

Cologne Summer School „Views on and of the Israeli Society“

In Israel, April 18th – 29th 2018

During the 12-day long stay in Israel, the Cologne Summer School “Views on and of the Israeli Society” enabled 15 members of the University of Cologne (students in teacher training, academic and professorial staff) to discover new ways of remembrance culture and the friendly and diplomatic relationship between Israel and Germany. The students acquired knowledge on anti-Semitic thought patterns and strengthened their reflected circumstances of a complex democratic society. All these experiences based on the major concern to discover diverse Israeli perspectives and to develop new thought processes and viewpoints.

The Summer School was a cooperation between the Chair in Political Science, Education Politics and Political Education, Prof. Gudrun Hentges and »school is open« 4.0. Three students could do research projects during the Cologne Summer School “Views on and of the Israeli Society” and wrote their Master Theses regarding Germanys public and cultural diplomacy in Israel and the German-Israeli comparison of Holocaust Education for children. Further assignments are currently prepared.

During the Cologne Summer School, the students got insights into the German public and cultural diplomacy affairs in Israel in meetings with different institutions: We visited the Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem, which enables students to work in those fields in Israel and abroad, and is corporation partner of Prof. Gudrun Hentges. In Tel Aviv, the group had the possibility to stay at the Goethe Institute and discover their attempts to educate and support German culture, language and projects in the context of the particular relationship between Israel and Germany. In the end, we could connect those perspectives with the “official” German diplomacy at the German embassy in Tel Aviv, which was a very interesting experience due to meeting two diplomats who were very friendly, gave insights in routines and happenings at the embassy and discussed German diplomacy within the Middle East openly.

In further meetings, we could broaden our horizon of inner-Israeli perspectives. First, the group had the opportunity to meet Elizabeth Kirshner, Director of Communication and PR at Women of the Wall. Women of the Wall is an organization that fights for the gender equal access and usage of the Western Wall. Elizabeth Kirshner presented a feminist perspective on Judaism and the ritual practices as well as how men and women use Jewish ritual objects. We could also deepen the topic of the German-Israeli relationship with Henry Jakobowitz who is active in tourism but also in political education. As 2nd generation, Henry shared the story of his father, who survived the Shoa, as well as what it was like growing up in Germany as a Jew in North Rhine-Westphalia and immigrating to Israel later on in his life. He expressed his opinion on Jewish life in Germany and Israel freely. For example he stated that Anti-Semitism is not a problem, which should be dealt with by the affected Jewish people themselves but by the non-Jewish society.

At several encounters, the group was confronted with questions on anti-Semitism, remembrance culture in Israel and Germany and pedagogical concepts on these topics. At the beginning of the Cologne Summer School, we joined the International March of the Living in Jerusalem for the occasion of Israel’s 70th Independence Day. The March of the Living is an annual event bringing people from all over to Poland and Israel. On Yom HaShoah, the Jewish Holocaust Remembrance Day, people of all ages – young adults to survivors of the Shoa – demonstrate all the way from

Auschwitz to Birkenau as a tribute to all victims of the Shoa. On Israel's Independence Day, called Yom Ha'atzmaut, the participants celebrated the existence of Israel. During our stay at Yad Vashem at the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, we dealt with the various facets of remembrance culture in Israel and how the deconstruction of anti-Semitic patterns of thoughts and behavior can be facilitated. Yad Vashem addresses not only the persecution and annihilation of the European Jews but wants to tell the people's individual stories before, during and after the Holocaust. The current anti-Semitic discrimination, especially Israel related anti-Semitism as a continuity throughout history, was further tackled in a workshop.

The focus on the individual biographies in their specific facets contains the opportunity to remember a single person's history through generations as well as strengthen interest and cognitive empathy, as well as seeing a concrete story in a historical and complex social context. An exceptional opportunity for one part of the group was to get to know one of those individual stories and meet a survivor of the Shoa. Fanny England was born and raised in Cologne, she went to the Jewish School called Jawne. To escape a possible deportation Fanny prepared herself in a hakhshara institution in Hamburg in 1940 to immigrate to British Mandate Palestine. Before making Aliyah, she was deported in December 1941 to Gutshof Jungfernhof and further to KZ Kaiserwald und Stuffhoff near Danzig where she had to perform forced labor. She survived the death march and was liberated in 1945 by the Soviet Army. In 1947, Fanny immigrated to Palestine to become an Israeli Citizen, homeland to her and her family.

We could get another perspective on Israeli remembrance culture and dealing with the Shoah in pedagogical context by visiting the House of the Ghetto Fighters. The House of the Ghetto Fighters focuses on the aspects of Jewish resistance during the Shoah, especially in the Warsaw Ghetto and resistance fighters in various partisan groups. Another speciality of the museum is the original glass cabin which was used during the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. This trial is a turning point in Israeli history and remembrance culture: there was a new and deeper understanding of national socialistic crimes from the perspectives of Jewish survivors. It led to a fundamental recognition and possibility to speak about the Shoah in the families as well as throughout Israeli society. Yad LaYeled, part of the museum's complex, is especially designed for children who encounter the remembrance every year on Yom HaShoah in a young age. At the museum, they can find answers to their questions and learn about the Holocaust, the dark horrors and the small flecks of light such as Yanusz Korczak.

The different parts of the Summer School were an excellent way for the students to discover multiple perspectives on and of Israel at first hand. All participants of the Summer School were able to acquire new experiences in the field of education for their further professionalization. They also broadened their professional competences regarding remembrance culture and the combat against anti-Semitism. In addition, they gathered knowledge on public and cultural diplomacy. Furthermore promising contacts to students, educators and researchers were maintained and made whilst our stay for future cooperation.

For more info and impressions check <http://ukoeln.de/5EEMC> or social media. »school is open« 4.0 (@schoolisopen) and participants shared daily their experiences on twitter, facebook and instagram #CologneSummerSchoolIsrael.

