jpr / policy paper

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

No. 1 | February 1999

Cultural politics and European Jewry

'The debate on the nature of culture is taking place among Jews with regard to the nature and content of Jewish culture. Sometimes, this Jewish debate parallels the general one, though perhaps it is argued with more passion because many of the protagonists perceive the very survival of a minority group to be at stake.'
Stanley Waterman

The **Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR)** is an independent think-tank which informs and influences policy, opinion and decision-making on social, political and cultural issues affecting Jewish life.

JPR's programme on culture explores the role cultural encounters play in forming Jewish identity and representing Jews and Judaism to the wider world. The programme also assesses the influence of Jewish culture on the lives of all sections of the Jewish population. Such information will assist the artistic community to reach their audiences.

Stanley Waterman was educated at the University of Dublin where he received a PhD in Geography. He emigrated to Israel in 1972 and has spent almost all his academic career at the University of Haifa. He has been Chairman of the Department of Geography and Dean of Faculty. Though much of his research has dealt with issues in the field of political geography, he has recently returned to issues of culture. During the 1980s he co-operated with Barry Kosmin on a series of articles on British Jewry, culminating in the publication of *British Jewry in the Eighties* (1986) and *Jews in an Outer London Borough—Barnet* (1989). His most recent (1998) articles, 'Carnivals for elites?: the cultural politics of arts festivals' and 'Place, culture, identity: summer music in Upper Galilee', deal with the cultural politics of arts festivals and how they reflect society and culture.

Acknowledgements
JPR gratefully acknowledges the support of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in the publication of this paper.

German and Russian summaries by Georg Mayer and Motya Chlenov.

A French language version of this paper is also available.

Contents

Summary

Besides being a confusing designation, culture is a contentious issue. Nevertheless, people depend on the relatively safe and stable entity called culture, which both aids and encumbers them as they negotiate their way in society.

Conventionally, religious beliefs and practices have been the main symbols of collective Jewish identity; their development and legitimation have been profoundly embedded in group life, social class and organizations. In the Jewish Diaspora, these beliefs and practices were the 'mortar' that cemented the 'Jewish' bricks. However, as European societies have modernized and become more secular, more pluralistic and multicultural, Jews have had to adapt. But European Jewish communities do not stand in isolation and the issue is not simply 'modernize and die' or 'modernize or die'—secularism *v.* religion. European Jewish communities, in their struggle to survive and create Jewish identities with which they are at ease, must contend with new streams of Jewish life emanating from North America and Israel. With the exception of France and the United Kingdom, which still have relatively large and viable—and autonomous—Jewish communities, most European communities are small with considerable need of external support.

Debate on culture is taking place among Jews in terms of the nature and content of Jewish cultures. But Jewish cultures are changing, as they have always done; this fact is most evident in both Israel and North America.

If European Jewish communities are to survive and prosper as autonomous entities without being over-influenced by any one ideological or religious tendency in the Jewish world, or without fear of assimilation, they must be sufficiently brave to develop their own means of self-expression and to learn to live with them. This is not an easy task, because those who offer single-track alternatives —such as the dissolution of the Diaspora or a return to a form of Judaism which isolates itself from the rest of society—do so with forceful conviction. European Jews must be able to develop an independent and vibrant culture.

The construction of forward-looking European Jewries will be hampered by attempts at delegitimization. Many accusations—e.g. that it is not the traditional way, that it is against the overall Jewish interest—will probably be aimed at efforts by European Jewry to set its own course for survival. However, if European Jewish communities are to avoid irreversible decline, there is no other way. The present offers a golden opportunity to communities of European Jews to co-operate across national boundaries and develop coalitions with other ethnic groups, and cultural and religious minorities, so that they can be leaders rather than hangers-on in the era of multiculturalism. It is an opportunity not to be missed.

Zusammenfassung

Kultur stellt abgesehen von der verwirrenden Komplexität des Begriffes auch im eigentlichen Sinne ein umstrittenes Thema dar. Wir finden von der relativ sicheren und stabilen Existenz der uns umgebenden Kultur, sowohl Unterstützung als auch Belastung.

Herkömmlicherweise stellten religiöse Vorstellungen und Bräuche, deren Entwicklung und Legitimität zutiefst in der jeweiligen Gruppe, sozialen Schicht bzw. in Organisationen verankert waren, die Hauptsymbole kollektiver jüdischer Identität dar. In der jüdischen Diaspora waren es diese Vorstellungen und Vorschriften, die jüdisches Leben formten. Da die europäischen Gesellschaften durch Modernisierung und zunehmende Säkularisierung pluralistischer und multikultureller geworden sind, haben sich die Juden anpassen müssen. Aber die jüdischen Gemeinden in Europa stehen nicht isoliert da, und die Problemstellung lautet nicht einfach „modernisieren und sterben" bzw. „modernisieren oder sterben", säkular oder religiös.

Die Debatte über den Kulturbegriff wird unter Juden auf den Ebenen der Beschaffenheit und der Inhalte jüdischer Kulturen geführt. Aber jüdische Kulturen haben sich immer verändert - eine Tatsache, die jetzt besonders in Israel und Nordamerika zu beobachten ist. Sogar im konservativen Europa werden innerhalb der jüdischen Gemeinden traditionelle jüdische Machtpositionen in Frage gestellt, und religiösen Führern und israelischen Politikern wird nicht mehr jene Ehrfurcht entgegengebracht wie früher.

In ihrem Kampf zu überleben und den Anstrengungen eigene, ihnen entsprechende jüdische Identitäten zu schaffen, müssen sich die Gemeinden in Europa auch gegen neue Strömungen jüdischen Lebens behaupten, die von Nordamerika und Israel ausgehen.

Wenn die jüdischen Gemeinden in Europa ohne übermäßige Einflußnahme von religiösen und ideologischen Strömungen und ohne Angst vor Assimilation, autonom überleben und gedeihen sollen, bedürfen sie der mutigen Entwicklung eigener Formen des Ausdruckes und der Bereitschaft mit diesen zu leben. Es handelt sich hier um keine einfache Aufgabe, da solche, die einseitige Alternativen anbieten, es mit eindringlicher Überzeugung tun. Wie zum Biespiel die Auflösung der Diaspora oder die Rükher zu religiösen Formen des Judentums die zwangsläufig zur gesselschaftlichen Isolation führt. Die europäischen Juden müssen dazu in der Lage sein, eine unabhängige und pulsierende Kultur zu entwickeln.

Die Entwicklung eines fortschrittlichen europäischen Judentums in einem Klima von Pluralismus und Multikulturalismus wird durch Versuche, ihm die Legitimation abzusprechen, erschwert werden. Vorwürfe, daß es sich hier nicht um den traditionellen Weg handle bzw. daß dies gegen allgemeine jüdische Interessen spräche, werden sich gegen das Bemühen europäischer Juden richten, einen eigenen Kurs in Richtung Überleben einzuschlagen. Wenn aber die jüdischen Gemeinden in Europa den irreversiblen Niedergang vermeiden wollen, wird es für sie keine Alternative dazu geben. Die Gegenwart bietet den europäischen jüdischen Gemeinden die einmalige Gelegenheit, über nationale Grenzen hinaus zusammenzuarbeiten und Verbindungen sowohl zu anderen ethnischen Gruppen und religiösen und kulturellen Minderheiten aufzunehmen. So können sie in einem Zeitalter des Multikulturalismus zu Vorreitern werden—eine Chance, die es nicht zu versäumen gilt.

Краткое изложение

Понятие "культура" не имеет однозначного определения, сама тема "культуры" является достаточно спорной. Но, очевидно, что как интеллектуально, так и эмоционально люди находятся в зависимости от относительно надежной и стабильной сферы, называемой культура, которая одновременно облегчает и затрудняет их жизнь.

Среди евреев спор о культуре ведется вокруг вопроса о природе и сущности различных еврейских культур. Но и сами еврейские культуры находится в процессе постоянного обновления и изменения. Хотя этот факт в большей степени очевиден в Израиле и Северной Америке, даже в консервативной Европе мало что может помешать еврею достичь высших государственных постов, не отрекаясь при этом от своего еврейства. Результатом такой свободы стало то, что традиционная власть еврейских общин над евреями становится все более сомнительной. Сегодня уже нет прежнего благоговения перед еврейскими религиозными авторитетами, равно как и перед израильскими политиками.

Религиозные убеждения и ритуалы являются основополагающими характеристиками еврейского самосознания. Им свойственны значительная инерция и сопротивление к переменам, что стало следствием их глубокой укорененности в общественной жизни и социальной сфере еврейства. В диаспоре религиозные убеждения и ритуалы были тем цементирующим раствором, который накрепко сцеплял основные составляющие еврейского бытия. Однако по мере того, как на своем пути к модернизации, европейские общества становились все более светскими, более плюралистичными и мультикультурными, евреям приходилось меняться и приспосабливаться. Кроме того, европейские общины не изолированы от внешней жизни, поэтому данная проблема не сводится лишь противопоставлению религиозности и светскости, к альтернативе – "либо исчезни либо осовременься". В борьбе за собственное выживание и создание собственной приемлемой модели, общины Европы должны выдержать конкуренцию с новыми направлениями еврейской жизни Америки и Израиля. За исключением Франции и Великобритании, в которых все еще сохранились относительно крупные и жизнеспособные еврейские общины, европейские общины невелики и в значительной степени нуждаются в помощи извне.

Если еврейские общины Европы намерены сохраниться и процветать как суверенные общности, не попадая при этом под чрезмерное влияние ультра ортодоксов, оставаясь вне угрозы ассимиляции или сионисткой альтернативы, у них должно быть достаточно смелости для того, чтобы выработать свои собственные средства самовыражения и научиться жить в соответствии с ними. Это не простая задача, поскольку и у сионизма, и у ультра-ортодоксии есть собственные планы. Конечной целью сионизма является постепенное исчезновение диаспоры путем ее перемещения в Израиль. Еврейская ортодоксия же предлагает возврат к жестко контролируемой системе взаимоотношений. И все же, если европейским евреям суждено сохраниться, они должны выработать свою собственную самостоятельную и жизнеспособную культуру.

В то время как плюрализм и мультикультурализм являются повальным увлечением нашего времени, построение нового, устремленного вперед европейского еврейства будет затруднено обвинениями в нелегитимности предпринимаемых шагов. Обвинения типа: "Это нетрадиционный еврейский путь, это против общих еврейских интересов," могут быть выдвинуты против усилий европейского еврейства по выработке стратегии собственного выживания. Однако если еврейские общины Европы хотят избежать необратимого упадка, у них нет иного пути. Сегодня у общин евреев Европы есть блестящая возможность создания коалиции с другими этническими группами, религиозными и культурными меньшинствами. В эру мультикультурализма они имеют шанс сохранить свои передовые позиции, вместо того чтобы оставаться в стороне. Упустить такую возможность просто нельзя.

1 Introduction

Welcome to the klezmer music revival, or at least to one of its latest incarnations. Twenty years since the initial resurgence of interest, record sales are soaring and audiences growing. . . . Yet if Perlman's prominence and mass appeal have brought klezmer numbers to new heights, the real excitement lies in the evolving diversity of the music, its listeners and its performers. The creative paths being forged in places like New York, Toronto, and more ironically, Berlin, point to a radically transformed art form that the itinerant Jewish folk musicians of Eastern Europe—the original klezmerim—could never have imagined. And while the cutting-edge performers struggle to innovate without losing touch with the roots of their art, listeners are turning to klezmer for more than its soulful melodies and its contagious rhythms. Indeed, klezmer music and the Yiddish culture that gave birth to it are the center of a new Jewish identity. Klezmer has become, in the words of revival violinist Alicia Svigals, 'the musical soundtrack for a new Jewish youth culture'.[1]

Culture is a word that almost defies definition. Rather, there are so many definitions that one can be chosen to meet almost any need. Some of these definitions are closely related while others diverge quite remarkably. The cultural critic Raymond Williams noted that culture was one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language. This was partly because of its intricate historical development in several European languages, but mainly because it is now used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought.[2]

Besides being a confusing designation, culture is also undoubtedly a contentious one. It is not just the terminology and meanings that are contested; culture is a contested issue in the real sense, exciting considerable debate, even passion.

