

### Young Scholars Workshop. Germans and Jews as Minorities in Eastern Europe

**Veranstalter:** Bundesbeauftragte für Kultur und Medien (BKM); Lehrstuhl für Neue Geschichte Osteuropas, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen; Forschungsverbund „Ambivalenzen des Sowjetischen“; Institut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen in Nordosteuropa e.V. (IKGN), Lüneburg; DAAD-Professur für Europäische und Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur, University of Sussex

**Datum, Ort:** 09.06.2021–10.06.2021, digital (Lüneburg)

**Bericht von:** Helene Henze, Institut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen in Nordosteuropa e.V. (IKGN), Lüneburg; Daniel Gebel, Bundesinstitut für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa (BKGE), Oldenburg

For the Young Scholars Workshop the Northeast-Institute (Lüneburg) welcomed a host of international participants. The online event centered on questions of temporary entanglements and historical parallels between the German and Jewish populations in Eastern Europe. A central aim of the conference was to highlight the cultural legacy of two influential minority groups and to encourage a comparative approach to the study of their history.

The keynote speech was delivered by JANIS PANAGIOTIDIS (Vienna). In his talk, he explored the question of how Germans and Jews were entangled with one another in Eastern Europe and how the relations between the two minorities changed in the course of the 20th century. Using the example of the chocolate manufacturer Josef Floris, a German-speaking Jew from Hungary, who in 1968, more than ten years after filing the application, was finally recognized as a „resettler“ in the FRG, Panagiotidis showed that the entanglement between Germans and Jews did not end with World War II. He argued that, on the contrary, the migration of Germans and Jews from Eastern Europe to Israel and Germany should be seen as part of their intricate history. These migration processes confronted both states with the recurring question of

whether someone could be „a German and a Jew“ at the same time and equally showed that the entanglement between the two minorities continued even when they were no longer territorially linked.

In the first lecture of the conference, REBEKKA HAHN (Bielefeld) dealt with the question of how the values of young Russian-German women from free church communities changed in the course of their adolescence. During a series of biographical interviews, Hahn observed that her respondents' childhood values were strongly influenced by their families and the church community they belonged to, but shifted later in life. These developments, she argued, could be primarily attributed to an approximation of values as they can be observed in adolescent girls of the same age from the German majority society. Despite this change, the young women did not part with their faith and continued to strive for a life in accordance with the „divine will.“

BIANCA RAFFAELA HEPP (Tübingen) addressed the influence of the Corona virus on the Romanian German cultural association „Hamroth“. Having worked with several members in the past two years, Hepp shed light on the importance of the eponymous Romanian village as a place of (be)longing. The place of origin and a gathering venue for many emigrés, Hamroth's inaccessibility during the global pandemic, Hepp argued, had turned it into a focal point for identity construction beyond mere nostalgia. Interestingly, Hamroth had acquired the same significance for younger members of the association who have never been there.

In her comment, KERSTIN BISCHL (Göttingen) spoke about the complex relationship between place and belonging. Places and by extension their materiality influence the way people perceive and construct the locale they find themselves in, she argued. The study of a particular place allows an interviewer to gain insights into a respondent's values or ideas of a „good life“. Bischl added that the place/belonging nexus is potentially accrued by the experience of migration: As places persist in memories, they are increasingly understood as something that „made“ a person. The sharing of memories related to a place,

---

the common recreation of the past, shapes the sense of belonging within a community in the present.

JUDITH THERESE VÖCKER (Leicester) delineated the specifics of the Third Reich jurisdiction system in the annexed territories. Using archive material on Jewish defendants in front of German courts, she traced the implementation of Nazi ideology in occupied Poland. The extensive information gathered on those accused as a standard procedure of the Third Reich special courts, allows historians to reconstruct the ways of life in multiethnic Polish and local Jewish communities.

Adding to Vöcker's presentation, IMKE HANSEN (Lüneburg) suggested to analyze the Third Reich jurisdiction in the occupied territories as part of the colonial entanglement of the Nazi regime, pointing out that the forced labor in the ghettos can be interpreted as slave labor. The detailed sources, she argued further, offer historians a chance to trace individual histories, those of the survivors as well as those of the perpetrators, beyond the era of National Socialism. Since court decisions are always made by individuals, they can also be studied as communicative situations between people and, in a broader sense, as tokens of National Socialist bureaucratic discourse.

The third panel was opened by KATJA GROSSE-SOMMER (Hamburg), who spoke about anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine in the years 1919-1921. Anti-Jewish riots were not uncommon in conflict-ridden Ukraine, where the balance of power often changed within a very short time. She raised the question of how Jewish individuals and institutions reacted to this violence and whether they could anticipate, when a pogrom would come and how it could unfold. By analyzing the memories and reports of Ukrainian Jews from that period, Grosse-Sommer was able to prove that temporality in particular played a major role in how those individuals perceived pogroms and similar acts of violence.

AMBER N. NICKELL (West Lafayette) examined the relationship between ethnic Germans and Jews in southern Ukraine in the years 1928-1941. Using ego documents from Germans interrogated by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) in the

course of the „German operation“ (NKVD order no. 00439), Nickell claimed that many Germans in southern Ukraine believed in German propaganda, including the myth of „Jewish Bolshevism“ represented in the figure of the „Jewish commissar“, even before the war began. The experience of persecution as „kulaks“ or „counterrevolutionaries“ by the Soviet state in the interwar period fatefully coupled with Anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda. Ultimately, this resulted in many ethnic Germans dehumanizing their Jewish neighbors, which was the ferment for their hostile actions during the Second World War.

