

„Secondary Conversions” – Transforming Religious and Ethnic Emblematism of Judaism and Jewishness

International Conference of the Simon Dubnow Institute
February 22 – 24, 2003

Outline for the Conference

The international conference „‘Secondary Conversions’ – Transforming Religious and Ethnic Emblematism of Judaism and Jewishness” at the Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture at the University of Leipzig seeks to open new perspectives on questions of internal Jewish transformations from within the methodological dialogue between the Jewish historical sciences and approaches in cultural anthropology, ethnography and psychoanalysis. One focus is a renewed in-depth examination of the epistemic value and reach of fundamental concepts of Jewish transformation in modernity. Foregrounded here are concepts such as ‘emancipation,’ ‘assimilation’ and ‘acculturation’—notions which either describe political or cultural transformations of Jewish self-identity at the time or those which were subsequently (super)imposed on the historical phenomena at a later date. Another focus is the attempt to accentuate and bolster fresh conceptual fields in the realm of Jewish history, moored more on the cultural sciences, proceeding from a historicization of those basic concepts in terms of theory and the history of ideas.

A central epistemic construct for internal Jewish processes of transformation is the conception of ‘secondary conversion.’ Utilizing the characteristic paradoxical connotation of such a ‘secondary’ conception of conversion and its dynamics, the more circumscribed interpretive field of the traditional epistemic-guiding concepts of emancipation and assimilation, usually limited to phenomena of external transformation such as legal status or habitus, is amplified, extending to encompass transformational phenomena of eminently central components of Jewish self-identity: namely the elements of religion and the validity and impact at deeper levels of emblems and symbols of the sacred, liturgical and ritual, and as well as other significant codings of religiosity.

In short: the concept of secondary conversion points to a level of perception concentrated to a far greater extent on components of internal transformation under the specific dimensions of secularization and modernity than the concepts of emancipation and assimilation, which tend by dint of their temporality to be oriented primarily though not exclusively to externalities.

Along with this alteration in focus (driven by the altered notion of conversion) to concentrate on the internal transformations of Jewish self-identity in the process of secularization and modernity, the concomitant slight shift in angle of vision can lead to new insights. While the concept of conversion generally signifies the abandonment of one’s religion and the embracing of another, secondary conversion seeks to describe presumably paradoxical situations: where individuals move nearer to another religion emblematically, symbolically, ritually or in terms of liturgy, though without experiencing a change in belief. Contrastively, transformations in the sense of secondary conversion occur when a religion, challenged by the changing circumstances of the time and for its own maintenance and survival, requires transformation. Such innovations, Reform reconfigurations, ‘Orthodox’ recollection of ostensibly earlier religious observances or syncretic constructions of religious self-identity, thus all tend to be more defensive in character, acting principally as a preservative. To this extent, the internal transformations of Jews, Judaism and Jewries reflect the particular context within which Jewish self-identities repeatedly ‘reinvent’ themselves anew. And this self-reinvention occurs in the form of a reaction that both adapts and rejects the forms predominant in the non-Jewish environment.

Alongside the processes of internal Jewish religious transformation triggered by secularization and modernity, the concept of secondary conversion also opens up new vistas in the realm of so-called secular transformations, such as the transformation of Jewish affiliation and belonging from the sphere of religion to ethnicity, a process historically more salient for dynamics in Eastern Europe. The transformation of traditional Jewish religion in Central and Western Europe, characterized as 'confessionalization' (or 'denominalization'), was more a transmutation in the sense of internalizing the emblems of religious belonging as a private personal creed, enjoying equal rights side by side with other schools and currents of belief (so-called confessions or denominations). By contrast, in Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, marked by processes of the nationalization or ethnicizing of the Jews, the predominant tendency was more an externalization of previously traditional emblems of affiliation. Such a transformation of an originally religious set of emblems into a presumably exclusively secular emblematics of nationality or even nation opens up a new perspective on the history of internal Jewish transformation. It also confirms the expansion of horizon in approaching traditionally oriented questions and their concomitant renewal that go hand in hand with the concept of secondary conversion.

Along with the idea of 'secondary conversion,' another useful notion for more precise cultural-anthropological calibration and micrological analysis is that of 'hybridity.' The intention here is to maintain the focus on phenomena of the internal religious world, viewing them as a constant process of transformation and fusion. The spotlight is not on the purportedly 'eternal' validity of religion but rather on the constant and ongoing transformation of components of self-identity deemed sacred (and thus unchanging). To that extent, the attempt here seems somewhat paradoxical: namely to contribute to a historicizing of the sacred by means of more micrologically based approaches, drawing on cultural anthropology, ethnography and depth psychology.

