



Avnir | Halpern | Lau | Pigorsch | Wilke [Eds.]

Siddy Wronsky

Sand und Sterne – חול וכוכבים – Sand and Stars

Edition of the 1930's Novel in the Context
of Jewish History, Gender and Social Work



Nomos

DZI

Yehudit Avnir | Ayana Halpern | Dayana Lau
Stephanie Pigorsch | Burkhard Wilke [Eds.]

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The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

1st Edition 2025

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Published by

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG
Waldseestraße 3–5 | 76530 Baden-Baden
www.nomos.de

Production of the printed version:

Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG
Waldseestraße 3–5 | 76530 Baden-Baden

ISBN 978-3-7560-1622-8 (Print)

ISBN 978-3-7489-4081-4 (ePDF)

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748940814>



Online Version
Nomos eLibrary



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Preface

Anyone who performs, teaches or learns social work also deals with its roots, with the development of the profession and discipline from a historical perspective. A sound knowledge of this helps to classify continuities and breaks and provides orientation for shaping the future. We are extremely pleased to be able to make a contribution to the historical research of social work and the further development of knowledge about the origins of social work with this book. It is the result of intensive research using current digital approaches and a trusting collaboration between Israeli and German stakeholders.

Siddy (Sidonie) Wronsky (1882-1947) was an important social reformer and social worker. She embodies the close connection between German social work and Zionist ideas, as she was active both in welfare work in Germany and later in the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine. She was involved in the civic, especially the Jewish women's movement. Her commitment to supporting those in need and establishing coordinated welfare structures in Berlin in the first half of the 20th century made her an influential figure in the professionalization and academization of social work in Germany and Israel.

Born in Berlin, Siddy Wronsky was a board member from 1914, chairwoman from 1918 and then, from 1923 to 1933, the first full-time managing director of the "Archiv für Wohlfahrtspflege" (Archive of Welfare Work), which was renamed the "Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen" (German Central Institute for Social Issues, DZI) in 1964. She was the editor of the "Deutsche Zeitschrift für Wohlfahrtspflege" (German Journal of Welfare Work), the predecessor of the journal "Soziale Arbeit" (Social Work), which is now published by the DZI together with the Berlin Senate Department for Labor, Social Affairs, Equality, Integration, Diversity and Anti-Discrimination. Under Wronsky's leadership, an extensive collection of specialist literature and cases for social work was compiled and the Institute's documentation activities were stringently systematized. In this way, she further consolidated the Institute's self-image as part of professional social work, as laid down by Jeannette Schwerin. To this day, the DZI in Berlin continues to perform fundamentally important work in the area of scientific infrastructure and thus also disciplinary legitimization for social

work in practice and science, as well as in providing information and independent monitoring in order to enhance professionalism, effectiveness, and trust in donation-soliciting civil society organizations. Without social workers like Siddy Wronsky, these important pillars for professionalized social work and more trustworthy civil engagement would not exist today.

After Hitler came to power, Siddy Wronsky was forced to emigrate. She took her knowledge and experience with her to Palestine, where she was invited to set up the first school for social work in Jerusalem. She was instrumental in establishing modern training, practice and structures for social work in Palestine. Siddy Wronsky died in Jerusalem on December 8th 1947, just a few months before the state of Israel was founded.

With “Sand and Stars”, the novelist Wronsky was unexpectedly discovered. This work opens up a view of Siddy Wronsky’s artistic work and gives an insight into her vision of a new future in the spirit of Zionism. What makes it special is that it is a work that was previously unpublished. The manuscript was found in the Central Zionist Archives (CZA, file number A149/10) in Jerusalem in 2017 as part of Dr. Ayana Halpern’s scientific activities. She was researching there, under the academic supervision of Prof. John Gal and Dr. Yehudit Avnir, for her dissertation on the transfer of knowledge between Jewish-German social workers and the development of social work in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. This was associated with the opportunity to further develop research on the person of Siddy Wronsky, which was significantly advanced in Germany by Gertrud Heitz-Rami, Franz Michael Konrad, and Peter Reinicke.

“Sand and Stars” is not a scientific treatise, but a literary work. The manuscript of the novel was found in German (188 pages), English (109 pages) and Hebrew (84 pages). The work, whose exact date of creation is not known, is now being made available to the public for the first time. The novel tells the story of four young Jews from the 1920s and 1930s who set off from Berlin to Eretz Israel with a group of Jewish orphans in order to build a new future in line with their shared Zionist vision. The novel is significant today as a testimony to contemporary history. Among other things, it makes indirect reference to Jewish welfare institutions in Berlin, such as the Ahawah children’s home run by Berlin’s Jewish community in Auguststraße, which Siddy Wronsky helped to found and run and whose building still exists today. Institutions in Israel that were founded by immigrants from Germany, such as the Ben Shemen Youth Village, are also mentioned in the text. One of the great missions of the novel is to establish

the practice of social work as an important tool in the effort to build the state of Israel.

