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CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF JEWISHNESS AT THE TURN
OF THE 21st CENTURY

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Introduction

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Interest in the Jewish heritage of Central and Eastern Europe has become increasingly noticeable in recent decades. But as Jewish motifs inspire all kinds of cultural products from music and comic books to the virtual world of *Second Life* and sex guidebooks, critics and scholars approach the "Jewish boom" with widely divergent views. While for some observers this revival symbolizes a new space for the Jewish / non-Jewish dialogue in post-Holocaust Europe, the rebirth of suppressed memory about Jews, or a form of moral witnessing of the Holocaust, others have been sceptical about the "hype with the Star of David", labelling it "virtual Jewishness", "Jewish Disneyland" or even "Jewrassic Park".[1] The expansion of Jewish themes in the media and the public sphere across Europe has been interpreted as an oppressive form of philo-Semitism, producing low-quality entertainment, spreading stereotypes, and being detrimental to local Jewish communities. The flourishing European market for Jewish culture inspires critical opinion even across the Atlantic. *A Jewish Cultural Manifesto* by an American-Jewish journalist opens with a succinct, if radical, statement: "Jewish culture belongs to Jews".[2]

The circulation of Jewish motifs in popular culture has taken on a global dimension. But while the transnational nature of this phenomenon has been noticed by scholars,[3] little attention has been paid to the process of cultural translation that underlies it. Meanwhile, the process of adapting and performing elements of Jewish heritage for a general audience, be it for concert-goers, museum visitors, or tourists, rests on the principles of negotiation and compromise that characterize the activity of transposing from one language to another. An analysis of the dynamics of this transfer, rather than only the end products of the "Jewish boom" offers an insight into how Jewishness is being imagined, understood and performed as well as into what is lost in translation. In order to investigate the processes underpinning the production and dissemination of new representations of Jewishness at the beginning of the 21st century, we invited scholars of various disciplines to a conference and workshops held from 24 to 26 November 2008 at the European University Institute in Florence. The conference, accompanied by workshops led by Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Professor Joachim Schlör, inspired the essays selected for this publication.

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[1] See Pinto, Diana (1999): 'The Third Pillar? Toward a European Jewish Identity', available at: http://www.ceu.hu/jewishstudies/pdf/01_pinto.pdf (accessed 2 June 2006); Steinlauf, Michael C. (2001): *Pamięć nieprzyswojona: polska pamięć Zagłady,* Warszawa: Cyklady; Lehrer, Erica (2007): 'Bearing False Witness? 'Vicarious' Jewish Identity and the Politics of Affinity.' In: Glowacka, Dorota and Zylinska, Joanna (eds.): *Imaginary Neighbors. Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations after the Holocaust*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press; Wöhlert, Meike (1998): 'Der Hype um den Davidstern.' In: *Zitty* NO. 16; Gruber, Ruth Ellen (2002): *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe,* Berkeley: University of California Press; Lackmann, Thomas (2000): *Jewrassic Park. Wie baut man (k)ein Jüdisches Museum in Berlin,* Berlin: Philo.

[2] Lustig, Sandra and Leveson, Ian, eds. (2006): *Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry,* New York: Berghahn Books, p. 3; See also Gebert, Konstanty (2004): 'Nieautentyczność?' In: Gruber, Ruth Ellen (ed.): *Odrodzenie Kultury Żydowskiej w Europie*, Sejny: Pogranicze; Cała Alina, et al. (2006): 'Koza ze styropianu, pejsy z pakuł.' In: *Midrasz*, no. 3, pp. 9-13; Chaney, David (1994): *The Cultural Turn. Scene-setting Essays on Contemporary Cultural History,* London: Routledge; Kafrissen, Rokhl (2005): 'A Jewish Cultural Manifesto.' In: *Jewish Currents*, available at: http://www.jewishcurrents.org/2005-nov-kafrissen.htm (accessed 19 May 2008).

[3] See for example Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*; Garfinkle, Adam (2009): *Jewcentricity,* Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons; Oişteanu, Andrej (2009): *Inventing the Jew: Antisemite Stereotypes in Romanian and other Central-East European Cultures,* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Many recent studies on the representation of Jews are either devoted to a particular cultural genre, be it opera, or the graphic novel[4] or focus on a specific theme, such as images of Jewish women, Holocaust memory or anti-Semitic stereotypes.[5] The essays in this volume cut across genre divisions, focusing on the spatial embeddedness of cultural representations, on their performative nature and the process of cross-cultural translation that underlies their creation, reception and instrumentalization.

Understanding culture neither in a structuralist way, as an "ideological machine" exerting influence on the masses, nor simply as a reflection of the essential group values, we opt for the Gramscian definition of culture as "a force field of relations shaped . . . by these contradictory pressures and tendencies".[6] Stuart Hall has argued that "[c]ultures are not 'ways of life', but 'ways of struggle'";[7] this struggle can be understood as the process of articulation, that is, negotiating the meaning of a cultural text in a particular context. As the post-Gramscian theorists of culture suggest, there is no singular and guaranteed meaning of a cultural act. Instead, cultural practices can generate multiple meanings, conditioned by a given context, historical moment, particular discourse.[8] In other words, cultural products signify something only in the process of being translated, adapted, deconstructed and reassembled. In the case of popular representations of Jews, this process of Gramscian "articulation", or cultural translation, has one more important dimension: the power relations between the subaltern and the mainstream. The translation and the incorporation of the ethnic other into a cultural product, readable to the majority, risks simplification, misinterpretation and omissions. On the other hand, the images of Jews in popular culture are created, circulated and consumed both by Jews and non-Jews. Appropriation coexists here therefore with self-expression and self-commodification.

