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Jewish Masculinities in Germany: Second International Workshop on Gender in German Jewish History

This workshop, the follow up to a 2003 conference in Hamburg on "Rethinking Jewish Women's and Gender History," explored the history of Jewish masculinities in Germany.

For some time now, scholars have been attentive to anti-Semitic conceptions and constructions of the Jewish body and Jewish masculinity. As the work of George Mosse, Sander Gilman and others has shown, various early modern and modern European critics diagnosed a distorted gender order among Jews and charged that Jewish men were physically weak, unfit or otherwise unable to fulfill traditional masculine roles in the family and state. A newer body of literature has recently begun to emerge which examines Jewish men and masculinities less in terms of anti-Semitic characterizations than through Jewish sources and from Jewish historical perspectives. Indeed, stretching back to rabbinic literature, one can find strands of alternate visions of masculinity interwoven in Jewish tradition which, according to some scholars (most notably, Daniel Boyarin), have continued to reverberate in the modern period. The Workshop on Jewish Masculinities in Germany foregrounded these issues and used the lens of gender and masculinity to analyze different areas of German Jewish life and experience over several centuries. It brought together historians, sociologists and Jewish studies scholars from North America, Europe and Israel to engage Boyarin's thesis and above all to interrogate the claim of a distinct Jewish gender order, examining the currency of alternate codes and practices of masculinity among German Jews

from the Early Modern period through the years after the Holocaust.

The workshop began with brief introductory comments by the host, Deborah Hertz (UC San Diego) who suggested that masculinity had become a new lens for seeing traditional themes in German-Jewish historiography, such as the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis and the question of assimilation. Then Stefanie SchÅ¼ler-Springorum (Hamburg), the main organizer of the 2003 Hamburg conference, noted some of the advantages and disadvantages of the study of Jewish masculinity, including the loss of focus on social historical questions surrounding religion and family. And Ben Baader (University of Manitoba, Winnipeg), the main organizer of this workshop, continued developing this theme, arguing that men too need to be seen as having gender, but pointing out the danger of losing sight of women and gender that can accompany historical studies of men and masculinity. These methodological problems surfaced repeatedly during the workshop's question and answer periods and closing session.

The workshop's first formal panel was the only session to examine the problem of Jewish masculinity in pre-modern contexts. It began with a paper by Ishay Rosen-Zvi (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) which engaged Boyarin's thesis that Talmudic sources present an alternative to western gender binaries in, for example, the figure of the embodied, carnal rabbi. Rosen-Zvi credited Boyarin with pioneering the application of the terms

of postcolonial theory to rabbinic literature, and hence introducing Homi Bhabha's paradigm of mimicry (imitation, inversion and resistance) to transcend the older framework of assimilation and difference which has been so influential in Jewish history. Rosen-Zvi gave a number of examples of the rich Talmudic discourses on the body. He showed how these texts seldom invoked gender in ways that a reading of the western theoretical literature on sexuality might make us expect. In fact, Rosen-Zvi noted that his work with rabbinic sources has led him to question whether the analytical framework that we deploy for reading gender is appropriate for rabbinic Judaism at all. Jumping into the early modern period, Andreas Gotzmann (Erfurt) presented the case of Veidt Kahn, a philandering and fraudulent late seventeenth/early eighteenth-century Frankfurt Jewish businessman. Gotzmann used the lurid details of Kahn's personal life and business ventures to make a number of larger points in Jewish and gender history and historiography. He demonstrated, for one, the gap between norms and practices, a discrepancy which suggests the pitfalls of using laws and codes as sources for getting at social reality. He argued, furthermore, that even a failed Jewish man - failed in terms of contemporary ethical and social standards - stood above women in the social hierarchy. And finally, using the records of Kahn's criminal proceedings, he showed the inadequacy of stereotypes about Jewish men as weak and soft and suggested that his subject's masculinity may have been more determinative of his social position than his Jewishness. In his commentary, David Biale (UC Davis) maintained that Jewish communities often resembled their surrounding contexts far more than the historiography has acknowledged. Picking up on one of Rosen-Zvi's points, he added that attacks on Jewish masculinity in the Medieval period tended to see Jewish men not as effeminized, but rather as demonic. He also called attention to early modern notions of dignity and the early roots of Zionism's claim to restore Jewish honor and masculinity.

