



## 5779 / 2018-19 Programme

Unless stated otherwise, all meetings start at **8:00pm** with tea served at the end of the meeting. The venue is the **Marian Oppenheim Hall, Edinburgh Hebrew Congregation, 4 Salisbury Road.**

### Opening of the season 4 November 2018

#### **Keith Kahn-Harris (Leo Baeck College), 'Antisemitism and divisions over Israel in Diaspora Jewish communities: The exploitation of Jewish difference'**

Divisions over Israel have become an increasingly significant feature of Diaspora Jewish communities in recent years, leading at times to serious and bitter conflicts. These divisions have begun to be recognised outside Jewish communities as well, and in some cases have been leveraged by those accused of antisemitism to provide 'alibis' for their words and deeds. All but the most extreme antisemites can find sections of Jewish opinion that will indemnify them. In this talk I will give some examples of this emerging phenomenon on both the political left and right, in order to demonstrate that the controversy over antisemitism in the Labour Party is part of a much broader phenomenon.

**Keith Kahn-Harris** is a senior lecturer at Leo Baeck College, an associate lecturer at Birkbeck College and runs the European Jewish Research Archive at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. His books include: *Denial: The Unspeakable Truth* (2018) *Uncivil War: The Israel Conflict in the Jewish Community* (2014), *Judaism: All That Matters* (2012) and (with Ben Gidley) *Turbulent Times: The British Jewish Community Today*.

**2018**

**25 November: Nasar Meer, 'Antisemitism and Islamophobia: comparisons and connections'**

In this talk, Nasar Meer will argue that antisemitism and Islamophobia should not be isolated from either each other or from other forms of racial discrimination. To this end, and in addition to 'comparing', we also need to 'connect' more than is presently the case. Conceptually this means drawing upon social and political repertoires of racialisation (or race-making) to illustrate the conceptual and empirical relationships between antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of racism.

**Nasar Meer** is Professor of Race, Identity and Citizenship in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. His recent publications in this area include: (2013) 'Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (3), 385-398. (2013) 'Semantics, Scales and Solidarities', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (3), 500-515. A short blog on the theme is available here: <http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/assets/Meer-Challenging-Antisemitism-and-Islamophobia-Together.pdf>.

**9 December: Alf (Lord) Dubs, 'The refugee crisis and the human rights response'**

Lord Dubs will discuss UK policies on child refugees, the EU situation, movement across the Mediterranean, source countries (especially in the Middle East), and wider global issues. He will also consider the international response to refugee and migration flows, and what might be the responsibilities of the international community. He will look at the way the migration issue is being exploited by far-right political parties.

**Alf Dubs** arrived in the UK in 1939 on a *Kindertransport* from Prague. He was educated at the London School of Economics and worked as a local government officer before entering politics, serving as MP for Battersea, 1979 to 1987. He was CEO of the Refugee Council from 1988 until 1995, entering the House of Lords in 1994 as a Labour Working Peer and becoming a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, 1997 to 1999. He has campaigned on behalf of unaccompanied child refugees, and still continues in this activity.

**2019**

**20 January: Frank Dabba Smith, 'On Jews in the development of photography'**

As a study of both corporate and individual behaviour in the context of Nazi Germany, Frank Dabba Smith's research concerning Ernst Leitz II – the liberal-left entrepreneur who owned the Leica camera factory in Wetzlar – seeks to build on understandings of the behaviour of businesses during this period. Very unusually, persecuted Jews and non-Jews were helped by Leitz through receiving training and or employment, being supported to leave Germany and to gain employment when abroad and, additionally, employees subjected to criminal prosecutions benefitting from timely interventions. Ambivalence is present, however, when considering the public face of Leitz during this period, the production of in-house designed armaments and utilising forced labour from Ukraine.

**Frank Dabba Smith** earned his first degree in Linguistic Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley. After working as a photographer and teacher, he trained to be a liberal rabbi at Leo Baeck College in London and has served since 1997 at Mosaic Liberal Synagogue (formerly known as Harrow and Wembley Progressive Synagogue). His PhD dissertation at University College London (UCL) is concerned with the behaviour of the camera manufacturer Ernst Leitz of Wetzlar during the Holocaust. He serves on the International Advisory Committee of EcoPeace-Middle East, as Vice-Chair of the Brent Multi-faith Forum, on the Independent Advisory Group of the Metropolitan Police in the London Borough of Brent and as a trustee for Berakah-Arts.

**10 February: David Rosenberg, 'London's Radical Jewish East End – an illustrated talk'**

Between the 1880s and the First World War, London's East End was transformed by the arrival of around 150,000 Jewish immigrants from the Tsarist Russian empire. The East End, the traditional immigrant quarter of London for hundreds of years, was described by contemporary writers as "the hell of poverty" and "the Empire of hunger". But it was also the cradle of struggles for better lives and many Jewish immigrants played a very full part in these struggles, creating their own newspapers and workers' clubs, leading strikes for better conditions, forming workers cooperatives, campaigning against those who wanted to deport them, and building joint struggles with non-Jews also fighting for social justice.