Culture is one of several words (other examples are community or neighbourhood, segregation or integration, society, urban, rural or suburban) which are used commonly and frequently in social sciences and the humanities, as well as in everyday parlance, that can mean quite different things to a pair of interlocutors, writers and readers. This is an outcome of giving too little thought to the meaning actually intended and simply interpreting the words and the implications imparted by their usage as one sees fit. This often results in discussions at cross purposes and debates with conflicting aims, often on a grand scale. Despite the emotions engendered by references to 'culture' and because of its multiple definitions, it is hard to pin down what a given individual or group wishes to convey when using the word.

In his handbook *Keywords*, Williams offers several definitions of culture, recognizing three broad active categories of usage: (i) a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; (ii) a general or specific indication of a particular way of life, whether of a period, people or group; and (iii) the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.[3] It is this latter category that often seems to be most widely used by the general public. Culture is understood as music and literature, theatre and film, painting and sculpture. Whether or not this really is the most widespread use of the term, it creates serious problems when it becomes virtually the sole usage. We should be aware that cultures are also the inferred (imputed or ascribed) patterns of beliefs, norms and values, expressed through communicative action and social practice, transferred between the contemporaries of a society, and from one generation to another, by means of production and reading of symbols. This is not a definition, but just another way of using the word 'culture'.

Besides being a confusing designation, culture is also undoubtedly a contentious one. It is not just the terminology and meanings that are contested; culture is a contested issue in the real sense, exciting considerable debate, even passion. Intellectually and emotionally people depend on a relatively safe and stable entity called culture which both aids and encumbers them. It conjures up images of control over the past evolution, the current identity and the eventual destiny of whole groups and their members, over who they were and how they came to be, over who they are and what they are likely to become.

2 Jewish cultures

The debate on the nature of culture is also taking place among Jews with regard to the nature and content of Jewish culture. Sometimes, this Jewish debate parallels the general one, though perhaps it is argued with more passion and the tone is pitched somewhat higher because many of the protagonists perceive the very survival of a minority group to be at stake. Within the Jewish debate, there are two definitions that are most

1 Jeremy Eichler, 'But is it Jewish?', *The Jerusalem Report*, 13 November 1997.

2 Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana 1976), 76-7.

3 Ibid., 80.

current today in scientific discourse and in everyday language. The first is the humanistic definition, where culture and public activity are not synonymous and the concept 'culture' stands in opposition to, *inter alia*, barbarism, lack of culture and primitiveness. The second is the anthropological-sociological definition in which the concept emphatically rejects the normative-evaluative approach and culture is, quoting the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, 'the mass of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values and the behaviours they induce'.[4]

Observing Jewish cultures over time, Efraim Shmueli has referred to culture as a unit of organized meanings that grasp and organize reality in three ways—through the practical sciences, through theoretical knowledge, and by offering a plan for personal and collective salvation. He recognized seven Jewish cultures throughout history, whose sum of meanings can be classified according to three main dimensions: (i) utilitarian knowledge, the practical wisdom responsible for shaping lifestyles, work and tools, interpersonal relations, and governing institutions; (ii) a cosmological sense of reality, a theoretical knowledge that is the source of philosophy and the sciences; and (iii) redemption or 'messianism'. Together they penetrate progressively into a culture's collective subconscious until they become self-evident and understood as the 'way of the world'.[5]

Several Jewish cultures, such as Zionism or today's religious Orthodoxy, declare their own authenticity and assert their right to speak for all Jews, striving for hegemony and denying the legitimacy of others.

Jewish cultures can be understood as 'frameworks' reflecting the worldview of a distinct socio-economic section of modern society. Though Jews ostensibly participate in Jewish cultural pursuits for several purposes, this participation can be seen as the celebration by the group of shared mythologies and values through managed interactions in production and consumption. Whereas some better established Jewish cultures leave a permanent mark as a codex of laws, most leave only a name or folk memories—in other words, an identity and a valuation endowed by the culture.[6]

4 Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures: A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990), 40-1.
5 Ibid.,16.
6 See Stanley Waterman, 'Carnivals for élites?: the cultural politics of arts festivals', *Progress in Human Geography*, no. 22, 1998, 54-74.

Several Jewish cultures, such as Zionism or today's religious Orthodoxy, have adopted universalist Jewish positions while remaining sharply particularist. They declare their own authenticity and assert their right to speak for all Jews, striving for hegemony and denying the legitimacy of others. Orthodoxy, in particular, aims to dominate the lifestyles of Jews and, as such, takes clear stands on issues such as gender and the voices of women, and is ambivalent to 'art', especially the plastic arts and the theatre.

Other variants of Jewish cultures are the products of Jewish communities that developed in particular places and specific periods. Some have seen better days and are kept alive as living museums, while others claim to represent Jews seeking and giving expression to their identities in multicultural situations in an increasingly secular and consumer-oriented world.

3 Jewish cultures and continuity in Europe

There are several overriding issues concerning Jewish cultures in contemporary Europe and the creation and production of these cultures. Closely related to one another and of equal importance are the crucial points of who produces these cultures and for whom they are being produced and—for it is not quite the same question—who are intended to be the consumers of these new Jewish cultures as we move towards the next millennium. There are also several further questions. These relate to how the production and consumption of Jewish culture are connected to Jewish identities and, more significantly, to meanings transmitted by such identities. These are all-encompassing questions of concern for Jews, as undoubtedly they are also for the non-Jewish populations among and alongside whom Jews live and work.

This paper, then, is concerned with Jewish culture and its continuity in Europe. More specifically, it poses questions about the nature of Jewish cultures in an increasingly secular Europe on the edge of a new millennium. I shall stress the plural term 'Jewish cultures', preferring this to the singular 'Jewish culture' because there are undoubtedly many different Jewish cultures, each the product of a given formula of Jewish beliefs, Jewish history and experience, and Jewish lifestyles. I use the word 'plural' in both its senses of meaning 'more than one' and 'various', and the word 'singular' in its senses as 'referring to only one' and 'remarkable, exceptional, or unique'. It has really always been this way for, as Goldscheider and Zuckerman so laconically put it, 'Vilna and its Jews were clearly not the same as

the Jews of Alsace nor identical to the Jews (and non-Jews) of Rome, Cologne, Prague, or Minsk. Similarly, 1650 was not 1700, nor 1750 or 1850. Enveloped in small societies, many of the Jewish communities shared similar characteristics, but no two were exactly alike.'[7] This point is well made but is often lost in the forest of charge and counter-charge over *the* 'correct' way for Jewish culture to develop so as to ensure Jewish continuity.

We must recognize that, just as it is hard to pin down exactly what is meant by 'British culture' or 'Spanish culture' it is futile to expect that there should be a single Jewish culture.

To refer to something blandly as 'Jewish culture' is to accept notionally that there is something that could be acceptable to all Jews if only they compromised over their ideal of what it should be. However, we must recognize that, just as it is hard to pin down exactly what is meant by 'British culture' or 'Spanish culture' (if indeed there are things as general as these), and each society comprises many subcultures, it is futile to expect that there should be a single Jewish culture.[8] The label 'Jewish culture' encompasses many related subcultures, some of which claim to possess exclusivity on the 'authentic' form, but all of which are variants influenced by history and tradition, current circumstances and prevailing trends.

Within this context, we must ask what constitutes Jewish cultures in Europe at the end of the twentieth century, and in which ways these differ from one another and from the cultures of the peoples alongside whom the Jews live. What is of relevance here is the extent to which Jewish cultures are unique, how much of 'Jewish' culture is actually shared and shareable culture, and how these Jewish cultures are transmitted to others, Jew and Gentile alike. We need a clear definition of what comprises Jewish cultures in the context of Europe on the edge of the twenty-first century. European Jewish cultures today are a mix of high and popular culture, and have also acquired a non-religious nature as they are marketed and targeted at secular Jews through outreach programmes, the general population, tourists and the media.

Several questions flow from this. If Jews in Western societies in general, and European societies in particular, have become more secular and more integrated into general society (in Jewish parlance, more assimilated), then

- What is unique about Jewish culture?
- To what extent are the religious elements of Jewish cultures relevant to secular Jewish populations and to society in general?
- What role can non-religious elements play in a predominantly secular Jewish culture?
- Is secular Jewish culture a contradiction in terms?
- Is Jewish culture today (however it is defined) produced for internal (i.e. Jewish) consumption only, to enable continuity of the ethnic group, or is it produced as a commodity for consumers in society at large?

No matter how we frame these questions, the issue at hand is who should be responsible for the production of Jewish cultures—Jews themselves, Jews aided by others, others guided by Jews, or others alone?

There is little doubt that, with the passage of time, what passes for Jewish culture has changed substantially. In one example from folk culture, klezmer used to be the music of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe and was played by groups of itinerant Jewish musicians, especially at weddings. Today's klezmer music is little more than another ethnic genre, placed alongside *céilí* and gypsy music on the shelves of the record stores, and as likely to be played by a Séamus or a Seán as a Zalman or a Yosske.[9]

On another level, the study of *Halakhah* (Jewish law) was once solely the concern of a rabbi and his disciples in a yeshiva (rabbinical seminary); today it forms part of informal adult education classes and university studies in a variety of institutions, using methods of critical analysis foreign to traditional modes of study. It might well be said by some that what is touted and consumed today as Jewish culture in Europe has little, if any, appeal to two specific groups, each of which sees itself as the sole legitimate vendor of the commodity. These are, on the one hand, the Israeli Zionist establishment (both secular and religious) and on the other, the Orthodox religious establishment outside of Israel. The importance of this fact cannot be over-emphasized.

European Jewry has arisen from the ashes of the Holocaust. It is a different Jewry located in different places and situated in different social and cultural milieux to pre-war Jewry. Prior to the war,

7 Calvin Goldscheider and Alan Zuckerman, *The Transformation of the Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), 11-12.

8 In this context, on the difficulties of defining American culture see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books 1995), especially chapter 2.

9 See Barbara Kirshen Blatt-Gimblett, 'Sounds of sensibility', *Judaism*, vol. 47, no. 1, 1998, 49-78.

there were several large communities. These, by dint of their size (as in Poland), or their relatively large presence in specific regions (such as the *shtetls* in the Pale of Settlement in Russia) or their relatively prominent position in the life of important economic, political and cultural centres such as Vienna or Berlin, were highly visible. Today's communities are, in comparison, small. Whether there is a shared European Jewish culture at all is a moot point. Before we can provide an answer to this complex question, we must ask to what we are referring when we use the term Jewish culture, and whether it is sound to use the term 'European' in these contexts.

European Jews face stiff competition in their search for survival and their efforts to produce an independent and vibrant culture.

It is important at the beginning to set out the obstacles that stand in the way of re-establishing self-reliant, robust European Jewish cultures at this time. European Jews face stiff competition in their search for survival and their efforts to produce an independent and vibrant culture. Competition comes from Israeli Zionism and North American Jewish culture, both of which have become the dominant forces in adapting traditional Jewish cultures and in shaping the Jewish identities for the great majority of the world's Jews in the second half of the present century.