The concept of 'secondary conversion' thus seeks to examine two elements: (1) the transformation of internal components of Jewish religious and ethnic self-identity in the process of integration and acculturation to the non-Jewish environment, with its array of non-Jewish creeds and profiles of belonging and (2) the resultant preservation of one's own characteristic self precisely by means of its transformation, extending all the way to the ostensible paradox of the sacred conserving itself hidden in the bosom of the profane.

Topics

The array of historical topics to be dealt with at the conference are grouped together under the comprehensive methodological question—termed 'secondary conversion'—of a transformation of Jews, Judaism and Jewries marked in its acculturational processes by melds of hybridity. Central to this focus is the 19th century, and this in a dual sense: (1) the 19th century in its chronological and systematic significance and (2) the 19th century as the century of the scientizing (re-) 'invention' of previous eras. This latter variant in the understanding of the epoch renders it both meaningful and possible to interpret past eras by utilizing the science-historical interpretations emerging at the time.

The conference will foreground the following thematic complexes:

The Jewish experience of emancipation and the formation of theory in the cultural sciences on assimilation, acculturation, syncretizing and hybridity

Paradigms of Jewish transformations and the transmutations of sacredness in the age of Jewish Enlightenment (language, scripture, rite, liturgy)

Jewish 'confessionalization' (denominalization) and 'Protestantization' in the 19th century (Reform, Neo-Orthodoxy, scientizing of Judaism as a discourse of affiliation, etc.)

Hybridity, authenticity and anti-hybridity in the study of deviant Judaism (Hellenizing Jews, Marranos, Sabbatian movement, Frankism, the Dönmeler, etc.)

Ethnic, culturalist and national transformations of Judaism in Eastern Europe (agnostics, atheists, socialists and the hidden sacredness)

Jewish self-Orientalizations in the 19th and 20th century (science, literature, liturgy)

(North) American transformations (pluralism, equality, diversity, Jewish worlds of experience and the genesis of cultural theory)

Secondary conversions and the 'invention' of new Jewries in Israel (Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, etc.)

Individualizations and collectivizations as a paradigmatic dynamic tension in Judaism

Dan Diner

Program of the Conference

Saturday, 22 February

Introduction:

Dan Diner

Scope and Meaning of „Secondary Conversions“

Keynote Lecture:

Todd Endelman, Ann Arbor

Neither Jew nor Christian -

Jewish Proposals for New Religions in Europe
and America, 1815-1935

Sunday, 23 February

I. CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chair: **Stephan Wendehorst**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Sigrid Weigel, Berlin

Epistemics of „Conversion“ -

Conceptual Discourses in the „Kulturwissenschaften“

Amos Morris-Reich, Jerusalem / Simon Dubnow Institute

Physical Anthropology and Linguistic Paradigm -

Franz Boas' Concept of Assimilation as Conversion of Belonging

Moshe Zimmermann, Jerusalem

„Assimilation“ - Reconsidered:

Jewish Emancipation, Acculturation, and other Modes of Interpretation

II. EARLY MODERN HYBRIDIZATIONS

Chair: **Yvonne Kleinmann**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Pawel Maciejko, Oxford
Redefining Judaism from Within:
Frankist Doctrines of Conversion in the Czech Lands

III. RELIGION INTO FAITH

Chair: **Dirk Sadowski**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Shmuel Feiner, Ramat Gan
The Maskilic Narrative of Modernization –
Cultural Conversion and Faith in Transformation

Moshe Pelli, Orlando
The Maskilim's Perception of Modern Judaism –
Forming and Reforming, Vision and Revision

Martin Tremi, Berlin
Mendelssohn's Multiple Masks:
From Philosophy to Critique of Religion?

IV. SECULARIZED THROUGH HISTORY

Chair: **Nicolas Berg**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Verena Dohrn, Göttingen
Secularizing One's Own Otherness:
„Acher“ – Reading within Eastern European Jewry

Nils Römer, Southampton
Paradoxes of Historical Consciousness –
German-Jewish Transformation from Wissenschaft into Faith

Michael Brenner, Munich
Secular Faith of Fallen Jews:
Rewriting Jewish History in the Early 20th Century

V. COMMUNITY TRANSGRESSED

Chair: **Carsten Schapkow**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Andreas Brämer, Hamburg
From Synagogue to Temple –
Modern Patterns of Jewish Piety in Hamburg, 1817–1933

