

REFLECTIONS



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the bridge

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PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen

Last year I had the privilege to light a candle on a huge chanukiah, set up in the heart of Brussels' European quarter. In a dark December night, I saw the lights of Chanukah reflected on the faces of the many people that had gathered for the event, and on the buildings that host the European Union's institutions. And it made me think. Just like those candles, the Jewish people have been a light unto nations throughout the centuries. Here in Europe, Jewish culture has shaped our philosophy, our values, the very idea of a united Europe. It is an essential part of who we are, as Europeans.

Yet the importance of our Jewish roots has too often been forgotten, downplayed, or even intentionally erased. This is one of the many faces of anti-Semitism – more subtle than Holocaust denial, but just as dangerous.

Only if we reflect on our history, can we avoid that our future mirrors the mistakes of our past. So I want Europe's new generations to know about the Shoah, about modern racism, and about Jewish life in today's Europe. I want our cities to protect and promote our Jewish heritage. I want our schools to teach about Jewish traditions in Europe. Europe should value its own Jewishness. European democracy can only be healthy if it reflects the diversity of our societies and the richness of our culture.

Therefore, I am especially grateful to the European Union of Jewish Students for making Jewish life more visible on university campuses all across Europe.

May this years' Chanukah – and this issue of The Bridge – be an opportunity for all of us to reflect on our European identity, and on the light that the Jewish people keep shining unto Europe.

President of the European Commission





VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Nicola Beer

Dear readers,

it is my great pleasure and honour to address you in this edition of “The Bridge”.

Notably – as this edition’s theme is „Reflections“, to me, reflecting means a process of serious, careful thoughts about the things we do, about ourselves and our place in the world between past and future. This is especially essential now, when we thought that time of war in Europe had been overcome.

Reflections are particularly important in the political arena. In the fast-moving political business, in which quick decisions are often made, it can make a difference to take the time to reflect. In my role as special envoy on combatting religious discrimination, including antisemitism, to reflect means to relate past experiences to current developments, to understand interdependencies and to analyse recurring and new patterns of discrimination. But reflection goes beyond that. It could mean going into a dialogue with oneself. It could mean to

step into the other one’s shoes and to try to look at the problem from the other one’s perspective and enter into an interfaith dialogue, in order to overcome religious discrimination and antisemitism.

The Bridge and the European Union of Jewish Students contribute immensely in creating awareness about Jewish life in Europe in all its facets. They provide a space for journalists, writers, thinkers among the Jewish community to voice concerns, discuss contemporary matters, and, as the theme of this edition aptly puts it, reflect.

In times like these, where religious discrimination, antisemitism, hate speech are as present as ever, we need to combine our forces, intellectually and with action. In this spirit, I wish all readers an inspiring read and food for thought.

Yours sincerely,

Vice-President of the European Parliament & Chairwoman of the Working Group Against Antisemitism





WELCOME BY EUJS PRESIDENT

Avital Grinberg

Dear Friends of EUJS,

We are closing an eventful year filled with historical moments. Our generation is witnessing the most brutal war of our time unfold in front of our eyes. Our generation is witnessing a mass revolution of the Iranian people against the unspeakable brutality of the mullah-regime. Furthermore, our generation is confronted with the rise of the far-right in numerous European countries that we call home. The overflow and intensity of information makes comprehending and processing such nuanced global developments a true challenge.

Since the beginning of the Covid pandemic it almost feels as though we are stumbling from one historical event to another with no time to recover. But stumbling is part of life and what matters is taking the short moment, a millisecond, to regain your balance and to continue the path. In this edition young European Jews will be able to take this millisecond and reflect. Reflection is a spiritual act that unites the past, present and future. In its ideal form, reflection recovers and stabilises us to ensure that in the next step we are able to proactively tackle the issues we care about. It is with this in mind that Rav Abraham Kook would write: „Prayer needs to enliven a person to be ready to act and get yourself going in justice and righteousness via the divine spirit that awakens you.” Prayer - in its much wider form is a reflection - must be the base for all our Jewish activism. Rav Abraham Heschel states that the liturgical movement as well as spirituality “must become a revolutionary movement, seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, and the vision.”

This is what the writers of this edition are doing. They use text to challenge us, the reader. And this challenge will be most valuable if it results in action. The Bridge continues to be an opportunity to follow Rav Kook’s and Herschel’s calling. The theme of Reflections is motivated by the urgent need to deepen the ongoing conversations. At the same time, Reflections will demonstrate the diversity of contemporary Jewish identity. It will give an insight into what motivates young European Jews and by that it also reflects the world we live in.

EUJS is releasing this edition of The Bridge magazine ahead of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah. During this eight-day-long holiday we are reminded of the destruction of the second temple by the Greeks during the 2nd century BCE. The Maccabim are a group of fighters who liberated Israel and restored the temple in Jerusalem. What strikes me about this story is the value of restoring the destroyed in a proactive, bottom up way. Ultimately their actions, on the ground activism, laid the basis for safe Jewish life and free spiritual practice. Their written story, that we recall every year, continues to serve as an inspiration and a bond with the Jewish people worldwide. May the natural and historical interconnectedness of writing and activism bring light and inspiration to us all.

We invite you to engage with the articles and to use the writers’ reflections for your own inner process. That being said, I am looking forward to the conversations the articles can stimulate and I wish you a joyful reading.

Avital Grinberg
EUJS President



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Emily Bowman

Dear reader,

It is my distinct pleasure to present to you the latest edition of EUJS' flagship publication, *The Bridge*. In this edition, we invited our writers to explore the theme of reflections, a word with numerous interpretations. 25 contributors have offered their insights within this publication from 15 countries across Europe.

The breadth of writers also reflects the essence of *The Bridge*. It is a pan-European magazine exploring a range of issues from both a European and Jewish perspective, providing young Jews with the opportunity to engage with key topics on a continuous basis. The variety of articles also reflects the diversity and plurality of young Jewish voices across Europe and the various lived experiences within.

Having already explored the themes of renewal and defiance in our prior editions, the editorial team found it timely and important that, in this issue, we reflect on the past and look to the future. However, in an ever-changing world, the word reflections can be understood in a myriad of ways.

On the one hand, we might think about the physical reflections we see around us, caused by a mirror, water, or light, for instance. Such reflections allow us to see a similar image. On the other hand, reflections can also be interpreted to mean the cognitive act of reflection. Cognitive reflections are the product of taking a step back, dedicating time, and actively questioning ourselves, our surroundings, our past and our present.

This edition of *The Bridge* would not have been possible without the impressive contributions from some amazing writers who have dedicated considerable time and effort to this project. In addition, I would also like to thank EUJS Vice President, Ilan Selby, and EUJS Communications Officer, Eryn Sarkin, for their invaluable editorial contribution to this issue.

I would also like to thank the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, for her greeting. EUJS is humbled by, and thankful for, the support and assistance it receives from the European Commission, and for the work of the Office of Katharina von Schnurbein who have been tireless allies of and advocates for Jewish communities around Europe.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Nicole Beer, for her kind remarks. It gives EUJS great comfort knowing that we have an ally in the European Parliament like MEP Beer, who is a supporter of Jewish Communities and their rights to practise their Judaism freely.

With this in mind, I would like to invite you to read on and to explore the wide-range of articles that constitute this edition, in which the topics of politics, Judaism, culture and identity are discussed. I hope that these articles challenge you, motivate you and inspire you.

Emily Bowman,
Editor-in-Chief

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Politics

Reflection on the State of our Democracies



In recent years, there has been a worrying trend among democracies in Europe as they have been coming under considerable pressure. This is evidenced by the many national elections this year, where right-wing, populist, and nationalist parties have either taken power or gained a sizable share of the vote for the first time in their country's history.

By: Máté Zsédely-Holler • Daniel Lazer •
David Fiorentini • Mira Kelber

In this article, we will examine the state of democracy in Hungary, Italy and Sweden in greater detail. This is a personal reflection on how our democracies got to this point, and how it affects young Jews in the countries and across Europe.

HUNGARY - MÁTÉ ZSÉDELY-HOLLER

In the early 2000s, Hungary was one of the most pro-democratic countries in Central and Eastern Europe. It had a vibrant civil society, a thriving economy, and a strong commitment to the rule of law and human rights. After becoming an EU member state in 2004, it seemed that after years of instability, Hungary's commitment to protecting fundamental rights deepened and that Hungary defeated its post-soviet autocratic legacies.

However, since the early 2010s, the country has undergone a dramatic shift. The government has become more authoritarian, and has grown increasingly intolerant towards minority groups. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and

his ruling Fidesz party have weakened many of the checks and balances that are necessary for a healthy democracy. Both freedom of the press and freedom of assembly have been curtailed. In addition, the government has used its control over the judiciary to stifle dissent.

THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN HUNGARY IS NOW IN A PRECARIOUS STATE.

Right-wing populism has been a major contributor to this shift. Fidesz has used anti-immigrant and antisemitic rhetoric as well as propaganda to instil fear and division in the people. In his speech in July 2022, Orbán even stated that "[Hungarians] have always fought: we are willing to mix with one another, but we do not want to become mixed-race peoples". This prime example of hate-mongering, dangerous words evocative of Nazi ideology and fascism, is only one example of the government's profound contempt for Western democracies, as well as its ongoing assault and demonisation of minority communities.

These developments have a significant impact on young Jews in Hungary. In recent years, the Jewish community has seen an increase in political antisemitism, prejudice and discrimination.

And now, despite claiming to have a zero-tolerance policy against antisemitism, Hungary's government, is legitimising bigotry and intolerance via its political rhetoric. Young adults are feeling increasingly unwelcome in Hungary as a result of the erosion of democratic practices and the aforementioned worrying trends. This is further exacerbated by the rise of radical right-wing parties like Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland), which received significant support, partly due to a decade of normalization of antisemitic rhetoric - both overt and indirect - used in Fidesz campaigns.

The flourishing of a Jewish community is dependent on a healthy democracy, which Hungary currently lacks. Despite current efforts to revitalise the community, the complex challenges that come with operating in an undemocratic environment prevent it from reaching its full potential.

“Many young adults are planning to leave or have already left Hungary. I am one of them.”

This is a worrying trend not just for Jews in Hungary, but for democracies across Europe. The rise of right-wing populism is a threat to the democratic values of tolerance and inclusion, which are essential for a healthy society. And as the example of Hungary shows, the systemic erosion of democracy can happen anywhere, even in countries once deemed democratic hopefuls.

ITALY - DAVID FIORENTINI

The electoral system in Italy is quite peculiar, but in a nutshell, a diverse coalition of many political parties is required to gain a majority in Parliament. As a result, in order to mitigate the pressures coming from various sides of the coalition, several Ministers or even the Prime Minister of past governments has been a technocrat or a new political actor who was not directly affiliated with any party. It was precisely under this setting that right-wing parties, such as Fratelli d'Italia and Lega, formed an alliance with moderate to centrist parties, such as Forza Italia and Noi con l'Italia.

Nonetheless, the huge gap in election results between Fratelli d'Italia and

the other members of the coalition undoubtedly made Giorgia Meloni the true winner of the elections. Fratelli d'Italia rose from a marginal position in the centre-right coalition, receiving only 4,26% of the votes in 2018, to becoming Italy's largest party, with 26% of the votes. As a result, after several technocrats as Heads of Government for the past years, a Party Leader was appointed Prime Minister.

These new developments have also contributed to why the latest elections have been so significant. It is not only because of the political-leaning of the Majority, but also because of the wide margin and the clear victory of Fratelli d'Italia, leading to the immediate appointment of Giorgia Meloni.

On the other hand, considering that this victory was vastly predicted, the moderate forces of the coalition have already devised a strategy to dilute the extremist tones of the faction to ensure a smoother conduct of Government. So much so that even the European People's Party serenely backed the coalition.

For example, one area in which the new government has shown a keen interest in is bilateral diplomatic relations between Italy and Israel. The center-right coalition has repeatedly spoken out in support of the State of Israel and its right to self-defense, in contrast to various anti-Zionist events organized by left-wing parties or even the 5 Stars Movement's clear pro-Iranian and pro-Chinese policies. However, given the deep complexity of the Middle Eastern geopolitical framework, the actions of a single Italian government are unlikely to upset certain balances. Nevertheless, during the election campaign some

bolder proposals were made, such as relocating the Italian embassy to Jerusalem. However, I believe it is unlikely given the strong pressure from the EU and other Italian interests in the region, particularly the region's energy dependence on Arab countries.

Finally, given the ideological roots of Fratelli d'Italia, which can be traced back to the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a neo-fascist movement founded in 1946, a significant portion of Italian Jewry is rightfully concerned. Given the numerous antisemitic and racist incidents tied to them on a local level, allegations of collusion with "black lobbies" or extra-parliamentary far-right parties, and admiration for past political figures such as Giorgio Almirante, who signed the Racial Laws of 1938, it is more than reasonable that the Jewish electorate's perception of Fratelli d'Italia will always err on the side of caution.

“Even if Giorgia Meloni's Government might improve her image, there will always be strong doubts towards the base of her party, who often get caught in blatant acts of antisemitism.”

SWEDEN - DANIEL LAZER & MIRA KELBER

In Sweden, the September elections resulted in a new minority, liberal-conservative government. However, the most eye-opening result was the



success of the far-right, conservative Swedish Democrats (SD). SD, now the second biggest party, is shrouded in controversy and all of a sudden wields significant influence over historically social-democratic Swedish politics. The success of SD in Sweden can largely be attributed to its restrictive immigration policies and harsh rhetoric towards the Muslim population.

The Swedish Democrats were founded in 1988 by members stemming from several extreme-right and racist organisations. For a long time, it was a fringe party, but the election of current party leader Jimmie Åkesson was a success resulting in legislative seats for the first time in 2010. The party's success is particularly concerning due to their connection to Nazism. Despite their best efforts to wash this legacy away, the party and some of its members are still involved in antisemitic incidents. Just last month, the municipal politician Rebecka Fallenkvist received international condemnation when she posted a picture of Anne Frank's diary calling her "immoral" and "horniness herself". This is just one example of the many antisemitic scandals that have engulfed the party.