In addition to both of these cultures, European Jews must compete with the dominant, and predominantly secular, cultures of the societies within which they live, as well as with the globalizing trends that ultimately emanate from the depths of American consumer society. They also have to learn to master the new means of transmitting their culture, using mass print and broadcast media, both through the mainstream—in which case they may not have control over what is transmitted—or through Jewish channels, in which case they reach only a limited audience. Furthermore, there are now relatively new communications technologies such as digital and cable television as well as CD-ROM and Internet publishing. These new technologies permit 'boutique' publishing and 'narrowcasting' in which even the tastes of the most meagre of publics can be catered for, so that marginal groups can work to mitigate, if not entirely neutralize, dominant cultures.[10]

10 See Roger Silverstone, *Jewish television: prospects and possibilities*, JPR Policy Paper, no. 1, March 1998.

4 The Jews in a 'new Europe'

The European Union with its expanding membership is now an integrated common economic market within which European bureaucrats have taken great steps to standardize and harmonize social and labour laws. There is even optimism that partial monetary union will shortly be achieved. Deservedly so, Europe has taken pride in the strides it has made towards economic and political union since the devastation wreaked by the Second World War. Nevertheless, Europe is a long way from being as uniform or united as the United States. The documents of the European Union and the debates in its parliament must still be translated into a number of languages. Despite the advances towards political union, the mosaic of official languages simply underlines the enormous cultural diversity that exists among Europe's regions and within the modern European states.

This diversity begs the question of whether it is possible to recognize a shared European culture. Obviously, there is a European culture area that is distinct from a South or East Asian one, or an Islamic one; equally obviously, Europeans do many things differently from North Americans or Australians. Yet, in some ways, the European culture area might be said to envelop North America, Australia, Argentina and some other regions influenced in the past by the colonial activities of European powers. On the other hand, the contemporary European culture area is probably enveloped by the United States. It all depends on the scale on which we wish to examine the question and the answer. In contrast with European identities, which are closely tied up with national cultures, New World identities have other hang-ups. It could be posited that to feel fully French, German or Spanish, one must also espouse French, German or Spanish nationalism. This does not mean that one cannot empathize with European cultures without being part of the nation, but it does mean that such empathy is not sufficient for full identity.

However, being American or Canadian is different, for America and Canada are, in principle (whatever the difficulties in realizing this to the full) multicultural states. Subcultures—youth, black, gay and 'hyphenated-American'—abound and are a feature of the New World cultural landscape, much more evidently than in Europe. As a result, Americans are greatly concerned with identity politics and, although ethnic factors are sometimes involved in these culture wars, they are not the only components.[11] The prime

11 Gitlin, chapter 2.

implication of this for Jews in North America is that one can be quite at ease with being simultaneously Jewish and American; it is legitimate to be associated with two cultures that are in constant interaction. To be a Jewish-American does not necessarily lessen one's commitment to being either American or a Jew. In Europe, things are more complex and perplexing. To be an Anglo-Jew or a French Jew or a German Jew (Jewish Englishmen, Frenchmen or Germans conjure up other images) is not easily accomplished, as full commitment to both can be a difficult balancing act.

Though there is sometimes a tendency to disclaim this, the social and political realities of Jewish life in Europe have changed substantially in this century. For a start, Europe itself has changed. In place of multi-ethnic empires, sharply chauvinistic nation-states, or states governed by one-party regimes, most of today's European states disclaim imperial designs or jingoism and proclaim their taste for multi-party democracy and market economies; many also openly laud the benefits of entertaining cultural pluralism. Though religious institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, have played some part in the transformation of Europe in the past couple of decades, Europeans have become more secular than ever before and are less interested in or influenced by organized religion than in the past. And what is important for Europe as a whole is just as important for Jews. Times have changed and there is little point in either denying it or in attempting to turn the clock back.

To be an Anglo-Jew or a French Jew or a German Jew (Jewish Englishmen, Frenchmen or Germans conjure up other images) is not easily accomplished, as full commitment to both can be a difficult balancing act.

As far as the Jews are concerned, the last sixty years have seen a sharp reduction in their numbers—the compound result of the Holocaust, of migration (both to Israel and elsewhere) and, to a lesser extent, of outmarriage and assimilation within general society. Moreover, in addition to their numerical decline, there has been a change in their geographical distribution. The Jewish community of Poland, over 3 million people before the Second World War, has virtually vanished; in countries such as Germany or Austria, Hungary or Romania, the present-day communities are much smaller and their composition bears little relation to the communities that preceded them. The largest West European community, that of France, has undergone a metamorphosis in the past fifty years, and the population that survived the war was replenished and rejuvenated with immigrants mainly from North Africa. The Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union, with the exception of those in the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine, survived the Holocaust but suffered from seven decades of cultural dystrophy; more recently, they have endured sharp numerical depletion through emigration, principally to Israel and North America.

Today's European Jews are walking a tightrope, attempting to balance history and tradition with modernity, distinctiveness with uniformity. The majority are probably less than interested in replicating the situation that held within pre-war Eastern Europe, where the bulk of European Jews lived. There, Jews were part of the human landscape but, although they lived among Poles or Russians, Hungarians or Romanians, they kept their distance. Zygmunt Bauman has noted that 'Poles and Jews did not live *together* but beside each other . . . While histories intertwined, life-worlds stayed hermetically sealed.'[12] Theo Richmond remarked on this in his 'biography' of a Polish *shtetl*:

> One Koniner gave me what she regarded as a typical example of Polish contempt for the Jews: 'If a Chasid went into a bank and tried to speak Polish, the Poles used to laugh in his face.' Without excusing such ridicule, one can understand why many Poles found it extraordinary that a people who had lived in Poland since the Middle Ages showed so little desire to learn its language. Until the First World War most Jewish boys [spoke] . . . Yiddish in and out of class, mixing in a world where only Yiddish was spoken. As adults they acquired enough Polish for everyday transactions in the marketplace. This shut them off not only from Poles but from those fellow Jews who had received a secular education . . . Jewish parents discouraged their children from forming friendships with Polish children . . . Thus Jewish apartheid, which began with compulsory segregation in the mediaeval ghetto, persisted not solely as a result of Christian prejudice but through choice. Ethnic exclusivity was a means of preserving the species . . . There is a terrible sadness about the words of the Polish-Jewish writer, Adam Rudnicki, when he asks: 'How was it possible to live together for a thousand years and know nothing about one another? Nothing.'[13]

The traditional Jews of Central and Eastern Europe were part of the economy and adopted those aspects of the host societies and cultures that were beneficial to them without endangering their traditional ways of life. Other than that, on the whole they produced and consumed their

12 Zygmunt Bauman, quoted in Theo Richmond, *Konin: A Quest* (New York: Vintage 1996), 161.
13 Richmond, 160-1.

own cultures. Jews who came into contact with more enlightened societies in Central and Western Europe, and later with more tolerant and liberal democratic societies, first in North America and then in Western Europe, were able to choose the extent to which they would produce and consume their own cultures or borrow from others. And, as Jews became more a part of these open societies, they could choose the extent to which they, as Jews, would contribute to the societies in which they lived. With the passage of time and the increase in the number of Jews who had fled the cultural and political restrictions of the East European ghettos and *shtetls*, the extent of Jewish acculturation into the local culture also increased.

Although European Jews adopted the lifestyles and became part of the environments in which they lived, as far as their segregation would permit, the extent of what they shared in common should not be underestimated. While much fun might be made of the stereotyped differences among Jewish communities in different parts of Europe—the bookishness of the Litvaks, the ecstasies of Hassidism, the sharpness of the Romanian Jew, the sweet tooth of Polish Jews, the sophistication of German and Austrian Jews, and so forth—these ostensibly different Jews did share much.[14]

5 Communities and communication

Throughout the length and breadth of East European Jewish communities, there was extensive oral and written communication in Yiddish; for Mediterranean Jews, Ladino served a similar purpose, on a smaller scale. These and other minor languages served as Jewish *linguae francae*.[15] In addition to these languages—and the prose and poetry, music and song, folklore and cuisine that they spawned—all Jewish communities, if not all individual Jews, could resort to the use of Hebrew as the ultimate Jewish language. Hebrew had long served as a language for business and correspondence and, of course, most of the liturgy was conducted in Hebrew. Although the liturgy varied throughout Jewish Europe, from Ashkenazi to Sephardi, a Ladino-speaking Jew from Thessaloniki could find a way of communicating with his co-religionist in Minsk or Budapest, Łódź or London.

Although Yiddish still survives as the language of first choice for Hassidic communities the world over, Ladino has declined almost to extinction and is kept alive as a folk language. Today's European Jews are much less able to find a means of common communication that is Jewish. Although Hassidim from Antwerp, Strasbourg or London communicate among themselves and with their brethren from New York, Bnei Brak and Melbourne, in Yiddish, and some French or Russian Jews might be able to speak to others in Hebrew, these are not possibilities for the vast majority of Europe's Jews, whose mother tongue—English, French, German or Russian—is often their only language. So in order to communicate with their fellow Jews, most of today's Jews must do so in a language that is neither their mother tongue nor, it must be noted, even a common Jewish language. More often than not, the language chosen to perform this task is English—the language of Hollywood, television and cyberspace. In an age of American cultural dominance, if not hegemony, the numerical superiority of North American Jewry has the potential to become a cultural superiority.

One of the implications of the loss of a Jewish *lingua franca* is that there are fewer possibilities for direct social contacts between different Jewish centres in Europe. Contact among Jews from different national communities has been dominated in recent years by the hegemonic tendencies of both Zionism and Orthodoxy, while the social distance between the predominantly English-speaking Jewry of North America and Jews in Europe has increased. Interaction is more likely to occur as a result of cultural contacts that can overcome the impediment of language. This point cannot be stressed sufficiently.

In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe the most significant contributions of individual Jews to the countries in which they lived were not made consciously as Jews. In other words, Jews—the Mendelssohns, Mahlers, Freuds, Einsteins, Blums, Rothschilds, Berlins and others—contributed to the cultures of Germany, Austria, France, Britain and elsewhere as individuals who were, or had been, Jews rather than as Jews. This contrasts with America where, perhaps because of the lack of constraints on being both Jewish and American, Jews were much freer, both to borrow from and repay American society. Jews contributed to American society not just as individuals who were Jewish but *as* Jews. Yiddishisms appeared in American English; the Borscht-Belt—Danny Kaye or Milton Berle or Jackie Mason—is an accepted part of American society; Bernstein wrote American music and was happy to indulge in Jewish themes when he felt the need. North American literature without its Malamuds, Roths or Richlers,

14 See Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food: An Odyssey from Samarkand to New York* (London: Viking 1997), 3-35, 173-7.

15 See Joshua A. Fishman (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Jewish Languages* (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1985).

or Hollywood without its Woody Allens and Steven Spielbergs or Barbra Streisands, is unthinkable. These Jews continued the traditions of Jewish folk cultures, and unashamedly utilized Jewish stereotypes, even to the extent of satirizing Jewish society while doing so. They were also producing for America because America wished to hear them, see them, read them, understand them; and ultimately, through the influence of American culture, they were producing Jewish culture for the world. Woody Allen's Jewish neuroses are of so much interest throughout the world because almost as much as they are Jewish, they are also American.