The realm of culture thus provides a unique contact zone. As Simon Bronner observes, "the texts of a given culture are locations in which to air, and contest, often troubling dialogues that are difficult to broach in everyday conversation and formal institutional outlets".[9] The rising popularity of Jewish heritage in Europe in the last decades, Diana Pinto notes, opened up such a forum, the "Jewish Space", where Jews and non-Jews encounter each other and where "opinions can be confronted, tensions resolved or first of all brought out in the open".[10] This "Jewish Space" in the realm of culture has been indeed the platform where artists and intellectuals probed the borders of cultural appropriation and questioned the very definition of Jewishness. Some of them have been apprehensive that "non-Jewish Jewish culture", or "virtually Jewish" culture, will "take precedence over living culture", replacing

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[4] Baskind, Samantha and Omer-Sherman, Ranen (2008): *The Jewish graphic novel, critical approaches*, Piscataway: Rutgers University Press; Gottlieb, Jack (2004): *Funny, it doesn't sound Jewish: how Yiddish songs and synagogue melodies influenced Tin Pan Alley, Broadway and Hollywood*, New York: State University of New York; Cheyette, Bryan (1993): *Constructions of "the Jew" in English literature and society: racial representations, 1875-1945,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Clark, Caryl (2009): *Haydn's Jews: representation and reception on the operatic stage,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[5] See Antler, Joyce (1998): *Talking back: images of Jewish women in American popular culture,* Hanover: Brandeis University Press; Oişteanu, *Inventing the Jew*; Mintz, Alan (2001): *Popular Culture and the shaping of Holocaust memory in America,* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

[6] Bennett, Tony (1998): 'Popular Culture and the "turn to Gramsci".' In: Storey, John (ed.): *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture,* London: Prentice Hall, p. 219.

[7] Hall, Stuart (1998): 'Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'.' In: Storey, *Cultural Theory*, p. 451.

[8] Storey, *Cultural Theory*, p. xii.

[9] Bronner, Simon J. (2008): 'The *Chutzpah* of Jewish Cultural Studies.' In: Bronner, Simon J. (ed.): *Jewish Cultural Studies. Jewishness: Expression, Identity and Representation,* Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, p. 4.

[10] See Pinto, 'The Third Pillar?'

memory and inherited tradition with mere "desire",[11] or, even more dangerously, with "a Jewcentric merry-go-round for fun and profit".[12] Others advocate, however, a new perspective on Jewish culture as part of a greater organism, where the boundaries between the Jewish and the non-Jewish are inherently unstable, dynamic and permeable.[13] In this vision, Jewish culture emerges not as a "text" in a non-Jewish "context", vulnerable to external influences, but rather as an organic part and parcel of a larger cultural sphere.[14]

David Biale's challenging "the very notion of an autonomous Judaism" in cultural analysis has influenced recent cultural studies, where the category of "Jewish" becomes more and more inclusive. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Jonathan Karp, in *The Art of Being Jewish,* define "Jewishness" as contextual and contingent, particularly in the collocation "Jewish art". "Jewish becomes subjunctive", they argue; it becomes "a consideration, a lens, a frame of reference, a contingency for what is shown".[15] Simon Bronner, advocating the new Jewish Cultural Studies, also proposes an open definition of Jewishness, which comprises not only "what Jews do", but also "what is thought about Jews". Once "Jewish" is defined as "an idea, or a way of thinking, in different cultures, even those devoid of Jews",[16] the discipline of Jewish Studies comes to embrace also the way non-Jews deal with elements of Jewish culture, "how they represent it, and even how they identify with or reject it".[17]

Although the conference in Florence, which served as the springboard for these essays, used the term of popular culture as the common denominator for the research presented, the discussions and workshops invited critical reflection on the hierarchical dichotomies implied in the very term. The distinction between "mass" or "popular" and high culture, which emerged only in the nineteenth century, has not only been political, but also permeable, marking an attempt to set class divisions in the field of entertainment and reduce social intermingling. What was denoted as mass culture, however, has always challenged the boundaries between "high and low, art and commerce, the sacred and the profane".[18] And in postmodern times, defined by fluidity, impermanence and the free circulation of ideas, more than ever before "cultural matter" is potentially available to everyone and constantly changing its form and content.[19] It is, therefore, not only increasingly difficult to define what the contents of "popular" culture or "high" culture are at any given moment, but, with today's cultural elite becoming "omnivorous", the very distinction loses its significance.[20]

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[11] Gruber, *Virtually Jewish,* p. 27

[12] Garfinkle, *Jewcentricity*, p. 146.

[13] Biale, David (1994): 'Confessions of a Historian of Jewish Culture.' In: *Jewish Social Studies,* no. 1, p. 44.

[14] Ibid., p. 45

[15] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara and Karp, Jonathan (2008): 'Introduction.' In: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara and Karp, Jonathan (eds.): *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 5

[16] Bronner, 'The *Chutzpah* of Jewish Cultural Studies', p. 1.

[17] Ibid., p. 16.

[18] Frith, Simon (1998): 'The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Defending Popular Culture from the Populists.' In: Storey, *Cultural Theory*, p. 578.

[19] Bauman, Zygmunt (1999): C*ulture as Praxis,* London: Sage, p. xlv.

[20] Bauman, Zygmunt (2008): 'Kultura do spożycia na miejscu.' In: Halawa, Mateusz and Wróbel, Paulina (eds.): *Bauman o popkulturze. Wypisy, koncepcja i wybór*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, p. 309.

