## Contesting Jewish Loyalties: The First World War and Beyond

**Veranstalter:** Gideon Reuveni / Kim Wünschmann, Centre for German-Jewish Studies, University of Sussex; Aubrey Pomerance, Jewish Museum Berlin; Miriam Rürup, The Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg; David Feldman, The Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London; Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft des Leo Baeck Instituts in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland
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**Bericht von:** Steven Schouten, University of Amsterdam / European University Institute, Florence

From 15–17 December 2016, a conference on Jewish loyalties from the First World War onwards took place at the W. Michael Blumenthal Academy of the Jewish Museum Berlin. The event, a follow-up of a 2014 conference on the Jewish experience in the Great War, was a joint project of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies at the University of Sussex, the Jewish Museum Berlin, the *Wissenschaftliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft des Leo Baeck Instituts in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, the Institute for the History of the German Jews in Hamburg and the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London. Its aim was to revisit and explore Jewish loyalties in various European countries throughout the early twentieth century. At its core was the idea that the First World War, as a watershed in Jewish history, posed a challenge to what it meant to be Jewish in many European countries.

MIRJAM ZADOFF (Bloomington) opened the first panel of the conference. She pointed to the multiple loyalties in the Scholem family of Berlin during the First World War. Exploring the correspondence of Werner (1895–1940) and Gershom („Gerhard") Scholem (1897–1982), Zadoff showed how these two brothers both set their hopes on a pacifist and radically transformed postwar world, with Werner embracing an „uncompromised universalism" in the Communist sense and Gershom opting for a Jewish solution. CARSTEN SCHAPKOW (Oklahoma) turned to the German-Jewish anarchists Gustav Landauer (1870–1919) and Erich Mühsam (1878–1934), who both openly opposed the First World War from the start and articulated a cosmopolitanism and a critique of patriotism during the conflict. ZOHAR MAOR (Ramat Gan) discussed the philosopher and Zionist Hugo Bergmann (1883–1975). Born and raised in Bohemian Prague, Bergmann combined attachment to multinational identities with a non-ethnic German nationalism. As a soldier in the First World War, he hoped for a German-Austrian-Habsburg victory that would open a possibility for a world with multiple identities, but this ideal collapsed when nationalism gained strength throughout Europe. Stimulated as well by an intimate encounter with eastern Judaism, the loss of that ideal led to a profound reevaluation of his Jewish identity which saw Bergmann strengthening his Zionist identity. In Zionism, he envisioned a place for both Jews and Arabs, and he made Jewish culture the *locus* of a world that transcended state borders; it was, Maor said, a way of „reinventing the Bohemian mosaic" of his early life.

In the second session, MOHSEN HAMLI (Tunisia) analysed the polemic that evolved in Tunisia in the years 1919 to 1921 between several short-lived French antisemitic newspapers, for example „Le Potache", and newspapers that promoted a Judeo-Arab alliance, for example „Le Sémaphore de Tunisie". Hamli argued that although the antisemitic newspapers could count on the implicit support of the French state, Jews, for example Joseph Cohen-Ganouna (1881–1929), managed to have them suspended. OLEKSII CHEBOTAROV (St. Gallen) pointed to the various ways in which the loyalties of Russian migrant Jews to Habsburg Galicia were framed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. According to Chebotarov, this framing depended on the nature of these Jews' mobility (transborder trade, immigration or transmigration) and on the perspectives of the actors involved (bureaucrats, inhabitants and migrants). MIRJAM RAJNER (Ramat Gan) concluded the session with a paper on the multiple loyalties of the Sephardic Jewish community of Sarajevo during the Ottoman, Austrian-Hungarian and

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Yugoslav eras. Focussing on Daniel Kabiljo (1894–1944), she showed how this Sarajevo artist developed a multifaceted identity that was Sephardic, Zionist and Yugoslav, as well as „orientalist" by the end of his life. Rajner's paper pointed to the role of the urban experience in the development of multiple and dynamic loyalties.