So, how do the Swedish Democrats position themselves towards Jewish life in Sweden? The answer is unclear. They aim to ban non-medical circumcision, however, this has broad support among the Swedish population and other political parties as well. Similarly, they want to ban denominational schools in Sweden, but would "consider keeping Jewish schools open". This last quote shows the two-faced relationship SD has with Swedish Jewry. The party is not openly antisemitic, but their policy proposals, which mainly target

Muslims, threaten to also hurt Jewish life in Sweden. Again, the importance of standing up for human rights has become as clear as ever.

“Is it possible to be both Jewish and Swedish and to vote for a far-right wing party like SD? Or will the Swedish Jews always be seen as “the other” and continue living under the threat of political antisemitism?”

Threats and discrimination against any ethnic, religious or national group are harmful to any democratic society.

Furthermore, an unfortunate consequence of the rise of SD is the manner in which Jews are being used as tools for political parties to make ideological statements. The anti-SD debate has largely focused on the party's Nazi past, with Jews being used as political pawns to prove a point. In 2018, Sweden's now prime minister Ulf Kristersson met with Holocaust survivor Hédi Fried, Z"l, who was worried about the rise of SD. During the meeting, he promised to never cooperate with SD amid fears from Fried that it could harm Swedish democracy.

When it became clear, however, that the Moderates would ally with the Swedish Democrats, Kristersson's Instagram was swarmed with thousands of comments of "Hédi Fried", in an attempt to highlight his broken promise. This was met with

criticism from Swedish Jews, who felt they were once again being used as a political tool in an attempt by critics of SD to highlight their problematic past.

Nonetheless, not everyone agrees, and the Swedish Democrats clearly pose a dilemma for Swedish Jewry. On the one hand, there are Jews who support SD and believe that they can solve Sweden's internal problems. Those who are afraid of SD, on the other hand, draw parallels between how Hitler's Nazi politics became normalised and fear that the same thing will happen in Sweden. This dilemma clearly shows the complexities created by SD's success.

CONCLUSION

We are all concerned about recent developments in our European democracies. However, as young Jews, activists, students, members of our communities, and citizens of our countries, we must speak up and take action when democratic values, which we hold dear, are violated.

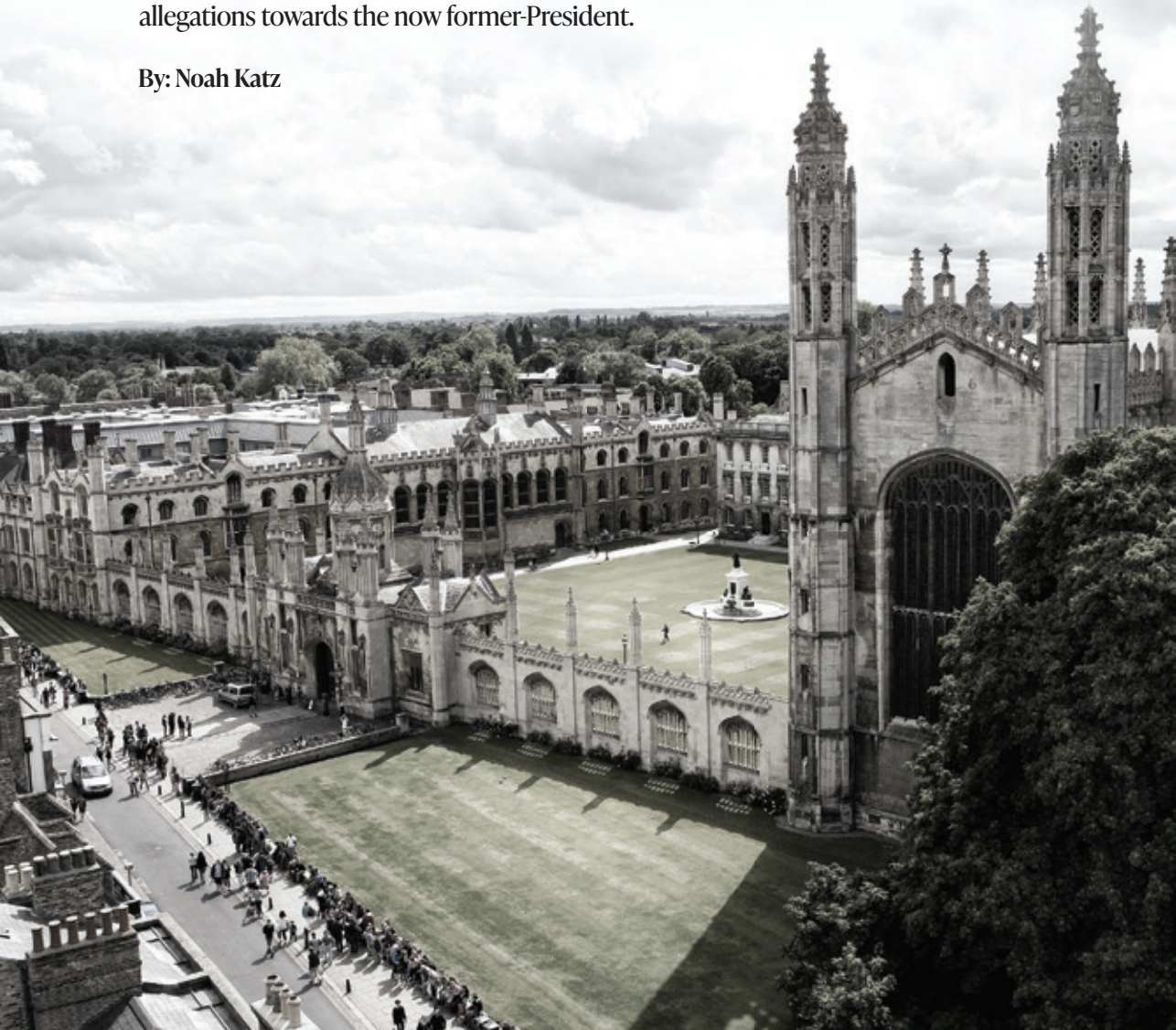
We have a role to play and while we thrive in democratic environments, our voices become more powerful in times of crisis and fragility. We are committed to ensuring that the Jewish voices are heard loud and clear in support of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. As members of EUJS, we stand with all those who are fighting for these values in Europe and around the world.



Reflecting on the implications of the NUS antisemitism debacle

On 1 November, at about half past three, it was released that the President of the United Kingdom's National Union of Students' (NUS) contract had been terminated following allegations of antisemitism. This termination was the result of an independent panel's decisions based on a King's Counsel led investigation into the allegations towards the now former-President.

By: Noah Katz



I am of the opinion that this decision has been made and that we should let it lie. The problems that we are faced with are twofold, that the election of the now former President was in fact a symptom, not the cause of the antisemitism within the student movement, and that there is a total lack of confidence from both within and without the student movement, which has left us with a near zero level of student representation to government.

The alleged actions of some in the student movement have contributed to the removal of the student voice from any government policy discussions. We are sat here with no representation because the NUS have allowed themselves to get to such a point where ties were cut.

The Cost of Living Crisis is the single biggest issue facing students. I currently work full time as the Vice President of Education of Lancaster University Students' Union (LUSU). I work day in, day out, for students on our campus, alongside the University, to improve their experience. The work that we are all trying to do to address the Cost of Living is being overshadowed by the world's oldest hatred.

We have had students coming into our office since the start of term telling us that they are skipping class because they can not afford a bus ticket to campus.

My involvement in my Students' Union has been genuinely transformational and I want other Jewish students to be able to experience that power. Young Jewish people are so vocal and passionate about the issues that affect young people at large because, simply, they affect Jewish people in the exact

same way; yet, there is continued disengagement of Jewish students within students' unions. I am an outlier as a Jewish sabbatical officer, there are only four of us out of hundreds of officers in England. I am privileged to have been chosen as a Lauder Fellow by the World Jewish Congress and my Fellowship project is all about showing the potential of students' unions and the student movement as a whole when they are not being marred by antisemitism. There are so many barriers to the involvement of Jewish students in students' unions.

The issues we have seen at NUS are a macrocosmic representation of what happens on highly polarised campuses. There is so much power in the student movement but it's currently tainted.

I completely understand why Jewish students do not get involved but that is what I want to change. I will be part of the change.



POLITICS

Integrating into a new society - reflections on being forced to flee

Throughout my life I have spent a lot of time reflecting on what it means to integrate, to move away from a place you knew and find a way to participate in – and belong to – a new community.

By: Meiron Avidan

I have lived in five different countries, most recently moving to Brussels a year ago to work for HIAS, a Jewish humanitarian organisation working to help those who have been forcibly displaced around the world.

I have undergone first-hand the experience of navigating a different and not always friendly bureaucracy, of having to learn a new language, of trying to find new friends, and of needing to visit a new doctor for the first time. It is daunting and overwhelming. But I chose to move, I wanted to.

“Many are not granted the luxury of choice and control over their whereabouts.”

The thousands of men, women and children who have arrived in Europe from Ukraine since the war started on February 24th are among those who did not choose to move but had to. Often, they bring with them few possessions and severe trauma from their experiences: they were forced to leave, they harbour serious fears for their future and for family and friends they have left behind, and they are still mourning the loss of the life they had. They were put in a difficult and precarious situation, something nobody should go through, especially not alone. Fortunately, they are not always left to their own devices.

When the war in Ukraine started earlier this year, the outpouring of support from Jewish communities in Europe, and from around the world, came in quickly with offers of time, money, resources, and homes. In my role as Integration Coordinator at HIAS Europe, I continuously witness the ongoing efforts of local Jewish communities in several European countries. For many, this is the first time taking on the role of integration facilitators, which requires a deep empathy, speed of action and endless reserves of energy and kindness.

I am proud that through HIAS Europe’s Welcome Circle Programme for Ukrainians, Jewish communities in nine different European countries have so far managed to support 249 people in rebuilding their lives. From Ireland to Poland, from Belgium to the Czech

Republic, the goal of the Welcome Circle programme is always for the beneficiaries to achieve self-sufficiency. This means focusing on whatever kind of support a person or family needs to integrate effectively, so that they can live an independent life as soon as possible.

As the war in Ukraine nears the one-year mark, the needs of those being supported by Jewish communities continue. There is so much that we can all do as individuals, as well as together as a community, to support those in need of help, whether they come from Ukraine or were affected by conflicts and crises in other parts of the world. If everyone took the time to offer support to those in need of help, the world would be a much better place.

So much of what happens to us in our lives happens because of chance, being in the right or wrong place when something happens. The one thing in life that we can affect is how we respond to those around us and making the decision to use our privilege and voice for good. Especially today, with conflict knocking on the doors of Europe, as well as rekindled winds of antisemitism and xenophobia sweeping the world, it has never been more important to take the time to reflect on our own lives as they intertwine and interact with others, what we want to achieve and how we can become a person we can be proud of.

If you are interested in supporting Ukrainian refugees through a Welcome Circle or in other ways, please reach out to me for more information: meiron.avidan@hias.org. To learn more about the work of HIAS in Ukraine and in other parts of the world, please visit our website at www.hias.org and follow @HIASEurope on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

POLITICS

Reflections, Atonement, and Apologies: A Jewish Tradition and Geopolitical Necessity

Reflections, atonement, and apologies are no longer just a Jewish tradition, but a geopolitical necessity which we need to explore to re-evaluate the international governance architecture.

By: Eryn Sarkin

Every year, we atone for the sins or wrongdoings that we have done over the last year. At the same time, we are meant to also reflect on the sins that we have committed and apologise accordingly. International actors should be no different. They should atone for

their wrongdoings and apologise. They should reflect on what can be done to ensure that these wrongdoings do not happen again, on which actors are participating in said wrongdoings, and on who has a role in halting these wrongdoings from occurring.

Yom Kippur reminds us that humans, intrinsically, commit errors, but we are supposed to reflect on these and learn to avoid repeating them in the future. Perhaps, this inherently important Jewish tradition is exactly the answer to the geopolitical tensions which impede peace and stability around the world.

Throughout history, we have seen greed, power, and money push both States and in some cases even individuals to the extremes - genocides, war crimes, destruction of religious sites, coups, you name it. As Albert Einstein himself said: “Three great forces rule the world: stupidity, fear, and greed”. In other words, the never-ending desire for power, an inherent fear of the other or the different, and lack of knowledge about that which we do not make effort to understand, are the three bases of the world order, and instead of seeing the mistakes of the pasts and learning from them, we ignore that these same behaviours are repeating themselves. Yet when given the chance to reflect, to atone, to apologise, to intervene, the world fails to do so.

In the Jewish tradition, we focus on personal sin, individual sin, and in many ways, the “small” sins. We atone, we apologise, we ask for forgiveness, we repent, we work to not repeat it. As we atone personally, this is what the world should be doing when “bigger” sins take place, when collective sins take place, when national or international sins take place. We focus so deeply on individual atonement but we should be talking about international atonement, an international movement to apologise and repent for all sins - not only those which receive international media attention. With atonement comes apology, and the need to ensure that

this does not happen again. If we want to ensure that these atrocities “never again” take place, there needs to be processes in place to ensure and enforce that these do not happen again.

When does the world sufficiently reflect, at least on a yearly basis, on what it has done and what it needs to do to ensure these atrocities do not happen again? Surely there should be a movement towards and a moment for the international community to apologise to victims, and reflect on what is happening around the world.

“Are we truly doomed to keep repeating the same mistakes? Doomed to repeat history? We speak of “never again” and take to the streets to protest, but at what point will our efforts become completely futile if we keep allowing these atrocities to occur?”

Unless we atone, apologise, and take active steps to do things differently, the mantra to actually prevent these small or big mistakes from occurring, “never again”, is just that - a mantra.

It’s no secret that the obstacles to prevent atrocities often lie in the institutions which govern international law. These international institutions are deemed as the “protectors” of civilians, human rights, and preventing

genocides, war crimes, and crimes against humanity from taking place. Yet are they doing it?

To a certain extent, they are. We have a range of institutions built with the so-called intention of promoting human rights, but in actuality, these institutions seem to reflect the motives of the superpowers, who make determinations (rarely) when real and effective interventions can take place.

The United Nations, built in response to the Shoah and World War 2, is no longer the institution which can truly, prevent atrocities, protect people, and hold perpetrators accountable. The United Nations (UN) has taught us what an international institution should look like, but we now need a body which can fulfil what the dream of the UN was to be.