**David Rosenberg** is an educator, teacher-trainer, writer, and tour guide specialising London's radical history. He is the author of *Battle for the East End*, (Five Leaves Publications, 2011) and *Rebel Footprints: a guide to uncovering London's Radical History*, (Pluto Press, 2015). See also [www.eastendwalks.com](http://www.eastendwalks.com).

**24 February: Phil Alexander, 'From Vitebsk to Glasgow: A tale of two cantors'**

Phil will talk about two important figures of Scottish Jewish music: Meyer Fomin and Isaac Hirshow. Both men were born in Vitebsk in the 1880s, both trained in Warsaw, and both moved with their families to Glasgow at the beginning of the 1920s, where they would remain for the rest of their lives. The first part of this talk will concentrate on these two cantors as part of early 20th century Eastern Europe's lively Ashkenazi musical life, where their careers spanned liturgical music, Yiddish song and classical performance. We will then listen to and discuss some of their work upon arriving in Scotland, looking at how much this musical material represents the East of their birth and training, and in what ways it reflects their new immigrant identities.

**Phil Alexander** is a Research Associate at the University of Glasgow, working on the 'Jewish Lives/Scottish Spaces' project. He has published articles on silence in Berlin and salsa in Scotland, and is currently completing a monograph exploring the diversity and complexity of Berlin's contemporary klezmer and Yiddish music scene. He is also a busy musician, leading the acclaimed band Moishe's Bagel and performing regularly with many of the UK's finest folk and jazz musicians.

**10 March: Anne Perez, 'Holy fathers, virtuous wives, and apostate sons: Zionism, conversion, and the question of who is a Jew'**

This talk will explore the way Zionists grappled with the issue of conversion to and from Judaism during the formative years of the Zionist movement and the early state of Israel. What role did conversion play in developing a definition of Jewishness as it related to religion, ethnicity, and after the establishment of Israel, citizenship? Zionists did not have a uniform answer to this question, and we will examine some key examples and junctures where this enduring question came to the fore in dramatic ways.

**Anne Perez** earned her PhD in History from the University of California, Davis in 2018, during which she was a doctoral fellow of both the Posen Foundation and Israel Institute. While her dissertation focused on conversion and the Zionist movement, her wider research interests deal with the intersections of religion and nationalism especially in contexts of conflict and inequality. Her article "Apostasy of a Prince: Hans Herzl and the Boundaries of Jewish Nationalism" has been published in the *Association for Jewish Studies Review*. She currently resides outside Edinburgh.

**7 April: Brendan McGeever, 'The Bolsheviks and antisemitism in the Russian Revolution'**

Based on archival materials gathered in Ukraine, Russia and the United States, this talk will explore the significance of antisemitism in the Russian Revolution. In doing so, it will examine how class politics could sometimes overlap with antisemitism, not just on the right, as is well known, but on the left as well, and in the Red Army in particular. In addition, the lecture will explore the as-yet untold history of how the Bolsheviks responded to the antisemitism that emerged within their own ranks. By bringing into focus the forms of individual and collective agency that actualised the Soviet response to antisemitism, the talk will challenge long-held assumptions about the Bolshevik record in this area.

**Brendan McGeever** is Lecturer in the Sociology of Racialization and Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London. He is the author of *The Bolsheviks and Antisemitism in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). For the academic year 2017-2018, he was Acting Associate Director of the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London.

**28 April: Svetlana Pogodina, 'Tradition then and now: The practice of namegiving in Jewish Russian-speaking communities of Latvia, Russia and Transnistria'**

Namegiving practices are central to traditional cultures. This talk will focus on the problem of choosing and giving names in Ashkenazi Jewish families before and after World War II in the territory of the former Pale of Settlement. We will also look at the problem of transforming the traditional Jewish names into Russian or Latvian. The material for this talk was gathered during oral interviews during ethnographic fieldwork in Latvia (Latgale region), Russia (Brjansk and Smolensk regions) and Transnistria (Tiraspol, Kamenka, Rybnica, Bendery). All the interviews were recorded in Russian, Latvian and partially in Yiddish.

**Svetlana Pogodina** is lecturer in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Latvia, and an assistant in the Riga museum "Jews in Latvia". She has participated in the ethnographic expeditions organised by the Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization "Sefer" to Latvia, Russia and Transnistria. Her research interests are Slavic traditional culture, Urban folklore, Ethnocultural stereotypes, Jewish folklore, and Yiddish Cinema.