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Self-governing through Cultural Production in Diaspora-centric Space: A Comparative Study of Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the Kurdish Diaspora in Berlin

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Abstract: This study examines how the self-organized social formations of Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the non-Jewish Kurdish diaspora in Berlin engage in self-governing cultural production practices that they establish to regulate their communities' cultural, emotional, and social affairs, address their challenges, and meet their objectives. The paper further analyzes the impact of cultural production on communities' everyday lives. Specifically, self-organized social establishments embrace cultural production objects, including ethnic food, circle dances, music, and religious melodies, to stimulate cultural spaces in which community members interpret and consume cultural production's symbolic meanings for a variety of objectives. These include, but are not limited to, the restoration of lived or ancestors' narrated memories, the promotion of collective identities, and a sense of belonging. They also foster community formation and social cohesion, seek to surmount social and structural obstacles in their integration process, and advocate for their homeland-related politics and interests. However, these meanings and their consumption within both communities vary depending on their homeland ties and needs, barriers, and political conditions in new environments. Kurdistan's Jewish initiatives capitalize on cultural production as a dynamic vehicle to reconstruct ancestral identities, evoke a sense of belonging, preserve ancestors' cultural heritage, reconnect with their ancestral roots, and promote social cohesion. However, non-Jewish Kurdish diaspora establishments in Berlin harness cultural production as a sociopolitical strategy to maintain the Kurdish identity, address refugees' integration difficulties, form their cohesive and political community, and engage in homeland politics. My findings, based on ethnographic fieldwork, 87 in-depth interviews with cultural actors and community members in Jerusalem and Berlin, and participant observations over a seventeen-month period, illustrate how self-organized formations play a vital role in the self-governing cultural production process and how they impact their communities' affairs, challenges, and objectives.

Keywords: Diasporas, cultural production, self-governance, Kurdish immigrants, Kurdistan's Jews, Berlin, Jerusalem

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Kurdistan's Jews[2] in Jerusalem and Berlin's Kurdish diaspora segments are two heterogeneous communities in the Middle Eastern region of the Global South and the European region of the Global North. Other distinctions include their Jewish, Sunni-Shia Muslim, Alevi, and Yezidi faiths; their political community memberships through citizenship acts in Israel and Germany; the circumstances and causes of their departure from the Kurdish regions in Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Iran; their integration processes in both receiving environments; and their ties to and perceptions of their ancestral homeland. Despite these substantial variations, Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and Berlin's Kurdish diaspora segments engage in the common daily practices of preparing and serving ethnic cuisine, performing circle dances, singing traditional lyrics along with sacred melodies, and playing traditional musical instruments. Self-organized cultural and social establishments, most notably self-identified Kurdish restaurants, self-organized dance troupes, community singers and musicians, as well as self-appointed cantors in Kurdish-designated synagogues in Jerusalem and self-appointed imams in Kurdish-designated mosques in Berlin, are driving forces behind these cultural production practices. What pushes distinct formations of Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the non-Jewish Kurdish diaspora in Berlin to engage in self-governing cultural production? How do their cultural production meanings impact the communities' lives at both sites? To address these questions, my study draws on seventeen months of ethnographic field research, including 87 in-depth interviews and participant observations. It argues that common culture as a process and lived experiences as a shared history inspire self-organized social actors to mobilize material cultural objects in collective practices to generate and circulate symbolic meanings consumed by communities' members for the regulation of their social affairs, diverse needs, structural challenges, and strategic objectives.

Jews from Kurdistan in Jerusalem and the Kurdish diaspora in Berlin share common culture features that include ethnic cuisine and preparation, Kurdish circle dances, and music traditions with religious melodies. Furthermore, these populations share common oppressive and discriminatory experiences in Kurdish regions and receiving environments. Kurdistan's Jews escaped the Kurdish areas under Iraqi, Turkish, Iranian, and Syrian control due to political persecution, discrimination, and pogroms (Ferhud) linked to Jewish rituals and the establishment of Israel in 1948. Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, the Europeanized Ashkenazi Jewish segments rejected the Mizrahim identities of Kurdistan's Jews, their cultural attributes, and social practices, while facing diverse forms of cultural and social discrimination. The book "My Father's Paradise: A Son's Search for His Family's Past" by Arial Sabar (2009) offers a remarkable insight into his father's experiences in both Kurdistan and Israel. The Kurdish diaspora community in Berlin consists mainly of refugees escaping political persecution in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq.[3] They

[2] I refer to the Jewish population in Jerusalem who are from the Kurdish areas of Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey as "Kurdistan's Jews." The Jews from Kurdistan are frequently identified as "Kurdistanî Jews," as in a recent study (Baser and Atlas 2021). However, these terms allude to the identity dynamics that define ethnically and religiously distinct communities' territorial ties to Kurdistan as their common ancestral homeland. Kurdistanî identity embraces all those communities who feel a deep sense of place orientation toward Kurdistan and maintain a profound and geographical connection with Kurdistan, irrespective of their varied socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. Accordingly, the term "Kurdistanî Jews" was appropriate in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, when the majority of the first generation of Kurdistan's Jews preserved their territorial ties to Kurdistan (Sabar, 1982). However, their Kurdistanî identity no longer accurately reflects their current situation, as their ties to Kurdistan and its politics have transformed and diminished. Many of the young members I interviewed confirmed their Kurdish lineage and culture, but they have no geographical ties to Kurdistan. They maintain hybrid identities as they identify themselves as Israeli citizens, members of the Jewish and Israeli communities, and feel a sense of affiliation and commitment to the state of Israel while simultaneously celebrating their ancestors' roots in Kurdistan and their cultural Kurdish heritage.

[3] The author conducted interviews with Ilan in Berlin on October 24, 2022.

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have also suffered discrimination in Berlin because of the geopolitical German-Turkish relationship and the "terrorist narratives" surrounding the status of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) (Dag, 2017). To reaffirm their cultural and social realities and tackle negative experiences, self-organized and autonomous community formations in Jerusalem and Berlin pursued the politics of cultural production by participating in everyday culinary, musical, and dancing practices as cultural and social spaces. Their actions engender and convey symbolic meanings, which are circulated and consumed by community members. These meanings help community members in Jerusalem reconnect with their ancestral identities, feel a sense of belonging, ruminate on lived experiences, and rebuild connections with their ancestral roots, all of which are necessary for the formation and cohesion of their community. However, Kurdish diaspora entities in Berlin generate additional meanings to assist their community members in preserving ethnic identities, pursuing integration, and engaging in homeland affairs. Thus, the politics of cultural production among both communities serve as a creative and strategic asset, enabling the implementation of culture as a continuous, historically situated process that reaffirms each community's existential values and origins. However, its interpretation is contingent upon the specific context of both communities in the Kurdish regions, their causal conditions in Jerusalem, and intergenerational experiences in both receiving environments.