The second panel was devoted to the nineteenth century and featured papers by Ben Baader and Robin Judd (Ohio State). Baader's presentation claimed that Jewish religious culture in nineteenth-century Germany underwent a process of feminization. Using the example of three major figures in German-speaking Jewish communities - Hamburg Reform preacher Gotthold Salomon, the Viennese Reform rabbi Adolf Jellinek, and S. R. Hirsch, the Frankfurt founder of the modern orthodox movement - he showed how even very disparate Jewish currents shared in the reorientation of the core of Jewish

religiosity away from study and prayer and toward feelings and emotional devotion. They also emphasized the domestic side of Judaism, elevating the home as a key site of Jewish observance and celebrating the sublime nature of women's spirituality. Finally, Baader claimed that these discourses about Jewish masculinity, though reflective of broader German currents, were simultaneously marked by belief in a distinctive, gentle form of Jewish masculinity. Robin Judd then discussed two types of Jewish ritual practitioners in the nineteenth century, *shohetim* (kosher slaughterers) and *mohelim* (performers of circumcision). Both types of practitioners, she demonstrated, had to exemplify a kind of educated and balanced manhood, showing dignity, poise and self control - in general, qualities best represented by the German idea of *Bildung*. Such attributes were perhaps especially important given the ongoing German debates about kosher slaughtering and the controversies around circumcision - both topics played a central role in debates about Jewish emancipation. In her commentary, Deborah Hertz reflected on the methodological implications of studying masculinity, asking how it differed from old forms of history writing which similarly focused on men. She also warned of the danger of concentrating on prescriptive writings rather than the behavior of actual Jewish men, making the case for the continued urgency of social historical research within German Jewish history.

The workshop's keynote address, "Sexual Identity and Jewish Identity in Modern Germany: The Case of N. O. Body" was delivered by Sander Gilman (Emory University). Gilman presented the case of Karl M. Baer, who at birth was taken for and raised as a Jewish girl (Marta) and, after a medical examination some twenty years later determined his sex as male, decided to live as a man. Gilman used this case - which came to the attention of German-Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld who urged Baer to publish an autobiography - to reflect on the meanings of Jewish and gender identities in this context. In the terms of nineteenth century science, Gilman argued, Jewish identity, like other ethnic and national identities, was racialized, meaning it was understood as having an underlying and immutable biological basis, and the same applied to sexual identity, concerning which no ambiguity could be tolerated. Even as current medical studies show the high frequency of gender ambiguous births (1.5%), Gilman warned that many researchers today are returning to the strict biologism and determinism of the nineteenth century.

In the third panel Stefanie SchÄ¼ler-Springorum and Gideon Reuveni (Munich) stressed different aspects of

German Jewish masculinity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. SchÅ¼ler-Springorum presented the case of Aron Liebeck, a Jewish businessman who left an extremely detailed and rich memoir. SchÅ¼ler-Springorum performed a kind of literary analysis on the memoir, calling attention to Liebeck's language and narrative choices. She called particular attention to Liebeck's rejection of military standards of manhood and his celebration of qualities like male beauty and gentleness in his friends and associates. Like Baader's paper, SchÅ¼ler-Springorum's presentation avowed the existence of a "soft" or gentle Jewish masculinity in the nineteenth century, but one that nonetheless celebrated characteristics like determination, integrity and social and economic advancement. She concluded by stressing the need for further research to assess the uniqueness of this type of masculinity and to compare it to broader, class-based tendencies within the German bourgeoisie. Reuveni, on the other hand, provided a sharply differing perspective by emphasizing the military side of Jewish masculinity in a paper on sports and gymnastics. In an effort to show that Jewish militarism long predates the State of Israel and the Arab-Jewish conflict, Reuveni traced its roots to Jewish athletics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, arguing that Jewish participation in sports, across the Jewish political spectrum, served nascent Jewish militarism. The commentary by Todd Presner (UCLA) asked about the relationship between SchÅ¼ler-Springorum's "soft heroes" and Reuveni's hardened Jewish heroes. Presner also picked up on the papers' themes of respectability and *Bildung*, but stressed what he described as *Bildung*'s dark side, or the dialectical process by which *Bildung* not only created ideals and prescriptions, but simultaneously meant the exclusion and elimination of those who lay outside of behavioral and physical norms.