Moshe Shokeid, Tel Aviv
Re-Invented by Sexual Orientation:
Cultural Anthropology of Jewish Gays in America

Monday, 24 February

VI. PERCEPTIONS CONSTRUCTED

Chair: **Markus Kirchhoff**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Doron Mendels, Jerusalem
Challenging Max Weber:
Gedaliah Alon and the Transformation of the Jews

Benjamin Harshav, New Haven
Transformation by Language –
Nation-Building in Hebrew Letters

VII. RELIGION ETHNICIZED

Chair: **Tobias Brinkmann**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Yaakov Ariel, Chapel Hill
Assimilated – Yet Loyal to the Tribe:
Paradoxies of German-Jewish Identity in America

Till van Rahden, Cologne/Chicago
Articulating Difference, Asserting Universalism:
„Germans of the Jewish Stamm“, 1850–1933

Katrin Steffen, Warsaw
Inventing One's Own by the Other –
Jewish Polishness, 1918–1939

VIII. TRANSFORMATION THROUGH LITERATURE

Chair: **Grit Schorch**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Barbara Harshav, New Haven
Sacred Text in Profane Tongue –
Translating Jewish Languages into English

Alfred Bodenheimer, Lucerne / Basel
Emblematics of Marranism –
Abravanel according to Heinrich Heine and Robert Menasse

IX. MODERNITY AND EXISTENTIALITY

Chair: **Sharon Gordon**, Simon Dubnow Institute

Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, Haifa
Between Jewishness and Judaism –
Jewish Modernization Reconsidered

Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jerusalem/ Chicago
Entering the Synagogue Through the Portals of the Church:
Franz Rosenzweig's „Conversion“ to Judaism

CONCLUDING PANEL

Chair: **Dan Diner**

Participants:

Todd Endelman, Ann Arbor

Shmuel Feiner, Ramat Gan

Justin Stagl, Salzburg

Alfonso de Toro, Leipzig

Participants:

Yaakov Ariel (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi (Haifa University)
Nicolas Berg (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Alfred Bodenheimer (Basel University / Lucerne University)
Andreas Brämer (Institute for the History of the German Jews, Hamburg)
Michael Brenner (Munich University)
Tobias Brinkmann (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Dan Diner (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig / The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)
Verena Dohrn (Göttingen University)
Todd Endelman (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
Shmuel Feiner (Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan)
Sharon Gordon (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Barbara Harshav (Yale University, New Haven)
Benjamin Harshav (Yale University, New Haven)
Markus Kirchhoff (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Yvonne Kleinmann (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Pawel Maciejko (St. Hugh's College, Oxford)
Doron Mendels (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)
Paul Mendes-Flohr (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem / The University of Chicago)
Amos Morris-Reich (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem / Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Moshe Pelli (University of Central Florida, Orlando)
Till van Rahden (Cologne University / The University of Chicago)
Nils Römer (University of Southampton)
Dirk Sadowski (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Carsten Schapkow (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Grit Schorch (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Moshe Shokeid (Tel Aviv University)
Justin Stagl (Salzburg University)
Katrin Steffen (German Historical Institute, Warsaw)
Alfonso de Toro (Leipzig University)
Martin Tremml (Centre for Literary Research, Berlin)
Sigrid Weigel (Centre for Literary Research, Berlin)
Stephan Wendehorst (Simon Dubnow Institute, Leipzig)
Moshe Zimmermann (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

Conference Report

Questions revolving around the Jewish sense of belonging and affiliation in modernity were the focus of this year's Annual International Conference of the Simon Dubnow Institute. The concept of „secondary conversion,“ with its paradoxical and provocative signification, was chosen intentionally in order to spur and facilitate a discussion of phenomena of transformation within Judaism beyond the interpretative arena of traditional concepts guiding epistemology, such as 'emancipation,' 'assimilation,' and 'acculturation.' The underlying idea of the conference was to draw on the standard concept of conversion – i.e. individual or collective change from one religion to another – while at the same time seeking to maintain a certain distance from that conception. And then to move on to identify and probe the paradoxes intrinsic to 'conversion' in an extended sense: the rupture of and departure from the traditional boundaries of Judaism, at times radical, while yet remaining within the perimeters of some manner of 'Jewish' existence and identity, however defined. Presentations also addressed the often hybrid forms of cultural transformation here inscribed.