What would really radically change the world we live in, where people are constant victims to atrocities committed by states, or organised extremist groups,

would be reflections on which structures are failing, and reflections of how these structures should be working. There is a need to reform the present institution or create a new institution which is equipped to deal with the present crises that the world faces. There needs to be an apology and repentance culture, and the international community and no state is too big or victim too small to be excluded from this. How else are we, truly, going to be able to achieve “never again”?

“This is exactly why reflections, atonement, and apologies are no longer just a Jewish tradition, but a geopolitical necessity.”



Reflections on the Never Again. Right Now. Campaign

In China's Xinjiang province, a region called East Turkestan by many Uyghurs, between 1.8 and 3 million Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples are held in concentration camps while being subjected to a merciless, industrialised campaign of brainwashing, torture and dehumanisation. Women are sterilised and raped. Prisoners are tortured and subjected to medical experiments. What is happening in Xinjiang is the largest internment of religious and ethnic minorities since the Shoah.

By: Bini Guttmann & Mischa Ushakov

By now the Chinese regime's human rights crimes are increasingly receiving worldwide attention, and sanctions are slowly being imposed. One of the many voices that contributed to this, and the first Jewish voice to globally call out the Uyghur genocide, was the Never Again. Right Now. (NARN) Campaign.

The NARN campaign was a coalition of young, mainly Jewish activists in Europe wanting to raise awareness about the genocide of the Uyghur people. Driven by the idea that we – as young Jews, as descendants of survivors of genocide and expulsion – have a special responsibility, but also a special voice, to draw attention to the fate of the

Uyghurs. For that reason NARN was founded in late January 2020, shortly after the International Holocaust Memorial Day, where year after year politicians and decision-makers come together to declare the empty promise of "Never Again".

Direct actions, webinars, high-level advocacy, online- and flyer-campaigns, as well as several global actions followed, including the roll-out of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in front of 30 Chinese embassies worldwide, and an alternative torch relay in

eight European cities in the run-up to the 2022 Olympic Games. Through the commitment of dedicated volunteers, the NARN campaign was not only the largest Jewish solidarity campaign in Europe in decades, arguably since the Soviet-Jewry movement, but was also successful in getting the European Union to impose its most wide-ranging set of sanctions on China since 1989.

“The Chinese government's actions are a modern genocide.”

The lessons that we learned, our main takeaways, and what we wish to impart to others can be summarised under three points:

1. BEING PRESENT IN NON-JEWISH SPACES CREATES SENSITIVITY TO JEWISH ISSUES.

The anti-CCP (Chinese Communist party) coalition unites a broad spectrum of political backgrounds and therefore, the critical points – those that forced us into discourse and might have led others to terminate cooperation – were also diverse. While there are of course clear boundaries, it is possible to make people, who would otherwise not be natural partners for Jewish organisations, to rethink, reflect and raise awareness, also because we had a common, very powerful opponent, the Chinese government.

2. USING THE JEWISH VOICE

Our initial thesis that people would listen to Jews talking about genocide turned

out to be only partially true. However, our standing and presence in international forums made it easier for political actors to call out the crimes against the Uyghur people for what they are: Genocide. For example, NARN brought together the World Uyghur Congress, the Belgian Jewish Students' Union (UEJB), and Belgian parliamentarians to discuss the atrocities that were taking place. Or our advocacy to bring the major Jewish organisations in the UK and the US onto the scene and get them to be active in opposition—not coincidentally countries whose parliaments now find the strongest words and actions against the CCP.

3. DISINTEGRATING THE CLASSICAL NARRATIVE ABOUT JEWS

In the ritualised commemoration of the Shoah, Jews play the role of victims. The attempt to remember with dignity and at the same time not be reduced to the role of victim is often unsuccessful. In the narrative of the NARN campaign, we did assume the ascribed role and then used it to draw our condemnation from it. By not discussing the 'who', we shifted the focus to the 'what'. Instead of genocide victims, we became genocide experts. Instead of self-fixated Jews, we were read as Jews who used their history for the common good.

The NARN Campaign was ultimately, of course, unsuccessful. The Uyghur genocide is still ongoing; the world is still largely deaf to the incredible suffering of millions. But the NARN Campaign can serve as an example for a new generation of Jewish activism. Activism that is volunteer-driven, loud, proud and aims to make the world a better place for all.



POLITICS

Fight Like Judith

You might have heard about the Talmudic heroine Judith.
 You definitely heard about the women in Iran recently.
 You might know what Judith was fighting for.
 You definitely know what the women in Iran are currently fighting for.

By: Avital Grinberg

These two stories are fundamentally different and this is not in any event an attempt to draw parallels between them. Rather this is an attempt to compare their values and their teachings, even if one of these stories is not over yet. Even though the heroes of this story, and especially their destinies, are different, the villains are the same - violent men who abuse their power and project their hate towards everyone who they deem weaker (i.e.: all women and minorities). Both stories elucidate the desperate attempts of the oppressed to halt their oppression and their religious persecution.

When it comes to the story of Judith, the Midrash tells us that Judith is a Jewish woman living in Betulia (Judea) around 165 BCE. The Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar sends the violent and hateful Holofernes to conquer

the region. It becomes evident that Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes is about to kill the Jewish people. Judith, frustrated by the Jew's sense of helplessness and inaction, visits Holofernes's camp. In the tent she feeds him cheese and wine, seduces him and just when he falls asleep drunk, Judith cuts off Holofernes's head. Yes, you read that correctly - she takes a knife and decapitates him. With Holofernes's head in her arms, she walks back into the village and announces the safety and freedom of the People of Israel.

Now, the women of Iran are far away from this "happy ending". On September 16th Jina Mahsa Amini was murdered. Her senseless and brutal death jolted Kurds, Iranians, and other oppressed people of the murderous Mullah-Regime to action and has led to nation-wide protests, spearheaded

by the unparalleled courage and bravery of Kurdish and Iranian women. The protesters in Tehran, in Saqqez, in Rasht, in Oshnavieh, Divandarreh, Garmsar, Hamedan, Kerman, Mashhad, Mehrshahr and beyond, are standing up to the oppressive, brutal, and barbaric regime of Ayatollah Khamenei. They are ready to pay the ultimate price for their actions in the hopes that one day they can live in a free country that does not seek to oppress them, torment them and kill them. By now it is impossible to keep track of how many hundreds, if not thousands, have been killed or arrested by the regime.

What makes this revolution unique is the fact that women are at the forefront of it all. Kurdish women, such as Jina Mahsa Amini herself, have been opposing the Mullah regime since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Now they are at

the helm of this revolution. "Jin, Jiyan, Azadi", meaning Women, Life, Freedom, is a Kurdish slogan that became the motto of the revolution, serving as a reminder of the catalyst of the protests, Jina Mahsa Amini's death.

Kurds, as well as Balochs, are being targeted most through brutal operations in the Kurdish region, via violent treatment by the police and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Their homes are being demolished, internet is restricted, protesters (including teenagers) are being raped, prisoners are being murdered. People living in these minority regions experience additional cuts in electricity and water, barricaded hospitals and the use of heavy weapons by security forces.

This shows that the situation is first and foremost a tragedy that left too

many people hungry, homeless, alone and traumatised. The only hope and legitimate way to speak about a happy ending in this story is by taking a leap of faith into the future where victory won't be that painful anymore.

“There might not be a foreseeable end in sight just yet, but there will definitely be no happy-ending if we stop caring and holding the Iranian regime accountable.”

What unites these two stories - Judith and the Jin, Jiyan, Azadî Revolution - is that they are both an intersectional fight. Not only was Judith and the Kurdish women of Iran in the religious minority, they were, and are, also women. Their struggles for equal treatment, respect and dignity from the perspectives of religion and gender are intrinsically intertwined. While it is undoubted that the women of Iran are primarily standing up for themselves, they are also standing up for free societies worldwide. Furthermore, the fact that Kurdish people are fighting alongside the people of Iran, thereby significantly contributing to this moment in history, highlights the power that lies within marginalised groups when they stand united. Ultimately, the fight of the Kurdish and Iranian people is a fight for all the oppressed religious, national and sexual minorities and therefore deserves our full attention and support.

At the end, the story of Judith is a Jewish tale that most probably did not happen exactly this way. But as her story was one of an oppressed woman within an oppressed minority group, Judith shall leave us with a similar lesson as the women of Iran: True courage is risking one's life when the world is standing idly by. We might see civil society protesting in solidarity but we are definitely not seeing the same level of support from decision makers who hide behind the weak policies of the EU and the UN. As a matter of fact, it teaches us that the people in positions of power, who live comfortably, will most likely not be the ones who truly make change. The ones who know true pain, oppression and fear in every cell of their body certainly will.

“Jin, Jiyan, Azadî - like Judith”





Judaism

To stand, to meditate, to encounter: The potential of reflection that lies in Jewish prayer

Reflection has its linguistic roots in Latin – the prefix “re-” means again and the latter part stems from *flectō* (“I bend” or “I curve”). Reflection does not have a corresponding word in the Tanach or in early rabbinic literature; however, Masechet Brachot 26b suggests that Jewish prayer can be a ritualised reflection. Three aspects characterise it: to stand, to meditate and to encounter.

By: Katharina Hadassah Wendl

According to rabbinic tradition, our forefathers instituted Shacharit, Mincha and Maariv. The narratives used to derive this from all contain ambiguous words. Take Abraham: “And Abraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord” (Gen 19:27) – this was the morning after he had interceded on behalf of Sodom, which God wanted to destroy.

This verse implies that Abraham had stood in front of God earlier already, perhaps repeatedly, to intervene for the inhabitants of Sodom. And now he does so again early in the morning – and with this, he established the morning prayer:

תְּנִיָּא כְּוֹתִיָּה דְרַבִּי יוֹסִי בְרַבִּי חֲנִינָא: אַבְרָהָם
תִּקְוָן תְּפִלַּת שְׁחַרִית, שְׁנֵאָמַר: “וַיִּשְׁכַּח
אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר עָמַד שָׁם,”
וַאִין “עֲמִידָה” אֵלָא תְּפִלָּה (...)

Tanya kevotei deRabbi Yosei beRabbi Chanina: Avraham tikken tefillat shacharit, shene’emar: “Veyashkem Avraham baboker el hamakom asher amad sham”, ve’eiin “amida” ella tefilla (...)

It was taught in accordance with Rabbi Yosi b. Rabbi Hanina: Abraham instituted the morning prayer, as it says, “And Abraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord.” And “standing” is prayer.

To stand up to pray means to halt for a moment and observe where we, and the world, are standing. This understanding of prayer tells us that reflection is the awareness of what is happening with and around us. For Abraham, this was the first thing he did in the morning, not once, but regularly.

Being a passive observer, though, is not enough – the purpose of reflection is to give us the impetus for change in attitudes and actions. To achieve that, we need to be able to face and negotiate reality. We are told of Yitzchak going out to the fields, the sade, just a few moments before he met Rivka, his future wife:

יִצְחָק תִּקְוָן תְּפִלַּת מִנְחָה, שְׁנֵאָמַר “וַיֵּצֵא
יִצְחָק לְשׂוּחַם בְּשָׂדֵה לְפָנוֹת עָרְבִי,” וַאִין
“שִׁיחָה” אֵלָא תְּפִלָּה (...)

Yitzchak tikken tefillat mincha, shene’emar “Vayetze Yitzchak lasu’ach basade lifnot arev”, ve’eiin “sicha” ela tefilla (...)

Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it is stated: “And Isaac went out to converse in the field toward evening” (Genesis 24:63)

What is not explicit is with whom Yitzchak was interacting. Masechet Brachot elaborates on this verse: Yitzchak went to converse with someone else – God. The Hebrew verb here – *lasuach* – is also used to express concepts like talk or dialogue. Reflection here is a two-party activity, it is not enough to just ponder alone, but we must engage with the other. It must lead to a real difference in the world.

Reflection is here to move us – it enables us to encounter ourselves and others from a different perspective. Yaakov experienced when he halted his journey from Be’er Sheva to Haran in order to rest in the evening:

יעֲקֹב תִּקְוֶן תְּפִלַּת עֶרְבִית, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּפְגַּע
בְּמַקְוֶם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם", וְאִין "פְּגִיעָה" אֵלֶּא תְּפִלָּה

*Yaakov tikken tefillat arvit,
shene'emar: "Vayifga bamakom vay-
alin sham", ve'ein "pegi'ah" ella tefilla*

*Jacob instituted the evening prayer,
as it is said, (Genesis 28:11) "He
encountered a certain place and
stopped there..." and "encounter"
means prayer.*

Sometimes, it is hard to see the bigger picture, to realise the embeddedness of everything. But reflecting on our lives in the broader sense or on a specific aspect allows us to encounter what we instinctively would rarely consider, and what prevents us from fulfilling our potential. In this encounter, we are standing upright, not bent or curved, as the Latin meaning of reflection would suggest. We tap into a tradition that embraces self- and God-awareness.

The Hebrew verb for prayer – hitpallel - though, never appears in these verses cited in Masechet Berachot 26b. Other verbs – וַיִּפְגַּע, לָשׂוּן, עָמַד – are used to express aspects of what it means to pray: Read in one line, they express what reflection means from a Jewish perspective: He stood to converse, and he encountered.

Reflecting, Jewish tradition tells us, is to stand above the complexities of our world for a moment and to ponder our role on the side, the world, – and to encounter new trajectories. Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch (on Genesis 20:7) merges these aspects and explains that to pray - lehitpallel – means: "To take the element of God's truth, make it penetrate all phases and conditions of our being and

our life, and thereby gain for ourselves the harmonious even tenor of our whole existence in God." (Hirsch, translated by Levy, 1959). Prayer, Hirsch argues, means to impress God, our relationships and roles in life onto what we feel and experience. To reflect is to understand our experiences in light of the world – and God. This understanding allows us to see the greater picture of life.

And with this in mind, by standing up to the potential of prayer, by meditating on and conversing about our lives, and by encountering our fears and beliefs, we can learn to fulfil our potential.



JUDAISM

Life, death and the choice - What does it mean to choose life?

