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You Only Live Twice

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Vibrant Jewish communities were reborn in Europe after the Holocaust. Is there a future for them in the 21st century?



Jumping across the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

Photomontage from Wikipedia.

Samuel Sandler, an aeronautical engineer and head of the Jewish community in Versailles, France, announced a few weeks ago that he'd had the local synagogue registered as a national landmark. "My feeling is that our congregation will be gone within twenty or thirty years," he told friends, "and I don't want the building demolished or, worse, used for improper purposes."

Once the seat of French royalty, Versailles is now among the tranquil, prosperous, and upscale suburbs of Greater Paris. Among the townspeople are executives employed in gleaming corporate headquarters a few miles away. They and their churchgoing families inhabit early-20th-century villas and late-20th-century condominiums set in majestic greenery. Among the townspeople too, are a thousand or so Jews of similar economic and social status who have made their homes in Versailles and nearby towns. In addition to the synagogue and community

center of Versailles itself, a dozen more synagogues dot the surrounding area.

So what makes Sandler so pessimistic about the future?

One answer might be thought to lie in the personal tragedy that befell him last year, when an Islamist terrorist shot and killed his son Jonathan, a thirty-year-old rabbi at a school in the southern city of Toulouse, along with Jonathan's two sons, ages six and three, and an eight-year-old girl. But Sandler had faced his grief with uncommon courage and self-control. Both at the funeral in Jerusalem and in later media appearances, he had made a point of defending democracy, patriotic values, and interfaith dialogue. Personal experience, then, may play a part in explaining Sandler's grim diagnosis of the prospects of French Jewry, and by implication of European Jewry at large; but it is far from the whole story. Nor is that diagnosis unique to him. To the contrary, the more one travels throughout Europe, the more one confronts an essential paradox: the European Jewish idyll represented by Versailles is very common; so is the dire view articulated by Samuel Sandler.

The Paradox

European Judaism *looks* healthy, and secure.

Religious and cultural activities are everywhere on the rise. Last December, in the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg, an exquisite new synagogue was inaugurated in Ulm, the most recent in a long series of new or recently restored sanctuaries in Germany. In Paris, a European Center for Judaism will soon be built under the auspices of the Consistoire (the French union of synagogues) and the French government. Many European capitals now harbor major Jewish museums or Holocaust memorials. In Paris, a visitor can proceed from the National Museum for Jewish Art and History housed at the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan, a 17th-century mansion in the Marais district, to the national Shoah memorial near the Seine, to the Drancy Holocaust memorial in the northern suburbs. Berlin hosts the Jüdisches Museum designed by Daniel Libeskind; the cemetery-like grid of the Mahnmal, the memorial to the murdered Jews of

Europe whose concrete slabs are spread over an entire city block in the center of the capital; and another national Holocaust memorial and educational center at Wannsee.

And yet, despite all their success and achievement, the majority of European Jews, seconded by many Jewish and non-Jewish experts, insist that catastrophe may lie ahead.

One does not have to look far to see why. A large-scale survey commissioned by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) tells a tale of widespread and persistent anti-Semitism. Although the full study is not due to be released until October, the salient facts have been summarized by EU officials and by researchers like Dov Maimon, a French-born Israeli scholar at the Jewish People Policy Institute in Jerusalem. Among the findings: more than one in four Jews report experiencing anti-Semitic harassment at least once in the twelve months preceding the survey; one in three have experienced such harassment over the past five years; just under one in ten have experienced a physical attack or threat in the same period; and between two-fifths and one-half in France, Belgium, and Hungary have considered emigrating because they feel unsafe. Statistics from my native France, home to the largest Jewish community in Europe, go back farther in time and tell an even darker tale. Since 2000, 7,650 anti-Semitic incidents have been reliably reported to the Jewish Community Security Service and the French ministry of the interior; this figure omits incidents known to have occurred but unreported to the police. The incidents range from hate speech, anti-Semitic graffiti, and verbal threats to defacement of synagogues and other Jewish buildings, to acts of violence and terror including arson, bombings, and murder.

And that is just France. All over Europe, with exceptions here and there, the story is much the same. Nor do the figures take into account the menacing atmosphere created by the incessant spewing of hatred against the people and the state of Israel at every level of society, including the universities and the elite and mass media, to the point where polls show as many as 40 percent of Europeans holding the opinion that Israel is conducting a war of extermination against the Palestinians; or the recent moves to ban circumcision and kosher slaughter; or the intense social pressures created by the rise of radical and often violent Islam of the kind that targeted Samuel Sandler's son and grandchildren (and of which more below). Statements by EU officials and others, even while they acknowledge the "frightening" degree of anti-Semitism prevalent in today's Europe, and even while they promise to "fight against it with all the means at their disposal," also contend (in the words of the

prime minister of Baden-Württemberg) that anti-Semitism is "not present in the heart of society" or in "major political parties." Such bland reassurances have quite understandably brought little comfort. Against this backdrop, it is little wonder that even so sober an analyst as Robert Wistrich of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, author of definitive works on the history and dynamics of anti-Semitism, has concluded that although the final endpoint of European Jewry may be decades in coming, "any clear-sighted and sensible Jew who has a sense of history would understand that this is the time to get out."

"A Sense of History"

For many European Jews, there is indeed a *déjà vu* quality to the present situation. Like Israelis, but unlike most American Jews, today's European Jews are survivors, or children of survivors, either of the Holocaust or of the near-complete expulsion of Jews from Islamic countries that took place in the second half of the 20th century. They know, from personal experience or from the testimony of direct and irrefutable witnesses, how things unfolded in the not too distant past, and how a seemingly normal Jewish life could be destroyed overnight. When anti-Semitic incidents or other problems accumulate, they can't help asking whether history is repeating itself. "Call it the yogurt's-expiration-date syndrome," an elderly, Moroccan-born Frenchman recently said to me. He elaborated:

Right after Morocco won its independence from France in 1956, my family joined the country's ruling elite. My father, a close friend of King Mohammed V, had access to everybody in the government. It went on like that for two or three years. Then one day, out of the blue, Father told us we were leaving. We children asked why. "We've passed the yogurt's expiration date," he said. "We have no future in Morocco; as long as we're free to go, we must go." So we left, leaving behind most of our money and belongings. Ever since then, wherever I've lived, I've been on the lookout for the yogurt's expiration date. In France, I think it's close.

To contemporary European Jews like this one, today's anxieties thus also recall the crucial choice they or their parents made some 30 or 50 or 70 years ago when, having survived the Holocaust, they resolved to stay in Europe—more accurately, in Western Europe, under the American umbrella—or, having been forced out of Islamic countries, to flee to Europe. Was this the right choice, after all? Hadn't a majority both of the surviving European Jews and of the refugees from the Arab world decided otherwise?

Yes, they had; and here too a little history is helpful. Back in the early 1930s, there were about 10 million

self-identified Jews in Europe (including the USSR). There were also others—estimates range from one to three million—who for one reason or another had converted to Christianity but retained a consciousness of their Jewish identity or who had intermarried or otherwise assimilated into Gentile society without converting.

Half of this prewar European population perished in the Holocaust. Of the five to seven million survivors, about 1.5 million emigrated to the newborn state of Israel throughout the late 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Another half-million made it to the United States—a number that would surely have been higher had the restrictive quota system introduced in the 1920's not still been in place. About 200,000 wound up in Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, South Africa, and Australia/ New Zealand. As for the roughly 2.5 million locked up in the Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, most made their way to Israel or the United States whenever the opportunity presented itself.

All in all, then, about two-thirds of post-Holocaust European Jews left Europe, and only one third remained. And the same is true of the more than one million Jewish refugees from Islamic countries. Upon being expelled or encouraged to leave, two-thirds headed to Israel and one third to Europe (or, in a few cases, to the United States or Canada). The proportion might vary according to country of origin—90 percent of Iraqi and Yemeni Jews emigrated to Israel, versus just 30 percent of Egyptian Jews— but the total ratio remained two-to-one against the continent.

What then motivated the minority that either stayed in or opted for Europe? For the most part, Jews who before the war had been citizens of Western European countries were eager, once their rights and property were restored, to resume their former life as soon and as completely as possible, even at the price of a certain selective amnesia about their country's wartime behavior. What the researcher Guri Schwarz observes about postwar Italian Jews can be generalized to others:

What emerges from the Jewish press, from memoirs, and from diaries as well as from declarations of community leaders is the marked inclination to deny Italian responsibility in the origin and implementation of persecution for the period 1938-1943 as well as for the period of mass murder and deportation that followed the [1943] armistice with the Allied forces. This behavior, in many ways similar to that adopted by Jews in other Western countries—such as France, Holland, and Belgium—can be understood if we consider the intense desire to reintegrate into society and the conviction that such a process would be easier if [Jews] avoided attracting too much attention to their specific tragedy.

Another factor here was that many refugees from Islamic countries were technically also West European citizens, and entitled as such to resettlement in the “mother country” with full rights and benefits. This was true of Algerian Jews, who as a group had been granted French citizenship in 1870; of many Tunisian or Moroccan Jews who had opted for French citizenship under France's protectorate; and of some Jews from Egypt, Lebanon, and Syria who were registered as Europeans under the terms of longstanding contracts between the European powers and the Ottoman Empire. Libyan Jews, as former Italian colonial subjects, were admitted to Italy, and residents of the former Spanish protectorate in northern Morocco to Spain.

As for refugees with no claim to citizenship in a West European nation, they might enter first as asylum seekers and then apply for permanent status. In *The Man in the White Sharkskin Suit*, her poignant memoir of her family's “riches-to-rags” expulsion from Egypt in 1956, Lucette Lagnado recalls the “relatively efficient, coordinated system of social services and relief agencies dedicated to helping refugees” in Paris: Funded by private philanthropists like the Rothschilds, as well as by deep-pocketed American Jewish organizations, the French groups tried to lessen the trauma. Refugees were immediately given a free place to live—typically a room or two in an inexpensive hotel—along with subsidized meals. They were put in contact with officials who would help them find them a permanent home somewhere in the world.

In the end, the Lagnados secured American visas, but many other Egyptian refugees in Paris would strike roots in the “narrow, winding streets” around the relief agencies and the Great Synagogue in the ninth arrondissement, just like previous waves of refugees from Eastern and Central Europe, “old furriers who still spoke German, and Polish, and Yiddish.” Culturally speaking, many of these new outsiders felt at home in Western Europe. Before the war, the Jewish upper and upper-middle classes in Central and Eastern Europe had learned French and English along with German and Russian and had imbibed bourgeois Western European values. The Jewish elites in Morocco, Turkey, Egypt, Syria, and Iran had also been formed in French, German, or Anglo-Saxon schools. While in Paris, Lucette Lagnado's French-educated mother, otherwise very Jewish and strictly kosher, would take her regularly to Parc Monceau to remind her that “this was Marcel Proust's playground. . . . And she said it with so much feeling and intensity that I knew I was expected to absorb the magic.”

A Golden Age

Soon enough, another and quite unexpected reason emerged to join or to stay in Western Europe. Old Europe, since 1914 the continent of gloom and doom, war and revolution, physical and moral exhaustion, division and crisis, decadence and tyranny, was giving way to a New Europe: optimistic, free, open-minded, united. Whereas the continent's reorganization after World War I had been a total failure, the Western Europe that emerged from World War II looked increasingly like a success story—even, as was commonly said, a miracle.

What happened, basically, was Americanization. The U.S.—which this time, unlike after the previous World War, had resolved to stay in Europe—was a powerfully benign hegemon. As Western Europe strove to catch up with American standards of living and the American spirit, Washington provided military security both against Soviet expansion and, within Europe itself, between neighbor and neighbor. This in turn boosted regional cooperation and lent credibility to age-old projects for a European confederation.