Cultural Products as Performance

Therefore, rather than question what genres and modes of representation are currently preferred and which peripheral, we concentrated on the dynamics of the act of representation, its performative dimension, its potential of mediation and its relational nature. The theoretical framework of performance studies offers here a way of interpreting cultural production beyond aesthetic hierarchies and divisions into canonical and non-canonical spheres of culture. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, the crucial contribution of the performative turn to the study of representations is the notion of agency. Cultural production is a performance, where objects not only signify, but also do things.[21] This idea expands the definition of representation as a cognitive tool. No doubt, representations are necessary to organize, structure and display knowledge.[22] The postmodern critique, however, questioned the assumption that representations simply mirror history/life/the real world.[23] Rather than being an essence, they are a happening, an event, a process. As David Chaney puts it, representation "far from being pictures of the social world, is more profoundly understood as the endlessly negotiable ways in which that world is being constituted and articulated".[24]

Performance studies are not only inclusionary, embracing both what are considered the high and low genres, but they allow cultural representations to be perceived as having a concrete social function. What makes a performance different from any other event is the intentionality and deliberateness of its authors, who make a conscious effort to represent something.[25] This intentionality, of course, can take a whole range of directions. Performance might "reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology".[26] Even though they claim a certain universalism, representations always serve the particular group that constructed them.[27] They are means to legitimize and enforce structures and at the same time to challenge alternative narratives and images. They are also a means of confirming the status quo through myth-making.[28]

This instrumentalization of cultural representations of Jews and the role that these images play in conveying more or less subtle political messages is evident in several of the conference essays. Sophie Wagenhofer, for example, analyses how the exhibition at the Jewish Museum in Casablanca strives to present the peaceful coexistence and cultural commonalities between Moroccan Jews and Muslims, sustaining the image of Morocco as a culturally diversified and tolerant country. Emphasizing the *marocanité* of the local Jews, and skilfully omitting sensitive issues such as anti-Semitism and the mass emigration of Jews from Morocco, the exhibition is clearly enmeshed in the current political discourses. But nor are the less obviously politicized representations of Jews in film, music, or even sex guidebooks free of ideological bias. As Evyatar Marienberg shows, popular filmic representations of the Hebrew kabbalistic text on marital sexuality, known as *Iggeret ha-*

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[21] See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara (1999): 'Performance Studies.' Rockefeller Foundation, Culture and Creativity, available at: http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/issues/rock2.htm (accessed 15 November 2009).

[22] See Chartier, Roger (1998): 'Kulturgeschichte zwischen Repräsentationen und Praktiken.' In: Chartier, Roger (ed.): *Die unvollendete Vergangenheit. Geschichte und die Macht der Weltauslegung*, Berlin: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, p. 10.

[23] See Massey, Doreen (2005): *For Space,* London: Sage, p. 28.

[24] Chaney, *The Cultural Turn*, pp. 71-2.

[25] See Hughes-Freeland, Felicia, ed. (1998): *Ritual, performance, media,* London: Routledge, p. 6.

[26] Conquergood, Dwight in Fischer-Lichte, Erika (1998): 'Auf dem Wege zu einer performativen Kultur.' In: *Paragrana* no. 7, vol. 1, p. 27.

[27] See Chartier, 'Kulturgeschichte', p.11.

[28] See Barthes, Roland 'Myth Today.' In: Storey, *Cultural Theory*, pp. 109–18.

Kodesh, or the Holy Letter, aim to present Judaism as a modern, open and pro-sex religion, fully compatible with contemporary Western culture. This message, propagated also in Rabbi Boteach's best-selling "self-help" book *Kosher Sex,* is constructed with the help of a selective approach to rabbinical sources and creative misinterpretations of the medieval text of the Holy Letter.

That the cultural products portraying Jews, especially those addressed to a predominantly non-Jewish audience, avail themselves of myths and clichés is not surprising. Popular culture is based on recognizability, and to cater to the needs of its audience it will adopt views and assumptions shared by the mainstream of society. Thus the image of Jews as picturesque, colourful and benign, as they appear in a number of Polish musical productions, is fully compatible with Polish romantic traditions, the popular vision of the multicultural and tolerant Poland and the myth of Polish benevolence towards Jews (Magdalena Waligórska). Clearly, "Jewishness" or "Jewish traditions" are not simply enacted or represented, but constituted and negotiated in these popular performances.

The potential influence of today's cultural products is boosted not only by the new media that provide unprecedented possibilities of circulation but also the selectiveness and repetitiveness of cultural production in the era of postmodern fluidity. "Culture industry" was a term that the Frankfurt School coined to denote uniform, predictable, mass cultural products. Today the industrial metaphor comes to label something completely different. "We are living in a yard of a factory recycling old meanings and disposing of production waste and market rejects", writes Zygmunt Bauman, exchanging the image of a production line with that of waste management.[29] In a world where everything has been written, what remains is the reshuffling of the elements already given and reinterpretation. As Bauman puts it: "nothing seems to die once for all, and nothing – even eternal life – seems to be destined to last forever".[30]

Although today's culture factory produces representations of a short life span, these representations reach consumers all around the globe. More than ever before artists and intellectuals are required to take on the interpreter's role, "translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition".[31] As the field of cultural studies, but also Jewish studies, becomes defined by the prefixes "co-", "trans-" and "inter-", as Joachim Schlör put in his key note address, it is translation that emerges as the central cultural practice.

Cultural translation

Translation is a particular kind of performance which combines intentionality with the notion of crossing borders. The concept of the insider and outsider is crucial here. Translation is never individual, but social because it is always an act of communicating cultural knowledge. As Paula Rubel and Abraham Rosman noted, "Every act of translation is a social act, involving social relationships, transforming as well as crossing boundaries".[32] Although it is

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[29] Bauman, 'Kultura do spożycia na miejscu', p. 311.

[30] Bauman, *Culture as Praxis*, p. vii.

[31] Bauman, Zygmunt (1987): *Legislators and Interpreters: on modernity, post-modernity, and intellectuals,* Cambridge: Cornell University Press, p. 5.

