

Shulamit Magnus

Spring, 2008

Oberlin College

Seminar on Modern Jewish Identity

JWST/ HIST 309

“Tell me,” he says. “I’ve often wondered how you know... how do you recognize one another? I mean, how did you know that [he] was a Jew? Did you give each other signals, or are there secret signs, or what? I mean what do you do when you are introduced?”...

I raise my trouser leg.

“That’s what we do, I say. We show each other our cloven hooves.”

--- Clive Sinclair, “Bulgarian Notes” (1990)

Rice 310 shulamit.magnus@oberlin.edu x58529

Office hours: Tu, Th 11-12, 1-2, and by appointment. Sign up sheets for office hour time on my door weekly; self-sign in. Email only re: other appointment time.

Seminar on Modern Jewish Identity

JWST/ HIST 309

Mon. 2:30- 4:20 KING 325

This Seminar focuses on Jewish identity in modernity-- which I define as the period after the traditional, autonomous Jewish community (kehilla) was abolished or severely weakened. Prior to this, being Jewish, in a prescribed, binding way, was not an individual choice but a collective and all-encompassing reality Jews were born into and, short of conversion, died with. With the demise of the kehilla in places of old Jewish settlement and with large-scale Jewish settlement in places lacking a pre-existing kehilla (England; the US), Jewish affiliation, behavior, and sense of self became voluntary and in part at least, self-defining. In the absence of the kehilla, Jews struggled to integrate into majority cultures with embedded, pervasive traditions of contempt for Judaism and Jews—or, in the US, into a remarkably open new culture whose very newness and openness posed, and poses, a fundamental challenge to Jewish identity.

This course examines forces that made for dissolution of Jewish identity in these circumstances; pressures on Jews to renounce, severely minimize, and compartmentalize, Jewishness; processes of acculturation and assimilation; social forces, including Jew-hatred, middle-class norms, and nationalism that made for continued identity (as well as loss of it), and some of the varied and unprecedented ways that most Jews continued to identify Jewishly and to invent and in some cases, propound, new ways of being Jewish. It begins and ends with a focus on contemporary realities.

The Seminar offers approaches to the question of modern Jewish identity by studying selected cases: individual, communal and collective, and organizational, in Europe and the US. It focuses on the role of class, gender, religion and secularism in identity; the complex and conflicting effects of Jew-hatred; and the dialectical relationship between acculturation and even assimilation, and identity affirmation.

Readings include biography, memoirs, ideological tracts, and organizational and social histories.

REQUIREMENTS:

A Seminar is the highest level of study in any department short of Honors. It assumes prior background in undergraduate-level study of (in this case), modern Jewish history. Seminar sessions are heavily student-driven discussion, with input but rarely lecturing by the instructor. Doing the reading with a high level of active engagement and bringing the fruits of considered reflection to class are therefore, essential. Be prepared to state and defend informed opinions and hypotheses based on assigned readings, while engaging those of other Seminar participants. This kind of participation is central not only to individual grades but to one of the Seminar's chief goals: experience of collegial learning. What each of us brings to the Seminar affects the learning of all and is the responsibility of each of us.

Attendance at each Seminar is required, unless documented significant illness or emergency prevents this, in which case, please be in touch with me as soon as you are able. It is difficult if not impossible to make up lost Seminar sessions but let us speak.

Should weather or other circumstance cause cancellation of class, prepare as usual, stay current with the syllabus; we will arrange a make up time.

Reading; observation papers:

Doing the assigned readings for each session in the manner described above is a basic requirement. Each student must prepare and bring to each session 1-3 pages of **informed observations about the reading**. These are not to be your notes to the readings or a summary of their findings, **but rather your analysis of and conclusions about the reading; points you wish to make in Seminar discussion**. Sit back when you finish the reading, or a chunk of it, and ask yourself what you have learned, what strikes you—and why. Draw comparisons with other cases we have studied. Be prepared to discuss your positions. Do not exceed this page limit. I prefer typed (double-spaced, 12 font, only), but will accept readable handwritten (if I can't read it, it can't receive credit). Observation papers are due in each week's Seminar; no late submissions.

I will not grade observation papers individually but their quality and your consistency in submitting them will count toward the participation element in your final grade (see below).

Whenever possible, please bring assigned readings, but especially primary sources (and MF/R whenever it is assigned), to class.