The thrust toward cooperation and unification helped the Europeans to make optimal use of the Marshall Plan and other American-sponsored mechanisms and regimes, from the Bretton-Woods agreements to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization for European Cooperation and Development, GATT, and beyond. Economic efficiency, combined with the postwar baby boom and the need to rebuild wrecked cities, factories, harbors, railways, and roads led rapidly to prosperity in most West European countries, with full employment, rising wages, and the consolidation or expansion of welfare programs from health care to housing to education. Finally, prosperity fostered political stability, the rule of law, human rights, and religious *aggiornamento* and tolerance, supplanting, for the first time in a century, the trademark European paradigms of racism, extreme nationalism, and class war. In spite of occasional setbacks (in particular, the global crisis of the 1970's) and negative side-effects (including the tendency to forget or to derogate the American role in the European miracle), this virtuous circle would prevail for a half-century. It culminated in the 1989 Western victory in the cold war, the incorporation into the West European fold of almost all of the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe and even three former Soviet republics, and finally the establishment of the European Union in 1993.

And where were the Jews in this picture? Suddenly, they were welcome in Europe *as* Jews, to a degree unseen since the Emancipation in the late-18th and

19th century. From despised or barely tolerated outcasts, or more or less pitied victims, they became exemplary and even archetypal Europeans, if not the very embodiment of what the new Europe was supposed to be. Their persecution at the hands of the Nazis, a haunting episode that most Europeans would refuse even to discuss in the immediate postwar era, now served to epitomize what the new Europe was *not*, and whose recurrence it had been designed to prevent.

Not that this Jewish transformation emerged quickly or fully formed. Michel Salomon, then the editor of the French Jewish monthly *L'Arche*, devoted a prescient cover story in the mid-1960s to the rise of what he called the new "Atlantic Jews," but it was only some fifteen years later, in 1979, that Simone Veil, a French survivor of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and a former French cabinet minister, was elected as the first chair of the newly established European Parliament.

Ironically, the rise of Israel, the main destination of postwar Jews *leaving* Europe, became another important element in the upgraded status and growing self-confidence of those who had opted *for* Europe. One might have expected the contrary. To be sure, Israel's achievements had dispelled many anti-Jewish stereotypes, but many West European Jews were cautious about expressing their solidarity with the state, either out of guilt over not having cast their lot with it or out of fear that they might render themselves vulnerable to the charge of dual loyalty.

All such worries were washed away by the extraordinary popularity that Israel enjoyed in the Western world throughout the 1950s, 60s, and (to a lesser extent) 70s—a phenomenon still awaiting thorough study. One reason undoubtedly had to do with the way a "normal"—that is, recognizably Western—Jewish state helped West Europeans cope with, or forget, the otherwise discomfiting and unassimilable memory of the Holocaust. Another reason was that Israel fit certain political fantasies on both the Right and the Left. Conservative Europeans, then very much on the defensive, were delighted to discover in the Jewish state the best of their own values: the primacy of a national and cultural heritage, technological and military prowess, refusal to surrender to the "barbarians." For their part, progressive Europeans were happy to celebrate the land of David Ben-Gurion, the kibbutz, and the Labor party as the very picture of their own utopian socialist dream come true.

In whichever form it took, Israel's popularity reflected positively on Jews everywhere: so much so, that the more European Jews identified themselves with the Jewish state, the easier and the more thoroughly they were accepted as bona-fide European citizens. Indeed,

the image generated by Israel, in combination with the optimism generated by the European virtuous circle, helped produce a minor virtuous circle inside the Jewish community itself.

Demographically, the postwar baby boom rejuvenated post-1945 West European Jewry, which was then further enlarged by immigrants from Eastern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. In France, the Sephardi input was spectacular: between 1945 and 1970, the French Jewish population leapt from under 300,000 to more than 600,000. In Italy, newcomers from Libya and other Mediterranean countries allowed the local Jewish community to maintain its 1945 level (roughly, 40,000 souls) despite emigration and rampant assimilation and intermarriage. In Spain, a shadowy post-Civil War community numbering in the low thousands rose rapidly to 15,000 thanks to immigrants chiefly from Morocco. Smaller inflows benefited other communities from Switzerland to Belgium to Scandinavia.

The quantitative impact of this immigration yielded qualitative results, enabling some communities to reach a sufficient critical mass to sustain Jewish activities. Overnight, it became feasible to provide kosher food, build synagogues, open schools, publish books, and launch media. Sephardi immigrants in particular, being much more traditional and more “ethnic” than the native Ashkenazim, also ranked higher in Jewish self-identification. Despite the internal differences among them—assimilated Jews from Algiers, Casablanca, and Tunis bore little resemblance to the strictly Orthodox Jews from the Moroccan Atlas, the Algerian hinterland, or Jerba in southern Tunisia—all came from countries where religion, for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, was the ultimate defining factor in public as well as private matters.

Jewish daily life was remodeled accordingly. France, which in 1960 boasted 40 kosher butchers in all, today has more than 300 butchers and as many stores, including the major supermarket chains, selling processed kosher foods. In 1960, there were four kosher restaurants in the entire country; today there are one hundred times as many. Where Jewish schools numbered about 40 in the early 1960s, with fewer than 2,000 pupils, today there are 286 schools serving 32,000 pupils. Some 45 percent of all Jewish children attend a Jewish school for at least a couple of years, and most study at least for bar- or bat-mitzvah. Together with the flourishing market for Jewish services and a more tradition-leaning Jewish profile came greater confidence. Earliest to emerge were pro-Israel political activism, increased proficiency in Hebrew, more talmudic studies, and Orthodox revivalism, soon followed by the discovery of Diaspora subcultures and their languages (Yiddish,

Ladino, Judeo-Arabic) and an upsurge in non-Orthodox religious denominations.

In sum, European Jews had entered a golden age, and as news of it spread, more non-European Jews joined the party. In the 1990s and into the first decade of the 21st century, sizable numbers of post-Soviet Jews immigrated to the European Union, chiefly to Germany. Some Israelis, too, moved to Europe, and many others without immediate plans went through the process of reclaiming their parents’ citizenship. For some Jewish or Israeli intellectuals and artists, Europe seemed like a New Jerusalem: more democratic, more promising, and more “Jewish-friendly” than Israel or the United States. There was the benign case of the Rumanian-born Elie Barnavi, a Tel Aviv University professor and briefly an envoy to France who was also closely associated with the Museum of Europe in Brussels and who for a while became a rhapsodist of the EU, which he described as a “democratic Holy Roman Empire.” There was also the grievous case of Avraham Burg, a former Speaker of the Knesset and former head of the Jewish Agency who turned against Zionism and publicly urged his fellow Israelis to procure European passports and leave their own benighted country behind.

Seeds of a New Anti-Semitism

According to rabbinic tradition, anti-Semitism **starts** when Jews beguile themselves into thinking they can fulfill their destiny in exile. Indeed, the anti-Semitic threat that so many European Jews worry about today materialized around the year 2000, precisely at the moment when Barnavi and Burg fell in love with the dream of Europe.

This, too, was not a sudden or even a completely unforeseen development: many previous phenomena that in themselves had appeared insignificant or negligible, or could be taken as lingering vestiges of a bygone past, turned out to be portents of things to come. Just as some physical or chemical substances may enjoy half-lives for eons, prewar and wartime anti-Semitism did not vanish overnight on VE Day but for a long twilight period continued to exist under one guise or another right alongside the new, emerging philo-Semitism. Conversely, the cycle of postwar philo-Semitism was still in flower when the latest, full-blown anti-Semitic cycle was getting under way. For the record, it should be noted that in Eastern Europe and the USSR—the same countries that had hosted the killing fields of the Holocaust—anti-Semitism never really abated after 1945, and at times became even more open and strident than before. This accounts not only for the waves of Jewish emigration whenever the Communists permitted it—and continuing even after the fall of Communism—but

also for the recent reemergence of explicitly anti-Semitic parties in Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Ukraine.

Nor had the transition from anti- to philo-Semitism in Western Europe itself been all smooth sailing. An ostensibly repentant West Germany entertained for two decades a fictitious distinction between hard-core Nazis and ordinary Germans, with the latter category including Wehrmacht personnel and less hard-core Nazis who allegedly had been ignorant of or uninvolved in the Holocaust. This subterfuge allowed West German courts to issue light or no sentences to Nazi criminals who came before them, and to postulate a twenty-year statute of limitations on war crimes. In one highly symbolic gesture in 1955, the West German embassy in France attempted to halt the release at Cannes of *Night and Fog*, Alain Resnais' documentary film about the Nazi extermination camps.

During the war itself, Britain, the nation that had heroically carried the full weight of battle from the collapse of France in June 1940 to the German assault on the USSR a year later, simultaneously indulged its own form of benign or not so benign anti-Semitism, especially in the form of governmental hostility directed at Zionism and the beleaguered Jewish populace in Mandate Palestine. In France, after the war, Holocaust survivors sometimes had to go to court to retrieve their home or business, or to win back orphaned Jewish children who had been sheltered—and baptized—by Church-supported networks. The postwar French government routinely upheld most non-political Vichy-era legislation and even kept Vichy coins in circulation while insisting that the Vichy state never really existed in the first place—and that the French state and its bureaucrats had taken no part and bore no responsibility whatsoever in the Holocaust. Jews who had been sent to Auschwitz or other death camps were deemed to be only “political deportees” and, as such, inferior in status to deported French Resistance fighters, despite the fact that the latter were not systematically murdered by the Germans and in general enjoyed a much higher rate of survival.

None of this is to gainsay the benign transformation in Western Europe that was to come. It is rather to reflect on an irony of history: that the seeds of the new anti-Semitism were being planted at about the same time the old anti-Semitism was giving way. In France, moreover, they were being planted by a most unlikely individual.

In May 1940, as France was reeling under the German onslaught, Charles de Gaulle was a junior member of the French cabinet who supported a merger of the French and British empires: a single army, a single government. A month later, he had become the leader

of the Free French, a small group of soldiers, civil servants, and colonial administrators who, in cooperation with the British, were intent on resisting the Nazis and the collaborationist Vichy regime. In time, de Gaulle would grow suspicious of his Anglo-Saxon hosts and benefactors. Neither Churchill nor FDR, he decided (with some justice), really believed that France would rise again from its abysmal defeat or regain its role as a world power. Nor did they see him and his movement as the legitimate heirs of French sovereignty, even when the entire resistance movement pledged allegiance to him. The Roosevelt administration, in particular, was prepared to bypass him entirely and, after the 1944 landing in Normandy, to subject metropolitan France to Allied military rule.

After the war, de Gaulle's foreign policy—he was prime minister and then president from 1944 to 1946 and from 1958 to 1969—grew fiercely nationalistic, based on a complete rejection of the West and of Anglo-American hegemony. He withdrew from NATO in 1964, sided with the Communists in Indochina in 1966, and supported Quebec separatism in 1967. Tellingly for our purposes, he also terminated an extremely fruitful cooperative relationship with Israel in science, technology, nuclear research, and armaments. As explained dryly by de Gaulle's foreign minister, Couve de Murville, this was just a matter of national interest: as long as France maintained its special relationship with the “Zionist state,” it would be unable to enter into a much sought-after grand alliance with the “non-aligned” world and the oil-rich Arab kingdoms.

All of this came as a shock to much of de Gaulle's constituency at home, which had been quite supportive of Israel. The France-Israel alliance had in fact been engineered in 1955 by Pierre Koenig, a Gaullist defense minister, and later expanded by Pierre Messmer, a Gaullist minister of the armed forces. The president himself had once referred to Israel as “a friend and an ally”—and it had therefore been widely assumed that he would stand by its side during and after the Six-Day War of June 1967. Instead, just days before the war broke out that would end in Israel's victory, he struck a “neutral” pose by placing an embargo on weapons deliveries to Middle Eastern belligerents; since Israel was then France's only customer in the region, “neutrality” amounted to a switch to the Arab side. Then, at a press conference in November, not only did de Gaulle question Israel's legitimacy as a nation-state but he also denounced Jews in general as an “elite, self-assured, and domineering people,” equipped with “vast resources in terms of money, influence, and propaganda.” I was nineteen at the time and, like most young people in France who were not on the Left, a fervent Gaullist; I

remember listening to the radio broadcast and feeling my blood run cold.