Devarim 30:15-20, Sidra (Parashat) Nitzavim



At the very end of the Torah, at the very end of the book of Devarim, Moses is also approaching the end of his life. Therefore, he gathered all the children of Israel around him for one final address, which looks as if it was designed to scare the people.

By: Sonja Viličić

The opening words of this sidra tell us that everyone is there: the elders, the officials, the woodchoppers, and all those who are present and all those who are not yet born, which implies that this is a Covenant between God and everyone, even those of us who are reading it today.

The sidra then continues by elaborating on the possible consequences that will follow if we obey the Covenant and if we break the Covenant:

Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil, inasmuch as I command you this day to love the Lord, your God, to walk in His ways, and to observe His commandments, His statutes, and His ordinances (judgements), so that you will live and increase, and the Lord, your God, will bless you in the land to which you are coming to take possession of it.

But if your heart deviates and you do not listen... I declare to you this day, that you will surely perish, and that you will not live long days on the land, to which you are crossing the Jordan, to come and take possession thereof. (Devarim 30:15-19)

What I find interesting in this text is that at a first glance it seems very clear: if you do good you will be rewarded and if you do evil you will be punished. But we do not know what good and evil really mean and what type of behaviour it requires of us. We also do not know what it means to Love God, to walk in His way and to observe His commandments, regardless if one is an observant Jew or not. We also do not know what it means to hear the voice of God. As such, without knowing all this, how can we measure our success and how can we know if we are doing good?

As tradition would advise, I looked for the answers in the commentary of the mediaeval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and Tanach, Rashi. But he doesn't provide an answer.

Rashi says the following, "**Life and Good:** Each one [life or death,] is dependent upon the other: If you do good, you will be granted life, while if you do evil, you will receive death."

Rashi makes it clear that our behaviour has consequences and that the consequences depend on our behaviour. In the continuation of his commentary he says that we should choose good, meaning we should choose life.

But what does it really mean to choose life? And why do we need such a threatening verse that suggests that 'life' means choosing that one God and that you respect His Torah, and death means that you reject that? How can we interpret this verse when we see bad people among those who are believers, observant and lovers of God, and we see great people among those who are secular, atheists, and agnostics? Furthermore, how are we to interpret this verse when we often see that it is those who are good that suffer?

On top of that, as a non-observant Jew who deeply cares about tradition and Jewish wisdom, this text tells me that I should love God, follow His way and observe the commandments as a way of doing good. It also tells me that I am part of this Covenant and that the ideal place for my people to live in is Israel. So how can I make this relevant to myself, as a secular Jew living in the diaspora? Let's try to unpack some of these questions.

The People of Israel are about to enter the Land that was promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the following lines capture the main themes of the Book of Devarim – life in the Land of Israel, God's love and justice, His commandments, all of which together should guide the People of Israel in building a society which is just and righteous, governed by God's social and religious laws.

We as humans decide how we want to read God's laws and commandments. What might be helpful here for us is to allow ourselves to switch the word 'God' to 'good'. Just think about how the two words are spelled in English and how similar these two words are.

Thus, if we change these two words, I feel that this text is then telling us that we have a responsibility and that we are in charge of our own behaviour. That each one of us should, at our own pace and in our own way, try to do good and to build societies that represent these different goods. None of us have a definition, a clear answer, or a definite understanding of what it means, and how we should come to that realisation. We do not have an answer and therefore we should welcome and include the different types of answers and be OK with all the approaches towards doing good, even in times when they might contradict our beliefs and value system.

Based on this text I would say that the way to live and to practise Judaism might mean to encourage one another to find our own ways of doing good and to be open to different interpretations of how that might look.

“We, as humans, have an intuition about what good and bad is, and therefore we have a responsibility to push ourselves to do good.”

Rabbi Cheryl Peretz said that: “In our most honest of moments, we know that sometimes our actions do alienate us, distancing us from ourselves, others, and God, leaving us in a place different than we would like to be or even should be. We become like aliens, living in a land that is no longer our own. But, we don't have to stay there, we can take new decisions, new behaviour that returns us to ourselves and in that way choose life not in the physical sense but rather in the spiritual and emotional.”

Adam Lieberman, a business consultant and a leader of an NGO which helps Jews from all backgrounds see the beauty and the relevance of their heritage, helped me understand what choosing life might mean. He said, “anything that takes effort and is hard to do, but makes you feel on the top of the world when you do it, is choosing life. But choosing death is easy. Not growing or

challenging yourself is easy. Anyone can do that. And most of us do. We choose death all day long...Use the strength you know you have to start choosing life... We're all designed for greatness. We're designed for life. Make the right choices and you'll feel richer than you can ever imagine. Like God said, '... choose life, so that you will live.' Choose life and you'll know what living really is.”

As a person who is also part of this Covenant, for me this paragraph is not about God but it is about our responsibilities towards ourselves and those among us. For me these lines are about how we want to live our life and about the society we want to live in. It puts the spotlight on us, because at the end of the day the choice is ours. We have a choice and the ability to distinguish good from bad, so yalla, let us choose good so that we live.





JUDAISM

Are Jewish leaders “born or made”?

Was Queen Esther born a leader or did she become one? The question of whether leaders are “born or made” has long captivated academics, professionals and society alike.

By: Emma Hallali

Specific inherited traits increase a person’s likelihood of becoming and being a leader. Similar to exceptional musical or athletic ability, some people possess these abilities from birth. Others can find it difficult to achieve the same level while they naturally succeed in other endeavours.

There is a rich history behind every great Jewish leader. For example, Esther was a freedom fighter as well as a Queen. She utilised her influence for good because of her selfless devotion to her people. She now stands with all other great Jewish women in history such as Golda Meir or Simone Veil : from the beginning of their calling, they behaved as leaders.

But what purpose would leadership training have for the rest of us if leadership cannot be taught or acquired? Can someone become a leader after attending a leadership programme? Can the qualities of charisma, persuasion, reliability, and empowerment be learnt? Will receiving a diploma help you become a leader?

Leadership is not a scientific theory, but rather an art form, a storytelling.

It is a collection of intrinsic qualities that have been sharpened and developed over time via instruction, practice, patience and experience.

Finding yourself at the right place at the right time plays a significant role in making one a leader. You could be a leader, but it also depends on whether you are in a situation where your skills can really be developed and highlighted.

To reflect on this, I will take a more personal approach. Since my early childhood, I have always had a strong sense of purpose, having felt motivated, and having been inspired to take on responsibilities. Whether it was through being a class representative throughout my academic career, or having been a team leader in the Jewish Girl and Boy Scouts of France, France’s largest Jewish youth movement.

Due to a number of reasons, a friend of mine connected me to the French Union of Jewish Students (UEJF), where I was able to find my voice, deepen my leadership potential, and utilise them for a cause that was dear to my heart - Jewish activism. I believe that the tragedy that most strongly affected my eagerness to become active was

the cowardly murder of Mireille Knoll in 2018, an 85-year-old woman who narrowly escaped the Vél' d'Hiv roundup in 1942. Following this event, I decided to help UEJF organise a march in Paris to honour her memory.

Learning from the Jewish student activist community made me realise how vital it is to speak up and raise awareness about what antisemitism is and that as Jewish students, we should not have to fight to have a normal university experience. Being in an environment where your peers share the same goal as you do, i.e. safeguarding a Jewish future in France, in Europe and worldwide, is of tremendous value in the creation of oneself and the growth of one's own leadership while learning from others.

But what does it mean to be a woman leader today? The role of leadership has all too regularly been associated with men. To see how relevant these links between leadership and men remain, one just needs to listen closely to certain political leaders' recent speeches. When the far-right candidate for the French presidential elections, Eric Zemmour said in 2013 that "women do not embody power" or when in 2015,

Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, said that women could not handle the pressure a political campaign when asked about the absence of women in his government.

I have always believed that women could assume leadership roles just as well as men. Does that mean that it is simple? Undoubtedly, the answer is no. Being a woman who aspires to a leadership position requires taking risks and setting boundaries.

In essence, if you choose to, you may very well be the activist and leader of today. Find a cause that inspires you, and you will discover that with ambition and determination, you can accomplish remarkable things!





JUDAISM

Nostalgia as a Safe Place in Judaism and Beyond

Nostalgia plays a vital role in Judaism. Jewish ritual allows us to relive our ancient glory, and many religious Jews yearn for Messianic times, where the greatness of ancient Israel is restored. It is a widespread belief that our reality has worsened since the destruction of the Second Temple, and perhaps even since Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. In this article, I will discuss the merits and complications of nostalgia in diaspora communities and the general population.

By: Yael Isaacs

Johannes Hofer, a Swiss doctor, coined the term nostalgia to describe the ailing of Swiss soldiers fighting abroad who longed to return home (Langer, 2013, p. 167). According to Jennifer Langer, a research associate of Jewish and Iranian culture, the term was initially used to diagnose an illness that could be cured by returning home. However, the term was later developed to describe the longing we could have for our childhoods, the perceived loss of innocence, or an idealised past. Nostalgia is a double-edged sword. It can be a constructive tool as it can allow us to view the positive parts of the past and connect the past to the present to reconstruct our individual and collective identities (Spitzer in Bal, 1999, p. 92). However, nostalgia can also highlight the pain of a lost past or homeland. I argue that nostalgia is fundamentally human. It is impossible not to sometimes feel sad thinking about happy times we cannot relive, the years of our youth we will never get back, and how we and everyone around us will age and die. The danger comes when our imperfect idealisations of times passed destroy, manipulate, and transform history into fiction.

Many Jews relive the events of the Torah each year. However, nostalgia for a past they did not live can be dull and holds little weight in the everyday life of most Jews. Roya Hakakian, a Jewish author, reflecting on her family's practices in their Iranian home, wrote that in Iran, her family said "next year in Jerusalem" with little conviction, for they were happy in Tehran (Hakakian, 2004, p. 52). However, for those newly exiled, the trauma of expulsion weighs on the individuals more persistently, and such is the case of Iranian Jewry who have since left Iran. Retelling the

Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt in the United States garnered a new meaning for Roya and her family. The story mirrored their loss and separation from their homeland (Iran), and the ancient Israelites' exile in the desert felt like the Hakakians' exile in a strange and alien land (the U.S.) (Hakakian, p. 43). Another Iranian author, Farideh Goldin, writes that she left Iran because of the growing hostilities towards Jews in Shiraz preceding the Islamic Revolution. Yet, her alienation in America, her love for her old culture, and her longing to be in a familiar land made her nostalgic (Goldin, 2003, p. 15, 192). Nostalgia can be healthy or at least innocuous as long as one can simultaneously recall why they left and refrain from fictionalising the past. However, this happens far too frequently in both diaspora communities and the general population.

Lauren Rosewarne, a scholar specialising in popular culture, writes that cultures have always retold and rewritten the same stories. It is only natural that with modern technology, the same thing occurs with film and television (Rosewarne, 2020, p. 279).

In the past century, we have seen movies remade by each generation. We often hear critics saying the brilliance of old media wielded was lost in new remakes. A wave of reboots, live-action remakes, and sequels or prequels has taken over the theatres over the past several years. Even before the pandemic, new Disney, DC, Marvel, Star Wars, and Star Trek movies were coming out. However, the surge in remakes and continuations spiked as soon as studios were allowed to continue movie production following Covid quarantine restriction. Furthermore, the statistics from streaming sites show that many

people have been rewatching old shows and movies. Rosewarne writes how nostalgia plays a significant role in film remakes and she writes how nostalgia plays a significant role in film remakes and continuations. She argues that nostalgia in the media, like nostalgia among Iranian Jewish authors, is a plea to return home to a past that cannot be repeated and potentially never really existed. Watching familiar characters in familiar places during the pandemic allowed us to escape to a safe place.

This longing for an idealised past does not just happen among diaspora communities or in the media consumption of the general population; we see this in many different sectors. For instance, people often reminisce about the fashion or music of earlier eras. Both industries play into that nostalgia, for example, by recycling samples of old songs and reusing old clothing styles. Furthermore, we regularly see how nostalgia influences politics. Many associate “Make America Great Again” with Donald Trump. However, Alexander Wiley, a Republican senator, first used this phrase prior to the 1940’s U.S. Presidential election, and Ronald Regan popularised the motto as his campaign slogan. Right-wing politicians use the glory of an imagined past and an offer to return to this idealised safe place to advertise themselves, a particularly appealing strategy when the present is bleak. Wiley’s speech came at the tail end of the great depression, and Reagan used the stagflation of the 1970s as a springboard for his popularity. Trump further appealed to social conservatives by promising a return to an (imaginary) time when the United States’ social hierarchies existed unchallenged. This appeal was particularly compelling for white men in de-industrialized states,

who saw both their social and economic status decline under the then-current ideological consensus of economic neo-liberalism and cultural liberalism. Certain people may have the privilege to idealise past decades for the fashion, music, and film or for the buying power and “family” values of times past. Nevertheless, the past is a hostile place for racial, ethnic, religious, or LGBTQ+ minorities.

“This type of painful nostalgia for something idealised or imaginary constitutes what I call nostalgia without reflection.”

Yearning for an old home is expected and can benefit the individual, and the collective one belongs to if a diaspora commemorates and celebrates their culture together. Furthermore, pining after old films, fashions, and music is harmless.

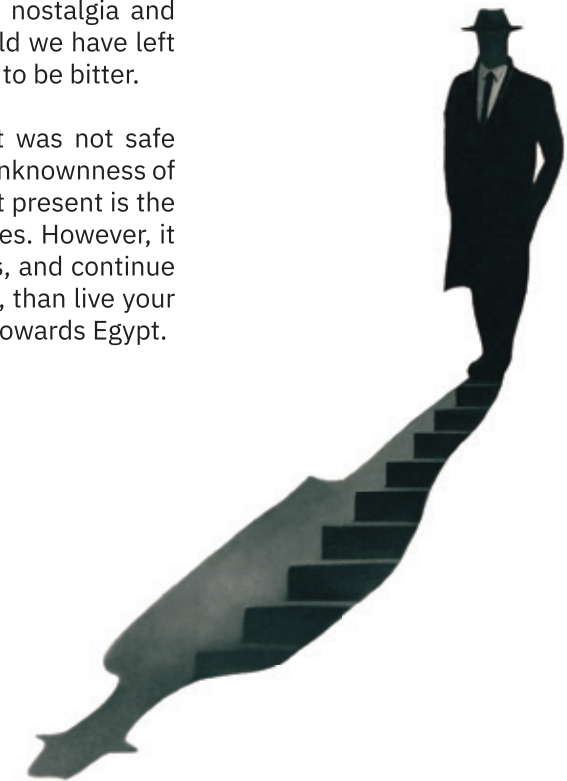
However, the trouble begins when we long for the past and, in this melancholy, rewrite history in our minds.