[32] See Rubel, Paula and Rosman, Abraham (2003): 'Introduction: Translation and Anthropology.' In: Rubel, Paula and Rosman, Abraham (eds.): *Translating Cultures. Perspectives on translation and anthropology,* Oxford: Berg Publishers, p. 15.

always only a compromise and, at times, it dangerously borders on appropriation, translation can also be understood as an encounter.[33]

Translation is bound to remain an approximation, a negotiation in which some loss of meaning is unavoidable.[34] It is "an ongoing, unfinished and inconclusive *dialogue*", a contingency, writes Bauman.[35] At the same time, its impact is not to be underestimated. "Cross-cultural translation is a continuous process which *serves* as much as *constitutes* the cohabitation of people", argues Bauman.[36] Every act of translation re-draws the boundary between groups and changes the partners taking part in the process. And it is that "reciprocal change" that is the ultimate outcome of the work of translation.

What are, however, the stages and the mechanisms of a cultural translation? Theoreticians of translation agree that the first step is to understand the text, or a cultural product, at hand. For Umberto Eco, this process of understanding means making a hypothesis about the "possible world" represented in a given text. If concrete facts and traces are missing, the translation will have to be based on plausible conjectures.[37] Todd Jones sees this process of interpretation as ascribing beliefs to another agent. This kind of hypothesis-making, especially if the translator is dealing with a culture radically different from her own, is based on self-reference and may produce distortions.[38] That is, the "possible world" of the other that we conjecture is likely to be shaped after the world as we know it. Of course, a good translator is supposed to approach as closely as possible to the meaning a given text/cultural product has for its producers. Bauman warns, however, that there is a paradox there. Gaining the privileged insider's interpretation the translator risks *becoming* the insider and losing touch with his own "universe of meaning". A translation without a measure of distortion is therefore an extremely difficult feat, if not utopian altogether.[39]

With perfect fidelity impossible to achieve, every translation moves on the continuum between foreignizing and domesticating. Domesticating, which for long characterized the approach of Western industrial nations to their subaltern others, consists in filtering a given text through the sensitivity of the reader. Domesticating the cultural product of the other is to insert it in the world of the new user, adapting it according to the needs of the target audience. This process might involve "rewriting", cultural assimilation and even "absolute loss". Foreignizing, in turn, relies on bringing the codes of the translated text into the target language. The cultural product thus translated remains to a certain extent alien but may retain more of its original meaning.[40]

Selectiveness and weeding out the features that might irritate the target reader allow the cultural translators to domesticate the "text". A domesticated text is easy to read, smoothed out and devoid of alien-sounding idioms and incomprehensible metaphors. By the same token, the elements of Jewish heritage or Jewish history undergoing domestication become compatible with national myths and popular clichés. Thus the image of the "magical Jew" on the Polish klezmer scene strikes a familiar note with the audience, who associate this trope

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[33] See Gadamer in Eco, Umberto (2003): *Dire quasi la stessa cosa. Esperienze di traduzione,* Milano: Bompiani, p. 231; see also Rubel and Rosman, 'Translation and Anthropology', p. 14.
[34] See Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa.*
[35] Bauman, C*ulture as Praxis*, p. xlviii.
[36] Ibid.
[37] See Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa*, p. 45.
[38] See Jones, Todd (2003): 'Translation and Belief Ascription: Fundamental Barriers.' In: Rubel and Rosman, *Translating Cultures*, p. 45.
[39] See Bauman, C*ulture as Praxis*, p. xlv.
[40] See Rubel and Rosman, 'Translation and Anthropology' and Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa.*

with their national romantic traditions. A romanticized Jew as a rustic, if mysterious, shtetl dweller is, as Waligórska points out, easily recognizable to a Polish consumer of culture and therefore readily adopted into popular heritage productions. At the same time, the legacy of communist and socialist Yiddish songs become the rejects of this cultural translation, and are consistently omitted from the performance repertoire.

The same selectiveness is also at work in case of the Jewish Museum in Casablanca. Jews are represented there as belonging to Moroccan culture, through objects and symbols that are also familiar to Muslims. Symbols like the *Khamsa*, known in the Islamic context as the "hand of Fatima" and as the "hand of Miriam" among Jews, are therefore among the most prominent exhibits. Moroccan decorative motifs, or texts in Judeo-Moroccan (a dialectical variety of Arabic written with Hebrew letters), serve to emphasize the sameness of the culture of Jews and Muslims in Morocco and the gap between the "domesticated" Moroccan Jew and, for example, the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition. Such a translation of Jewishness enables local Moroccan Jewish culture, framed as a desirable contribution to the Moroccan mosaic of ethnicities, to be disassociated from what is believed to be the foreign and potentially threatening global Jewish collective symbolized by Israel or the US Jewish community.

Bringing the "cultural text" to its reader implies not only making it compatible with the needs and expectations of the target audience, but sometimes also updating concepts and ideas in the original text that appear antiquated or politically unacceptable. Marienberg addresses this process in his analysis of the popular adaptations of the Holy Letter. Tracing the changes and reformulations that this medieval text underwent in film scripts, he pictures the process of domestication in which the Holy Letter became not only more understandable to the modern viewer, but also de-Judaized, and secularized. Replacing, for example, the medieval concept of female "insemination" with the orgasm, the text is integrated into the world of its contemporary user and tuned in to modern Western ideas about sex.