The third session opened with a paper by GAVIN J. WIENS (Toronto), who looked at the German-Jewish experience of the First World War in a context that took into account the heterogeneity of the German armies. Besides Jews, Alsatians, Bavarians, Poles, Mennonites, and other ethnic and religious groups were part of the German military. Afraid of a loss of cohesion, army leaders feared multiple loyalties among these groups. Consequently, they had been monitoring the loyalty of many of its soldiers, and this occurred, Wiens showed, already long before the notorious *Judenzählung* (Jew Census) of 1916, which intended to assess Jewish participation in the war effort. Wiens stressed the need to see the Census not only as an antisemitic issue, but as one of many ethnic treatments implemented during the war, and to understand it within a wider context of an overall mixed bag of loyalties in the army and of the army's wish to keep up the morale of those in uniform. ALEXANDRA ESCHE (Berlin) investigated the Berlin Jewish bourgeois elites, who from 1890 to 1918 moved from the east of the city to its western parts. The Jews of this so called *Westzug* were keen to identify with upper class German society, yet not unconditionally, as illustrated by the case of the Jewish doctor Hermann Zondek (1887–1979). KNUT BERGBAUER (Wuppertal) turned to the Jewish Youth movement in Breslau that gained strength in the First World War. Like the other participants, Bergbauer challenged the idea that one-dimensional loyalties of Jews existed.

The conference's keynote lecture was delivered by ULRICH WYRWA (Potsdam / Berlin). He took on a broad geographical perspective, comparing „spaces of experiences" and „horizons of expectations" (Reinhard Koselleck) on different sides of the front and in different countries. According to Wyrwa, the First World War was a decisive moment because the previous unity of European Jewry broke down and with it the more balanced position of multiple loyalties that existed before 1914. The war forced Jews to take sides, leading in part to the collapse of transnational bonds between friends, colleagues and families. The war experiences of the Jews in Europe were by no means coherent and simultaneous, he stressed, and they affected nations in different ways. For Wyrwa, it was not only the First World War itself that constituted the breaking point, but „the whole nexus of war, revolution and counter-revolution" – a „nexus" characterised by feelings of hope and despair about Jewish emancipation and civil rights.

On the second day of the conference, YULIA MINUTINA-LOBANOVA (St. Petersburg) opened the fourth session by exploring examples of Russian-Jewish poetry composed during the first months of the First World War. As elsewhere in Europe, Russian-Jewish poets initially saw the war as a chance for emancipation, but these hopes soon turned into disappointment. Censorship prevented critique of Jewish discrimination, yet such criticism, Minutina-Lobanova showed, was occasionally published. KATALIN FENYVES (Budapest) spoke about the loyalty of the Hungarian Jews to the Hungarian language and state, and about their wish to downplay ethnic Jewish dimensions. Like Minutina-Lobanova, she showed that loyalty, although also a matter of choice, was inextricably tied to politics. The paper opened up a source-critical debate about what is said and written about loyalty, and about what can and cannot be expressed in normative and historical contexts.

LJILJANA DOVROVŠAK (Zagreb) opened the fifth session of the conference with a paper on the stance of Croatian Jews towards the Habsburg and Karadordević rulers before and after the First World War. Although defining their loyalties differently, Dovrovšak argued that Jews in both cases expressed themselves as loyal servants of the respective rulers. TIM COBETT (Vienna) presented a sketch of Jewish memory discourses in postwar society, showing how Austrian Jews framed themselves – in the words of the Viennese Rabbi and historian Max Grunwald (1871–1953) – as „the only loyal Austrians" in the 1920s

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and 1930s. Focusing on the Austrian *Bund jüdischer Frontsoldaten*, the Jewish veteran organisation founded in 1932, he showed how such discourses were characterised by continuity and rupture between Habsburg (imperial) and Austrian (republican) history, as well as between Jewish and non-Jewish Austrian history.

In the sixth session, ŽELJKA OPARNICA (Budapest) introduced the audience to the works of the Chief Rabbi of Serbia, Rabbi Isaac Alkalay (1882–1978), from 1912 to 1918. Alkalay defended Sephardic Jewish identity and sought support in the United States for the right of Serbian self-determination in 1918. IRENA LYOBOMIROVA OGNYANOVA (Sofia) argued in her paper that Bulgaria has known a long history of „tolerance" towards the Jews, and that Bulgarian Jews saw no contradiction between Jewish, Zionist and Bulgarian identities.