Dan Diner stressed in his introduction that the concept was intended to generate a more powerful and probing cultural-anthropological approach to these phenomena of inner Jewish transformations. He

emphasized that the term 'conversion' also connoted the aspect of 'transgression,' the overstepping of traditional boundaries, at times quite stressful; it also denoted the act of changing religion. The modifier „secondary,“ in Diner's view, signified the circumstance that these transformations took place within the ambit of Judaism itself. Though it should be borne in mind that those who negotiated these transitions redefined repeatedly and anew what they understood by 'Judaism' and 'Jewishness.' Common to these blueprints of Jewish belonging was the fact that they were all situated in a semiotic space beyond the traditional conceived notion of Judaism. They were manifested as a transformation of Jewish religion into a 'religious affiliation' or 'denomination' (its Konfessionalisierung) or 'Protestantization' in various configurations in Western and Central Europe, or in forms of a collective, secular-national(-ist) understanding of Judaism in Europe's East. Yet one of the basic assumptions of the concept underlying the conference was that in all these transformations of Jewish emblematics – from sacred to secular – residues of the sacred characterizing the traditions laid aside were nonetheless retained. These were manifested in a distinctive manner in the thinking, culture and language of the transformed identity. One of the principal aims of the conference was to identify these emblems and elements of the sacred beyond religion as quasi-non-alienable core components of what is Jewish, even in collective and individual constructs of belonging in modern and secular versions.

As became evident in the course of the conference, it was not always possible for the presenters and participants to overstep the perimeters of traditional patterns of interpretation and open their apertures of approach in a substantive way to the suggested concept of „secondary conversion.“ This difficulty remained, even though the conference organizers had made it clear right from the start that the concept had not been chosen to dislodge or supplant time-tested concepts such as 'emancipation,' 'assimilation' and 'acculturation' etc., or to impinge on their spheres of validity and interpretative potential. Rather, its foregrounding was intended to facilitate a certain shift in perspective, allowing the inclusion of concepts from cultural anthropology and post-colonial studies – most especially the notion of 'hybridity' – in order to press forward down these pathways toward new insights. It became evident in commentary and reaction to the presentations and exchange between papers and panels, where the validity and applicability of the concept of „secondary conversion“ were discussed, at times very heatedly, that the selection of this concept and its inclusion in the conference title had succeeded in spurring critical thought about traditional and new concepts in historical inquiry. Many presenters also endeavored in their papers to deal with the concept and its interpretative potential, seeking to integrate it into their analyses.

The conference was opened by a keynote lecture by Todd Endelman (Ann Arbor), known for his research on Jewish conversion to Christianity in modern times. Endelman discussed the phenomenon of Jewish proposals for new religions in Europe and America in the period 1815–1939. Among European and American Jews who no longer practiced their ancestral religion and wished to distance themselves from the Jewish collective, there were a small number who were incapable of embracing Christianity, because its theology was as unacceptable to them, as was the system of tenets and axioms of faith of traditional Judaism. Despite their alienation from revealed religions, some of them still believed that religion in general was both spiritually necessary and socially desirable. To resolve their predicament – theists of Jewish origin in a Christian world who wanted to be neither Jews nor Christians – they envisioned, created, or joined new religions of a universalistic character. Endelman presented a survey of these movements in America and different European countries. Most of the proposals remained no more than visionary blueprints. Nonetheless, despite their lack of success and their undeniable naiveté and eccentricity, they merit serious attention, for they are powerful testimonials to the assimilationist impulse in European and American Jewish communities between the end of the Napoleonic era and the Second World War. These movements instantiate a partial conversion, though not a full completion of the process of crossing boundaries.

The second day of the conference opened with a session focusing on the conceptualization and terminology of „(secondary) conversion,“ which dealt more generally with the notion of assimilation into

