

ABSTRACTS

7th Contact Day Jewish Studies

Dan Michman (Yad Vashem and Bar-Ilan University) - Comparative Research on the Shoah in Western Europe: Achievements and Limitations

Comparative research, by itself not the most developed methodology in the study of history, has even been more limited in Holocaust studies – a field which has attracted major interest in recent decades - and was actually carried out only regarding Western Europe. In this presentation I will point to some of the important achievements of this research, but also to the conceptual limitations of this approach regarding the overall understanding of "the Holocaust" as an event and regarding its trans-national characteristics. These limitations result from the underlying assumption that the main question asked in this kind of research is the differences in the amount of victimization.

Pim Griffioen (Saul Kagan fellow in Advanced Shoah Studies by the Claims Conference) - Jewish coping strategies and hiding in the Netherlands, 1940–1945, in a Western European Context

Whereas there are several scholarly books and numerous articles on Jewish responses to persecution in France and Belgium, a monograph on the various Jewish coping strategies and hiding in the Netherlands is still lacking. How were Jewish behavior and reactions – diverse as they were – shaped by the conditions and possibilities in the context of the occupation, persecution, local society and the background of the Jewish population in the Netherlands? How was Jewish hiding organized and financed in the Netherlands in its various stages, as compared with Belgium and France? This paper will present some preliminary results of a research project on Jewish responses to persecution, as well as hiding and escape opportunities in the Netherlands from 1940–1945, in a Western European context. A distinction is made between (individual) Jewish reactions during the first stage of anti-Jewish policies (1940–1942), and the reactions during the second stage of systematic deportations (1942–1944). During the first stage one of the coping strategies was a revival of Jewish cultural and religious life in the Netherlands, including the activities of youth associations. During the second stage there were various ways people tried to evade deportation, as well as different forms of going into hiding. Significant factors that had a positive or negative impact on hiding and escape opportunities of Jews in the Netherlands will be summarized and discussed against the background of the situations in this respect in Belgium and France. In France and Belgium relatively many survived under the cloak of a non-Jewish identity in boarding houses, rented rooms and cheap hotels, and children in convents, boarding schools and children's colonies on the country-side, with the help of underground *networks* and relief organizations. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, Jews who survived did so mainly by going into hiding and concealing themselves completely through *individual* contacts with non-Jews. Sources include Jewish testimonies, letters, diaries and recollections with regard to attitudes and responses to the persecution in the Netherlands, as well as unpublished archival material and short biographies of non-Jewish rescuers.

Rudi Van Doorslaer and Veerle Vanden Daelen (Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society) – Jewish History in Belgium: status quaestionis and comparative perspectives

This presentation brings an overview of the development of historical research on contemporary Jewish history in Belgium, with a special focus on the history of the judeocide. Which subjects have been studied so far and by whom? Was the research focus a regional, national or international one? To what extent has Jewish history in Belgium been studied in comparative perspective within the country (i.e. comparing the two largest Jewish communities, in Antwerp and Brussels respectively) and internationally? Why did it take Belgium much longer than its neighbouring countries to have a governmental commission to study Jewish assets looted during the Second World War and which subjects remain

insufficiently covered? Multiple perspectives intersect within Jewish history: Jewish history as an element within world history; Jewish history within migration history, primarily concerning the great migration waves from Eastern and Central Europe to the West (transatlantic and otherwise) that took place during the 19th and 20th centuries; and history of the Shoah. An assessment of the themes and timing of publications on Belgian Jewish history (as compared to elsewhere) will be described according to these three perspectives.

Gerben Zaagsma (Georg-August-Universität Göttingen) – The diaries of Anne Frank. Research – Translations – Critical edition.

The diaries of Anne Frank. Research - Translations - Critical Edition is a new joint project by the Lichtenberg-Kolleg (The Göttingen Institute of Advanced Study) and the Fritz Bauer Institute, Frankfurt. The project runs in the period 2013-2016 and will result in a new multilingual critical edition of the diaries of Anne Frank and a multi-author research monograph that will put the diaries in a variety of comparative, literary and historical perspectives and explore readings and receptions.

