

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University College London</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 33 – Theology and Religious Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Trajectories of European Jewish identity: Providing tools to engage with pasts unknown</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Research by Michael Berkowitz, François Guesnet and John D. Klier has inspired and informed a wide range of public engagement, including exhibitions, popular television shows (such as <i>Who Do You Think You Are?</i> reaching 5.82 million viewers) and lively conversation on internet-based forums. Their work on Jewish life and culture in continental Europe and Britain has shaped and provided vital content to local, national and international communities numbering in the millions. Through non-academic conferences and lectures, stimulated and contributed to international public debate on little-discussed histories, and provided cultural organisations an opportunity to promote and participate in this debate.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) UCL research investigating the diverse trajectories of modern British and European Jewish identity was conducted by John Doyle Klier, Corob Professor of Modern Jewish History (died in office in September 2007), Dr François Guesnet (part-time Lecturer 2007–8, full-time Corob Lecturer in Modern Jewish History 2008–11; Corob Reader in Modern Jewish History since 2011) and Michael Berkowitz (Reader at UCL since 1997, Professor of Modern Jewish History since 2004). Their collective study encompasses the history of Jews in Europe from the early modern era and questions of identity formation and self-representation in 19th–20th century Britain.</p> <p>The first strand of research, led by Klier and Guesnet, addresses the history of Jews in Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland-Lithuania and Russia. In contrast to the small Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe, Jews in East-Central and Eastern Europe during the early modern era (18th–19th centuries) lived in large communities. These enjoyed significant autonomy, guaranteed through privileges offering considerable constitutional and legal stability over many generations. This contributed to a strong identification with the community as a distinct cultural and political entity, most evidently in the continued use of Yiddish, the insignificant numbers of conversions to the surrounding faiths, and the cultural hegemony of religious observance. Another key insight concerns the impact of the partitions of Poland, and the integration of former Polish-Lithuanian Jewry in Russia, Prussia and Austria, which led to significant political and cultural segmentation of a once-unified community. These questions were examined in Klier’s posthumously published monograph [a], and Guesnet’s research on Jewish historiography in East-Central Europe, which focuses on the dialectics of integration and separateness [c, d], and developed in his anthology of Polish sources on the Jewish presence in Poland [b]. Guesnet is also Director of the Montefiore Testimonials project, which is digitising and transcribing testimonials sent by Jews from around the world, but particularly continental Europe, to the great British Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, from the 1840s to 1885.</p> <p>Berkowitz’s work on modern European Jewish identity formation and political self-representations between 1881–1948 has focused on the relationships between art, politics, culture, sport (especially boxing) and spectacle. Research focused on boxing in England, where Jewish boxers such as Daniel Mendoza, Isaac Bitton and ‘Dutch Sam’ were leading figures in the sport’s rise to prominence in the 18th–19th century, with Jews remaining active until the early 1960s [e]. Since 2008, Berkowitz has researched the engagement of Jews with photography in Europe and the United States, and has investigated the pioneering attempt in the 1960s to write a history of Jews in photography [f].</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references) [a] John D. Klier, <i>Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–1882</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011). Edited posthumously by Helen Klier & François Guesnet. Available on request. [Highly positive reviews in historical and Jewish studies press, eg <i>American Historical</i></p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Review 117 (Apr 2012): 'the achievement of a consummate archival historian'.]

[b] François Guesnet (ed.), *Der Fremde als Nachbar. Polnische Positionen zur jüdischen Präsenz. Texte seit 1800* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2009). Submitted to REF2014.

Positively reviewed in *Mittel- und Osteuropa Kultur*, Dec–Jan 2011 (URL <http://www.moe-kultur.de/pdf/moe74.pdf>); *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropaforschung* 60 (2011) 2, 323.

[c] François Guesnet (ed.), *Zwischen Graetz und Dubnow: Jüdische Historiographie in Ostmitteleuropa Im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt 2009). Available on request. Positively reviewed in *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 05.01.2011; *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*; *Judaica* 67 (2011) 2, 334-336; *jgo.e-reviews* 4 (2011).

[d] François Guesnet, "Between Permeability and Isolation: Ezriel Natan Frenk as Historian of the Jews of Poland," in Israel Bartal, Antony Polonsky, and Scott Ury (eds.): *Polin. Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 24: Jews and their Neighbours in Eastern Europe since 1750 (Oxford, Portland, Oregon: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 111–131. Submitted to REF2014.

[e] Michael Berkowitz, "Jewish fighters in Britain in historical context: Repugnance, requiem, reconsideration," in *Sport in History*, vol. 31, no. 4 (December 2011): 423–443.

doi:[10.1080/17460263.2011.645334](https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2011.645334) [refereed journal article].