Had de Gaulle been a covert anti-Semite all along? Anti-Jewish remarks are to be found in letters that he wrote as a young officer to his relatives after World War I. But in the 1930's, shunned by the French army's upper echelon and his former mentor Marshall Philippe Pétain, he had been befriended and supported by Colonel Emile Mayer, a retired Jewish officer and, like de Gaulle himself, a strategic contrarian. During the war, as the charismatic leader of the Free French and head of the French Liberation Government, de Gaulle abrogated the Vichy racial laws in the territories that fell, one by one, under his authority. In sum, it would be fair to say that de Gaulle had been raised in an anti-Semitic culture, had become relatively unprejudiced in his middle years, and relapsed toward the end of his life. But de Gaulle's personal feelings are less important than his legacy. In 1967, he was widely criticized for his betrayal of Israel and his anti-Jewish remarks. Still, he was and he remained de Gaulle, a larger than life character and France's greatest national hero since Napoleon. Thanks to his enormous stature and his major domestic achievement—a new, modernized, and all-powerful state bureaucracy fully committed to his doctrine of “national independence”—the decisions he made and the stands he took would exercise a growing influence not just on France but on all of Western Europe.

The anti-American, pro-Arab, and objectively anti-Israel policies initiated by de Gaulle in the 1960s have remained to this day an essential tenet of French foreign affairs and French political culture, whether under conservative or socialist governments. If they have also spread like a virus into the European Community and the European Union as a whole—and they have—the reason is that the EU's decision-making process, at French insistence but with British acquiescence, is based on the principle of unanimity or near-unanimity rather than on majority opinion. France may at one point have been the lone country in Europe with an explicitly anti-Israel agenda, but when it came time to formulate an all-European position on the Middle East, the choice was between no position at all or a compromise between, on the one hand, the French line and, on the other hand, the more pro-Israel approach advocated by other countries. Since Europe very much wanted to have, or appear to have, a say in Middle Eastern affairs, it chose the second option, thus turning a tiny minority view into, in effect, half the European view. And since every European country was supposed to abide by the EU's “common foreign policy,” a modicum of hostility to Israel was now routinely endorsed.

Over the years, the entire European political class has been reeducated into a culture of Israel-bashing. Think of William Hague and David Cameron: as young Conservative activists or backbenchers, these British politicians were as pro-Israel as Stephen Harper of Canada; today, as mature politicians, they have joined Europe's anti-Israel choir.

The End of the Dream

To the degree that Israel's popularity had been an important factor in Europe's postwar embrace of its Jews, the growing rejection of Israel undermined the Jewish image and standing. According to a 2011 study on “intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination in Europe” by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (linked to Germany's Social Democratic party), 63 percent of Poles and 48 percent of Germans believe that Israel is conducting a genocidal war against the Palestinians aimed at their “obliteration.” The same study found 55 percent of Poles, 41 percent of Dutch, 37 percent of British, and 37 percent of Germans in agreement with the following statement: “Considering Israel's policy, I can understand why people do not like Jews.” Still, the Gaullist-inspired reversal of attitude toward Israel would probably not have been strong enough on its own to resurrect old-fashioned European anti-Semitism. It was powerfully abetted by two additional developments.

First, the half-century of Europe's virtuous cycle started to unravel. From the 1990s on, one could sense growing discomfort with the top-heavy, anti-democratic, and chaotic governance of the European Union. The successive treaties of Maastricht (1992), Amsterdam (1997), Nice (2001), and Lisbon (2007), clumsily mixing heavy-handed overregulation with a free-market economic model, were ratified by national parliaments that were rightly seen as subservient to the unelected European Commission in Brussels, rather than by referendum as most citizens in most countries would have preferred. An exception was the 2005 European Constitutional Treaty, a comprehensive summing-up of Europe's new institutions; rejected by both France and the Netherlands, the two countries that submitted it to a referendum, it had to be quietly dropped.

Disillusionment with the European project gathered strength after the launching of the euro in 2002, a deflationary “single European currency” that undermined whatever stability in the world economy had been provided by the American dollar, and that was also totally incompatible with the welfare programs ingrained in the culture of many EU members. Not only did the euro fail to sustain prosperity on the Continent—with the exception of Germany, which in time undertook to lower wages

and cut welfare payments—but after 2008 it led to a series of national bankruptcies or near-bankruptcies from Ireland to Greece and from Spain and Italy to France.

And where did the Jewish community fit in *this* picture? Jews had benefited from their identification with the European project as long as “Europe” was a warrant for prosperity and progress. As “Europe” came increasingly to connote disruption, stagnation, and poverty, they were increasingly held in suspicion—guilty by association with a false dream, as it were, and all the more so since many of the charges against the EU (undemocratic, ruled by an opaque clique with no concern for ordinary Europeans) dovetailed with classic conspiracy theories about the Jews.

The second, very large factor working against the Jewish community arose from an abrupt shift in Europe’s demography. In the early postwar decades, population growth had contributed to the era of good feeling. From the 1970s on, everything changed. The European birthrate plummeted, just as immigration from Muslim countries was attaining unprecedented heights. Today, Muslim immigrants and their children amount to 10 percent or more of the population in major countries like Germany and France as well as in Sweden, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In the United Kingdom and Denmark, Muslims comprise upward of 5 percent of the population. Estimates of actual figures vary since most European countries do not allow ethnic or religious census or registration, immigrants are reluctant to give accurate information about themselves or their families, and Muslims in particular resort to *taqiya* (dissimulation about their identity and religious practice) when and as they deem it necessary. What is undeniable is that the proportion of Muslims in European society is rapidly increasing, either naturally or by further immigration or by conversion of non-Muslims, and that the proportion of Muslims in the youngest age brackets is much higher than the proportion overall. The entire French population, including overseas territories, stands currently at 67 million. Some seven to ten million of these—10 to 15 percent—are non-European, mostly Muslim immigrants or children of immigrants. Among younger cohorts, the figures are much higher: 20 to 25 percent of those under twenty-five are of non-European and Muslim origin. Within the next half-century, unless the ethnic French embark on a new baby boom of their own, or immigration stops, or immigrant fertility falls dramatically, France will become a half-Islamic and half-Islamized nation. This is quite problematic in itself, and all the more problematic to the degree that Islam overlaps with radical Islam: a philosophy and a way of life that reject democracy, the open society, and, needless to

add, Jews. Islamists see Europe as an Islamic-society-in-the-making; attempts by ethnic Europeans or by democratically-minded Muslims to reverse that process, or to reconcile Islam with European and democratic values, are regarded *prima facie* as “Islamophobia”: i.e., a Western war on Islam. Indeed, in the radical Islamic view, any objection or opposition to Islam or to the transformation of Western secular democracy into Islamic theocracy vindicates jihadism as a legitimate form of self-defense.

In *Islam: The French Test*, the veteran French journalist Elisabeth Schemla, formerly an editor at the leftwing magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, conservatively estimates Muslims in France at seven million. In her judgment, based on survey data, one third of that community—fully *two million* people—already embrace radical Islam, and the proportion is steadily growing. She quotes Marwan Muhamad, secretary-general of the ominously named Committee against Islamophobia in France (CCIF): “By what right can anyone say that, 30 years from now, France will not be a Muslim country? . . . No one in this country can wrest from us . . . our right to hope for an entire society faithful to Islam. . . . No one in this country can decide French national identity for us.” The Committee’s logo features the capital letters “CCIF” arranged so as to suggest an alternative reading: *çaiif*, the Arabic word for sword. Mohamed Merah, the murderer of Samuel Sandler’s son and grandchildren, started his killing spree last year by slaying a lone French soldier in Toulouse on March 11. Four days later he shot three more soldiers in the nearby town of Montauban: two died on the spot; the third, severely wounded, is now a quadriplegic. Merah selected his eight victims in order to “avenge” Islam, as he boasted shortly before being gunned down by security forces. Presumably the four soldiers, either of North African or West Indian origin, were guilty of betraying their Muslim brethren by joining an “enemy” army that has been fighting in Afghanistan, the Sahara, and the Sahel, and that defends the (by definition) Islamophobic French state. As for his Jewish victims, are not all Jews the enemies of Palestinians in particular and the worldwide Muslim *umma* in general?

Manuel Valls, the French interior minister, has warned that the growing radicalization of the Islamic milieu in France is producing “dozens of new Merahs” every year. And France is hardly alone: one need only recall the slaughter of the film director Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands in 2004; the Madrid train bombings in the same year; the London suicide bombings in 2005; or the beheading in London this year of the British soldier Lee Rigby.

Islamist violence is not only a matter of murder or terror—often, as we have seen, directed at Jews. Most frequently it manifests itself in intimidation, taking the form of petty crime and racketeering, threatening behavior on trains and buses, or full-fledged rioting and looting. While not always openly Islamic in character, these acts primarily involve Muslim youths, as was the case in the French riots this year and earlier in 2005, and in this year’s Swedish riots. The implicit message they convey is clear enough: any perceived slight to the Muslim “nation within the nation” is liable to trigger mob violence or even urban warfare. They thereby strengthen the bargaining power of Muslim organizations, especially the radical ones, vis-à-vis the government and the political class.

Confronting Reality

For years, some Jewish leaders entertained delusory expectations concerning the rise of Islam in Europe. Some believed that a more religiously diverse Europe would conduce to an even more secure place for Judaism in the long term. Others thought that by joining the fight against such conventionally defined evils as “anti-immigration bigotry,” “anti-Arab racism,” and “anti-Islamic prejudice,” European Jews would earn the affection and gratitude of Islam at large and perhaps even contribute to peace between Israel and its neighbors. Still others were of the view that Muslims would gradually become integrated and assimilated into the European mainstream, just like Jews in the past.

Such hopes are long gone. The sad fact is that many European Muslims subscribe to the unreconstructed forms of anti-Semitism that are prevalent in the Muslim world at large, and are impervious to any kind of Holocaust-related education. In today’s Europe, hard-core anti-Jewish and anti-Israel activity, from harassment in the street or at school to arson and murder, is mostly the doing of Muslims.

Another, opposite set of delusions is also gone: namely, that European Jews could easily or safely take part in a broad alliance *against* radical Islam. True, there is no doubt that most ethnic Europeans feel as threatened by Islam as do most Jews. A Tilder/Institut Montaigne poll released in April this year found that, with one exception, all religions in France are regarded positively; the one outlier, Islam, is regarded negatively by fully 73 percent of Frenchmen. According to another poll, by Ipsos/Le Monde, 74 percent find Islam “intolerant” and 80 percent believe it is “forcing its ways on French society at large.” A parallel poll conducted in Germany last year yielded similar results, with 70 percent associating Islam with “fanaticism and radicalism,” 64 percent calling it “prone to violence,”

and 60 percent citing its penchant for “revenge and retaliation.” In addition, 80 percent of Germans think Islam “deprives women of their rights” and 53 percent foresee a battle between Islam and Christianity. Is there any comfort to be drawn by European Jews from such findings, on the grounds that, for a change, a different minority has been singled out for aspersion? Alas, there is none. For a variety of reasons and out of a variety of motives—one might list among them the upsurge of an undifferentiated European xenophobia, combined in this case with a felt need to deflect the fear and resentment of Muslims onto an easier target—many ethnic French, Germans, and other Europeans are now of the opinion that Judaism, too, is an alien creed, and must be duly countered or curtailed. In surveys, they point to external similarities between Jews and Muslims: related Semitic languages, insistence on ritually processed food and ritual slaughtering, circumcision, and gender separation. Two-fifths of Britons and up to three-quarters of Germans now oppose circumcision. Last year, after a medical mishap involving a Muslim circumcision, a German court banned the practice altogether for minors; it took parliamentary action to make it legal again.

