

# Introduction

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In a broadest sense, this book is inspired by the context and follow-up initiatives that have emerged as part of my international research network with the title: “Gender and Sexuality in (Neo-)Orientalism: An Entangled History of European and Middle Eastern Identity Discourses.” The network was funded by the NWO Netherlands Research Association from 2013 to 2017 and treated the role of gender in the context of Orientalism and Antisemitism through conferences, workshops and publications. Following the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, I decided for the unhyphenated spelling of Antisemitism.

The research network which was a decisive inspiration for the present volume originally focused on questions that arise from dealing with historical continuities and changes, similarities and differences of Orientalism, Antisemitism and Islamophobia. During our five-years cooperation, however, my research interest, shifted from a comparison of Islamophobia and orientalized Antisemitism to a broader focus on the role of gender and sexuality in the “Jewish Question” discourse and especially on the study of how the Jews were made into the European prototype of an “internal Other” (Brunotte et al. 2017). As it is also documented in our first programmatic publication from 2015 “*Orientalism, Gender, and the Jews*”, I then examined the ways in which orientalized stereotypes of the external and internal Other intertwine in 19<sup>th</sup> century European national discourse. Our joint research further focused on how orientalist self-fashioning demarcated and transgressed these borders in Jewish cultural production.

I started the research network in October 2013 by inviting the network members to an inaugural conference at Maastricht University. This meeting was followed by a conference in 2014 at the Humboldt University Berlin with the theme “The Homophobic Argument. National Politics and Sexuality in Transregional Perspective” and a further conference in 2015 at the Univer-

sity of Antwerp with the focus: “Colonialism, Orientalism and the Jews: The Role of Gender and Postcolonial Approaches”. The official work of the network was concluded with a conference at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) in 2016 that was organized by Damir Skenderovic and Christina Späti on the topic “From Orientalism to Islamophobia?”; the last joint publication, a result of this conference, appeared in 2019.

Of particular relevance for my research approaches, which combine gender studies with an emphasis in masculinity studies with studies in Antisemitism and Orientalism, were the discussions and meetings with research groups at the University of Tel Aviv and Humboldt University Berlin, especially Christina von Braun, Claudia Bruns, Ofer Nur and Ofri Ilany, and with my American colleague Jay Geller from Vanderbilt University Nashville. With its interrogation of the roles assumed in its interplay by gender, processes of sexualization, as well as attempts of a “heroic” masculine “revolt” of the colonized in scholarly and aesthetic formations the present book takes up the red thread of my special contribution within the research network I chaired from 2013-2017.

One focus of the present book, on the role of masculinities, especially in their relevance in the modern Antisemitism, is further indebted to my long-term work in the field of masculinity studies as an Associate Professor at the *Institute for Cultural Studies* at the Humboldt University Berlin and my collaborations with the *Selma Stern Center for Jewish Studies Berlin-Brandenburg* as well as the *Center for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies* at Humboldt University Berlin. Equally significant for this focus were the discussions that I organized and teaching that I did as Associate Professor and Fellow at the *Center for Gender and Diversity* at the Faculty for Arts and Social Sciences of the University of Maastricht from 2010 until my retirement in September 2021.

The term “puzzle” in the book’s title encompasses a multi-layered radius of meaning. It may suggest a confused totality whose pieces must be put together in the right places by a long and careful investigation. “To be puzzled” by something, however, need imply neither a totality nor piecemeal aspects. In this sense “puzzle” can also designate the state of being puzzled and thus characterize a phenomenon which, owing to its puzzle-like transformations, can bewilder, shock, perplex or confound. In this book, these disturbing qualities of ambivalence, incoherence, plurality, fluidity, slipperiness and the like attach themselves to “femininity” as a “puzzle” and to the discursive figure of the “Jew” in the European imagination. Framed by a gender-analytical view, the qualities become carriers of uncertainty and transgressors of boundaries,

“perplexing matters” or “figures of the third” (see Holz 2004; Bauman 1991) all the more so when “femininity” and “Jewishness” come together and mix in a puzzle-like manner.

