

International Affairs and the Politics of Memory: German-Jewish-Israeli Relations after the Holocaust

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An international conference was held in January, 2014 at Haifa University with the participation of 21 scholars working on the topic of „German-Jewish-Israeli Relations after the Holocaust“. The conference was organized by Amos Morris-Reich (University of Haifa), Jacob S. Eder (University of Jena) and Hubert Leber (University of Marburg).

The 69 years that have passed since the end of the Holocaust have not lessened its presence in German-Jewish-Israeli relations. Although remembrance of the Holocaust is obviously genuine, the politics surrounding it have always served the ever-changing agendas of the various international players. The aim of the organizers of the conference was to present a comparative, interdisciplinary and cross-temporal overview of the dynamics of this relationship that has been shaped continuously by sentiment, history and pragmatism.

DAN DINER (Jerusalem), in his keynote address, described the atmosphere during the negotiations over reparations between Germany and Israel in 1952. The vocal and often violent protest and opposition in Israel and the semi-official boycott of Germany created an awkward dissonance among the Israeli negotiators. Diner described the tension and open rift between the negotiating sides despite their shared cultural and background since most of the Israeli delegates were of German origin. For example, the official Israeli refusal to speak in German was soon overturned in private encounters between German and Israeli participants who discussed their common childhood contacts in Germany. This paradox, to the desire to preserve the gravity of Holocaust memory

and the practical requirements of „day to day politics“ would be the major theme in all of the following conference presentations.

The first panel dealt with the relations between Israeli and German society. FANIA OZ-SALZBERGER (Haifa) analyzed the involvement of the attitude of Israeli society towards Germany and memory of the Holocaust. She found four stages in this development: (1) The first 15 years were characterized by the absorption of immigrants into the Israeli society. (2) Shock and realization subsequently emerged in Israeli society during the Eichmann trial. (3) Cultural and individual events began to be held in the 1970's in commemoration of the Holocaust. (4) Human interaction between the two societies intensified after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of Poland to Israeli visitors.

LILY GARDNER FELDMAN (Washington D.C.) turned the attention to the rhetoric used by German leaders discussing Israel in which she found constant references to friendship and responsibility towards it. She explained this as a result of the co-existence of similar interests shared by both states and a reconciliation process that had not yet matured.

KATHARINA KONAREK (MUNICH) analyzed the operations of German non-governmental political organizations in Israel. While their main focus until the 1990s was the formation of German-Israel solidarity, this has changed since the Second Intifada (starting in 2000). Since then, a large part of the NGOs' work has been devoted to an attempt to build bridges between the Palestinian and Israeli societies, and to help in supporting the peace process. All three speakers portrayed the fragile interplay between friendly interactions unrelated to the past and a reconciliation process completely aware of the Holocaust.

The second panel was devoted to the first decades after the war. All three speakers described the influences of personal biographies and domestic interests on the politics of Holocaust memory during this time. SHLOMO ARONSON (Jerusalem) spoke about David Ben-Gurion's position on relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. Ben-Gurion was a keen advocate of reconciliation, not so much for ideological reasons as for his con-

cern for Israel's geopolitical status. Aronson claimed that this pragmatic reasoning was a major cause for Ben-Gurion's downfall in the early 1960s after the Eichmann trial and the affair about German rocket scientists in Egypt.

JENNY HESTERMANN (Berlin) examined Konrad Adenauer's visit to Israel in 1966 as symbolizing a change in the relationship between the two states. Adenauer came to Israel in the hope of presenting a better image of Germany there, but faced a new, post-Ben-Gurion environment in which the German-Israeli relationship was no longer regarded as an asset.

KRISTINA MEYER (Jena) turned away from the Israeli domestic scene to inner-German politics: the Social Democrats (SPD) and their relationship with Israel. The SPD and its leaders had also been victims of the Nazis and regarded Israel as a mutual ally. This alliance even used the rhetoric of German-Jewish symbiosis. Meyer described the important role which the SPD played in the Bundestag in affirming the payment of reparations and in forming connections with Israeli society. Their support did change slightly during the 1960s following the cold shoulder they received from Israeli officials.

The third panel examined the relations between American Jewry and West Germany. ZOHAR SEGEV (Haifa) described these relations through the eyes of the American Jewish community immediately after the end of World War II. His analysis of the World Jewish Congress in general, and the operations of its president Nahum Goldmann in particular, showed that the German issue was seemingly just part of a much larger conflict between the interests of the new State of Israel and those of World Jewry.

JACOB S. EDER (Jena) talked about the increasing dialogue between the German government and American Jewry during the 1980s. Following years of more or less indifference between the two sides, the growing public presence of Holocaust memory in the United States since the late 1970s was received as a political problem by German diplomats and politicians. Eder claimed that lines of communication were therefore initiated with Jewish leaders in the United States, which resulted – despite a series of conflicts and

confrontations – in closer relations between American Jewish organizations and a number of government institutions and nongovernmental organizations in West Germany.