Ritual slaughtering, kosher as well as hallal, is likewise under threat in Europe. Almost three-quarters of Frenchmen disapprove of it, and almost one-half of Britons advocate a complete ban. Indeed, the practice is already prohibited in five European countries. The most recent to join the ranks is Poland where, only a few months ago, a sparkling new Museum of the History of the Polish Jews opened to great acclaim in Warsaw. “When [Poles and Jews] look in the same direction,” gushed a Polish Jewish businessman at the lavish inauguration ceremonies, “it’s great for [Jews], great for Poland, and great for the world.” Now, in a bitter irony that Samuel Sandler would recognize and appreciate, Poland has effectively banned the production of kosher meat.

Some political figures have rushed to condone and encourage these developments. Last year, François Fillon, the prime minister of France in the conservative Nicolas Sarkozy administration, urged both Muslims and Jews to renounce “ancestral traditions with not much meaning nowadays,” like kosher and hallal slaughtering. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front, who came in third in the 2012 French presidential race, suggested in *Le Monde* that both the Islamic female veil and the Jewish male *kippah* (yarmulke) should be banned in public. In a TV interview on the same day, she conceded that the *kippah* is “not a problem” in France, but pressed Jews to adjust to its banning anyway as “a small sacrifice” since “laws must apply to all.”

But evenhandedness in these matters is absurd, and wholly unjust. Punctiliousness in ritual observance is far more central to traditional Judaism than to Islam, and there are already many instances where, as the researcher Dov Maimon has detailed, the religious rights of Jews have been set aside by European governments. Above all, putting Jews in the same category as Muslims in order to appear evenhanded requires pretending that they are two of a kind when it comes to the problems each presents to civic and social life in Europe, to democracy, and to Western values. This way lies surrender to blackmail and, eventually, conflict without end.

Even worse scenarios may be contemplated. Real life is often circular: the farther you travel in one direction, the closer you come to those traveling in the opposite direction. What about a nightmare fusion, at some point in the future, of an anti-Semitic Left, an anti-Semitic Right, and an anti-Semitic Islam? In the case of France, there are ominous precedents: many Frenchmen who started out as fierce anti-German patriots in the late-19th century ended as pro-German activists or collaborationists in the 1930s and early 40s. “Better Hitler than Blum,” went a slogan of French pro-German appeasers at the time of Munich (the reference was to Léon Blum, a Jew and then the socialist prime minister of France). Many right-wingers might feel closer today to the stern creed of Islam than to either Zionism, globalism, or the flaccid morals of liberal democracy.

Alternatively, many prewar left-wing anti-racists and philo-Semites were eventually seduced by Hitler’s “socialist” credentials, and accepted anti-Semitism as part of the package. Following the same pattern, today’s European Left and far Left tend to cultivate Muslim voters at any cost in order to gain an edge over the Right. And indeed, in the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections, 86 percent of French Muslims voted for the Left, probably enough to ensure a win in both races. In another exquisite irony, a cottage industry of European academics and intellectuals has taken to promoting Muslims as Europe’s “new Jews” and indicting present-day Jews for betraying their “universalist” mission on earth by “regressing” to a reactionary ethnocentrism.

As for Muslim anti-Semitism, it has been intimately connected with classic European anti-Semitism for more than a century, and has massively borrowed the latter’s doctrines and tropes, from the blood libel to Holocaust denial to the crazed conspiracy-mongering of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The two brands share a common language, and each sees in the other a mirror image of itself. Much money has also circulated between them. Just as fascist and Nazi funds helped Arab and Iranian anti-Jewish activists in

the past, so Arab and Iranian money has been lavished on all stripes of European anti-Semites in our time.

What Is to Be Done?

The Zionist leader Ze’ev Jabotinsky once famously distinguished between the “anti-Semitism of persons” and the “anti-Semitism of things.” The former category, made up of individuals (including some Jews) with their particular moral or political shortcomings, can be fought, at least up to a point. The latter, which has to do with deep-seated social factors, with demographics, and/or with hard, obdurate, ingrained ideology, is another matter entirely. Of the two varieties, European Jews now confront the second. What will they do? Emigration, either to Israel or to America, is an option being actively considered. Should this become a widespread choice, it will inevitably be followed by the shrinkage of Jewish institutions, the drying-up of religious and cultural life, the deepening erosion of morale, growing anxiety and fearfulness—and more emigration.

The signs are everywhere. Recently, a leading rabbi in Paris reported that four-fifths of the young people being married at his synagogue no longer see their future in their country of birth. Admittedly, right now everybody in France is pessimistic about the future, especially the economic future; according to a recent poll, more than one in three citizens are considering emigration, and the proportions are higher among the young and the working class. Still, French Jews, and young French Jews in particular, appear to be considerably more pessimistic than others, and more serious about their pessimism.

And it must be said that they have reason. A sense of history, even if unarticulated and perhaps barely conscious, inevitably hovers over today’s situation. Almost a half-century ago, in an essay entitled “Jews and Germans,” the great scholar Gershom Scholem endeavored to locate the “false start” that led from Germany’s guarded mid-19th-century enfranchisement of its Jews, and from German Jews’ grateful embrace of all things German and the dream of a unique German-Jewish “symbiosis,” to the savage German attempt in the mid-20th century to annihilate all the Jews of Europe. While granting that the key to the mystery remained elusive, and that in any case the past could never be “completely mastered,” Scholem dared to hope that increased communication between the parties might yet yield the “reconciliation of those who have been separated.” Dying in 1982, he was spared the need to witness the outcome of his brave hope.

An even longer sense of history might take one back to late-18th-century France, the cradle of the

Enlightenment, and to the moment when, during deliberations over the civic enfranchisement of French Jews, the liberal nobleman Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnerre rose in the National Assembly to declare: “To the Jews as individuals, everything; to the Jews as a people, nothing.” Citizenship for the Jews was to be purchased conditionally, at the price of an end to their communal apartness and to many of their religious traditions.

For the most part, in France and throughout Western Europe, that price was fully and willingly paid. Generations of Jews eagerly pledged their allegiance to the ideals of democracy, patriotism, and religious tolerance, pouring their prodigious talents and energies into making Europe a better place. Over the centuries, in fair weather, the bargain held; in foul, the price would be successively raised, the conditions of acceptance revised, the bargain hedged, until at last the offer was finally, brutally, rescinded in wholesale massacre.

Now, busily building monuments and museums, Europe ostentatiously engages in celebrating and mourning its lost dead Jews of yesterday, whose murder it variously perpetrated, abetted, or (with exceptions) found it could put up with. Meanwhile, it encourages and underwrites the withering of Jewish life today. Once again, Jews are accepted on condition: that they separate themselves from their brethren in Israel and join the official European consensus in demonizing the Jewish state; that they learn to accommodate the reality that so many ethnic Europeans hate them and wish them ill, and that Islamists on European soil seek their extinction; and that in the interest of justifying their continued claim to European citizenship, they accept Europe’s proscription of some of the most basic practices of their faith.

To the dead Jews of yesterday, everything; to the living Jews of today, little and littler.

Can it really be that European Jewry was reborn after the Holocaust only in order to die again? Can it be that, even as Jews, you only live twice? History, of course, is unpredictable except in retrospect. But it would be irresponsible in the extreme to brush off the possibility of demise; “unthinkable” is no longer a word in the Jewish vocabulary. The sober assessment of Robert Wistrich, the instincts of Samuel Sandler and so many other European Jews—these rest on firm foundations. The expiration date looms nearer, however slowly and by whatever intermediate stages it may finally arrive.

A mitigating view of today’s situation might have it that, at the very least, divine providence did beneficently afford to about two million European Jews a brief golden age, a true rebirth, which in turn brought fresh luster to European civilization as well as

encouragement and inspiration to millions of their fellow Jews around the world, most especially in the Jewish state. True enough; but what is no less certain is that the end of European Jewry, a millennia-old civilization and a crowning achievement of the human spirit, will deliver a lasting blow to the collective psyche of the Jewish people. That it will also render a shattering judgment on the so-called European idea, exposed as a deadly travesty for anyone with eyes to see, is cold comfort indeed.

Mosaic, August 5 2013

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The Refusenik Exodus

From Slavery to Freedom United the Jewish World and Brought Down the Soviet Union

What lessons can we learn from them today?

By Izabella Tabarovsky

The story of the refuseniks—Soviet Jews who were refused permission to emigrate and were often jailed and persecuted for having asked—and the global struggle for their freedom is one of the most momentous chapters in recent Jewish history. Rich in biblical symbolism, it is filled with drama and heroic action. It culminated with victory: a triumphant exodus of 1.5 million Jews from the Soviet Union. Yet in the three decades that have passed since then, efforts to transmit the story to the next generations have come to naught.

Anat Zalmanson-Kuznetsov, an Israeli filmmaker and the daughter of celebrated refuseniks Sylva Zalmanson and Eduard Kuznetsov, first became aware of this failure as she began to tour with her award-winning 2016 documentary *Operation Wedding*. The film documents her parents’ participation in a daring 1970 plot to hijack an empty Soviet plane from an airfield outside Leningrad and fly it across the border to Europe. She noticed that the teens who showed up at her screenings lacked any historical context that would help them understand the film. “I had to explain everything from scratch—including the fact

that people were not allowed to leave the Soviet Union,” she said.



Soviet Jews arrive in the West Bank city of Ariel, 1990
ESAIAS BAITEL/GAMMA-RAPHO VIA GETTY IMAGES

Zalmanson-Kuznetsov, 40, remembers how the story gradually faded from public memory. As a child growing up in Israel, she experienced the glow of her parents’ fame firsthand. Just walking into class felt like a ceremony: “My teachers had been protesting for my parents’ release just a few years earlier,” she said. Yet when she began to research her parents’ story as a young filmmaker, she found that not a single film had been made about them.

Exactly why this story, which touched millions of Jews around the globe, has been so thoroughly forgotten has puzzled many over the years. Misha Galperin, interim CEO of the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, which is home to the exhibit *Power of Protest: The Movement to Free Soviet Jewry*, and which before the coronavirus crisis had planned to host a talk by Natan Sharansky on the lessons of the Soviet Jewry’s movement for today’s fight against anti-Semitism, thinks the reason may be that the participants in those events are still with us. “It was such a part of my life, it didn’t occur to me that it was part of history or something I needed to tell my children about,” he said. Echoing his musings, Zalmanson-Kuznetsov recalled having to push her parents to speak about their experiences. “Many of these people were heroes, but they didn’t know how to tell their story,” she said.

Part of the problem, though, is most certainly a failure to make the story of Soviet Jewry relevant to new generations of Jews, who have an obvious need for a story of an extraordinary rebirth of Jewish identity in a part of the diaspora that many had assumed was destined for cultural and spiritual annihilation. Behind the heroic grand narrative of a resistance struggle in a country that no longer exists on maps is a story about the why and how of the process of Jewish rediscovery which is both inherently powerful and also worthy of

present-day reexploration and transmission. While American teenagers today might find it difficult to relate to a story of harassment of activist Jews by Soviet state police and imprisonment in the gulag, for each *refusenik* who experienced those ghastly hardships there were dozens whose drama was seemingly more prosaic yet more relatable. Kicked out of their jobs and familiar social circles, pushed to the margins of society, stuck in refusal for years and even decades, these largely assimilated Jews had to reinvent their lives in their newly narrowed circumstances.