6 The decline of traditional Judaism

As part of the secularization of European societies, most of the extraneous social and political constraints that had for so long been placed on Jews in terms of residence and occupations had vanished by the end of the twentieth century. Today, there is little to prevent a person from succeeding in business and the professions, or reaching the highest offices of state: he or she does not first have to deny his or her Jewishness or even their Jewish origins, as is shown by figures such as Bruno Kreisky in Austria, the late Lord Justice Taylor, Sir Malcolm Rifkind or Lord Weinstock in the United Kingdom, Simone Veil, Laurent Fabius or Jacques Attali in France, or Mervyn Taylor in Ireland. One implication of this greater freedom for Jews to excel throughout society without having to disavow their Jewish identity is that the traditional power of a community in which there was intense social interaction among Jews has declined. This power had encouraged the consensus, the mortar that held Jews together as a community. When this was weakened, Jews were freer to act in their own individual interests than had hitherto been the case. On the other hand, some leaders of Jewish communities, today as in the past, are leaders because they were successful in business and politics and were thus the links between the wider and Jewish communities, as in the cases of the Rothschilds or the Bronfmans.

Today, there is little to prevent a person from succeeding in business and the professions, or reaching the highest offices of state: he or she does not first have to deny his or her Jewishness or even their Jewish origins.

The decline of the traditional religious community also signifies a concomitant downgrading in the moral authority of rabbis and of those institutions whose task it was to police deviance within the community.[16] The social obligations and political restraints that had been the major sources of Jewish communal consensus all but vanished. Traditionally, religious structure legitimated existing social patterns, and the smaller the Jewish community, the greater were the obligations towards uniformity and the curbs over deviations from accepted norms of conduct. Previously, if a controversy was thought not to be 'in the name of heaven', it was declared heretical, and those who strayed beyond moral authority were ejected from the fold.[17] In the modern age, this kind of political and moral authority no longer holds, and many Jews wilfully and willingly break the bounds, not so much to cock a snook at authority but to demonstrate that it is individual choice rather than community constraints that is of vital importance to them.

The movement towards individual choice and rights added to the pressure that had already been applied on traditional religious leaders during the previous two centuries by the forces of the Enlightenment and the rise of new religious movements, that would guide rather than determine beliefs and practices. In this century, the rise of hedonistic consumer societies throughout the European culture area delivered another blow to the traditional Jewish way of life. For an increasingly large number of Jews, many beliefs, institutions and customs that had previously been deemed necessary for group preservation and had formerly been accepted without question—even when their functions were no longer clear—were jettisoned. Among the religious practices thus discarded were strict sabbath observance, *kashrut* (dietary laws), life-cycle events and other rituals. The primacy of religious norms, outcomes as well as sources of cohesion, that had been the most discernible feature of pre-modern Jewish societies, was overthrown.[18] In short, we are living in a more fragmented world in which nothing is dominant any longer except the constancy of change. People are more prone to adopt multiple identities, one result of which is the need for an aesthetic which supports them at various stages of their lives.

The distancing of Jewish cultures from tradition and the evolving relationships between Jewish cultures in an increasingly secular Gentile world are not new in themselves. For almost a century, the principal strains of Zionism were secular. They attempted to relocate Jewish culture and society within a world that had increasingly become dominated by the secular force of nationalism.

16 Goldscheider and Zuckerman, chapter 2.
17 Shmueli, 10.
18 Goldscheider and Zuckerman, chapter 2.

7 Europe and Europeans

Though this paper concerns European Jewry, I have not made any attempt thus far to define what I mean by 'Europe'. The terms 'Europe' and 'European' lack clarity and are inconsistent, meaning quite different things to different people. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the metamorphosis of the European Economic Community of the 1960s into the European Union of the next millennium, there has been a tendency to refer to 'a new Europe'. This suggests that there was an 'old Europe' that preceded it and which lasted for centuries and differed from it in some substantial way. In effect, the 'old Europe' had existed only since the end of the Second World War, for what had emerged from that war was, in itself, a new Europe.[19]

European Jews are now free to evolve as never before, to be original in terms of how their cultures develop.

There have been at least three 'new Europes' this century. The first followed the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, and was dominated by new, inherently unstable, nation-states with sizeable ethnic minorities, most of which harboured territorial claims on other states. This intrinsically volatile 'new Europe' was followed by an interim period dominated by Nazi Germany from the ashes of which, in 1945, emerged the next 'new Europe', dominated by two processes—the Cold War that split Europe into East and West, and the rise in importance and increasing institutionalization of the European Union. The most recent 'new Europe' of this century which emerged after 1989, resembles the first, in that nation-states are a major component. This time, however, the state boundaries more closely resemble the distributions of the ethnic groups, with notable exceptions in the Balkans and Transylvania. Nevertheless, though they are nation-states which, by their very nature, favour one nation or ethnic group over all others, in theory and principle these states have embraced such concepts as 'plural democracy' and 'free market' and aspire to become part of a wider, pluralist Europe.[20]

Notably, none of these 'new Europes' has ever been able to shake off its predecessors, and issues such as rootedness in old imperial and ideologically-bound associations, in freshly re-invented national emotions and the nationalisms engendered by the old nation-state ideal constantly surface. If the first of these new Europes was bound up with experiment and expectation, and the second with tension and trepidation, the most recent has been prone to over-optimism. Electoral successes for far-right parties in some European states, especially France and Austria, and a rise in jingoism and xenophobia in many places, raise questions about the rosiness of the future. Open-mindedness and liberalism do not yet inevitably prevail over prejudice and intolerance. The 'natural' hostility that exists between ethnic and national groups, potentially uncomfortable for those perceived as not being part of the *ethnie* or nation for which the nation-state was conceived, as well as for other nonconformists, still exists, and occasionally spills over into violence, and not just in the new democracies of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

It is in these milieux that we must place the production and consumption of Jewish cultures in Europe. If, as Diana Pinto has put it, the new Europe has 'Freed [them] from the age-old choice between total assimilation and ghettoization, Jews, in many ways the prototype of the new European, have the chance to *belong* in Europe as never before—as well as the chance to participate fully in the construction of the new, pluralist Europe.'[21] But the *if* is italicized, for the overriding question is whether the latest 'new Europe' is really as pluralist as many hope. Pinto also noted that Jews in today's Europe are 'voluntary', their Jewishness no longer shaped by the state but an integral component of European civil society. She is suggesting that the European Jews have grown closer to American Jews whose Jewish identity for much of this century has been 'voluntary' rather than something foisted upon them by extraneous forces.[22]

Thus, European Jews are now free to evolve as never before, to be original in terms of how their cultures develop. However, Jewish cultures in 'new Europe' are still dominated by the past, by the realities and images of both Jew and Gentile. In addition, European Jews, whether they like it or not, must live in a world in which their actions are not independent of outside forces. This is not often spoken about in public and is something that must be confronted if European Jews are to

19 Peter J. Taylor, *The Way the Modern World Works: World Hegemony to World Impasse* (Chichester: John Wiley 1996), 2-6.

20 C. D. Harris, 'Unification of Germany in 1990', *Geographical Review*, no. 81, 170-82; A. B. Murphy, 'The emerging Europe of the 1990s', vol. 4, 1-17.

21 Diana Pinto, *A new Jewish identity for post-1989 Europe*, JPR Policy Paper, no. 1, June 1996, 1.

22 See also Stanley Waterman and Barry A. Kosmin, 'Ethnic identity, residential concentration and social welfare: Jews in London' in Peter Jackson (ed.), *Race and Racism* (London: Allen and Unwin 1987), 254-71.

take up the challenge to recreate themselves in Europe. Yet, as long as Israel claims the right to speak for and defend not just its own citizens but also Jews throughout the world, and inasmuch as the rest of the world, including the Jews, accepts this anomaly, freedom of action for Europe's Jews will remain seriously curtailed.

At the opposite extremity of the spectrum of outlook on the Jewish future to Pinto stands Bernard Wasserstein's extremely pessimistic view of contemporary European Jewry. In the conclusion to his book *Vanishing Diaspora*,[23] he asked whether Jews could—or should—maintain some form of separation between themselves and surrounding society—religiously, culturally or socially. If the answer was affirmative, Wasserstein asked where and by whom the dividing lines should be drawn. If it was negative and it proved either impossible or undesirable to separate Jews from the rest of European society, Wasserstein asked the even more difficult question of whether European Jews could indeed survive as Jews or whether they might dissolve into a society that killed them through 'kindness'. In Wasserstein's view, European Jews were on the way to becoming little more than a disembodied memory, and could be expected eventually to go the way of the Jewish community of Kai'feng, the members of which, by the nineteenth century, had become indistinguishable from their Chinese neighbours.

The great challenge must be that of creating a viable and vibrant new Jewish culture to take the place of what had been and is now gone.

Wasserstein's book makes for chastening reading, both in terms of its pessimistic tone in general and the depressingly sad end foretold to the long and eventful cohabitation of Jews and Gentiles on the European continent. Undoubtedly, there is much that is true and disturbing in the cameo portraits of contemporary European Jewish communities and populations that Wasserstein paints. Yet, for those unwilling to accept such a distressing conclusion to the long Jewish sojourn and imposing presence in Europe, there remains a question of whether there are ways of avoiding it. For them, the great challenge must be that of creating a viable and vibrant new Jewish culture to take the place of what had been and is now gone.

23 Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora* (Penguin 1997), chapters 10 and 11.

8 Producing Jewish cultures

There are several quite basic, but nonetheless revealing, questions that can be asked about any culture and can be put specifically to the case of Jewish cultures in today's Europe. Among these are how a culture has been produced and by whom, and what processes are involved in its reproduction and adaptation. No less important than the issue of who the culture producers are and the nature of their product, is for whom it is being produced. And, for it is not quite the same question, who are the consumers of that culture? A further question is how the production and consumption of Jewish culture are related to Jewish identities and to the meanings transmitted by such identities. The interaction between the production of culture and its consumption, its creation and its re-creation, in response to changing demands, are means by which Jews attempt to maintain themselves as a group.[24] At the same time, the constant changes in Jewish life and culture also present opportunities to influence its character, and never more so than at present.

These are not esoteric academic issues. They are of all-encompassing concern, especially for Jews, as they undoubtedly are for many other groups too. In most of the societies in which Jews live, they are regarded as a successful ethnic minority. Lessons applicable to other minorities can be learned from the transnational Jewish experience, at least in those societies that strive to be multicultural. Sometimes, the Jews are perhaps viewed as too successful, their achievements regarded with suspicion and envy. Traditional antisemitism persists and is so deeply rooted in some European societies and cultures that Jews can still be blamed for many of a country's social and economic ills despite the fact that their numbers are negligible.

One of the most ubiquitous features of living cultures is that they are constantly evolving.[25] Whereas in the past most changes to a culture would have resulted from internally generated processes with occasional external borrowing, this process is today less internally-oriented than ever before. In an age of mass media and pervasive information accessible to all, cultural modification can no longer be dictated from within unless a conscious effort is made to erect barriers separating the culture from the outside. In the past, cultural change was orchestrated by self-appointed and

24 In a slightly different context see Waterman, 'Carnivals for élites? . . .'.

25 Shmueli, 24-9.

group-perpetuating leaders from within and not freely 'negotiated'. In today's 'open culture market', negotiation has become more evident in that individuals make choices, adopting cultural elements from many different sources and adapting them to suit the needs of the times.[26]

The increase in free choice over how to adapt culture can lead to the questioning of group wisdoms and the contesting of group leadership. This occurs when it is difficult to reach agreement on the meanings of culture and, when it does occur, cultural change is no longer smooth. We then enter the realm of cultural politics, where 'culture' in its broader sense of a 'way of life' and in its narrower senses of aesthetics, taste and style cannot be divorced from 'political' questions about power, inequality and even oppression.[27] Furthermore, one of the implications of championing Jewish multiculturalism and of giving cultural politics their due has been that the fine line between religion and everyday living has become blurred.

The role of new Jewish culture in Europe is a socializing one, an attempt to create new social networks that aim at universalization.