Self-organized diasporic formations value cultural production, mobilizing a variety of artistic, cultural, and material objects in collective practices to address their unique cultural and historical realities (Chin et al., 2000; Zalibour, 2019). Specifically, they capitalize on cultural production to reconnect with their ancestral roots, maintain a sense of community cohesion, and express and experience cultural existence, which is a critical aspect of their collective identities (López-Calvo, 2019; Mobasher, 2018). However, the role of diaspora entities in the self-governing cultural production process has received little attention in the context of migration governance (Abrams & Armeni, 2023; Betts, 2011; Gamlen, 2014; Khayati, 2012; Kunz, 2012; Rother, 2022). The mainstream literature often focuses on diaspora governance in connection with sending remittances, lobbying for domestic and national politics, and ethnic and religious activities. Furthermore, researchers have scrutinized diaspora governance mechanisms in the context of rebel and insurgent movements. They are depicted as competitors with national governments for taxation and loyalty, while their legitimacy in exercising self-governance is called into question (Coggins, 2015; Mampilly, 2011). This literature barely addresses the dynamic agency of autonomous diaspora formations, their role in the cultural production process, and their contribution to their community affairs. Consequently, social diaspora formations' ability to navigate the complexities of their community members through cultural production is a largely unexplored aspect of their agency. This study aims to address this assumption by comparing the cultural production objects, politics, practices, and objectives of self-organized social actors from Kurdistan's Jewish community in Jerusalem and the Kurdish community in Berlin. It explores how these actors generate specific meanings for their communities' consumption of cultural production, which have significant implications for their daily affairs. The paper's main objective is to explore the role and impact of autonomous social networks, through cultural production, in regulating cultural, contextual and social community affairs in Jerusalem and Berlin.

Scholars from the fields of political science, anthropology, sociology, and history have conducted substantial studies on the Jewish community of Kurdistan in Israel and the Kurdish diaspora in Germany. These studies have focused on the historical and ethnographic aspects of Kurdistan's Jewish community (Ammann, 2014; Bali, 1999; Baser & Atlas, 2021; Brauer, 1993; Kalimi, 2023; Y. Sabar, 1982; Şanlı, 2019; Tzemach, 2014; Zaken, 2007). Specifically, their religious and social lives, identity, folklore, literature, music, and social structures both before and

after their emigration from Kurdistan were subjects of investigation (Gavish, 2010; Kiwi, 1971; Sabar, 2009; Shwartz-Be'eri, 2000). Shimon (2007) and Sharaby (2022) have examined the integration process of Kurdistan's Jews into Israeli society. Extensive research has also been conducted on political activism, identity, statelessness, cultural production, and integration of Kurdish populations in Europe (Adamson et al., 2024; Ammann, 2000; Ata, 2023; Dag, 2017, 2022, 2024; Eliassi, 2021; Emanuelsson, 2005; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Schøtt, 2023; Toivanen, 2021). These studies offer a profound insight into these populations' affairs, experiences of forced migration, and political activism. However, no previous studies have compared the cultural strategies embraced by Kurdistan's Jews and the Kurdish diaspora to tackle their forced migration from their ancestral homeland, their integration process, and their ties to their homeland. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative studies of how autonomous cultural actors utilize cultural production to impact communities' affairs. Specifically, there is a lacuna in how these self-organized establishments attribute diverse meanings to cultural production, as well as how ordinary members consume and interpret these meanings. Thus, the role of self-governing cultural production practices in each community and their implications for their cultural, political, and social issues are mostly unexplored. Therefore, this comparative and case-based study aims to explore how and why these communities employ cultural production. To this end, it seeks to "connect what would otherwise remain unconnected, specify what would otherwise remain unspecified, and emphasize what would otherwise remain unrecognized" (Scheffer & Niewöhner, 2010, p. 11).

The paper is structured as follows: First, I discuss the conceptual and theoretical framework of cultural production in relation to diaspora, culture, and self-governance. Then, I outline the research design and methods for the data collection and analysis. In the following sections, I present empirical findings on both populations' contextual and causal conditions. I conclude the paper by addressing how this study contributes to our understanding of cultural production and its implications for diaspora-centric communities' affairs.

Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches

Diaspora is a vague term with multiple definitions (Grossman, 2018). However, one can disaggregate it into analytical, practical, and descriptive categories (Dufoix et al., 2008; Zheng, 2010). It describes the experiences, memories, and imaginations of scattered communities in the past, present and future. Their experiences and memories involve forced separation, dispersion, alienation, and uprooting from their homeland, whereas their imaginations encompass the preservation of their cultural and ethnic identities, transnational ties to their dispersed compatriots, and the possibility of return (Brubaker, 2005; Harvey & Thompson, 2017). Its practical category encompasses cultural and political activities in receiving states, with a focus on social interactions, community cohesion, and homeland politics. The dispersed people coalesce around a common culture and homeland to support or oppose certain hegemonic politics in their home countries (Vasanthakumar, 2021). As an analytical category, diaspora conveys complex meanings that involve changing conditions in receiving societies, home countries, and transnational spaces for identity construction and community formations (Zheng, 2010). This process is a result of the transition in the globalized world from ethnic and religious purity to hybridity and creolized cultures (Bhabha, 1994; Cohen, 2023; Hall, 1990). Hybrid identities, multiple languages, and creolized cultures for diasporic subjects living in "two worlds" with "double consciousness," lead to diaspora-centrism (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019, p. 50).

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Robert E. Fox (2001) defines the concept of "diaspora-centrism" as a "centerless center," which challenges the idea of territorialized identities and fixed communities in favor of "mobile," "fluid," "indeterminate," and "de-territorialized" identities and communities (p. 368). Dispersed communities' cultural performances, which exist between two or more cultures in their ancestral and adopted countries, elicit a diaspora-centric approach. Beyond the center-margin paradigm of diasporas, Fox (2001) places diaspora-centrism between Eurocentric and Afrocentric perspectives, underscoring the diaspora's agency by expressing "struggle, survival, rebirth, and the creation of new... centers" (p. 369). In this context, Brah (1996) deconstructs the relationship between diaspora, homeland, and eventual return by offering two diaspora approaches: "homing desire" and "desire for a homeland" (pp. 177). The former expresses a yearning for cultural belonging and the necessity to immerse oneself in a de-territorialized homeland culture, maintaining ethnic and symbolic identity boundaries in a new setting without a direct connection to the geographical homeland they have left behind (Hussain, 2017). While striving to preserve ancestral culture, the importance of the geographic homeland fades. This points to a lack of homeland orientation due to the erosion of transnational ties to and engagement in political and spatial affairs in the ancestral homeland (Brubaker, 2005; Tölölyan, 2010). However, this typology is undoubtedly diaspora-centric, with its members expressing a desire to belong to a culture rooted in the ancestral homeland. The latter corresponds to "a desire" of dispersed populations for a "homeland" and entails "returning to, possessing, or reconquering a physical territory" (Hussain, 2017, p. 7). These diasporic constituents maintain cultural and ethnic boundaries linked to the homeland while simultaneously remaining homeland-oriented. Whereas they participate in cultural and political affairs from afar, they often harbor dreams of returning to their traditional homeland. Although the homeland remains a major component of their collective identities, its significance shifts when diasporas acculturate to new social contexts (Tölölyan, 2010). The first category is diaspora-centric, with faint ties to the ancestral homeland but craving a sense of belonging to ancestral culture. Kurdistan's Jews, for instance, are an example of this category. However, the second category is diaspora-centric (due to cultural connection) and diasporic (due to homeland attachment, commitment and orientation). The Kurds in Berlin represent the second diaspora typology. Yet, common culture serves as cement for diasporic and diaspora-centric communities.

