

Since the beginning body was in the Jewish culture an object of heated discussions, quarrels and rabbinic treaties. Unlike Christianity, though, despite controlling especially woman's body through various rituals, body was never taboo. As one of the scholars stated people of the book were in fact people of the body. Since the 1880s with advancing industrialisation, migration, modernisation, secularisation, emergence of new political movements within Jewish culture and beyond it, until the outbreak of WWII, discourses on body in Jewish culture were undergoing considerable changes. The aim of the proposed project is to examine the nature of those changes that are seen in press, literature, memoirs, recollections, correspondence, autobiographies, political pamphlets written in five languages – Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, German and Russian – that were used by Jews living in the Polish lands, that occupied the former territory of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Second Republic of Poland; as well as in visual arts (photography, film, press illustrations, journal covers, painting, sculpture and graphics) depicting Jewish body. Visual materials were not just an ornament to the written content, but they co-shaped discourses on body. In autobiographical sources photography or newly-developing film are often mentioned as the factors influencing one's perception of one's body. Thus, visual sources are treated in the project as the 'sixth' language. Importantly, each of the languages has a different function: Yiddish, often called women's language, gives intimate, women's perspective; Hebrew, on the other hand, is the language of male treaties on woman's body, hence it gives male perspective; and with the emergence of Zionism it propagated new model of Jewish body (both male and female) – muscular, healthy and sportive; while Polish, German and Russian were aimed also at non-Jewish reader, thus they have much more autoethnographic character. Additionally, on the turn of the twentieth century, Polish gave voice to acculturating Jewish women. Project timeframe that goes beyond typical chronology, is aimed at thorough examination of the impact of WWI, which shook social norms, which was visible in fashion, in withdrawal from mikveh of religious women, and in appearance of mutilated, disfigured bodies that reminded of fragility of human body; on discourses on body. The project's objective is to analyse and juxtapose the changes that occurred within the discourses on body until the outbreak of WWII, which brought a totally new paradigm in reflection of Jewish body and changed entirely social structure of the Polish lands. What were mechanisms shaping those discourses? What were the relations between them? How were the new models of Jewish corporality related to different variants of Jewish identity? How did the new ideas related to corporality spread? These are only some of the questions that a seven-member-team of philologists, historians and art historians will try to answer.

The project, which develops further studies on discourses on body in Polish-Jewish writings, is highly original in its character as it approaches the topic, that was not thoroughly studied, from a very broad perspective. Results of research on discourses on body in five languages, in four different areas of human creativity (literature, autobiography, press and visual arts), in two different perspectives (male and female) will considerably broaden current knowledge not only on Jewish history and culture in the Polish lands, but also on Polish social history and culture between 1880 and 1939. Obviously, studies on corporality are related to reproduction rights, sexuality, social norms, hygiene, healthy life style and development of sport, thus the results of the project may be used by scholars from different disciplines in humanities, like: historians, sociologists, social psychologists, theologians, cultural studies specialists, art historians, literary specialists, and German, Russian, Polish, Yiddish and Hebrew philologists. Due to its transdisciplinary character, the project is intended to use different research methods like: discourse analysis, gender theory and criticism, archival analysis, literary analysis, source criticism. Because apart from the anthology of sources, monograph, articles aimed at academic and non-academic audiences, one of the results will be a virtual map showing the spread of ideas on corporality, the project will use also methods of machine learning and named entities recognition process. Data basis for the map will be made of Jewish press in five languages (Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, German and Russian) that was published in the Polish lands between 1880 and 1939.