

Unacknowledged Kinships: Postcolonial Studies and the Historiography of Zionism

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Using the tools of postcolonial studies to analyze the history of Zionism, and especially of European Zionism, is often considered odd or even inappropriate by both historians of Zionism and postcolonial scholars. The conference made a strong claim against this notion. In his opening remarks, STEFAN VOGT (Frankfurt) argued that the relevance of such an approach is based on a structural connection between the two fields, which is often obscured by politically motivated reservations. Therefore, the aim of the conference was to bring together scholars of the history of Zionism applying postcolonial concepts and research approaches and to discuss whether and in which ways the range and depth of the application of these concepts to the history of Zionism can be extended, and what new avenues of research could be explored. In particular, the conference wanted to help making the postcolonial approaches developed in the historiography of non-European Zionism available for the study of Zionism in Europe.

The first keynote lecture was given by DEREK J. PENSLAR (Toronto / Cambridge). By analyzing the relationship between dependence and independence in four foundational texts in the history of Zionist statecraft (Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State*, the Balfour Declaration, the Biltmore Program and the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel), he illustrated the Zionist project's convergence with and divergence from anti-colonial projects and postcolonial states in the first half of the twentieth century.

The opening panel discussed key concepts of postcolonial theory and their applicability to the history and culture of Zionism. MANJA HERRMANN (Berlin) analyzed the concept

of authenticity in Early German Zionist literature as a counter narrative to „the inauthentic per se: assimilation“.

ABRAHAM RUBIN (Frankfurt) approached Zionism and Postcolonialism with the Algerian Jewish theorist Alfred Memmi, demonstrating his effort to situate Zionism within a „Third World“ framework.

Finally, STEFAN VOGT (Frankfurt) presented Stuart Hall's concept of positioning as a tool to analyze the fundamentally ambivalent character of Zionist identity politics. Taking Martin Buber's peculiar Orientalism and the German Zionists' strategy against anti-semitism as examples, Vogt argued that the concept of positioning makes it possible to see the indebtedness of Zionism both to German hegemonial nationalism and, at the same time, to subaltern anti-colonial identity politics.

In the second session, SCOTT SPECTOR (Michigan) described „The East“ as a cultural imagination rooted in the Habsburg experience, employing various examples, for instance Eugen Hoefflich's (Moshe Ya'akov Ben-Gavriel) pan-Semitic conception which identified Jews and Arabs in an anti-colonial struggle against European dominance.

MALGORZATA A. MAKSYMIAK (Rostock) focused on Eastern Zionists' reaction to the Western image of the „Ostjude“ while understanding East and West as categories of social difference. The following discussion circled around the identitarian and linguistic plurality characterizing Habsburg Zionism as an ethnonational project facing heterogeneity as a challenge.

The third session presented critical perspectives on the relationship between Zionism and movements for African-American Empowerment in the 19th and early 20th century. MICHAEL BERKOWITZ (London) and MARK H. GELBER (Be'er Sheva) centered their talks on two main figures of African repatriation movements. Looking closely at Marcus Garvey's (1887-1940) conviction for corruption in 1925, Berkowitz discussed the role of the leading judge, Julian Mack (1866-1943), a famous American Zionist, arguing that Mack's generally progressive Zionism in this case helped to ensure a narrow and negative verdict on Garvey's Black Nationalism.

Going back to the 19th century, Gelber discussed the much more ambivalent valuation of African repatriation within early Zionism by looking at one of the first proponents of Black Nationalism in the United States: Martin Robinson Delany (1852-1885).

In the third paper, LIORA HALPERIN (Seattle) reflected on whether the study of American settler colonialism could provide insight for the research on Jewish agricultural colonies in late 19th century Palestine. Exploring national memory and commemoration, the politics of heroism and „firsting“, she emphasized the often ambiguous place of these early colonies in evolving narratives about the origins and implications of the Zionist settlement project in Palestine.

The second key note speech of the conference was given by an expert on postcolonial theory and literature, ATO QUAYSON (Toronto / New York). He discussed the problem that both colonialism and the Shoah have often been studied with a fixed set of concepts which tend to prevent scholars from exploring the relationship between Black and Jewish experiences. In contrast to this, Quayson identified a number of aspects, such as the ambivalent implications of enlightenment and emancipation or the effects of migration and the industrial revolution, which constitute important points of intersection.