a wider society. Sigrid Weigel (Berlin) explored the epistemics of „conversion“ in modern cultural studies. She focused on the interpretation of the term „conversion“ by two Jewish writers, Heinrich Heine and Walter Benjamin, conceptualizing „conversion“ as the essence of secularization and relating it to the problem of „convertibility.“ Heine interpreted „conversion“ as an act of economic exchange, where an individual is provided with an entrance ticket to the wider civil society. Benjamin perceived „conversion“ as an essential part of capitalism, by which one converts but at the same time is also converted, in the general process of modernization. Generally, „conversion“ within secularization means transformation of materials, money, individuals and groups. Weigel presented the Jewish position in modernity as a contrasting experience of the impossibility of a simple, total and one-dimensional conversion, since in Jewish secularization, conversions are also accompanied by other transformation processes. Amos Morris-Reich (Leipzig and Jerusalem) shifted the focus from cultural studies to the history of anthropology. He discussed conversion in terms of assimilation, as manifested in the work of Franz Boas, the founder of cultural anthropology. In the sphere of physical anthropology, Boas repeatedly deconstructed racist notions of identity, revealing them as scientifically baseless. In his cultural studies, Boas regarded the spoken languages of various primitive groups as the embodiment of their irreplaceable and irreducible individuality. Boas supported the assimilation of the Jews and repeatedly argued that the Jews had already assimilated physically, as an integral part of his representation of man as a fundamentally assimilated species. To insist on the assimilated linguistic character of the Jews would have countered the conception that distinct individuality is fashioned through the instrumentality of language. Thus, while Boas in his physical anthropology supported assimilation, his linguistic anthropology stressed the distinctive and indigenous individuality of groups and resisted identity change. Moshe Zimmermann (Jerusalem), questioned whether the term „secondary conversion“ was able to replace the old concept of „assimilation.“ He argued that assimilation is wider than „secondary conversion“ in its scope of signification, and thus is more useful, since the term „secondary conversion“ excludes departures from Judaism after a border crossing, while they are still regarded as an assimilatory response. He further argued that „secondary conversion“ cannot serve as a neutralized term for „assimilation,” since „conversion,” especially in its Hebrew equivalent „hamara,” is laden with negative connotations and historical memory, and provokes emotional responses. The third argument Zimmermann mustered to interrogate the use of „secondary conversion“ was based on its religious roots. These apply a theological approach to the analysis of secularization and modernization. For these reasons, in Zimmermann’s view, „assimilation“ still remains the term of choice for historians.

Pawel Maciejko (Oxford) examined early modern transformation processes and hybridizations of Jewish religiosity as a result of conversion movements. He looked at these processes instantiated in the Frankist movement in the 18th century in Poland and Bohemia/Moravia. While most of the Frankists in the Kingdom of Poland-Lithuania converted to Roman Catholicism in the wake of the Lvov Disputation of 1759, becoming a kind of crypto-Jewish sect, many followers of Frank in Habsburg Bohemia and Moravia did not renounce their Jewish faith and remained actively involved in the affairs of the Jewish community. They sought a redefinition of Judaism from within, inter alia through a new interpretation of traditional texts and tenets of faith in the light of Frankist doctrine. While they construed Frank’s conversion in terms of mystical aspects, affirming this step, they were at the same time vehement in condemning any assimilation to the Christian environment.

The following panel dealt with the Haskala and its effects on the individual Jew and Jewish society in the late 18th and early 19th century. Shmuel Feiner (Ramat Gan) began his presentation citing from reports by young Maskilim at the end of the 18th century narrating about their experience in moving from the traditional ambit of Jewish life to the world of the Enlightenment. Frequently this move was evinced as a kind of conversion, with the associated feelings and emblematics of the forbidden, of transgression and danger. Against the backdrop of the individual and collective experiences of the Maskilim, Feiner proposed to see Jewish Enlightenment as a ‘cultural conversion.’ On the intellectual plane, an active interest in philosophy, science and literature supplanted the traditional ideal of Talmudic erudition. At the same time, the social and cultural self-understanding of these individuals changed. They saw themselves

more and more as members of a new elite competing with the traditional rabbinical establishment. A part of cultural conversion was also the sense of being separate and separated from the past, of belonging to an epoch characterized by Enlightenment, tolerance and progress, a primary wellspring from which the Maskilic narrative of modernization drank. Moshe Pelli (Orlando) agreed with Feiner that the Haskala was a dramatic cultural turn within European Jewry, but he placed more emphasis on the reformist aspects of the change rather than its revolutionary facets. Pelli showed how the Maskilim made use of the traditional emblematics of rabbinical culture, the external forms of traditional erudition and its representation, in a manner that smacked almost of mimicry. In their conventions, style and institutions, they often appropriated the model of rabbinical culture. The introduction of Maskilic 'approbations' for Enlightened works, following the example of the traditional *haskamot*, or the use of rabbinical honorary titles for venerated, prominent Maskilim, are evidence of this practice. By contrast, the projects of the Maskilim were clearly more radical in their content, since they aspired to nothing less than the creation of a counterculture to vie with rabbinical Judaism and the crystallization of a new Jewish identity in the sense of the ideals of European Enlightenment. Martin Treml (Berlin) focused on one of the key figures of Jewish Enlightenment, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786). Given his position as a proactive intermediary between the different worlds of traditional Judaism, European Enlightenment and the Haskala, Mendelssohn, as a radical philosopher and observant Orthodox Jew, is the individual showcase example for cultural hybridity in that phase of transformation of German Jewry. His way of life, thought and writing led him to employ multiple 'masks.' Changing of registers and adapting to the respective cultural code enabled him to negotiate this path between the worlds. After he had made a name for himself as a rational philosopher of Enlightenment with his work *Phädon* and other writings, repeated demands by Christian scholars for him to convert challenged him to a defense of Judaism, imposing on Mendelssohn the „literary hide-and-peek game of a Marrano style of writing” (Klaus Briegleb on Heine).

