

Call for Papers

Antisemitism and Sexuality Reconsidered

Place: Berlin

Conference Venue: Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin

Convener: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin), Anna-Carolin Augustin (GHI Washington), Sebastian Bischoff (Paderborn University), Kristoff Kerl (Feodor Lynen-Fellow, University of Copenhagen), in cooperation with the German Historical Institute, Washington DC (GHI) and the Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin

Date: December 13-15, 2021

Deadline of Application: July 1, 2020

We invite the submission of abstracts for a conference on “Antisemitism and Sexuality Reconsidered,” to be held December 13-15, 2021 at the Center for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin.

Although constructions of Jewish sexualities and alleged Jewish attacks on sexual morals have played a significant role in modern antisemitic worldviews, – whether the same is true for premodern times has to be discussed –, only few historical studies have focused on the connection between sexualities and Jew-hatred. Against this backdrop, the conference aims to stimulate further research and debate on this topic. To bring the differences in the role sexualities played in judeophobic discourses at different times and in different regions into view, the temporal and geographical focus of the conference reaches beyond the times of modern antisemitism and beyond ‘Western societies.’

In manifold ways, sexualities have played a crucial role in the history of judeophobia. Since ancient times, sexuality has been one of the fields where the borders between different communities, Jewish and otherwise, were drawn most fiercely. At least since the rise of modern antisemitism imaginary conceptions of deviant and dangerous ‘Jewish’ sexualities became crucial. In modern antisemitism, sexual desires attributed to Jews have been characterized by a transgression of the male-female binarity – a characteristic that corresponds to constructions of Jewish effeminate manhood and masculinized womanhood. Whereas discourses ascribed ‘unmanly’ desires to Jewish men in different ways, Jewish women were constructed as seductive, passionate, and sexually active: attributes that have typically had a male connotation. At the same time, constructions of Jewish sexualities have reinforced notions of male activity and female passivity.

Historians have demonstrated that the alleged deviant sexualities of Jews were inscribed into their bodies. Since the end of the 17th century discursive linkages between the circumcised penis and sexual amorality were shaped in debates about Jewish bodies.

In addition, antisemitic discourses also constructed Jews as forces that used their alleged social power to undermine sexual morals and the sexual order. Adolf Hitler accused Jews of ‘mongrelizing’ the ‘white race’; Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, lamented that Jews spread

a doctrine of ‘animalistic sexuality’; and contemporary far rightists fantasize about an alleged Jew-driven ‘porn conspiracy’ aimed at turning whole countries into “masturbatoria” and by this means strengthening and expanding alleged Jewish social dominance.

We hope that inviting attention to a broader reconsideration of ‘Antisemitism and Sexuality’ will shed light on the topic and how it can be expanded in interesting new directions.

Areas of specific focus could include but are not limited to:

- Scientific discourses on Jewish sexualities: How did scholars construct Jewish sexuality? How did the scholarly discourses about Jews and sexuality change over the centuries? Did ‘Western’ scholarly discourses differ from ‘non-Western’ discourses, and if so, in which ways?
- Sexuality in premodern judeophobia: Which notions about Jewish sexualities circulated in premodern times? How did these notions manifest themselves in judeophobic practices?
- Sexualities and Jewish bodies: Which physiognomic characteristics were linked to Jewish sexualities in judeophobic discourses?
- Transformations in sexual morals in the context of Jew-hatred: How have Jews been made responsible at different times and in different geographical regions for transformations in the sexual order?
- Racist constructions of sexualities: Racist constructions of sexualities also have a long history. However, it seems that there are some significant differences in the ways in which the racist ‘Other’ and the judeophobic ‘Other’ were perceived to threaten the sexual order. To address the commonalities and differences, one panel at the conference will examine racist constructions of sexualities.
- Sexualities and theoretical debates: Historical differences in the significance and role that sexuality played in various kinds of Jew-hatred in different times and at different places can provide insights into commonalities and differences between different kinds of judeophobia. Thus, the study of sexualities can serve as a probe into the history of different forms of Jew-hatred and contribute to ongoing theoretical debates in the field such as scholarly discussions about concepts such as ‘judeophobia’ and ‘antisemitism’. What can we learn about the relationship of different kinds of judeophobia and antisemitism by scrutinizing sexuality?

Scholars interested in presenting a paper at the conference are invited to submit a brief proposal (250-300 words) and a short biographical note by using the following link: <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/772895f3e67f4f8c93462a325082a1d2>. The deadline for application is July 1, 2020.

The costs for accommodation will be covered. Furthermore, the organizers are applying for additional funding and, thus, will hopefully be able to reimburse for travel costs. The conference language is English.