

The background features abstract geometric shapes in shades of blue and grey. A dark blue triangle points downwards from the top left. A light blue triangle points upwards from the bottom left. A grey triangle points upwards from the bottom right. The text is positioned in the white space between these shapes.

# Conference Reports



## Antisemitism and Sexualities Reconsidered

Conference held on December 13-15, 2021, at the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung, Technische Universität Berlin (TU Berlin). Sponsored by the German Historical Institute Washington (GHI), Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft and the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung at TU Berlin. Conveners: Anna-Carolin Augustin (GHI Washington), Sebastian Bischoff (Paderborn University), Kristoff Kerl (University of Copenhagen) Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (TU Berlin). Participants: Nathan Abrams (Bangor University); Christine Achinger (The University of Warwick); Jens Elberfeld (MLU Halle-Wittenberg); Ruth Ennis (Leipzig University); Sander L. Gilman (Emory University); Hans-Joachim Hahn (University of Basel); Deborah Hertz (University of California, San Diego); Gal Hertz (Tel Aviv University); Dagmar Herzog (City University of New York); Elisabeth Janik-Freis (TU Berlin); Uffa Jensen (TU Berlin); Caroline Kahlenberg (University of Virginia); Martina Kessel (Bielefeld University); Nadja Klopprogge (University of Giessen); Dani Kranz (Ben Gurion University of the Negev); Margarita Lerman (Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow); Hannah Lotte Lund (TU Berlin); Elissa Mailänder (Sciences Po, Paris); Kerstin Mayerhofer (University of Vienna); Lisa Silverman (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee); Jan Süselbeck (NTNU Trondheim); Sören Urbansky (GHI Washington); Lukas Uwira (Viadrina European University); Vojin Saša Vukadinović (Freie Universität Berlin); Richard Wetzell (GHI Washington); Benedikt Wolf (Bielefeld University).

The premise of the Conference “Antisemitism and Sexualities Reconsidered” was to bring the differences in the role sexualities played in judeophobic discourses at different times and in different regions into view. To expand the tem-

poral and geographical focus of the debate beyond the era of modern antisemitism and beyond the bounds of “Western societies” was the ambitious approach reflected by the extensive range of papers submitted. The keynote was delivered by Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, with a commentary by Dagmar Herzog.

The first panel, “White Slavery Narratives around 1900,” was chaired by Elisabeth Janik-Freis and dealt with the entanglements of the so-called *Mädchenhandel* (trafficking of girls) by supposedly Jewish procurers and evolving antisemitic stereotypes once the legal term of “trafficking” was established. Ruth Ennis and Margarita Lerman expanded the ongoing debate among historians on how to classify the white slavery narratives which highlighted the relation between tropes of white slavery and antisemitism. Ennis and Lerman emphasized the interconnection between the development of new forms of policing migration across all European empires, including the Ottoman, and the adaption of antisemitic discourse to enforce these emerging practices. They suggested that the so-called *Mädchenhandel* shifted from carrying only minor or no punishment to being perceived as morally outrageous, while connecting a “certain Jewishness” to the problem. For Lerman, a 1892 trial at Lemberg in which 28 mostly Jewish defendants were accused of trafficking women works as a focal point for the modification of political and juridical practices at hand. Ennis, on the other hand, draws her assessment from the correspondence of European diplomats who were among the driving forces for new regulatory frameworks concerning trafficking in order to toughen migration laws in general.