Culture is a broad collection of informal inherited knowledge that is modified, embodied, and contested in traditions, incorporated into practices, and transmitted through social learning with permeable boundaries (Li, 2007). Culture is a process rather than a product that determines collective communities' historical and social truths, beliefs, arts, customs, behaviors, and ways of life (Murray, 2005). For instance, Ibn-Khaldun interprets culture as a synonym for human beings as social entities rather than as an instrument or capital, as Bourdieu (1993) asserted. Fundamental elements of culture, according to Ibn-Khaldun, are an interconnected, harmonious, and homogeneous set of beliefs, values, and practices that impede individual agency and heterogeneity within collective groups (Khaldun, 1967; Mahdi, 2016; Pišev, 2019). However, culture becomes fluid and hybrid as it collides and blends. Hall (1990) notes that cultural life, identities, and diasporas are not pure but rather syncretized and hybrid. Furthermore, Bhabha (1994) points to hybrid cultures that originate from modernity and are consistent with Ibn-Khaldun's (1967) definition of civilization. Hybridity, a byproduct of modernity, is a common and significant component of both individual and collective identities, as well as human communities' cultural landscapes. Hybridity instills a dynamic fluidity in human society, yet the spatial aspects of cultures continue to exist in people's lives due to the profound influence of environmental and territorial discourses (Hussain, 2017).

Vertovec regards "diaspora" as "mode of cultural production" because they are produced and reproduced through culture (1997, p. 289). Diaspora actors use a variety of material objects, notably poetry, novels, films, music, dance performances, and cuisine, in cultural practices to express their collective identities, cultural heritage, traditions, and lived experiences, as well as their future aspirations (Cohen, 2023; Dag, 2022; Fotouhi, 2018; Kabir, 2019). Their collective cultural practices are the result of self-governing mechanisms employed by self-organized social actors who operate in various social sectors. These actors' resources and agency draw from the autonomy that underpins the process of self-governing cultural production (Dag, 2023). Despite its varied trajectories, the concept of autonomy is a form of self-organization and freedom for collective communities in the absence of state structures to regulate their cultural, economic, and social affairs and provide mutual support (Chatterton, 2004; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). Autonomy is not an ideological concept but rather an organizational configuration that involves a "multifaceted process of prefiguration of alternative realities" designed to ensure the cultural, political, and social survival of marginalized communities (Dinerstein, 2015, pp. 1–2). Self-governance is fundamentally derived from autonomy, which is exercised by self-regulating, self-steering, bottom-up, and non-hierarchical networks and committees (Dag, 2023). The autonomous organization of these social actors is a manifestation of exercising power from below, enabling them to negotiate their needs, interests, and objectives (Thurston & Fernández-Götz, 2021). They utilize cultural elements to galvanize collective actions in cultural and social spaces. Community members interpret and consume the symbolic meanings of their cultural production practices to identify and regulate their cultural, political, and social affairs. As a result, the autonomous organization and collective actions of social agents, in conjunction with the mobilization of cultural components, facilitate social gatherings, interactions, and encounters between community members and non-members. In other words, culture is central to the self-governing collective practices of social subjects (Gattinger, 2005). The following sections offer empirical analyses of cases involving the self-governing cultural production of diaspora-centric Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the non-Jewish Kurdish diaspora in Berlin.

Research Methods

I employed a variety of qualitative methods to conduct ethnographic field research in Jerusalem and Berlin for this study. I specifically relied on participant observations and in-depth interviews, guided by a case-oriented comparative methodology as well as a thematic analysis approach, to interpret and analyze how autonomous formations and communities generate multiple meanings through their engagement in collective cultural production, and how these meanings relate to their community affairs, needs, and objectives. The ethnographic approach is essential for the description, reflection, and interpretation of the culture and history of collective communities, which display their context, knowledge, and way of life (Geertz, 1973; Vine et al., 2018). Furthermore, the ethnographic approach to comparative methodology establishes connections between diverse subjects, objects, and activities and finally contributes to their comparable relationships for "analytical clarity" (Scheffer & Niewöhner, 2010, p. 2). Thus, the comparative study is designed to enhance understanding of social phenomena rather than measure them (Lewis & Nicholls, 2014). My ethnographic research involves participant observations and in-depth interviews. I used in-depth interviews as an explanatory instrument to gather information, aiming to understand participants' perceptions and how they "attach certain meanings to phenomena or events" under research (Berg, 2001, p. 72). Additionally, I employed participant observations as a data collection technique, referring to a process in which researchers delve into participants' social

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lives to analyze their activities, interactions, and behaviors (ibid., 2001). The aim is to observe distinct cultural events in "natural settings" to extract information about "social interaction and situations as they occur rather than artificial situations" (Burgess, 2006, p. 65).

I used thematic analysis to interpret and assess the interview transcripts and fieldwork notes. The scholars apply thematic analysis in qualitative research to the interpretation and analysis of data through the identification of common themes, ideas, and patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). The thematic analysis method consists of several stages, including familiarization with the data, creating codes, searching for common themes, reviewing, identifying, and naming these themes, and writing-up stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I applied thematic analysis to interpret my fieldwork and interview data. I first attempted to gain a significant amount of familiarity with my transcribed interviews and notes from the ethnographic field research, then moved on to generate codes for relevant aspects, which I organized into themes. Subsequently, I searched for common themes and ideas. Finally, I started to review, identify, and name the common themes to provide explanations and clarifications. In the writing-up stage, I compared the participants' stories and generated logical and coherent accounts based on quotas and extracts from interviews and fieldwork notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I conducted ethnographic research in Jerusalem from August 2021 to June 2022 and in Berlin from August 2022 to November 2022. My study included participant observations at various social and cultural events in both cities, as well as 87 in-depth interviews with community leaders, culture producers, and ordinary community members. I attended various cultural events, such as concerts, weddings, dance performances, festivals, and prayers. These comprised Kurdiyada (a three-day Kurdish excursion), celebrations of the Seherana and Kubbeh festivals, Shabbat prayers, and Bar Mitzvahs (a Jewish ritual and family festivity celebrating the adulthood of boys on their 13th birthday) in self-identified synagogues, named after the Kurdish cities of Amadiyê, Diyarbakir, Qamishli, Urfa, and Zakho in Jerusalem's neighborhoods of Katamon and Nachlaot. In Berlin's Neukölln and Wedding neighborhoods, I attended Newroz celebrations and religious ceremonies at the Mesopotamia and Halil Ibrahim mosques. Additionally, I attended a variety of social activities, including picnics, excursions, and dancing lessons hosted by autonomous dance troupes and musician groups at both sites. Finally, I visited self-identified Kurdish restaurants (IMA, Azura, Kubbeh Bar, Istabach, and Zariffa) in Jerusalem and (Tenur, Erbil, Hejî-Hesen, and Lazan) in Berlin. Following my participant observations of social and cultural events and religious rituals, I became acquainted with the participants' customs, cultural codes, intra-community relationships, and constraints. Then, I established a rapport with the leaders and ordinary members of both communities, becoming a natural participant in their cultural and social activities.