Jewish soldiers and students were the subject of panel four, which began with Miriam RÅ¼rup's (Leipzig) paper on Jewish student fraternities in Germany around the time of World War I. RÅ¼rup provided a kind of historical sociology of the landscape of German Jewish fraternities - formed when Jews were excluded from German fraternity life in the early twentieth century - and then analyzed the impact of World War One on these students' identities. She demonstrated that the three major types of Jewish fraternities - assimilationist or German patriotic; Zionist/Jewish nationalist; and Orthodox - reached a kind of truce under the pressures of the war environment which in general strengthened students' identities as Jews. Lisa Swartout (Indiana University, South

Bend) compared Jewish and Catholic student fraternities in Wilhelmine Germany. She noted that the presence of women in German universities, starting in the late nineteenth century, catalyzed changes in the norms and practices of male students. Providing a detailed analysis of two incidents where students' honor was potentially insulted and noting the papal prohibition on dueling, Swartout discussed the complex intersections of male honor codes with religious affiliation. In contrast to Catholic students, Jews were able to duel and thus were permitted to participate in the university's rituals of male honor. Paul Lerner's (University of Southern California) comments compared fraternity and military life as two all male realms that served as important rites of passage into adult life. More broadly he noted the status of World War One as a major watershed in German, Jewish and gender history, and he tried to complicate the notions of masculinity that ran through the two papers, with reference to trauma and the experience of World War One and alternate types of male behavior in the beer hall and trench.

Panel five concerned the phenomenon of the "muscle Jew" in Germany, Austria and Palestine and featured papers by Ofer Nur (EHESS, Paris) and Etan Bloom (Tel Aviv). Nur focused on Hashomer Hatzair, the leftist Zionist youth movement, in the years just after World War One, and looked at male bonding rituals and homoeroticism among the movement's early adherents. He showed the strong influence of German thinker Hans BlÅ¼her - notable for his work on eroticism and masculinity and his rejection of the bourgeois family - on this group of Zionists who valorized action over reflection and a vision of tough masculine virtue over brooding, sensitive romanticism and who formed a male erotic community. Etan Bloom continued the focus on Zionism and Jewish masculinity with a paper on the modern Hebrew handshake or Chapcha, a firm grasping of the hand with a friendly, but not too intimate touching of the back, neck or shoulder. Through field research on Israeli, Arab, and European handshakes and a cultural studies style reading of the timing and choreography of the handshake, Bloom explored such topics as Jewish settlement in Palestine, agriculture, and the military using, for one, the speed of the handshake as a synecdoche for the amazing dynamism of the Zionist project in the Land of Israel. He combined these elements into his picture of the modern Hebrew habitus derived from the European Muscle Jew. Derek Penslar's (Toronto) comments, which were read by Lisa Silverman (Whitman College) built on the papers and challenged the often assumed di-

chotomy between diasporic and Israeli masculinities, but then asked how the move to Palestine effected ideas and realities of Zionist masculinity. Penslar also pointed out that most immigration to Palestine derived from necessity rather than ideology and speculated about the currency of such Zionist ideas in the broader Israeli population.