DANI KRANZ (Beer Sheva) observed that both presentations – using southern Ukraine as an example – show how interethnic relations between minorities can change in a short span of time. The changing relationships between Germans and Jews from cooperating minorities in the interwar times to the „hated other“ strongly influenced by anti-German actions of the Soviet Union and antisemitic propaganda of the German Empire, makes it clear how the relations between minorities can be influenced by the actions of „external actors“.

MAGDALENA BURGER's (Bamberg) paper dealt with the emergence of women's clubs in fin-de-siècle Prague. Barred from joining the burgeoning men's clubs of the Bohemian cultural capital, women initially found access to Jewish associations. Retaining their practices, such as offering their members material help or opportunities to better themselves, soon the first all-women clubs were founded. Vocal and assertive, their members claimed hitherto male roles for themselves, thus attaining visibility and agency in the public sphere.

In the discussion that followed ALEXIS HOFMEISTER (Basel) stressed the importance of association studies. Arguing that the state of a society is mirrored in the density and variety of its public life, he also cautioned against the hasty conclusion that the negotiating processes within and between associations should be seen as an indicator of democratic readiness.

TADEUSZ SKWARA (Toruń) focused on the disparity in the depiction of the Jewish Autonomous Region of Birobidzhan in the works of Willi Schlamm and Lion Feuch-

wanger. As a staunch communist with a strong sense of Jewish belonging, Schlamm takes a reckoning with the Stalin regime and exposes the Birobidzhan project as a legal fiction. In contrast, Feuchtwanger's depiction of Birobidzhan, a Soviet attempt to turn urban Jews into farmers, is reminiscent of a bucolic paradise. The contradiction, Skwara argued, is to be sought in the political climate of the 1930s: For Feuchtwanger, a Jewish German, Birobidzhan is a projection space, a safe haven and an opportunity for Jews to integrate into the Soviet system.

PAOLA FERRANDI (Bochum) spoke about the Soviet-Jewish writer and journalist Vasily Grossman and his chronicling of the experiences of the Soviet Jews during the Second World War. Based on the analysis of two works, „Berdichev - Not as a Joke, but Seriously“ and „Ukraine without Jews“, Ferrandi claimed that Grossmann originally did not identify as a Soviet-Jewish author. It was only during his activity as a war correspondent that Grossman found his „Jewishness“: Being faced with the atrocities carried out against the Soviet Jewish population, which included the wiping out of his family in Berdichev, Grossman felt it was his moral task to not let the crimes go unrecorded.

Referring to Kwame Anthony Appiah's notion that religion, just like nationality, culture, class and race is merely a „lie that binds“, DAVID FEEST (Lüneburg) argued that it is exactly this confusion about belonging in the lives and writings of Jewish writers that is symptomatic of the Soviet project at large. A self-proclaimed „brotherhood of nations“, which promised equality to all its constituting nations and ethnicities, the Soviet Union was de facto riddled with contradictions as regards to these matters. A collective Jewish identity, Feest added, therefore cannot and should not be expected where self-perception struggled with the Soviet state's redefinition of what it meant to be Jewish.

While dealing with different subjects and temporal settings, the presentations offered an inspiring perspective on the possibilities of a *histoire croisée*-approach to the history of the Jewish and German minorities in Eastern Europe.

### Conference overview:

Welcome address by Joachim Tauber (Lüneburg)

Keynote: Jannis Panagiotidis (Vienna): Significant Others? Entangled Histories of Germans and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe

#### Panel I

Rebekka Hahn (Bielefeld): Adolescent Narratives of Value Genesis and Development – Biographical Perspectives on Transmission and Transformation in the Context of Russian-German Families and Churches

Bianca Raffaella Hepp (Tübingen): Construction of Belonging and Non-Belonging to Communities of Remembrance

Comment: Kerstin Bischl (Göttingen)

#### Panel II

Judith Therese Vöcker (Leicester): Rights and Laws Within a Disenfranchised Community: Jews Under German Law in the General Government 1939–1944

Comment: Imke Hansen (Lüneburg)

#### Panel III

Katja Grosse-Sommer (Hamburg): Anticipation of anti-Jewish Violence during the Ukrainian Civil War, 1917–1921

Amber N. Nickell (West Lafayette): „Counterrevolutionary,“ „Fascist,“ „Trotskyite,“ „Spies“? Ethnic Germans and Jews in Southern Ukraine, 1928–1941

Comment: Dani Kranz (Beer Sheva)

#### Panel IV

Magdalena Burger (Bamberg): „That we in Prague first have to find out from women what a club is!“ - The Importance of German and Jewish Women's Associations for the Cultural Life in Prague (1890–1938)

Comment: Alexis Hofmeister (Basel)

#### Panel V

Tadeusz Skwara (Toruń): State anti-Semitism or Paradise for Jews? Pictures of Jewish Life in the USSR in the 1930s in the publications of Willi Schlamm and Lion Feuchtwanger

---

Paola Ferrandi (Bochum): Vasily Grossman's „Berdichev – Not as a Joke, but Seriously“ and „Ukraine without Jews“ – Acknowledging and Addressing Jewish Existence in the Soviet Union between Journalism and Literature

Comment: David Feest (Lüneburg)

Tagungsbericht *Young Scholars Workshop. Germans and Jews as Minorities in Eastern Europe*. 09.06.2021–10.06.2021, digital (Lüneburg), in: H-Soz-Kult 14.08.2021.