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# Pioneers, Losers, White Collars: Narratives of Masculinity Among German-Speaking Jews in Palestine/Israel

Patrick Farges

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# Remembrance and Research

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A Source for Oral History and Discourse Analysis**

Anne Betten

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in Interviews with Second Generation "Yekkes"**

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How Metaphorical Constructions and Remembering Process Interweave**

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**"You Have No Right to Remain Silent": The Israel Police Oral History Project**

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# **Pioneers, Losers, White Collars: Narratives of Masculinity Among German-Speaking Jews in Palestine/Israel**

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## **Introduction**

As early as 1999, Anne Betten wrote the following invitation to future scholars working in various fields:

*I hereby want to reiterate my appeal to all those interested in working with this corpus of interviews that have been transcribed and made accessible to all. This corpus of more than 300 hours of recordings constitutes a unique archive of linguistic, historical as well as human experience, the study of which is to this date far from being exhaustive (Betten, Du-nour, Dannerer 2000: IX).*

Betten's appeal still holds true, and the collection of interviews known as the 'Israel Corpus' can indeed be considered an oral history archive. Betten's intuition from the beginning of her research was that soliciting, recording and producing "linguistic biographies" (Sprachbiografien) of German and Austrian Jews who had migrated to Palestine in the 1930s was not just a matter of language retention vs. linguistic adaptation. The Israel Corpus collection is an oral history in that it collects both personal memories of biographical importance as well as personal narratives of historical significance. However, oral histories often reveal less about the actual events than about their meaning (Portelli 1981), and thus invite us to inquire into the socio-

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cultural interpretations of historical experience, which include gender and masculinity. The Yekkes' forced migration to Palestine, also called "Fifth Aliya" in Zionist historiography, was profoundly a gendered experience, and this is often only alluded to. In the present paper, I wish to analyse how the interviewees (men and women) present self-narratives of the changes they experienced throughout the migration and post-migration process and related to the gendered representations of masculinity.

### **1. The Interview as a Site of Gendered Performance**

The interview is a standardized mode of eliciting biographical narratives. Hence there are expectations and set plans. And yet the outcome of this dialogical operation is highly uncertain and unpredictable. The oral history interview is characterized by a double asymmetry of information: on the one hand the interviewer holds a scientific agenda towards the interviewee; on the other hand the interviewee holds the information. Hence the interview is a co-constructed space in which the narrative has a social – and at times emotional – function within the relational frame interviewer-interviewee. Oral history narratives are products of both this conversational interaction, and of social, historical as well as cultural frames. Meanings about gender – among other things – and forms of 'gender-camaraderie' are thus constantly being negotiated within the interactive space of the interview (Mailänder, Beer, Düring 2011). I shall focus specifically on constructions and models of masculinity: the oral history interview produces gendered constructions of masculinity 'now,' and it also gives insights into the historical and remembered constructions of masculinity – especially about competing models of masculinity.

Over the past thirty years, a first generation of men's studies has offered numerous insights into the construction and representations of masculinities. One important contribution to the field is Raewyn Connell's definition of (and fieldwork on) "hegemonic masculinities" (Connell 1995), a notion which refers to dynamic forms of negotiating masculine domination in given societal frames. First

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understood as men's practices guaranteeing their domination over women, the concept of hegemonic masculinity also encompasses men's practices ensuring domination over alternative and subordinate forms of masculinity. According to Jack Halberstam, hegemonic masculinity "depends absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities" (1998: 1). Socially and historically constructed, masculinity appears contingent and fluid. Masculinities are produced through a complex process of development involving negotiation in multiple social relationships, cultural settings, and specific historical circumstances. Connell points out that "to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, [masculinity] is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (2005: 71). Different forms of masculinity exist in definite relations with each other, but often in relations of hierarchy and exclusion, thus relying on power structures. Hegemonic masculinity as the historically and culturally stable and legitimised form of masculinity is essentially dynamic and contextual, i.e. historically situated. It thus maintains a dialectic link with other regimes, systems, or forms of masculinity. In a later stage, Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt have insisted that hegemonic masculinity be understood as a "pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just as a set of role expectations or an identity)" (2005: 832). Masculinities – like femininities – are being practically performed, they refer to ways of "doing gender" (West, Zimmerman 1987). The oral histories hence become sites of gendered identity work and sites of multiple reconfigurations of masculinity.