Just as no culture is static, so no cultural change is spontaneous. Though Jewish cultures have continuously changed through time, the changes have never been either impromptu or improvised. Cultural change has traditionally been controlled by 'directors' and 'producers'—rabbis, members of rabbinic courts, and influential lay intermediaries—who have acted as gatekeepers. The designers of Jewish cultures used them to re-construct themselves, and the successful ones were self-reinforcing, creating a sense of empowerment. Thus, the role of new Jewish culture in Europe is, in a sense, a socializing one, an attempt to create new social networks that aim at universalization. They thus can compete with Zionism and (ultra-)Orthodoxy.

9 Cultural politics and Jewish culture

Conventional approaches to culture in academic Jewish studies have adopted historical perspectives, and have sought to highlight both the glories and tragedies of the past. They have looked back rather than tried to understand the present and scrutinize the future. Modern cultural politics have provided both intellectual rationale and academic legitimacy for social scientists to study many issues that encompass Jewish cultures, such as ethnography and racism, art, music and food. All of these, under different rubrics, had traditionally been within the domain of 'defenders of the faith'—historians, philosophers and, most significantly, interpreters of religion.

From the traditional religious Jewish viewpoint, today's attempts to define Jewish cultures along ethnic lines are viewed as no more than a transient cultural aberration, doomed to failure as any such attempts have been in the past. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the caveat of Calvin Goldscheider and Alan Zuckerman that for most Jews most of the time, ideologies and beliefs have only justified decisions that had already been reached on other grounds, and that we tend to over-emphasise the importance of intellectual writings because of their visibility.[28] In other words, how Jews act and what they actually do should be at least as important as what they write and think.

Creation of new Jewish cultures or the adaptation of existing ones are examples of cultural politics at work. The Jewish debate over orthodoxy and dissidence is not new but it has taken on a different character, and Jewish culture is more disputed than ever. In today's disputes, reform of, or strict adherence to, religious beliefs and practices, and the relationship with Zionism and Israel, are usually prominent. The debates are usually variants of the contention that because religion is no longer of daily importance for most Jews, and belief has become more of a personal than a group matter, normative Judaism no longer determines the character of Jewish culture to the extent that it once did.

To some extent among Jews, Zionism had become a surrogate for religion, but with the nation-state losing some of its gloss the myths surrounding Israel's creation have largely been shattered. This is especially so in North America where the nation-state ideal has never been particularly attractive, and an ideology such as Zionism is seen today by some as less, if not less than, relevant. Thus there is a need to attempt to formulate alternative paths of action.

As a counter force to religion and nationalist ideologies as the principal moulders of Jewish culture, Jewish ethnicity has become a more

26 See Stanley Waterman, 'Keeping a distance: Israel at 50' in *Political Geography*, vol. 18 (forthcoming 1999).

27 Peter Jackson, 'Towards a cultural politics of consumption' in J. Bird, B. Curtis, T. Putnam, G. Robertson and L. Tickner (eds.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge 1993), 209.

28 Goldscheider and Zuckerman, 240.

significant factor in the formulation of Jewish peoplehood.[29] Though Jewish ethnicity draws partly on religion, belonging to an *ethnie* has become, in itself, as pertinent for altering, creating and maintaining Jewish cultures as are religious precepts or nationalist imperatives. Thus the characteristic that distinguishes the new Jewish condition from its forebears, especially outside Israel, is the fulcral position attached to the social and cultural at the expense of the religious or nationalist. In reality, emphasis has shifted from the production of Jewish culture to its consumption. Jewish culture, as it appears in its new ethnic forms, is not just acquired and 'consumed' as a product; people try to accord it meaning by actively incorporating it into their lives. Ethnic definitions of Jewish culture are in the mainstream of today's Jewish discourse, and highlight the 'commodification' of culture in an era of consumerism.

In an era in which religious beliefs and myths have largely been replaced by Jewish ethnic emotions and affiliations, the question arises as to what happens to the culture that is produced and consumed.

Although the American sociologist Sharon Zukin has stated that culture is a *'fait accompli'*, it does, in reality, have another facet.[30] The variety embedded in contemporary Jewish cultures results from attempts to come to terms with the demands placed by many competing 'patrons', who differ over the definition of symbols and their spaces. This is a feature of culture that has come more to the fore in today's secular world. As a result, culture has become, in Zukin's words, an 'agent of change'. It is no longer solely a reflection of civilization: it has become a tool utilizing images not only as saleable commodities but also as the basis of tourist and real estate markets and visions of collective identity.

10 Changing Jewish culture

In the conventional historical view, religious beliefs and practices are the principal symbols of collective Jewish identity. They were part-and-parcel of Jewish culture and had a functional relationship with the values underlying social life and with Jewish institutions. Religious tenets had considerable inertia because their development and legitimation are profoundly implicated in group life, social class and organizations—and in elite interests. Judaic culture was dominated by fundamental beliefs—in God and His commandments contained in the Torah, in their interpretations through Talmudic discourse, in symbolic redemption upon the coming of the Messiah and in a return to Zion (which has become a practical reality over the past century).[31] In Diaspora and exile, these beliefs were the mortar that kept the bricks of the Jewish people together; Torah was, indeed, a 'movable territory'.[32]

Cultures originate in creative power and creativity is intensely experienced in the unfolding of a new culture. As every culture basks in creativity, one can be sure that important changes are taking place.[33]

Cultures are marked by the strength with which they can fashion and frame peoples' lives; healthy cultures are those whose uniqueness can overcome external forces, even when these forces are absorbed and assimilated. As new cultures do not usually break completely with the past, all Jewish cultures seek some inspiration from earlier forms. In an era in which religious beliefs and myths have largely been replaced by Jewish ethnic emotions and affiliations, the question arises as to what happens to the culture that is produced and consumed.

Intense creativity in the early stages of cultural production is followed by consolidation and institutionalization and, finally, a culture becomes a reality that feels like 'second nature'. But great events and acts require new interpretation; decisive breakthroughs cannot be ignored or left unchallenged. A Jewish world that has experienced both the trauma of the Holocaust and the establishment of a Jewish nation-state, a Jewish world that is confronted with such relative novelties as democracy and globalization in both of which choice and availability have high priorities, has no alternative but to react and is naturally in a state of flux as it attempts to re-define itself. Legitimate questions can thus be raised about whether 'new' Jewish cultures are being produced today and, if so, for whom.

Imprecise parallels abound. Studying variations in the patterns of cultural provision in contemporary American cities, the sociologist Judith Blau

29 See Stephen Miller, Marlena Schmool and Antony Lerman, *Social and political attitudes of British Jews: some key findings of the JPR survey*, JPR Report, No. 1, February 1996.

30 Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge MA and London: Blackwell 1995), 113.

31 Shmueli, chapters 1 and 2.

32 See Emmanuel Maier, 'Torah as movable territory' in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 65, 1975, 18-24.

33 Shmueli, 24-5.

distinguished between 'élite culture' and 'culture with broad popular appeal'.[34] Élite culture includes special interest museums and galleries, opera and festivals, orchestras, ballet and dance companies, contemporary chamber ensemble companies, and professional non-profit and commercial theatres, whereas popular culture comprises popular music concerts, general interest museums, cinemas, bands, dance halls, variety establishments, country music festivals, and craft fairs. Culture with broad popular appeal is often represented as the 'consciousness industry', as a form of social control by an elite interested in advancing its own interests.

Of course, it is easy to canonize aspects of a culture, and the emergence of political and cultural elites defining themselves as a dominant class establishing social distance between themselves and the rank and file is inevitable. These elites then develop new cultural institutions to entrench their positions. This has happened, for example, in the arts world where support for the arts was an important part of the process whereby elites differentiated high art from mass entertainment, constructing new hierarchies of taste and discrimination. They refined culture, and differentiated between 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' genres.[35]

In more recent times, even traditional religious Jewish cultures have taken on a somewhat elitist format in which only cognoscenti are part of the production process; these are also, for the most part, the main consumers, leaving the mass of the Jewish population out on a limb. Élite Jewish cultures speak to an elite population—rabbis and others who take their Judaism seriously. Perhaps Judaism has always been so: in former Jewish cultures, the prophets, priests and rabbis formed a small elite of the population; by the nineteenth century, learning had spread so that the followers of elite Jewish cultures became more numerous. Even so, the majority of Jews followed a form of mass culture in which music and song, popular and liturgical, prayer in synagogues, and observing religious precepts as part of a way of life, were important.

Legitimating an elite is one of the most crucial roles in the progress of any culture, and modern Jewish cultures are no exception. Whereas until recently it was relatively easy to define the Jewish elite, it had begun to be more complex by the end of the nineteenth century and, by the end of this century, it had become altogether more difficult. Individual Jews who have made their reputations in the wider society rather than within the Jewish community, Jewish politicians, commercial interests and image-makers, all vie with the traditional religious elite to take over what is portrayed as Jewish culture. Entrepreneurs and agents produce films in which Jews and Jewish society and culture form the focal point; much the same can be said about radio and music, and the staging of festivals of Jewish interest. This only reflects a wider condition in the field of culture in which art, music and sport—to mention the more prominent examples—have been commandeered by marketing agencies and managers and transformed from arts and culture into arts and culture industries.[36] If this can occur in art and sport, what is to stop it from happening also to an ethnic culture, especially when religion no longer plays the leading role that it once did?

11 Cultures and place

As with many other cultures, Jewish cultures are often connected to place and many have had strong place identification. Sometimes, a Jewish culture can even help define a place. The current Jewish community of Prague is all but invisible, yet the Jewish cultures of Prague play an important role in constructing the present image of that city. New York in general, and the Lower East Side in particular, the East End of London and many other sites became places in the cultural sense because of the role played by Jews and their cultures in their development. There is nothing new here. The Canadian geographer Ted Relph has argued that all places are culturally defined and that strict cartographic location is merely an incidental quality; Sharon Zukin reiterated this when she wrote that place was a cultural artifact of social conflict and cohesion.[37] Of course, place-boundedness is not necessarily a prerequisite for the development of a Jewish culture. Many Diaspora Jewish cultures, parts of which are ubiquitous if not universal, arose without conscious reference to the places in which the Jews lived, although they did relate to a mythical Zion, the place to which Jewish people were eventually destined to return.

34 Judith R. Blau, 'High culture as mass culture' in A. W. Foster and J. R. Blau (eds.), *Art and Society—Readings in the Sociology of the Arts* (Albany: SUNY Press 1989), 430-9.

35 See Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1988).

36 See Norman Lebrecht, *When the Music Stops: Managers, Maestros, and the Corporate Murder of Classical Music* (London: Simon and Schuster 1996).

37 Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1991), 12.

But perhaps places have become more important in contemporary Jewish Diaspora cultures than in the past. Place promotion has become an important actor on the stage of local and regional economic regeneration over the years. Selling a place to the wider world, or selling the culture as an inseparable part of a place, rapidly becomes a significant facet of many forms of Jewish culture. If the selling is successful, then the culture becomes an important image-maker in its own right. The place facets of Jewish cultures cannot be altogether divorced from the commercial sides of tourism, regional and local economy and place promotion, because place promotion and special-event tourism represent large commercial interests. This feature highlights latent tensions between culture as authenticity and culture as economics, perhaps the most prominent issue of all in the competition for acceptance among various pretenders to the crown of Jewish culture. Jewish cultures are, then, likely to become caught up in the politics and economics of currying favour with government subsidizers or commercial sponsors, considering what their potential audiences desire and taking care to be politically correct.[38]

Jewish cultures are likely to become caught up in the politics and economics of currying favour with government subsidizers or commercial sponsors, considering what their potential audiences desire and taking care to be politically correct.