Refusenik women and their children, Moscow, Ovrazhki, 1979

COURTESY OF REMEMBER & SAVE

What is so compelling about the *refuseniks*’ story today is that so many of them chose to define themselves by delving into their Jewish identities and finding sources of strength, motivation, and optimism there. From friends of friends, they dug out the addresses of old men who had the secret knowledge of the *Torah*. They studied with them, then in turn taught others. Under the guise of camping, they organized expeditions to Holocaust mass graves and Hasidic sites and reported to others on what they saw. “It meant something to them to recover that sense of their Jewish selves, their Jewish identity and this connection with the tradition and the values, and to relate to one another on that basis,” said Ann Komaromi, associate professor of comparative literature at the University of Toronto, who worked with prominent *refusenik* activist Yuli Kosharovski on the English edition of his seminal work “We Are Jews Again”: *Jewish Activism in the Soviet Union* (2017).

It is this process of Jewish rediscovery that makes this story so important and relevant. “This is not just the story of Soviet Jews. It’s the story of our nation,” said Zalmanson-Kuznetsov. After she finished *Operation Wedding*, she realized that her mission was not yet over. “It’s about the whole story,” she said. “At the age of 15 or 16, children ask themselves questions like, how would I behave in that situation?” When you learn about it at that age, she said, it creates an impact.

Which is how the Refuseniks Project was born. The project is a collection of 30 lesson plans designed to help Jewish educators teach a variety of age groups. The lessons include video and music links, photographs, slide shows, and ideas for interactive learning. “With every lesson, I asked myself: How can I make it more engaging for the kids?” said Zalmanson-Kuznetsov.

The lessons, which are in English and available for free, in partnership with Bar Ilan University’s Lookstein Center for Jewish Education, are built around contemporary universal themes that students can relate to, such as social justice, political protest, women’s rights, or popular culture, as well as specifically Jewish and Israel-related topics that guide students to reflect on their own stories and Jewish identities. For example, the lesson “Present, Protest and Inspire” includes biographies of 16 Prisoners of Zion—prisoners of conscience who were punished with jail terms for Jewish activism—including a 9-month-old baby and a teenage girl whom the KGB kidnapped to prevent her from emigrating to Israel with her father. Students are asked to work in small groups to plan a protest on behalf of one of the refuseniks, then present a protest—which may be in the form of dance, a collage, or a song—to the rest of the class.

The lesson “Brainwashing and Fake News” includes a brief video of a 2004 interview with a former KGB official. In the interview, the official insists that the Soviet Union did not have a Jewish emigration problem and estimates the total number of people refused permission to emigrate at around 20. (The actual number is estimated at 30,000–40,000.) The lesson plan prompts students to consider how to “tell the difference between truth and a lie,” setting up a conversation about the very contemporary issue of fake news.

A number of educators have already given Zalmanson-Kuznetsov’s curriculum a try. Nick Greene, who splits his time between acting and teaching at Valley Beth Shalom Conservative synagogue in Encino, California, picked two lessons to teach his eighth-grade students. They began with “Women of the Refuseniks.” The group watched a video about well-known female refuseniks such as Avital Sharansky, Ida Nudel, and Raiza Palatnik, and Western women’s campaign for Soviet Jewry including film stars such as Jane Fonda and Liv Ullman. “I thought it was a wonderful, modern sort of look at this,” said Greene. The lesson kicked off a discussion about what it would have meant to be not just a Jew but also a woman at that time in the Soviet Union.

Everybody knows six million died in the Holocaust. Everybody should know who a Prisoner of Zion is

For the second lesson, Greene chose “Sing in Hebrew: Songs sung by captive Soviet Jews and by free Jews in Israel.” Students learned a well-known Israeli song, “Kachol V’Lavan” (“Blue and White”), which was written in the 1960s by a 21-year-old refusenik, Israel Rashal. The song, whose lyrics express (in a simple and easily graspable Hebrew) a longing for Israel, became the refuseniks’ anthem. “The song is wonderful, and their being eighth-graders right now in this world, pop culture is so influential, and music is a big part of that,” said Greene. The lesson evolved into a discussion of the role of artists in today’s American society and the power of music as a means for personal and political expression. At the end of the lesson, the students performed the song together.

The universal themes of the lessons, such as political protest and artistic freedom, can be explored in other contexts, but exploring them in the Jewish context made it more personal for his students, Greene explained. “A number of our congregants’ ancestors were the Soviet Jews. A lot of them participated in the Soviet Jewry movement, so they have a personal experience with that.” But the material created points of reference for students of other cultural traditions as well. Students from the synagogue’s Persian families, who had their own family history of social upheaval, displacement and emigration, also could relate to it, Greene told me. Echoing his observation, Zalmanson-Kuznetsov recalled an Israeli teenager of Ethiopian descent who approached her after a lecture to tell her how much the story touched her and inspired her to work to bring her Ethiopian family to Israel.

Another way to create a personal and emotional link for students with the material is to invite a participant in those events to class. This was the approach that Debbie Chessin, educational director at Cleveland’s Reform Beth Israel-The West Temple synagogue, intended to take before the coronavirus pandemic put her plans on hold. Their synagogue had been at the forefront of the Soviet Jewry movement, and she had invited Herbert Caron, one of the leading activists in the movement, who is now 97, to come and share his story. “The stories will always be there, but to hear them from individuals, whether it’s a Holocaust survivor or someone who was a refusenik, it’s impactful,” said Chessin. (Zalmanson-Kuznetsov’s “Bring Refuseniks or Activists to Class” lesson makes it easy to find such a guest speaker—including for a video link, if one doesn’t live nearby.)

The refuseniks’ stories teach lessons of courage and resilience, as well as commitment to one’s Jewish

identity. Sharansky himself indirectly made this point in a recent lighthearted video in which he offered tips for handling a quarantine, based on his experience of spending nine years “quarantined” in a Soviet prison (half of them in solitary confinement). His tips—remember that you are part of a larger whole; don’t expect your circumstances to change for the better immediately; use your time productively—offer a model of endurance and mental strength under circumstances beyond one’s control that have obvious relevance to the experiences of billions of people around the world today, whether they are suffering under authoritarian regimes, or are victims of war, famine, or pandemics.

It is Zalmanson-Kuznetsov’s belief that the refuseniks’ stories need to become household knowledge among Jews the same way that Holocaust is. “Everybody knows six million died in the Holocaust. Everybody should know who a Prisoner of Zion is.” Moreover, she emphasized the strong historical link between the Holocaust and the story of the Soviet Jewry movement. Her mother, for example, was part of a group of Jewish youth that used to gather decades after the war in the Rumbula Forest, where tens of thousands of Jews had been shot, to pick up litter from the abandoned graves. In Ukraine future refuseniks began their path by gathering at the site of the Babi Yar massacre in Kyiv, in defiance of official orders. Memory of the Holocaust is what prompted a rebirth of Jewish consciousness for them, and also was an important mobilizing factor for Jews abroad.

“It’s the last event that united practically all Jews, independent of their political interests and religious views,” said Nati Cantorovich, head of the Research and Information Department of Nativ, an Israeli government agency that played a critical role in the movement. Nativ is working to declassify some of its documents related to the era and to translate Zalmanson-Kuznetsov’s site into Hebrew.

To stimulate further interest, Zalmanson-Kuznetsov has established a giveaway for educators who teach one or more lessons on the Soviet Jewry movement: prizes of \$300, \$700, and \$1,000, to be awarded in an online raffle on June 7. (Jewish LearningWorks, a San Francisco Bay Area Jewish learning organization, is acting as a fiscal sponsor for the award.) Applications are due June 4, so teachers have several weeks to teach a lesson and enter the competition. Teaching this material while we all find ourselves in forced confinement may bring it even closer to home.

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April, 8 2020

We have a Winner; Will we have a Game- changer too?

*The post-Corona epilogue of an
overheated Sino-American relationship*

By Anis H. Bajrektarević

Americans performed three very different policies on the People’s Republic: From a total negation (and the Mao-time mutual annihilation assurances), to Nixon’s sudden cohabitation. Finally, a Copernican-turn: the US spotted no real ideological differences between them and the post-Deng China. This signalled a ‘new opening’: West imagined China’s coastal areas as its own industrial suburbia. Soon after, both countries easily agreed on interdependence (in this marriage of convenience): Americans pleased their corporate (machine and tech) sector and unrestrained its greed, while Chinese in return offered a cheap labour, no environmental considerations and submissiveness in imitation.

However, for both countries this was far more than economy, it was a policy – Washington read it as interdependence for transformative containment and Beijing saw it as interdependence for a (global) penetration. In the meantime, Chinese acquired more sophisticated technology, and the American Big tech sophisticated itself in digital authoritarianism – ‘technological monoculture’ met the political one. But now with a tidal wave of Covid-19, the honeymoon is over.

(These days, many argue that our C-19 response is a planetary fiasco, whose size is yet to surface with its mounting disproportionate and enduring secondary effects. All this illustrates – the argument goes – nothing else but the non-transparent concentration of power and our overall democracy recession; lasting consequences of cutbacks, environmental holocaust, privatisation of key intergovernmental and vital national institutions, ill-fated globalisation on (overly allopathic-cantered) healthcare and lack of public data commons.

There are also growing speculations if the lockdown is invasion or protection – whether the aim is herd-immunity of herd loyalty; if is there any back-to-normal exit from the crisis or this disaster ‘turned into planetary terror, through global coup d’état’ will be exploited to further something already pre-designed (with a fear, not as a side-effect, but rather as a manufactured tool to gain control). E.g. *Le Monde*

Diplomatique – while examining the possible merge between tech oligopoly and political monopoly – claims: “Political decisions have been central in shaping this tragedy — from the destruction of animal habitats, to the asymmetric funding of medical research, to the management of the crisis itself. They will also determine the world into which we emerge after the worst is over.” The XXI century frontline is the right to health and labour, privacy and human rights. (LMD, IV20)

Still to be precise, the so-called virus pandemic brought nothing truly new to the already overheated Sino-American relations: It only amplified and accelerated what was present for quite some time – a rift between alienated power centers, each on its side of Pacific, and the rest. Is this time to return to a nation-state, a great moment for all dictators-in-waiting to finally built a cult of personality? Hence, will our democracy be electro-magnetised and vaccinated for a greater good (or greedier ‘god’)? This text examines a prehistory of that rift; and suggests possible outcomes past the current crisis. Does our history only appear overheated, while it is essentially calmly predetermined? Is it directional or conceivable, dialectic and eclectic or cyclical, and therefore cynical? Surely, our history warns (no matter if the Past is seen as a destination or resource). Does it also provide for a hope? Hence, what is in front of us: destiny or future?

Theory loves to teach us that extensive debates on what kind of economic system is most conducive to human wellbeing is what consumed most of our civilizational vertical. However, our history has a different say: It seems that the manipulation of the global political economy – far more than the introduction of ideologies – is the dominant and arguably more durable way that human elites usually conspired to build or break civilizations, as planned projects. Somewhere down the process, it deceived us, becoming the self-entrapment. How?

One of the biggest (nearly schizophrenic) dilemmas of liberalism, ever since David Hume and Adam Smith, was an insight into reality: Whether the world is essentially *Hobbesian* or *Kantian*. As postulated, the main task of any liberal state is to enable and maintain wealth of its nation, which of course rests upon wealthy individuals inhabiting the particular state. That imperative brought about another dilemma: if wealthy individual, the state will *rob* you, but in absence of it, the pauperized masses will *mob* you. The *invisible hand* of Smith’s followers have found the satisfactory answer – sovereign debt. That ‘invention’ meant: relatively strong central government of the state. Instead of popular control through the democratic checks-&-balance mechanism, such a state should be rather heavily indebted. Debt –

firstly to local merchants, than to foreigners – is a far more powerful deterrent, as it resides outside the popular check domain.

With such a *mixed blessing*, no empire can easily demonetize its legitimacy, and abandon its hierarchical but invisible and unconstitutional controls. This is how a debtor empire was born. A blessing or totalitarian curse? Let us briefly examine it.