During my participant observations, I identified individuals for in-depth interviews. In Jerusalem, I interviewed musicians, dancers, cantors, leaders of the National Association of Kurdistan's Jews in Israel (Irgun ha-Artzi shel Yehudey Kurdistan be-Yisrael), co-founders of the Kurdish dance troupes of Gonenîm and Delala, and ordinary community members. Many of the participants were second- and third-generation members, born to parents from Morocco and Kurdistan. I interviewed 16 women and 37 men between the ages of 20 and 80, all of whom were Israeli citizens. In Berlin, I conducted 34 in-depth interviews, eight with women and twenty-six with men. My previous ethnographic fieldwork enabled me to access cultural networks and associated activities directly. Participants included founders, regular dancers, and musicians from the Govendaki dance troupe and Hangaw musical team, as well as mosque attendees, imams, community leaders, and ordinary activists from various political Kurdish segments. My interviewees were Kurdish refugees from Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey. I reflected on the interviewees' diversity related to their ages, genders, citizenship statuses, religious confessions

(Sunni, Alevi, Yezidi) and home countries. The interview questions focused on the participants' identities, lived experiences, inspiration for their participation in cultural spaces, and how they consumed cultural production meanings. Most interviewees in Jerusalem considered cultural practices such as festivals, synagogues, and restaurants to be cultural spaces where they interpret cultural production and ingest meanings connected to their roots, social cohesion, ethnic identities, and a sense of belonging. However, outside these cultural spaces, they identify as Jews and Israeli citizens, with some using social media to listen to Kurdish music and watch dance performances from Kurdistan and Europe. In contrast, Berlin's participants use cultural production to place significant emphasis on political developments in Kurdistan. They express a weak sense of belonging to Germany as their ultimate homeland, but they justify their commitment to the Kurdish cause and kinship. They accentuated the significance of Kurdish music, dancing, and cuisine, which serve as umbilical cords between community members and Kurdish culture, thereby connecting them to their traditional homeland.

I selected the Kurdistan Jews in Jerusalem and the Kurdish diaspora in Berlin as cases and sites for this research paper based on their immigration history, community demographics, and spatial concentration. Throughout their exile in Kurdistan, Kurdistan's Jews preserved Jerusalem as the holy city, referring to the Kurdish city of Zakho as "Kurdistan's Jerusalem" (Gavish, 2010, p. 44). Following their 1950s immigration to Israel, Kurdistan's Jews primarily settled in Jerusalem. According to Kurdistan's Jewish leaders, there are between 50,000 and 80,000 Jews from Kurdistan in Jerusalem and its surrounding towns of Ma'ala Adumim and Mevasseret Zion. However, the majority were born to mixed Jewish parents from Kurdistan and other countries of origin.[4] Berlin is home to the largest Kurdish diaspora segment in Europe, composed of immigrants from Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This group adheres to distinct religious denominations (Sunni, Alevi, and Yezidi), various dialects (Kurmanjî, Soranî, and Zazakî), and regions of their divided homeland. A substantial number of Kurds arrived in West Berlin as refugees in the 1990s and 2010s, while others arrived as scholarship recipients in Soviet-controlled East Berlin in the 1970s and as Turkish guest workers in the 1960s (Dag, 2017). Interviewees estimated that there are 150,000 Kurdish immigrants in Berlin, with over thirty immigrant associations.[5] They constitute the largest diasporic community outside of their traditional homeland. However, this study's findings based on common history and culture can be applied not only to Berlin's Kurds but also to Kurdish diaspora establishments in other European cities.

Research Finding: Shared Context and Culture

The socioeconomic conditions, citizenship rights granted by the Israeli and German governments, and religious affiliation of Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and Kurds in Berlin vary considerably. However, the lived experiences in the ancestral homeland and receiving environments, along with common culture, transcend these distinctions. Both populations share a history of ethnic cleansing and pogroms (Farhud), which resulted in forced migration and exile from Kurdish regions in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Additionally, they experienced discrimination and criminalization in their integration processes in Jerusalem and Berlin. Their shared culture encompasses ethnic cuisine, circle dances, folk music, and religious melodies at self-identified Kurdish synagogues in Jerusalem and Kurdish mosques in Berlin.

[4] The author conducted interviews with Yehuda Ben Yosef in Jerusalem on May 26, 2022.
[5] The author conducted interviews with Ilan in Berlin on October 24, 2022.

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Kurdistan's Jews and Kurdish people have endured various forms of oppression and displacement from their ancestral homeland throughout their histories. The Jews of Kurdistan were subjected to persecution in Turkey, pogroms in Iraq, and, ultimately, deportation from both countries in the mid-20th century (Bali, 1999; Sabar, 2009; Şanlı, 2019; Tzemach, 2014; Zaken, 2007). My interviewees in Jerusalem linked the repression of the Jewish community in Turkey to their Jewish faith and Kabbalah-related rituals.[6] The pro-Nazi regime of Rashid Ali in Iraq hunted out Jews in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region in the early 1940s, culminating in pogroms that burned their houses and businesses (Zaken, 2007). The Iraqi government also threatened Kurds to maintain positive relations with their Jewish neighbors while pushing Kurdish and non-Kurdish chieftains to participate in anti-Jewish pogroms (Gavish, 2010). In response to persecution and maltreatment, most Kurdistan's Jews were airlifted to Israel in the end-1940s as part of the "Ezra and Nehemiah" operations (Gavish, 2010). Their Kurdish neighbors played a crucial role in the evacuation of Jewish members from Iraq by smuggling them out, while they grieved when their Jewish neighbors left for Israel. Serdar, a Kurdish refugee in Berlin, stated that both Kurds and Jews in Kurdistan received the same treatment as second-class citizens, living in conditions similar to prisons in the Kurdistan Region. After the Jews emigrated, the Kurds became the only target of the pan-Arab regimes, which ultimately perpetrated multiple acts of genocide against them.[7]

Like Kurdistan's Jews, the Kurdish population endured repression from a variety of nationalist regimes in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, Kurds suffered under draconian measures linked to forced assimilation, mass deportations, genocides, and exile (McDowall, 2007; Sadiq, 2021). The denial of Kurdish cultural identity, in conjunction with the perpetuation of oppressive policies of systematic discrimination, racism, and persecution, continues to be a contemporary phenomenon in these states. To promote Turkish supremacy, for example, governing Turkish elites and institutions degrade Kurds as sub-humanized people, characterizing them as "backward," "pre-modern," "tribal," and inferior subjects who have been forced to undergo complete assimilation (Yeğen, 2007, p. 119). Kurds in Syria and Iran confront ongoing threats to their cultural, ethnic, and political rights, as well as persecution and displacement.