There is a need to create a favourable cultural milieu, especially for creative talent, to reach Jewish populations that have not been actively involved in the affairs of Jewish communities and in the production of Jewish cultures. In the cultural environment of the postmodern era, it is increasingly necessary to harness whatever creative talent exists, and combine it with sponsorship and marketing skills. This may mean developing festivals and other special events, organizing competitions, and making awards as incentives and stimuli in order to further these aims.

This trend can be expected to continue as the promotion of Jewish cultures has now become an important attraction for private business. Jewish cultures are seen by promoters as image-makers, attractions, investments and catalysts for other developments such as tourism development. Indeed, the tourism facet of a Jewish culture appears to be as consequential as the cultural facet, and it is probably impossible to examine many aspects of a contemporary Jewish culture without relating it to 'special event tourism', whether this is the fiftieth anniversary of the state of Israel or a festival of Jewish music. Jewish tourism is attracted to specific places. In addition to Israel, Jewish tourists are 'attracted' in relatively large numbers to centres such as Prague, Toledo and, indeed, Auschwitz.

Promoting a Jewish culture can also serve as a public relations event for a locality; it can draw in tourists and generally enhances the promotion of a local and regional economy—Jewish film festivals are currently all the rage. However, the balance between a Jewish festival as a medium for selling a place and a more 'genuine local tradition'—whether authentic or invented—is variable. Though the promotion of Jewish culture may not reflect any specific local awareness or tradition, and may actually be designed to declaim the locality's reputation in the world, the promotion of Jewish culture generally has a strong local element. The participants are predominantly local and the local economy rapidly recognizes the commercial virtues of something which succeeds.

Festivals of Jewish culture are often planned with the revitalization of local Jewish life in mind, by offering opportunities to partake of Jewish culture in informal settings and attractive environments. This can create a bandwagon effect as communities scramble to copy the idea, and as these projects are often initially élite-led, they are often directed towards high culture (i.e. artistic creativeness) in order to achieve objectives initially set by the élite. This can, of course, exacerbate latent tensions between cultural regeneration—concerned with community self-development and self-expression—an internal orientation, and cultural exhibition—with its external projection towards society at large.[39]

In the case of Jewish cultures, prestige projects and place marketing do not necessarily contribute to cultural regeneration: they are more inclined to bring benefits to the local Jewish establishment and to cultural tourists. Place-marketing also tends to encourage a 'safe' Jewish culture that can attract commercial sponsors and substantial audiences, and which offends few. A good example of this is the amount of funds available for Holocaust-related 'culture'. Investment in the Holocaust culture industry finds many backers and not only does it generally not displease anyone, but it strikes a sympathetic chord among Jewish

38 See Waterman, 'Carnivals for élites? . . .'.

39 Justin Lewis, *Art, Culture and Enterprise* (London: Routledge 1990), chapter 7.

and non-Jewish cultural consumers alike. This shows that the interests and agendas of sponsors are very important elements in the production and reproduction of culture. Even Holocaust-related events can find themselves in competition with other Jewish events, more attractive in the sense that they are less gloomy. In this vein, it is easier to find funding for a blockbuster evening of cantorial music or of Israeli folk-songs in a large, underused synagogue than for a lecture on the production of culture in the concentration camps held in a small hall. There are dangers in linking such cultural development too closely with place-focused development. Whereas the strategy might be a success economically, it is, in the long run, often less beneficial culturally.

As often as not, there are real and sharp differences between Jewish culture as it is frequently promoted, and traditional forms of culture rooted in religious beliefs and everyday life. Whereas traditional cultures were of the people, there is a tendency today to distinguish between active and passive participants. Contemporary attempts to 'perform' Jewish culture have become detached from everyday life. The ability to display or perform their Jewish culture, usually away from the centres of Jewish life, often with friends or colleagues, has traditionally been a means of performing a *mitzvah* (good deed). With the current commercialization of festivals, however, there is a possible risk that presenting Jewish culture may metamorphose into a sort of busman's holiday in which the active participants interact only with one another, the exact opposite of the cultural renewal that was intended.

Despite five decades devoted to social and cultural integration in Israel and a degree of success, it is impossible to describe a representative Israeli culture.

Contemporary Jewish culture can act on consumers in ways that endow them with personal qualities that can be displayed in widening contexts. One comes to be distinguished, not simply through the consumption of Jewish products, but by consuming symbols and for 'having been there'. Moreover, the symbolic, social and political meaning of the culture as well as the historical circumstances within which it is situated are significant aspects of the production of meaning.

It is possible to organize Jewish cultural events to be either exclusive or inclusive, using sophisticated or crude means, transparently or tacitly. Information is often transmitted through brochures and programmes, press advertisements and broadcast media. The repertoire for Jewish cultural events can be, and often is, constructed upon a format that favours those with a specific cultural background and/or education. On the whole, it reaches those who are in tune with the ethnic wavelength but, with a little effort, it can also reach others. Preferential booking for events can help ensure that a 'desirable' audience forms the bulk of those attending; social etiquette based on ethnic norms, restricting the attractiveness of the event to a self-chosen group, is another method often used. Of course, this all begs a difficult question that is not always asked—who a consumer of Jewish culture is supposed to be.

12 European Jewish cultures and Israeli Jewish cultures

However we define European Jewish culture, there is a problem concerning its interaction with Israeli culture. Perhaps a generous way to sum up Israeli (Zionist) attitudes to Diaspora communities over the past century would be to say that Diaspora Jews are totally dependent on Israel for their ultimate survival—unless they wish to survive within the constraints of ultra-Orthodox Judaism. This perspective on the Israel-Diaspora relationship has two implications. On the one hand, there is little that European Jews can offer Israel except themselves; on the other hand, many Israelis look upon European Jews as a lost cause, with little to offer Israel except history and folklore and, perhaps, the incentive of being collectively part of an important business network for Israel.

Despite five decades devoted to social and cultural integration in Israel and a degree of success, it is impossible to describe a representative Israeli culture. The culture debate in Israel in which Jews of European stock regarded the others from a viewpoint of Jewish Orientalism, dormant for so many years, has now become active, and Israeli identity and Israeli culture are now actively contested between Ashkenazi (European) and Mizrachi (Oriental), between secular and religious, between conservatism and liberalism. With the massive influx in the 1950s of immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East, who soon outnumbered the other ethnic groups in Israeli society, it was only natural that they should eventually begin to flex their muscles. They made their presence felt through politics and, by the 1990s, there was an accompanying decline in the influence of secular Ashkenazi Jews. At the same time, the power of the Orthodox also rose, as over the past two decades, they came to hold the

balance of power between the two large secular voting blocs. As a result, there are now open conflicts over the definition of culture, and over what it is to have culture, in Israel.[40]

During the period of Ashkenazi dominance, there was interest in so-called popular or ethnic 'cultures' or 'traditions', mainly for their curiosity value. The 'integration' that Israel sought in the 1950s could only be a one-way process and Orientals were to become part of a secular, Western society. Today's debate about culture in Israel acknowledges the widening rift between cultures, and the complexities of the plural nature of Israeli society. Israeli culture is no longer a question of aesthetics (as if it were ever that!) and has become one of power, of access to and control over resources, and over people. This serves further to segment a society which is increasingly retreating from the challenge of creating a national culture.[41] In this respect, Israeli society, like that of the United States, may also be entering what Todd Gitlin has called a 'twilight of common dreams'.[42]

This, of course, begs the issue of what Israeli culture is or what it is trying to be. There are divergent cultural traditions in Israel but there has traditionally been a privileging of European affiliation. Much of what was traditionally perceived as 'culture' in Israel—as Israeli 'culture'—no longer applies. In 1990s Israel, it is not politically correct to trumpet traditional European high culture too loudly, as revisionist versions of oriental cultures, religious fundamentalism, territorial nationalism and American-style philistinism all offer virulent competition in the contest to fashion an 'authentic' Israeli identity.[43]

When Israeli culture was considered to be a variant of Central European culture, it represented Israel looking out towards a wider world. Today, forms of Israeli culture have become more diverse while at the same time Israelis have become much more inward-looking. In the Israeli context, the emergence of new Sephardi revisionist historical thinking is complex, and the social forces that have brought it about are motivated as much by welfare politics as by religious revivalism. The land fetish of the National Religious Party, too, is as important as any fundamental regeneration of religious beliefs.

The intense competition among the religious parties in Israel for votes has brought about a concentration of effort on introspection and particularism, at the expense of contact with the outside world. This introspection has made Israelis more suspicious than ever of Gentile cultures to which Jews had made important contributions. Contemporaneous with this increased tendency of Israelis over the past decade-and-a-half to look inwards has been the development of an obsessive culture of material consumption, modelled on a vaguely American lifestyle that reveres commodification and rewards commercialism. The upshot of these parallel processes, which is of particular significance to the relations between Jews in Israel and Jews in Europe, is that there has been a distancing of Israeli values and cultures from European ones. In their place, American values have come to the fore as the principal external forces in the almost impossible competition to fashion an 'authentic' Israeli identity.

Moreover, as Zionism has arrogated to Israel the right to speak for all Jews (whether or not they wish to be spoken for) and to rescue all Jews from the 'mire' of the Diaspora, self-expression on the part of Diaspora Jews that deviates from the Zionist line is regarded as an aberration. The United States community has discovered this (to its displeasure if not necessarily to its detriment), but the smaller European communities are more vulnerable to Israeli pressure in this respect and must contend with a much more difficult task. The current crisis with American Jewry over the issues of peace and Orthodoxy v. Reform and Conservative, in the context of an Israel whose military and economic future is no longer in doubt, is leading to a breakdown of Zionist claims to universalism and hegemony. Put simply, Israel does not look favourably upon Diaspora Jewish communities that choose to express themselves independently.

This superior disposition has been complicated in recent years by the renaissance of Orthodox Judaism in Israel and the competition among its principal strains, all of which has made real dialogue with either non-Zionist and non-Orthodox Jews more difficult than ever before. Since 1948 the Jewish Agency has sent 'emissaries' to European and other communities, whose ultimate objective has been to encourage emigration to Israel. Failing the fulfilment of this mission, an interim aim was to ensure a Jewish education for those choosing to remain in the Diaspora; and if this 'Jewish education' was not strictly religious, it was designed to ensure sympathetic support for

40 Virginia R. Domínguez, *People as Subject, People as Object: Selfhood and Peoplehood in Contemporary Israel* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press 1989), esp. 96-191.
41 Stanley Waterman, 'Place, culture, identity: summer music in upper Galilee' in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 23, no. 2, 253-67.
42 Gitlin.
43 Waterman , 'Place, culture, identity . . .'.

Israeli ideals and policies among Diaspora Jews. Whereas North American Jewry is still large and strong enough to withstand some of these pressures and make its presence felt both politically and culturally, the smaller European communities feel their dependence on Zionism and Orthodoxy more acutely. It could be said that, in cultural terms, European Jews today are recipients rather than contributors to overall Jewish culture, almost the exact reversal of the situation a century ago. This imbalance and lack of equality make fertile and reciprocal interaction with Israeli culture difficult to pursue.

13 Size, markets and the marketing of Jewish culture

A major problem facing many European Jewish communities is the small size of their populations. Small size implies that aspects of economies of scale have to be taken into account and that, as a consequence, much of the development of local Jewish cultures must be aimed not just at Jews but at the non-Jewish population. Thus, in smaller Jewish centres, secular Jewish events such as festivals of Jewish literature, music, or even cuisine must be directed principally not at members of the Jewish community but at the general population in order to ensure financial, and perhaps even intellectual, viability. Were they to be oriented solely towards the *ethnie*, and especially when the cultural issue is not of a religious nature, interest may not be kept at a sufficient level to permit the event to be staged in the first place.