The fourth panel dealt with the role played by historical consciousness and historiography in the process of the modernization and secularization of Judaism. Verena Dohrn (Göttingen) presented her views on the modern reading of the mythologem of 'Aher' (the 'Other') in East European Judaism. The Tannaite Elisha ben Abuya known by this name is considered to be the archetype of „heretical Otherness,” in contrast with Torah-true traditional Judaism. Dohrn showed how the Russian Maskilim of the 19th century made use of the 'Aher' narrative in order to justify their own deviation from the traditional interpretations of Judaism and Jewish religion, and thus in a word their modernity. In his *Book of Life*, the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow likewise interpreted in retrospect his own break with the traditional Jewish life-world by recourse to the 'Aher' paradigm, which became a kind of leitmotif in his memoirs. Nils Römer (Southampton) explored the changes in Jewish-German historiography and philosophy of history in the course of the 19th century, its transformation from 'science' into 'faith.' After the crystallization and development of a Jewish historiography in Germany from Jost to Graetz that was oriented to Enlightenment and Reform, toward the end of the 19th century the perspective shifted. The task of Jewish historiography came to be seen more and more in the renewal of the religious ties of the Jews and a new definition of their identity. One indicator that pointed up this new tendency was the public interest that emerged in the 1880s in the founder of the Science of Judaism, Leopold Zunz, in his role as a leading spiritual and religious figure. Römer argued that Franz Rosenzweig's „flight from history” should also be viewed in terms of a quasi-religious attribution of meaning via history. According to Michael Brenner (Munich), the historicizing of Judaism resulted in a broad array of Jewish definitions of self-identity in the early 20th century. In place of the classic Science of Judaism, the predominant narratives that emerged were the concept of Jewish autonomy in Eastern Europe, Palestine-centered Zionism and West European diasporic individualism. In Brenner's view, the key period in this process were the 1920s and 30s, marked by the publication of Dubnow's *Weltgeschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, the establishment of YIVO in Vilna, the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and the creation of programs in Jewish Studies at Oxford and Columbia. Brenner examined these developments making use of the relevant writings and statements by Simon Dubnow, Benzion Dinur und Yitzhak Baer. He directed special attention to the Jewish historians in the Diaspora, especially Salo Baron und Cecil Roth. In their

counterposing of Diaspora to Zion and persecution to integration, both men in their way contributed to the formation of a modern Jewish identity in the Diaspora.

The Reform movement which emerged in the 1820s should of course also be included in the spectrum of individual or collective „secondary conversions“ in modern Judaism. In a lucid and exacting lecture, Andreas Brämer (Hamburg) sketched the history of the Hamburg Tempelverein, marked by the challenge of traditions which, though seemingly antiquated, community members did not wish to risk a total rupture with. Alongside familiar signature components of Reform worship, such as a Reformed liturgy, sermons in German and organ accompaniment, important basic conceptions of Judaism were retained. Though this period was decisive for the success of the Reform movement, and thus is the abiding focus of attention in historiography, Brämer stressed that a comprehensive look at the entire span of the history of the Tempel from 1817 to its forced closing in 1938, including all its crises and retreats, shows that this „secondary conversion“ should not be interpreted as a linear process leading to a clear and unambiguous result. The anthropologist Moshe Shokeid (Tel Aviv) explored another kind of border crossing or overstepping of traditional community structures. Based on the findings of his own field work, he examined the self-image and search for identity of Jewish homosexuals in the United States. Gays and lesbians from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform homes who, after 'coming out' had withdrawn voluntarily or involuntarily from their original surroundings and were in some instances alienated from their religion, founded a number of gay synagogues in the 1970s in the quest for spirituality and social community. In the framework of these communities and synagogues, they learned that their sexual difference did not necessarily have to stand in the path of their longing to find themselves in terms of a religious identity. While the external forms of worship and communal life – a mixture of hippy lifestyle, Chassidism and conventional Judaism – initially reflected a kind of 'religious hybridity,' the phenomena later increasingly gave way to a clearer and more pronounced version of 'mainstream' Judaism.

