

Emotions and the History of Modern Anti-Semitism

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Historians, political scientists, sociologists etc. have primarily approached modern anti-Semitism as a cognitive phenomenon, mainly to be described with the concept of „prejudice“. If and how the recent shift towards the study of emotions in the human and social sciences could change this perspective and refocus the respective historiography, was the subject of the international conference „Emotions and the History of Modern Anti-Semitism“ which took place on April, 16th–18th 2012 at the research center „History of Emotions“ of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development (MPIB) in Berlin. It was organized by Uffa Jensen (MPIB), Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Center for Research on Antisemitism, Berlin), Raphael Gross and Daniel Wildmann (Leo Baeck Institute London).

In his introduction, the historian UFFA JENSEN (Berlin) stressed the importance of a praxeological understanding of emotions in order to avoid the reification of anti-Semitism via the emotions. During the interwar period, a significant body of literature had already emphasized the emotional dimension of anti-Semitism, as Jensen showed with the largely forgotten essay „Antisemitismus als Gruppenscheinung“ by Fritz Bernstein. Moreover, Jensen explored the emotionalized language in Richard Wagner’s „Judaism in Music“ (1850/1869) which signaled a new dimension of physicality in anti-Semitic discourse. The historian JONATHAN JUDAKEN (Memphis) discussed the rich variety of critical theories about anti-Semitism that existed in the early 20th century: Sigmund Freud, Talcott Parsons, Jean-Paul Sartre, the Frankfurt

school. Against the backdrop of older interpretations of anti-Semitism from a Rabbinic, Christological, liberal or Zionist perspective, these new theories shifted the focus from the object of contempt, the Jews, to the subject who hates, the anti-Semite. Thus, Judaken labeled them as critical theories of anti-Semitism. From Freud’s „Moses and Monotheism“ (1937) onwards, anti-Semitism was linked to emotional forces in the psychic life of the anti-Semite, and especially to fear and anxiety. Judaken emphasized the break with this tradition through a turn to historical analysis, which was epitomized by Hannah Arendt’s critique of Sartre in „Origins of Totalitarianism“ (1951). Her interactionist model again focused on the role of Jews in society for the explanation of anti-Semitism. As a consequence of this increasingly dominant approach, the emotional and psychic dimensions of anti-Semitism receded as well. In his comment, the sociologist and historian DETLEV CLAUSSEN (Hannover) emphasized the importance of a critical theory especially for a social and political strategy against anti-Semitism.

The historian RUSSELL A. SPINNEY (Santa Fe) opened the panel on emotions and anti-Semitic violence with a discussion of various outbreaks of such violence during the Weimar Republic, that is the desecration of a Jewish cemetery in Erfurt in 1926 and its consequences on the local level. By looking at the strains within local emotional communities, Spinney argued that the fabric of interpersonal relations between Jews and non-Jews already started to dissolve during the Weimar years and, thus, much earlier than previously thought. The historian STEFAN WIESE (Berlin) compared the two major outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence in Imperial Russia: the pogroms of 1881/82 and between 1903 and 1906. In a micro-political analysis he discussed the reasons for the higher level of deadly violence during the second wave of pogroms. The first series of attacks against Jews could still be explained within a system of rural justice. These pogroms were thus directed less against the physical well-being of Jews, but they were designed to humiliate the Jewish members of the rural community. For the second wave of violence,

Wiese argued that a program of Jewish pride and self-assertion, which, in particular, the new Jewish socialist parties of the Bund had propagated in the Pale of Settlement, aggravated a spiral of violence. The Jewish-socialist strategy of deterrence backfired and thus contributed to the increased violence. In his comment, the historian CHRISTHARD HOFFMANN (Bergen) stressed the importance of placing anti-Semitic emotions in a larger context of general emotional economies. While he would argue that the anti-Semitism of the Weimar Republic had not substantially changed in content and form from the one in Imperial Germany, the general emotional economy was completely different in the post-WWI period.

The panel on the role of rationality in anti-Semitic discourse was opened by the sociologist and historian WERNER BERGMANN (Berlin), who surveyed the major anti-Semitic activists from the 19th and early 20th century like Wilhelm Marr, Adolf Stoecker, Eugen Dühring, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Adolf Hitler and others. Virtually all of them, Bergmann argued, tried to deny the importance of emotionality or irrationality in their anti-Semitism. Bergmann showed how influential the rational validation with scientific expertise was for the anti-Semitic discourse, especially in Germany. From the prevalence of such an „Antisemitismus der Vernunft“ (Hitler), the historian ANTHONY KAUDERS (Keele/Munich) distinguished the „Neue Leidenschaftlichkeit“ in the anti-Semitism of Ludwig Klages' characterology. Klages associated the 'Jew' with rationalism and intellectualism that needed to be superseded and destroyed. Apart from the fact that Klages' anti-Semitism was also attacked by major Nazi ideologues, Kauders could show that both dimensions – cold rationality as well as hot irrationality – became increasingly intertwined in Nazi anti-Semitism. In his comment, the historian ROBERT S. WISTRICH (Jerusalem) underlined the particular importance of a scientific appeal ('Wissenschaftlichkeit') for the German tradition of anti-Semitism.