The Soviet Union – much as (the pre-Deng’s) China itself – was far more of a classic continental military empire (overtly brutal; rigid, authoritative, anti-individual, apparent, secretive), while the US was more a financial-trading empire (covertly coercive; hierarchical, yet asocial, exploitive, pervasive, polarizing). On opposite sides of the globe and cognition, to each other they remained enigmatic, mysterious and incalculable: *Bear* of permafrost vs. *Fish* of the warm seas. Sparta vs. Athens. Rome vs. Phoenicia... However, common for the both (as much as for China today) was a super-appetite for omnipresence. Along with the price to pay for it. Consequently, the Soviets went bankrupt by mid 1980s – they cracked under its own weight, imperially overstretched. So did the Americans – the ‘white man burden’ fractured them already by the Vietnam war, with the *Nixon shock* only officializing it. However, the US imperium managed to survive and to outlive the Soviets. How?

The United States, with its financial capital (or an outfoxing illusion of it), evolved into a debtor empire through the Wall Street guaranties. Titanium-made *Sputnik* vs. gold mine of printed-paper... Nothing epitomizes this better than the words of the longest serving US Federal Reserve’s boss, Alan Greenspan, who famously quoted J.B. Connally to then French President Jacques Chirac: “True, the dollar is our currency, but your problem”. Hegemony vs. *hegemony*.

House of Cards

Conventional economic theory teaches us that money is a universal equivalent to all goods. Historically, currencies were a space and time-related, to say locality-dependent. However, like no currency ever before, the US dollar became – past the WWII – the universal equivalent to all other moneys of the world. According to history of currencies, the core component of the non-precious metals’ money is a so-called promissory note – intangible belief that, by any given point in future, a particular shiny paper (self-styled as money) will be smoothly exchanged for real goods.

Thus, roughly speaking, money is nothing else but a civilizational construct about imagined/projected tomorrow – that the next day (which nobody has ever

seen in the history of humankind, but everybody operates with) definitely comes (i), and that this tomorrow will certainly be a better day than our yesterday or even our today (ii).

This and similar types of collective constructs (horizontal and vertical) over our social contracts hold society together as much as its economy keeps it alive and evolving. Hence, it is money that powers economy, but our blind faith in constructed (imagined) tomorrows and its alleged certainty is what empowers money.

Clearly, the universal equivalent of all equivalents – the US dollar – follows the same pattern: Bold and widely accepted promise. For the US, it almost instantly substantiates extraterritorial economic projection: American can print (any sum of) money without fear of inflation. (Quantitative easing is always exported, value is kept home.)

But, what does the US dollar promise when there is no gold cover attached to it ever since the time of Nixon shock of 1971?

Pentagon promises that the oceanic sea-lanes will remain opened (read: controlled by the US Navy), pathways unhindered, and that the most traded world's commodity – oil, will be delivered. So, it is not a crude or its delivery what is a cover to the US dollar – it is a *promise* that oil of tomorrow will be deliverable. That is a real might of the US dollar, which in return finances Pentagon's massive expenditures and shoulders its supremacy.

Admired and feared, Pentagon further fans our planetary belief in tomorrow's deliverability – if we only keep our faith in dollar (and hydrocarbons' energized economy), and so on and on in perpetuated circle of mutual reinforcements.

(Supplementing the Monroe Doctrine, President Howard Taft introduced the so-called 'dollar diplomacy' – in early XX c. – that "substitutes dollars for bullets". This is one of the first official acknowledgements of the Wall Street – Pentagon symbiotic link.)

These two pillars of the US might from the East coast (the US Treasury/Wall Street and Pentagon) together with the two pillars of the West coast – both financed and amplified by the US dollar, and spread through the open sea-routes (Silicone Valley and Hollywood), are an essence of the US posture.

This very nature of power explains why the Americans have missed to take the mankind into completely other direction; towards the non-confrontational, decarbonized, de-monetized/de-financialized and de-psychologized, the self-realizing and green humankind. In short, to turn history into a moral success story. They had such a chance when, past the Gorbachev's unconditional surrender of the Soviet bloc, and the Deng's Copernicus-shift of

China, the US – unconstrained as a *lonely superpower* – solely dictated terms of reference; our common destiny and direction/s to our future/s.

Winner is rarely a game-changer

Sadly enough, that was not the first missed opportunity for the US to soften and delay its forthcoming, imminent multidimensional imperial retreat. The very epilogue of the WWII meant a full security guaranty for the US: Geo-economically – 54% of anything manufactured in the world was carrying the *Made in USA* label, and geostrategically – the US had uninterruptedly enjoyed nearly a decade of the 'nuclear monopoly'. Up to this very day, the US scores the biggest number of N-tests conducted, the largest stockpile of nuclear weaponry, and it represents the only power ever deploying this 'ultimate weapon' on other nation. To complete the irony, Americans enjoy geographic advantage like no other empire before. Save the US, as Ikenberry notes: "...every major power in the world lives in a crowded geopolitical neighborhood where shifts in power routinely provoke counterbalancing". Look the map, at Russia or China and their packed surroundings. The US is blessed with its insular position, by neighboring oceans. All that should harbor tranquility, peace and prosperity, foresightedness.

Why the lonely might, an *empire by invitation* did not evolve into empire of relaxation, a generator of harmony? Why does it hold (extra-judicially) captive more political prisoners on Cuban soil than the badmouthed Cuban regime has ever had? Why does it remain obsessed with armament for at home and abroad? Why existential anxieties for at home and security challenges for abroad? Eg. 78% of all weaponry at disposal in the wider MENA theater is manufactured in the US, while domestically Americans – only for their civilian purpose – have 1,2 small arms pieces per capita.)

Why the fall of Berlin Wall 30 years ago marked a beginning of decades of stagnant or failing incomes in the US (and elsewhere in the OECD world) coupled with alarming inequalities. What are we talking about here; the inadequate intensity of our tireless confrontational push or about the false course of our civilizational direction?

Indeed, no successful and enduring empire does merely rely on coercion, be it abroad or at home. The grand design of every empire in past rested on a skillful calibration between obedience and initiative – at home, and between bandwagoning and engagement – abroad. In XXI century, one wins when one convinces not when one coerces. Hence, if unable to escape its inner logics and deeply-rooted appeal of *confrontational nostalgia*, the prevailing archrival is only a winner, rarely a game-changer.

A Country or a Cause, Both or None?

To sum up; After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Americans accelerated expansion while waiting for (real or imagined) adversaries to further decline, 'liberalize' and bandwagon behind the US. One of the instruments was to aggressively push for a greater economic integration between regional and distant states, which – as we see now, passed the 'End-of-History' euphoria of 1990s – brought about (irreversible) socio-political disintegration within each of these states.

Expansion is the path to security dictatum, of the post-Cold War socio-political and economic mantra, only exacerbated the problems afflicting the *Pax Americana*. That is how the capability of the US to maintain its order started to erode faster than the capacity of its opponents to challenge it. A classical imperial self-entrapment!!

The repeated failure to notice and recalibrate its imperial retreat brought the painful hangovers to Washington, the most noticeably, by the last presidential elections. Inability to manage the rising costs of sustaining the imperial order only increased the domestic popular revolt and political pressure to abandon its 'mission' altogether. Perfectly hitting the target to miss everything else ...

Hence, Americans are not fixing the world anymore. They are only managing its decline. Look at their footprint in former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Georgia, Libya, Syria, Ukraine or Yemen – to mention but a few.

When the Soviets lost their own indigenous ideological matrix and maverick confrontational stance, and when the US dominated West missed to triumph although winning the Cold War, how to expect from the imitator to score the lasting moral or even a temporary economic victory?

Dislike the relationship with the Soviets Union which was on one clear *confrontational acceptance* line from a start until its very last day, Americans performed three very different policies on the People's Republic: From a total negation (and the Mao-time mutual annihilation assurances), to Nixon's sudden cohabitation. Finally, a Copernican-turn: the US spotted no real ideological differences between them and the post-Deng China. This signalled a 'new opening' – China's coastal areas to become West's industrial suburbia. Soon after, both countries easily agreed on interdependence: Americans pleased their corporate (machine and tech) sector and unrestrained its greed, while Chinese in return offered a cheap labour, no environmental considerations and submissiveness in imitation. However, for both it was far more than economy, it was a policy – Washington read it as interdependence for transformative

containment and Beijing saw it as interdependence for (global) penetration. In the meantime, Chinese acquired more sophisticated technology, and the American Big tech sophisticated itself in digital authoritarianism.

But, the honeymoon seems over now.

Lasting collision course already leads to the subsequent calls for a decoupling of the two world's largest economies. Besides marking the end of global capitalism which exploded since the fall of Berlin Wall, this may finally trigger a global realignment. The rest of the world would end up – willingly or not – in the rival (trade) blocks. It would not be a return to 1950s and 1960s, but to the pre-WWI constellations. Epilog is plain to see: Neither more confrontation and more carbons nor more weaponized trade and traded weapons will save our day. It failed in our past, it will fail again any given day.

Entrapment in Imitation

Interestingly, China opposed the I World, left the II in rift, and ever since Bandung of 1955 it neither won over nor (truly) joined the III Way. Today, many see it as a main contestant. But, where is a lasting success? There is a near consensus among the economists that China owes its economic success to three fundamental factors. Firstly, it is that the People's Republic embraced an imitative economic policy (much like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan or ROK did before) through Deng-proclaimed opening. Second goes to a modest domestic consumption, and German-like thick home savings. Finally, as the third factor that the economists attribute to Chinese miracle, is a low production costs of Sino nation – mostly on expenses of its aging demography, and on expenses of its own labor force and country's environment. None of it has an international appeal, nor it holds promise to an attainable future. Therefore, no wonder that the Imitative power fights – for at home and abroad – a defensive ideological battle. Such a reactive status quo has no intellectual appeal to attract and inspire beyond its borders.

So, if for China the XIX was a "century of humiliation", XX "century of emancipation", should it be that the XXI gets labeled as a "century of imitation"?

(The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is what the most attribute as an instrument of the Chinese planetary posture. Chinese leaders promised massive infrastructure projects all around by burning trillions of dollars. Still, numbers are more moderate. As the recent *The II BRI Summit* has shown, so far, Chinese companies had invested USD 90 billion worldwide. Seems, neither People's Republic is as rich as many (wish to) think nor it will be able to finance its promised projects without seeking for a global private

capital. Such a capital – if ever – will not flow without conditionalities. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS or ‘New Development’ – Bank have some \$150 billion at hand, and the Silk Road Infrastructure Fund (SRIF) has up to \$40 billion. Chinese state and semi-private companies can access – according to the OECD estimates – just another \$600 billion (much of it tight) from the home, state-controlled financial sector. That means that China runs short on the BRI deliveries worldwide. Ergo, either bad news to the (BRI) world or the conditionalities’ constrained China.)

How to behave in the world in which economy is made to service trade (as it is defined by the Sino-American high priests of globalization), while trade increasingly constitutes a significant part of the big power’s national security strategy? And, how to define (and measure) the existential threat: by inferiority of ideological narrative – like during the Cold War; or by a size of a lagging gap in total manufacturing output – like in the Cold War aftermath. Or something third? Perhaps a return to an inclusive growth.

For sure, there is no intellectual appeal in a growth without well-being, education that does not translate into fair opportunity, lives without dignity, liberalization without personal freedom. Greening international relations along with a greening of social fabrics and its economy – geopolitical and environmental understanding, de-acidification and relaxation is that missing, third, way for tomorrow. This necessitates both at once: less confrontation over the art-of-day technology and their de-monopolized redistribution as well as the resolute work on the so-called Tesla-ian implosive/fusion-holistic systems. That would include the free-transfer non-Hertzian energy technologies (able to de-toxicate our troposphere from dangerous fields, waves and frequencies emittance - bringing it closer to Schumann resonance); carbon-sequestration; antigravity and self-navigational solutions; bioinformatics and nanorobotics.