It is only natural that we seek shelter in a safe place (the past) when the world seems to be falling into disarray. Inflation is higher than it’s been in the past 40 years, energy prices and interest rates are soaring, more and more households are falling into more and more debt, and economic recessions have rocked major economies such as Great Britain. War and conflict are taking

the lives of hundreds of thousands in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Ukraine. Record temperatures and increased natural disasters have washed the globe and led to housing and food insecurity in places like Sierra Leone, Argentina, and Ecuador. It is easy to feel that the world is doomed and to seek some escape. There is no harm in nostalgia or longing for a lost home or a past that seems brighter. However, nostalgia can become dangerous when we romanticise the past to the point of creating a fantasy.

The Torah recounts that as the Israelites faced the hardships of the wilderness, many longed for a return to the familiarity of slavery in Egypt: “If only we had meat to eat! Indeed, we were better off in Egypt!... Why did we ever leave Egypt?” (Numbers 11:18-20). It is tempting to give in to nostalgia and create a fantasy of a world we have left behind, a world we know to be bitter.

Nostalgia for a past that was not safe still feels safer than the unknownness of the present, whether that present is the desert or the United States. However, it is better to be like Moses, and continue walking into a new world, than live your life forever turning back towards Egypt.





Culture

On why one should not use Yiddish words in public and other pesky little inherited habits

As a pork-eating Jew, Friday evenings are seldomly accompanied by lit candles and blessings over the wine. But when my friend ‘A’ visited me some months ago, I knew that hosting a small kiddush at my place went without saying.

By: Tomas Kantor-Nagel



Since there was no kosher wine to be found in any Milanese supermarket, we gathered around a bottle of Coke on a hot July evening. I live on the ground floor of an old yellow building and my door-window leads to a central courtyard, where on summer evenings, some work out, others hang their clothes, and a handful go out for a smoke. So as my friend was about to light the candles, I promptly opened the door-window to reach the external wooden door and shut it closed.

“There’s still light outside, why did you close the door?”, asked A. “Just to have some more privacy” I excused myself.

In truth, I did not want anyone to see that we were celebrating Shabbat; in that moment, I was imbued by the fear of being identified as “the Jew of the building”. Yes, I know, it’s ridiculous. There was barely anyone around, and had there been anyone, I doubt they had peered into my studio. But as much as I am proud of being Jewish, I have always smoothly avoided discussing and showcasing my Judaism in public.

Once upon a time, my paternal grandfather and I were out for coffee as we so often did during the weekends before lunch. I no longer recall the subject of our conversation but at a given point I casually spat out the word *goy*. He turned to me and said in a kind but firm voice “it is best not to use that word.” I can still hear him in my head.

My grandfather, Juan Carlos Kantor, was an ever-present figure in my childhood. We would talk about anything and everything, as long as, of course, one did not use any Yiddish words in public. Yiddish was the phonetical incarnation of Judaism, the language of the

secluded, religious, and insular shtetl Jews, far removed from the polyglot, secular, and assimilated Habsburg Jews of my grandfather’s native Prague.

After the Anschluss my one-year-old grandfather, his older brother, and parents Milada and Emil, fled to Paris from where they managed to secure visas to migrate to Chile, the only country that welcomed them. All three of Milada’s siblings were murdered in concentration camps along with their spouses and children, while only one of Emil’s two sisters survived the war alongside her only son. No one else remained.

“So why would anyone keep any link to Judaism, when being Jewish was just a death sentence?”

Unlike my maternal family, who also fled Nazi persecution yet never hid their Judaism, the Kantors did their best to erase their Jewishness upon arriving to Chile by, among other things, converting to Catholicism. Still, years after the passing of my grandfather, I often catch myself reflecting on my own family history through my actions, in an almost comical performance of intergenerational trauma which feels almost external to me, cemented by habit rather than genuine fear.

In the words of author André Aciman, my brothers and I were brought up as “Jews of discretion”. And although growing up everyone knew, and no one cared, that we were Jewish, there was never a mezuzah on our door post or a

Star of David hanging from our necks. Jewish identity was tacitly confined to the domestic realm.

I never received any actual orders from anyone to conceal my Jewishness, yet from the earliest of ages I started mimicking the notion that one should be a camouflaged Jew. This means that I never wore the golden star of David that my maternal grandmother once gifted me, that I tend to reply with “Czech”, as opposed to “Jewish” whenever someone asks about the origin of my last name, and that even last night, upon seeing a man with a kippah on the tram, my first thought was “dude, take that off, they’re gonna see you.”

In the hodgepodge of Jewish family stories, the themes of intergenerational trauma and concealing Jewishness are deeply intertwined and not uncommon. Yet even when antisemitism is alive and well, there should be no reason to have hidden Shabbat dinners in Italy or in any Western country in 2022. Thus, I decided to write this article as if staring

at my reflection in the mirror, examining the explainable origins of my pesky little habits, but also the comicality and even irrationality of their recurrence and magnitude.

How we behave as adults is naturally determined by what we absorb from those closest to us in our childhoods.

But the process of “growing up” often means finding ourselves replicating the same attitudes of those who raised us. Regardless of our backgrounds, this is an invitation to observe how we all carry the weight of our heritage, and to contemplate what parts of it we choose to reflect onto others. It is my conviction that only by unpacking these reflections can we truly heal inherited traumas and fully embrace our genuine selves.



Of Cosmopolitans and Eternal Jews

The Viennese Gesera, the Reconquista in Spain, pogroms in Russia, the Shoah – Jewish History is filled with persecution and still, it is not the one defining parameter of it. Jewish History is also a story of resilience.

By: Chris Steinberger

In 1941, Hannah Arendt wrote that the only place one is safe from antisemitism is on the moon. However, I am sure that Theodor Herzl would have objected to that idea. In *Der Judenstaat* (In English, *The Jewish State*) he stated that Jews bring antisemitism and persecution with them wherever they go. This rather provocative statement only concludes what is well known: Everywhere Jews go they are threatened to experience

antisemitism, they are made to feel as though they are 'other', they are the scapegoats. Thus, if Jews move to the moon, will they live freely and without the fear of being, once again, driven out? Or perhaps something worse? According to Herzl, no. But then again, what will the next destination be? Mars?



Antisemitism does not need Jews in order to actively spite them, to hate them, and to make them feel responsible for every, however small, seed of evil in the world. 'The Jew' is an idea that has real life, and at times fatal consequences. On the contrary, what hatred towards Jews does need is a historical context, the evolution of time, and a culture where it can grow.

In order to better understand the aforementioned phenomena, we first must distinguish between anti-Judaism and antisemitism. First came anti-Judaism which was directed towards the Jewish religion as a whole. This form of hatred is as old as Judaism itself. Then, in the 19th century came antisemitism. Jews were racialized. Their religion became secondary, antisemites saw Jews as being the root cause of evil, the idea of the Jew being both inferior and superior, being both communist and capitalist. This is at least how academics categorize those two different types of Jew hatred.

However, some prominent figures in history, such as Martin Luther, teach us that the lines are blurred. At first, Martin Luther was a rather vivid defender of the notion that Jews could be converted to Christianity, that their souls could be saved. Later in his life, disillusioned as the Jews did not want to give up their ancestral religion, he wrote a book called *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (In English: *Of Jews and their lies*). The premise of the book was that Jews are naturally corrupt beings, that they should be driven out of the country, except for the young men who could be used for forced labor, that their places of worship should be destroyed, that their religious texts should be buried and banned in all Christian lands. All this

seems scarily familiar. Another of his arguments was that Jews could not be trusted as they know no homeland. As they could never be faithful to the lands they live in

Almost 400 years later, a similar argument could be found in the Soviet Union. The idea of the Jew, the cosmopolitan, who could not stay faithful to the socialist idea, since the Jew could never be faithful to solely the land they live in. Forgetting that there were a significant number of Jews who believed in the promises of communism, some out of ideals, some out of social necessity. All of this does not matter. The idea of an eternal Jew, a Jew who is always on the run, bringing destruction to wherever he goes prevailed and helped nurture persecution, exile and discrimination.

Jewish history is a story of immigration. Immigration that was too often forced upon us. Immigration that cost the lives of many. But, as I mentioned before, it is also a story of resilience. A story of how Jews, no matter where they lived, kept a close connection to the religion of their forefathers. A story of how Jewish diversity was born. Cultural differences that should be cherished as they show us, once again, how multi-faceted and rich Jewish culture is. At the same time, Jews found a home in Israel. A destination that was a far flung dream. A dream of 2000 years. Israel. Named after the people of Israel. A country that had, and has, the duty to unify what a thousand yearslong diaspora kept separate. The duty to provide a new home for the many who lost their homes. A country that is full of tension and has its flaws. But at the end of the day, Jerusalem is closer than the moon.

Rootless Cosmopolitans - Reflecting on the New Wave of Jewish Migration from Post-Soviet Countries

After the “Big Aliyah” of the 90s, the subsequent exodus of Jews from the former Soviet Union (FSU) has colloquially been known as the “Putin Aliyah”, which intensified in 2014 and is likely to peak in 2022.

By: Hanna Sedletsky



Russian and Belarusian Jews fleeing their countries taken over by dictatorship, together with the Ukrainian Jews, fleeing the dictatorial occupation and military violence, are disseminating around the world and other EU countries, and are now facing the challenges of forced displacement and reintegration. With the new wave of migration from their countries of origin, an already complex Post-Soviet Jewish identity is to be redefined once again. The history of Jewish migration out of fear for one’s safety is extensive. It is arguably one of the main pillars of Jewish culture and, appallingly, it is still being written during our lifetime.

In the past 100 years, Jewry from the FSU has not had a single generation raised without active oppression or migration, and as Putin’s actions drive more people out of their homes, the Post-Soviet Jewish communities of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus have to find ways to survive and to reimagine their lives yet again.

The liminal period between making a decision to leave one’s home and finding oneself to be an alien in a new cultural context can be a trigger for creativity for some and a cause for disintegration of one’s identity and sense of self for others. When paired with trauma of fleeing the war, or the communal guilt for the actions of one’s government, these feelings become overwhelming and they stagnate reintegration into the society.

Moreover, the Post-Soviet Jewish community presents a very specific case of cultural syncretism, as the Soviet period characteristically tended to erase Jewish culture, suppress national identity and stop Jews from using their

languages, celebrating holidays and connecting to their traditions.

Hence, when people from the FSU relocate to Israel or other countries with prominent Jewish communities, they not only stand out as foreigners, but they are also labelled as “uneducated” Jews, shamed for the forced erasure of their identities.

Thus, physical safety and stability comes with the price of discrimination and disdain. Such treatment drives migrants from the FSU to believe that they are not Jewish enough to even try and reconnect, and they distance themselves further away from the tradition and community. Yet, the Post-Soviet Jewish community is not a monolith and many either managed to preserve some of the traditions in their families, or have made a conscious effort to rebuild their connection with Judaism after the fall of the USSR. More recently, as the turmoil and crises in the FSU have been intensifying, many more are delving into the practices and learning, seeking spiritual haven in Jewish tradition, since turning back to the Jewish generational memory may be a very helpful way of finding new meaning in life’s hardship and of coping with the unbearable reality of losing home.

The destruction of the second Temple and the forced exile of the Jews out of Eretz Israel became a foundational trauma of Talmudic rabbis, which has informed the development of Judaism as we know it today. In an attempt to reform Jewish practices after the violent uprooting of the lives of the entire population, the rabbis have used legal, literary, theological, metaphoric, and other mediums. Anxiety to retain unity

and what was left of the culture at the time permeates the rabbinic texts. As the rabbis were reimagining the nation's relationship with the Divine, daily routine and even perception of time, they aimed at preserving as much of the remaining sense of identity as possible.

The rabbinic anxieties and challenges of rebuilding their entire way of life after the destruction of the Temple are akin to the spirits of the numerous generations of exiled Jews, including those of us who are presently fleeing the war, repressions, and dictatorial regimes. So perhaps the experience of the previous generations that went through similar calamities has the potential to aid Post-Soviet Jewry in restoring their shattered sense of belonging.

Despite decades of suppression of Jewish heritage in the FSU, Post-Soviet Jewry has managed to build a vibrant underground culture with unique minhagim that needs to be preserved, studied and merged with more traditional practices. The world is currently experiencing a lot of drastic change and each and every community is facing its own challenges. Yet, from the history of the Jewish people we learn that inclusion and unity are key to survival. The adversities that the Post-Soviet Jewish community is facing cannot be a battle that they fight alone but rather, the global Jewish community should include its vulnerable members and embrace the collective nature of Jewish resilience. By nurturing oneness and generational remembrance of Am Israel, the Post-Soviet Jewry just might blossom into a thriving and defiant community, be it in the former Soviet countries, or wherever they will call home.





CULTURE

It is not (only) Jewish History

“How are we going to pass on the memory of the Shoah with the last survivors and witnesses leaving us?”. This is an issue that is increasingly being raised within the discourse of Jewish organisations, remembrance institutions, and political leaders.

By: Eitan Bergman

This duty to preserve the memory and to remember the Shoah is huge and challenging. The Shoah was a very unique event in more than one way. It changed and impacted the world forever. In a world without direct witnesses who can attest to the atrocities, it is legitimate to worry that the Shoah is in danger of being relegated to “some historical event” just like any other. I firmly believe in the importance for diaspora Jews to define themselves not only through the lens of the Shoah and antisemitism, but with the positive agenda of what European Judaism is and means to so many young Jews. However, I believe that remembrance is built into our genes and that Europe, and our generation in particular, have a specific responsibility, that might impact the way the Holocaust will be perceived by future generations.

We live in the most interconnected society humankind has ever known, where we can be in contact with our friends, near and far, at great ease. Paradoxically, it is in the 21st Century that individualism and loneliness seem to also be at an all time high. The French researcher Jérôme Fourquet theorised about this societal change in his book, *The French Archipelago*. One of the consequences of this transformation is that we tend to forget how the past influences the present. Recent elections in Western societies can certainly attest to this.