AVITAL GINAT (Tel Aviv) showed in the following session that the motivation of the *Yishuv's* leaders to ally with Great Britain shortly before the Balfour declaration of 1917 was not self-evident – up until then, the Zionist movement had generally been pro-German. It was only by 1915/16 that the Zionists in Palestine became more interested in the British. According to Ginat, the shifting of allegiance was practical and pragmatic rather than ideological in motivation. By analysing two texts of the Socialist Zionist Poale Zion, „The Peace Manifesto" (1917) and „The Minority Memorandum (1942), EHUD MANOR (Oranim) argued that issues of multiple loyalties in Jewish history should be understood against the background of the position of Jews as a minority group.

The final session of the day concluded with the presentation of the latest issue of the online journal „Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewry", a special issue entitled: „The Great War: Reflections, Experiences and Memories of German and Habsburg Jews".[1] It was introduced by Wyrwa, one of its editors; thereafter, four contributors to this issue, the above mentioned Dovrovšak, Schapkow and Wyrwa along with STEVEN SCHOUTEN (Florence/Amsterdam), outlined their essays.

In the eighth session that took place on the final day of the conference, THOMAS IRMER (Berlin) presented a paper on Otto Hermann Kahn (1867–1934), a wealthy German-born Jewish banker and philanthropist who had settled in the United States before the First World War. During the conflict, Kahn explicitly started to define himself as „an American of German origins" who supported the American cause and sought to mobilise the American public to defend democracy – a stance that was also defended after the war, and that, ultimately, joined hands with a loss of connection to the German homeland. CHRISTOPH JAHR (Berlin) compared Paul Nathan (1857–1927) from Berlin with Lucian Wolf (1857–1930) from London. Both Nathan and Wolf advocated an Anglo-German detente before, during and after the Great War. The armed conflict interrupted contact between these two men, but their friendship was resumed after its conclusion when their idea of Anglo-German cooperation was framed within a context of the need for the containment of Soviet Bolshevism. Nathan and Wolf, Jahr showed, were liberal Jews who regarded themselves as loyal patriots of Germany and England respectively, yet they also embraced an idea of European civilisation. Their commitment to East European Jewish relief projects was not an expression of Jewish particularism, Jahr argued, but of their „belief that they had an important task to uphold a balance between the national, international, universal, and Jewish allegiances".

In the ninth and final session of the conference, RICHARD E. FRANKEL (Louisiana) explored the relationship between antisemitism, globalisation and national belonging in Germany and the United States. Jews, he showed, were seen as foreigners and traitors in both countries, notions that were intensified by war, defeat and revolution. Globalisation and mass scale migration in the 1920s placed such threats in an increasingly universal and abstract context. JAKOB STÜRMANN (Potsdam) discussed the Latvian Jews Franz Kursky (formerly Samuel Kahan, 1874–1950) and Rafael Rein Abramovič (1880–1963), two members of the Bund (founded in 1907) who left their homeland after the creation of the

[1] http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/index.php?issue=9 (02.03.2017).

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Soviet Union. He showed that the „double" loyalty of these two men to Yiddish-Jewish identity and international Socialism in exile from 1919 to 1933, although common to East European Jews, was not well understood in the postwar context of Berlin. Moreover, Stürmann added, in Berlin Abramovič was generally seen as a *Russian* activist and Kursky as a *Jewish* activist, a classification that has been asserted long after in a historiographical context.

In summation, the conference showed how Jews in modern European history moved between various combinations of ethnic, political, ideological, and religious loyalties. It also showed how the First World War set a precedent for more restricted ways of thinking about ethnic loyalty – the war challenged prewar Jewish loyalties, yet without putting an end to ongoing reinventions of the prewar „Bohemian mosaic". Cities, for example Sarajevo and Berlin, friendships, such as that between the 'German' Nathan and the 'Englishman' Wolf, and journals, for example „Le Sémaphore de Tunisie", provided spaces where multiple loyalties and transnational perspectives continued to be fostered and constructed.