The sixth panel analyzed Jewish masculinity through the prism of race in interwar Germany. The first paper, by Ann Goldberg (UC Riverside) focused on the voluminous correspondence between Friedrich Gundolf, the reactionary Heidelberg literature scholar, and Elisabeth Salomon, his (Jewish) “new woman” lover and later wife. Gundolf belonged to right-wing intellectual circles and participated in the misogynist, homoerotic, and philosophically anti-Semitic group around poet Stefan George. Goldberg gave Gundolf’s and Salomon’s letters and dreams a psychoanalytic reading and engaged Boyarin’s framework of Jewish gender anxiety which, she concludes, is not sufficiently historical to usefully shed light on this twentieth-century context. Sharon Gillerman (Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles) then spoke about Siegmund Breitbart, a Jewish strongman in early twentieth-century Europe. Gillerman showed how Breitbart’s performances betrayed his keen awareness of his audience and thus how he shifted his repertoire to satisfy the tastes and preferences of different groups. Hence, for German and Austrian audiences he was Sigmund, while for his Eastern European Jewish fans he performed as Zischa. More broadly, using postcolonial theory, Gillerman suggested that as a Jew, Breitbart borrowed from and transformed prevailing European models of masculinity. While he theatrically reinscribed dominant notions of German and Jewish masculinities, he simultaneously challenged and destabilized them, and performed new modes of being male and Jewish. Darcy Buerkle (Smith College) then used her commentary to introduce a number of concepts and correctives to the workshop as a whole. For example, she called attention to the crucial distinction between men and masculinity as historical and social topics and urged participants to compare Jewish masculinities to the masculinity discourses of other marginalized groups, such as African Americans, for which there is already a large scholarly literature. She also cautioned that masculinity studies risk turning their back on the feminist political project which put gender studies on the agenda in the first place.

The seventh panel turned to National Socialism and its aftermath and consisted of a paper by Judith Gerson (Rutgers University, New Jersey) on German Jewish

refugees who settled in New York and an in depth commentary/reflection by Atina Grossmann (Cooper Union, New York) on the problem of Jewish masculinity in the Nazi period. Through an analysis of a large sample of memoirs, Gerson showed that male refugees typically dwelled on their military service in World War I and their families’ long loyalty to the German nation. And challenging existing research on gender in Nazi-era refugees, she claimed that men shared many of the concerns held by women and that the existing historiography has exaggerated the gap between the genders. Grossmann then asked about the larger place of the Holocaust within German-Jewish studies and sketched the contours of a study of masculinity among German Jews in Nazi Germany and then in ghettos, concentration camps, and DP camps, and in emigration. She also underscored the need for comparison between German and Eastern European Jews’ experiences of these various sites.

The workshop concluded with a roundtable session on new directions in research which featured David Myers (UCLA), Ute Frevert (Yale University), and Paula Hyman (Yale University). All three historians reflected on the methodological status of masculinity studies within gender history, and Myers in particular wondered if gender still retained the radical, destabilizing power which Joan Scott attributed to it a decade ago. Myers and Frevert both stressed the need for comparative, transnational frameworks, and Frevert urged scholars to continually ask what is specifically Jewish within Jewish history. Hyman, finally, cautioned that gender was a relational category and insisted that studies of (Jewish) masculinity not lose sight of women and gender roles and relations. In the closing discussion that ensued participants noted the unprecedented nature of the event, i.e. its pioneering focus on the problem of Jewish masculinity, the great strides it made in viewing German Jewish history through the prism of gender, and the uniqueness of its combination of scholars from German history, gender studies and Jewish studies in a joint exploration of the German Jewish past. Indeed, it was widely affirmed that the conference was pathbreaking in the ways it mediated between internal Jewish, religious sources and historical, contextual perspectives which enabled participants to interrogate the relevance of the Talmudic tradition for questions of gender and sexuality in modern Jewish history. Participants agreed that this workshop was only a first step and enthusiastically called for further conferences to continue developing this fresh line of inquiry and fleshing out the important questions along on the interstices of German history, Jewish studies and the study

of gender and sexuality.

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