At times, however, the attempt to update and polish a given "text" might have much more serious consequences. An interaction at the Jewish Museum in Berlin reported by Bishop Kendzia poignantly illustrates the risks of domestication. An employee of the Jewish Museum in Berlin admonishes a group of young visitors for having used the word "*Juden*" [Jews] while commenting on the exhibition: "It is not called 'the Jews', but 'Jewry'!". Considering "*Juden*" disrespectful, the staff member prompts a "politically correct" term: "*Judentum*". Trying to provide what he believes to be an agreeable word to denote Jews, the "translator" fails entirely. Suggesting the "inoffensive" substitute, he is actually conferring an aura of impropriety on the word, making it stand out. Domestication, more than any other device, exposes the domination and power that the translator assumes.

Although domestication seems to be the usual strategy in translating elements of Jewish culture into cultural products addressed to a general audience, foreignization is often also the case. Foreignizing, which implies retaining as much of the original text as possible, might do so even at the cost of comprehension. If the reader stumbles on such a foreignized text he or she has to invest some effort to fully understand it. At times, understanding is not even the scope of this kind of translation. Rather, the consumer of a foreignized representation is confronted with the impossibility of comprehending. In her analysis of the filmic images of Jewish women, Małgorzata Pakier shows how Jan Jakub Kolski in his *Far away from the Window* attempts to introduce the spectator to the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, and in particular, life in hiding, by staging the story in claustrophobic interiors, or filming through a key hole. Bringing the spectator into the perspective of the isolated and alienated Jews, Kolski manages to foreignize his narrative. Menashe Kadishman's installation *Fallen Leaves* in the Jewish Museum in Berlin has a similar disturbing effect. This unorthodox work

of art, a thick a layer of iron masks scattered on the floor of an empty concrete space, evokes strong and opposed emotions. Invited to walk across this field of clanking face-like scraps of metal, many museum visitors interviewed by Bishop Kendzia felt uncomfortable and uneasy, some of them choosing not to enter the installation surface. Kadishman's disquieting work introduces a dissonance in the informative exhibition spaces, producing shock rather than comprehension, anxiety rather than communication.

Since foreignizing aims to give a touch of otherness to the translated texts, its end product does not have to be fully intelligible. Sometimes, it is precisely the obscure and the enigmatic that gives such representations power. Koven discusses, for example, how Jewish symbols, like the Magen David, are used in the *giallo* films to convey the flavour of the arcane, and Dutkowska points out that the copies of the old Yiddish inscriptions in Kazimierz are not meant to be understood, but rather to produce an aura of otherness. Such an instrumentalization of the Jewish heritage is also a form of foreignization, even if it actually defies the objective of translation.

Some of the cultural products discussed in this collection of essays, however, seem to escape the neat dichotomy of domestication and foreignization. Are the new pop adaptations of Yiddish poetry, discussed by Janina Wurbs, a domestication of the Jewish heritage into a contemporary musical language, or do they mark a foreignization of pop music with the sound of a nearly extinct language? A similar question can be raised about Julian Stryjkowski's translation of the predicament of a queer identity into biblical language. Does the juxtaposition of two kinds of otherness, homosexuality and Jewishness, make it easier to comprehend either of these conditions, or does it rather alienate the reader with the impossibility of the solidarity between the two (Laura Quercioli Mincer)? The continuum between domestication and foreignization offers a range of strategies to render the elements of Jewish culture into a language accessible to the general public. Balancing clarification and obfuscation, artists as cultural translators both cross and at times violate boundaries. And although translation – the gains of intercultural communication aside – implies also the losses of misinterpretation and manipulation, it provides a unique site to confront dissimilarities and search for similarities between cultures.

The Spatial Embeddedness of Representations

Culture and cultural translation take place, that is, they not only occupy (urban) spaces, but also shape them. Thus space is not only the background of culture but a "mode of representation" itself.[41] Julia Brauch, Alexandra Nocke and Anna Lipphardt in their recent *Jewish Topographies* distinguish between "Jewish spaces" and "Jewish places" as two modes of spatiality in which Jewish culture is embedded. Although the boundaries between them might not be clear-cut, the former are defined predominantly by their location, and the latter by performance. In other words, *places* have concrete geographical coordinates, like the Jewish Museum in Berlin; *spaces*, in turn, are "spatial environments in which Jewish things happen", like Jewish music festivals which might enact Jewishness in places where everyday Jewish life does not exist.[42] In both cases spatiality guides our cognitive experience. The environment is "a scaffold to which we attach meanings";[43] it is a framework through which

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[41] Chaney, *The Cultural Turn,* pp. 154-6.
[42] Brauch, *Jewish Topographies,* p. 4.
[43] Lynch, Kevin (1993): *What Time Is This Place?* Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, p. 241.

we visualize cultures.[44] But it is also the subject of our affective ties, the locus of our memory.[45]

Spaces, therefore, regardless of whether they are defined by their location or by the performance that they host, have a double function for cultural representations. Agata Dutkowska illustrates this well with the example of the Cracovian Jewish district. Kazimierz, with its simultaneity of traces from various periods, is a mode of representation where the present intersects with the past and the "authentic" meets the simulacrum. Kazimierz is, however, at the same time also the object of representation. As the old Jewish signs become replicated to meet the demand of the tourist industry, and as Kazimierz produces copies of itself, a meta-representation takes place. The ghetto of Venice, likewise, provides both the stage for performing Jewishness, a slate on which different narratives of Jewish history can be inscribed, and becomes a metaphor of something transcending the Jewish experience: fragility and postmodern instability (Levis Sullam). The same duality defines the Jewish Museum in Berlin. While the architectural voids signify the scars that the Holocaust left in the German society, the very structure of the museum becomes both an object of debate and a popular motif of tourist souvenirs (Bishop Kendzia). The "Jewish Spaces", as pictured here, are understood as representations, but not reduced to a stasis. They are not the realm of closure, the fixed and the petrified, offering a still snapshot of the reality that excludes the possibility of change, development and movement. Jewish districts and Jewish museums are, rather, sites of change and rival representations, unfinished spaces which are in the process of becoming.[46]

The focus on performance, translation and spatiality that this collection of papers offers suggests a reading of the "Jewish boom" beyond the essentialists' categories of "authentic" and "virtual". Rather, it looks at contemporary cultural products as modes of examining, making sense of and instrumentalizing Jewishness. The adaptation of Jewish motifs into popular culture is analysed here in terms of intercultural negotiation, not appropriation. Using the framework of cultural translation, we understand the Latin "translatio" quite literally, not only as transport, but also as a change, a metaphor, and an act of botanical grafting.[47] Translating Jewishness for popular culture, although sometimes motivated by political agendas and national mythologies, breeds also new art, and opens new spaces of cultural exchange.