With this in mind, I joined the Hineni seminar in Lyon, France, organised by the Unified Jewish Social Fund in November, 2022. The aim of the seminar was to brainstorm with Jewish (youth) institutions about the future of the community and their role in their own countries. With the intention of

looking towards, and planning for, the future I never expected that during this seminar I would delve into the past of my own family.

In the early 1940s, my grandfather Alec Bergman, aged 12, went with his friend Marcel Bulka and his little brother, Albert, to Izieu, a village close to Lyon, to a youth camp where Jewish children were actually hidden. My grandfather always told me that back then, he did not realise what was going on. He knew about ‘the Germans’ and that ‘Jews were endangered,’ but he could never have imagined what was going on. For him, his time in Izieu was simply a collection of good memories with friends. Shortly after, the parents of Alec escaped a rounding up of Jews and decided to collect him and join other family members in the South of France, close to Montpellier. This decision saved him because a few weeks later, on April 6th, 1944, after a denunciation call, the Gestapo, under the order of Klaus Barbie, came and rounded up the 44 remaining children and the 7 adults taking care of them.

“Their crime ? Being born Jewish. All of them were murdered upon their arrival to the camps.”

On the second day of the Hineni seminar, we visited the National Memorial of the Prison of Montluc. There, resistance fighters (such as Jean Moulin) were imprisoned by the Nazis, and Jews were held before being deported to Drancy and then Auschwitz. During our

tour of the prison, we came across a room called the 'Room of the Children of Izieu'. Being aware of the story of my grandfather Alec, I realised that the kids from Izieu were held in that cell for one night before being deported to the death camps. I felt submerged with sadness when I remembered how my grandfather was speaking of his friend Marcel and his brother, Albert, aged 4. I imagined them there, lost and scared. I was really struck by the fact that my grandpa escaped the roundup, which allowed me to stand there, full of emotion, nearly 80 years later. On the second floor, the guide showed us the cell where Klaus Barbie, the Nazi officer who ordered the rounding up of the children, was held after the war. As I stared at his cell, I wondered about what he was thinking while awaiting his trial. Did he think about what he did to those innocent children?

The visit completely shook me. And it also reminded me of one of my first feelings when my grandfather passed away: it is now my turn to pass on his memory, and his story. It is now my responsibility. In that moment, standing in that prison in Montluc, this responsibility suddenly felt real.

Our last evening at the Hineni seminar was dedicated to the idea of commemorating, and more precisely, to brainstorming about ideas on how to pass on the stories of those who have passed. It is clear that the task of our generation will be radically different than the task of previous generations, but the preservation of such places and personal stories are an asset for everyone to personally connect to history and to reflect on it. Many tools were already put in place, through formal and informal education. Those of us living today and

the future generations, whether Jews or not, should identify and appropriate themselves with the stories, in order to understand them, learn from them, and pass them on to the next generations. It is only by keeping the memory (inter) active and alive that we will achieve the challenge of preserving the memory of the Shoah.

The Shoah is not about the past, but about the present. The Shoah is not (only) a historical fact, but an event that has an impact on everyone's lives. The Shoah is not (only) Jewish history, it is our European and universal history.



Integration Dismantled - A Personal Interpretation of Integration

What is integration? This question has lingered in my mind ever since a jaw dropping incident occurred in the Westend Synagogue of my hometown, Frankfurt am Main in Germany.

By: Tamara Ikhaev

I was nervous yet excited as I headed to conduct my first ever educational tour in Russian. This tour would cover a range of topics including Jewish history, religion, culture, and contemporary life in Germany for a group of Ukrainian refugees. As part of their integration, The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees booked a tour for them at our synagogue to expose them to our vibrant and strong Jewish community in Frankfurt am Main.

“Hello everybody, my name is Tamara and I’m Jewish.” All eyes fell on me and you could feel the tension in the air. I knew what the crowd was thinking because this was not the first time that I was the very first Jew that people met. I shrugged it off and proceeded to conduct my educational tour which sparked many interesting questions about Judaism and Jewish life in Germany. My closing words for all of my tours are “If you come out of this tour with more questions than answers, then I did my job well!” With all the great questions and engagement from the

crowd, I felt satisfied and was ready to wrap things up.

I began leading the crowd over to the exit, signalling that our time together was coming to a close, but I noticed a man in the audience eager to tell me something. I smiled and nodded in his direction and that is when he blurted out “Do you know what we call greedy people in Ukraine... Jews!” He chuckled and expected me to smirk back but instead my jaw dropped. Thought after thought raced through my mind: “How can he say something like this?!”

While I tried to figure out what to respond, a woman from the group interfered and said “You hurt the girl! They’re not greedy, they’re frugal!” Not exactly a better approach, I thought to myself. Walking home, I had one constant thought that I could not shake: The whole idea behind this educational tour was to give refugees a picture of us Jews, beyond the black and white textbook pictures of Jewish victims during the Holocaust, with the

purpose to widen the tolerance towards immigrants coming from places where hatred and prejudice towards Jews is the norm. Based on how the tour concluded, it is clear that the group needs a debriefing and multiple follow up educational sessions. But, I knew the reality was that the Federal Office For Migration could now check off “Jewry in Germany” from their formal curriculum. Is that what integration is? A checkmark symbolising that something is considered done although the work has barely even begun?

I poured my heart out to some of my friends who, like me, have parents who emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Europe. They all excused the incident claiming that “this is the mentality in Eastern Europe, it is not based on bad

intentions and should not be taken personally, it is the norm.” Should this be the norm though? I started to second guess myself. Perhaps this is legitimate and I should not be so hard on the Ukrainian refugees, they did not come here voluntarily.

This reminded me of the immigration story I heard from an acquaintance of mine, now even a friend, a barista at my favourite coffee shop. Whenever I visit the coffee shop, I am greeted by his smiling face. One day I visited with my partner, an American who loves telling his story of ditching corporate New York City for the Start-Up Nation of Israel. When my partner told the barista that he is from Israel, my heart dropped. Will I be treated any differently from now on and no longer be greeted with a smile



from him? A few days later, I sat at that coffee shop and worked on my laptop. The barista approached me, smiling, and to my pleasant surprise told me that he is interested in the Torah and even compared it to the Quran. This sparked our first ever long form conversation that extended beyond the topic of how we like our coffee and the weather. He shared with me that he is a Syrian refugee with a degree in economics. He fled Syria as a result of violence after being shot and badly wounded. He reminisced fondly of his time in Syria and explained that he is sad that he cannot return. When he came to Germany, he had hopes for a better future. Here he eagerly learned the language, tried to understand the people, and immersed himself in society. Initially this sounded like an example of successful integration. However, it sounded better in theory than in practice because he continued to share that despite his immense efforts, he is alienated. Before noticing how much he is trying to fit into the society, people notice how he stands out by pointing out his accent and asking where he is originally from.

So, this leads us back to the same question, what exactly is successful integration? Is it learning a language to an extent where you can interact with locals or until no one can differentiate you from a local? What is the cost of integration? Is it losing yourself and your values to be part of a homogenous construct?

Another incident that made me reflect on these questions occurred a few years ago, when I was obtaining my driver's licence. It all started when I told my instructor that I could not make it to the most important lesson, the one the day before my driving test, because it fell on

a Jewish holiday and I am an observant Jew. "What do you mean? The other Jewish driving student didn't seem to have a problem taking classes the same day!" he angrily responded. I explained that not all Jews keep the holidays and that the levels of observance vary. This only infuriated him further as he started ranting to me about the inconsiderate local Jewish sports club that does not attend tournaments and soccer games on Saturdays and pleads for important tournaments, where all local soccer clubs compete against each other, to be delayed. This apparently "disadvantaged every other sports team because they had to adjust only because of one sports club." According to him the Jewish team should respect that Saturday is not a resting day for all other teams but only for them. After all, "we are in Europe." Is this what integration means, dropping your religious observance in order to conform to the masses?

After reflecting on all the questions posed in this article and sharing all of these personal anecdotes, I want us to finally come back to my initial question: "What is integration?"

"You can put your mind at ease now, because I will finally give you the answer...I don't know."

The only thing I do know after reflecting on these questions so deeply is that it is not as clear cut as society makes it seem. I strongly believe that integration is not something that can happen at formal integration events or by checking

off agenda items on a curriculum. Integration is personal and certainly not one-sided where the people who come to a country have to fully adapt to the new societal norms and simultaneously give up what is characteristic to them or their belief. Integration is also adapting our societal norms to fit and welcome our new immigrants, to become a patchwork construct that provides the possibility for everyone to be an equal citizen while still honouring one's roots. Instead of judging immigrants to be different, why don't we embrace the beauty of diversity in a bigger picture?

Let us start by considering our peers. For example, not setting exam dates or mandatory events on Jewish high holidays such as Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur. Part of integration is tolerance, not judging people based on their accents, where they are from, or what they believe.

After a long thought process and many unshared thoughts I still am pondering about this question and since I would not be true to myself without finishing this article with a question, I want to ask you, dear reader: what is integration?



CULTURE

Let's Burst Our Bubble - My COP27 Experience

“Expect the unexpected”. This phrase represents my outlook on life.

By: Micol Di Gioacchino

I am someone who, by nature, tends to plan everything meticulously and gets nervous when things do not go as anticipated. But with time, and with experience, I have learned that during our time in this world, I should embrace the idea that things do not always go as you expect them to. Be they positive or negative.

COP27, the conference for Climate organised by the United Nations, was definitely a clear example of this outlook.

When I arrived in Sharm El Sheikh I expected to be in a super environmentally-friendly venue, with older people who “knew about climate,” perhaps who were even experts on the climate, and with some youth organisations, who I would be collaborating with during the week. The reality was not like that at all.

At COP27, policymakers indeed spoke about climate change. However, their comments were, all too often, caveated by their even more urgent concerns



about the energy crisis, and so climate change (if im being optimistic) was put in second place. In reality, the climate agenda would be much lower down the pecking order - third? fourth?

The venue – the blue zone – had really nothing to do with sustainability. Plastic was everywhere, Coca-Cola was the main sponsor of the event, and the price of food inside the venue was five times the cost of the same food outside of the COP27 event. This was the lived experience of “expect the unexpected” in its negative form.

However, the people that I met at COP27 were the biggest highlight of my activism experience. Never in my life did I think that I, an Italian Jew, would sit at a McDonald’s table with a guy from Iraq and with a woman from Sudan speaking about religion for more than two hours, and in Egypt no less.

Never in my life did I think that I would listen to the story of a powerful young woman from Madagascar who fights every day for gender equality and women’s rights in her country. Moreover, I would have never even expected to listen to the experiences of a Ghanaian woman telling me how hard it is to often be the only black woman in her job as an energy analyst.

Thinking about these conversations I still have goosebumps. Maybe I am an overly sensitive person, but let’s think for a second about that.

I realised that whether I like it or not, each one of us is living our personal lives experiencing the things that happen in our personal bubble. For example, on my social media feeds, the majority of people often speak about Judaism and

antisemitism, but I do know that these are likely perceived as minor topics for society at large. That is because I am part of a minority and therefore I often seek, and thus see the topics discussed by the minority I am part of.

But at COP27, I felt like my bubble suddenly exploded. I met people that I had really nothing in common with - especially when talking about our life experiences – however, I still had so many meaningful and deep conversations that I will forever cherish in my heart.

We shared our visions, our pragmatic goals and specifically what we wanted to achieve from our position as youth organisations at COP27. We spoke about us as human beings and as present-day leaders. We collaborated in drafting a policy position paper that could ideally unite the voices of all the European Youth Organisations. Not a care about one’s religion or race or politics. I firmly believe that, everything I mention above, was made possible only because we were open about ourselves, open to listen to others and ready to share our perspectives without any feeling of judgement. This was what was amazing - collective advocacy from a plethora of backgrounds.

So let’s burst our bubbles, and let’s meet the world, because once we do that, truly amazing things can happen.



CULTURE

Queer Judaism? Disappeared.

It is no surprise that many Germans only have a rudimentary idea about what Judaism actually is. In many schools it is never taught any differently. The topic of Judaism is being covered in history, ethics and religion lessons but always under the same prefixes: antisemitism, Shoah or as an archaic, punitive religion. It is important to deal with the Shoah and with the Nazi-regime.

By: Monty Ott

However, in order to effectively combat antisemitism, educational programs and common narratives must be questioned, because they may also conceal part of the problem. For Jewish diversity is suppressed from them. Jewish queer people find it very difficult to find role models - especially female ones. There is an abundance of books, films and newspaper reports that link Judaism with victim roles, but few that deal with how colourful, sometimes contradictory and plural Judaism in Germany is and always has been.

Queer Jews do not fit into this picture, which is why narratives of diverse Jewish identities do not find their way into popular historical narratives. The courageous, resistant Jews are just as little talked about in Germany as queer

ones. Thus, a large piece of (German) Jewish history is lost. But if you are serious about dealing with German history, you should look right here. Nowadays, academically, one often orients oneself to the USA or Great Britain, not least because Germany has robbed itself of a part of its soul with the murder of millions of Jews. For it was many Jews who also fought for new thinking at German universities and institutions and thought about the fact that everything could be different.

One such person was Magnus Hirschfeld. Today, a Foundation founded and financed by the German state educates people about gender and sexual diversity is named after him. It seems a bit superfluous to mention that it is regularly antagonised from

the ranks of the right-wing Party AfD. The members of parliament of the supposed alternative are trying to use their parliamentary options to make the work of the Foundation more difficult, even to abolish it altogether. Not only because of the goals of the Foundation, but also because of its namesake. Hirschfeld founded the Institute for Sexual Research in 1919 and wanted to raise scientific research “on the whole sexual life” to a new level. But Hirschfeld was not only a researcher, he was also an activist and mobilised against ‘Paragraph 175’ throughout his life. This paragraph made male homosexuality a punishable offense. In the Weimar Republic, the law was still much more “lenient”; it was only tightened up by the National Socialists in 1935. Hirschfeld’s institute was more than a research facility. Until its destruction in 1933, it was also a place of refuge - a very physically safer space. And it was necessary. Homophobia was cast into law in the so-called “175” and, along with socially acceptable antisemitism, fundamentally called into question the social belonging of queer Jews. In them, as in other marginalised groups, the failure of the Enlightenment manifested itself.

