

German Jewish History and Culture in Modern Times

6. International Seminar to Research Students at the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem, 15. bis 20. März 2009

The 6th International Seminar was – at least from the participants' point of view – a big success. In the name of all participants, we would like to repeat our thanks to all those responsible for the interesting and enriching week we spent in Jerusalem. Our special thanks go to Martha Keil, Shlomo Mayer, Joachim Schlör, Stefanie Schüler-Springorum and the people at the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem.

The evening before the official beginning, Gal Hertz, the groups's guide for the social and cultural programme, organized a first informal meeting for all people from abroad. On Sunday, the 15th of March, *Shlomo Mayer*, *Stefanie Schüler* and *Martha Keil* then opened the seminar at the Leo Baeck Institute with remarks on the idea of the LBI workshop.

The first panel, moderated by *Martha Keil* (Vienna), concentrated on the period around 1800. *Anne Purschwitz* (Halle-Wittenberg) introduced her dissertation project about „The Religion of the Citizen – Debates about the ‚Verbürgerlichung‘ of the Jews in Prussia 1780-1847“. Purschwitz questioned the meaning of the expression ‚Jewish question‘. To examine how this was defined and understood she analysed the significance within the then debate, manifested in writings by prominent authors like Christian Wilhelm Dohm or Friedrich Julius Stahl.

Francisca Solomon (Vienna) introduced her research topic, „Between Traditionalism and Assimilation. Views of the Galician Jewry in the Works of N. Samuëli, K. E. Franzos and S. R. Landau“. In her presentation she explained her approach to questions of cultural transfer on a micro and a macro level by examining the constellation of figures and the narrative structure in the literary texts of those writers. She illustrated a tension between the emancipation of German Jews and the orthodoxy in Russia that is echoed in the texts. Furthermore, she mentioned intertextual relations, a subject which was – with a certain emphasis on the transnational interrelations – seized in the following discussion.

Moderated by *Mosche Zimmermann* (Jerusalem), *Inka Le-Huu* (Hamburg) presented her project about Jewish-Gentile Relations in three German cities between 1815 and 1871: Hamburg, Frankfurt/Main and Fürth. Le-Huu focused on the dialogue between Jews and non-Jews as it is represented in books and other publications. In addition, she examined discussions which took place in journals and interreligious societies and provided information on the official politics of interrelations. She presented a selection of results from her research in the archive of Hamburg.

After a lunch break, *Gideon Freudenthal* (Tel Aviv) moderated the second session, which started with a richly illustrated presentation by *Nurit Sirkis-Bank*. She discussed the history and iconography of the Horb Synagogue, built in 1735. It is one of the remaining wooden synagogues Eliezer Sussmann from Brody painted between 1732 and 1742 in Southern Germany. Sirkis-Bank analysed the elements and symbols of the paintings in its historical and artistic context – thus showing the complex interplay of artistic languages and Jewish tradition. The discussion pointed out even more meanings of the same symbols which referred inter alia to the non-Jewish society (like that of an apparent star of David in the timber framing of houses turning out to be a common symbol for breweries).

The following two talks suggested new approaches to Walther Benjamin: *Gal Hertz* (Tel Aviv) compared Walter Benjamin's „Agesilaus Santander“ to Ludwig Klages „Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele“. He analysed some peculiar aspects of Benjamin's text, like the significance of time and self-representation and correlated those to the writings of Klages, underlining the dichotomies of both. Hertz concluded that Benjamin and Klages were referring to the same image of an angel of history, from different perspectives.

The concluding presentation of this day was an attempt to re-read Walter Benjamin, by *Sami Khatib* (Berlin), focusing on Benjamin's relationship to Marxism on the one hand and on Jewish theology on the other. Khatib approached Benjamin by analysing the author's understanding of the terms history, ‚Eingedenken‘ and ‚Jetztzeit‘. He argued that one can't arrange Benjamin's materialist and theological works in a diachronic order, but rather has to interpret them within the frame of the „elective affinity“ of libertarian Marxism and Jewish theology (Michael Löwy).

The day closed with a tour through the tunnels under the Wailing Wall. *Gal Hertz* guided this tour and provided the group with a first insight into the long history of Jerusalem. He commented on the relationship of historical sites and present narratives in this special case.