The second significant connection between Kurdistan's Jews and Kurds is their common cultural heritage. Kurdistan's Jews hold their ancestral culture in high regard, deeply rooted in Kurdistan. By embracing Kurdish cultural elements and values, they refused to assimilate into Israel's Europeanized society between the 1950s and the 1970s. They restored their ancestral culture in Israel, which Baruch Shimoni (2007) differentiates from that of the Europeanized Ashkenazi community and the Mizrahi groups. The cultural elements from Kurdistan are ubiquitous in Jerusalem, as the Kurds and the Jews coexisted for thousands of years in Kurdistan. They have influenced one another through common foodways, folk music, religious melodies, and circle dances. One of the cultural components is the oral music tradition, which is based on shared historical experiences dating back to ancient Babylonia and encompasses areas of modern-day Kurdistan. Kurdish folk melodies have significantly influenced Jewish music in Kurdistan, supporting the symbiotic relationship between their respective musical genres in Israel (Kiwi, 1971). A respondent, for example, informed me that the lyrics of Kurdish Dengbêj, a type of music or singing storytelling, help them feel connected to the Kurds and their ancestors from Kurdistan.[8] Another essential cultural element is the culinary heritage (Sabar, 1982). In his anthropological

[6] The author conducted interviews with Rimon in Jerusalem on February 14, 2022.
[7] The author conducted interviews with Serdar in Berlin on November 20, 2022.
[8] The author conducted interviews with groups of elder members in Jerusalem on June 3, 2022.

publications, Eric Brauer (1993) extensively explored the similarities in foodways and cuisine between Kurds and Kurdistan's Jews, including bread, meat dishes, preserved meat, dairy products, bulgur, rice, and dumplings. Collective circle dances are other characteristics that both groups of people have traditionally shared and are still prevalent today. Jewish immigrants from Kurdistan imported cultural practices, traditions and lifestyles to Israel, including foodways, music with melodies, instruments, and lyrics, and circle dances (Shwartz-Be'eri, 2000). Today, Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the Kurdish community in Berlin continue to actively practice their common cultural features.

Common Experiences upon Arrivals in Jerusalem and Berlin

Kurdistan's Jewish population perceives their displacement as a long-desired return to Jerusalem, which coincided with the end of their nearly 2,000-year exile in Babylonia.[9] Conversely, the forced Kurdish immigration to Berlin and other cities since the 1970s can be regarded as the beginning of their exile. However, the end of the Jewish exile and the start of the Kurdish exile did not significantly improve their living conditions or social affairs, nor did they lead to the recognition of their cultural values and identities in their new surroundings. The Jews of Kurdistan in Jerusalem continued to endure social and institutional discrimination and inferior status, while Kurdish immigrants and refugees in Berlin encountered various degrees of discrimination and criminalization.

The Jews from Kurdish regions in Turkey arrived in Israel between the 1920s and 1930s, in Iraq in the 1950s, and in Syria and Iran in the 1960s (Kalimi, 2023; Şanlı, 2019; Tzemach, 2014). They first settled in immigrant reception centers (Ma'abarot), living as refugees. However, they later left refugee camps to build their own homes and businesses (Sabar, 2009). They primarily worked in the agricultural and construction sectors and played a significant role in Israel's development (Zaken, 2007). Many interviewees stated that their ancestors felt a deeper sense of Kurdish belonging because the common Kurdish culture was more inclusive and attractive to them, even though one of their parents was not from Kurdistan.[10] Nevertheless, they shared hybrid identities with elements of religious (Jewish), ethnic (Kurdish), and civic (Israeli). In the 1960s and 1970s, Europeanized Ashkenazi Jews anticipated that non-Europeanized Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Eastern-Oriental) would have adopted a homogeneous Israeli identity based on European values and norms and abandoned cultures, languages, and identities that they had acquired from the Arab and Muslim countries. Baruch Shimoni (2007), an Israeli sociologist of non-Europeanized Kurdish-Mizrahi descent, recounts his experiences and emphasizes that the Europeanized Jews necessitated that the Mizrahi Jews accept assimilation by eradicating their old culture and replacing it with Europeanized culture as a cornerstone of the new homogeneous Israeli identity.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Kurdistan's Jews in Israel suffered from a sense of inferiority, symbolized through the Arab expression "Ana Kurdi" stereotype (I am Kurdish), which denoted illiteracy, ignorance, and stubbornness (Sharaby, 2022). Due to their Kurdish heritage, many elderly community members claimed to have constantly faced insults in schools and on the streets. Yoni said that he had encountered a similar insult when educators in schools referred to students as Kurdish for failing to understand lessons. Educators have used the term Kurdishness as a

[9] The author conducted interviews with Yoni in Jerusalem on June 12, 2022.
[10] The author conducted interviews with Neely in Jerusalem on August 18, 2022.

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pejorative term for stupidity.[11] Ilana expressed her reluctance to converse in Kurdish or Arabic with her mother outside, expressing dissatisfaction and glancing around whenever she heard her mother speaking Kurdish. She was worried about social exclusion and pressure from her Europeanized Jewish neighbors.[12] The younger generation felt ashamed of their Kurdish heritage and customs throughout the 1950s and 1970s (Sharaby, 2022). For instance, despite their six-day employment, the elderly received reimbursement for only five days. They attributed this to their Kurdish heritage and previous experience with rigorous labor in Kurdistan.[13] During this time, Europeanized Ashkenazi Jews discriminated against the Jews from Kurdistan at institutional and social levels, expecting Mizrahi and non-Europeanized Jews to undergo social and cultural transformations to conform to homogenized European culture as a benchmark of modernization while abandoning their imported cultural heritage. However, the modernizing approach aimed at generating a homogenized Israeli identity failed, resulting in a gradual transformation from a melting pot to a hybrid society. Consequently, various Jewish communities from the Middle East and Africa vehemently assert their cultural heritage and ancestral identities, striving to embrace their imported identities with determination, openness, and enthusiasm (Sharaby, 2022; Shimoni, 2007).

In the 1970s, the assimilation policy had created an identity vacuum, which they sought to address and fill through cultural production (Sharaby, 2022). Kurdistan's Jewish leaders launched many cultural activities, including a series of festivals that transformed into cultural hotspots, showcasing traditional music, circle dances, food, and exhibitions of traditional costumes, clothes, and artifacts. By relying on these cultural objects, they sought to revitalize their cultural identities, reconnect with their ancestral heritage, and resist the assimilation policy, aiming to erode their sense of Kurdistan's belonging and create an emptiness in their ethnic and ancestral identities.

The Kurdish diaspora in Berlin endured similar experiences at the outset of their exile, suffering social and economic exclusion and political criminalization. They ended up in Berlin as "Turkish guest workers" as a consequence of economic underdevelopment and the Turkish government's depopulation scheme in Kurdish areas in the 1960s and 1970s (Borck, 2003; Dag, 2017; Lötzer & Sayan, 1998). They were viewed as labor forces rather than human beings who experienced social marginalization (Gerdes, 2009; Hinze, 2013). Prejudices against Kurds in Berlin, however, distinguished them from those of other immigrant populations through direct and indirect criminalization. The Turkish embassy in Berlin and other government agencies attempted to pressure German authorities to ignore Kurdish requests in the 1980s, thereby suppressing their voices. Ilan, a Kurdish diaspora leader, claimed that the German authorities failed to recognize Kurdish organizations' efforts for refugees' integration and provide funding for their cultural activities. Instead, the authorities requested that Kurdish organizations relinquish their Kurdish identities and present themselves as Turkish immigrant organizations to secure cultural recognition and funds. Authorities justified their decisions by citing demands from the Turkish government and the tight German-Turkish relationship.[14] The Turkish Embassy in Stockholm made similar covert efforts to suppress Kurdish voices, attempting to close the first Kurdish nursery and discontinue Kurdish language programs (Emanuelsson, 2005).