A critical confrontation with the past means working to ensure that Jews are no longer perceived only in the role described above, which, in the words of Max Czollek, in no way “represents Jewish plurality (...) [but] is intended to fulfil the promise of reconciliation for German society”. In the role of the victim, Jews are supposed to testify to a purified Germany. However, the history of queer Jews in particular shows that Germany was by no means “ourified” after 1945. The persecution of homosexuals simply continued after the German defeat.

This affected not only gay men, but also lesbian women. Although they were not specifically persecuted in Germany by Paragraph 175, their sexuality was equally considered “degenerate” under National Socialism. Even if they were not ostracised by law, they experienced social and state repression, leaving many with only the path to social isolation. Likewise, trans persons lived under constant threat. Even if gender affirmation surgeries were still possible in some cases, homosexual transpersons also experienced criminalization by the “175” before and after 1945.

Those affected reported that although homosexuals were no longer sent to concentration camps, nothing else had changed. The Nazi version of Paragraph 175 continued to apply in the Federal Republic. Reforms followed only in 1969 and 1972, before the Paragraph was completely abolished in 1994. This law was an instrument that made homosexuals into perpetrators in the public perception. Thus, if Jews were to be part of the remembrance narratives that emerged only late, parts of their identity had to be concealed or repressed - because in these they could not be supposed “perpetrators” and victims at the same time.

In addition to Magnus Hirschfeld, other queer Jews had also initiated a rethinking: Fritz Bauer became a champion of modern criminal law, Herschel Grynszpan was once a symbol of the rebellious Jew, and the lesbian-feminist Shabbat Circle was, as Debora Antmann reports, one of the most important feminist groups of the 1980s. The latter had formed primarily because of the suppression of Jewish perspectives from popular as well as

feminist discourses. However, this was equally accompanied by the accusation in Jewish Communities of being definitive destroyers of Jewish tradition. This was also based on the notion that the Torah rejected homosexuality. The sentence that “a man shall not lie with a man as with a woman” was also instrumentalized by Christian theology and was then the moral foundation for laws such as Paragraph 175.

Even today, in the Jewish and Christian spheres, these sentences are used as arguments when a religious prohibition of homosexuality is postulated. For many years, rabbis and many other people have tried to offer alternative readings: that this prohibition was directed only against heterosexual men who actually wanted to sleep with a woman, or that it concerned the exploitation of power relations, for example, against slaves in ancient times. This becomes especially important because Jews, like the founders of the Shabbat Circle, also experience discrimination in queer groups. Antisemitism is a problem for society as a whole and is becoming increasingly violent. Therefore, Jewish communities and initiatives are a particularly important shelter today.

Herschel Grynszpan is a particularly significant example of the contradictory role attributions that Jews receive in popular memory. American journalist Jonathan Mark says that today schools and squares would be named after Grynszpan if there had never been the rumour that he slept with men instead of a nice Jewish girl. Grynszpan’s name is associated today mainly with an assassination attempt on a German embassy secretary, which Nazi propaganda used to justify the robbery and murder of the November pogromes.

When the German President speaks in Yad Vashem about no name and no history being forgotten, I ask myself why people like Herschel Grynszpan are only perceived in such a limited way? Their lives and their perceptions tell us that there was by no means a “zero hour” with which everything began anew in 1945. Rather, they tell us that National Socialism continued in the Federal Republic in terms of personnel and ideology, that there were continuities. Queers and Jews experienced them firsthand. The suppression of Jewish diversity in favour of a role that Jews are supposed to play for the German theatre of memory - as sociologist Michal Bodemann called it - is such a role. According to this, they are strictly religious and/or victims. Plural, joyful, combative, resistant Jewish life contradicts this.

It is about time that Germany deals with these gaps in its remembrance narratives. For it is precisely the fragmentary representation that shows that this is “the rumour about the Jews” (Adorno) and not real Jewish life.

This article was originally published by the Zeit Online under the title of Queeres Judentum? Verschwunden.



Identity



IDENTITY

We are not all the same: *Jews and intersectionality*

In April 2019, the famous German newspaper Spiegel published a thematic issue on Jewish life. Spiegel, a magazine read by millions of readers, thus had the chance to convey Jewish life reality to a broad audience.

By: Hanna Veiler

But instead, the editors decided to serve age-old stereotypes and conspiracy narratives. The cover of the issue featured a black-and-white photograph taken in Berlin in the 1920s, depicting two orthodox men.

The title was “Jewish Life in Germany. The mysterious world next door.” Instead of presenting an authentic picture of Jewish life in Germany, which

today is once again flourishing and varied, Spiegel had decided to convey to its readers: “Jews are not only mysterious and thus somehow exotic and dangerous at the same time. They also all look like orthodox men.”

The reality, however, is that Jews in Europe are extremely diverse, often have a wide variety of migration histories, and live out their Judaism in

different ways. Thus, there is not “the image of the Jew”, but a multitude of complex and contradictory identities that need to be represented. However, this also leads to the following point: Jewish identity cannot be understood without intersectionality.

Intersectionality stands for the intersection of different forms of discrimination. Those who acknowledge intersectionality acknowledge realities of life. For example, Jewish women experience not only antisemitism but also sexism, which makes their life realities different from those of Jewish men. The same is true when experiences of racism, homophobia, ableism, etc. are added to the experience of antisemitism.

This makes intersectionality something we need to talk about within our communities. Because not only are we all equally affected by antisemitism. Jews of color additionally experience racism within communities as well, queer Jews experience discrimination within communities because of their queer identity, and so on. This results in different realities of life that are affected by different power structures. Only a Jewish community that recognizes this can become more inclusive. Only an inclusive Jewish community is sustainable and viable.

But the issue of intersectionality and Jews holds potential for conflict not only within our communities. Unfortunately, Jewish perspectives are consistently left out or made invisible in non-Jewish intersectional spaces.

This leads to a point in time not long ago that marks a cut for numerous Jewish activists: May 2021. As a consequence

of the escalation in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian territories, we were facing a wave of violence against Jews across Europe. Progressive Jews have particularly painful memories of that month, as it became clear then how little self-proclaimed safer spaces actually were safe for us. More specifically,

I am talking about university groups, feminist associations, queer initiatives, etc., within which Israel-related antisemitism was reproduced on an ongoing basis and continues to be reproduced to this day.

But the most painful thing was to see how many who we thought were allies turned away from us or simply remained silent. So many, with whom we had previously shouted out slogans for equality and human rights side by side at demonstrations, remained silent back then.

Thereby the highest form of violence is not being openly discriminated against. The highest form of violence is being made invisible. It is the denial and erasure of our existence and our perspectives in these contexts, the denial of the reality of our lives and the danger we face from all forms of antisemitism.

We and our different, intersectional identities, are made invisible again and again. This is what happens when activists who otherwise speak out about everything are silent when it comes to antisemitism and this is what happens when Der Spiegel portrays us all as orthodox men. It’s time to change this.



IDENTITY

Reflections of a Third-Culture Kid

Let me start this reflection with the following statement: I am not a third-culture kid (TCK). Or at least not in the strict sense of the term. According to Merriam-Webster, a TCK is defined as “a child who grows up in a culture different from the one in which his or her parents grew up.”

By: Emily Bowman

In an article written by Sophie Cranston from Loughborough University, she said that the subject of TKCs “surfaced as comfort in relation to the ascribed grief and insecurity of identity that is associated with childhood global mobility.” Mobility is a term that many within Jewish history and contemporary Jewish culture are familiar with. Whether it was due to fleeing persecution in the past or making aliyah in the present, the Jewish people are mobile. This mobility

raises inevitable questions within oneself about belonging, identity, the future, one’s culture, and beyond. Thus, since my life could also be described as rather mobile, I found solace, and simultaneous unease, in identifying as a TCK.

So, why am I not a third-culture kid?

My Hungarian mother and my American father met in 1992, on Kibbutz Yagur

in Israel. While my mother was from a post-socialist Eastern-European country that was freshly out from behind the Iron Curtain, my father was from the capitalist capital of the world where it was said, that if you worked hard enough, and invested your time and effort, you could achieve greatness and unprecedented wealth. Their polar-opposite cultural contexts, and a host of other factors, resulted in their drastically different upbringings and their varying views on the world. Nevertheless, during that summer in 1992, both of them ended up in Kibbutz Yagur at the very same time.

Fast forward 30 years and two children later, here we are, and here (in Brussels) I am. By the age of 22, I have lived in multiple countries, however, as I often add when I provide my brief bio during small-talk, I predominantly grew up in Hungary and a little bit in the United States, the countries where my parents are from. As such, the prior statement would automatically preclude me from being a TCK.

So, why do I say that I am a third-culture kid?

The Budapest that my mother grew up in, during the 70s and the 80s, was drastically different from the Budapest I got to know during the 2000s and the 2010s. In high school, my mother was forced to learn Russian and the ability to travel freely was denied to all living under socialism, except for a limited few. Budapest in the 70s and the 80s, under the control of the Soviet Union, was a city that was shielded from most of Western culture: one could not find Levi's jeans or Lindt chocolate easily, there were no Starbucks nor a McDonald's on every corner. The Soviet

influence permeated every facet of life, and one could not escape it. For example, one of the main squares and the main avenue in Budapest used to be emblazoned with the names Liberation Square and People's Republic Avenue, evoking the strong influence of the Soviet Union. Needless to say, this was not the case during my childhood in Hungary.

Contrary to my mother's upbringing, my father did not grow up under socialism. Quite the opposite, he grew up in the United States of America, in Fairfield, Connecticut. For those who are not familiar with Connecticut, it is the little state in the North-East of the country, tucked in between Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York State and the Long-Island Sound. The Fairfield that my father grew up in during the 70s and 80s was exactly as one would imagine when thinking about an idyllic American setting. Although the Vietnam War and Cold War were the dominant agenda items on the evening news, life was good. It was a time of Star Wars movies, yuppies and Guns N' Roses. Again, needless to say, this was not the case during my time growing up in America.

During my childhood in Budapest, I never experienced constraints to my freedom of movement nor was I ever told by a state authority what language I had to study. On the contrary, I was able to experience the city at a time when Western influences were gaining momentum, and more Western brands and shops began opening their doors. In Fairfield, while I was fortunate enough to experience 'the good life,' I was also exposed to a reality that my father never had to experience during his adolescent years. Soon after the Columbine High School massacre in 1999, active-

shooter drills became a common occurrence in middle schools and high schools across the United States. The US became a country living in increasing fear, especially following the terror attacks of 9/11. Fear of active shooters, fear of terrorists, fear of needing to pay for expensive health insurance, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of deportation and so forth.

“Budapest and Fairfield no longer represented the cultural contexts in which my parents grew up, and so, I became a third-culture kid.”

However, this phenomenon is not an isolated occurrence. It would be difficult to find any country on this Earth that still resembles itself from 40 – 50 years ago. Advances in the fields of technology and transportation, the increased interconnectedness of people, and the wealth of opportunities available to more and more people have all contributed to these developments. In the last 50 years, the World has undergone changes at a rate that was unthinkable until recently.

As such, perhaps the real question is the following: Will we all eventually become third-culture kids?



IDENTITY

Recognising Intersectional Identities in Jewish Communities and Queer Spaces

In September 2022, I wrote with Murilo Henrique Cambuzzi, from the Antisemitism Observatory of the CDEC Foundation in Italy, a blog post on the Facing Facts website reflecting on hate speech in online social platforms. The article builds on the latest Fundamental Rights Agency Report 2022, highlighting the increase in hate-based incidents towards minorities in online environments and analyses the complexities of hate speech. It focuses on the growing intersection between different hateful ideologies, with a focus on antisemitism and anti-Queer rhetoric. Taking from the experience of writing that article, I want to take a step back and reflect with you on the importance of mainstreaming an intersectional-informed approach in our communities.

By: Daniel Heller

In recent years, identity discourses have gained momentum in Europe. People acknowledge the importance of the individual place of speech to explore and realise one's disadvantages and advantages in society. The unique interaction and intersection of identity traits shape the person's experiences. It is essential to recognise how groups are not homogenous and how every person has characteristics that intersect and which may be grounds for one or more forms of prejudice or intolerance. For example, a queerxJewish person may experience anti-Queer and antisemitic attacks simultaneously, while a heterosexualxJew will be subject 'only' to antisemitic attacks. These attacks may come both from people outside or within the communities. Also, a gayxJew may be subjected to antisemitism within the LGBTI community and homophobia within the Jewish community.

“There is a great inadequacy in understanding people just by stressing one of their identities.”

The insights, perspectives and experiences of individuals and communities that experience these intersectional harms need to be considered and integrated into ongoing efforts to reform EU law in this area. This sort of visibility is essential, as is an understanding of the growing intersections between different hateful ideologies.

The Antisemitism Observatory has recently recorded trending cases and intersectional connections between antisemitic and anti-Queer rhetorics online. In the article, Murilo and I highlight that “[p]rofiles that spread

antisemitic hatred are oftentimes the same ones that spread homophobic, transphobic, anti-gypsyism, xenophobic, racist, etc. hatred.”

Jewish and LGBTQAI+ people share a long, common history of discrimination (one can think that both communities were persecuted and murdered by the Nazis), but also of resistance.

“Jewish communities and Queer spaces need to do more to accept and combat hateful narratives against LGBTQIA+ Jews and to provide a space for solidarity and support.”

There is a rising need for a holistic and intersectional-informed approach to combating hate.

In her essay, Intersectionality and Antisemitism – A New Approach, Dr Karin Stögner – Professor of Sociology at the University of Passau, Germany and co-ordinator of the Research Network on Racism and Antisemitism in the European Sociological Association – reflects on the concept of intersectionality and antisemitism. She argues that difficulties in recognising the importance of intersectional identities in the Jewish environments influence the possibility of exchanging and contributing to other communities by affecting the experience of antisemitism in Europe.

The essay continues by stressing that due to this closeness of Jewish society, intersectionality discourse fails to include global antisemitism as part of its characteristics.

