

MUSLIM JEWISH FESTIVAL REPORT



2021 & 2022 EDITIONS

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through the
Muslim Jewish Alliance



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Introduction

The Muslim Jewish Festival, or “MuJew Festival,” took place in Berlin, Germany from 11th to 14th of November 2021 as an in-person event; and on November 8th and December 20th 2022, as part of the *Muslim Culture Days* hosted by the State of Berlin. The MuJew Festivals showcased the diversity and creativity of Berlin’s Muslim and Jewish communities, with eleven different events and 50 separate performances, including music, dance, poetry, film screenings, and panel discussions under the motto “ART United – Muslim Jewish Voices.” Among the events were “Alif-Aleph”: an Opening Ceremony, “Tacheles Germany”: a visual arts exhibition on Socio-Political Issues, “Alliance”: a Panel on Muslim-Jewish relations, “HIStory”: a Panel on Queer Perspectives and a concert. Included were additionally an authors’ reading, a film screening, a cooking show and a side event on music and mental health. Berlin’s residents were invited to celebrate Muslim and Jewish artists and thinkers, to learn about Muslim and Jewish spirituality, and to combat both anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism.

The Muslim Jewish Festival – 2021 edition

Activity

Muslim Jewish Conference alumni coordinated the establishment of local Muslim-Jewish working groups through five online Workshops on: Team-building, Antisemitism and Anti Muslim Racism, Change Management, Diversity, and Public Relations. The work done through these working groups established the common vision to co-create artistic events during the Berlin Muslim Culture Days. The main outcome of this vision was to organize a Muslim Jewish Festival and to connect its agenda to the “1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany” events supported by the German Federal Government. Through establishing such a connection, the MuJew Festival 2021 edition would use the impulse of a nationally supported series of events, and cooperate in organizing a Festival with massive impact.

MJC alumni and JUMA spearheaded the planning efforts of the Muslim-Jewish Festival in 2021 with an equal representation of Muslim and Jewish team members as well as artists involved in the festivals programming. JUMA partnered with the Muslim Jewish Conference and included Hillel Germany, Eruv Hub, the Jewish Center Synagogue Fraenkelufer and the Anne

Frank Educational Center to build a diverse Festival team, consisting of people with connections to Islam and Judaism, capable of cocreating a diverse agenda.

In preparation for the MuJew Festival, this team visited other Jewish and Muslim festivals like *the Festival of Resilience*, *the Middle East Union Festival* or *the Dagesh Festival* to get an impression of the existing festival landscape in Berlin and thus helping the search for artists to perform at the Muslim-Jewish Festival.



Additionally to organizing the Muslim Jewish Festival, the team managed to create and promote Muslim-Jewish cooperation on even more levels. For example, Muslim illustrator Hatice Cevik, who was already the in-house designer for the Muslim Cultural

Days in 2020, created a new logo and corporate design for the MJFestival in 2021. Jewish videographer Eric Guemise brought these illustrations to "life" within the announcement trailer.

The program

The Muslim Jewish Festival took place from November 11th – 14th 2021 at the Prachtwerk in Neukölln. Additionally it was livestreamed for everyone not able to get one of the 750 tickets in time. This livestream was an opportunity to "experience" the festival privately and also include many more members of different communities. The MJF team contacted about 70 Muslim and Jewish communities to increase the dissemination of the event and the positive feedback, active involvement and even support of many of those local Muslim and Jewish groups exceeded the expectations of the MJF team. Various members of the Jewish community recommended to provide private security at the Festival venue and helped the team with this delicate matter. In addition, there was full cooperation and coordination with the Neukölln Police and the Police in Berlin (LKA).

The distribution of the MJFestival advertising material (posters, program booklets, website) by Muslim and Jewish communities was an added value to the dissemination strategy.



The schedule of the Muslim-Jewish festival agenda was designed to feature three events per-day from Thursday to Sunday (starting at 14:00, 18:00, and 20:15 respectively). This sequential distribution of the agenda allowed the attendees to participate in all the MJF events, without overlapping or missing any performance.