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What kinds of narratives of masculinity – situated both in the past and in the present – were elicited in the Israel Corpus? To what extent can the experience of 'being a man' – often experienced as an 'all-male' performance – be told in the context of an oral history interview between the interviewee and a team of exclusively feminine interviewers? Do other dimensions, such as the age difference (as relatively young female interviewers interviewed a majority of older men who tended to 'lecture' them about history), play a role?

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The first example is the interview Anne Betten conducted with Elchanan (Erwin) Scheftelowitz. Born in 1911 in Berlin, Scheftelowitz earned his Ph-D in Law in 1934, before attending the rabbinical seminary, and preparing for emigration. He arrived in Palestine in 1937, and became an attorney and notary. In this interview, I shall argue, gendered roles are being performed, which re-enact a model of traditional bourgeois (and academic) masculinity. The question is: to what purpose? The beginning of the interview is the phase in which the general frame of the narrative interaction is being installed. The interviewee has understood that the interviewer's agenda is to learn more about his language proficiency, and to reconstruct his linguistic biography. Scheftelowitz comments:

**Example 1: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Mr. Elchanan (ES) and Mrs. Sara Ruth Scheftelowitz (SRS), Jerusalem, 27 April 1994**

ES: And now, if I tell you something freely, you have to ask yourself what about? It is not just about the form of the speech, you have to ask yourself about its content. And I want to tell you something about history and our time, e.g. about little things that are, by and large, unknown and that would be told for the first time.

*ES: Ich werd Ihnen jetzt etwas frei berichten. Man muss sich aber auch fragen, worüber man berichtet. Das bedeutet: Nicht nur die Form der Rede, sondern auch der Inhalt der Rede. Und ich habe mir vorgenommen, über etwas Historisches zu reden in unserer Zeit. Zum Beispiel über einzelne Dinge und Ereignisse, die im Großen und Ganzen unbekannt sind und die zum ersten Mal der Öffentlichkeit bekannt sind.*

What follows is a lecture in history, performed by a 'learned' Yekke in front of a female audience: a German woman scholar – who reclaims her status in the course of the interview – and Mrs. Scheftelowitz, who voices no particular claim of being proficient in history or in languages (she even admits to "being somewhat stupid" – "ich bin ganz dumm"). Mr. Scheftelowitz adopts a traditional masculine

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bourgeois stance, and regularly interrupts the flow of his wife's dramatic life story, in order to re-establish "the facts" in the eyes of the interviewer. Sara-Ruth Scheftelowitz was born in 1915. A kindergarten teacher, she emigrated to the Netherlands in 1934. In 1943, she was arrested and brought to the concentration camps of Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen. She survived, went back to Holland and finally emigrated to Israel in 1949. Here is one example in which the interviewer, Anne Betten, who has previously heard about that dramatic story, helps Mrs. Scheftelowitz tell her version of her own story:

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AB: Allow me to ask something. During my last visit, I learned about the fact that you, Mrs. Scheftelowitz, had been in Auschwitz...

SRS: Not Auschwitz

ES: Bergen-Belsen

AB: So you went to Bergen-Belsen?