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[44] See Schlögel, Karl (2003): *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit. Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik,* München: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, p. 70.

[45] See Tuan, Yi-Fu (1974): *Topophilia. A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values,* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, p. 93.

[46] See Massey, *For Space*, p. 59.

[47] See Eco, *Dire quasi la stessa cosa,* p. 234.

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Reinventing Jewish Venice:

The Scene of the Ghetto between Monument and Metaphor[1]

Simon Levis Sullam

Abstract

The Ghetto of Venice, in the city where the word "ghetto" first originated, is still the site and symbol of Jewish Venice five centuries after its forced establishment. In its various stages of reinvention, the ghetto evolved in the popular imagination from a sort of gate to the Orient, to a monument, a destination for mass tourism. After the end of Jewish segregation the Ghetto represents an open scene or stage where neither performers nor audience are necessarily Jewish. The significance of the district and its ancient remnants today reaches beyond its role as a Jewish space. More than ever before, the Ghetto becomes a metaphor for conditions of fragility, precariousness, isolation and instability.

The Ghetto after the ghetto

As you enter the Ghetto of Venice today, almost five hundred years after its establishment, you will most likely encounter various groups of high-school students on a day trip to Venice and guided tours of the neighborhood and the synagogues organized by the Jewish Museum for tourists from around the world. You will notice the souvenir shops selling Judaica, together with glass objects produced on the nearby island of Murano, and old or fake-old prints of Venice representing not only the Ghetto, but more often San Marco and the Rialto bridge. You will find a kosher restaurant run by a Lubavitch group, transplanting the Eastern European traditions from Brooklyn to the Venice lagoon. (Here as elsewhere, from Kraków to Bombay, this group also runs a small yeshiva, where you are insistently encouraged to put on *teffilin* and to contribute *zedakah* for the Chabad community). In the main square, Campo di Ghetto Nuovo, you will come across two Holocaust memorials, and in the vicinity you will find a public elementary school, a non-kosher *pizzeria*, a bookstore for children, and a travel agency offering trips to the Seychelles Islands, India or Mexico, the novel and more leisurely "promised lands". Peeking from below through the windows of the high buildings in the central Campo, you will perhaps also catch a glimpse of finely restored apartments of the non-

Jewish new bourgeois who recently moved to this gentrified neighborhood, with bookshelves reaching to the ceilings and modern art on the walls.

All this seems to have very little to do with the Ghetto from the day in July 1797, when the Napoleonic armies destroyed the wooden doors that had forcedly enclosed the Jewish neighborhood for almost three centuries. It was also then that the tree of liberty was planted at the center of the Campo di Ghetto, soon to be encircled by dances and celebrations initiated by the Venetian Jewish community.[2] An archaeological-like exploration is thus needed to identify among today's signs the different historical periods and cultural processes that shaped the neighborhood in the last two centuries. This essay will delineate in synthesis some aspects of this archaeological reconstruction by interpreting the Ghetto of Venice as a theatrical stage, as Kenneth Stow did for the ghetto of the early modern Rome by adopting Victor Turner's definition of theater as emerging "when a separation is determined between an audience and a performer".[3]. I will argue that also after the demise of the ghetto as a space of forced separation, the Ghetto of Venice is still a site of performance. The performers of today, however, are not necessarily Jewish and the forms of performance are in many ways imposed by the expectations of the audience.

While for the early modern period we might perhaps assume a stronger, though not at all complete, separation of roles, with the Jewish population as performers and the non-Jews as the audience, today's audience facing the Ghetto is made up also of Jewish participants and is often taking part in the performance itself. The Ghetto of Venice can be therefore considered as a "Jewish *space*" since, in opposition to "Jewish *places*", it is characterized not only by "location", but also by "performance".[4] At the same time, "the Ghetto after the ghetto" is today only in part a Jewish space, because of the absence of "univocity" and "stability" which is intrinsic to any "practiced space".[5] I will describe how the perceptions and representations

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[2] In the rich literature on the Ghetto of Venice, see the classic Roth, Cecil (1975 [1930]): *History of the Jews in Venice*, New York: Schoken Books and the more recent Calimani, Riccardo (1987): *The Ghetto of Venice*, transl. Katherine Silberblatt Wolfthal, New York: Evans; Concina, Ennio, Camerino, Ugo and Calabi, Donatella (1991): *La città degli ebrei. Il Ghetto di Venezia, architettura e urbanistica*, Venezia: Albrizzi; Davis, Robert C. and Ravid, Benjamin eds. (2001): *The Jews of Early-Modern Venice*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. For the Jewish community between the 19th and the 20th century, see my *Una comunità immaginata. Gli ebrei a Venezia*, Milan: Unicopli (2001); and my 'Il Ghetto.' In: Levis Sullam, Simon, Brusò, Fabio (2008): *Il Ghetto. Piazza Barche*, Padova: Poligrafo, pp. 11-40. I repeatedly rely on these studies of mine, and especially on the latter, in the course of the present essay.