The scripts could be made publicly accessible as a digital edition and as an eBook during the project period from August 2022 to December 2023 thanks to the funding programme for the digitization of cultural assets of the State of Berlin supported by the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Social Cohesion. The funding programme is implemented by the Forschungs- und Kompetenzzentrum Digitalisierung Berlin (Research and Competence Center Digitization, digiS), an institution for interdisciplinary consulting, support and coordination of digitization projects at the Zuse Institute Berlin. We are very grateful to the entire digiS team for their expert advice and collegial support. Thanks to this inspiring collaboration, Siddy Wronsky's trilingual novel, an important piece of Berlin history and the history of the DZI can be made accessible to the public. The original analog versions are still in the care of the Central Zionist Archives, which we would like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular the deputy director Simone Schliachter, for her generous support of our project. It is obvious and exciting how this project establishes a connection between Siddy Wronsky's two homes – the one in Berlin, which she left physically but not in spirit, and the one in the emerging state of Israel, where she spent the last years of her life and dreamt about.

Thanks to the funding, we were able to enter into a wonderful collaboration with the e-Lijah Lab of Digital Humanities at the University of Haifa. The Lab, an incubator for the promotion of digital projects in all areas of the humanities, has significantly supported our project in the conception and implementation of the digital edition. In addition to this book, "Sand and Stars" is also published as a freely available, structured and annotated edition (in XML TEI) and as an open access web edition.¹ In this form, all three language versions are displayed on a web interface and linked to each other for parallel reading. They are also enriched with data and subject-specific coding. To achieve this result, many steps were necessary in our multilingual and multilocal team. From digitization, through automatic text recognition, correction, annotation, and analysis, the project was always connected to digital tools. This approach, which is particular to historical research in social work, is also relevant from a methodological perspective. Thus, the scientific analysis of the work and

1 For the digital edition please visit <https://www.dzi.de/ueber-uns/geschichte/digitalisierungsprojekt-sand-und-sterne/>

its historical, contextual and social work classification were deepened by the simultaneous, joint work of the research group. The possibility of comparing the similarities and differences in the three language versions has greatly advanced the analysis and to a certain extent “transnationalized” it. This decentering of the analysis towards a collaborative and site-diverse approach has productively expanded the scientific knowledge of the manuscript and the person of Siddy Wronsky. We therefore sincerely thank Dr. Sinai Rusinek, Dr. Eliezer Baumgarten, Gil Shalit and all colleagues from the lab for their extraordinary commitment and trusting collaboration. We are also grateful to the following scholars, whom we had fruitful conceptual discussions with regarding the novel: Prof. John Gal, Dr. Jan Kühne and Prof. Volker Jörn Walpuski.

Through her energetic and pathbreaking research on Jewish-German women social workers in Palestine, Dr. Ayana Halpern focused specifically on the figure of Siddy Wronsky. Prof. Peter Reinicke and Siddy Wronsky’s nephew Max Neufeld had contributed greatly in gathering information and essential documents. During her archival work at the Central Zionist Archives, Dr. Ayana Halpern came across the manuscript and has been doing active remembrance work for years for the strong women who are in danger of being forgotten. The entire research team of “Sand and Stars” – Dr. Yehudit Avnir (social worker and Emerita at The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare), Dr. Dayana Lau (researcher and lecturer at the Alice Salomon Archiv of the Alice Salomon University Berlin) and Dr. Ayana Halpern (social worker and researcher at The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare) – that tirelessly discussed various aspects of the novel and circulated it in the scientific community, deserve special thanks for the strength that results from the desire for debate and knowledge production. The academic contextualization – which is provided in this book by the well-founded essay by the three authors – is important in order to be able to classify “Sand and Stars” historically and professionally. Thanks to their research, the novel “Sand and Stars” builds bridges between Berlin and Israel, yesterday and today, by shedding light on the shared history of the professionalization of social work. The project thus contributes to research on exiled social workers in Mandatory Palestine and their significance for the development and academization of social work in Israel.

At the time of writing this preface, Israel had been at war for more than a year. The Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th 2023 and the Middle East war that followed are a turning point for our project. Work on “Sand

and Stars” had to take place in shelters under conditions of rocket alarms. We see it as an outstanding achievement that our colleagues in Israel have continued their work despite the massive challenges for themselves, their families and communities. Over the months, we have not only witnessed the acute threats to Jewish life in Israel by Hamas and its allies, but also the devastating suffering of the Palestinian civilian population in the context of Israel’s military offensive in the Gaza Strip. This book is not intended to be a commentary on current events, but to place a historical document in its social context at the time. There are continuities into the present, but these must also be carefully contextualized and reflected upon. We advocate humanity and joint dialog and hope for a peaceful future for Israel and Palestine.

Berlin in December 2024

Stephanie Pigorsch, social worker and research associate at DZI, and
Burkhard Wilke, executive and scientific director of DZI

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Yehudit Avnir is a social worker. Her professional practice had been mainly in the domain of municipality social agencies. She gained her PhD from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and is currently an Emerita of the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social welfare, where she taught courses on macro issues, history of social work, and methods practices for BSW and MSW degrees. She was the Head of the Field Practice Unit at the school, and the Head of the BSW program. Yehudit Avnir continues to pursue her interests in macro paradigmatic issues, and in historical aspects of social work. Contact: yehudit.avnir@mail.huji.ac.il

Ayana Halpern is a social work practitioner, scholar, and lecturer. Her doctoral dissertation, written at the Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University, dealt with historical and gender aspects of the social work profession, emphasizing the creation, transition and transformation of knowledge from Weimar Germany to the Jewish community in Palestine. Soon after, she became a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Social Work at the Free University of Berlin, researching political-gender aspects and power relations in the care of fathers in welfare services between Israel and Germany. Contact: ayana.hal@gmail.com

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