From the project description (<http://bit.ly/1c1tK7N>):

“Seventy years after the end of the Second World War our knowledge about the war and the Holocaust is based upon a wide variety of sources and a rich range of historiographies. Amongst the first sources to be published, and quickly acquiring a rather unique status, were the diary notes of Anne Frank. Around the world many children and teenagers have read and are still reading editions of Anne’s diaries - either at school or in private. In the biography of many readers as well as in national commemorative cultures the engagement with the war and the Holocaust began with the diary of Anne Frank. It became a symbol.

Meanwhile Anne Frank’s notes have been aligned with a wide range of moral debates - on refugees, on asylum, on human rights. From a historian’s perspective this is not without problems. Historical dimensions such as the particular political circumstances of the persecution of Jews in the Netherlands, Anne Frank’s family history in Germany, her emigration, which she shared with many German Jews, the situation of other teenagers persecuted by the National Socialists - to mention only a few dimensions - have played a somewhat secondary role in the worldwide reception of the diaries. Moreover, over the decades countless publications, oral histories and autobiographies relating to the Holocaust have become available, enabling us to read and study Anne Frank’s diaries in the context of these sources.

So far much research has focused on important issues such as the authenticity of the diaries - a key topic of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s, on aspects of Anne Frank’s family history and on the issue of who was responsible for the betrayal of the inhabitants of the Secret Annex.

Our new project aims to open up a range of additional and new perspectives, exploring the history of Anne Frank and her diaries within the framework of more comparative European, if not global cultural, intellectual, literary and political history.”

The project focuses on two keywords; contextualisation and reception. In my presentation I will outline the project and its rationale (both the multilingual critical edition and the planned research monograph). In order to illustrate the project’s emphasis on contextualizing the diaries I will also briefly talk about my own new research on Wartime Yiddish Diaries, which aims to introduce a comparative perspective by analysing other Jewish wartime diaries.

Ruth Levitt (Wiener Library) - Research on the Novemberpogrom 1938 (Kristallnacht)

In hundreds of towns and villages, large and small, in Germany and Austria, thousands of Jews were simultaneously persecuted and victimised on 9-10 November 1938. Over 1,000 synagogues were desecrated, looted and burned. Thousands of Jewish shops, businesses and homes were damaged and looted. Countless individuals were attacked, abused and beaten; over 90 were killed; over 25,000 were arrested, deported and detained in concentration camps for months; many hundreds more died there. Increasing restrictions and disenfranchisement of Jews in Germany and Austria preceded the pogrom, and from then on ghettoisation intensified, more and more Jews were rounded up and sent to Poland as forced

labourers, and random attacks and executions were common. Poland was invaded, war was declared and the Holocaust gathered pace.

In Amsterdam in November 1938 and the following weeks, Alfred Wiener's Jewish Central Information Office (JCIO) collected 356 uniquely vivid, contemporary testimonies of the Novemberpogrom from eyewitnesses. These are special because they are unmediated by later interpretations, historiography and changes in memories. Most are in German although 18 are in Dutch. There is a set of letters to the Kindercomité in Amsterdam describing attempts to rescue children after the pogrom, and extracts from postcards written by children on a Kindertransport to their parents. A few accounts were provided by people who had already moved to the Netherlands, Britain or the United States after the pogrom.

Wiener had started to collect published and unpublished works, press cuttings, photographs and eyewitness testimony in Berlin in the late 1920s, moved to Amsterdam in 1933 to continue this work and then to London in 1939. Now, 75 years after the pogrom, we have begun preparing the Novemberpogrom records for publication in English in 2015 as an online digital resource, an e-book and a physical book, enhanced with historical research, contextual information, indexes and glossary. The purpose is to enable historians, researchers, students, teachers and opinion formers internationally who otherwise might not know about or be able to use the German-language material (published in 1998 and 2008) to understand and use information about this crucial milestone on the road to the Holocaust.