The second day of the seminar started with a panel on biographies, moderated by *Itta Shedletzky* (Jerusalem). With his talk about „Jewish German Life-World and Sociological Theory in the 19th century“, *Mathias Berek* (Leipzig) presented his post-doctoral research project about the 19th-century Jewish-German philosopher Moritz Lazarus. As early as in the 1860s, Lazarus stated that belonging to a nation would be a matter of will, not of race or language. Berek outlined the perception of Lazarus' and his work as well as its influence on general sociology. With Lazarus as the paradigm, he analysed the nexus between the Jewish-German „Lebenswelt“ (Husserl/Schütz) of that time and the theoretical work emerging from it.

Ivonne Meybohm chose a ‚non-traditional‘ traditional biographical approach to „David Wolffsohn 1856/58-1914“. She examined Wolffsohn as co-founder of the Zionist movement, pioneer of the state of Israel, and thus his political relevance for the Zionist project. She examined not only the stations of his life but rather his involvement in the Zionist movement, in groups and networks, as well as his influence on political structures. Hence, she concentrates on the years between 1892 and 1914. Meybohm involved the participants in an interesting discussion on the pros and cons of a thematic approach to Wolffsohn's biography instead of a strictly chronological, encompassing account of his life.

Lyzette Jacinto – sharing Meybohm's reservations regarding the value of the ‚traditional‘ biographical narrative – in her presentation, „On the other shore. Freedom and Exile of Alice Rühle-Gerstel“, chose the suicide of the author as a starting point to trace her life and work. The obscure intellectual Rühle-Gerstel, born in Prague, was involved in Social Democracy and in the women's movement. Her work was interrupted by National Socialism and Rühle-Gerstel was forced to emigrate. The discussion mainly emphasised Jacinto's methodological approach of contextualizing Rühle-Gerstel's literary work to other literary sources on a micro- and macro-level.

After a coffee break, *Avner Dinur* continued with his talk about „The Jewish-German Hyphen Culture: A Post-Colonial Reading in a Non-Colonial Case“. He discussed the problems of the term ‚German-Jewish‘ as a hyphenated identity in the postcolonial discourse. Dinur briefly outlined some aspects of the relationship between Germans and Jews as a background for meanings of ‚German-Jewish‘ and stressed the significance of the term ‚Bildung‘ in this context. He illustrated some problems and characteristics by referring to Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas and then transferred the discussion to the level of the meaning of Arab-Jewish identity. The discussion mainly dealt with the ‚hyphen‘ – the term as well as its special relevance in the context of ‚German-Jewish‘.

Rosa Reicher (Heidelberg) offered insight into some ideas of Gershom Scholem about ‚Bildung‘. In her presentation about „The ethos of Bildung“, she regarded Scholem as ‚Bildungstheoretiker‘ whose concept of ‚Bildung‘ would be a Jewish one. In the discussion, the use of the term ‚Bildung‘ was questioned, since it was an important catchword in the discourse, charged with different denotations.

The fourth session after the lunch break was led by *Joachim Schlör* (Southampton). It started with the presentation „Canon in Exile – the Reading Culture of German-Jewish Immigrants in Palestine and Israel“ by *Caroline Jessen* (Jerusalem). Jessen outlined her methodological approach to the ‚canon‘ of German literature as a medium of cultural memory (Jan Assmann). She exemplified aspects and functions of the canon of German-Jewish literature in Mandatory Palestine, focusing on the works of the German-Jewish writer and Zionist intellectual Josef Kastein and his struggles with seemingly incompatible canones and value systems.

Gad Kfir (Jerusalem) continued with a presentation of „The Jeckes’ Influence in Children’s Toys during the British Mandate (1920-1948)“. He introduced some examples of toy collections and the principles of creation and production during the 1920s and illustrated how toys could mirror political and social developments.

Philipp Mettauer (Vienna) concluded the day with an illustrative talk about „The Jewish-Austrian Emigration to Argentina from 1938 till Today“. He presented results from the 80 interviews he had conducted and added stories and photographs of some of the families. Mettauer drew a rich picture of the refugees’ living space and life, covering several generations. Many of the questions following his presentation focused on the Austrian post-war process of coming to terms with the past. Concerning the Austrian Jews in Argentina, Mettauer explained that there had not been any contacts between the Jewish refugees and the Nazi refugees after 1945.

After this intense day, the buses headed towards the „City of David“, where we were guided through the archaeological excavation site. The guide, preoccupied with his task of underlining the importance of the place as the „real setting“ of the biblical stories about King David, treated the group mostly like a school class and encouraged us to conduct role-plays. The tour was on a very low intellectual level, full of reproductions of unquestioned myths. Afterwards we visited an Arab youth club in the neighbourhood of the archaeological site (Silwan). There we were told about social, political and economic problems resulting from the existence of this site, particularly for the Israeli-Arab and Palestinian inhabitants of Silwan. The people who ran the youth club presented it as a neighbourhood empowerment project aimed at improving living conditions in Silwan and insisted on its political autonomy – e.g., by refusing any financial aid from Fatah or Hamas. The alternative archaeology project also appeared to be not purely archaeological fieldwork, but also a political opposition to the, as they described it, right-wing organization that runs the official archaeological site of the „City of David“.