All required reading is on shelf reserve in Mudd, which is the default option for doing the reading but not the best way to do it, given the borrowing time limit.

Required reading NOT in the "Required Titles" list (see below), and NOT encyclopaedia articles, has been ordered on eres (jwst309)

If you cannot locate material on eres or shelf reserve, immediately ask library staff, preferably the Reserve Room supervisor, for help. This, not contacting me, is the most effective way to get assistance, since all I can do is contact them. Telling me there is a problem will not excuse failure to obtain readings, which you should arrange well in advance of a Seminar session. Similarly, for any problems in the Bookstore, contact their supervisor; do contact me about any problem your efforts do not resolve. For eres, do check more than one way: title, author, editor. There are no excused failures to obtain readings. If illness or emergency prevents you from doing them or attending class, see above.

I have ordered “Required Titles” (see below), in the bookstore; I expect you to have your own copies of anything on this list. However, I strongly advise you to obtain your own copies of all assigned reading, through purchase or Ohio link (be sure to give ample time if using the latter). Do collaborate with one another to obtain and share readings, quite doable in a small group.

Expect ca. 150pp. of reading or its equivalent per Seminar session. The best way to prepare is to read gradually. Do not leave reading for the last minute.

N.B.: There are only 10 sessions with assigned readings; there is reading FOR the first Seminar session.

Lead off presentation: Each student will lead off 1-2 sessions for not more than 10 minutes. Think of this as a spoken, more substantiated and organized version of your observation paper. You will teach the Seminar: lay out major issues and questions for our discussion, citing specifics, drawing comparisons, stating informed, substantiated conclusions. Bring a 1-2 outline of your points for each Seminar participant, which will be in place of an observation paper that day.

Seminar Paper: A research project culminating in a paper of 17-20 pages, not including Notes and Bibliography, is required. A significant portion of the semester will be devoted to working sessions with no assigned common readings, in which students present on their ongoing research and comment on one another’s drafts.

You must choose a preliminary topic in consultation with me, by the fifth week of the semester. You MAY revise or even change this topic but you must have an approved preliminary focus and bibliography and be prepared to discuss these briefly in class by this point; make an appointment to see me by the second week of classes. Mudd reference librarians are wonderful at helping you construct a literature search for your topic and will give you an individual appointment for this; I highly recommend that you do this. Contact them well before mid-semester for an appointment.

In our first session after break, you must submit a revised or elaborated/expanded topic statement and bibliography for discussion in class. To help in your thinking, see the suggestions I list at the end of this syllabus. By our 11th class, you will be presenting on your emerging research and will continue to do so for the remainder of the semester.

Your paper must use primary sources in a significant way.

The quality of your composition and writing count heavily in a Seminar paper. Use of foot-or-end note and Bibliography conventions as specified in Rampolla, (see below), is required and will count in your final grade.

The Seminar paper is due on the day and time set for a Final Exam for this course by the Registrar. Instructors have no say in this; requests for extension or incomplete must be processed through the Dean of Studies.

Grading: participation in Seminar sessions, observation papers, and lead off and other presentation: 55%; research paper 45%.

Required Titles (ordered in Bookstore):

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (MF/R), The Jew in the Modern World (2nd ed.)

Michael Meyer, Jewish Identity in the Modern World

Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing in History

Please note: as needed for background (and of course, when assigned), consult Encyclopaedia Judaica, either hard copy, or the new, online edition. Other good reference works are:

Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought

Lloyd Gartner, History of the Jews in Modern Times

Howard Morely Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History

H.H. Ben-Sasson, A History of the Jewish People

Anything listed on the syllabus as “recommended” means precisely that and is there only to alert you to something I think is good, for reading now if you wish, or for your paper.

1. Challenges to Identity: Modernity 2/4

There is no one Presenter today. Rather, each of you will contribute main points and conclusions that you derive from the readings. We will sign up presentations for subsequent sessions; think of 2-3 you'd be interested in leading.