Doron Mendels (Jerusalem) presented a paper on the Israeli historian Gedaliah Alon, focusing on Alon's book *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 C.E.)*, which he described as an expression of „secondary conversion“ of a Jew from an East European Orthodox background to a modern national understanding of Jewishness. In an effort to distance himself from Max Weber's notion of the Jews as 'pariah people' in antiquity, Alon, already as a student in Berlin in the 1920s, began to form and consolidate his later historical views. Yet unlike Dubnow or Graetz, Alon did not interpret the Talmudic era as an age of decline. Rather, he evaluated Hellenization as something positive, regarding this phase as a cultural and political high point in late ancient Judaism. On the one hand, Alon stressed the parallel development between Jewish history and universal history; on the other, he also emphasized the autonomy of Jewish life in Palestine in that period. Benjamin Harshav (New Haven) interpreted the change in Eastern European Jewry since the 19th century as the „modern Jewish revolution,“ concentrating especially on the Jews in Czarist Russia and their cultural and linguistic behavior. Those Jews found themselves faced with the option of adopting the languages of the non-Jewish world around them or of developing their own secular culture in Yiddish or Hebrew. Harshav argued that both the transition to using non-Jewish languages and the secular, modern use of Hebrew and Yiddish could be interpreted as „secondary conversion.“ He stressed that no matter what paths the Jews took toward secularization and modernization, they were still shaped by pre-modern linguistic and cultural patterns embodying residual elements of traditional identity and affiliation. That was also the case when Jews adopted the languages of their surrounding environment. Harshav conjectured thus that not only the writings of Sholem Aleichem were marked by a dialogic, non-linear and non-narrative Talmudic structure – this was also manifest, for example, in works by Freud and Kafka.

A further panel focused on the transformation of Jewish belonging from the basis of religious distinction into social belonging based on ethnic self-understanding. Yaakov Ariel (Chapel Hill) discussed the manners of German Jews who were assimilated fully into white middle-class American norms and culture. In their socioeconomic circumstances, manners, dress, and language, there was little that differentiated them from their non-Jewish upper class Anglo-Saxon neighbors. But while German Jews

were non-observant by traditional norms, they had not abandoned Judaism. Conversions to Christianity were rare and intermarriage remained at a very low rate. Moreover, German Jews were active Jews who experimented with religious reforms. Ariel asserted that the American German-Jewish experience of being fully 'assimilated' yet socially insular, cosmopolitan in aspiration yet loyal to the tribe, stood as a factor in the background. This hybrid existence helps to explain Reform Jewish theology during that period, and could be understood as „secondary conversion.“ Till van Rahden (Cologne/Chicago) analyzed the inner struggle for justification of the existence of Jewish identity in the liberal and national discourse of modern Germany. German discourse of the nation-state and society appears to be liberal in its bearings, calling for homogeneity. The process of „becoming national“ can also be understood as one in which individuals and groups come to accept or engage beliefs, ideas, rituals, or practices often radically different from those with which they began, i.e. a process of conversion. There was a call in practical terms from Jews, Catholics and Protestants for some kind of pluralism. This meant the calibrating of a balance between unity and diversity. In this process, a pathway on which Jews searched for a particular existence within the general nation, they adopted the concept of „tribe“ (Stamm). This term was particularly attractive to German Jews because it was well-established in general German political discourse, expressing a legitimate form of cultural and ethnic difference, and thus contributed to their „self-formation.“ Another relationship between the particular and the general was presented by Katrin Steffen (Warsaw), who explored the experience of Jews in Poland. Large segments of Polish Jewry in the new inter-war Poland (1918-1939) transformed religion into nationality, into an ethnic understanding of their existence in many different ways. One of them was via adoption of Polish cultural and historical traditions and language in order to invent a specific, new and distinctive secular Jewish-Polish form of identity. This amalgamation of Polish and Jewish traditions was based on an effort to retain and transform what was one's „own“ while adopting and transforming the „other.“ Undoubtedly it was an ambivalent phenomenon, but not arbitrary, situated on the borderline between two worlds, a form of cultural hybridization.