The cultural program turned out to be an interesting contrast to general narratives, whether they are leftist, right-wing, or the official Zionist one. It was indeed an example of democratic courage to allow not only people who agreed with the received wisdom, but also people who were very critical of it, to guide a group of guests like us. You might not find the same in German official institutions, so special thanks for this courage to the Leo Baeck Institute.

Tuesday's session, hosted by the Minerva Center for German History at Tel Aviv University, brought together case studies from various regions and eras and was moderated by *José Brunner* (Tel Aviv). The starting paper, by *Verena Kasper* (Graz), dealt with a period as early as the second half of the 18th century. Her Ph.D. project is based on the 1300 cases brought by the Jews of the Frankfurt Community to the Imperial Aulic Council (Reichshofrat) of the Holy Roman Empire, and explores how important imperial institutions like the Council have been in the Jewish struggle for autonomy against local authorities. The paper as well as the discussion stressed the connection between everyday life and the legal cases – the Jews of Frankfurt were forced to live in a heavily overcrowded „Judengasse“ whose gates were closed at night, on Sundays and Christian holidays.

Thus, it is no coincidence that most of the appeals were directed against the Frankfurt Magistrate and against Jewish neighbours.

Börries Kuzmany (Vienna) covered the Galician town of Brody – a once respectable trade center connecting East and West – in the long 19th century. In Austria, the border town of the Habsburg Empire has been regarded as a „failure“ since the beginning of the 20th century, with a stagnating population and a glorious but now distant past. From a Jewish perspective, Brody was still at the core of the „mental map“. Two thirds of the population were Jews, and it was one (if not „the“) center of Rabbinic-Talmudic Scholarship, as well as the Haskala in Eastern Central Europe. From a Polish perspective as well, the development was a success story, since the town increasingly polonized itself. Thus, Kuzmany showed that the history of failure is only one possible narrative about Brody.

Mathias Seiter (Southampton) then spoke about his research into the close relationship between regional and national identities, as is typical especially for people of German nationality. He investigated the cases of the province of Posen and Alsace-Lorraine between 1871 and 1914. Although cities, especially Berlin, became centres for Jewish life during this time, German Jews who settled there often continued to root their self-perception in the regional context of the borderland they had grown up in. Discussants added that the regional identity in question mostly developed when there was no dominant city with a strong local identity, like in Königsberg or Frankfurt.

Philipp J. Nielsen (New Haven / TelAviv) then covered the years of the Weimar Republic in his paper about German Jews as part of the political Right. His examples revealed once more that Jews spanned the political spectrum like everybody else. It is interesting though to have a closer look at how a German-National monarchist like Schoeps dealt with the ideological connection of anti-Semitism and the Right, and how he didn't even let the Sho'ah disturb his reactionist conservatism. In the discussion it turned out that the family legacy with its obligation to keep certain traditions was the strongest incentive to hold on to a conservative position: the ideological and the cultural-social dimension are entangled.

In the last paper of this session, *Martin J. Wein* (Jerusalem) examined the political wings of the Jewry in Bohemia in the run-up to World War I. They were divided in Czecho-Jews, German-Liberals, and Zionists. The later movement grew as anti-Semitism increased. German Liberals lost importance since many Jews among them started to join the Zionist movement, while the non-Jews often fell to German nationalism.

The second half of the day was devoted to the history of Tel-Aviv. Gal Hertz had invited a guide for a critical city tour that told and questioned famous narratives around „The white city“ (although the tour itself was not less controversial).

The session on Wednesday was very thoughtfully and amiably moderated by Otto Dov Kulka (Jerusalem). It started with *Sonja Grabovsky's* (Wuppertal) paper about the children of Jewish-Christian couples, who had been racially classified by the National Socialists as „Half Jews“. As a result, they were forced into a state of ambivalence (Zygmunt Baumann), belonging neither to the German nor to the Jewish community. Thus, many of those who survived the Holocaust were excluded from „clear-cut identities“, being neither a „real victim“, like those Jews murdered in the concentration camps, nor part of the German collective of perpetrators. The audience discussed whether it would be worthwhile to consider the problem under the term of multiple identities instead of ambivalence. And one discussant pointed out that it was not only the so-called Half-Jews who had had to cope with the ambivalence of identity, but also people who had been racially defined as Jews by the Nazi Germans without being asked about their self-description.