The second day started with a panel on „Confrontations“ which addressed the significance of World War II and the Shoah for the topic of the conference. By addressing the history of the Shoah in the Middle East, ORIT BASHKIN (Chicago) paid attention to the „postcolonial moment“ in the formation of Mizrahi identity in Israeli society, stating that Mizrahim see themselves as non-white Jews and therefore their postcolonial perspectives and experiences differ fundamentally from the Ashkenasim.

The second speaker, CHRISTIAN WIESE (Frankfurt) focused on the Zionist and the anti-colonial thinking of three German speaking intellectuals, Hans Kohn, Robert Weltsch and Hannah Arendt, during World War II. He compared their conclusions from the combined experience of colonialism and the Shoah, arguing for a nuanced view of the con-

nection between the Shoah and the establishment of a Jewish state.

Dealing with constructions of knowledge and language in the Zionist context from a postcolonial perspective, the fifth session started with NA'AMA ROKEM (Chicago) who approached the question of how the Hebrew University of Jerusalem fits into a conversation about Zionism and (Post-)Colonialism by examining the import and dissemination of knowledge in the 1920s and 1930s.

Subsequently GILAD SHENHAV (Frankfurt / Tel Aviv) read Gerschom Scholem's early writings on the Hebrew language through a postcolonial lens, revealing their ambivalent position between the „colonial worldview“ and its counter-narratives.

Finally, DAFNA HIRSCH (Tel Aviv) focused on a particular case study from the field of nutrition science and education, demonstrating the intersection of race, gender and indigeneity. Her example illustrated the ambivalent positioning of Zionists in fields organized by the binary oppositions of colonialist or settler / native and civilized white / primitive non-white and thereby stressed the relevance of these postcolonial concepts to the historiography of Zionism.

The afternoon session was dedicated to inside and outside perspectives on „Palestine and Israel“. ARIEH SAPOSNIK (Be'er Sheva) explored formative moments in the shaping of Zionism in the Yishuv (the pre-state Jewish community of mandatory Palestine) by means of the now largely forgotten, native-born Palestinian Jewish group „Hasolel“ (The Pavers) that formulated a unique Zionist position on indigeneity.

EITAN BAR-JOSEF (Be'er Sheva) traced cultural reactions to the Mandate over Palestine (1920-1948) in British culture after 1948, describing it as an arena in which present-day attitudes towards Israelis and Palestinians were prefigured.

Building a bridge to the last panel on „Decolonization“, JOHANNES BECKE (Heidelberg) compared state expansions in postcolonial times, arguing that Israel's rule over the Occupied Territories followed a distinct pattern of irredentist expansionism which was widespread among member states of the Non-Aligned Movement throughout the process of

decolonization. Furthermore, he questioned the position that these expansionist projects should be described as „Third World colonialism“. Instead, Becke plead for the recognition of their cultural and political ambivalence, including colonial, postcolonial and anti-colonial elements.

The speakers of the last session asked whether Israel can be seen as a postcolonial state amongst others against the background of global decolonization in the aftermath of World War II. Focusing on the case of Shlomo Dov Goitein (1900-1985), HANAN HARIF (Jerusalem) showed how Zionist historians and orientalist strove to establish and maintain contact to Muslim intellectuals in India and Pakistan and how the independence of these postcolonial states influenced this relationship.

REPHAEL STERN (Cambridge) demonstrated in his „Uncertain Comparisons“ of the Zionist and Israeli Views of India and Pakistan from the end of the Second World War through the mid-1950s that Zionists were deeply aware of the fact that they were part of the British Empire and shared this inheritance with other colonial spaces.

ARIEH M. DUBNOV (Washington, D.C.) also focused on the short but decisive period between 1947 and 1955 by contrasting the Zionists' participation in the Asian relations conference hosted by India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947 with the Israeli absence at the Conference of Asian and African Nations in Bandung in 1955. He postulated that at this point the ethno-racial assignment of whiteness to Jews by others was fixed.

