

Liselotte Grschebina

A woman with a Camera wandering between two heritages

A Case study by Orly Zimmerman

1. Photography and cultural heritage

Photographs are visual narratives. As such they can document collective experiences and contribute to the formation of a collective memory and heritage. This formation is based on material processes and also on the cultural industry that produces those imagery. Photographs are one means of exchanging and sharing knowledge, tradition and constructing narratives, and photographers as well as photographic archives are cultural agents within such processes.

From the beginning of the twentieth century to the founding at mid-century of the state of Israel, Jewish photography in Palestine/ Israel is rooted in the history of establishing the Zionist idea and the cultural and political consequences of that undertaking. Photography had an important role in Zionist propaganda campaigns, by producing imagery at the service of the Zionist ideal and photographs were instruments of propaganda by their ability to mediate ideological message. By the 1930s most of Jewish photographers were preoccupied with Zionist ideals and their photos were an instrumental tool in the creation of a collective consciousness. They had a key role in constructing a national myth and narrative and renew heritage for a nation in formation.

The rise of the Nazis in the 1930s prompted the migration of photographers to Palestine. Among them were Tim Gidal, Alfred Bernheim, Helmar Lerski, Hans Pinn, Walter Zadek, Alfons Himmelreich, Ellen Auerbach, Lilly Brauer, Anna Landes and Liselotte Grschebina. German photographers had the advantage of familiarity with German culture that Zionists ideologists drew inspiration from and modelled their style of nation building programs on. The photographs of Liselotte Grschebina of athletics, immigration, architecture, WIZO and women's farm, agriculture and Tnuva, culture, and industry of pre-State Israel have become an significant part of Israel shared heritage (Oren 1995; Perez 2000; Hansen-Glucklich 2017).

2. Liselotte Grschebina, German-born Israeli (1908-1994)

Liselotte Grschebina was born 1908 in Karlsruhe, Germany. From 1925 to 29 she studied painting and graphic design at the local art academy, the Badische Landeskunstschule in Karlsruhe (BLK), and commercial photography at the School of Applied Arts in Stuttgart.

In January 1932, Grschebina opens Bilfoto, her own studio, announcing her specialization in child photography, and takes on students. In 1934, Grschebina leaves Germany and arrives in Palestine. She meets Ellen Auerbach in Tel Aviv and together they open the studio Ishon (which means “eyeball” or “little person” in Hebrew) and promote their specialization in children's photos (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342037>).

Grschebina was part of the German community in Palestine becoming friends with other photographers such as Walter Zadek, Walter Kristeller, Alfons Himmerlich, Fritz Cohen, Anne Landes and Lilly Brauer. Together they founded the Palestine Professional Photographers Association. Grschebina undertook assignments for Palestine Railways and the dairy company Tnuva. She submitted photographs to the sports pages of Jewish newspapers and from 1934-47 she was the official photographer of the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/341995>).

Grschebina was one of the founders of the Israel's first association of photographers, the Association of Professional Photographers (Caplan 2008). Grschebina's son discovered her photographer's archive only after Grschebina's death. In 2000, the private archive of Liselotte Grschebina's photographs with the approximately 1.800 photos were given to the photo department of the Israel Museum Israel Museum by her son Beni Gjebin and his wife Rina Shoham, with the assistance of Rachel and Dov Gottesmann, Tel Aviv, Geneva and London. The gift added to the Israel museum's collection powerful images of pre-state Israel. Grschebina's striking photographic series of athletes is aesthetically reminiscent of Soviet – and even Nazi – imagery in its quest to convey the power of the Zionist enterprise (Ghert- Zand, 2019) (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/search/site/Grschebina%20and%20+Liselotte>).

3. Research questions

My research explores the contribution of Grschebina's photographs within the constructing of shared cultural heritage, my research questions are:

- What are the affinities and the relations between her Cultural German heritage and her constructed new heritage in Palestine – Israel?

- How did Grschebina construct a new shared heritage for the future newborn state with the tools of her past cultural German heritage?