The fourth panel discussed the complex connection between German Jewry and the German state. Both speakers depicted, in very different ways, the suppressed memory of the Holocaust in the lives of German Jewish communities. TOBIAS FREIMÜLLER (Jena) analyzed the ambiguous connection between the post-war Jewish community in Frankfurt am Main and its local history. Although the Jewish community dated back to the late Middle Ages, the postwar community could not be seen as a continuation of the prewar history in that city. The new community was formed by East European Jews who did not relate to the local history. It was in fact the City Council which attempted in the 1960s to contact former Frankfurt residents and to build a local historical museum to commemorate the Jewish history of the city.

CONSTANTIN GOSCHLER (Bochum) in his presentation on the securitization of Jewish communities in the 1970s and 1980s gave a broader view of the German Jewish population after the Holocaust. Following anti-Semitic attacks in the late 1960s and early 1970s, security measures were established in Jewish institutions and the demand for federal support in the defense of the Jewish population was growing. Goschler described this as a process of securitization, which transformed the mental perception of these communities and not just their material existence. Freimüller and Goschler told the stories of communities trying to normalize their existence by transferring the aberrancy of the situation to government and town officials.

The fifth panel examined Germany's approach to the Middle Eastern conflict with respect to Holocaust remembrance. CAROL FINK (Columbus, Oh) used Willy Brandt's trip to Israel in 1973 as the theme of her presentation. The first visit of an incumbent German chancellor to Israel was not arranged for the sake of forming a stronger alliance, but rather the contrary. The goal was to explain German neutrality. Fink claimed that Brandt attempted to free Israel-Germany relations „from the chains“ of Holocaust memory.

According to Brandt, and in contrast to Israeli public opinion, he and his government were no longer responsible for the acts of Nazi Germany.

HUBERT LEBER (Marburg) depicted a restaging of this argument during the 1981/82 debate about a possible delivery of German Leopard II tanks to Saudi Arabia. Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin – in accordance with a broad consensus in the Israeli public – claimed that his country had a historically based right to veto such a deal. German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, however, emphasized that the Federal Republic could decide independently about her arms export policy. Eventually, the Saudi tank deal was prevented by strong opposition within Schmidt's own SPD/FDP coalition, also motivated by the sense of a special obligation towards Israel.

JAN BUSSE (Berlin) presented a discourse analysis of German foreign policy between 1998 and 2009. He claimed that German foreign policy always balanced a sense of responsibility for Israel's safety against a neutral Middle Eastern policy. According to Busse, during the last twelve years Middle Eastern policy has been a continued commitment to the two-state solution. In his conclusion, he suggested that the growing influence of the EU on German foreign policy might cause a shift towards a pro-Palestinian policy. But this would still be hard to foretell.

The sixth panel shifted from the Federal Republic of Germany to the German Democratic Republic's relations with Israel and the Jewish people. All three participants described an internationalization of the Jewish-Israeli question in East Germany. In a way, East German attitudes towards the Nazi past and its connection to Israel were in close correlation to Cold War circumstances.

LORENA DE VITA (Aberystwyth / Jena) showed that GDR policy towards Israel in the 1950s was an outcome of its self portrayal as a new creation in German history. As a result, East Germany refused to acknowledge any responsibility towards Nazi war crimes. Moreover, East German officials described West Germany, in particular, and the West, in general, as direct successors of Nazi Germany.

JEFFREY HERF (College Park, Md) drew a similar argument in his presentation on the

role of East Germany in support of the Arab side in the Middle Eastern conflict. According to Herf, Israel was seen as an integral part of American colonialism, accused of pursuing Nazi-style policies. He claimed that the GDR's support of the Arab world was moral, financial and material, with the defined purpose of destroying the State of Israel.

ANGELIKA TIMM (Tel Aviv), in contrast to the description made above of independent policy making in East Germany, depicted a semi-independent policy, which was constructed in the confines of a Soviet framework. As a result, new and improved relations between Soviet and American leaders from the 1970s onwards led to a reconfiguration of Israel-GDR relations. Timm demonstrated this through the reparations question that was reopened at this time. Initiated negotiations and new East German proposals for compensation were merely a means for strengthening ties with the US.

The seventh and eighth panels, which closed the conference, discussed academic connections and ties during the first decades after the war. AMOS MORRIS-REICH (Haifa) told the story of the Israeli geneticist Jacob Wahrman, who was known for his adamant objection to the international genetics convention in Germany in 1963. Morris-Reich found to his surprise that Wahrman's private letters revealed an ongoing dialogue with German scholars that had begun a couple of years after the end of the war. Applying to these cordial correspondences reading strategies derived from David Kettler's notion of „first letters,“ Morris-Reich showed indications of the present of the recent past in the „pure science“ that was the object of the correspondences.

DANI SCHRIRE (Jerusalem) described similar connections between German and Israeli folklorists. Personal ties between Israeli academic folklorists and their German counterparts were only possible by turning a blind eye towards their personal pasts. In an additional depiction of the need to omit unwanted details in these connections, Schrire described a lecture given by the German folklorist Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann in 1961 in Jerusalem. Weber-Kellermann knowingly chose to use a toned-down version of a ballad, otherwise depicting a suicide of a Jewish girl, as a result of

the presence of Israeli audience.

