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On Scholarship as Visiting Research Fellow (2010-2011)

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Charlotte de Rothschild: Her Life in a Prism of Her Diaries

The common themes in my dissertation are the facets of the self of a German-Jewish woman living in England. The self develops on the basis of different identities which can be well observed in the diaries. The multi-leveled character and transnational identity of a Jewish woman in the nineteenth century is the centre of my attention. The Rothschild Archive in London contains the diaries of Charlotte de Rothschild (1819-1884), one of the most important women in the English branch of the Rothschild family. My research basis are the diaries written by Charlotte de Rothschild, a highly regarded personality within the family and her relatives, in German from the years 1846-1859, which have not been explored at all. The diary belongs to the most important ego-documents in which especially the autobiographic aspect and the introspection become manifested and which generate the basis of the lived identity and its constitution. Additional sources are a year calendar in English, a diary in French as well as private letters to her husband and children written in German and English. On this sample I would like to reconstruct the identity of this mainly German-writing Jewish woman living in 'exile'. Her diaries should be analyzed primarily from the historical-anthropological point of view in the frame of which my questions can be answered most appropriately. As the method of my work I chose the historical anthropology of German provenance. This method offers the space to find the suitable instrumentarium for the description and interpretation. The paradigm of the historical anthropology cannot be determined by a clearly defined spectrum of methods. At the same time a set of obligatory guide lines follows results from the history of the paradigm and from its commitment to human history and the human experience. Historical anthropology springs from the emphasis on the individual, the historical protagonist. Exactly for this reason, historical anthropology elevates microhistory to the status of a paradigm. Microhistory represents the concentration of the research on a small and assessable area. This open discipline offers enough free space to find an appropriate tool. In identity research, especially in the case of multi-identity, Clifford Geertz's "thick description" is the fittest, because it attempts to describe and analyze why people behave the way they behave.