In smaller Jewish centres, secular Jewish events must be directed principally not at members of the Jewish community but at the general population in order to ensure financial, and perhaps even intellectual, viability.

By being 'other-oriented', these ostensibly Jewish events are usually directed towards the past, in which case they reflect heritage rather than the active creation and re-creation of a culture. Such secular (ethnic) events offer little of intrinsic interest to Jews whose identities are directly connected to religious beliefs and practices. If, on the other hand, they place emphasis on a local Jewish community in relation to other ethnic groups in a locality, they are of little interest to Israel or those with a Zionist outlook.

If Jewish cultures are being produced and disseminated in this way to a wider audience than the members of the Jewish ethnic group, how does this influence their content and character? For any cultural or ethnic group to claim the sole right to represent itself *vis-à-vis* society at large or to have veto powers over the way in which it is depicted is, in many eyes, the antithesis of a plural or multicultural society. At the same time, to have a situation in which image-makers who are unfamiliar with the group and with intragroup diversity and nuances create the images of the group for external consumption seems to many to be bordering on a travesty. Yet, this is the price we pay for democracy and freedom of speech and other forms of expression. It is also what occurs in a postmodern era when images and statements are deconstructed and analyzed, and then reconstructed to suit an almost infinite variety of people and situations. A good example of this is provided by one of the world's leading newspapers, the *New York Times* which, by virtue of being published in a city with a large Jewish population, has a wide Jewish readership. However, its news and articles with Jewish content are not written specifically for the paper's Jewish readers and are certainly not read solely by them; 'concerned' Jews can present Jewish views by way of 'op-ed' articles or letters to the editor.

An important question, then, is who the consumers of Jewish culture should be. Although Jewish culture must be related primarily to the continuity of the Jewish *ethnie*, it is not produced today solely for the edification of the members of the *ethnie*. It is also produced for a wider public—to inform them, as it were, of the cultural activities that are (or were) part of a Jewish way of life.

This issue can be stated in another way. Like all kinds of culture in today's world, whether it be classical music, sport or aspects of lifestyle, to what extent has the production of Jewish cultures been commercialized and made into a commodity? And, following on from the question concerning who the consumers of Jewish cultures might be, is who *should* produce these cultures? For instance, a documentary film on music-making in Theresienstadt, or on relations between Muslims and Jews, or on medical and moral issues relating to circumcision are not made solely or even primarily for Jewish audiences. Some might say that they are not made with Jewish viewers in mind at all but are produced for the enlightenment of the public-at-large, as part of broader issues within public discourse. Some are also produced with the express aim of making money. The question underlying this, of course, is one that perplexes many Jews and others. What is it about Jews and Jewish cultures that makes them sufficiently attractive or interesting to non-Jews, to the extent that they might even consider absorbing parts of Jewish cultures into their own cultural

milieux? Perhaps the Jewish obsession with self drives the film producers, writers and artists, and this is then imposed on a market because the 'producers' are so heavily Jewish.

A similar situation has been created with the blossoming of academic departments and university chairs devoted to Jewish studies. (Judaic studies, theology and classical Hebrew have been integral parts of the academic curriculum at many European and American universities for centuries.) The recent rise of Jewish studies at universities throughout Europe can be seen as part of a trend, widely observed in institutions of higher education, towards understanding the increasingly pluralist nature of many of the societies in which they are located, or of appreciating a past in which society was less homogeneous or of placing the national self in a world that is vicariously familiar and frighteningly foreign. Thus establishing a department of Jewish studies is best seen alongside the founding of a school of area studies in which students are taught about exotic cultures (Japanese, Chinese, Indian, American), a department of community studies with courses in ethnic pluralism, intercommunal interaction, community mutual aid projects, and the like, or a faculty of local or national studies (read: Celtic heritage or German history). In some countries, a commitment to Holocaust education has been a contributing factor. At any rate, this is a form of culture that is basically being consumed by outsiders; it is also to a large degree being produced by outsiders.

In Europe, unlike in the United States, where there is a large Jewish student population, Jewish studies programmes are established within institutions which, in the vast majority of cases, are secular environments frequented primarily by Gentiles. In most cases, the Jewish presence among both students and academic staff is minimal. Courses and research programmes in Jewish studies are not aimed primarily at Jews; most are not aimed at Jews at all. The end result is that most of the potential clients for these programmes are non-Jews. Introductory courses in Yiddish and Ladino language and literature, Jewish mysticism, philosophy and history, courses in Jewish music and musicology, the origin of Ladino ballads or klezmer music, seminars such as 'the Jew in English drama' or 'the sociology of the ghetto' are not designed with Jewish students in mind, although some thought might well be given to producing a commodity with a sympathetic view of the Jews. (There may, of course, be a simpler explanation: universities need money, and some are willing to accept Jewish studies as a sort of 'loss leader', in the hope of drawing donors more closely to the university).

Not only is there an 'other-oriented' approach in the establishment and maintenance of Jewish studies programmes at academic institutions but, where they are located in places with sizeable Jewish populations, there may well be little contact between the local Jews and the department. Not only is lack of contact common but, as the academic staff and students—even Jews—are often outsiders (at least from the viewpoints of the local Jewish communities), this is frequently an added incentive to maintain more than a cautious distance.

There is a similar effect even where academic study is not the issue and high culture is not being produced and consumed. Situations that engender tensions within the local Jewish establishment and between it and the general society may arise with the establishment of a local Jewish museum, a particular form of local history museum. This occurred in the case of the Manchester Jewish Museum, founded in 1984 on the initiative of a non-Jewish academic and supported by Manchester City Council. The museum's aim was to illustrate the immigrant experience in Manchester at the turn of the century and it did not serve any particular contemporary Jewish purpose. It is depicted as part of the 'Attractions and Tours' category of Manchester City Council's Internet site.

A similar situation might arise with the refurbishment of a synagogue that had formerly served a substantial Jewish population and is of architectural value. The local Jewish community cannot find a suitable benefactor to undertake this task and does not have the resources to undertake such a venture on its own; nor is the Israeli government interested in supporting such a venture. On the other hand, the local or national government views it as being part of the city or national heritage and renovates it using public funds. The often minuscule local Jewish community, in need of a community centre, approaches the authorities and the synagogue becomes a meeting place for local Jews. However, its use as a local heritage site, or a venue for cultural events such as lectures or concerts, may clash with its use for prayer and as a community centre by the extant Jewish community which may well be viewed, at best, as an unavoidable nuisance.

Underused synagogues, local Jewish heritage museums, festivals of Jewish culture, university departments of Jewish studies, all become vehicles for the transmission of versions of Jewish culture, prompting the question of for whom the culture is being produced. The desire to be politically correct in pluralist societies that are increasingly becoming multicultural, the

inevitable commercialization and commodification, and the need to be economically viable when public subsidies are less forthcoming than before, mean that the production of the non-religious elements of Jewish cultures is slipping from the hands of Jewish publicly-supported and voluntary bodies into those of Jewish and Gentile entrepreneurs and bureaucrats.

To what extent must the producers of culture adapt themselves to the political desires of the subsidizers and the sponsors? Though there is a considerable Jewish media presence in much of Western Europe, more and more of what might be thought of as Jewish culture is controlled by non-Jews. From a Jewish viewpoint, the peril once more is that this might mean that Jewish culture is being produced in ways that do not necessarily serve the needs of the ethnic group itself. This is not to say that this must necessarily lead to active antisemitism; however, benign neglect of the sensitivities of Jews might have a similar effect.

'Unauthorized' and uncensored interpretations of what purports to be Jewish heritage or culture now reach a wide audience and, what is more, the washing of dirty linen in public is never very flattering to those whose laundry is being done.

Though there may well be in some countries, as antisemites enjoy pointing out, a somewhat disproportionate presence of persons of Jewish origin in both the print and broadcast media—as proprietors, producers and directors, editors, commentators and presenters—Jews are a far cry from being in control of the media. This discomfiture of many identifying European Jews with a pluralist and multicultural Europe revolves around many of these issues. The discomfiture emanates from a situation in which the representation of Jewish culture in the media and the marketing of many elements of Jewish culture are outside the direct influence of people who regard themselves as the morally or institutionally legitimate (these are not necessarily identical) spokespersons and interpreters. Even more threatening (again from the institutional Jewish viewpoint) than lack of direct influence over the content of Jewish material in the media is that in the age of information, there is decreasing control over who will hear, see or read what is presented and represented.

In other words, the *transmission* of Jewish culture, which used to be primarily in the hands of 'practising' Jews, has now become the *marketing* of Jewish culture. Or, perhaps more accurately, the transfer of those elements of Jewish culture deemed to be of more general interest has passed into the hands of Jews less steeped in traditional lore, as well as to outsiders. Thus, allusions to what passes for Jewish culture can now be found in the press and the broadcast media, in the theatre and on film, in music and place-marketing, and elsewhere, often with the direct and indirect support of government agencies and 'quangos', commercial companies and advertising agencies, often in support of aims that have little, if anything, to do with the Jewish communities themselves.

In this sense, 'unauthorized' and uncensored interpretations of what purports to be Jewish heritage or culture now reach a wide audience and, what is more, the washing of dirty linen in public is never very flattering to those whose laundry is being done. The cultural politics of circumcision, ostentatious bar mitzvah celebrations, or a Jewish woman attempting to acquire a *get* (Jewish religious divorce) from a reluctant husband, make for interesting copy or viewing time, but they may embarrass many Jews who prefer to be reminded that Kirk Douglas is a Jew, that Israel won the 1967 war against the Arab states in six days, that Yitzhak Perlman was born in Israel to Holocaust survivors, or that what happened to Jews in Europe in the 1930s or 1940s was considerably more real than what is depicted in films such as *Schindler's List* or *The Garden of the Finzi-Contini*.

This leads to issues such as the links between the production of Jewish cultures and tourism. For instance, why do countries which have harboured antisemitism or have otherwise been hostile environments for Jews at various times in their histories, such as Spain or Poland, emphasize their Jewish connections? And how do these societies, in which there are currently small Jewish populations, market their Jewish connections and Jewish histories? Do they do this by emphasizing the Jews as a unique group or as part of the wider history of society in each country? A mirror picture of this issue, incidentally, is how Israel copes with and markets Christianity—to the Gentile world and to Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora.

In this respect, the regional differences in what constitutes Jewish culture in Europe come to the fore. A question that can be posed here pertains to how Jewish cultures will appear when the principal aim is to supplement the local and national histories of Prague, Salonika or the East End of London. These representations provide dilemmas not only for the Jews, but also for the Czechs, the Greeks and the British.

14 Jewish culture in twenty-first century Europe

What future can there be for European Jewish cultures as we enter the next century? While there is patently no pan-European culture or society, there are many common elements throughout the continent, more than there has been for a long time. Today's European states are mostly democratic with market-led, consumer-oriented economies, with a tendency towards a 'Hollywoodization' that encourages a blander, more homogeneous Europe. Obviously, Europeans still eat and drink different foods and speak different languages—and some Europeans of different hues are still prejudiced against one another in the same way as in the past. Nevertheless, the potential for communication has undoubtedly increased, both between Jewish communities separated by relatively great distances and between Jews and other groups with whom they share space as neighbours. Developments in communication can work ostensibly to benefit Jews, facilitating latent contacts between individuals and communities and uncovering much of the so-called Jewish mystique, effectively undemonizing them. At the same time, this new situation allows Jews to absorb and assimilate elements from wider society ever more rapidly, implying a detrimental effect.