ES: Bergen-Belsen in Holland

AB: I don't know if you are ready to tell the story of how you ended up there, Mrs. Scheftelowitz, if your husband already/

*AB: Erlauben Sie mir, dass ich da mal was dazwischen frage. Ich weiß von unserem ersten Besuch, dass Sie, Frau Scheftelowitz, in Auschwitz gewesen sind...*

*SRS: Nicht in Auschwitz*

*ES: Bergen-Belsen*

*AB: In Bergen-Belsen sind Sie gewesen*

*ES: Bergen-Belsen in Holland*

*AB: Ich weiß nicht, ob Sie bereit sind, wenn Ihr Mann das jetzt schon hier/*

Later in the interview, just when Mrs. Scheftelowitz is telling a particularly intense moment of her story, her husband jumps in to set an exact date:

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SRS (FAST): I really thought I would never see my child again in this life. And then the train started again. A lot more died in this train of typhus. And eventually the train stopped near a forest and a huge grave was carved out to bury all the dead. And then the journey went on and on. All the way, the German guards were present. And then we stopped near a small village called Tröbitz and all of a sudden the Germans were gone.

ES: This was April 23rd, 1943

SRS: No, 1945

ES: 1945, I was wrong

SRS: Yes, and we

ES: They got off the train

AB: Would you please let your wife tell the end of the story?

*SRS (SCHNELL): Ich hab gedacht, jetzt sehe ich das Kind im Leben nicht wieder. Und dann sind wir noch weiter gefahren, viele sind gestorben in dem Zug an Flecktyphus, und dann hat der Zug gehalten und man hat im Wald ein großes Grab gemacht und hat all die Toten da reingelegt. Und dann ist er gefahren und gefahren und immer waren die Deutschen als Bewachung dabei. Und dann hat er gehalten auf einmal in einem kleinen Dorf, das heißt Tröbitz. Und auf einmal waren die Deutschen weg.*

ES: Es war der 23. April 1943

SRS: Nein, 1945

ES: 1945, ich hab mich geirrt

SRS: Ja, und wir

ES: Die Insassen stiegen aus

AB: Lassen Sie doch bitte Ihre Frau das noch zu Ende erzählen

To summarize: Mr. Scheftelowitz plays out a traditional “learned” masculine role and doing so, he gets support from his wife. What is at stake here is the understanding of historical relevance, and the relevance of one’s intimate experience to the writing of history. Mrs. Scheftelowitz retraces and re-enacts her lived experience. She says at one point:

Mrs. Betten, listen: all of us, everyone in my generation could tell you a whole novel.

*Hören Sie, Frau Betten, von uns, von unserer Generation hat jeder einen ganzen Roman zu erzählen.*

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The interview is framed by her as a novel in which biographical experience creates coherence. Mr. Scheftelowitz, on the contrary, relies on chronological coherence (e.g. dates), and lectures the German woman scholar who is interviewing him. The interview is performed by him as an academic scene – from a professor to a student. I shall argue that this stance is particularly important to his distinctive identification as a Yekke.

## **2. Oral History Interviews as Sources for Writing the History of Masculinities**

If we now move from the gendered interactions within the space of the interview to the historical constructs of masculinity expressed in the narratives, it is interesting to look for traces of concurring models of masculinity within the Israel Corpus collection. Although the individual trajectories are unique, the scripts and frames used to tell a coherent life-story share a lot of common features and they refer to a generational and existential post-migratory experience. While representations of Jewish masculinity (e.g. the 'muscle Jew') were brought over from Europe, new representations also emerged in Palestine/Israel: e.g. the Jewish settler, the kibbutznik, the 'pioneer' (chalutz). Moreover, the oral histories of the Israel Corpus also voice experiences of male downward social mobility, of 'losing' one's social and bourgeois status, thus re-defining traditional gender frames within families.

## 2.1. The Sons: Pioneers and New Jews?

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There is an important divide within the Israel Corpus (first generation) – the divide between the parents' and the children's experience. The latter generation can also be called the 'generation 1.5,' as it combines an early socialisation in Germany or Austria with migratory rupture, and re-socialisation in Mandate Palestine/Israel at a relatively young age. Among the members of the 'generation 1.5,' there are numerous members of the 'Youth Aliya' (Aliyat HaNoar). This generation experienced and intensely lived the Zionist ideals of the New Jew (Naor 2011).