Barbara Harshav (New Haven) focused on the problematics of translating texts from modern Hebrew into English. These two tongues function as secular and modern languages, yet both are shaped by a powerful religious tradition, based on historical fundamental texts, with multiple meanings and a variety of connotations. Translating from modern Hebrew into English, one should consider the different layers of meanings, which can never be fully achieved. Harshav mentioned a major problem translating another Jewish language – Yiddish – into English. As Yiddish words are used or interpolated today in American English, they often have a specific comic meaning. It is therefore difficult to use these words in a serious context and they are divorced from their original signification. Alfred Bodenheimer (Basel) presented the symbolism of the Marrano in modern Jewish literature . He focused on the role of the Marrano figure Isaak Abravanel in Heine's novella *Der Rabbi von Bacherach*. Abravanel finds himself in the limbo between Judaism and Christianity, defining himself as a „pagan.“ In a way, Heine, himself a convert from Judaism, reflects his own narrative in this figure. Another reflection of the author's self through the figure of a Marrano, also by the name of Abravanel, appears in the work of the contemporary author Robert Menasse, himself of Jewish background. In his novel *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* (2001), the author expresses the estrangement of being a 'Jew who is not a Jew' in contemporary Austrian society. Thus, Heine and Menasse both thematize the inability of secularism to close the gap between Jews and the surrounding society – i.e. „secondary conversions“ where they are left in a hybrid zone of „paganism.“

Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi (Haifa) dealt in his presentation with the individual Jewish experience of modernization. Analyzing the conversion of individuals to modernity reveals the high price involved – a total rejection of the past in a kind of post-traditionalization, encompassing much of the realm of the family and its traditions. Conversion derives out of rebellion against one's parents, and thus is conversion to modernity. Beit-Hallahmi presented two aspects of individual life where rupture with the past is involved. Examining Jewish Nobel prize laureates, he noted that they are characterized by creativity and contempt for tradition. A survey of Israeli names shows a clear tendency to abandon traditional names and adopt newly coined secular names. Paul Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem/Chicago) discussed Franz

Rosenzweig's „conversion“ to Judaism. He mentioned the fact that Rosenzweig's experience and understanding of Judaism was Christian in nature: the dynamics of Rosenzweig's return to Judaism reflected a „Christian conversion;“ he perceived Judaism as a spiritual and theological religion etc. Rosenzweig viewed the synagogue as a liturgical community, a perspective clearly rooted in Christian theology of the Church. The liturgical community of the synagogue and the Church experienced a process of broadening in the 19th century, and lost its sacred nature. Mendes-Flohr emphasized his positive view of Rosenzweig's application of Christian theology to Judaism. This is derived from the fact that Judaism has always been a religion that absorbed influences throughout history, and should be regarded as the classical example of a hybrid religion. The individual „secondary conversion“ of Rosenzweig is a link in the long chain of inner transgressions within Judaism, and thus part of the Jewish experience.

In the concluding panel of the conference, Todd Endelman expressed the need for an alternative term to „assimilation.“ „Secondary conversion“ refers to the phenomenon of transformation, which is common to almost all Jewish movements in modern times. Yet this term has certain unintended connotations. Consequently, it cannot replace „assimilation,“ and there should be further search for an alternative expression. Justin Stagl (Salzburg) looked at the meanings of primary conversion, socially a transition from one community to another, and a movement in social and cultural space. This action engenders feelings of guilt in the convert and a feeling of loss in the group he leaves behind. The most interesting case is the second stage, by which borders are dissolved. All this can be applied to the transitions from pre-modernity to modernity. Yet the term „secondary conversions“ is applicable only if it can be applied to other groups, not just Jews, and other transitions as well. Alfonso de Toro (Leipzig) applied „secondary conversions“ to the post-colonial experience. In this perspective, „secondary conversions“ are conceived as an approach to „the other“ on an epistemological level as a category which retains diversity. Methodologically, this term bespeaks an interdisciplinary approach, and should be understood in terms of a theory of the culture of hybridity as an exchange between heterogeneous and unified elements. Shmuel Feiner approved the coinage „secondary conversion“ for two reasons. First, he understands the work of the historian as initiating new approaches through new concepts, i.e. conceptual innovation. Second, the term is useful because it signifies not just the transformation but the pain involved in this process as well, as is clearly the case in the Enlightenment period. Dan Diner closed the panel noting that the concept „secondary conversion“ is nourished by the aura of paradox. This paradox is placed in the realm of a change that goes as deep as a conversion – a conversion, however, which does not lead to a change in religious faith. Not the person's belief is transformed, but his religion is transmuted alongside the rites and emblematics of other faiths. The understanding of Jewish time, based on the sacred and insofar on eternity, is transformed into the notions of history.

Dirk Sadowski / Sharon Gordon