**Conference overview:**

*Session 1: Thinking Loyalties*
Chair: Aubrey Pomerance

Mirjam Zadoff (Bloomington): „Our Beloved Germany": On the Loyalty of the Revolutionary

Carsten Schapkow (Oklahoma): Debating Jewish Loyalties in an Anarchist Framework: Gustav Landauer and Erich Mühsam

Zohar Maor (Ramat Gan): Hugo Bergmann in the Great War: The Tangle of Austrian, German and Jewish Loyalties

*Session 2: Dilemmas of Loyalty*
Chair: Oliver Glatz

Mohsen Hamli (Tunisia): The Jewish Promoters of Judeo-Arab Alliance in Tunisia, 1919–1921

Oleksii Chebotarov (St. Gallen): Who were the Tsarist Jews? Questions on Loyalties of Russian Jews in Habsburg Galicia

Mirjam Rajner (Ramat Gan): To Be Sephardic, Zionist and Yugoslav: The Threefold Loyalty of Sarajevo Artist Daniel Kabiljo

*Session 3: From Kaiserreich to Weimar Republic*
Chair: David Jünger

Gavin J. Wiens (Toronto): A Mixed Bag of Loyalties: Confessional, Ethnic and Regional Minorities in the Imperial German Army, 1914–1918

Alexandra Esche (Berlin / London): Between Class, Faith and Fatherland: Jewish Bourgeois Identities and the „Berliner Westzug", 1890–1918

Knut Bergbauer (Wuppertal): „Hedad!" und „Hurra!": Junge jüdische Wanderer in Krieg und Nachkrieg

*Keynote Address*
Chair: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum

Ulrich Wyrwa (Berlin): The Dialectic of Expectations and Experiences: Jews in Europe during the First World War

*Session 4: From Empire to Nation States I: Eastern Europe*
Chair: Kim Wünschmann

Yulia Minutina-Lobanova (St. Petersburg): „And probably later, after the storm is over…": The First World War as a Chance for Jewish Emancipation

Katalin Fenyves (Budapest): Conflicting Loyalties of Hungarian-born Jews in the Interwar Period

*Session 5: From Empire to Nation States II: Austro-Hungary and Successor States*
Chair: Gideon Reuveni

Ljiljana Dobrovšak (Zagreb): „Long live the king, the king is dead"

Tim Corbett (Vienna): Once „the Only True Austrians": Mobilising Jewish Memory of the First World War for Belonging in the New Austrian Nation

*Session 6: Balkans and South-Eastern Europe*
Chair: Ulrich Wyrwa

Željka Oparnica (Budapest): The Man and the Networks: Rabbi Isaac Alkalay and His Ac-

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tion During the Wars in Serbia, 1912–1918

Irina Lyubomirova Ognyanova (Sofia): Jewry-related Discourse in Bulgaria in the Interwar Period

*Session 7: The Zionist Movement and the World War*
Chair: Christoph Kreutzmüller

Avital Ginat (Tel Aviv): Ottoman, German or English? The Zionist Movement and the Yishuv's Expectations Regarding Palestine's Future After the First World War

Ehud Manor (Oranim): Contesting Jewish Loyalties: Socialist-Zionism and Minority Rights

Ulrich Wyrwa with Ljiljana Dobrovšak, Carsten Schapkow and Steven Schouten (Florence / Amsterdam)

The Great War: Reflections, Experiences and Memories of German and Habsburg Jews (1914–1918). Presentation of the newly published special issue of „Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History"

*Session 8: Between the Old and the New Worlds*
Chair: Gideon Reuveni

Thomas Irmer (Berlin): Loyalties of the „King of New York": Otto Hermann Kahn and World War I

Christoph Jahr (Berlin): Two „Ministers of Foreign Affairs" of Their Respective Community? Paul Nathan, Lucien Wolf and the Question of Jewish Loyalty Before, During and After World War I

*Session 9: The „Jewish Question" and the Loyalty Challenge*
Chair: Miriam Rürup

Richard E. Frankel (Louisiana): The „International Jewish Traitor?" Antisemitism, Globalization and the Question of National Belonging in Germany and the United States

Jakob Stürmann (Potsdam): Franz Kursky and Rafael Abramovič in Berlin between 1919/1920 and 1933: Members of the General Jewish Labour Bund

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