Moshe (Max) Ballhorn belongs to exactly that younger generation. He was born in 1913 in Berlin and was 20 years of age when he migrated to Mandate Palestine in 1933. At the time, he was a fit and athletic young man who had already "become a fervent Zionist" prior to leaving Germany. In the interview with Anne Betten, he delivers a narrative reconstruction of his first years in Tel Aviv. This new beginning was clearly marked by the Zionist ideals of construction and collective action:



Moshe Max Ballhorn on the terrace of his house in Tiberias, July 1, 1990

Photo: By interviewer Anne Betten

### **Example 2: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Moshe Max Ballhorn (MB), Tiberias, 1 July 1990**

MB: But then you have to find work. After some efforts I was given a temporary job: mixing concrete. You are given one of those small concrete mixers and then you have to carry those buckets to the place where the concrete is being used. This was in July 1933 and after the first day, and I mean, I was no wimp at the age of 19, after

the first day, I said to myself: This is no job for me, this is a job for someone who killed both father and mother. (...) And then I saw a small stand where they sold lemonade. And they were hiring! (...) But this guy said: No, I won't hire you. You got work in the construction business. So I went on. (LAUGHS)

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AB: He was just waiting for someone weaker. How very responsible of him!

MB: He saw who he had in front of him! (...) So then we created a construction co-op – approximately twenty of us, all of us beginners except for one guy who knew how to build. And so we started building. And how do you start a new building? You start digging. And go dig in July on the Tel Aviv coast! But we did it and we made it. We laid the foundations and slowly the house rose above the ground. And we all learned something – all twenty of us. And, strangely enough, the building is still standing. It is still standing!

*MB: Und jetzt muss man aber doch arbeiten. Also nach viel Mühe hat man mir eine Arbeit verschafft, und hat man da Beton gegossen. Mit dieser kleinen Betonmaschine da und dann musste man Betoneimer schleppen, d. h. wenn der Beton rausgegossen wurde, musste man ihn dahin schleppen, wo er verwendet worden ist. Das war im Juli 1933 und da habe ich ein Tag gearbeitet, und ich war nicht schwach als neunzehnjähriger Junge. Und wie ich da fertig war, habe ich gesagt: Das ist keine Arbeit für mich, das ist eine Arbeit für jemand, der Vater und Mutter totgeschlagen hat. (...) Und dann sah ich so eine Bude, da hat man Limonade verkauft. Also da stand eine Tafel dran: Limonadenverkäufer gesucht! (...) Da hat der Typ aber gesagt: Dich nehme ich nicht, du gehst auf den Bau arbeiten. Also bin ich weitergegangen. (LACHT)*

AB: Da hat er auf einen Schwächeren gewartet. Sehr verantwortungsbewusst!

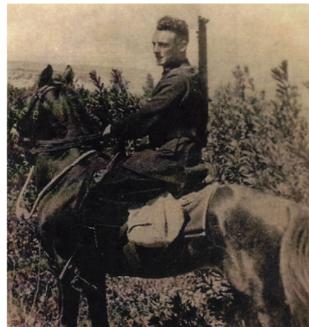
MB: Er hat gesehen, wen er vor sich hat! (...) Also dann haben wir eine Baukooperative gegründet, ungefähr 20 Leute. Wir hatten uns einen Fachmann genommen, ein Mann, der was von Bauten verstand, denn keiner von den zwanzig hatte jemals was mit dem Bau zu tun gehabt. Und wir haben angefangen zu bauen. Also wie

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*fängt man einen Neubau an? Mit Graben, man gräbt. Nun graben Sie mal im Juli an der Küste von Tel Aviv! Doch wir haben's gemacht und wir haben's geschafft und wir haben die Löcher gegraben und wir haben die Fundamente gegossen und haben langsam das Haus aus dem Boden aufgehoben. Und wir haben dabei gelernt, alle zwanzig. Und merkwürdigerweise – er steht heute noch, der Bau steht heute noch!*

