



Viola Rautenberg

On Scholarship Visiting Research Assistant (2009-10) from the Institute for German-Jewish History, Hamburg

viola.rautenberg@gmail.com

Gender History of the German-Jewish Immigration to Palestine in the 1930s

In my PhD project I use the category of gender for the historical analysis of the German – Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1930s. Although many different aspects of the “German Aliya” have been described, very little academic research has been conducted on the social organization of the relationship between the sexes. This historiographical gap begs for a study.

Within the fifth Aliya some 50,000 German Jews reached Palestine in the 1930s. Their lives were turned upside down by the immigration process: climate, mentality, political system, language – nearly everything in their new homeland seemed strange and often repulsive, provisionally and backward. The Yekkes were not a homogeneous group but differed from earlier immigration waves in certain aspects (e.g. higher average age, better education, higher amount of immigrants entering with the capitalist certificate, higher amount of middle class members). The absorbing Yishuv community was characterized by immigrants from Eastern Europe that suspected the new immigrants of endangering the socialist achievements and refusal of assimilation. Not only different concepts of Zionism, religious tradition and culture clashed here but 2 models of Jewishness: the German, or Western and the Eastern European Jewry. The latter turned out to be the leading model in sense of culture and religion in the Yishuv society while the Yekkes (who felt superior in this conflict while in Germany) found themselves to be a minority here.

As gender is as an historical phenomenon subjected to historical change it is safe to assume that the migration process had a deep impact on the gender-relations of the immigrating group and vice versa. With this project I investigate how the process of immigration and absorption was experienced, shaped and remembered by men and women, how constructions of masculinity and femininity were challenged during this process and how the conception of the family valid in German Jewish surroundings was altered in Palestine.