In a further panel on the role of the media, NATHAN D. ABRAMS (Bangor) examined examples from contemporary film, which exhibit a new form of counter-communication

against anti-Semitism. Deliberately leaving older analytical concepts like Jewish self-hatred behind, Abrams argued that much of recent Jewish film tries to appropriate anti-Semitic stereotypes in a self-confident effort to mock, subvert and undermine their logic. The complex emotional state, which is produced by a filmic reproduction of anti-Semitism like „Borat“ (2006) and for which Abrams employed Daniel Boyarin's concept of „Jewissance,“ may arguably be an effective form of combating anti-Semitism. DANIEL WILDMANN (London) analyzed two episodes of the German crime series „Tatort“ from 2003 and 2004 in which Jewish figures and anti-Semitism played a major role. While the emotional and moral setting of the films clearly condemned anti-Semitism and wanted the viewer to share this view, the portrayal of the Jewish figures was much more complex. These characters were based on anti-Semitic stereotypes and frequently juxtaposed with figures of „good Germans,“ which consequently made it possible to accept anti-Semitic stereotypes without bad feelings, as Wildmann argued. REMCO ENSEL (Nijmegen/Amsterdam) analyzed contemporary representations of the Al-Durra incident in Dutch-Moroccan pop songs. The (alleged or real) killing of the young boy Muhammad Al-Durra by Israeli crossfire during the second Intifada has become an international rallying cry for anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic propaganda. The emotional coding of the incident does not just allude to anti-Semitic imagery of infanticide, but also exhibits a nationalist structure of the child as martyr. In her comment, DARCY BUERKLE (Northampton/Berlin) challenged Abrams' assumption of a self-confident stance among Jews vis-à-vis anti-Semitic stereotypes. In light of the discussion of the „Tatort“ episodes and the Al-Durra incident, she also demanded a more rigorous reflection on the role of fear in anti-Semitic representations and the shame it produces.

The panel on anti-Semitism across various east-European countries was led by ULRICH WYRWA (Berlin) and his research group „Anti-Semitism in Europe. National contexts, cultural transfer and European comparison“ at the Technische Universität Berlin.

By studying the international dissemination of the new concept „anti-Semitism“ in the second half of the 19th century, the questions emerged if the emotional dimension of the anti-Semitic discourse also „travelled“. On the panel, various anti-Semitic documents were presented and discussed in detail: MILOSLAV SZABÓ on the poem „The bloody Kahal“ by the Slovak poet Svetozár Hurban-Vajanský, MARIJA VULESICA on the anti-Semitic fever of Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer, MACIEJ MOSZYŃSKI on a anti-Semitic letter by the Polish journalist Ludomir Prószyński, and KLAUS RICHTER on the childhood reminiscences of the Lithuanian priest Juozas Tumas. In her comment, ANDREA HOPP (Berlin) pointed out the emotional dimension of the long tradition of anti-Jewish stereotypes in Europe, which was established before the neologism „anti-Semitism“ became common currency. Moreover, she stressed the functionality of emotions for the transmission of anti-Semitic messages. Despite some common traits in these cases of anti-Semitism, Hopp also identified subtle generational differences.

The following panel on emotions in Nazi anti-Semitism particularly focused on incidents of race defilement („Rassenschande“) from different perspectives. ALEXANDRA PRZYREMBEL (Berlin/Essen) analyzed the practices of dishonoring and shaming involved in these acts, which, in her view, became central categories for anti-Semitic practices and violence under National Socialism in general. By studying the „Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor“ and Artur Dinter’s novel *Sin Against Blood*, Przyrembel described the emotional regime of Nazi anti-Semitism. Moreover, she was interested in the ritualistic aspects of the public shaming acts involved in „Rassenschande.“ WERNER KONITZER (Frankfurt am Main) discussed the same historical incidents, but from the different perspective of an analytical philosopher. He raised the question if the acts of race defilement reveal how moral feelings were changed under National Socialism into a specific Nazi morality. Using the Strawson-triad of resentment, indignation and guilt, Konitzer analyzed how the specific emotional organization of the race defilement cases actually ex-

cluded the victims from the moral community. The comment by MICHAEL WILDT (Berlin) highlighted the specific role of sexuality and of sexualized imagery in the public anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime. This sexual aspect seemed particularly prone to the emotionalization of anti-Semitic practices, as can be observed in the public shaming acts of „Rassenschande.“