UTE DEICHMANN (Beer-sheva) took an institutional look at the formation of ties between the Weizmann Institute in Israel and the Max Planck Society in Germany. A combination of individual academic motivations, political support and institutional prestige led to the official cooperation between the two institutions early as 1959, despite strong opposition in Israel and in Germany. Deichmann stated that this cooperation improved scientific departments in Israel and in Germany and helped to internationalize them. However, it also whitewashed the Nazi past of many German scientists.

SHARON LIVNE (Haifa) analyzed collaborations in medical science during the 1950s as an example of the boycott on Germany. She explained that scientific relations started soon after the war on a personal level, although there were collectively considered inappropriate. The strict cultural boycott on the German language and German newspapers could not be imposed on individual scientists. An attempt to maintain an official boycott was rejected, partly due to political objections from Ben-Gurion.

The conference presentations and discussions testified to the complexity of the relations between Germany, Israel, and the Jewish world, and shed light on the problems that arise while dealing with this history. The entanglement of emotions, history, and agendas were depicted through social, political, and individual examples using different approaches and methods. A common theme in all the presentations was the constant need to be aware of the past and to ignore a certain part of it simultaneously. Any future research on the topic should reflect awareness of this and of the question as to what was gained in each encounter between the sides by forgetting, omitting or whitewashing the past.

Conference Overview:

Opening lecture

Dan Diner (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), *Language and Belonging: The German-Israeli Encounter in Luxembourg, 1952*

Panel 1: Between Governments and Societies

Fania Oz-Salzberger (University of Haifa), Is-

rael and Germany: Reconciliation, „Normalization“, and Universal Lessons

Lily Gardner Feldman (Johns Hopkins University), *Special Relationship, Reconciliation, Friendship, or Alliance? The Role of Memory and Interests in the German-Israeli Partnership*

Katharina Konarek (University of the German Bundeswehr, Munich), *Political Foundations and their Influence on German Foreign Policy. The Case of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, 2000–2010*

Panel 2: The Early Decades

Shlomo Aronson (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), *David Ben-Gurion and the Federal Republic: The Domestic Israeli Scene*

Jenny Hestermann (Berlin Institute of Technology), *Politics of Scandal? Adenauer's Visit to Israel in 1966 and His Clash with Premier Eshkol*

Kristina Meyer (Friedrich Schiller University Jena), *The SPD, the Jews and the State of Israel, 1945–1970*

Panel 3: Diaspora I - American Jewry

Zohar Segev (University of Haifa), *Remembering and Rebuilding: American Jewry, Europe and Germany in the 1940s and 1950s*

Jacob S. Eder (Friedrich Schiller University Jena), *Cold War Diplomacy and Holocaust Memory: West German - American Jewish Relations in the 1980s*

Panel 4: Diaspora II - German Jewry

Constantin Goshler (Ruhr University Bochum), *The Securitization of German-Jewish-Israeli Relations in Post-War-Germany*

Tobias Freimüller (Friedrich Schiller University Jena), *Migration, Memory and New Beginnings: The Post-War Jewish Community in Frankfurt/Main*

Panel 5: Germany, Israel, and the Arab World

Carole Fink (Ohio State University), *„The Most Difficult Journey of All“: Willy Brandt's trip to Israel in June 1973*

Hubert Leber (Philipps-University of Marburg), *„The Leopard that Forgot the Holo-*

caust“? Israel, West Germany’s Arms Export Policy, and the Saudi Tank Deal Debate in 1981/82

Jan Busse (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin), Between Historical Responsibility and Two-State-Solution: Politics of Memory and the German Foreign Policy towards the Middle East Conflict, 1998-2009

Panel 6: East Germany and Israel

Lorena De Vita (Friedrich Schiller University Jena/Aberystwyth University), The Mistake of Dr. Seydewitz: Reflections on the East and West German Foreign Policies towards Israel in the Long 1950s

Jeffrey Herf (University of Maryland), East Germans at War with Israel during the Cold War

Angelika Timm (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Tel Aviv), The „Third Third“: The Approach of the East German Political Elites to Jewish and Israeli Claims

Panel 7: Academic Relations I

Amos Morris-Reich (University of Haifa), The „First Letters“ of Jacob Wahrmann in Historical Perspective

Dani Schrire (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Tangled Narratives: German-Israeli Folklore Research, 1955-1970

Panel 8: Academic Relations II

Ute Deichmann (Ben Gurion University of the Negev), The Difficult Beginnings of Israeli-German Collaboration in the Sciences – Scientific Motivations and Political Agendas

Sharon Livne (University of Haifa), Initial Contacts in the Scientific Relations between Israel and Germany (1945-1965)

Tagungsbericht *International Affairs and the Politics of Memory: German-Jewish-Israeli Relations after the Holocaust*. 12.01.2014–14.01.2014, Haifa, in: H-Soz-Kult 23.05.2014.