In short, more of initiative than of obedience (including more public control over data hoovering). More effort to excellence (creation) than a struggle for preeminence (partition).

‘Do like your neighbor’ is a Biblical-sounding economic prophecy that the circles close to the IMF love to tirelessly repeat. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a formidable national economic prosperity, if the good neighborly relations are not built and maintained. Clearly, no global leader has ever in history emerged from a shaky and distrustful neighborhood, or by offering a little bit more of the same in lieu of an innovative technological advancement.

(Eg. many see Chinese 5G – besides the hazardous electrosmog of IoT that this technology emits on Earth’s biota – as an illiberal innovation, which may end up servicing authoritarianism, anywhere. And indeed, the AI deep learning inspired by biological neurons (neural science) including its three methods: supervised, unsupervised and reinforced learning can end up by being used for the diffusion of digital authoritarianism, predictive policing and manufactured social governance based on the bonus-malus behavioral social credits.)

Ergo, it all starts from within, from at home; socio-economically and environmentally. Without support from a home base (including that of Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet), there is no game changer. China’s home is Asia. Its size and its centrality along with its impressive output is constraining it enough. Conclusively, it is not only a new, non-imitative, turn of socioeconomics and technology what is needed. Without truly and sincerely embracing mechanisms such as the NaM, ASEAN and SAARC (eventually even the OSCE) and the main champions of multilateralism in Asia, those being India Indonesia and Japan first of all, China has no future of what is planetary awaited – the third force, a game-changer, lasting visionary and trusted global leader.

Vienna, 31 March 2020

Post Scriptum

To varying degrees, but all throughout a premodern and modern history, nearly every world’s major foreign policy originator was dependent (and still depends) on what happens in, and to, Russia. So, neither a structure, nor content or overall direction of world affairs for the past 300 years has been done without Russia. It is not only a size, but also a centrality of Russia that matters. That is important as much (if not even more), as it is an omnipresence of the US or a hyperproduction of the PR China. Ergo, that is an uninterrupted flow of manufactured goods to the whole world, it is a balancing of the oversized and centrally positioned one, and it is the ability to controllably corrode the way in and insert itself of the peripheral one. The oscillatory interplay of these three is what characterizes our days.

Therefore, reducing the world affairs to the constellation of only two super-players – China and the US is inadequate – to say least. It is usually done while superficially measuring Russia’s overall standing by merely checking its current GDP, and comparing its volume and PPP, and finding it e.g. equal to one of Italy. Through such ‘quick-fix’, Russia is automatically downgraded to a second-rank power status. This practice is as dangerous as it is highly misleading. Still, that ill-conceived argument is one of

the most favored narratives which authors in the West are tirelessly peddling. What many analysts miss to understand, is in fact plain to see; throughout the entire history of Russia: For such a big country the only way to survive – irrespectively from its relative weaknesses by many ‘economic’ parameters – is to always make an extra effort and remain great power. To this end, let us quickly contrast the above narrative with some key facts: Russia holds the key positions in the UN and its Agencies as one of its founding members (including the Security Council veto right as one of the P5); it has a highly skilled and mobilized population; its society has deeply rooted sense of a special historic mission (that notion is there for already several centuries – among its intellectuals and enhanced elites, probably well before the US has even appeared as a political entity in the first place). Additionally and tellingly, Moscow possesses the world’s largest gold reserves (on surface and underground; in mines and its treasury bars); for decades, it masters its own GPS system and the most credible outer space delivery systems (including the only remaining working connection with the ISS), and has an elaborate turn-key-ready alternative internet, too.

Finally, as the US Council of Foreign Relations’ Thomas Graham fairly admits: “with the exception of China, no country affects more issues of strategic and economic importance to the US than Russia. And no other country, it must be said, is capable of destroying the US in 30 minutes.” (FAM, 98-6-19, pg.134)



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six books (for American and European publishers) and numerous articles on, mainly, geopolitics energy and technology. He is editor of the NY-based GHIR (Geopolitics, History and Intl. Relations) journal, and editorial board member of several similar specialized magazines on three continents.

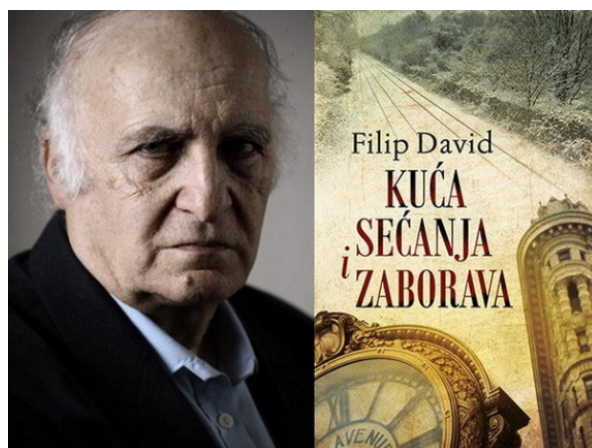
His 7th book, ‘From WWI to wwv – Europe and the World 1918-2018’ has been realised last winter.

Filip David

The House of Memories and Forgetfulness

Filip David
Kuća sećanja i zaborava.
Belgrade, Laguna 2014

By Svetlana Tomić



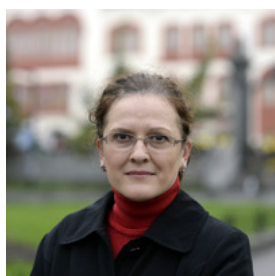
Over the past decade several excellent post-Yugoslav novels have been published on genocide and Holocaust. This indicates a strong writers’ need for reconstructing the past and analyzing the present. Filip David is a renowned author, known and translated abroad. What distinguishes his new novel *Kuća sećanja i zaborava* (*The House of Memories and Forgetfulness*) from Bosnian and Herzegovinian (Dževad Karahasan *Noćno vijeće* 2005, Igor Štiks *Elijahova stolica* 2006) or Croatian writers (Daša Drndić *Sonnenschein*, 2007) is the opening of the theme of evil, its constantly changing form and extent, in a wider context.

The story about evil begins with Albert Vajs in 21st century, with the agonized sound of a train. Quickly we find the reason why that sound has been haunting Vajs for six decades. During the WWII his parents threw Albert and his younger brother from the train to Auschwitz in order to save the children’s lives. Albert never succeeds in finding his brother. A German family helped Albert to survive but he ran away because he wanted to keep his identity. Guilt will follow him to the rest of his life. It becomes another name for the pain of remembering, or the pain of truth.

In the confessions of numerous Jewish children who

escaped the Holocaust and hid their identity, the conflict between memories and forgetfulness is revealed as an illusion. While warning us of the consequences of the choice what to remember and what to forget, Filip David suggests a new dialogue between memory and forgetfulness, a need for a new language for understanding evil. That is why in a literal “House of Memories and Forgetfulness” Albert cannot choose the button for erasing his recollections of his brother, father and mother.

The writer masterly connects different stories, Jewish legends, myths, literary allusions and keeps up their rhythm. To picture the reality and to comprehend the nature of evil David uses and combines various documentary confessional forms from the past (diary, letters, messages, interviews) and present (newspaper articles, medical and criminal reports) with dreams, hallucinations, fantastic visions, nightmares, and hope. The essayistic parts on evil and violence may serve as a literary connection to the books by Tzvetan Todorov *Facing the Extreme* (1996) and Amartya Sen *Violence and Identity* (2006). In the age when news all around the world is full of evil, national and religious conflicts and wars, terrorism, Filip David, himself a surviving witness of the Holocaust, wants us to remember that “(our) world is based on human solidarity and individual conscience”. It is not without reason that the central episode of the novel is the one about Miša and Kosta, about love and humanity, truth and morality. It should be noticed that during diverse interactions with the world many male characters of David’s novel cry. This purifying power of the body’s fluid makes human suffering more visible and at the same time points out what Todorov underlined, that “humanity has not improved and still refuses, on the whole, to hear the lesson from Auschwitz”.



Svetlana Tomić, Alfa BK University
World Literature Today, Oklahoma, May-August 2015, pp. 107-108.

Dr. Alona Fisher-Kamm

An interview with Israel’s ambassador to Serbia

In a wide-ranging interview with the Magazine, Fisher-Kamm discussed a variety of topics such as Zionism’s roots in Serbia, Holocaust remembrance, global antisemitism and the issue of Kosovo.

By Michael Freund



Dr. Alona Fisher-Kamm

In a few weeks from now, Dr. Alona Fisher-Kamm, Israel’s envoy to Serbia, will pack her belongings and make her way back to Jerusalem, completing what by all accounts has been an exceptionally successful stint in Belgrade. During her term, bilateral relations between the two countries have blossomed, boosting trade, tourism, mutual understanding and friendship to new and unprecedented levels. With its strategic location in the Balkans, close ties to both East and West, and a strong historical affinity for Jews and Israel, Serbia has been drawing ever-more attention from Israel’s foreign-policy decision-makers.

This is in no small measure to Fisher-Kamm and her team who, despite laboring within tight budgetary constraints, have nonetheless made their presence – and Israel’s – felt in various sectors of Serbian society. A career diplomat, Fisher-Kamm has filled postings as far afield as Buenos Aires, Paris and Madrid. She speaks six languages and holds a doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

In a wide-ranging interview with the Magazine, she discussed a variety of topics such as Zionism’s roots in Serbia, Holocaust remembrance, global antisemitism and the issue of Kosovo.

Since Israel and Serbia re-established diplomatic relations in 1992 after the breakup of Yugoslavia, bilateral ties between the two countries appear to

have grown much closer, particularly in the past several years. What are the factors behind this and how would you describe the current state of the relationship?

Relations between Israel and Serbia have been growing steadily, but in the last few years we have been witnessing a significant enhancement, not to be taken for granted. One of the factors is the current president and government. They understand the assets of Israel and their potential contribution, especially for the Serbian economy. Serbia is currently on the EU accession path. It focuses on its economy and strives to increase foreign investments.

In addition, it has been very successful in stabilizing and modernizing its economy. It is shifting from low-tech and an agriculture-oriented economy to a hi-tech one, developing a small but dynamic ecosystem. Israel serves as a role model and success story in this sense, as a small country under complicated geopolitical conditions and limited trade exchange with our neighbors.

Serbia and Israel are both small countries surrounded by historical foes. Each has seen their homeland invaded and occupied down through the centuries, and Serbs and Jews were murdered side by side during the Holocaust. How much of a role do these similarities play in terms of bolstering Serbian support for Israel?

Whenever analyzing relations between countries, one should bear in mind the mutual interests as well as the deep feelings of the people, negative and positive alike. In the case of Israel and Serbia, the emotional level and this feeling of solidarity and common destiny are very strong. They are based on the long Jewish presence in the Balkans and its interrelations with the local culture and on the Holocaust, which left its mark on the Serbian collective memory as well. You feel it wherever you go in Serbia, from lectures in universities, interviews in the media, to meetings with politicians and decision-makers. Yet only in recent years, conditions have been met to transform these feelings into a clear and coherent political agenda beneficial for all.

Last September, for the first time since the Holocaust, a Hebrew center opened in Belgrade. Then, to mark Israel Independence Day, several key locations in Belgrade were illuminated with blue and white lights. Do you think these indicate a trend of some sort? Is there growing interest in Israeli culture among Serbs?

No doubt, we should see these two milestones as part of a growing tendency to enhance the relations in all fields and create more long-term platforms for cultural and academic exchanges. The Serbian public is

particularly curious and open to foreign cultural activities and the number of festivals here is impressive. Israel is considered a leading country when it comes to cultural manifestations also thanks to big efforts of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Yet in my opinion, these two events represent more than a regular cultural exchange.