The German government formally outlawed the PKK and designated it a "terrorist" organization in 1993, following an escalation of violent confrontations between the PKK and the Turkish army throughout the early 1990s, which resulted in a substantial surge of violence (Dag,

[11] The author conducted interviews with Yoni in Jerusalem on June 12, 2022.
[12] The author conducted interviews with Ilana in Jerusalem on May 23, 2022.
[13] The author conducted interviews with Gani in Jerusalem on June 7, 2022.
[14] The author conducted interviews with Ilan in Berlin on October 24, 2022.

2017; Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). Kurdish diaspora leaders assert that Berlin authorities have drawn on the terrorism discourse to criminalize PKK supporters, non-PKK Kurdish activists, and ordinary Kurdish refugees. Kerwan, for instance, claimed that the PKK's ban impacted not only politicized Kurds and associations but also all Kurdish immigrants from a range of sectors. He stated that landlords refused to rent their properties to Kurdish individuals or organizations, citing their decision not to rent to "terrorists." He added that some German media sites carried headlines pointing out that "Kurds are equal to terrorists."[15] The persecution of PKK-affiliated Kurdish refugees, as well as the criminalization strategy, had a detrimental economic, political, and social effect on the marginalization of the Kurdish diaspora in Berlin (Göksel, 2023, p.362; Dag, 2017; Kaufer, 2019). Kurdish refugees claimed that individual authorities of Turkish descent, particularly those in German police forces, social benefit providers, employment centers, and immigration offices, insulted them and subtly criminalized them because of their Kurdish heritage.[16] For example, while participating in a variety of rallies against Turkey's anti-Kurdish policy, I witnessed a police officer insulting Kurdish demonstrators in Turkish, which sparked a violent response from Kurdish protesters and police intervention, including the arrest of Kurdish activists and the cancellation of the Kurdish rally. A representative from NAV-DEM, a Kurdish immigrant center, informed me that certain German police officers of Turkish descent have intentionally disrupted Kurdish rallies and intimate participants.[17] In response to discriminatory and criminalizing policies in Berlin, Kurdish cultural producers, just like the Jews in Jerusalem in Kurdistan, embraced cultural production as a strategic instrument to combat discrimination and criminalization on multiple levels while also maintaining connections between diaspora members and their homeland. Furthermore, several self-established Kurdish music and dancing groups offer weekly dancing and music lessons for community members to perform multiple Kurdish circle dances, and restaurant operators produce daily traditional cuisine, all of which take place in self-governing cultural spaces.

Self-governing Cultural Production in Diaspora-Centric Cultural Spaces

Culinary, music, and dance formations among Kurdistan's Jews and the Kurdish diaspora engage in dynamic cultural production practices as self-governing diaspora-centric cultural spaces. By preparing and serving traditional cuisine to community members and non-members, self-identified Kurdish restaurants set up diaspora-centric culinary spaces. Singers, traditional instrument players, and cantors in Jerusalem's synagogues, as well as imams in Berlin's Kurdish mosques, form diaspora-centric music spaces where singing ethnic lyric and religious melodies are common performances. Finally, the dance teams and committees establish diaspora-centric dance spaces in which they offer circle dance performances. Each of the three categories of cultural production is associated with a wide range of meanings that are relevant to community affairs, social cohesion, and collective identities and belongings. Furthermore, the cultural production meanings of Kurdish actors in Berlin involve refugee integration and homeland politics.

Self-governing Cultural Production in Culinary Space

Kurdish restaurant operators, often family members, play a crucial role in promoting homeland-rooted foodways. They prepare and serve traditional Kurdish dishes, which community

[15] The author conducted interviews with Kerwan in Berlin on March 19, 2018.
[16] The author conducted interviews with Ferda in Berlin on October 22, 2022.
[17] The author conducted interviews with Ilan in Berlin on October 24, 2022.

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members and non-members in both cities consume daily. By engaging in ethnic foodways, these establishments pave the way for culinary spaces decorated with images of symbolic figures and Kurdistan landscapes. Consumers regard these spaces as home-like settings where they express and enact collective Kurdish identities and reflect on their cultural heritage. They also establish and preserve their connection to their ancestral homeland, developing overall patterns of social interaction. Consequently, these culinary establishments seek to satisfy the social, emotional, and cultural needs of their community members and introduce Kurdish realities to non-members.

Jerusalem's restaurant owners prepare dishes such as dumplings (Kubbeh and Xamusta), which their parents and grandparents used to consume in Kurdistan. However, offering traditional dishes is not isolated from the symbolic meanings the culinary actors communicate but rather a way to express their connection to their ancestral roots. For example, the IMA operator emphasized his connection to his mother's cooking spirit while presenting a variety of Kubbeh soups as major dishes at his restaurant. This food, prepared in Kurdistan, is highly representative of the Kurdish community in Jerusalem.[18] Thus, Kurdish foods evoke narrated memories of ancestry among younger generations and foster a link to their traditional foodways in Kurdistan. These establishments also raise awareness among younger community members of their ancestors' cultural heritage and encourage them to continue these traditions. The Azura restaurant's chief, Ghani, shared his experiences preserving these ancestral foodways:

> My father was a well-known chef who ran this restaurant for 55 to 60 years. He taught us how to prepare traditional Kurdish dishes in this restaurant, which specializes in home-made cuisine. Consequently, the foodways and services I offer here connect me with my father, grandfather, and ancestors from Kurdistan. This signifies my Kurdish identity.

Particularly, traditional cuisine serves as a prerequisite for their cultural and religious rituals, as well as a symbolic marker for collective identities and a sense of belonging to ancestral roots. A community leader, Mortachai, explained the significance of Kubbeh, highlighting that the younger generation feels nostalgic for Kubbeh and the other rituals.[19] Thus, ethnic cuisine is a collective good that contributes to preserving their traditional values and preventing future generations from becoming alienated and assimilated from their ancestral roots.

Kurdish culinary establishments in Berlin adhere to similar foodways, yet their interpretations of conveyed meanings differ from those of Kurdistan's Jews. Kurdish restaurant owners identify their establishments and cuisine as Kurdish homes and products, reinforcing this with images of deceased Kurdish figures and landscapes. Accordingly, they transform their establishment into a miniature Kurdistan by showcasing the Kurdish reality with collective cultural values, traditions, and attributes. By doing this, they establish a community space to foster a sense of intra-community belonging among Kurdish immigrants and familiarize non-community members with the cultural, political, and historical Kurdish reality. Cemshid, the Lazan operator, described his objective as follows:

> Through the Kurdish restaurant, we exhibit to the world that we are a nation with distinctive characteristics involving culture, traditional cuisine, clothes, language, history, and geography, all of which I present in my restaurant so that others can discover about Kurdistan and its people. I am pleased to showcase Kurdistan and the Kurdish people to the world through Kurdish foodways, alongside all these acts and artifacts.

[18] The author conducted interviews with Avnon in Jerusalem on April 27, 2022.
[19] The author conducted interviews with Mortachai in Jerusalem on May 16, 2022.