Creativity in culture in order to facilitate its survival can be understood in at least two different ways. On the one hand, it allows a culture to change from within, to adapt, to find ways of neutralizing aspects of other cultures deemed potentially hostile, as in Orthodoxy and ultra-Orthodoxy. The creative reactions by Jews to threats of modern, postmodern and post-industrial societies range from erecting barriers around the culture, permitting minimal change by social and cultural osmosis (as in the case of ultra-Orthodoxy), to adapting religious precepts and practices to meet the needs of a modern Western society (as in the case of Reform Judaism). At the same time, creativity also means being able to influence the wider society, to change it in such ways as to allow Jews to operate more freely, to make it more tolerant, more open. As Orthodoxy (and its ultra-Orthodox variant) become de-Europeanized, they become more opposed to non-religious art forms of all kinds and, therefore, by extension, they are at least potentially unlikely to be allies of European Jewries seeking their own means of expression.

Most extant European Jewish communities are small or medium-sized, and in these smaller communities, almost all of what purports to be Jewish culture must be imported. This stands unfavourably and in contrast with earlier European or current American or Israeli Jewish cultures, which are sufficiently large and vibrant to produce their own culture and consume much of what they produce. The main sources for the importation of extraneous cultural material are therefore either Israel or North America, counteracting elements that emanate from the surrounding Gentile culture. It thus seems that the size of a community and its geographical distribution and overall density, all of which affect the potential for human interaction, imply a greater probability of viability.

With the exception of the French and British communities and those of Russia and Ukraine, European Jewish communities tend towards the small end of the scale. Despite their numbers, the communities of the former Soviet Union were effectively isolated culturally from mainstream Jewish cultures for several decades. Nevertheless, much can be learned from the ways in which these communities behaved in the 1970s and 1980s. The dissidents were for the most part self-taught; they sought help from outside but received it in only a limited form. Their pro-activeness led the way to new forms of Jewish self-identity, awareness and pride among the more marginal and less self-assured members of the *ethnie*. They expressed their Jewishness through study of Jewish history, literature and the Hebrew language, through an identification with religion if not through its practice, and mainly through focusing on the pride and self-esteem generated by ethnic identity itself. Although numerically large, Soviet Jewry faced many of the problems of much smaller communities.

Though small size undoubtedly places communities at some disadvantage, disadvantage should not be interpreted as coincidental with failure. There are several small cultural communities throughout the world that successfully maintain their cultures while adopting elements from larger and more powerful ones. As *The Economist* recently reported, 'Iceland is an oddity. With a population of just under 270,000, it is easily the smallest member of the OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development], . . . yet it has all the trappings of a modern state: its own language, currency and central bank, an airline and ambassadors, and a fine body of literature.' *The Economist* explains that economies of scale are traded off against a desire to share a country with people you like. At the end of the twentieth century, in a world in which small states are tolerated and in which some small states are highly successful, being small and independent can be a distinct advantage, allowing groups that would otherwise

be insignificant minorities to survive and flourish.[44] In tolerant societies, Jewish communities can behave rather like the Icelanders, a small dispersed community with a language and distinct culture of their own, who have been forced into closer contact with mainland Europe in this century and from which they have adopted many cultural elements and culture traits, without relinquishing too much of their own.

Nurturing Jewish culture in a tolerant environment is extremely hazardous. There is no guarantee that the aims of the minorities and the sponsoring institutions are identical.

In today's Europe, in particular one in which the European Union already has fifteen members with others queuing to join, multiculturalism is both politically correct and generally expedient. No modern European state that espouses liberalism and tolerance can be seen to discriminate against any group that is simply attempting to express its unique qualities while its members assert that they are just loyal citizens of the state who, occasionally, do some things in a different way. So, governments have been willing to budget for multicultural societies in ways that permit ethnic, religious, social, or cultural minorities to express their differences. Grants towards the construction, renovation or maintenance of places of worship, subsidies for ethnic festivals or carnivals, sponsorship for ethnic or religious studies at universities, colleges and schools are all ways in which state and local governments can be seen to support expressions of diversity within the society.

Nevertheless, nurturing Jewish culture in a tolerant environment is extremely hazardous. There is no guarantee that the aims of the minorities and the sponsoring institutions—be they state or local governments, 'quangos', organizations and institutions such as universities, commercial corporations, or private donors—are identical. Let us consider, for example, a television company that commissions a private film producer to make a documentary on a particular topic concerning a specific ethnic group because it considers it interesting (topical), quaint (a curiosity), or promising financial returns on an investment (commercial). In commissioning this work, the company may or may not have in mind the interests of the particular group that is the subject of the documentary; it may or not even be aware of the individuals' sensitivities; it may or may not choose to discuss certain issues and topics with members or representatives of the group, preferring to liaise with non-group experts instead. It may not even consider the group that is the subject of the film to be its ultimate consumers; if the aim of the company that commissioned the work is to stress the multiculturalism of the state or to make money, then it is even quite likely that the subject group's interests (and even sensibilities) will be played down, if not altogether ignored. There may not be the slightest hint of malevolence in any of this, although that is not necessarily the way in which perceived biases might eventually be interpreted.

Some European nation-states are involved in satellite broadcasting. Programmes produced in one European country can be received throughout the continent and even world-wide; examples of this are both BBC World and BBC Prime TV (directed specifically towards Europe), and BSkyB's channels; French, German, Italian and Spanish programmes are also widely available. Some of these channels devote programming time to topics of European interest and concern, so that making large audiences aware of cultural diversity and issues involving minority groups has become much easier than in the past.

Of course, one of the hazards of commercial broadcasting is that events can get out of hand. Programme managers who determine the overall programme agendas of a broadcast channel become ascendant over directors and producers, who determine the actual content of individual programmes. Moves by commercial interests to take over many aspects of programming content only reflect a more general situation in which art, music and sport have been transformed from arts and culture into arts and culture industries. Television programming is particularly prone to this kind of commercial exploitation. This demonstrates that, overall, image-makers control content and form rather than those nominally in charge of setting the tone. This may be no more than the continuation of a historical process, in which a new elite emerges to contest positions held by established elites and set new agendas.

Pursuit of multiculturalism does not necessarily indicate that there is constant consultation over the perceived implications or ramifications of any actions taken. Multiculturalism and pluralism do not necessarily imply that each cultural or ethnic group has control over its own segment of audiences or readerships; rather, they may be interpreted by the 'powers-that-be' as acknowledging that not only is there no monolithic way of being French or German or British but that there is no monopoly over how to portray the range of diversities that exist within a state. In

44 'Little countries: small but perfectly formed', *The Economist*, 3 January 1998.

some ways, it is an example of having one's cake and eating it, for multiculturalism and pluralism both suggest multiple and varying narratives for depicting and interpreting society and culture.

15 Developing a viable and vibrant Jewish culture

Culture is both the substance and a symbol of collective identity, and this is no less true in today's secular cultures than it was for cultures in the past. Today, the emphasis is placed on culture as an 'agent of change'.[45] It is no longer solely a reflection of material civilization, but has become a tool using images not only as saleable commodities but also as the basis of tourist and property markets and visions of collective identity. And as an agent of change, culture is more important than many care to credit, overshadowed as it is in daily news coverage and public awareness by politics and social problems such as violence, homelessness and drug abuse. However, as Jewish life is undergoing a period of reconstruction and Europe is trying to re-adjust to the post-Cold War period, this is an opportune time to monitor developments and to try and influence them.

Almost any European city in which there was once a Jewish community of any substance boasts a Jewish museum and a renovated Jewish synagogue which is sometimes still active, at least on Jewish holidays and most sabbaths, if not every day. Festivals of Jewish culture—film festivals, klezmer music, choral music—are held in many countries. Several cities have a local Jewish radio station, or at least a community radio with several hours of Jewish broadcasting time available. And both television and cinema seem to be able to produce items—documentary and feature films—on Jewish topics. Moreover, the possibilities for a European Jewish television channel have become very real with the advent of digital broadcasting technology.[46]

We live in a postmodern era of designer products for the masses. Individual choice has reached new heights. Computer technology permits us to choose a suit of clothing and adjust it for individual size, shape and style, for fabric material, colours, and design. Some of us are psychologically ready for designer Judaism in which Jews are as Jews feel.

If European Jewish communities are to survive and prosper as independent entities without being dominated by ultra-Orthodoxy, or without fearing decimation by assimilation or Zionism, they must be courageous enough to develop their own means of self-expression. This would be no easy task in itself. Both Zionism and Orthodoxy have their own well-defined agendas, for the ultimate aim of Israel and Zionism is the total dissolution of the Diaspora and its transfer to Israel, while in the view of many, including secular and traditional Jews, in both Israel and the Diaspora, ultra-Orthodoxy offers a return to the ghetto. Yet, if Jews are to be as Jews feel themselves to be, then developing an independent and vibrant culture must be the way forward.

This difficult mission of constructing a forward-looking European Jewry in an age of pluralism and multiculturalism will be hampered by attempts at delegitimization. All kinds of accusations—that it is not the Orthodox or even traditional way, that it is against the 'national' (i.e. overall Jewish) interest—will probably be levelled at any efforts by European Jewry to set an alternative course for its survival. However, if European Jewish communities are to avoid irreversible decline, there is no other way. The present time offers a golden opportunity to develop coalitions with other ethnic groups, with other cultural and religious minorities, and to give full vent to the idea of multiculturalism. European Jewry must seize this opportunity.

45 Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities*, 113.
46 Silverstone.

Recent JPR publications

Reports

Jacqueline Goldberg and Barry A. Kosmin
The social attitudes of unmarried young Jews in contemporary Britain
No. 4, June 1997

Steven Kaplan and Hagar Salamon
Ethiopian immigrants in Israel: experience and prospects
No. 1, March 1998

Barry Kosmin, Antony Lerman and Jacqueline Goldberg
The attachment of British Jews to Israel
No. 5, November 1997

Stephen Miller, Marlena Schmool and Antony Lerman
Social and political attitudes of British Jews: some key findings of the JPR survey
No. 1, February 1996

Policy papers

Margaret Brearley
The Roma/Gypsies of Europe: a persecuted people
No. 3, December 1996

David Capitanchik and Michael Whine
The governance of cyberspace: racism on the Internet
No. 2, July 1996

Margaret Harris
The Jewish voluntary sector in the United Kingdom: its role and its future
No. 5, May 1997

Diana Pinto
A new Jewish identity for post-1989 Europe
No. 1, June 1996

Roger Silverstone
Jewish television: prospects and possibilities
No. 1, March 1998

World Wide Web

Antisemitism in the World Today

published electronically by the
Institute for Jewish Policy Research and American Jewish Committee

Web address:
http://www.jpr.org.uk/antisem

Books

Bernard Wasserstein
Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945

Second edition published by Leicester University Press in association with JPR, 1999

To order copies of JPR publications, please contact the

Institute for Jewish Policy Research
79 Wimpole Street
London W1M 7DD
tel +44(0)171 935 8266 fax +44(0)171 935 3252
e-mail jpr@ort.org
web site http://www.jpr.org.uk

jpr / policy paper

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

JPR Reports are indexed in **Index of Articles on Jewish Studies** (Jerusalem), **Kiryat sefer** (Jerusalem) and in **Ulrich's International Periodicals Directory** (New York) and are listed online by **Bowker International Serials Database** (New York) Subscription: £30/$50 (per annum); single copy £5.00/$7.50

ISSN 1363-1314 typeset in house printed by Chandlers Printers Ltd

Institute for Jewish Policy Research and American Jewish Committee: an international partnership to enhance co-operation in research, analysis and policy-planning on issues affecting Jewish life worldwide

Published by Institute for Jewish Policy Research 79 Wimpole Street London W1M 7DD UK
tel +44 (0)171 935 8266 **fax** +44 (0)171 935 3252 **e-mail** jpr@ort.org **web site** http://www.jpr.org.uk
registered charity no. 252626