David Jünger (Leipzig) spoke about migration plans within the Jewish community between 1933 and 1940. For many German Jews and their institutions it was not a matter of course in the 1930s to emigrate from Germany. Some even saw chances for Judaism in the increasing persecution: the Zionists envisaged a Jewish

resurrection, the Orthodox a clearer distinction between Jews and non-Jews. Others expected that after the segregation of the Jews the authorities would grant them minority rights within German society like those in the new states in Eastern Central Europe after World War I. Thus, representatives of German Jewry tried to negotiate with the Nazi regime (which they thought would act rationally) about expelling the larger part of German Jewry on condition that certain rights were assured to the rest.

The paper of *Orly Selinger* (Tel Aviv) returned to the topic of children and youngsters. In her project she examined diaries, letters and „Poesiealben“ written by German Jewish children and adolescents in National Socialist Germany. She analysed how the sources dealt with identity, group membership and the growing exclusion from society. First of all, there was no „German-Jewish identity“ as such. Second, especially those children equipped with a strong sense of „Jewishness“ in their families found it easier to face the exclusion, although in many cases there were still strong ties to Germany. During the discussion the question of whether there are differences between boys and girls within the sample arose.

Avivit Ashkoti-Shafir (Haifa) then shifted to another level in her paper about the representation of the Sho'ah in children's literature. Investigating German and Israeli book illustrations and picture books from 1968 till today, she found that in most books the Holocaust is depicted as something very important for today and not as something far away in the past. Besides this, in quite a few of them common stereotypes about the Jews are reproduced. The grade of violence between German and Israeli books differs significantly: German illustrations are less restrained in showing the Sho'ah in its brutality. The discussion involved the question of whether the books should be analysed within the context of the representability of the holocaust or not.

Julia Anspach (Bonn) also examined post-NS media: anti-Semitism in German „Heimatfilm“ after 1945. Those movies' plots are developed in a binary structure alongside the dichotomies of metropolis and countryside, modernity and tradition, society and community, rootlessness and Heimat. That is also the basic structure of anti-Semitism. The greedy merchant, counterpart of some positive figures, often still bears Jewish attributes. Anspach stressed the general danger of criticizing capitalism in a personalizing way, as several of the films during the German „economic miracle“ do. In the discussion someone asked if one could describe those movies and narrative structures as anti-Semitic even if „the Jew“ is not openly mentioned. But one has to take into consideration that most of the viewers of the „Heimatfilm“ had been part of the National Socialist collective only a few years before. Nevertheless the „Heimatfilm“ often tried to draw a line between the present and the „good old days“ before 1933 or even '29 – before the Nazis „went too far“.

This controversial end of the day's panel session was followed by a visit to Yad Vashem. A guided tour through the museum explained the pedagogical concept. Even if it might not be appropriate to present Yad Vashem as a „museum of decisions“, this was a very interesting insight. Afterwards, there was a discussion about this concept with *Doron Avraham* from the education department. Some questions referred to the relation between historical research and the culture of remembrance, e.g. whether the exhibition has taken the Holocaust out of its World War II context. Other objections were raised against the teleological orientation of the exhibition.

The first panel of the last day, moderated by *Mark Gelber* (Beer Sheva), was devoted to theatre and theatre-critics. *Jonah Mandel* (Jerusalem) presented his dissertation project, „The fluctuating Jewish and artistic identity of Arthur Eloesser“. Mandel's paper focused on changes and continuities in the critic's career, and on Eloesser's approach to the plays staged by the „Jüdischer Kulturbund“. The topic of identification with universalistic values as well as Jewish culture dominated the presentation as well as the following discussion.

In her presentation, „Staging Zionism in Weimar Berlin: Habima and the German-Jewish elite“, *Shelly Zer-Zion* (Jerusalem) discussed the role of the Hebrew-language theatre troupe Habima in promoting Zionism as an aesthetic program beyond the realms of concrete politics in Weimar Germany. She showed that the perceived message of Habima's performances answered a German audience's search for an ‚authentic‘ modern

Jewish identity. In this context, Zer-Zion stressed the importance of projections and counter-projections without which Habima's success in Germany cannot be fully understood: While Habima members wanted to be seen in the context of Western theater traditions, its German audience projected their agenda of cultural Zionism on the performances.