[3] See Stow, Kenneth (2001)*: Theatre of Acculturation. The Roman Ghetto in the Sixteenth Century*, Seattle: University of Washington Press. Stow (p. 143, note 73) quotes from Turner, Victor (1982): *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: PAJ Publications. My work on memory and space has been also particularly influenced by Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1924) and *La mémoire collective* (1950), as well as by suggestions coming from the Chicago School of Sociology, especially Wirth, Louis (1928): *The Ghetto*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[4] See Brauch, Julia, Lipphardt, Anna and Nocke, Alexandra (2008): 'Exploring Jewish Space. An Approach.' In: Brauch, Julia, Lipphardt, Anna and Nocke, Alexandra (eds.): *Jewish Topographies. Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, Aldershot: Ashgate, p. 4. It should be noted that the analogy of the stage applies to Italian squares (*piazze*) more generally as a defining characteristic of Italy's public life: see Fontana, Alessandro (1972): 'La scena.' In: Vivanti, Corrado and Romano, Ruggiero (eds.): *Storia d'Italia,* vol. I, *I caratteri originali*, Turin: Einaudi, pp. 791-866; and for the modern period, Isnenghi, Mario (1994): *L'Italia in piazza. I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai nostri giorni*, Milano: Mondadori.

[5] I thus push further the definition of space proposed by Michel de Certeau as referred to by Brauch, Lipphardt and Nocke, since I interrogate the exclusive Jewish nature of "Jewish spaces". De Certeau writes in *The Practice of Every Day Life* (1980): "Space is composed of intersections of mobile elements … [It] occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it … It has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper'"(p. 20, note 11). A recent assessment on Jewish spaces is also Fonrobert, Charlotte Elisheva and

of the Ghetto developed in the past two centuries: from its reinvention and orientalization, through the nationalization and patriotification, to the monumentalization and museumification and, finally, to its metaphorization.

Orientalization

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century Venice was famous as one of the key destinations of *Grand Tour* of Italy. Such notable visitors as Goethe or Lord Byron, however, never visited the Ghetto itself, but only the ancient Jewish Cemetery on the island of Lido.[6] The initiators of the modern quest for Jewish Venice the French romantic René de Chateaubriand, who wrote about it in his autobiographical *Mémoires d'Outretombe* (1848-50),[7] and the French novelist Théophile Gautier, who lingers upon it in the 1852 account of his journey through Italy.[8] They were followed by numerous others, who visited the Ghetto between the last decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, leaving important literary accounts of their visits.[9] William Howells, writer and consul of the United States of America devoted to the Ghetto a chapter of his *Venetian Life* (1867)[10]; the English novelist and Zionist activist Israel Zangwill opened his cycle *Dreamers of the Ghetto* (1898) in the Venice Ghetto;[11] and the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke set one of his *Stories of God* (1900) in the Ghetto.[12] Finally, the first historical monograph on the Jews of Venice, which appeared only in 1930 and was authored by the English Jewish historian Cecil Roth, under certain respects belongs to this literary tradition as well.[13]

Shemtov, Vered (2005): 'Introduction.' In: *Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space*, special issue of *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 1-8.

[6] For an overview see Kanceff, Emanuelle and Boccazzi, Gaudenzio, eds. (1981): *Viaggiatori stranieri a Venezia*, Geneva: Slatkine, 2 vols. For the nineteenth-century rediscovery of the city, Pemble, John (1995): *Venice Rediscovered*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

[7] The edition I have consulted is a selection from the original six-volumes work: see De Chateaubriand, François René (1849-1850): *Deux Livres des Mémoires d'outre-tombe,* Tome I, *Séjour á Venise*, edited by Maurice Levaillant (1936), Paris: Librarie Delagrave. The first selections from Chateaubriand's *Mémoires* in English translation appeared in 1904 and 1920.

[8] I have consulted the recent edition: Gautier, Théophile (1852): *Italia. Voyage en Italie*, edited by Marie Hélène Girard (1997), Paris: La Boite à Documents. This work went through numerous French editions and was also translated into English as *Journeys in Italy* in 1903.

[9] On the early modern visitors to the Ghetto see Ravid, Benjamin (2003 [1997]): 'Christian Travellers in the Ghetto of Venice: Some Preliminary Observations.' In: Ravid, Benjamin (ed.): *Studies on the Jews of Venice, 1382-1797*, Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 111-50.

[10] William D. Howells (1867): *Venetian Life*, Cambridge Mass.: Riverside Press. Howell's characterization of the Ghetto was heavily stereotypical, verging onto the anti-Semitic.

[11] See Zangwill, Israel (1898): *Dreamers of the Ghetto*, London: Heinemann. The volume opens with the story 'A Child of the Ghetto' and closes with 'Chad Gadya', set during the Passover dinner of a wealthy and emancipated Jewish family, who had left the Ghetto and lived in a palace on the Venetian Grand Canal. See also Zangwill's lecture from the late 1890s, 'The Ghetto', in Zangwill, Israel (1937): *Speeches, Articles and Letters*, M. Simon ed., London: The Soncino Press, pp. 2-27, where the writer refers to his visits to, and research on, the Jewish neighborhood of Venice. For Zangwill's fascination with and for his aestheticizing representations of Italy see, furthermore, his *Italian Fantasies*, London: Heinemann, 1910.

[12] See 'A Scene from the Ghetto of Venice' in Rilke, Rainer Maria (1932 [1900]) *Stories of God*, transl. Nora Purtscher-Wydenbruck and Herter Norton, London: Sidgwick and Jackson. For Rilke's visits to the Ghetto in 1897 and 1911, see Prater, David (1986): *A Ringing Glass. The Life of Rainer Maria Rilke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 32 and 211.

[13] Published originally as *Venice* in the *Jewish Communities Series* of the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia (see the most recent edition Roth, *History of the Jews in Venice*).