Under the title “Sexuality and (Anti-) Zionism,” the second panel on day two began with Deborah Hertz’ rich remarks on Bertha Pappenheim and her opposition to the Youth Aliyah. Hertz focused on the very different identities Pappenheim took on. Pappenheim, an Austrian-Jewish feminist

and social worker, stood both with the radical feminists on issues such as the rights of single mothers and prostitutes, while also promoting nuclear family arrangements and other traditional gender norms – hence her strong critique of the kibbutzim. Pappenheim famously pointed out the antisemitic sentiments of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* leadership. Hertz stressed the need to engage in a debate about the antisemitic legacy of German feminism. Caroline Kahrenberg's following talk gave insight into how Palestinian Arabs discussed Jewish women's bodies in the early twentieth century. According to Kahrenberg, the sex talk about Jewish women's bodies served as a platform for anxieties and to cope with the sudden social changes associated with modernity, such as colonial rule, Zionism and shifting gender roles. She concluded that over time, the female Jewish body became a tool for anti-colonial struggle. An impressive and diverse selection of literature, caricatures and press articles illustrates and underpins Kahrenberg's remarks about the alleged promiscuous and European Jewish woman in Palestinian Arab discourse. The panel was concluded by Vojin Saša Vukadinović, who analyzed the anti-Israeli and antisemitic sentiments of Alija Izetbegović, former president of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and his "Islamic Declaration." Vukadinović argued that Izetbegović should be understood as an early Jihadist ideologue, whose reception in the West remains rather positive.

The third panel titled "Antisemitism and Jewish Perversion," began with Gal Hertz and his examination of "Entrepreneurs of Vice. Jewish Sexuality in Viennese Courts," followed by Benedikt Wolf's remarks about the constellation of antisemitism and anti-homosexual animus (homophobia) exemplified by Otto Julius Bierbaum's novel *Prinz Kuckuck. Leben, Taten, Meinungen und Höllenfahrt eines Wollüstlings*. Wolf argued that the novel's reader was supposed to align with the antisemitic protagonist, Henry Felix, who does not know he is Jewish, and Karl, his stepbrother, who is homosexual.

According to Wolf, a link between antisemitism and anti-homosexual animus is established through the fantasy of anal intercourse which plays an integral yet non-explicit part in the novel. With reference to Postone, Wolf argued that the promiscuous Jew Henry functions as the personification of universal interchangeability, rootless and parasitical. Karl's homosexuality, on the other hand, echoes this interchangeability in regard to gender norms. Although Jewishness and homosexuality are assigned to two different characters, they are connected through the marker of modern social contingency. Lisa Silverman then gave an engaging glimpse into her forthcoming book *The Postwar Antisemite: Culture and Complicity after the Holocaust*. In reference to the trial of Veit Harlan, Silverman argued that his defense strategy should be considered a pivoting point concerning the definition of the postwar antisemite. Karen Niehoff's testimony in that very trial played a substantial role: She described Ludwig Metzger, original screenwriter of the antisemitic film *Jud Süß*, as a committed National Socialist though arguing he was not an antisemite. Harlan's strategy on the other hand was to portray Metzger as a typical antisemite, undermining Niehoff's testimony while absolving himself. To Silverman, the new type of defense strategy employed by Harlan becomes a powerful rhetorical tool: It grants the accused the moral authority to determine who the antisemite is or was while obscuring his or her own proven or well-known antisemitic involvement.

The fourth panel, "Jews, Sexuality, and the State," started with Lukas Uwira on the notion of "Jewish Polygamy and the Alleged Inability to Found a State." Uwira discussed the antisemitic impression popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that a nation state could only be founded upon monogamy – the only pillar of society which Jews are incapable of due to their alleged polygamy. In particular, Uwira drew a connection between the ideas of "Jews" as unable to build a state and, at the same time, as responsible for

the destruction of those states they currently reside in. Martina Kessel continued the panel with her talk on "The Threat of Democracy. Identity Politics, Sexual Tropes and the anti-Jewish Impulse in Modern Germany." Drawing on material from the satirical weekly magazine *Simplicissimus*, founded in 1896, Kessel highlighted the application of antisemitic stereotypes in contemporary cultural artefacts such as caricatures and postcards. Sören Urbansky closed the panel with his presentation titled "'White Slaves' of Chinatown. Interracial Intimacy in Turn of the Century Singapore, Vladivostok, and San Francisco," in which he investigated the existing sharp ethnic boundaries in imperial Russia in the context of prostitution.

