

Zoé Grumberg's EHRI fellowship at CEGESOMA

Zoé Grumberg is a third-year PhD Candidate at the Center of History of Sciences Po Paris, where she prepares, under the supervision of prof Claire Andrieu, a PhD "*S'engager et militer, reconstruire la vie juive, lutter contre l'oubli. Les Juifs communistes yiddishophones après la Shoah, Paris, 1944-années 1950*" 'Engagement and militancy : reconstruction of Jewish life, struggle against forgetting : the Yiddish-speaking Communist Jews in Paris after the Shoah, Paris 1944- 1950's'.

Zoé Grumberg was EHRI fellow at CegeSoma in June 2018. In this article she explains how the EHRI fellowship was helpful for her research.

My research is a study of the reconstruction of Jewish-communist life in Paris after the Second World War and the Holocaust, through the analysis of a network of associations born during the Interwar Period or during the war and created by immigrant Jews from Eastern Europe who were members of the French Communist Party (PCF). Their story between 1944, when they started to (re)build their associations, acted to help the Jewish community and spread their ideology among Parisian Jews, and the end of the 1950s ? after international events that had a major impact in the French Jewish-communist sphere such as the anti-Semite trials in USSR in 1952 and 1953, Stalin's death (1953) and in 1956 the Khrushchev file about the problems of Stalinism and the personality cult, the events in Hungary and in Suez ? is at the core of my thesis. Through this research, I intend to make a contribution to the history of the post-Holocaust Jewish life in France, to study the mutual relationships between the PCF and associations of Jewish-communist immigrants and to follow paths of activists. My thesis thus stands between several fields: Jewish and Holocaust history, the history of immigration, the history of political commitment and of Communism. During a Conference on Communism in Paris, in October 2016, I met prof José Gotovitch, a specialist of Communism in Belgium and a former director of CegeSoma. He told me that some comparisons between the French and Belgian cases could be interesting and advised me to go to Brussels ?

Transnational history

Circulations of ideas, people and structures between different countries and continents are nowadays a major theme in history. Studying the French-Jewish communist organizations' archives, I was struck by the importance of the interactions between Jewish communists of different countries, more particularly between France and Belgium. A lot of members of the French organizations had lived in Belgium before coming to France in the 1920s-1930s and they maintained relations with Belgian activists. After the Holocaust, Paris was the city where most of the Yiddish-speaking Jews gathered: the Belgian organizations probably wanted to cooperate with this vivid Jewish life. I thus decided to study these relationships. I am also convinced that comparison can help to understand phenomena: in the case of Jewish communists, the most comparable countries seem to be France and Belgium, as Rudi Van Doorslaer has pointed out in 1997 in his book on Jewish communists in Belgium between 1925 and 1940. In the Interwar Period, both countries were chosen by Jewish immigrants and the PCF and the Belgium Communist Party (PCB) had the same kind of structures for immigrants and Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe. During the War, Jewish communists of both countries created active Resistance organizations. Then, in the post-war period, both Communist Parties had to rethink their integration of immigrants, particularly Jews. Even though my PhD does not intend to be a comparison per se, I thought my reflection could benefit greatly from some insights in the Belgian case in addition with the study of interactions between the two countries. Ultimately, this two-week EHRI fellowship at CegeSoma has proved to be fruitful.

Accessing archives

While in Brussels, I had the opportunity to visit several archives, among which of course CegeSoma. Through the EHRI-project research portal, I was able to find several archival documents about the Jewish-communist Resistance: a box about Esta and Maurice Heiber, files about the Comité de Défense des Juifs (CDJ), some testimonies about the CDJ (between 1947 and 1951), documents about relationships between the CDJ and the Front de l'Indépendance after the war. It would help me to understand the conflicts around Resistance and Jewish-Resistance in Post-war Belgium and to make comparisons with the French case. Finally, I also looked at the Guide des Sources pour l'histoire des populations juives et du judaïsme en Belgique, which was very helpful to identify sources that could interest me.

Of particular interest are the very rich files of the Police des étrangers kept at the Belgian State Archives. My goal was to find traces of Jewish communists from France who were expelled from Belgium in the 1930s. After a long search of several activists' names on microfiches ? which was difficult since I did not always have their first name nor their birth date ? I was able to find several files of Jewish communists who settled in France in the 1930s after their expulsion from Belgium. This would help me to follow their

migration path.

I also visited the Musée Juif de Belgique, to find documents about Solidarité Juive, the major Jewish-communist association in Brussels after the Second World War. In Solidarité's archives, I was able to identify several documents about the interactions between Solidarité and the UJRE, the main French association I am studying. They indeed invited each other to commemorations of the Holocaust, their summer camps worked together (some French children went several times to Belgium for the whole summer), a short version of the French Jewish-communist newspaper Naïe Presse existed in Belgium. I also read a lot of documents about Solidarité's program for the reconstruction of the Jewish life in Brussels after the Holocaust: in my PhD I could thus do some comparisons with the French organizations.

At the CARCoB (Centre des Archives du communisme en Belgique), thanks to José Gotovitch, I had an easy access to the so-called CCP's files (Commission centrale de contrôle politique auprès du Comité central ? Central commission of control of the Central Committee) of several Jewish Belgian activists and to major documents about a conflict in 1947 between the Belgian Communist Party and some Jewish communists. I could thus elucidate the relationships between the Belgian Communist Party and its Jewish activists, as I have already done for France. Comparison will be particularly precious: was it a French or a Belgian way? of dealing with Jewish activists after the war or was it similar? Did both Parties collaborate on this specific matter as they did for other themes? I also found precious documents about a conflict around the Naïe Presse, a Jewish-communist French newspaper that was also published in Belgium (a one-page version of it anyway): I realized that French and Belgians cooperated for this publication but that a hierarchical relation existed: the French indeed tended to monitor the Belgians and did not hesitate to ask them to be accountable.

At the library of CegeSoma I found several academic works and articles on Jewish Resistance and Communism under Nazi rule that are essential for my research and are not easily accessible in France.

Meeting archivists and researchers

Not only access to archives was facilitated, the EHRI fellowship was also an opportunity to meet and talk with archivists and researchers at the different institutions where I worked. Contacts were very easy and I would like to thank everyone who helped me : Bruno Benvindo and Olivier Hottis (Musée Juif de Belgique), Filip Strubbe (State Archives), who guided me through the files of the Police des étrangers and the staff of the State Archives who was very patient despite my many questions, José Gotovitch and Marie-France Hanon (CARCoB) and Pieter Lagrou (ULB). I also met Arnaud Bozzini, who recently wrote a PhD about the Jewish communists in Brussels after the Second World War. At CegeSoma I had many interesting academic (and non-academic conversations) with Charlotte Hauwaert, Florence Rasmont, Florent Verfaillie, Fabrice Maerten, Gertjan Desmet, Dirk Luyten and of course its director Nico Wouters. The two weeks of EHRI fellowship opened doors, not only to archives but also to people!

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