Visitors were able to attend as many events as possible without overlapping. This scheduling was carefully chosen to maximize the possible experience of the visitors and to ensure transparency. In addition, the MJF's accessibility was ensured by a central venue (Prachtwerk) to increase the convenience for possible attendees.



Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the MJF team was already confronted with special planning challenges in the spring of 2021. The festival took place adhering to the local restrictions to ensure the health and protection of all visitors. There were no positive cases of COVID-19 during or after the festival among the visitors as well as the organizing team and performers. During the preparation numerous formats had been considered from in-person, to hybrid, to drive-in, to digital-only. At the end, the MJF team decided to coordinate a hybrid format ensuring that the 750 visitors could physically experience the festival and thousands more could follow it online. To ensure the highest possible health security protocols for the visitors and to track possible infection chains, an online ticketing system (Eventbrite), as well as a contact tracking system (Digital Waitor) was utilized. During the summer planning sessions, the MJF team was looking into a variety of venues, but considering the new COVID variants

and the rise of the infection rates, the decision was formed to organize the Festival with a maximum capacity of 100 attendees per each event.

Cultural institutions and communities supported the MJFestival with ideas, connections and promotion of the MJF agenda. The AusArten Festival, Jewish-Muslim Cultural Days Heidelberg, Dagesh, Middle East Union Festival, The Festival of Resillience, the educational initiative Ferhat Unvar, Keshet Germany, ELES and JSUD to name just a few. This close cooperation diversified advertising efforts and expanded the scope of people, that could be reached as well as the involvement of respected community multipliers.



The Muslim-Jewish Festival 2021 was advertised in the public space. For this purpose, a large-scale billposting campaign was conceptualized in the Berlin area.

Flyers were distributed in bars, cafes, clubs, through billposting and promotional materials such as bottle openers and cloth bags were produced, expanding the advertising efforts, ultimately helping to mobilize potential audiences.

Summary of results and impact

The collaborative approach, through which the Muslim Jewish Conference Alumni convened the team of the Muslim Jewish Festival, helped create a new narrative showcasing the diversity and creativity of Berlin's many Muslim and Jewish communities. It constituted an important milestone in the path of celebrating Muslim-Jewish artistic expression and spirituality as ways of creatively attempting to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism.

The composition and trust-building process that occurred within the MJF team was crucial to bridge the gap between Muslim and Jewish communities and to create the safe spaces necessary to promote Muslim-Jewish cooperation through arts and culture.

As quantitative indicators of the festival outcomes we can highlight:

- 750 in-person visitors.
- More than 100 contributions of over 60 art and culture creators from over 12 different art forms.
- 24,000 generated views on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram and thousands of interactions through these channels.
- 900 subscribers on the MJF social media profiles.

From a comparative perspective and based on the preliminary research and the visits to other Muslim and/or Jewish festivals, there are no precedents of any Muslim-Jewish festival that has achieved these numbers.

From a qualitative point of view, the artistic contributions, their audiovisual documentation as well as all event photos, which will remain available online on demand on YouTube and Instagram, form a common digital platform of Jewish and Muslim art and culture, innovative and unrivaled in their diversity and variety. Although the contributions ranged from dance performances to spiritual events or theological lectures, the audience was kept consistently interested, engaged and enthusiastic.

As Muslim-Jewish arts and culture project, in addition to the interreligious aspect, the creation of such a high degree of intrareligious visibility is truly unique. Among the