Furthermore, my respondents stressed that traditional cuisine at Kurdish restaurants enables them to enact their ethnic identities and connect with their hometowns. These practices diminish their geographic distance from their hometowns and overcome the social isolation and alienation they experience in exile.[20] Kurdish consumers reiterated that these establishments are more than just places to eat; they also function as cultural and social spaces where they gather with their peers, interact, and discuss individual and communal concerns. Finally, these establishments follow a political agenda to commit themselves to the Kurdish struggle and encourage Kurdish immigrants to claim and express their Kurdish identities.[21] Accordingly, Tenur restaurant operator Amed recounted:

> Thousands of Kurds run restaurants in Berlin. Nonetheless, they market their enterprises as Turkish, Italian, or Middle Eastern restaurants. They offer traditional cuisine from other nations since they are afraid to use the Kurdish name. They pass up the opportunity to name their establishments in Kurdish while simultaneously conducting their business... I use the Kurdish name to reflect on our ability to contribute to Kurdish culture and struggle.

Frequently, self-identified Kurdish restaurants in Jerusalem and Berlin function as self-organized actors and self-governing culinary spaces where community consumers experience cultural, historical, political, and social Kurdish reality and existence. These restaurants also meet consumers' needs and challenge discrimination while non-Kurdish consumers become familiar with Kurdish culture and truth.

Self-governing Cultural Production in Music Space

Autonomous music actors in Jerusalem and Berlin use music as a teleological and expressive instrument to construct diaspora-centric music spaces in which they communicate their community concerns, exhibit their passion for cultural belonging, and express their sentiments. Furthermore, Berlin's music networks aim to galvanize community mobilization and remind them of their commitment to the homeland struggle. Various scholars have already studied the role of music in articulating, preserving, or transforming cultural identities and memories, as well as serving as a tool for a sense of belonging, integration, and political protests (Alajaji, 2015; David, 2009; Erlmann, 2003; MacLachlan, 2014; McDonald, 2013; Okigbo, 2015). The musical process, including its instruments, content, practices, aesthetics, and meanings, as well as the role of self-reliant actors, fluctuates to varying degrees between Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and non-Jewish Kurds in Berlin. Kurdistan's Jews often listen to and play love songs like "lê Nûrê" and "Kevokamin," which stimulate listeners to perform a variety of dances. These forms of music represent their ancestors' Kurdish heritage and identities. However, the Kurdish diaspora segments in Berlin listen to "revolutionary" lyrics and songs, which contain political and nationalist narratives about homeland objectives.

The music actors in Jerusalem noted that their parents or ancestors encouraged them to recite and listen to Kurdish lyrics, which they typically learned from earlier Kurdish musicians such as M. Arif Cizrawi and Isa Berwari.[22] Their elders exclusively relied on the Soviet-sponsored Kurdish Radio Yerevan, which aired traditional Kurdish lyrics and poetry throughout the 1960s

[20] The author conducted interviews with Hecî in Berlin on September 19, 2022.
[21] The author conducted interviews with Amed in Berlin on September 13, 2022.
[22] The author conducted interviews with Dror in Jerusalem on March 17, 2022.

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and 1970s (Ghazaryan, 2021). Contemporary musicians draw inspiration from their ancestors' musical traditions and play at festivals, weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and Hannah events.[23] Their performances contribute to cultural and social spaces, where they play musical instruments or recite Kurdish lyrics or religious melodies in synagogues as a means of self-expression while their community members listen and dance. Thus, by engaging in music practices, they communicate and perpetuate specific meanings that are associated with their ancestral Kurdish heritage, restore their cultural dignity, enhance their well-being and contentment, and promote their social interactions. These performances also serve as an empowering tool against the ethnic stigma and prejudice of their parents, grandparents, and themselves, as well as against the assimilation and erasure of their cultural heritage and identity, which they view as vital to their survival. Furthermore, rabbi and cantors at Kurdish-designated synagogues deliver Torah readings using Kurdish melodies inspired by their forefathers, as Rabbi Smual Barashi expressed:

> This synagogue in Nachlaot represents my grandfather's traditions, Kurdish melodies, and the Torah reading style. My grandfather taught me the traditional and Kurdish manner of reading Torah when I was eight years old. So, I am committed to upholding my grandfather's legacy of Kurdish melody and Jewish worship and transmitting it to the next generation. Even in the rain, visitors from across Jerusalem walk 1.5 hours to Barashi Synagogue on Shabbat to hear this Kurdish melody.

These melodies are frequently associated with "ancient Mesopotamian" or "mountain melodies" (Kiwi, 1971, p. 61). By characterizing these melodies as Kurdish, worshipers express their desire to experience Kurdish customs, worship traditions, and welcoming atmosphere, all of which help them remember and link them to their ancestral roots in Kurdistan.[24]

Music practices are one of the cultural spaces in which Kurdish actors in Berlin use various forms of music to communicate their statelessness, identities, and childhood memories. Moreover, they employ music to mobilize Kurdish constituents for homeland politics and solidarity with their homeland compatriots in their political struggle against the oppressive policies of ruling regimes. For instance, the singer, Newshan, reiterated his dedication to the "Kurdish resistance:"

> My primary goal is to create Kurdish-patriotic music for the Kurdistan population and contribute to the Kurdish struggle. I use music to support the Kurdish resistance, as I think that the global audience values culture, particularly music and songs. It has a higher impact than all other activities. I strive to play my part since I am aware that culture, music, education, interaction, and ethnic food are the key elements through which the world's population improves itself. The music serves as an opportunity for us to attract attention.

Other singers remarked that their music represents a strong mental or emotional connection to Kurdish traditions, beliefs, and homeland. Similarly, Kurdish imams recite Hejaz, a traditional Kurdish melody, to remind devout Kurdish immigrants of their religious customs in Kurdistan, as well as their responsibilities to stand together for the Kurdish cause.[25] Finally, Kurdish diaspora associations offer musical instrument lessons (saz, Erbane, Dahul, and Zurne). These associations endeavor to foster cultural exchange between Kurdish immigrants and non-Kurdish residents of Berlin. Their objective is to encourage different communities to engage in shared cultural activities

[23] The author conducted interviews with Avnon in Jerusalem on January 21, 2022.
[24] The author conducted interviews with Arial in Jerusalem on April 17, 2022.
[25] The author conducted interviews with Mehmoud in Berlin on September 29, 2022.

and to value one another's cultures, both of which are fundamental to fostering integration and social cohesion.[26]

Self-governing Cultural Production in Dance Space

Dance performances and meanings in the diaspora contribute to a variety of objectives, including the expression of cultural identities, community formation, and the transformation of structural constraints in the integration process (Pripp, 2019; Zami, 2020). Furthermore, circle dances remind diasporas of their homeland's traditional way of life while also allowing them to experience and build their cultural identities from afar. In Jerusalem and Berlin, the self-organized dance performers construct dance spaces in which they facilitate the collaborative and performative demonstration and enactment of their collective identities and cultural belonging. They create traditional Kurdish ways of life while advocating for community development, unity, and solidarity. Furthermore, the Kurdish dance troupes and performers in Berlin are committed to promoting Kurdish refugees' integration by defying stereotypes and prejudices through interactions with German citizens and other immigrant groups.