There is a need to create spaces to facilitate training and dialogue. Organisations like Keshet UK and Keshet Ga'avah are great examples of the role and spaces that Jewish-LGBTQIA+ organisations – such as Keshet Italia – are trying to create as bridges between both communities. Acknowledging the experiences and reflecting on the issues are vital points in discussing the importance of intersectionality within communities, which can then influence national and international legislation.

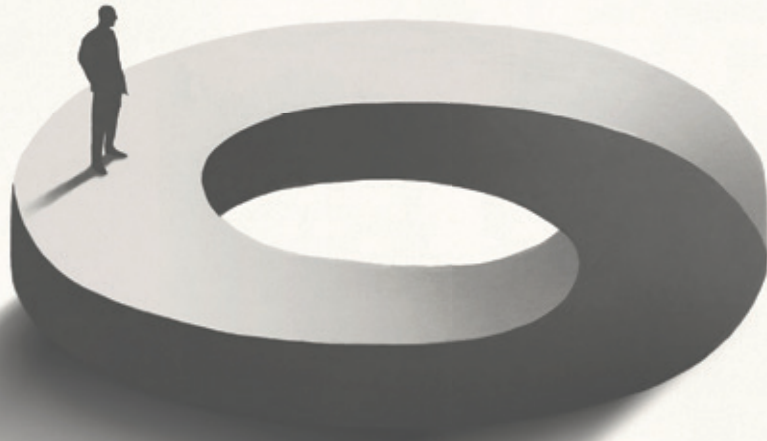


IDENTITY

Israeli, Iraqi, and Jewish

Two years ago, in the summer of 2020, I travelled to Jerusalem to participate in the StandWithUs Israel Fellowship. As we sat around the room, we received our mission - “tell a personal story”. I do not know why but, at that moment, the first thought that I had was that I do not know how to speak Arabic.

By: Shir Peress



Maybe I felt like it was time to expose the secret I had been concealing for years. As I stood there, in the Jerusalem living room, waiting to tell my story, my voice started to tremble, even the way I was standing became increasingly less comfortable. Insecurity gripped my entire body.

I managed to take a deep breath and started to “confess”: My name is Shir and my parents, Ban and Ezra, emigrated to Israel from Iraq in the 1970s. They emigrated 20 years after Operation Ezra and Nehemiah of the 1950s. I was born in 1996 as the youngest child, I have two sisters and one brother. In our home, Arabic was always spoken. They call it Iraqi-Jewish, but for me, all different variants of the Arabic language sound the same. I don’t know Arabic, I could never understand more than a few words even though, until today, my family keeps talking to me in the language, which makes me emotionally detached and sometimes even angry. The irony is that I have taught myself Spanish, which I understand and can speak almost fluently.

Until the age of 10, I had difficulty understanding how and why my parents spoke this language. The language of the enemy. That’s how I perceived it anyway; of those carrying out attacks on buses and in malls and because of them, I had to go to school for three years with this box that contained a gas mask. As a child, I could not separate the language from the people who spoke it, even though those were my parents. I did not understand how they spoke Arabic and still went to the synagogue, did Kiddush and celebrated Jewish holidays. I felt ashamed and embarrassed that my parents spoke Arabic and, for years,

I made sure to make this reality a “secret”.

The thesis of my bachelors degree at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem provided me with the opportunity to write an auto-ethnographic study and do research on a personal subject from my perspective. Thanks to this, I explored the life of the small Jewish community that remained in Iraq after the 1950s and I especially learned about my parents’ childhood, the shocking experiences they went through as children in one of the most brutal countries in the Middle East. I was privileged to write about the “Untold Aliyah” because there is a real lack, in my opinion, of academic inquiry into the subject.

During my research, I dealt with three theoretical concepts that were guidelines throughout: ‘Historiography’, ‘Language’, and ‘Identity’. The writing allowed me to re-examine my way of looking at central ideas, which guided my thinking as a child and teenager in Israel. I was able to develop a more critical thought process about taboo subjects from my past. Writing the thesis was a therapeutic tool for me and, at the end of it, I felt how the shame I had at first to talk about the subject became the source of pride. The more I spoke about it, the more my stuttering and feelings of discomfort disappeared. In its place, a confidence and assuredness grew within me.

As I reflect on this topic today, I am hugely grateful that I was able to turn shame into pride. My Iraqi heritage was always part of my identity but today I understand and accept it more than ever. My name is Shir and I am an Israeli Jew of Iraqi heritage.

Avital Grinberg

Avital Grinberg was born in Berlin, Germany and is the elected president of the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS), which represents 36 national student unions across Europe. Being raised by a Post-Soviet single mom, she keeps exploring the complexity of Jewish, female and migrant identities. Avital's activism began in interfaith dialogue as well as in the Jewish youth movement, where she was the head of summer camps. During her studies of Art History in Berlin and Jewish Education in Jerusalem, Avital was on the board of the Jewish Student Union of Germany (JSUD), focusing on Women+ Empowerment, LGBTQIA+, interfaith dialogue and inclusion. In 2021 she was elected to the board of the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS). Following that she moved to Brussels to become the Program Manager EUJS, where she is based till today.

Bini Guttmann

Bini Guttmann is a Jewish activist from Vienna. Currently, he is a member of the Executive Committee of the World Jewish Congress (WJC). Between 2019-2021, Bini was the President of the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS). Bini is from Vienna, Austria, where he studied Law and Political Science at the University of Vienna and built up and led the Austrian Union of Jewish Students (JöH) for three years, making it into one of the most active Jewish Student Unions in Europe.

Chris Steinberger

Chris Steinberger studies History, Romance philology (Portuguese/French) and Jewish Studies. He co-founded Keshet Austria and has been a board member of JöH (Jewish Austrian students Union) since October 2022. In addition, Chris is an editor at Noodnik magazine, the flagship publication of JöH.

Daniel Heller

Daniel Heller grew up in Rome, Italy. Daniel holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences with a specialisation in Political Science and a Master's degree in Conflict and Development from Universiteit Gent, where he researched for his Master's thesis the challenges and advantages of an intersectional-informed approach to hate crime policies. His interests include concepts of violence, racism, the political, and intersectionality. He works at CEJI – A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe.

Daniel Lazer

Daniel Lazer was born in Malmö, Sweden but currently studies International Relations at Leiden University, The Hague (graduation 2023). Daniel is the co-founder of Jewish Youth of Malmö (JUM), a former Ronald S. Lauder Fellow with the World Jewish Congress as well as a former intern at The Nordic Office of the World Jewish Congress.

David Fiorentini

David Fiorentini is the President of UGEI, the Italian Union of Jewish Students and Young Professionals. Born in Siena, currently lives in Milan where he attends the fifth year of Med School at Humanitas University. Moreover, he is an editor for HaTikwa, the magazine of Italian Jewish Youth.

Eitan Bergman

Eitan Bergman, born in Liège, Belgium, is the Executive Director of EUSJ. He is an elected Executive member and Secretary General of the umbrella organisation of the Belgian Jewish community, the Coordination Committee of Jewish Organisations in Belgium (CCOJB) and a member of the World Jewish Congress Jewish Diplomatic Corps (WJC JDCorps). Before that, Eitan worked at the European Jewish Congress (EJC) for three years and at the Belgian Embassy in Tel Aviv. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science and a Master's degree in International Relations (specialising in peace, security and conflicts) from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB).

Emma Hallali

Born and raised in Paris, France, Emma Hallali is enrolled in a LLM program in European Law with a focus on Technology in Europe at Utrecht University, in the Netherlands. She has a long-lasting involvement in her Jewish student community. She is national delegate in charge of events and international relations in the French Union of Jewish Students (UEJF) as well as an EUJS board member. Emma's personal priorities include, but are not limited to, actively campaigning against antisemitism and all forms of discrimination as well as preserving Holocaust Remembrance.

Emily Bowman

Emily Bowman is the current Policy Officer at the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS) and the European Union Affairs Officer at B'nai B'rith International. She is originally from Hungary and the United States, but also spent time living in Tel Aviv, Amsterdam and is currently living in Brussels. Prior to starting her jobs in Brussels, she completed her Bachelor's degree in Politics, Psychology, Law and Economics at the University of Amsterdam.

Eryn Sakin

Eryn Sarkin, with an M.A. in Religion, Culture, and Peace Studies from the United Nations University for Peace (UPeace), and a B.A. in Sociology from Universidade Nova de Lisboa, is the current EUJS Communications and Outreach Officer. Originally from South Africa, having spent many years in the United States and Portugal, Eryn has a globalist, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary diverse background. She is passionate about problem-solving and conflict management, human rights and international justice, environmental issues, creating spaces where all voices can be heard, combatting injustices, and uplifting and supporting member unions.

Hanna Sedletsky

Hanna Sedletsky is a Russian Jewish activist and educator currently studying at Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem. They are an alumnus of “Ze Kollel” program in Berlin, and they hold a degree in Middle Eastern history. Hanna has a background in queer and anti-war activism, and they are interested in Post-Soviet Jewish culture and history, as well as Jewish text and philosophy.

Hanna Veiler

Hanna Veiler was born into a Jewish family in Belarus in 1998 and grew up in a small town in southern Germany from 2005. Since her youth, she has been concerned with the topics of complex identity, migration and memory culture. After completing a voluntary service in Israel in 2017, she began studying art history and became involved in Jewish student activism. Today, Hanna is vice-president of the Jewish Student Union of Germany, ambassador of the Jewish-Muslim project “Shalom and Salam” and works as a political educator and publicist.

Katharina Hadassah Wendl

Katharina Hadassah Wendl is a PhD researcher at the Freie Universität Berlin. There she is involved in an interdisciplinary research project on mediaeval Torah scrolls and focuses on the halakhic developments of Jewish scribal laws. She studied Secondary Education (English, History) as well as Jewish Studies in Vienna and now lives in London.

Máté Zsédely-Holler

Máté Zsédely-Holler is a Vice-President of the European Union of Jewish Students (EUJS). Máté, born in Hungary, is currently studying Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, with a focus on Comparative Politics of Central and Eastern Europe. He is a World Jewish Congress Cadet and a former Lauder Fellow and serves as the Vice-President of Global Forum and Missions at the AJC’s Campus Global Board.

Meiron Avidan

Meiron is the Integration Coordinator at HIAS Europe, where she has been working since October 2021. Meiron is leading on HIAS Europe’s Welcome Circle programme which supports Jewish host communities around Europe to effectively integrate refugees into their communities, and into society more generally. Before starting at HIAS, Meiron gained her Masters in International Development at the London School of Economics (LSE) where she took a specific interest in migration and refugee issues. She was born in South Africa, grew up in London and has spent time living and working for NGOs in Israel, India, and now Brussels.

Micol Di Gioacchino

Micol Di Gioacchino, 22 years old, Treasurer and Board Member of EUJS. She has been involved in Jewish activism since she was 16 years old. First as a Bene Akiva Madricha and after as the Treasurer and Executive Director of UGEI, she learned that European Jewry is diverse and therefore potentially strong. She fights against antisemitism and anti-Zionism, but she believes that the real fight is to empower and consolidate the Jewish identities of the present and future generations in Europe.

Mira Kelber

Mira Kelber was born in Malmö, Sweden but currently studies Human Rights at Lunds University. Mira is the founder of Jewish Youth of Malmö (JUM), and president of the organisation. She is also vice president of the Jewish Youth organisation of Sweden. She has been rewarded from The Swedish Committee Against Antisemitism for her work against Antisemitism.

Mischa Ushakov

Mischa Ushakov is 24 years old, a post-soviet, Jewish European and by profession industrial designer. He believes in public spaces as a stage of socio-political discourse, in analog action forms of activism and thinks that it is up to everyone to overcome identity politics in the long run. The motto of his activism: Everyone should take a little responsibility and big corporations a lot!

Monty Ott

Monty Ott is a political and religious scientist and researches queer Jewish theology. In December 2022 he published his first book “Wir lassen uns nicht unterkriegen” - Junge jüdische Politik in Deutschland”, that he wrote together with the author Ruben Gerczikow. He writes articles on current political issues, for example in the taz, the ZEIT, the Jüdische Allgemeine, the Berliner Zeitung, and the WELT, in which he explicitly takes a stand on antisemitism, remembrance culture and queerness. For a decade, Monty Ott has been involved in educational work on antisemitism. From 2018 to 2021 he was also Founding member and chairman of Keshet Deutschland.

Noah Katz

Noah Katz is the VP Education at Lancaster University Students’ Union, a Lauder Fellow with the World Jewish Congress, a Deputy on the Board of Deputies of British Jews for UJS (UK) and is a member of the National Scrutiny Council of NUS (UK). They are deeply passionate about the value of holistic education and is a champion for Jewish and youth engagement within policy and politics.

Sonja Viličić

Sonja is from Serbia where she runs NGO Haver Srbija, an educational organisation that brings Jews and non-Jews together to learn, share and explore their identities. Sonja is also working as the Jewish educator at the European Union of Jewish Students where she is trying to empower students to take ownership of their Jewish life and shape it in the way that suits them the best!

Shir Peress

Shir has been working for EUJS since November 2022. She has a B.A. in international relations and Spanish & Latin American Studies from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Shir had volunteered in a different organisation around Israel and Mexico where she gained experience in informal education and different cultures.

Tamara Ikhaev

Tamara Ikhaev is a Business Psychology student based in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She is the former President of her local Jewish Students Association while being active in various Jewish Organisations as a member or volunteer. In 2021 she was also part of the first cohort of the IMPACT: Emerging Leaders Fellowship Program by WUJS and B'nai B'rith. After finishing high school, Tamara started working at the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt and additionally conducting educational tours for the Jewish Community.

Tomas Kantor-Negel

Tomas Kantor-Negel was born and raised in Santiago, Chile, where he was an active member of a Jewish youth movement while growing up. He moved to Vancouver, Canada, where he studied international relations and economics at the University of British Columbia and worked as co-editor in chief of the Journal of International Affairs. Tomas has been living in Milan since 2021, where he is currently completing an MSc Economics at Bocconi University. He is passionate about social sciences, the applications of economics to the battle of climate change, literature, and hiking.

Yael Isaacs

Yael Isaacs is a graduate student of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Amsterdam. She is interested in modern Jewish and Iranian history, in addition to writing, cooking, and hiking.

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