The eyewitnesses, from diverse social, occupational groups and affiliations, reveal the immediacy of direct experiences of people and communities in larger cities, smaller towns and tiny rural settlements, in private homes, organisations and welfare institutions. Several describe in detail the treatment of individuals taken to Buchenwald, Dachau and Sachsenhausen concentration camps.

Arising from this work in progress, the contribution will consider the uses of the testimonies, particularly those in Dutch, for later historiography.

Barbara Dickschen (Free University Brussels) – The Language of the Antwerp Jewish community

The Jewish community of Antwerp, the largest one in Belgium, is the product of different waves of immigration, beginning in the second half of 19th century till Second World War. In our lecture, we will try to study how this minority group keep up balance between the will to maintain its unique cultural identity and the need to integrate into the mainstream. To do so, we will focus on the linguistic features of this naturally multilingual population. How did the Jewish community of Antwerp adapt itself to the changing linguistic context in Flanders and, in particular, how did they cope with the language policy in Flemish educational system?

Jan Maes (Kazerne Dossin, Memorial, Museum and Documentation Centre on Holocaust and Human Rights) - "The Mission among the Jews" by the Reformed Church of Sanderusstraat in Antwerp (1932-1948)

In 1932, the Reformed Church of Sanderusstraat in Antwerp started an evangelization campaign to convert a "remnant of elect Jews, representatives of God's chosen people", to the faith in "the true Messiah, Jesus Christ". A "Commission for the Mission among the Jews" was founded. They were inspired and helped by Dutch missionaries who regularly came round in Antwerp and Brussels. The project was substantially financed by "The Deputation for the Mission among the Jews" of the Synod of the Dutch Reformed Churches.

Who were these men? How did they conceive their missionary work? Which strategy did they develop? What activities were organized? What means did they have? What were the topics of their lectures? What difficulties did they encounter? How did the Jews respond? Had their missionary work any success? Did Jews dare to publicly show their interest in conversion? What changes in the missionary work among the Jews in Belgium occurred with the arrival of the refugee and converted Jew, Abram Berek Czarnolewski? Did his Jewish background made any difference? Do we get a better understanding of the situation of the Jews and of some Christian Jews in Belgium before WWII? How did the Second World War and the

Holocaust affect the missionary work? How did the missionaries assess their work after the war?

The study is mainly based on original documents recently found in the Archives of the Reformed Church of Sanderusstraat in Antwerp, and on original documents in the Archives of "The Deputations for the Mission among the Jews" in the Archives of Utrecht.

Jacques Déom (Free University Brussels) - The *Aliya Beth* from Belgium

Between 1945 and the independence of the State of Israel, intensive efforts were made by the Zionist movement in order to bring to Palestine, then placed under British mandate, several hundreds of so-called "displaced persons" coming back from Nazi concentration camps and death centers who were vegetating in Belgium. These operations must be considered as against the background of an Europe-wide initiative – named *Aliya Beth* – aiming at "gathering the exiles" by forcing the blockade imposed by the British. Three boats packed with Jews from Belgium (the *Tel Hai*, the *Hahayal Haivri* and the *Theodor Herzl*) set off from Antwerp, La Ciotat and Sète (near Marseille, France) towards the coasts of Eretz Israel (in March and July 1946 and in April 1947 respectively).

As much as it is a contribution to the history of Zionism, this research should shed light on some aspects of the socio-economic and juridical situation of refugees in Belgium in the age of the post-war reconstruction. It is also apt to specify the attitude of Belgium – its decision makers, its various political trends and its public opinion – in front of the Zionist project, then in active development, but also confronted with the harsh reactions of its British allies.

Huibert Schijf (Universiteit van Amsterdam) - Jews in the Merkelbach archive: a useful sample?

