mentioned to him that new customers, often Catholics, started coming to their store as a way to express sympathy. Although Biélinky states a few times that people do not pay attention to the posters, his own insistence in reporting on them and their apparent effect in drawing in a sympathetic clientele suggests otherwise. First, it is clear that the public identification of Jewish storeowners through the display of yellow posters rendered visible the existence and the repartition of Jewish stores throughout the city. In addition, far from being a measure without consequence, even though the effect on business seemed limited, the identification of Jewish stores contributed once more to bringing the Jewish community into the spotlight and to assert its status as 'other' by singling them out. The reactions of Jewish store owners and community members reported by Biélinky, as well as his own attitude towards the yellow posters, suggest that the omnipresence of these signs in public space resulted in a great deal of attention and led to some worry in the Jewish community. As such, public space ceases to be neutral (if it had ever been) and becomes a constant remainder for the Jews of their status of 'other', as well as for the non-Jews of the fact that 'others' are in the city.

The effects of this signage however vary according to the different neighbourhoods and streets of Paris. While it appears to have been common knowledge that, for example, Jews owned most of the shops in *le Carreau du Temple*—Biélinky reports that shopkeepers in the market declared: 'Everyone knows that we are Jewish, and Christians will keep coming in crowds'—this is not the case for other places in the capital. Biélinky himself seems somewhat surprised by, or at least extremely attentive

to, the spatial distribution of Jewish shops in Paris. On November 1, the second day after the yellow posters are made mandatory, Biélinky notes that almost all shops in the *passage du Prado* are Jewish, while there are very few Jewish establishments in *Montparnasse* or in the Boulevards. Here, we see how signage plays into the already existing subjectivity of Jewish storeowners. This new mandatory and prominent exposure of affiliation with the Jewish community has little impact on those for which Jewish identity is already openly disclosed or assumed, oftentimes because of the nature of their business, their location or the shop's name (see in particular Zalc, 2010 for a study of the role of shop names in marking urban space in Interwar Paris); their existing Jewish subjectivity remains relatively unaltered. For the others however, the forced disclosure of their Jewish identity resulted in drastic changes in their Jewish subjectivity, generating some unease but also prompting some ways of mediating this evolving subjectivity.

Thus, while the 'Jewishness' of particular urban spaces was now marked and intensified in novel ways, the precise significance of this designation was not seamlessly taken up by Parisians. Indeed, some Parisian Jews took it upon themselves to resist, appropriating and subverting the technique of signification. On October 5, Biélinky writes that Jewish business owners who are war veterans plan to supplement the mandatory poster with another one listing their war decorations and mentions in dispatch. Others are also putting up posters reading 'Three sons mobilized', 'French establishment', and many more statements meant to show their attachment and contributions to the French nation. These additional posters testify of the fact that 'Jewishness' was often perceived, at least partially, to be in opposition to 'Frenchness'. But they are also examples of the ways Jewish store owners negotiated their Jewish subjectivity, using the very same medium that reshaped it. To them, their identity could

not be reduced to their 'Jewishness' and professing their French identity and their connection to the French nation was needed. This tension between 'Frenchness' and 'Jewishness' is a theme that is recurrent in the diaries studied, particularly as the next step of Jewish identification unfolds, that of the wearing of the Jewish star.

Bodily inscriptions of Jewishness

On May 29, 1942, the eighth German ordinance concerning anti-Jewish measures extended the identification process to all Jewish individuals. The ordinance stated that, beginning June 7, 'it will be forbidden for Jews aged 6 and older to appear in public without wearing the Jewish Star' (Klarsfeld, 2001, p. 379). In accordance, yellow stars were promptly distributed to about 83,000 Parisian Jews (Poznanski, 1994, p. 55). The ordinance also described the characteristic of the insignia and specified that it had to remain 'clearly visible' on the left side of the chest area. As with the yellow posters, the matter of the Jewish star caused much worry and discussion in the Jewish population. On June 1, Biélinky states 'in diverse Jewish milieus, this new ordeal is received with composure and courage' but also notes that women in queue to receive their insignias are afraid to be mistreated. He later mentions that schools are taking measures to prevent Jewish pupils from being victims of mocking or aggressions. Hélène Berr's entries from June 1, when she first hears about the ordinance, to June 11, after she has been wearing the star for a week, testify of the turmoil caused to her by the yellow star. She writes of being 'in a terrible state' after learning about the news. She discusses it with her friends, decides at first not to wear the star, and later changes her mind judging not to wear the star to be cowardly.[6] On June 8, after she has been