Ballhorn's narrative is told because it is 'worth telling' in the context of the interview. The narrative perfectly fits the myth of the pioneer and this key anecdote is constructed like an archetypal Zionist heroic narrative: The uprooted hero is tested by hardships (the July heat on the coast of Tel Aviv), he experiences near hopelessness (*This is a job for someone who killed both father and mother*), until he finally collectively triumphs over the ordeals (*We did it and we made it*). The young man's first – egoistic – reaction is to look for an easier work, but the Zionist collective (personified by the owner of the lemonade stand) changes the young man's attitude and at the same time, his life trajectory. The 'New Jew' finally finds an appropriate way of being integrated in the Zionist collective of twenty pioneers, by doing a manly work and by building the land in a long-standing way (*The building is still standing. It is still standing!*). The interviewee's physical fitness and his manliness at the time (*I was no wimp at the age of 19*) are confirmed by the (female) interviewer who thus contributes to co-constructing a gendered narrative of heroic masculinity (*He was just waiting for someone weaker. How very responsible of him!*).



Moshe Max Ballhorn, 1937  
A member of the British  
Palestine Police in  
Zemah/Sea of Galilee

Photo: Courtesy of Esti Haviv

## 2.2. Fathers as Losers. Gender, Downward Social Mobility, and Migration

For the older generation however, the migration to Palestine often meant a traumatic biographical rupture, as it only increased the loss of social and professional status that had started in Europe due to the rise of anti-Semitism. This rupture had important gendered consequences: it modified men's social status as well as their positioning within the families. Their self-representation and self-construction as 'men' were thus profoundly affected by the migration process. Their forced passivity and their helplessness did not correspond to the dominant representations of manliness. This resulted in a near complete loss of control over their lives due to their previously held cultural assumptions linking masculinity with dominance. Everything these men had known and understood about their selves was being questioned. In post-migration, the older men's incapacity to assume their traditional protective role for their families was experienced as a symbolic form of emasculation (Farges 2012). Walter Zadek, who belongs to the 'generation 1.5,' summarizes this social and professional loss of status as follows:

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### Example 3: Israel Corpus, Interview Kristine Hecker with Walter Zadek, Holon, 21 October 1990

And all those people who had been general directors or presidents or high ranking scholars and so on, they had no opportunity to use their competences here. Here you needed muscle and hands, construction workers and farmers, not professors.

*Und all die Leute, die früher in Deutschland Generaldirektoren oder Präsidenten oder Wissenschaftler von Rang waren oder so was, hatten ja hier gar keine Möglichkeit, sich auszuwirken, nicht? Hier brauchte man Hände, hier brauchte man einen Bauarbeiter, einen Landarbeiter und so etwas, aber nicht Professoren.*

Haim Sela, who was born in 1914 (as Karl Stein) and who grew up in Berlin-Schöneberg in a wealthy environment with a "villa, housemaids and a chauffeur," describes how the loss of status

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affected the entire family constellation. As a member of the younger generation he adapted culturally and socially to the new kibbutz life in Hazorea. He seemed to be particularly focused on how he perceives his father's loss of status as the family provider as well as his loss of masculine identity.

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**Example 4: Israel Corpus, Interview Anne Betten (AB) with Haim Sela (HS), Kibbutz Hazorea, 30 April 1991**

AB: Were your parents able to adapt?

HS: Well, that was a huge problem, my parents. Of course my father had dreamed about being successful in his business and building something up here. But of course, he failed. In the first



Chaim Sela with his wife (right) and Anne Betten in Kibbutz Hazorea, Interview on April 30, 1991 (private photo)

weeks and months, my parents were with us on the kibbutz and they lived in very primitive conditions. (...) And we didn't have much to offer them either. That was a huge problem. Anyway, they moved to Tel Aviv and my father started to sell all sorts of brushes. And then they moved to Pardes Chana and my father worked very hard in the citrus farm. My mother didn't work. Neither of them learned Hebrew. (...) After that they came back to the Kibbutz Hazorea and my

father worked as a saddler. (...) And they both died here, my father in 1952 and my mother in 1968. (...) Now I realise that this generation suffered much more than we did. We were able to transform the trauma into something creative, because we were young. We didn't see it that way. (...) But our parents! For this generation it was a deep loss.