[f] Michael Berkowitz, "Jews in Photography': Conceiving a field in the papers of Peter Pollack," in *Photography & Culture*, vol. 4, no. 1 (March 2011): 7–28.

doi:[10.2752/175145211X12899905861357](https://doi.org/10.2752/175145211X12899905861357). Submitted to REF2014.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

UCL research on the history of Jews in Europe has helped to shape the stories British and European Jews tell about themselves. This has been achieved by providing cultural organisations, media and individuals with information from research on under-reported facets of Jewish cultural heritage, and creating original forums at which to engage with this heritage.

Informing genealogical research and engaging the public with a little-known heritage

Research at UCL has enabled investigations of British Jewish heritage by the producers of the popular BBC genealogy programme *Who Do You Think You Are?* Guesnet and Berkowitz received enquiries from the programme makers (eg Guesnet, 2010, 2011 and 2012). Most notably, on 11 August 2011 Berkowitz appeared on an episode aired both in the UK and overseas. The producers approached Berkowitz to help the actor June Brown – who played Dot Cotton in *EastEnders*. Berkowitz drew on research to advise on tracing her ancestor, the Sephardi Jewish boxer Isaac Bitton, and recommended sites of particular relevance such as the Tom Cribb pub which was later used for filming. The audience of the original broadcast was 5.82 million, demonstrating the reach of this impact [1].

The *significance* of this public engagement impact is demonstrated by the intense interest this segment generated in this little-known history. The episode's web forum had an active discussion about the boxing connection, including a viewer who discovered her own ancestral links to Jewish boxers in the East End of London [2] and many others who noted their prior ignorance of this history. The episode was reviewed in news outlets including the *Daily Mail*, *Independent*, *Daily Mirror*, *Metro* ("perfect fodder for a social history programme") and on genealogy blogs such as *Genes Reunited* [2]. As a result, a wide public has gained a new appreciation of the complex routes by which Jews integrated themselves into British society. This has profound impacts both on those of Jewish heritage, who thus gain a deeper understanding of and connection with their cultural heritage, and the wider British public whose understanding of Jewish history is improved, thus contributing to community cohesion.

Fostering debate between academics, cultural organisations and the public

UCL research provided cultural organisations and embassies with a means to fulfil their mandate to promote informed and authoritative debate in London and internationally about contested or

Impact case study (REF3b)

little-known histories, demonstrated by their repeated sponsorship of events bringing the research to an interested public. Research also provided British Jews with a sustainable forum at which they could engage with academic debates around the history and experiences of Eastern European Jewry and thus created interest and engagement with a shared, but often overlooked, history. This was achieved through a series of free talks and public conferences at the UCL Institute for Jewish Studies, which were advertised through community newspapers and mailing lists to attract a non-specialist audience and were accompanied by exhibitions and film screenings.

For example, research provided the Polish Cultural Institute (PCI), a diplomatic mission, a means by which to achieve what it terms “one of the most challenges priorities of Polish cultural diplomacy”: to engage the British public with Polish and Jewish relations in their historical and contemporary aspects [3]. This was achieved through a partnership, beginning in 2009, to arrange a conference titled ‘Warsaw: the History of a Jewish Metropolis’ (June 2010), organised by Guesnet, who lectured on the 19th century transformation of Warsaw’s Jews “from community to metropolis”. This was sponsored by the PCI, its collaborator the Instytut Adama Mickiewicza and the Polish Embassy as part of Polska!Year. This was so successful that the Polish Embassy invited Dr Guesnet back in March 2012, to moderate a discussion on Polish-Jewish relations in the Second World War, which was also widely covered in London’s Polish press [4].

According to the Director of the PCI, this was the largest academic conference devoted to the history of the Polish capital outside Poland itself [3]. The conference, and those which succeeded it, was designed as a hybrid event attracting a non-academic Polish and Jewish audience interested in engaging with the latest research on the subject. It was attended by over 300 people [8] and sparked a series of successful collaborations, including:

- May 2011: *Unsere kinder*, the last Yiddish film in Poland, introduced by Guesnet
- Dec 2011: launch of a special issue of the journal *Polin* (over 100 attendees)
- Feb 2013: sold-out screening of the Venice Biennale film *And Europe Will be Stunned* by Yael Bartana for Jewish Book Week. Guesnet was the historian on the discussion panel before about 400 Jewish and Polish attendees [3].

These and similar events in 2010–2013 collectively attracted over 1,400 people and enabled the PCI to fulfil its commitment to promote discussion of the contentious history of Jewish-Polish relations while reaching out to a British public interested in Jewish themes [3]. It also enabled the PCI to build sustainable new relationships with other organisations, such as Jewish Book Week, with whom a new partnership was subsequently arranged for 2014.