[6] Biélinky also mentions a few people who advise not to wear the star and who are condemned as cowards (June 1st, 1942 entry).

wearing the star for the first day, she writes ‘my god, I never thought it would be so hard.’ She mentions, pell-mell, kids pointing fingers at her, most of her day going ‘normally’, a woman showing her to her companion, a maid smiling at her repeatedly, a man staring at her, and tearing up without knowing why when another woman smiled at her. On the next day, she writes ‘today was even worse than yesterday’ and refers to more finger pointing, more expressions of sympathy, several awkward interactions with friends and acquaintances not knowing how to react to the insignia, and being asked to move to the last subway wagon, to which Jews are confined.

Experiences such as these with the yellow star suggest something of the dislocations and turmoil – both internal and interpersonal – generated by this Nazi policy, whose impact on Jewish life seems to have been intended to do more than simply identify Jews. Indeed, historians have argued that the objectives of the yellow star was to humiliate the Jews, to ‘isolate [them] from the rest of the population and to lead to a trend of hostilities against them’ (Poznanski, 1994, p. 57) as well as to ‘ensure that they would be pointed out in public, conducing them to kowtow even more, […] and that they would end up feeling ashamed of themselves’ (Sémelin, 2013, p. 311). The diaries we use as primary sources do not allow us to comment on the persecutors’ intents, but they do allow us to examine of the effects of persecution on Jewish lives. Clearly, through visual identification and demarcation of Jews and non-Jews, the Nazis extended the process of signification from urban space to bodies themselves. Beyond signs in the urban environment, critical research has also explored how human bodies are sites of subjectivation and resistance thereof. Grosz (1994), for example, relying on the work of Nietszche, Foucault, and other thinkers, has shown that the body can be considered as a writing surface, ‘as a social object […] to be marked, traced, written upon by various regimes of institutional power’ (p. 116). Through ‘body writing’ or

processes of inscription, bodies are constructed as 'network[s] of meaning and social significance, producing them as meaningful and functional 'subjects' within social ensembles' (p. 117). Such body writing can take various forms, including clothing, makeup, exercise, and habitual patterns of movement, and bodies can be marked voluntarily or not by the subject. Grosz notes that unique inscriptions can acquire different meanings depending on social positions and relations. Moreover, she argues that subjectivity is produced differentially by body writing; thus the production of one subjectivity through the use of one inscription on some bodies automatically produce another, one could say inverse, subjectivity due to the absence of the inscription on other bodies. In our case, it means that the yellow star simultaneously produces a Jewish subjectivity (those who wear the star) and a non-Jewish one (those who do not). Yet, Grosz makes clear that the 'body itself is a multiplicity of competing and conflicting forces' and that complex, multiple subjectivities result from this assemblage of competing forces, some but not all of which are inscriptions of varying sorts. Applied to body writing, this means that a single and unique body inscription does not necessarily result in one unique and stable subjectivity. This understanding of subjectivity and bodily inscription helps us to understand the complex, multiple, and often contested nature of Nazi policies of identification through mandated wearing of the yellow star.