A. Introduction to the subject:

-- defining "modern;" "Jewish;" "identity"

-- Kehilla, "emancipation," and identity

B. Contemporary realities: US Jews

Egon Mayer, Barry Kosmin, and Ariela Keysar, "American Jewish Identity Survey, 2001," Center for Jewish Studies, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (Reissued 2003 by The Center for Cultural Judaism), pp.6-47 (pagination as in the 2003 edition)

C. Background: Centrifugal Forces, Dissolution of Pre-Modern Identity

Michael Meyer, Jewish Identity in the Modern World, Introduction, chps. 1-2, pp.3-58

Eleonore Sterling, "Jewish Reaction to Jew-Hatred in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 3 (1958): 103-121

Sander Gilman, Jewish Self-Hatred, Antisemitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews, chp. 1, pp.1-21

Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, The Jew in the Modern World (2nd ed.), pp.114-116, 118-121, 123-126, 128-132, 177-182, 186-187, 197-202, 254-260, 261-262, 272-274 (Please bring MF/R to class each time is assigned).

2. Acculturation, Assimilation, Modern Identity: Gender and Class-- Two Views 2/11

Presenter:

* Be sure you sign up to see me re: paper topic selection; see deadlines for preliminary and revised statements, below.

EJ (either edition), "Rahel Varnhagen"

Heidi Thomann Tewarson, Rahel Levin Varnhagen: The Life of a German Jewish Intellectual, Introduction, chps.1, 3, pp.1-3 only; 17-52, 91-138

MF/R, pp.260-261

Marion Kaplan, The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany, Introduction, chps. 1-2, pp.3-84

(Recommended: Michael Meyer, The Origins of the Modern Jew, chp 4, pp.84-114)

3. Nation and Jewish Identity in Late Nineteenth Century France 2/18

Presenter:

* Reminder, as above. Do sign up with Mudd reference librarian re: your literature searches.

Michael Marrus, The Politics of Assimilation: The French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair, chps. 2-4, 5 (selection), 7-8, pp.9-83, 86-88, 163-242

4. Acculturation + Antisemitism Begets Identity? Evidence from German Jewry 2/25

Preliminary paper topic and bibliography due next class

Presenter:

George Mosse, German Jews Beyond Judaism, chp. 1, pp, 1-20

Ismar Schorsch, Jewish Reactions to German Anti-Semitism, 1870-1914, Introduction, chps. 4-5, pp.1-21, 103-148

EJ "Jacob Wasserman"

Jacob Wasserman, My Life as German and Jew, pp.1-74 (easy reading memoir)

5. Wasserman, continued

3/3

Submission of preliminary topic and bibliography due in class today.

Presenter:

Wasserman, pp.75-235

(Recommended: Bernard Lazare, Edmond Fleg, in Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea, pp.469-485)

6. Love/Hate, Self and Other: Ostjuden; “Authentic” Jewishness 3/10

Presenter:

Steven Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers, chps. 1-3, 5, 7, pp.3-80, 100-120, 139-184

Shulamit Volkov, “The Dynamics of Dissimilation: Ostjuden and German Jews,” in Jehuda Reinharz and W. Schatzberg, ed.s, The Jewish Response to German Culture From the Enlightenment to the Second World War, pp.195-211

MF/R, pp.282-286

(recommended: Gershom Scholem, From Berlin to Jerusalem)

7. Eastern Jews and Eastern Views of Jewish Being: Dubnow and Ahad HaAm 3/17

Presenter:

Leon Simon, Selected Essays by Ahad Ha-‘Am, Introduction, “Imitation and Assimilation,” “Slavery in Freedom,” “The Spiritual Revival,” pp.11-40, 107-124, 171-194, 253-305

Simon Dubnow, Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism, ed. Koppel Pinson, Introduction, First and Second Letters, “The Doctrine of Jewish Nationalism,” “The Doctrine of Spiritual Nationality..” pp. pp.1-65, 76-115

SPRING BREAK 3/22-30

Revised topic statement and bibliography due in class after Break

8. The Social Construction of Identity: Vienna 3/31

Revised topic statements and bibliography due in class today

Presenter:

Marsha Rozenblit, The Jews of Vienna, 1867-1914: Assimilation and Identity, Introduction, chps. 1-6, pp.1-146

MF/R, pp.278-279 (Freud address to Bnai Brith)

(Recommended: Benjamin Nathans, Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter With Late Imperial Russia, chp. 3, pp.83-164)

9. Jewish Socialism 4/7

Presenter:

Nora Levin, While Messiah Tarried: Jewish Socialist Movements, 1871-1917, chps.1, 14-17, pp.3- 19, 219-279

The Life and Soul of a Legendary Jewish Socialist: The Memoirs of Vladimir Medem, trans. Samuel Portnoy, chps. 1-12, 14-17, 23-26, 30-31, pp.1-64, 68-93, 112-135, 167-179

MF/R, pp.419-423

10. Poles of Influence on Contemporary Jewish Identity: Shoah; Israel; Feminism 4/14

Presenter:

film: "A Life Apart: Hasidism in America" arrangements to view this (over food!), TBA.