To answer these questions, I focus on five main issues:

- The human body and the construction of the image of the “New Jew” (Farges 2018)
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342137>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/343468>
- Sports (Ashkenazi 2011)
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342023>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342021>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/343473>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342025>
- Agriculture (conquering the land)
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342242>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342134>
- Portraits and pioneers
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/343463>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342235>
- Modernity and the “New Land”
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342063>
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/343450>

I will compare the photographs that were captured in Palestine-Israel with those that were taken in Germany (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342024>; <https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/342200>; <https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/343471>).

4. Methodology

- Visual analysis: The visual analysis that underlies this study examines facets of the photographic conception of Liselotte Grschebina, including motifs, style, and atmospheres through the lens of the concept shared heritage. In order to understand Grschebina dialogue with both “here” and

“there”, I analyze photographs from Israel museum Archive of Liselotte Grschebina (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/search/site/Grschebina%20and%20%20Liselotte?page=1>).

- Interviews: Interviews will be conducted, in order to understand the migrant’s wandering between two heritages. Possible interview partners are: 1. Grschebina's son Beni Gjebin; 2. Dr. Noam Gal, Curator of Photography at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

5. Theoretical framework and Key concepts

- Photography, Archive, and shared heritage (Azoulay 2012; Sela 2014; Sela 2000; Sekula 1986; Kidd 2016)
- German-Jewish Zionist photographers (Sela 2013; Ashkenazi 2018; Berkowitz 2019; Hansen-Glucklich 2017; Yosef 2014)
- German-Jewish Zionist photographer, Liselotte Grschebina, (Caplan 2008)

6. References

Ashkenazi, O. (2018). Strategies of Exile Photography: Helmar Lerski and Hans Casparius in Palestine (87-119), in Marc Silberman (ed). Back to the Future: Traditions and Innovations in German Studies. Bern: Peter Lang.

Ashkenazi, O. (2011). German Jewish Athletes and the Formation of Zionist (Trans-)National Culture. Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society. 17 (3), pp.124–155.

Azoulay, A. (2012). Archive. political concepts 1 (<http://www.politicalconcepts.org/archive-ariella-azoulay/>).

Berkowitz, M. (2019). Photography’s Jewish affinities: Unintended benefits and squandered opportunities for Zionism & Israel. Journal of Israeli History. 37 (2), pp.249-27.

Caplan, Y. (Ed) (2008). Woman with a camera, Liselotte Grschebina, Germany 1908 – Israel 1994. Jerusalem: Israel Museum.

Farges, P. (2018). Muscle” Yekkes? Multiple German-Jewish Masculinities in Palestine and Israel after 1933. Central European History 51, pp. 466–487.

Ghert- Zand, R. (2019). New Israel Museum photography exhibition puts women artists back in the picture. The Times of Israel (<https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-israel-museum-photography-exhibition-puts-women-artists-back-in-the-picture/>).

- Grossmann, R. (2018). Negotiating Presences: Palestine and the Weimar German Gaze. *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*. 23 (2), pp. 137–172.
- Hansen-Glucklich, J. (2017). Father, Goethe, Kant, and Rilke: The Ideal of Bildung, the Fifth Aliyah, and German-Jewish Integration into the Yishuv. *Shofar*. 35(2), pp.115-116.
- Israel museum Archive of Grschebina Liselotte (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/search/site/Grschebina%20and%20%20Liselotte?page=1>).
- Kidd, J., (2016). Democratizing Narrative: Or the Accumulation of the Digital Memory Archive (71-86). *Museums in The New Mediascape. Transmedia, Participation, Ethics*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Oren R (1995). Zionist photography, 1910–41: Constructing a landscape. *History of Photography*. 19 (3). Pp. 201-209.
- Perez, N. (2000). *Time Frame, a century of photography in the Land of Israel*. Jerusalem: Israel Museum.
- Sekula, A. (1986). The Body and the Archive. *October* 39, pp.6-11.
- Sela, S. (2000). *Photography in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s*. Israel: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House.
- Sela, R. (2014). Rethinking National Archives in Colonial Countries and Zones of Conflict; The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Israel's National Photography Archives as a Case Study. *Ibraaz* (<https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/78>).
- Yosef, D. (2014). From Yekke to Zionist: Narrative strategies in life stories of Central European Jewish women immigrants to Mandate Palestine. *Journal of Israeli History*. 33(2), pp.185-208.

Copyright of this Working paper: Orly Zimmerman, November 2020.