

Dr. Daniel Mahla
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Haifa Center for German and European Studies
Spring Semester 2026
Wed 2-6 pm
Room: HCGES
Course Number: 26 3512 B01
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Doing Oral History:

German-Speaking Jews in Palestine/Israel (Yekkes)

as Case Study

Oral testimonies are a central source for the study of history, not only for academic research, but also in the field of public history. Documentary films, radio features, museum exhibitions, truth commissions, and many other groups and organizations make use of such testimonies. Scholars have discovered testimonies to write the history of “ordinary men and women,” of neglected groups as well as of forgotten or disappeared events. One of the great advantages of the field is that activists and scholars can produce their own sources. But what are the issues to consider? And what is the best way to conduct such interviews? The course provides an introduction to the field of oral history with an emphasis on the practical aspects of conducting interviews and producing testimonies.

The students' final project is to conduct an interview with descendants of German-speaking Jews in Israel (*Yekkes*) and to produce an audio podcast from that interview. Therefore, in addition to the practice of oral history, we will also discuss the history of the Yekkes. German Jews came to Palestine/Israel mostly in the 1930s escaping persecution in Europe. Here they faced strong suspicions about their ideological commitment to the Zionist settlement effort because of their attachment to German culture and mores. Yet despite such hostilities, the Yekkes contributed decisively to Zionist state building efforts and influenced the young society in a great variety of ways. Over time, attitudes towards the Yekkes changed German-speaking immigrants and their descendants began to take pride in their cultural heritage and developed many ways to cultivate it.

Discussions in class are a major part of the course. Therefore, students will have to prepare the texts for each class and participate actively in the discussion. The major assignment of the course is the preparation of a recorded audio-interview with a descendant of Yekkes in Israel. Groups of 2-3 students each will prepare and conduct an interview together, and then edit it and add their own historical introduction to produce an audio-podcast. This will be done in different stages over the course of the semester: We will start by working out a list of questions together. The different groups will then conduct their interviews and present us with a short evaluation of the interview. After that, the groups will work out the social and historical context of their interviews and prepare an introduction in writing or as an audio file. Finally, they will edit and cut the interview and add their own introduction.

Grading

Your various projects and your participation in the course will count for 50% of the final grade. The final audiophile will count for the other 50%.

Readings

You will find all required readings on Moodle. Prepare the readings assigned each week thoroughly. In many weeks, I will provide you with discussion questions that help you to navigate the reading and us to structure the discussion in class. You will find these questions on Moodle in the week before the respective session.

Additionally, I recommend reading one or several of the general introductions to oral history. Among many others, the following books are available at the university library:

Abrams, Lynn: Oral History Theory, London 2010.

Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.): The Oral History Reader, London 2016.

Donald A. Ritchie (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of Oral History, New York 2011.

Donald A. Ritchie: Doing Oral History, Oxford 2003.

Paul Thompson: The Voice of the Past: Oral History, Oxford 2000.

Podcasting:

Olmstedt, Jill: [Tools for Podcasting](#), Open Textbook Library 2009.

Tee, Morris, Evo Terra and Ryan Williams: Expert Podcasting Practices for Dummies, Hoboken 2008.