In 2013, all the glass plate negatives from the Merkelbach Studio (1913-1969) in Amsterdam were scanned and made public. The large collection (40,000 photos in total) shows predominantly wedding photos, young children, alone or with parent(s), more often with their mother than with their father, adolescents, family groups and adults posing for the camera. Most people certainly belonged to well-to-do families as taking these high-quality photos was expensive. It is also very likely that this was the case with the large majority of photographed Jews. Their photos show at least some well-known representatives from the three main economic sectors in which Jews were active in Amsterdam in that time: banking and stock-broking, trading of diamonds and fashion. Jewish doctors and lawyers were photographed in the studio as well. One can argue that the collection provides a sample of Jewish elites who mainly lived in Amsterdam during the Interbellum. Unknown, however, is how representative the sample is or how many families or individuals are missing. Identifying people turns out to be a time-consuming process. The percentage of identifications is still limited but several results can already be named. For instance, there are many Jewish immigrants in the collection. Russian and Polish Jews from the 1910s or German-Jewish immigrants from the 1920s and German-Jewish refugees from the late 1930s. In addition, photos give a face to several names on the list of the Dutch Joods Monument where all victims of the Holocaust in the Netherlands are documented. The sample also provides survivors whose life courses suggest answers to the question how they survived. Apart from going into hiding, several other narratives emerge. The overall conclusion can be that the photos in the rich Merkelbach archive offer a valuable contribution to Jewish history in Amsterdam but it also has become clear that the photos do not tell a story just by admiring them.

Tamara Becker (University of Amsterdam) - Photos to be remembered (the Annemie Wolff collection)

In 1943 Annemie Wolff launched herself as a portrait photographer, keeping a photo studio at her home address. She had fled Munich in 1933 with her Jewish husband, architect Helmuth Wolff. They had settled in the newly built Amsterdam Rivierenbuurt and established themselves, rather successfully, as photographers. When the Dutch surrendered to Nazi-Germany on May 15th 1940, they committed suicide, but Annemie survived the attempt.

Although she made portraits until 1952, only the first hundred rolls of film from 1943 have been preserved, along with the cash book.

With the aid of this book it is often possible to identify those photographed. The next step is to find them or their descendants, and to trace their histories. About half of those photographed were Jewish people, half of whom survived the war. The photos reveal part of a network of Annemie's neighbours, friends and their relatives. The result is an insightful case study, touching on themes as the chances of survival for the Jewish population of the Rivierenbuurt in relation to their social and cultural position. The portraits offer a window into the lives of the residents of the Rivierenbuurt during the tumultuous year 1943.

Eyal Boers (Tel-Aviv University & Ariel University) - "Black Book": Dutch Prototype or Jewish Outsider

This paper shall explore the character Rachel Stein in the film "Zwartboek".¹ Specifically, the paper shall examine whether Rachel's character is a prototype of the "Dutch Woman" or that of the "Jewish Other"?

The main hypothesis in this paper maintains that Rachel's character possesses both features of the Dutch prototype (a white, secular, sexual, freedom – loving individualist) and features which can be defined as specifically Jewish (a black haired victim persecuted by the Nazis, transforming herself into a gentile, while remaining loyal to her fellow Jews and ultimately becoming a Hebrew teacher).

Based on Jon Stratton's article "Not really white –again: performing Jewish difference in Hollywood films since the 1980s"², this paper claims that Rachel's character corresponds with the trend in Hollywood films of the 1950s and 1960s in the sense that she is a Jewess undergoing assimilation into white Dutch society. The ending of the film, however, corresponds with a trend which Stratton identifies in American films of the 1980s –Rachel's assimilation to the "dominant" culture is doomed to fail and in an individualistic act she makes Aliyah and lives in a Kibbutz – in Stratton's words, her Jewish difference is produced through a specific experience and through "performance".

Finally, this paper claims that Rachel's "Dutchness" is symptomatic to Dutch nostalgia in the 21st century to the Jews as "others" who blend into Dutch dominant culture, while Rachel's "Jewish Otherness" reflects a transnational identity – one that is always shifting and traverses cultural and national boundaries. In this sense, a film about Dutch Jews in the Second World War reflects on issues of identity in the 21st Century.

¹ Black Book (English title). 2006. Paul Verhoeven's World War II film about a young Jewish woman who becomes a member of a resistance group in the Netherlands.

² Stratton, Jon. 2001. "Not really white--again: performing Jewish difference in Hollywood films since the 1980s". *SCREEN* 42 (2). pp 142-166.