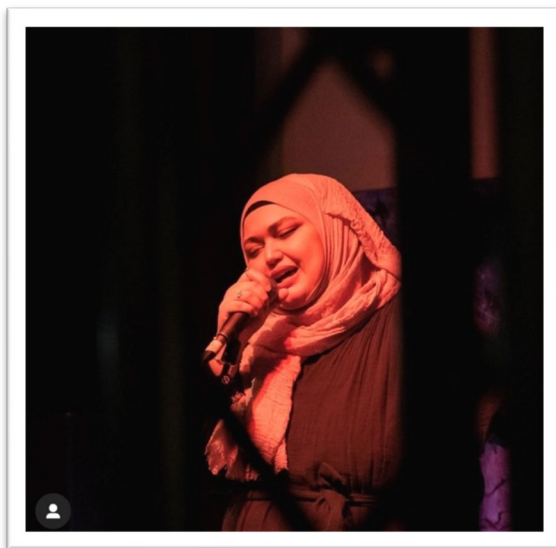
approximately 100 artistic contributions, queer, Alevi, conservative, Sunni, progressive, Sephardic, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, black, Asian, agnostic, feminist, religious, but also common content was represented. The biographies of all artists as well as all contributions are available at (mujewfest.wordpress.com).



Attending audiences, not Muslim nor Jewish showed their approval by commenting on social media. Arife, a prospective teacher, wrote "Wow, my heart goes out to you". The MJF 2021 was able to further expand the original target audience and engage with a larger and more diverse group of people, bringing together Muslims and Jews as well as non-Muslims and non-Jews.



By using hybrid formats, the MJF was not limited locally, but able to welcome viewers from all over Europe and the world (particularly Germany, Austria and Switzerland due to many German speaking events.). During rising tensions within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the MJF was another opportunity to put a "United through Art" approach in to practice as innovative model, transcending sociopolitical polarization, prejudice and discrimination.





Individual contributions, such as the film "Masel Tov Cocktail" will also be used in an educational context. Individual artists will thus act as multipliers long after the official end of the project. Through the careful curation of the contributions, through the respective accompanying texts, as well as the intensive online presentation of all speakers, a common thread emerges, which allows interested viewers to either choose contributions selectively or to take in the total amount of 11.5 hours of material as a whole. Both the [final trailer](#) and the event photos convey an extensive and visually appealing impression of the accomplishments.



The Muslim Jewish Festival – 2022 edition

Activity

Using the momentum created during the 2021 edition of the Muslim Jewish Festival, the MJF team started to plan the activities for 2022. Consistent grassroots impact requires follow up action after landmark events such as a large festival, in order to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslimism hatred in the long term. As it happened in 2021, the results of the preliminary workshops held by the organizers, provided these requirements and concrete ideas to cocreate the 2022 edition of the Muslim Jewish Cultural Events. In 2021 the agenda of events related to the wider theme of “1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany” provided the necessary conditions to implement a first festival edition. 2022 presented an opportunity to focus even more on Muslim-Jewish cooperation on a grassroots level, using the approach of arts and culture.

The first part of the Muslim Jewish Festival 2022 took place on November 8th including the film screening “Two trees in Jerusalem”. It was followed by a Q&A panel with the Holocaust Survivor Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen. The event also included a public reading and Q&A session with MJC alumni Zachary Gallant, author of the book “Brauner Boden – Ein jüdischer Blick auf die deutsche Aufarbeitung der NS Zeit”.



A second MJF event took place on November 22nd highlighting the topics of Mental Health and Music. For this event queer and shia Healing Coach Ahmed Sadkhan and the sunni musician Merve “Mery” Kumral performed a diverse selection of Muslim and Jewish songs, followed by lessons related to selfcare, motivation and self-reflection.

The program

On the eve of November 9, also known as “Reichskristallnacht”, the MJF team organized a local Muslim Jewish Festival Event focusing on the art forms of literature and film called “Erinnerungskultur neu denken” – rethinking remembrance culture”. In cooperation with the MJC, the Global Ethic Foundation, Stiftung Weltethos, and Humanity in Action at Il Kino Kreuzberg. For years Germany has shown leadership in regards to remembrance efforts, having many dates dedicated to Holocaust remembrance for example but Jewish activists like Zachary Gallant or Max Czollek claim that the current remembrance culture is often missing Jewish perspectives.