The “femininity puzzle” of the book’s title is then unraveled in two ways: first, by an analysis of the effeminization of the male Jew and his modern queer sexualization in racialized discourse, and then by an examination of the transgressive and liminal forms of femininity that were attributed to Jewish women, especially in their allosemitic orientalizations as “Beautiful Jewess” in 19<sup>th</sup> century art, opera and literature. The term “allosemitism” was coined by the Polish-Jewish critic Artur Sandauer and given its theoretical shape by Zygmunt Bauman (1998). It goes beyond the reductive, binary terms of Antisemitism and philosemitism to better represent the “radically ambivalent” (Bauman, *ibid.*: 143) attitude towards Jews that combines both antisemitic and philosemitic elements. This term and analytical tool is especially useful in the analysis of literature because it is flexible enough to do justice to the complexity of a literary text. The allosemitic approach of the present book takes into account the “ambivalent and hybrid” (Bauman 1991: 80) social position of the “Jew” and the “protean instability of the ‘the Jew’ as signifier” (Cheyette 1993: 8), “including the horror and fascination towards a plural, transgressive and liminal Other who defies clear-cut categories” (*ibid.*). Particularly the figure of the “Jewess” was often not marked antisemitically but represented as an idealized form of femininity and faith. Thus the book analyzes the figure of the “Beautiful Jewess” as a liminal and hybrid figure between different cultures and religions.

The historical focus of the present book is on the Hobsbawmian long 19<sup>th</sup> century and the *fin de siècle*. As John C. Fout has emphasized, “a ‘new’, historically specific stage in the history of sexuality” (Fout 1992: 389) occurred around 1890. The time saw not only the founding of psychoanalysis and sexology but also the production of multiple “sexualities, including the ‘homosexual,’ the racialization/gendering of antisemitism, and the sharp increase in contemporary Christian homophobic discourse” (Boyarin 1997: 208-209). Connecting the intellectual worlds of Berlin, London and Vienna, the geographical focus of the book lies on Germany, Austria and the UK. Employing an intersectional approach, it explores how gender, processes of sexualization and feminization have been crucial in the construction of the “Jewish Other.” It addresses imaginative, aesthetic and epistemological rather than sociological or empirical questions. It analyzes how literature, performing art, psychoanalysis and sexology probe and respond to the ambivalence of racialized gender stereo-

types, especially against the backdrop of modern hegemonic masculinity and contested patterns of femininity. The book also reconstructs how third spaces of reflection are opened up in science, literature and “new dance.” The analysis further focuses on the influence of gendered homophobic antisemitism in selected works of Jewish scholars, in particular of Sigmund Freud and Otto Weininger, asking how they responded to and in what ways they internalized and resisted antisemitic attributions.

To demonstrate the peak of this process of orientalist sexualization, I chose as one of my examples the figure of the Jewish princess Salome, the related narrative about her, and her modern re-invention. The German scholar Florian Krobb thinks that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the “Beautiful Jewess” already became a pan-European obsession, in which her characterization does not always distinguish clearly between “the Jewish and the feminine” (Krobb 1993: 192). The “femininity puzzle” thus also includes speculations on the paradox and confusion surrounding the ambivalent figure of the Jewess. Taking into account that the Jewish minority in 19<sup>th</sup> century culture was generally seen as half-occidental and half-oriental, modern and medieval, degenerate and regenerate, as well as a European and a non-European people, a general goal of my study is to look for the evidence that gender makes a difference in the visibility and characterization of the “Jewish Other” and what role projections and fantasies of “femininity” and “effeminization” play therein.