*AB: Wie haben sich Ihre Eltern noch eingliedern können?*

*HS: Das ist ein großes Problem gewesen, meine Eltern. Mein Vater hat natürlich davon geträumt, er würde hier weitermachen*

*können in seinem Beruf und würde sich wieder was aufbauen hier. Das ist natürlich alles nicht gelungen. In den ersten Wochen und Monaten waren meine Eltern bei uns im Kibbuz und haben sehr primitiv gelebt. (...) Wir selbst waren so beschränkt in den Möglichkeiten, was den Eltern zu bieten, es war ein großes Problem. Auf jeden Fall sind sie dann nach Tel Aviv und mein Vater hat angefangen, irgendwelche Bürsten zu verkaufen (...). Und nachher sind sie übergesiedelt nach Pardes Chana und dort hat mein Vater schwer gearbeitet in einer Obstplantage und meine Mutter hat nicht gearbeitet. Hebräisch haben sie beide nie gelernt. (...) Nachher sind sie wieder in den Kibbuz gekommen nach Hasorea. (...) Mein Vater hat zum Schluss hier als Sattler gearbeitet und Pferdegeschirre repariert. (...) Und sie sind beide dann hier gestorben. Mein Vater ist 1952 gestorben und meine Mutter ist 1968 gestorben. (...) Heute ist mir vollkommen klar, dass diese Generation viel mehr gelitten hat als wir. Uns ist es gelungen, da wir jung waren, dieses Trauma in eine positive Auswertung zu übersetzen. Wir haben es nicht so empfunden. (...) Aber die Eltern – für diese Generation war es ein schwerer Bruch.*

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### **Conclusion: White Collars with Bildung – a Distinctive Feature of Yekke Masculinity?**

A lot of the linguistic approaches to the Israel Corpus converge when analysing how extraordinary the Yekkes' linguistic (and cultural) retention has been, linking this in particular to emotions and identity work. Even in the remotest places in Israel, you could find a Yekke who would embody the ideal of Bildung. Joseph Amit (born 1923 in Vienna as Heinz Reich) tells the story of a certain "Doktor Warburg" in Kiriati Anavim:

#### **Example 5: Israel Corpus, Auto-interview Joseph Amit, Frankfurt/M., 1996**

In Kiriati Anavim there was this Doktor Warburg, the local doctor, a village doctor, who came from a famous family in the financial sector. (...) He never made really it. And whenever he spoke

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Hebrew, he spoke like a young boy or even like a child. But the moment he spoke German, his Kultur would shine bright!

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*Es gab in Kirjat Anavim den Doktor Warburg, der ein kleiner Arzt war, ein Dorfdoktor, von einer berühmten Familie stammend, die in der Finanz war. (...) Aber er hat sich eigentlich nie wieder eingelebt. Immer wenn er Hebräisch sprach, sprach er so wie ein junger Bursche oder ein bisschen kindisch. Und im Augenblick, wo er deutsch sprach, hat seine Kultur gegläntzt!*

In the post-migration situation, the “Doktor,” who grew up in an upper-class milieu that gave him a social identity as a “man with a position,” is reduced to the status of a boy or child. Overall, the older Yekkes’ self-representation and self-construction as men was deeply affected by the downward social mobility. In the gendered dichotomy of the traditional gender roles, their situation seemed to float between the gender poles. How can we interpret the prevailing figure of the archetypal male Yekke, the “Herr Professor” or the “Herr Doktor,” so prevalent in the historiography and memory? Henry Wassermann – criticizing Joachim Schlör’s idealized vision of the Yekkes’ integration in Israel in his book *Endlich im Gelobten Land* (2003) – refers to them ironically as the “Super-Yekkes” (Wassermann 2004: 583).