The communities attending these events also benefited from a new conversation about British Jewish history and connections to continental Europe, which facilitated the strengthening of this group with its cultural heritage and history. When several screenings of *Unsere kinder* sparked an interest in historical research amongst members of the Shomrei Hadat Congregation in London, for example, they invited Guesnet to deliver a series of three lectures on the history of the Jews in Poland and Lithuania in October 2012–January 2013 [5]. These, in the words of the congregation’s President, “enhanced our community and our understanding of who we are and who we have come from” [5].

UCL research led to wider public awareness of, and interest in, the little-discussed role of Jewish sportsmen and thus challenged assumptions about the role of this community in British society. This was achieved through the development of heritage resources in order to conserve and interpret cultural and historical heritage. In 2007 the Jewish Museum London mounted *Ghetto Warriors*, the first major exhibition on the relationship of Jews and other minorities to boxing. Drawing on the work which was later published as [e], Berkowitz served as its Academic Consultant and co-edited with Ruti Ungar the widely praised catalogue, *Fighting Back? Jewish and Black Boxers in Britain* (2007), to which Berkowitz contributed an essay. This was, unusually for a publication in this field, reviewed in *Supersport* in 2009 and recommended as a ‘fascinating new book’ of interest to boxing fans despite its academic style [6]. The significance of this exhibition is demonstrated by its ongoing use by the museum, which incorporated parts of Berkowitz’s

Impact case study (REF3b)

interpretation into a new permanent display launched in 2010 [7]. It also integrated objects from the show into its Sandford Award-winning *Take One* educational programme, such as a pair of shorts worn by a Jewish boxer competing in the Olympics [8]. In 2013, this research was used for a special exhibition and public lecture (30 July), on Jews and boxing, for members of the Jewish Historical Society of England as a preview of its 120th anniversary celebration later that year.

A two-day public colloquium on relations between Jews and Lithuanians, co-organised by Guesnet, brought this contested subject to worldwide attention. 'No Simple Stories' (February 2011) was co-sponsored by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe and the Lithuanian Embassy. It was attended by over 250 people from non-academic and academic backgrounds [9]. Even before the event, the involvement of the Lithuanian government was strongly disputed by groups who felt it was complicit in downplaying the Holocaust and difficulties faced by present-day Lithuanian Jews. Heated debate erupted in the media and at the event [10]. A comparatively little-known controversy was thus brought to mainstream attention and covered in *The Economist* (circulation over 1.4 million) where lively debate continued in the comments section [10]. As many positive emails on the thought-provoking content confirmed [9], the conference provided space for a stimulating and informed debate on this contested history.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[1] Berkowitz appearance on episode: <http://bit.ly/18YnFBw>. Reach: Audience figures from Digital Spy: <http://bit.ly/1cHFJal>.

[2] Significance: *Who Do You Think You Are* episode web forum: <http://bit.ly/16ofVM3>. Examples of news and blog coverage: Genes Re-United 'Who Do You Think You Are? June Brown - Episode 1', 11 August 2011, 12 comments, over 1,800 views. <http://bit.ly/18oGtOf>; Liz Thomas, 'EastEnders' June Brown discovers she's a real cockney in *Who Do You Think You Are?*', 2 August 2011 *Daily Mail*: <http://dailym.ai/1eGdlWY> (readership* 4.3m in print); Rachel Tarley. 'Who Do You Think You Are? featuring June Brown was a rare treat', 11 August 2011 in *Metro* (readership* 3.6m) <http://bit.ly/16q0l5F>. *Adult readership figures from National Readership Survey top line figures July 2011 to June 2012 <http://www.nrs.co.uk/top-line-readership/>.

[3] Statement provided by the Director of the Polish Cultural Institute in London confirming use of research for outreach, and events details.

[4] Newsletter No.9 (2012) of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in London. Full page interview in the London-based *The Polish Observer* (August 2009); full page article in *Dziennik Polski*, an online publication in Britain, 21 May 2012 <http://bit.ly/1dlji2K>.

[5] Statement from President, Shomrei Hadat Congregation. Notice on synagogue website: <http://bit.ly/12wwC26>.

[6] Supersport.com: R. Jackson, "Focus on boxing's minority groups", 9 Jul 2009 <http://bit.ly/16Zut5j>.

[7] Photograph demonstrating ongoing use (and thus significance to interpretation) of Berkowitz exhibition materials available upon request.

[8] Jewish Museum London's educational workshop using Olympic boxing shorts: <http://bit.ly/11yWX3o>.

[9] Audience figures and feedback provided by Institute of Jewish Studies administrator.

[10] Sample news coverage: 'UK calls on Lithuania to tackle anti-Semitism', *Jerusalem Post* online (most-read English language website in Israel), 8 Feb 2011 <http://bit.ly/16Zxcf8> 'A challenging look at Jewish life in Lithuania', *The Jewish News* (weekly readership 100k) 20 Jan 2011. 'Old Wounds', *The Economist*, 10 Feb 2011 (print circ. 1.5m). <http://econ.st/16dAjNR>.