On the final panel about the emotions in postwar anti-Semitism, ANNA PARKINSON (Chicago) discussed Hans Keilson’s postwar novel „The Death of the Adversary“ (*Der Tod des Widersachers*). This daring work from 1959 depicted a Jewish protagonist who puts himself into the position of the prejudiced adversary, in this case Hitler. In this psychoanalytically informed narrative, the reader is thus made to experience the emotional dialectic of anti-Semitism, in which the opposing positions of victim and perpetrator are increasingly challenged. In her presentation, KATHARINA OBENS (Berlin) described the emotional reactions of young German students after they have met a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. In the complex interactions between students and survivor as well as with the interviewer, a whole set of emotions are expressed: feelings of mourning, guilt, shame etc. Obens took special interest in the perspective-taking mechanisms involved in empathy or in its blocking. The comment by SUSAN NEIMAN (Potsdam/Berlin) raised in particular the issue of the orchestration of emotions, which seems to be at work in the highly controlled setting of such meetings between students and survivors.

While the conference made clear how important and productive the analysis of emotions within the history of modern anti-Semitism can be, there is much more work to be done. In particular with reference to the last panel, the consequences of such an approach for any enlightened project of education against anti-Semitic stereotypes were debated quite extensively during the final discussion of the conference. Furthermore, the conceptual role of morality and moral economies within anti-Semitism was raised as a further problem to address. As the panel on Nazi „Rassenschande“ revealed, moral feelings play a major role in anti-Semitism, but if

and how to historicize morality poses a challenge for future reflection.

Conference Overview:

Welcome

Ute Frevert (Berlin)

Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Berlin)

Raphael Gross (Frankfurt am Main/London)

Daniel Wildmann (London)

Introduction

Uffa Jensen (Berlin): The History of Emotions. A New Perspective on Modern Anti-Semitism?

I. Writing Emotions Into the History of Anti-Semitism

Jonathan Judaken (Memphis): Anxiety and Modernity. Talcott Parsons, Sartre, and the Frankfurt School on Modern Anti-Semitism

Comment: Detlev Claussen (Hannover)

II. Emotions and Anti-Semitic Violence

Russell Spinney (Santa Fe): Expanding the Emotional Economy of Anti-Semitism in the Weimar Republic

Stefan Wiese (Berlin): The Emotional Micro-Politics of Collective Violence – Pride, Fear, and the Jewish Pogroms of Late Imperial Russia

Comment: Christhard Hoffmann (Bergen)

III. Anti-Semitism – Rational or Irrational?

Werner Bergmann (Berlin): The Negation of Emotions in Modern Anti-Semitism. The „Antisemitismus der Vernunft“

Anthony Kauders (Keele/Munich): Good Feelings, Bad Rationality: The Problem with Jewish Reason

Comment: Robert S. Wistrich (Jerusalem)

IV. Emotions, Anti-Semitism and Media

Nathan D. Abrams (Bangor): Reverse Stereotypes. Anti-Anti-Semitic Counter-Communication in Contemporary Cinema

Daniel Wildmann (London): German TV Crime Series and German Emotions – Jews in

„Tatort“

Remco Ensel (Nijmegen): Singing about Muhamad Al-Durra. The Emotional Mobilization of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (in the Netherlands and Elsewhere)

Comment: Darcy Buerkle (Northampton/Berlin)

V. Anti-Semitism and Emotions Across Europe

Ulrich Wyrwa (Berlin), with Maciej Moszyński, Klaus Richter, Miloslav Szabó and Marija Vulesica (all Berlin): Anti-Semitic Emotions in Europe (1879-1914). Similarities and Differences of Anti-Semitic Feelings in Various Czarist and Habsburg Regions

Comment: Andrea Hopp (Berlin)

VI. Emotions, Anti-Semitism and National Socialism

Alexandra Przyrembel (Berlin): Mixed Feelings. „Race Defilement“ and Anti-Semitic Violence, 1933-1938

Werner Konitzer (Frankfurt am Main), Moral Feelings and Hatred: Some Reflections about the Role of Emotions in the ‘Race Defilement’-Pogroms

Comment: Michael Wildt (Berlin)

VII. Emotions and Postwar Anti-Semitism

Anna Parkinson (Chicago): „Death of the Adversary“. The Affective Structure of Anti-Semitism in Postwar Psychoanalytic Literature

Katharina Obens (Berlin): Emotions and Counter-Memory. Young Germans’ Impressions and Perceptions After Meeting a Survivor of the Holocaust

Comment: Susan Neiman (Potsdam/Berlin)

VIII. Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Emotions and the History of Modern Anti-Semitism*. 16.04.2012-18.04.2012, Berlin, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 20.06.2012.