There are of course examples of “Super-Yekkes” whose masculine social capital was hardly affected by the migration process. One famous example is given by Emmanuel Strauss (born 1926 in Düsseldorf) when he describes his mother’s father, Martin Buber:

**Example 6: Israel Corpus, Interview Miryam Du-nour (MD) with Emanuel Strauss (ES), Jerusalem, 19 May 1991**

ES: Well, my grandfather was very busy in his academic and Zionist spheres here in Israel and he would sit long hours in his study. (...) I remember the breakfasts and lunches with him. We would talk about various topics – from family matters to political talks and news. My grandfather was very interested in the news and whenever he had not heard them, he would ask us all and then discussions would start, of course. He would give his opinion

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and hear about ours. (...) I always wondered how far his understanding of young people's problems would go.

MD: Did you speak German or Hebrew?

ES: That's a good question. (...) They say that he managed quickly to make himself not understood in Hebrew (BOTH LAUGH). But that's a joke of course. (LAUGHS)

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*ES: Also mein Großvater war ja sehr beschäftigt in seinem akademischen und zionistischen Leben und im politischen Leben hier in Israel und er saß immer bis spät in seinem Arbeitszimmer. (...) An was ich mich gut erinnere, das sind an die gemeinsamen Frühstücks- und Mittagessen, an denen man sich*



Emanuel Strauss,  
interviewed by Miryam Du-nour,  
1991

(private Photo)

*unterhalten hat über ganz Verschiedenes, sowohl über Familiensachen als auch ganz über politische Gespräche, Neuigkeiten. Mein Großvater war immer sehr dran interessiert, die Nachrichten zu hören und wenn er die nicht gehört hatte, dann fragte er uns alle, ob wir was Neues gehört haben. Und dann knüpften sich natürlich Gespräche an, in denen er auch seine Meinungen äußerte und auch uns anhörte. (...) Ich habe mich immer gewundert, wie weit seine Einfühlungskraft in die Probleme von Jugendlichen wie uns, wie groß sie war.*

MD: Habt ihr mit ihm Deutsch oder Hebräisch gesprochen?

ES: Das ist eine gute Frage. (...) Man sagt, es ist ihm sehr schnell gelungen, sich schon in Hebräisch unverständlich zu machen (BEIDE LACHEN). Das ist natürlich ein Spaß. (LACHT)

Yet it is also possible to interpret the figure of the male "Super Yekke" as a memory construction that serves an identity-building

purpose. As the latest historiography on the Yekkes has shown, the “ethnic” identity that has developed over the years served as a strategic resource within the multicultural framework of Israeli society, despite noticeable initial integration problems. This phenomenon was analyzed by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy who calls it, in Bourdieusian terms, an “integration through distinction” (Sela-Sheffy 2006), relating it to other examples of post-migration ‘ethnic’ integration. Using Herbert Gans’ theory of “symbolic ethnicity” (1979), i.e. a selective adherence to a group’s native culture, which provides immigrants with a symbolic capital in the host society, Sela-Sheffy writes:

*In view of this social context, it is my contention that the Yekkes’ distinctive habitus and ethnic retention tendencies were induced by an on-going distinction process which was instrumental in – and not an obstacle to – their social integration.*

(...)

*It seems to be in much the same vein that, despite their heterogeneity, a Yekke identity unified the German-speaking Jewish immigrants and made them a more cohesive cultural group than they were before immigrating. (Sela-Sheffy 2013: 42-43, 47)*

Despite the hardships of the migration and post-migration process, the performance of a bourgeois and intellectual masculinity is a Yekkish way of reclaiming a manly role and a valorised social position, without adopting a virile (or masculinist) attitude. It is thus a way of remaining true to the Bildungsideal of the German Jewry without adopting a muscular stance, too reminiscent of the brutal nationalistic excesses witnessed in Germany prior to the emigration.

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