Michael Meyer, Jewish Identity in the Modern World, chp.3, Conclusion, pp.59-85

Haviva Ner-David, Life on the Fringes: A Feminist Journey toward Traditional Rabbinic Ordination, Preface, Introduction, chps.1-5, pp.xiii-xv, 1-130

Elliott Horowitz, "They Fought Because They Were Fighters and They Fought Because They Were Jews: Violence and the Construction of Modern Jewish Identity, in Peter Medding, ed., Jews and Violence, Studies in Contemporary Jewry, 18:23-42

11., 12., 13 Individual Research Topics and Writing 4/21, 4/28, 5/5

These weeks are devoted to work on your individual research paper topics. There are no assigned common readings. The Seminar meets as usual, in advance of which you will have circulated drafts of your paper for comments by all. Each student will have at least one opportunity to present on her/his topic and ongoing research and get group feedback on content and writing during our regularly scheduled Seminar time.

You must circulate a draft of your paper to all Seminar participants by noon on the Friday preceding the class for which you are scheduled to present (please get me a hard copy, as well as an emailed document). Further details about the mechanics of this TBA.

You may, indeed, should continue work on your draft over the weekend preceding your presentation, and should report on progress and changes you've made since the Friday draft—but the draft must be out to everyone by the Friday deadline.

Some suggestions for topics or areas for research:

-- There was a continent-wide phenomenon in the late nineteenth century into the interwar period of Jewish cultural revival and creation and assertion of new forms of Jewish identity. Time constraints prevented us from reading about this specifically, but there is much about this phenomenon in German, Austrian, French, Russian Jewry. You could look at one of these Jewries or compare several. Some authors to see: D. Neiwyk; Paul Mendes-Flohr; George Mosse; Paula Hyman; Benjamin Nathans; Gershom Scholem (his memoir).

-- There is a whole genre of memoirs and other writing about “return” to Jewish identity in one form or other; Paul Cowan, An Orphan in History; Stephen Dubner, Turbulent Souls (subtitled “A Catholic Son’s Return to His Jewish Family”) are two; see too, Victor Perera, The Cross and the Pear Tree, A Sephardic Journey. Since we’ve seen that this phenomenon began already in the nineteenth century (see Gershom Scholem’s memoir, works on Franz Rosenzweig), is plenty to think about. Great paper topic!

-- Much material about US Jewry:

sociological studies (see Egon Mayer, Charles Liebman, Marshall Sklare, Steven M. Cohen, Sylvia Barack Fishman); some of these compare the Jewish identity of US and Israeli Jews; histories (see Deborah Dash Moore, Hasia Diner, Jonathan Sarna, Arthur Goren, Jeffrey Gurock);

memoirs that illustrate, e.g., how broader currents in postwar US culture—the civil rights movement, the emergence of assertions of Black US identity—affected Jewish thinking about identity (see e.g., Cowan; Dubner).

-- Israeli Jewish identity-- “post-Zionism”—or the changing place of Israel in US, or other diaspora communities’ identity

-- You can choose a group (like Jewish socialists); a place (France, Germany-- including post war); an individual (e.g., Freud); an organization (e.g., how Reform Judaism has changed re: the nature of Jewish identity, and about Zionism, in particular), or take a comparative perspective.

-- You may choose a topic/ area on the syllabus, or one entirely off it.

-- Remember that you must use primary sources in a significant way in your paper.

As I hope this course shows, you can approach all kinds of historical material with the identity question. However, some works explicitly do this, e.g.,

David Weinberg, Between Tradition and Modernity: Haim Zhitlovsky, Simon Dubnow, Ahad Ha-Am and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identity

David T. Goldberg, Michal Krausz, eds., Jewish Identity (theoretical approaches)

Steven M. Cohen, American and Modern Jewish Identities (sociological)

Alain Finkielkraut, The Imaginary Jew (impact of Holocaust on Jewish identity; analysis and proposals by French Jewish leftist)

Bernard Susser and Charles S. Liebman, Choosing Survival: Strategies for a Jewish Future

The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity, eds. Laurence Silberstein and Robert Cohn

I look forward to working with you on your topic selection!