Quite clearly, the yellow stars drew a great deal of attention to the Jewish community and to Jewish individuals, in a manner similar, but somewhat more personal, to what happened with the yellow posters. Just as signage did, part of the Jewish subjectivation process is acted upon by bodily inscriptions through the eyes of others. Indeed, although Biélinky insists multiple times that behaviour towards Jews has not changed, his own accounts of the days following June 7 indicate otherwise. He reports that the public identification of Jews is sometimes answered by some

sympathetic acts from gentiles, for instance individuals leaving their seat in the subway to 'decorated' (as Biélinky puts it) Jews or strangers shaking hands of Jews in the streets[7], but also with a few derogative comments and insults against Jews in queues and in the streets. He also mentions the suicide of a nine-year-old Jewish girl after being mocked at school. Quite clearly, the yellow star is anything but insignificant, for both Jews and gentiles.

The mandatory character of the yellow star also means that Jews that might have been passing for gentiles in the past clearly are now clearly identifiable. Biélinky's journal is quite eloquent on that point. On June 8, he is able to count the number of Jews along his way and to notice that there is only one Jewish girl on the school of the boulevard of Arago. He also writes that thanks to the insignias 'an objective observer […] could realize that the great majority of the Jews of Paris do not have traits typically attributed to Jews.' In other words, the identification process is effective in making explicit the presence of Jews in the streets, and in differentiating them from non-Jews. The visible presence of Jews in public space is made clear in Berr's entry from October 28, 1943, in which she writes that a woman with whom she spoke on the street 'reckoned there were a lot of Jews in Paris, obviously, you notice them with that label [the yellow star] stuck on them.'

In this context, we understand the distress expressed by several of our diarists: wearing the Jewish star changes the daily interactions they have with individuals they know, as well as their experience of public space as they become more aware of how

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[7] These acts of sympathy are not to be taken as a sign that Parisian bystanders actively fought against anti-Jewish persecution. As historians have argued, although such 'non-ideological human relations could sweeten the pill […] the destiny of the Jews was determined by the ideological anti-Semitism rooted in the population and legitimized, codified, and applied by the various agencies of the French state' (Poznanski, 2002, p. 307).

bystanders might now perceive them as Jewish, and thus as different from them. But the insignia changes more than simply the attitudes of others; it clearly also affects the Jews' sense of self. For some, the yellow star, alongside other identification and persecution measures, forces them to reassess their Jewish subjectivity. This is especially the case for those who were the most assimilated and did not particularly associate with their Jewish identity, as Mesnil-Amar makes clear when, just after the liberation, she writes: 'We were turned into Jews, gradually, from the outside we who had forgotten our Jewishness' (August 6, midnight entry). This process of 'becoming Jewish' through persecution and forced identification is well illustrated in Grunberg's diary. For a while, he did not abide by the obligations of registering as Jew[8], thereby avoiding restrictions such as the display of the Jewish poster on his hairdresser salon. He justifies his choice with this statement: 'Practicing no religion, I did not consider myself as such [i.e. a Jew]' (undated entry, p. 46). After deciding to regularize his situation in late 1941, he states: 'Arriving at the prefecture, my case […] was quickly settled, I got out of there Jewish' (undated entry, p. 47). A similar sentiment is echoed by Lejoyeux on the day he learns about the Jewish star ordinance. It is worth quoting him at length here:

> I'm afraid. This is the saddest day of my life. After this, us Jews will never be the same as before, neither as individuals, nor as a people. I am ashamed of what I am. What malediction do we incur? I am fifteen, I am French, without money, I am able of nothing except from being Jewish and Judaism is unknown to me […] I wished only one thing, to be a French among others and to not be an individual responsible of all of what designate each day the Staffel

[8] According to the first German ordinance, the head of each Jewish household had to register at their local police station. This was the first mandatory form of public identification for Jews, even though it did not initially translate into any form of identification in public space beyond posters on businesses. Lejoyeux is the only other one of our diarists to briefly discuss the registration of his own family (October 3rd, 1940 entry); all the other diarists but Biélinky started to write well after the enactment of this measure.