The fifth panel, titled "Antisemitism, Gender, and Sexuality," began with Kerstin Mayerhofer's talk, "'Quam mulieres menstruosi sunt'. Perceptions of the 'Men-Struating' Jew," which focused on this lesser-known motif of antisemitic rhetoric. She pointed out that Jewish inferiority was substantiated by the Christian claim that Jewish men are menstruating. Menstruation was seen as a sign of weakness or, even worse, a sinner's mark due to the refusal to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah. A particular Jewish gender distortion was then developed and integrated into Christian doctrine from the twelfth century onward, which construed Jewish women's sexuality as uncontrollable while Jewish men were feminized. Next, Jens Elberfeld talked about "Anti-Semitism and the History of Juvenile Sexuality in Early 20th-Century Germany". Elberfeld drew attention to the antisemitic usurpation of a critical cultural discourse on abstinence that could be weaponized using the imagery of the Jew as the modern subject par excellence and its promiscuous desires. Nadja Klopprogge's paper titled "Joel A. Roger's 'Sex & Race'. Exposing the Racist and Antisemitic Politics of History" appeared to be at the heart of the conference's investigation into the link between sexuality and race, or respectively antisemitism. Driven by the purpose to deconstruct the myth of a racially pure

lineage, Rogers identified sexuality as the ultimate hub for racist and antisemitic structures of social order decades before Michel Foucault would write his seminal series on *The History of Sexuality*. Klopprogge highlighted Roger's approach to demystify racist concepts of white purity on the basis of a phenotypic analysis of important statesman and poets throughout history.

The final panel of the conference addressed "Contemporary Sexual Antisemitisms." In Nathan Abrams' paper, "Subverting the Race. Jews, Porn, and Antisemitism in Contemporary American Discourse," the author analyzed the discourse around his own person as a case study of how antisemitic narratives developed regarding his research on the entanglement of Jews and the porn industry. Illustrated with references to a collection of right-wing websites, Abrams showed how his research was misrepresented as proof that Jews try to destroy Gentile morals through porn. In a rather traditional antisemitic conspiracy narration, Abrams is identified as an agent of a greater "Jewish" plan associated with hidden forces. Afterwards, Dani Kranz introduced her ambitious research design examining the potential link between the image of ancient but still persistent exoticized Jewish sexuality and the "sexy Israeli" among Jewish/German and Israeli Jewish/German adults. Finally, Jan Süsselbeck and Hans-Joachim Hahn presented their paper entitled "Sexually Harassed by Jews? Contemporary Debates on Berthold Woltze's Genre Painting 'Der lästige Kavalier'." Both explored the recent memefication of a painting from the 1870s which kick-started a debate among critics and researchers on social media about its antisemitic insinuation and/or tropes. Although Woltze is known for stereotypical depictions in his other works, Süsselbeck and Hahn point out that the painting in question remains rather ambiguous regarding its antisemitic portrayal. Both emphasize that especially from a current perspective it is difficult to determine how the painting would have been perceived in the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, Woltze's painting, implicitly or explicitly, is highly charged with antisemitic imagery.

Sander L. Gilman delivered concluding remarks. Coming from a Freudian perspective, Gilman discussed the potential origins of xenophobia. Whether it is considered a natural phenomenon or an aberration of human development, both assumptions tend to pathologize the concept. To Gilman, the more important aspect lies within the concrete social and historical manifestation of phobias such as antisemitism or racism, rather than in their underlying structures. In order to understand them, we should approach such phenomena antithetically: Instead of looking for deviant behavior, we should ask how "normality" is delimited? Eventually, such an undertaking might be able to filter out the symbolic registers of difference that define the political in reference to Georg Simmel. The core message of the conference, Gilman argued, was that the stereotypes of deviant human sexuality and the image of the Jew as their exemplary embodiment in the world have neither vanished nor improved – an argument bolstered by the extraordinary papers presented at this conference.

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