## Summary of the Chapters

**Chapter One** “The Femininity Game of Deception: *Female, Jew, femme fatale Orientale* and *belle Juive*” starts reconstructing how the focus on gender and sexuality characterized the field of Jewish cultural studies in the late 1990s and looks at the dominant role played therein by the historical and postcolonial readings of Sigmund Freud’s theory of sexuality. It asks about the extent to which these epistemological intentions offered an opportunity that “grants theorizations about Jewishness a place in ongoing discussions about race, ethnicity, nationness, diaspora, memory, religion, gender and sexuality” (Bunzl 2000: 323). The first chapter further examines the surprising impact of androcentrism in these earlier approaches and points out the emphasis on “female” Jewish masculinity, especially the overdetermined significance that femininity – in Boyarin’s spelling “effemminization” (Daniel Boyarin 1997) – is given in antisemitic and, as a response, also in inner-Jewish identity discourses. It

analyses the role of orientalization in European constructions of an “Orient Within,” based on the figure of the orientalized Jewish princess Salome.

**Chapter Two** “Queering Judaism and Masculinist Inventions: German Homonationalism around 1900” starts from today’s homonationalism and its masculinist discourse. It argues that current homonationalism must be placed in a historical genealogy. The case study focuses on the Second German Empire, in which the discourse of political crisis was represented by a “male gender crisis” that revolved round the Kaiser and his alleged “homosexual” circle. Just as with debates within the incipient gay movement, the discourse centered in the dispositive of “normal masculinity” as representative of the nation/state. The chapter addresses a religious contour of this discursive constitution of homosexualities and a possible Jewish inflection to be found therein.

**Chapter Three** “Modern Masculinity as Battleground of Identity Politics and Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character*” further contextualizes the discursive intertwining of antisemitism and modernity. As Jacques Le Rider and others have noted, in both Berlin and Vienna the “crisis of modernity” (Le Rider 1993: 17) discourse condensed the political-cultural crisis into a perceived “crisis of masculinity.” No other turn-of-the-century work shows more emphatically than Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* the at once pathographic and seismographic insights of the simultaneously misogynous and anti-semitic elements of the then current discourse on the crisis of modernity. In Weininger’s bestseller from 1903, antisemitism and misogyny come together inextricably in the thesis of the femininity of the Jews. According to Christine Achinger, “Weininger was not [only] defending the ‘male’ rational, bounded subject against the threat arising from sexual urges associated with ‘woman,’ but also against a threat to the autonomous subject emanating from modern society itself, associated in Weininger’s work particularly clearly with the ‘Jewish mind.’” (Achinger 2013: 122).

**Chapter Four** “Against Effeminization. Sigmund Freud’s Theory of Culture between Male Band Discourse and Antisemitism,” examines the influence of the growing antisemitism on Sigmund Freud’s theory of the founding of culture with its “band of brothers” in its centre as well as basic psychoanalytical theories of homosexuality, masculinity and femininity. The chapter is based on the groundbreaking postcolonial reading of Freud’s psychoanalysis by American scholars such as Daniel Boyarin, Sander Gilman, Ann Pellegrini and Jay Geller. The scientific Antisemitism prominent in medicine at the time aimed, among other things, at portraying male Jews as effeminate and dis-

eased. It denied them the possession of masculinity and thus too the aptitude to be a scientist. Freud's personal and scientific struggle to define a "heroic" Jewish masculinity was therefore closely linked throughout his life, up to and including his late work *Moses and Monotheism* (*Der Mann Moses*, 1939), to his fight against the dominant antisemitism.

**Chapter Five** "The Jewess Question. The "Beautiful Jewess" as Liminal Figure in European Culture" concentrates on the "Beautiful Jewess" in general as a central trope in the discourse of the Jewess as a cultural "figure of the third." Starting from the presupposition of her situatedness in a frontier zone between religions and cultures, the chapter focuses on the depiction of the "Beautiful Jewess" in literature. It uses examples from English and German 19<sup>th</sup> century novels to analyze how literature explores the ambivalences of the stereotype and opens up third spaces of reflection. Narrative and scenic discourses on the "Orient" are examined as a multilayered and ambivalent ensemble of relational references.