Gonenim and Delala are dance troupes from Jerusalem's Kurdish Jewish community, performing at Seherana, Kubbeh food festivals, Kurdiyada, and many private events, such as Bar Mitzvahs and weddings. These troupes are accompanied by traditional instrumental musicians, especially the Dahul and Zurna teams. Dancers deploy dance performances as a critical tool to establish a space in which their members can reconcile with narrated ancestral memories, rekindle their sense of pride, strengthen community cohesion, and actualize their collective identities in response to stereotyped experiences. Ajami, a dance performer, stressed:

> At a young age, I found it challenging to disclose my Kurdish roots to others due to the prevalence of stereotypes and prejudices. Girls and adults from other Jewish communities at the school mocked me because of my Kurdish roots. Consequently, I was unable to identify myself as Kurdish, but rather as Iraqi. However, I am now extremely delighted to identify as Kurdish and strive to instill a sense of pride in my children's Kurdish identity, thereby perpetuating the tradition. I achieve this by dancing, whereas my husband does so by performing Kurdish songs. I daily perform and teach Kurdish dances, which helps me feel closer to my roots.

Their performances also build an emotional and spiritual connection to their ancestral memories and cultural heritage. Ben, another dance performer, for example, accentuated why he reconnects with his roots in Kurdistan through circle dances, celebrating his productivity and fruitfulness:

> In Jewish culture, we believe that communities without roots are not trees that can bear fruit. So, to resemble trees and produce fruits, we must have roots that are Kurdish. To this end, I began to take responsibility for my own knowledge about my Kurdish heritage by performing Kurdish dances and attending Kurdish festivals. This helps us connect with our roots and incorporate them into our daily lives.

[26] The author conducted interviews with Sherif in Berlin on September 26, 2022.

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Additionally, ordinary members recognized circle dances' mental and social advantages as contributing to the constitution of a cohesive community and bringing a sense of well-being, excitement, and happiness to their communal lives.[27]

In Berlin, GovendaKi and the dance committees of Kurdish diaspora associations contribute to space-building through dance performances and lessons. The self-organized dance troupe GovendaKi operates during national holidays like Newroz, whereas dance committees affiliated with political actors perform at specific anniversary ceremonies, drawing attention to homeland politics. Dance troupes frequently incorporate political statements into their performances to encourage a sense of unity among diasporic constituents and homeland compatriots, as well as to raise awareness of Kurdish experiences of statelessness and discrimination. Furthermore, GovendaKi seeks to cultivate mutual understanding among different immigrant populations, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Its manager, Weysi, recounted:

> Our dance troupe functions like a magnet, drawing more individuals to join us. We are individuals from various immigrant communities. Tourists sometimes join us and express an interest in our culture. We exchange stories about our experiences, and they share theirs. By participating in dancing lessons, numerous individuals become acquainted with us. These include Kurds from various regions of Kurdistan, as well as non-Kurds. Our dancing troupe resembles a social community, where individuals engage in social activities and perform together.

Newly arrived Kurdish refugees appreciate dance performances and reflect on childhood memories of dancing at weddings in Kurdistan. These memories form the cornerstone of their identity and ultimately lead to a sense of belonging to the Kurdish community.[28] Furthermore, dance actors provide an intercultural setting in which Kurdish immigrants interact with German citizens and immigrants, breaking down stereotypes and prejudices. This approach enables Kurdish constituents to resist exclusion and discriminatory policies, as well as to combat feelings of humiliation while simultaneously expressing their culture, traditions and values through dance performances.

Conclusion

My paper examined the self-governing cultural production process within a diaspora-centric context by comparing Kurdistan's Jews in Jerusalem and the Kurdish diaspora in Berlin. This process covers self-organized autonomous formations' collective agency, the politics of cultural production in culinary, music, and dancing spaces, and how cultural meanings shape the cultural, emotional, and psychological needs, social affairs, structural challenges, and overarching objectives of diaspora-centric and diasporic communities. The paper argued that self-organized autonomous establishments adopt common cultural practices to generate and stimulate the development of diaspora-centric cultural spaces. These establishments in these spaces empower diasporic and diaspora-centric communities to engage in social and cultural practices that impact identity (re-)constructions, sense of belonging, and social cohesion. However, the politics and meanings of cultural production by social establishments differ depending on the context and causal factors in their new environments, as well as their needs and challenges. Kurdistan's Jews specifically exploit cultural production to restore narrated memories, oppose oppressive and

[27] The author conducted interviews with Yossi in Jerusalem on April 3, 2022.
[28] The author conducted interviews with Shiyar in Berlin on December 3, 2022.

discriminatory lived experiences, and reconnect with ancestral roots. Their cultural practices help to form collective identities, foster a sense of belonging, consolidate their cohesive community, and fundamentally reinforce their community's well-being. Non-Jewish Kurdish diaspora formations in Berlin, on the other hand, engage in self-governing cultural production practices to tackle repressive policies in their home countries and discriminatory treatment in their new environment. This also evokes specific meanings among these diaspora members, allowing them to reflect on identity maintenance, refresh their lived memories, and generate social capital for integration through interactions with their peers, German citizens, and other immigrant communities while also advocating for their compatriots' ongoing political struggle in their homeland. Generally, self-organized subjects establish self-governing mechanisms in diaspora-centric cultural spaces to enable their community members to revisit their past experiences and meet their requirements. They also strive to assure identity reconstruction and preservation, community cohesion, and integration in receiving societies. Their cultural production practices regulate their cultural and social lives and ensure their communities' survival.

The outcome of this study is crucial for multiple stakeholders, particularly policymakers and academics in Germany, Israel, and beyond. It expands their understanding of how the self-governing cultural production practices among the most marginalized diasporic and diaspora-centric segments can function as a dynamic and strategic tool to address complex and diverse themes and concerns. Furthermore, the study helps these actors gain a broader perspective on how self-governing cultural production empowers marginalized subjects to participate in cultural and social everyday life, resolve social conflicts, and promote social cohesion. In particular, stakeholders in the field of migration can recognize the beneficial effects of self-governing cultural production on the integration process of newly-arrived immigrants, as well as the impact it has on their socioeconomic and cultural lives in receiving societies. Additionally, it draws academic attention to the interplay between diaspora concepts, self-governance, and cultural production, which shape diasporic identities, community formation, integration, and homeland ties. Finally, it sheds light on hitherto unexplored contextual and current ties between Jews of Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora through cultural aspects and lived experiences that they employ to fulfill multiple common objectives. It opens a new debate on the status of Kurdistan's Jews, their approach to Kurdish culture in connection with narrated memories, and the roots of their ancestors, which continue to be prevalent elements in their daily affairs in Israel.

I limit the focus of this paper to the self-governing process of cultural production as an essential political and strategic asset, as well as its impact within a diasporic and diaspora-centric context. However, future studies might examine certain factors that shape the agency and politics of diaspora-centric actors in the self-governing cultural production process. These factors include but are not limited to political opportunity structures, the availability of resources in diverse receiving environments, social structures such as gender and generational dimensions, and the digitalization process. Furthermore, there is a lack of research on how the collaboration between policymakers and self-organized diasporic formations in the self-governing cultural production process could contribute to the improvement of immigrants' affairs and the resolution of their complex cultural and social challenges. Finally, more studies need to pay attention to the way various diasporic and non-diasporic actors mobilize cultural production as a tool of soft power within the framework of international relations to lobby decision-makers. In this context, the extent to which Kurdistan's Jews leverage cultural production to lobby the Israeli government's policy toward the Kurds in the Middle East is still unexplored. Finally, additional comparative research is critical to examine distinct objects of cultural production, which might differently shape the affairs, needs and objectives of immigrant populations in their respective receiving societies.

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