

Call for Papers: Workshop and Conference for early- and mid-career researchers: *Jewish Friends. Contemporary Figures of the Jew*

Institute for Jewish Studies | Dahlem Humanities Center, Freie Universität Berlin

October 16th-18th, 2017

Deadline: August 18th, 2017

Organized by Elad Lapidot and Hannah Tzuberi

Participants: Cynthia M. Baker, Daniel Boyarin, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Salman Sayyid, Oded Schechter, Ron Naiweld, Ofri Ilany, Hillel Ben-Sasson, Ivan Segré, Sultan Doughan, Baruch Wolski

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, as Nirenberg shows, but was 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 *Shoa* 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.

This conference will be highly interdisciplinary and will gather scholars of a wide range of research fields and methodologies to explore various aspects of the new figural paradigm of the Jew. It will be preceded by a one-day workshop with Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin. We would like to invite in particular early and mid-career researchers, whose work engages the following questions:

- How can the current figure of the Jew be more accurately characterized, in itself and in historical and transcultural comparisons?
- How can the ambivalence of this figure be described and identified in concrete situations worldwide, on the political, social, cultural and epistemological levels?
- What is the relation between the current figure of the Jew and the various Jewish personal and communal forms of existence?
- What is the relation between the current figure of the Jew and other basic categories and figures of Western discourse?
- How does the figure of the Jew intersect with the figure of the Muslim?

We invite 20-minutes presentations of papers (in English). For application, a short abstract (max. 300 words) and a short CV (max. 200 words) is to be mailed to Elad Lapidot (elapidot@zedat.fu-berlin.de) and Hannah Tzuberi (tzuberi@zedat.fu-berlin.de) by August 18th, 2017.

The conference is supported by the *German Research Foundation (DFG)*.

For further information, please refer to

www.fu-berlin.de/dhc/programme/termine/cfp-jewish-friends.html