**Chapter Six** "Seeing, hearing and narrating Salome. Modernist sensual Aesthetics and the role of narrative Blanks" focuses on the narrative construction, beginning with the biblical text, of the figure of Salome and on the modern aesthetic obsession with that figure. In 19<sup>th</sup> century the revival of the figure of Salome was increasingly effected through narrative media, folk stories and literature; around the fin-de-siècle, dance, paintings and opera made her an popular intermedia icon. Only Wilde's play, and then Richard Strauss's opera, however, aestheticized visual desire and produced an aesthetic spectacle abounding in symbolist and biblical metaphors. In the opening scene of Strauss's opera, Salome's visual-physical attraction is contrasted with the fascination of the disembodied "holy" voice of the prophet, proclaiming God's new Christian message from the depths of the cistern. There is a tension between the description of a stereotypical Jewishness of Herod's court and the depictions of the five argumentative Jews on the one hand and beautiful girl Salome on the other:

The stark doubleness of the Semitic discourse in *Salome* constructed the Jew as the unchanging racialized Other as well as one who encompassed the possibility of a new redemptive order. [...] Caught between the spheres of Judaism and Christianity, the figure of Salome portrayed the plight of the Jews and served as a metaphor for the Jewish question. (Seshadri 2006: 43-44)

This chapter proposes the hypothesis that it is from the "absence" – the "blank space" within the biblical narratives – that modern, multimedia aesthetics

draws its formula of self-reflection as “purely aesthetic” and its sacralization of the aesthetic. The guiding question is how narrative gaps and specific narrative strategies have opened a virtual space of imagination in the process of aesthetic response.

**Chapter Seven** “Dancing on the Threshold. Maud Allan and the English Salome Scandal (1918),” examines the most famous European fin-de-siècle Salome, the Canadian dancer Maud Allan, analyzing the interconnections of Allan’s dance, a libel suit and the juridical production of sexualities. On 16 February 1918, the right-wing London journal *Vigilante* published an article under the insinuating title “The Cult of the Clitoris” (quoted in Hoare 1998: 90). The text warned against the harmful effects of a private performance of Wilde’s prohibited play *Salomé*, starring the most famous Salome dancer of the time, Maud Allan, in the role of the Jewish princess. Skillfully blending political and sexual phobias, the conservative and patriotic Movement for Purity in Public Life fanned the ensuing public uproar once news of the performance broke on 10 February 1918, a time when catastrophic Allied defeat still seemed possible and England was in the grip of war hysteria. The chapter focuses on how the intrigue of a right-wing member of parliament, Noel Pemberton-Billing, a leading figure in the Purity Movement, succeeded in bringing Allan before the court of the Old Bailey in May 1918. The trial serves as a window into the sexual obsessions, conspiracy theories and politics of the war era. Examination of the court records of the Pemberton-Billing trial show how religious, juridical and medical discourses interacted to produce the so-called sexual “pervert” in normalizing society. The prosecution used new developments and terms in sexology, mainly from Richard Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*, to cement the assumption that “perverse” art mirrored “perverse” minds and bodies, and *vice versa*.

**Chapter Eight** “Where there is Dance, there is the Devil’. Femininity and Violence: Salome as Maenad” concentrates again on the multifaceted birth of “modern dance” in female exoticism, in which early 20<sup>th</sup> century dancers exploited the gestural repertoire of ancient or exotic ritual for their own aesthetic and emancipatory efforts. The chapter connects this artistic avant-garde dance of which Maud Allan was a prominent representative to a critical theory in the study of religion that reflected and accompanied the art form in a unique way. The Chapter’s focus is Jane E. Harrison (1850-1928), a well-known scholar in archaeology and classics who drew cultural-historical connections between Salome’s “Dance of the Seven Veils” and the then very popular dance of the Dionysian Maenads. For her, the wild followers of the

god of wine, theater and orgies, represented female transgressions of the public order and public gender division. Many contemporaries, however, saw the maenads, who penetrated more and more into the cultural awareness thanks to the *Dionysian* turn in the discourse about antiquity inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Pater, as the very embodiment of violent feminine rebellion and women's fight for suffrage. Harrison interpreted the Jewish Princess *Salome* as a sister of the maenads.

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