> propaganda. Nazis have persuaded me insensitively that the guilt I take on is not so abnormal. All in all, even the people who are not antisemite and the Jews have absorbed the idea that Jews are different from everyone else, proof is, they are Jews and the others are not […] *I thought I had a double condition a bit specific, that of a French Jew, but I realize that I am foremost a Jew.* I don't believe in the Jewish race, but I belong to the Jewish people before belonging to humankind, the Germans remind me of that. (May 29, 1942 entry, emphasis added)

In addition to highlighting the already discussed disquietude generated by the obligation to single oneself out as Jew, this quote illustrates how the process of becoming Jewish on the terms of anti-Jewish persecution is simultaneously perceived as un-becoming French. These two identities seem no longer compatible. This painful process of subjectivation through body inscription is oftentimes evoked in terms of foreignness, as expressed in Berr's entry from the second day she had to wear the Yellow star: 'I suddenly felt I was no longer myself, that everything had changed, that I had become a foreigner, as if I was in the grip of a nightmare. I could see familiar faces all around me, but I could feel their awkwardness and bafflement. It was as if my forehead had been seared by a branding iron.' (June 9, 1942 entry). These passages suggest that Jews' sentiments of estrangement expand from the perception of others to the perception of the self. They become alien not only to the nation, but also to themselves.

Unsurprisingly, in the face of the many consequences of the yellow star, Jewish attitudes varied greatly. Some, such as Lejoyeux's aunt and grandmother, decided to embrace the display of their Jewish identity by 'proudly' wearing the star. This, however, puts them in a situation where their identity was reduced to their Jewishness as their individuality was superseded by their belonging to the Jewish 'category'. In the words of Berr on June 29, 1942, 'In the street, you can't avoid being a representative [of the Jewish people], going out is a trial'.

Alternatively, some thought to negotiate their subjectivity by subverting the body-writing technique through the addition of alternative emblems, just as they had done with signage in shops. Historians have documented the case of Jews who wore war decorations or an insignia bearing the colours of the French flag alongside the yellow star in what appears to be an effort to, once again, reconciliate their Jewish identity with their attachment to the French motherland (Poznanski, 2012, p. 293; Sémelin, 2013, pp. 312–313). Biélinki reports other ways the emblem is subverted, this time by non-Jews (although these cases are clearly the exception rather than the norm). He mentions an instance in which about 75 employees of *the Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations* (Deposits and Consignments Fund), 'in solidarity with a Jewish employee who had been laid off, went out of the building decorated with insignias fashioned according to "the official model" in yellow paper' (June 6, 1942 entry). He also writes that he heard of a student protest in the Latin quarter 'in favor of Jews' during which we know through other sources that individuals wore yellow stars with ludicrous inscriptions such as 'Swing', 'Zoulous', or 'Papous' (Sémelin, 2013, p. 477). These examples show how some Jews and a few non-Jews tried to challenge the differential production of Jewish and non-Jewish subjectivities through body writing. Such attempts remained however fairly limited, as any improper display of the yellow star was strongly repressed. Non-Jews could be imprisoned for showing support by wearing non-approved yellow stars and Jews who supplemented the insignia with other emblems, or who simply wore it inappropriately (unsown, on the wrong piece of clothing…), risked arrests and deportation (Poznanski, 2012, p. 295). Thus, many Jews devised practices meant to partially escape the consequences the yellow star had on their everyday life and to negotiate their Jewish subjectivity in public space. Some, including Mesnil-Amar, took the risk of continuing their regular practices and lives without the insignia, either in

specific occasions or altogether. She mentions several times going to coffee shops while this was forbidden to Jews, which suggests that she was indeed not wearing the insignia at these times (see her July 28, 1944 entry for instance). Not wearing the star allows one to free oneself from anti-Jewish restriction, and to partially escape Jewish subjectivity, at least as far as others are concerned. Lejoyeux, who also chose not to wear the star, reflects on this: 'I am not a Jew like the others. I take the metro. Jews should take the last wagon in the metro. I don't give a damn, I don't have a star. Am I free? Yes, as long as I am not caught' (June 6, 1943 entry). For Lejoyeux, not wearing the star frees himself from part of his Jewish subjectivity, at least in his interaction with the world, and it seems also partially for himself, as he highlights his difference with other Jews. Of course, this means running the risk of being discovered and arrested, adding another element to Jewish subjectivity for those who hide their identity, even temporarily, that of being in situation of constant danger of being identified.