Jews can end up being misused in remembrance activities which are not carefully thought through. In a worst case scenario remembrance culture can turn into “Gedächtnistheater” – (Remembrance theater) as Michel Bodemann called this phenomena resulting in critical Jewish perspectives, often not being heard in the public

discourse. The MJF team invited author Zachary Gallant to talk about his current book “Brauner Boden – ein jüdischer Blick auf die Aufarbeitung der NS Zeit” (Brown Ground – a Jewish perspective on processing the Nazi past”). The book includes several stories of German businessmen who collaborated with the Nazis. After the Shoah the most of these business men were able to keep their money and maintained their power. None of the mentioned companies were expropriated.



With this program the MJF wanted to honor those, active in the fight against the Nazis. Current studies by the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (Central Council of Jews in Germany) states that one third of Germans believe their family had rescued jews during the Shoah. That number was in fact only 0,001%, and therefore not many of these stories exist in Germany. The MJF team invited Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen and featured the Humanity in Action film “two trees in Jerusalem”, which is telling the story of Cornelia’s parents. Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen was very active in the fight against racism and antisemitism in her political career as member of the FDP (liberal democratic party). She became Ausländerbeauftragte der Bundesregierung – (Head of Migration by the Federal State), raising her voice many times supporting marginalized migrant groups such as Sinti, Roma or Muslims.



The film screening "Two threes in Jerusalem" tells the story of Cornelia Schmalz-Jacobsen's parents who were honored at the garden of the righteous at the Yad Vashem Museum. An open discussion between Mrs. Schmalz-Jacobsen, Zachary Gallant and the public followed. The discussion focused on reflections and critical questions related to the culture of remembrance in Germany:

- Which stories of heroes have been told in the past and which have not?
- Are temporary Jewish perspectives included in the current discourse about remembrance work?

The event helped to bring awareness to a very important topic and the MJF's model of combating racism through arts and culture was effectively implemented for a German audience.



On the 24th of November 2022 a second MJF event took place, focusing on the topics of Mental Health and Music at Cafe Kremanski in Kreuzberg. For this event the MJF team invited the queer and shia coach Ahmed Sadkhan and the Sunni musician Merve

“Mery” Kumral. Both artists were part of the program during the Muslim Jewish Festival 2021, presenting an excellent opportunity to follow up with performances that received positive feedback. Mery recently published her first song "Out of love" in November 2022 and this MJF event provided a safe space for her to perform the song for the first time in live setting. Additionally she performed a diversity of Muslim and Jewish songs opening the space for Ahmed Sadkhan to share his lessons about selfcare, motivation and self-reflection through music.



The MJF team invited German Journalists from the NDR – Norddeutscher Rundfunk (North German Broadcast), already working with Ahmed Sadkhan on a documentary on queer Muslims in Germany. As such this Event is now part of his documentary which can be found online ([Queer und Muslimisch - wie passt das zusammen? | NDR.de - Kultur - Programm](https://www.ndr.de/kultur/queer-und-muslimisch-wie-passt-das-zusammen-100.html)).

Summary of results and impact

The second edition of the Muslim Jewish Festival confirmed the effectiveness of combining both large and smaller scale events based on arts and culture, creating a sustainable model of fostering cooperative initiatives in cooperation with a growing community and variety of Muslim and Jewish artists and activists.



As quantitative indicators of the festival outcomes we can highlight:

- 175 in-person visitors.
- 1200 generated views on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram and hundreds of interactions via these channels.
- 300 new subscribers on Muslim Jewish Festival social media profiles.

From a qualitative point of view, the possibility of organizing preliminary workshops in-person helped to keep the MJF audience active, engaged and connected. At the same time, diversifying the Festival program, including a film screening, a book reading, panel discussions and music performances helped to start innovative networks of cooperation within the audience. For many participants it was considered a “safe space” to promote effective Muslim-Jewish cooperation through arts and culture.

The path created by a **Muslim Jewish Festival** in the last two years already incubated trust and coalitions among a vast group of Muslim and Jewish art activists who are committed to move forward with more Muslim Jewish events and initiatives in order to expand and diversify this innovative model. **The Muslim Jewish Conference** has proven once again, what kind of powerful and beautiful change it can inspire and the **Muslim Jewish Alliance** has provided this alumni project with the necessary support to transform possibility into reality.

We are change.



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