An extraordinarily central, even constitutive element of the set of questions concerning Jews has always been the question concerning the image, the idea or the figure of the Jew for non-Jews. In 2013, David Nirenberg showed how in virtually every chapter of the history of Western thought, basic notions of the world and the self, such as the good and the body, the national, the religious and the cultural, were fashioned and transmitted through figures of Jews. These figures have not always been coherent; they presented contradictory images, and flexibly merged, like fluids, into ever new iconographic formations. What they did have in common was that the Jew has paradigmatically been the figure of the antithesis: a foil to Christian love, a symbol of global commerce, an opponent of reason and tolerance, a malign cancer to the Aryan national body, a problematic origin of Christianity and Western civilization. Thus, the figuration of the Jew not only did not require the presence of real Jews, but, perhaps even predicated on their absence.

This conference will reflect on the current situation of this paradigm. It will tentatively point at and attempt to contemplate a profound shift in the paradigmatic figuration of the Jew that seems to have begun after the Shoah and is still at work today. While “Jews”, “Judaism” and “Israel” remain important terms for describing and accounting for global agenda, they seem no longer to serve as figures of antithesis, but on the contrary of essential and integral, even representative element of the West’s political-cultural self. For the first time in history, the Jew has become a figure of the Western establishment, which is normatively committed to support the Jewish state and to protect and cultivate Jews and Jewish institutions. Jews have become a “good other”. Anti-Semitism still exists, but is perceived by normative institutional discourse as social and psychological, even epistemological pathology. The conference will reflect on the ambivalent nature of this new situation of the Jew as a figure of hegemony.

The historical situation of Germany makes it an especially interesting place for this conference. In contemporary Germany, figures of Jews have been playing an important role in the making of a new national self, following the fall of the Berlin wall. “Renaissance of Jewish life” has emerged, as also observable in Eastern and Central Europe, as a powerful narrative of overcoming the past destruction. The central role of this narrative stands in utter disproportion to the very limited presence of actual Jewish communities. Thus, the Jew has become a figure of a national discourse that does not necessarily promote pluralism and multiculturalism.

Organized by Elad Lapidot (elapidot@zedat.fu-berlin.de) and Hannah Tzuberi (tzuberi@zedat.fu-berlin.de)
MONDAY, OCTOBER 16th, 2017
Room JK 33/121, closed event
11:30-18:00
Workshop with Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17th, 2017
Room L113
9:00-9:30 Greetings and Introduction

“Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They’re Anti-White” (J. Baldwin)
09:30-10:30
Ben Ratskoff (University of California, Los Angeles)
Whiteness and Christendom: James Baldwin’s Figure of the Jew
Response: Daniel Boyarin (University of California, Berkeley)
t.b.a.
Chair: Anne Eusterschulte (Freie Universität Berlin)
10:30-11:00 Coffee Break

The “bürgerliche Verbesserung” of Jewish Knowledge
11:00-12:00
Elad Lapidot (Freie Universität Berlin)
My Disfigured Friend
Response: Asher Mattern (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)
The Leveling of the Human or the Sublation of Jewishness in the Liberal Form of Consciousness
Chair: Gilad Shenhav (Minerva Humanities Center / Goethe Universität Frankfurt)
12:00-13:00 Lunch Break

Politics of Friendship
14:00-15:00
Oriol Poveda Guilén (Uppsala University)
“A Friend of the Jews” – Walking the Razor’s Edge Between Judeophilia and Friendship
Response: Agata Bielik-Robson (University of Nottingham)
“Myth and Anti-Myth of the Strong Israeli Woman”
Chair: Elad Lapidot (Freie Universität Berlin)
15:00-15:30 Coffee Break

Wednesday, October 18th, 2017
Room L113

Gendered Images of Power
9:00-10:00
David Hadar (Freie Universität Berlin)
Reading Gal Gadot: The Image of the Tough Israeli Woman in American Popular Culture
Response: Silvana Greco (Freie Universität Berlin)
Myth and Anti-Myth of the Strong Israeli Woman
Chair: Michael Weinman (Bard College Berlin)