One last option to escape the effect of the mandatory display of the yellow star was to avoid public space in the occupied zone completely, or as much as possible. Hiding, as Mesnil-Amar's father and Grunberg did, or leaving for the free zone where persecutions was, at first, not as severe, as did Fathaud and her family, were commonly adopted techniques thought out to mitigate persecution. These were, however, of course not only responses to forced public display of Jewish identity but more generally to the intensification of persecution coinciding with the yellow star measure and the increasing risks of arrests and deportation.

Conclusion

In our analysis of diaries written by Jews while antisemitic persecution was developing and intensifying in occupied Paris, we have shown how identification of Jewish spaces and of Jewish bodies in space through signage and body-writing contributed to the

establishment of an 'ideal' Jewish subjectivity on the terms of the Nazis and their collaborators. These measures, however, did not have the same effect on all Jews or their fellow non-Jewish Parisians, and Jewish subjectivity was activated and negotiated in many different ways. Some, mostly those whose Jewish identity was already well asserted, are at first little concerned by the mandatory display of their Jewishness. Others were much more affected by these measures and by their newly enacted subjectivity as Jews and as victims of anti-Jewish persecution. As we have seen, this ideal subjectivity was challenged and contested in multiple ways, sometimes with the help of some non-Jews who were, on their side, unwilling to seamlessly become the antisemitic subject they were supposed to become.

Of course, the identification of Jewish bodies and spaces was merely one step in the process of anti-Jewish persecution and genocide. The yellow posters were only one of the early measures of the vast process of aryanization of Jewish properties. After they were identified, Jewish stores were either forcedly transferred to non-Jews or simply liquidated. Similarly, the yellow star marked the beginning of the intensification of anti-Jewish persecution and served to facilitate the enforcement of restrictive measures (curfew, forbidden places or activities…) and large-scale arrests and deportation. Both in the case of Jewish spaces and Jewish bodies, their increased visibility was slowly followed by their disappearance: for the Nazis and their antisemitic allies, the ultimate 'ideal' Jewish subject was one who ceased to exist altogether. Indeed, anti-Jewish persecutions and genocidal practices resulted in the gradual removal of Jews from the city both directly (through arrest and deportation) and indirectly (as Jews hid or fled). A corollary of the disappearance of Jews from the city is the exclusion of public spaces from the life of Jews. As such, anti-Jewish persecution transformed both the city and the lived and embodied experience of Jews in the city.

Here, we have sought to demonstrate how modifications of the urban environment, through signage, and of bodies in the city, through body-writing, played a part in these transformations. Although we have shed light on some of the processes at plays, we have said little about how these processes might have varied across the Parisian Jewish community(ies), most notably for less bourgeois Jews. This article has also left aside the question of gendered experiences of subjectivation, in part because of limitations of space, but also because, although gender issues are present in the general context described by our diaries, they are rarely directly addressed, as Dalia Offer also noted in her own study of Holocaust diaries (Ofer, 1999, p. 144). More research is thus needed to understand the multiple ways anti-Jewish persecution acted as subjectivation processes while mediating lived spatial experiences. For future work, different sources, such as survivors' testimonies, might be helpful in shedding a new light on these processes and addressing some of the limitations inherent to diaries. In relying upon the diaries of Parisian Jews during the German Occupation, we hope to have expanded the methodological repertoire of cultural and social geographers interested in understanding processes of subject formation through analysis of written personal reflections. Despite the limitations discussed above, we believe that such texts provide important insights into the processes by which subject positions are taken up or rejected, considered and contested.

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