The opening of the first academic institute for Hebrew would enable us to create in the long run a cadre of academic experts and researchers on different aspects of Israel and Judaism, and to fill the gap due to years of academic absence here. The lighting of four iconic sites of Belgrade in blue and white to celebrate Israel's 72nd anniversary is an exceptional gesture of the city that sends another clear message of solidarity.

Several months ago, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic attended the AIPAC Conference in Washington, DC, where he announced that Serbia would be opening an economic and diplomatic office in Jerusalem. How important is this step and what does it signify in terms of international recognition of Israel's capital?

This historical statement of President Vucic is a huge step forward in the relations between Serbia and Israel. On the one hand, it is the next natural step when you follow the enhancement of relations in recent years.

On the other hand, one needs to remember Serbia is a non-EU country, striving to solve its pending issues with its neighbors in the Balkans, a region where big powers have always played an important role. When you take the challenges that Serbia is facing today and you see this statement as part of many other important steps taken by both sides in recent years, you can appreciate its real magnitude.

Ethnic strife and historical memory have played a large role in the Balkans for centuries. How does this impact or complicate Israel's diplomatic efforts in the region?

In the Balkans, history and the struggle for historical narratives are very dominant in general and in politics in particular. One should be very sensible and attentive to all narratives. It is very easy to fall into the cliché and stereotype trap.

I believe the message should be that the will and interest of Israel to develop friendly relations with all the countries in the region do not come at the expense of anyone. On the contrary, Israel's growing interests in the region serve the Balkans and the will of its governments to guarantee peace, stability, economic growth and prosperity.

What are some of the key points that you stress in your hasbara [public diplomacy] efforts vis-à-vis the

Serbian public and media? How receptive have they been to the message?

I repeat the message of historical ties while mentioning the need to nurture them and to work together to fill this friendship with substantial content. While leaning on our common history, we should follow our present interests and look to the future.

Another message is the relevance of Israeli know-how to the social and economic goals of Serbia. One of the main challenges that Serbia faces today is the migration of youth. The authorities are investing much effort in attracting them through innovation, entrepreneurship, etc. – all areas where Israel has a lot of experience. We are an important player in this domain through different stakeholders, including MASHAV, the development agency of Israel.

What has Serbia's stance been regarding the Iranian threat to Israel as well as the dispute with the Palestinians? Do you detect any shift in their position in recent years?

Serbia is not taking sides in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. It hardly makes any official statements in this regard. Although I would expect and hope for better voting patterns in the UN arena from such a friendly country, I do acknowledge the growing understanding in Serbia of the challenges that Israel is facing in the region. I believe that with time we can expect even better results in this regard.

When it comes to Iran, it is safe to say the world is slowly realizing the destabilizing role it has in our neighborhood, yet raising the awareness is a sluggish process.

Despite international pressure, Israel has refused to recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia. Why is that?

Israel, out of its own perspective of the Middle East, rejects in principle the idea of unilateral measures, and in particular, unilateral declarations of independence without a comprehensive agreement. I believe that our allies understand and respect this position that strengthens Israel in the international arena. I hope that new developments in the Balkans will facilitate a process leading to an agreement that will allow the region to invest more efforts in its well-being and prosperity.

A few years ago, Serbia became the first European country to adopt a law regarding the restitution of Jewish property that was seized during World War II. How has this law been implemented?

Indeed. Serbia should be commended for adopting unanimously in 2016 that law that allows restitution of Jewish property, not only to the heirs but also to the Jewish community in case there are no heirs. This is

extremely important for countries like Serbia, where 85% of the Jews were murdered in the Holocaust.

In addition, the law allocates around \$1 million per year from the Serbian budget for the well-being of the Jewish community, for Holocaust survivors and Holocaust remembrance. This is unique and unprecedented in Europe. Today, the law is implemented and the Jewish community can enjoy better conditions as a community and as individuals. Its success should serve as a model to other European states that are reluctant to do so for obvious reasons.

In recent years, trade and tourism between Israel and Serbia have undergone significant growth. In what fields in particular have Israeli firms proven successful? And where do you think there is room for further growth?

Well, the main Israeli investments in Serbia are in real estate: residential buildings, offices and commercial complexes. Israeli investment in this field has had a leading position for many years. In recent years, we see the Israeli investment portfolio diversified. It includes renewable energy, water treatment and management, agricultural technologies, engines, food and beverage, transportation, IT, etc. The embassy has a visible and even prominent role in enhancing the economic exchanges. Yet, I believe there is room for many more areas to be discovered.

Trade between Serbia and Israel is relatively low but is growing steadily – around 15% every year. The signing of an agreement for the avoidance of double taxation as well as other economic agreements should give important impetus to the relations. But the lack of a free trade agreement is an impediment that needs the attention of both authorities. Another significant development is the increased number of Israeli tourists in the last four years, since the introduction of direct low-cost flights between Tel-Aviv and Belgrade. I hope that this tendency will be followed also by an increased number of Serbian tourists to Israel that is growing steadily.

There has been growing academic cooperation between Israel and Serbia, with the University of Belgrade and Kiryat Ono College in Jerusalem forging ties and creating centers to promote mutual study. Do you foresee more such initiatives taking place in the future?

Academic exchange is an important component of relations between two countries. It contributes to better education of the young generation and better understanding of each other. Given the potential in both countries, I would expect more long-run joint academic projects in various fields.

In this regard, the cooperation between the University of Belgrade and Ono College is very encouraging.

Ono College is supporting the Center for Hebrew Language and Civilization at the Belgrade University, while the University of Belgrade is supporting the Center for Serbian Studies in Ono's college in Jerusalem. There are several more academic initiatives and projects like the Seminar of Jewish Culture in the University of Belgrade in cooperation with Ben-Gurion University. Medicine, exact sciences, engineering are just some examples of academic areas that are worth exploring.

Antisemitism is on the rise around the world, particularly in Europe. What is the situation in Serbia, and what steps have the government taken to combat it?

Jews and Judaism are well respected in Serbia. Antisemitism has a very low profile here, and during my mandate I have been witness to one severe case of desecration of Jewish graves, which is of course one too many.

Generally, Jews feel safe in Serbia, and the few minor incidents I was aware of were always met with the appropriate reaction by the authorities. Yet, hate speech and antisemitism in social media know no boundaries and it would not be wise to assume that any country is immune. Personally, I participated in many events dedicated to this important issue, highlighting the message that fighting antisemitism is not an Israeli or Jewish task but the duty of the governments, as antisemitism serves as a litmus test for society.

There has been growing concern expressed about a revival of nostalgia for fascism in neighboring Croatia, where public displays of support for the wartime Ustaše regime, which was allied with Nazi Germany, have become all too frequent. How worrisome is this development?

Any sign of Holocaust denial, Holocaust relativism or revisionism in Europe and around the world should be of great concern for us and for European society, as it undermines the values Europe is founded on. Education, legislation and Holocaust remembrance are the three pillars to face this challenge.

I am very encouraged by the measures that Serbia has been taking in the last years. Just to name a few: the recent adoption of the IHRA working definition of antisemitism, the inauguration of the beautiful and historical synagogue in Subotica, the Law of Property Restitution, and the activities dedicated to Holocaust remembrance on the 27th of January and throughout the year.

Finally, yet importantly, I would mention the visit of President Vucic to Jerusalem to mark 75 years of the liberation of Auschwitz. This was followed by the gesture of hanging a yellow flag with the Star of

David on the balcony of the President's Residence to send a message of pride instead of humiliation. This does not mean that all measures were taken to ensure that antisemitism will not prevail, but I think these are crucial steps and I wish many other countries would follow.

Earlier this year, the Serbian National Assembly passed a law to create a memorial center at Staro Sajmište, the site of a Nazi extermination camp on the outskirts of Belgrade where thousands of Jews, Serbs and Roma were murdered. How crucial is this to ensuring Holocaust remembrance and educating the next generation?

One cannot overestimate the importance of this law, adopted earlier this year after much anticipation and debates. Staro Sajmište (the Old Fairground) is a symbol of the joint suffering of Jews, Serbs and Roma in Serbia during the Holocaust. Yet, for us, the Jews, Staro Sajmište represents the site where Jewish women, elderly and children from Belgrade and beyond were concentrated and sent to death in gas trucks.

For years, the place was neglected and is still in very bad shape today. Under the new law, authorities will build a museum, and education and research centers as an appropriate memorial for the victims. By opening the center to the public, Serbs and foreigners will have the opportunity to learn, at last, the history of this camp and its atrocities.

Serbia and some Holocaust scholars have been trying to raise greater public awareness about Jasenovac, the death camp that was run by the Ustaše regime in Croatia where countless thousands of Jews and Serbs were murdered during World War II. Why isn't Jasenovac more well-known outside the region?

It is a very critical question that maybe others would be able to better answer. I can only guess the historical circumstances that led to this oblivion. What is essential now is to see what we can all do in order to restore justice for the victims of Jasenovac.

Yet as the atrocities of this camp, known as "Auschwitz of the Balkans," are not well documented, deep academic research is still required in order to avoid dominance of political stances. I am glad to see that several steps were taken in this direction.

How did the coronavirus affect Serbia and the functioning of the embassy? Did it have any impact on the bilateral relationship between the two countries?

COVID-19 is a multidimensional crisis that affects us all. At the very beginning of the crisis, President Reuven Rivlin had a very friendly conversation with the Serbian president, where they exchanged views

about the situation and explored ways for Israel and Serbia to collaborate in facing the challenge.

On behalf of MASHAV, the Embassy of Israel donated to Serbia basic hygienic and food products for the elderly and other vulnerable sectors during the lockdown. Experts from both countries exchanged best practices either bilaterally or in virtual multilateral forums. The crisis in my opinion has shown two things: the importance of having friends and a strong position in the international arena, and the big asset that Israel has, not only as a Start-Up Nation but more importantly, as a social impact nation.

Theodor Herzl's grandparents are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zemun, a Belgrade suburb, where Rabbi Yehuda Alkalay, one of the founding fathers of religious Zionism, served as chief rabbi in the 19th century. And Serbia was the first country to recognize the Balfour Declaration in 1917, thanks in part to the efforts of Capt. David Albala, a Serbian-Jewish war hero. Do you think that Serbia's role in Zionism's history is sufficiently appreciated?

Before coming here, I was aware that Theodor Herzl's family originated from Zemun, where Rabbi Yehuda Alkalay served as chief rabbi. I was less aware of David Albala's crucial role in Serbia becoming the first country to recognize the Balfour Declaration. The more I read, the more I was fascinated and had the feeling that this is not coincidence.

Serbia was home to a very strong Zionist movement and activity. In August 2018, Rivlin was the first Israeli president to visit Serbia. In a very emotional event, both presidents named a street after Herzl in Zemun, right next to the already existing Rabbi Alkalay Street. I am not sure there are many cities in the world where you can find in one neighborhood two streets named after the founding fathers of the State of Israel.

As you look back on your four years of service in Belgrade, how would you summarize your term and what advice would you give to your successor?

These years were fulfilling. I had the great honor to take part and contribute to the improvement of relations between Israel and Serbia. I enjoyed a friendly environment that facilitated the activities of the embassy here.

It is never easy to leave a country, but this time I find it even harder. Luckily, COVID-19 spared me the traditional farewell parties. It might be easier for me without them. My wish for my successor is that they enjoy the same spirit of collaboration that I did in all venues of society.

"The sky is the limit" might be an overused cliché, but no doubt the potential for our bilateral relations needs to be fulfilled for the benefit of the two countries.

The writer is founder and president of the Israel-Serbia Friendship Association.

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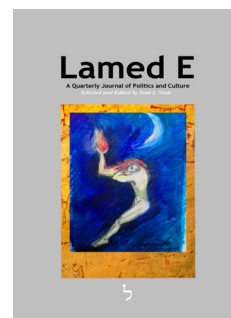
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