Accounting of the Soul: The Social Life of an American-Jewish “Continuity Crisis”

Over the last three decades, American Jewry, a small but highly established ethno-religious minority group, has been flooded by concerns about numerical decline, commonly tagged as the “Jewish continuity crisis.” Deeply invested in socio-demographic forms of knowledge, Jewish leaders and organizations have construed certain trends as approaching a critical threshold, framing them as both markers and catalysts of assimilation and assigning them an existential weight. Based on a long-term anthropological and socio-historic study, I ask how and why American Jewry perceives and manages itself as a community facing a ”continuity crisis.” What are the scientific and discursive practices that shape this understanding? How do these practices steer certain population visions and policy interventions? And what can these communal dynamics teach us about the sensibilities, as well as strengths, of American Jewry as a minority, post-Holocaust, and diasporic Jewish community? By looking into the production and circulation of population statistics on various American-Jewish sites, I shed light on the constitutive role of social-scientific knowledge in the making of American Jewish imageries and policies of crisis. This inquiry implicates broader theoretical concerns, particularly the public life of demography as a generative social knowledge; the multivalent cultural value of quantification; and the governmental, survivalist strategies of minority groups as voluntary communal polities.

Recommended Reading

PUBLIKATIONEN AUS DER FELLOWBIBLIOTHEK

Kravel-Tovi, Michal (Cambridge, 2020)
The specter of dwindling numbers: population quantity and Jewish biopolitics in the United States
https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1850901015

Kravel-Tovi, Michal (Osvord, 2018)
Accounting of the soul: enumeration, affect, and soul searching among American jewry
https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1853672947

Kravel-Tovi, Michal (Arlington, VA, 2014)
Bureaucratic gifts: religious conversion, change, and exchange in Israel
https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1853673730

Kravel-Tovi, Michal (Arlington, Va., 2008)
The work of the present: constructing messianic temporality in the wake of failed prophecy among Chabad Hasidim
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