After a coffee break, *Shmuel Feiner* (Tel Aviv), head of the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem, moderated a panel of presentations rooted in philosophy, literary studies, and history.

In the first presentation, *Grazyna Jurevicz* (Potsdam) provided a reading of Moses Mendelssohn's anthropological concept („the destination of man“), which emphasized the philosophical thinking of the European enlightenment and Judaism as two coequal, inextricable sources for Mendelssohn's thinking. Stressing inconsistencies as well as the different, inseparable layers of his thinking, Jurevic portrayed Mendelssohn's work as a body of systematic thought unhampered by a rigid system's constraints. In the discussion Jurevicz again stressed her understanding of Mendelssohn as a „hyphen-thinker“.

Kerstin von der Krone's „Scholarship in Public – Wissenschaft des Judentums and its Press“ provided interesting insights into the role of the press as a medium of scholarly communication for Jewish scholars from the 1820s till the early 1930s. She emphasized the importance of a discourse beyond the boundaries of academic institutions for the establishment of the ‚Wissenschaft des Judentums‘. Her presentation revealed the particular impact of the press on the constitution of Jewish science. The discussion focused on Krone's analytic approach as well as on the extent to which not only journals edited by scholars from the ‚Wissenschaft des Judentums‘ could be of benefit for her research.

Caspar Battegay's (Heidelberg) presentation, „The other Blood – Language and Community in German-Jewish Literature 1830–1930“, examined the symbolism of blood in texts by German-Jewish writers such as Moses Hess, Martin Buber, Heinrich Heine, Franz Rosenzweig, Franz Kafka, and Max Nordau. He approached the works with the methodology of rhetorical analysis as well as close reading to illustrate Jewish counternarratives to the hegemonic discourse of blood in Non-Jewish and often Anti-Semitic contexts. Battegay's analysis revealed how the heavily charged term ‚blood‘ became a tool in the search for Jewish ‚authenticity‘ also in German-Jewish culture. Comments on his presentation demanded historical contextualization as part of the analysis of texts.

Yaakov George Kohler (Beer Sheva) spoke about Maimonides' „Guide of the Perplexed“ and its interpretation as well as its appropriation by the Reform Movement in Germany. Kohler outlined how Maimonides was turned into a role model for liberal scholars in the course of the 19th century. His theory suited their agenda of historicizing and rationalizing Judaism. Thus, this panel's concluding presentation and its discussion also dealt with the emergence and the functions of a strong narrative in promoting ideas and creating a lasting icon.

A general discussion on practical issues as well as on structure and dominant themes during the various work-sessions concluded the International Seminar. Whereas the majority of participants could easily agree on the advantage of English as common language throughout the seminar, topics such as the need for an overriding theme for all participants remained controversial. While such a prescribed focus might reduce the risk of ‚loose ends‘, some participants argued that the wide range of topics was appropriate for a seminar for research students presenting their doctoral or post-doctoral work. Several participants stressed the benefit of interdisciplinary discussions that have balanced misunderstandings arising from different terminologies of philosophers, sociologists, (art-)historians, and literary scholars. A majority of the participants endorsed the proposal to add one section for general discussion of fundamental issues to the various thematic panels.

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that some participants objected to the time frame of the seminar, since it did not provide equal time for all presentations and discussions, seemed to be too crowded

on some days, and was not equally binding to all moderators. However, as delays and rescheduling etc. can never be fully eliminated from a seminar that brings together more than 30 research scholars presenting their work in the highly condensed atmosphere of a one-week-workshop, these critical remarks might be taken lightly.

A dinner at the German Colony's amiable restaurant „Luciana“ concluded the official part of the International Seminar. Here, participants had an opportunity to meet some of the members of the board of the Leo Baeck Institute Jerusalem. The dinner not only gave seminar participants as well as their hosts the opportunity to look back and evaluate the past discussions, it also allowed them to discuss plans for further co-operation and to switch to non-academic topics. After dinner Gal Hertz presented a movie by the Israeli filmmaker Udi Aloni at the Leo Baeck Institute. He had, furthermore, invited Aloni to join the group for a discussion of the movie. Despite the event's late hour the participants profited once more from Gal's readiness to provoke discussions about contrasting political as well as aesthetic views.

On the last day of the International Seminar the group travelled to Masada. Gal guided them through the site, with a critical focus on the story told to visitors today. It turned out to be another intriguing example of culture and politics of remembrance to be found in present societies.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise / recommended citation style:

AHF-Information. 2009, Nr.074

URL: <http://www.ahf-muenchen.de/Tagungsberichte/Berichte/pdf/2009/074-09.pdf>