By combining postcolonial studies and the historiography of Zionism the conference provided a platform not only for the discussion of existing approaches, but also for a consideration of how new interdisciplinary perspectives can prove productive in the future. The papers, all of which were well researched, innovative and thought provoking, demonstrated that such an approach is capable both of discovering important unresearched aspects of this history and of reinterpreting the better known parts of it in intriguing ways. The discussions, too, underscored what a vivid and promising field the conference had staked out. Unfortunately, this

discussion does not yet attract a great many scholars outside of the field of Jewish history. However, the conference was certainly a starting point to promote the dialogue between scholars of postcolonial studies and the historiography of Zionism and to encourage further research.

Conference overview:

Keynote lecture

Chair: Christian Wiese (Goethe-University Frankfurt)

Derek J. Penslar (University of Toronto / Harvard University): Declarations of (In)Dependence: Dialectics of Zionist Statecraft

Session 1: Conceptualizations

Chair: Tilmann Gempff-Friedrich (Goethe-University Frankfurt)

Manja Herrmann (Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies): Zionist Concepts of Authenticity as Counter-Narratives

Abraham Rubin (Goethe-University Frankfurt): Thinking Zionism with Postcolonialism in the Writings of Albert Memmi

Stefan Vogt (Goethe-University Frankfurt): Zionism as „Positioning“: Re-Conceptualizing Zionist Identity Politics

Session 2: Looking East

Chair: Claudia Willms (Goethe-Universität Frankfurt)

Scott Spector (University of Michigan): Habsburg Zionisms between East and West

Malgorzata A. Maksymiak (University of Rostock): Mapping Zionism: The Term „Ostjude“ in Zionist History and Historiography

Session 3: Looking West

Chair: Johannes Becke (Center for Jewish Studies Heidelberg)

Michael Berkowitz (University College London): Marcus Garvey and Black / Jewish Relations: What's Zionism Got to Do with It?

Mark H. Gelber (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev): Early Zionists and the „Negro Question“ in the United States

Liora Halperin (University of Washington):

Narrating and Commemorating Zionist „First“: Insights from the Study of American Settler Colonialism

Keynote lecture

Chair: Stefan Vogt (Goethe University Frankfurt)

Ato Quayson (University of Toronto/New York University): Postcolonialism and Diaspora: Encounters, Interactions and Intersections

Session 4: Confrontations

Chair: Stefanie Fischer (Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies / Fritz Bauer Institute)

Orit Bashkin (University of Chicago): Jews in the Middle East during World War II

Christian Wiese (Goethe-University Frankfurt): The Predicaments of Non-National Nationalism: Hannah Arendt's, Hans Kohn's, and Robert Weltsch's Anti-Colonial Thinking during and after World War II

Session 5: Culture

Chair: Mark H. Gelber (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

Na'ama Rokem (University of Chicago): The Hebrew University on the World Map

Gilad Shenhav (Goethe-University Frankfurt / Tel Aviv University): The Eye, the Tongue, and the Fatherland: Gershom Scholem and Postcolonial Critique

Dafna Hirsch (Open University of Israel): Feeding Zionist New Men: Between Westernization and „becoming Native“

Session 6: Palestine and Israel

Chair: Derek J. Penslar (University of Toronto / Harvard University)

Arieh Saposnik (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev): The Shaping of an East-West Hebrew Indigeneity in Palestine

Eitan Bar-Yosef (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev): A Mandate to Forget: Representations of Mandatory Palestine in British Culture after 1948

Johannes Becke (Center for Jewish Studies Heidelberg): Between Monumentalism and Miniaturization: Israel's Settlement Project

and the Question of Third World Colonialism

Session 7: Decolonization

Chair: Manja Herrmann (Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies)

Hanan Harif (Hebrew University Jerusalem): South-Asian Muslim Frameworks for European-Jewish Good Intentions: Hyderabad, Karachi and „Jewish Orientalism“

Rephael Stern (Harvard University): Uncertain Comparisons: Zionist and Israeli Views of India and Pakistan in the Age of Partition and Decolonization

Arie M. Dubnov (George Washington University): From New Delhi to Bandung: Zionists and Jewish Territorialists Facing the Emerging „Third World“

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