What many of these representations of Venice have in common is the orientalist gaze on the Ghetto and its inhabitants, as can in part be found in the representations the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe by Western European observers, although with relevant differences in content and context.[14] The writers of these travel accounts, Jews and non-Jews alike, visited the Jewish neighborhood in search of the lost vestiges of the ancient Jewish presence and, independently from what they saw, imposed an exoticizing and aestheticizing gaze on this space.[15] The Ghetto of Venice, located in a city under the influence of its relationship with Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, seems to have represented for these authors a Jewish Orient within the Venetian Orient.[16]

De Chateaubriand and Gautier, were probably the key initiators of this literary tradition. De Chateaubriand is of particular interest here also because he never actually visited the Ghetto itself but only the Venetian island of Giudecca, which was believed to be the first Jewish site in the Venice Lagoon (a claim, based on the supposed etymology of the island's name, rejected by most scholars today). Despite the fact that, when he arrived there in 1833, there was with certainty no Jewish presence on the island, de Chateaubriand wrote, "Only a few Jewish families remain on the Giudecca: they can be recognized by the traits of their faces. The women of this race are much prettier than their men".[17] The French writer also reported seeing some of these women peeking from their doorways and commented not only on their beauty, but also their aduncous noses.

The novelist Théophile Gautier did reach the actual Ghetto and he described it as a "court of miracles" where everything was "strange, wild and mysterious". During his visit Gautier found himself standing in front of one of the synagogues, whose entrances were surmounted by a stone with "Oriental writing", which he discovered to be Hebrew. It appeared to him as a

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[14] For a first approach to this tradition see Miron, Dan (1995): 'The Literary Image of the Shtetl.' In: *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. I, no. 3, pp. 1-43. For the broader cultural context, quite different from the Italian, see Aschheim, Steven (1982): *Brothers and Strangers. The East-European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*, Madison: University of Wisconsin. See also below, note 20.

[15] For the transformation of mostly Jewish accounts and narratives centred on another famous Italian Ghetto in the time of Emancipation, the Ghetto of Rome (which was opened only in 1870), see Lerner, L. Scott (2000): 'The Narrating Architecture of Emancipation.' In: *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, pp. 1-30; Lerner, L. Scott (2002): 'Narrating Over the Ghetto of Rome.' In: *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2-3, pp. 1-38. Recent examinations of modern travels to and representations of other Jewish neighborhoods include: Roemer, Niels (2005): 'The City of Worms in Modern Jewish Travelling Cultures of Remembrance.' In: *Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space*, special issue of *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 67-91; Roemer, Niels (2009): 'London and the East End as Spectacles of Urban Tourism.' In: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 99, no. 3, pp. 416-34.

[16] In the course of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century, up until its gradual rebirth since the 1970s, the neighbourhood of the Ghetto remained a low income and even indigent area of the town and it also became deteriorated from an architectonic and urbanistic point of view. Probably also for this reason for a long time, despite the survival of its architectural treasures, the Ghetto did not feature among the historical and artistic landmarks of the traditional sightseeing tours of Venice. The neighborhood is not even mentioned for example in the classic *Italy. Handbook for Travellers* by Karl Baedecker in its first editions since 1869 (I have consulted them from the 2nd edition of 1870). It begins to appear, although with brief references, in later editions from 1903 on. In the rich collections or series of photos of Venice from the late 19th and early 20th century, even when including low-income areas of the city, we do not find pictures of the Ghetto. It may be interesting to notice that this absence from the general sight and public views of Venice – in this case perhaps also for more complex and specific tensions surrounding the Ghetto as a symbol – is confirmed by the fact that the neighborhood is not even mentioned in the correspondence or writings concerning their visits to the city by prominent intellectuals or writers, Jewish or of Jewish background, such as Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust or Theodor Herzl, who do not seem to have gone there.

[17] See de Chateaubriand, *Deux Livres de Mémoires*, p. 164. Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise noted, translations into English are mine.

dirty, dark and degraded neighborhood, whose inhabitants wandered in rags like ghosts. "Every illness of the leprosariums of the Orient" seemed to befoul the walls of the buildings; no line of the architecture was straight. At the same time, the writer also imagined that within this filth, inside the dark buildings, were "the Rebeccas and Rachels of a radiant Oriental beauty" and that one could certainly find all sorts of treasures in gold and precious stones, originating from Smyrna or even the remote India.[18]

This orientalizing representation, being a mixture of stereotypization, aestheticization, deformation and ambivalent rejection, can at times be found also in the accounts of Jewish authors like Zangwill and even in Roth's history of the Jews of Venice. In an article preceding his monograph Roth, possibly inspired by Zangwill, described the Ghetto from the time of Rabbi Leon Modena (1571-1648) as seen through the eyes of a visitor appreciating the "pictorial charm" of the neighborhood and observing the "Levantine merchants in their turbans" and "their beautifully dressed ladies".[19] Roth's representation of the Ghetto – and of Italian Jewry more generally – belongs, I would suggest, to what has been called the "aesthetics of Jewish self-affirmation".[20] At the same time, the historian participated in a specific aestheticizing and orientalizing tradition, with its stereotyping and ambivalent self-mirroring. Both in the texts by Roth and Zangwill, as well as those by de Chateaubriand and Gautier, we see an audience, be it non-Jewish or Jewish, who is not simply attending, but also shaping the performance, which these authors/visitors try to capture in their orientalizing and aestheticizing accounts of the Jewish space.[21]

Nationalization and Patriotification

A new phase in the history of the Ghetto of Venice was marked by the Great War. The Jewish participation in the war and its commemoration proved a central experience and site of memory in the European process of the "nationalization" of Jews.[22] In the early 1920s, the Venetian Jewish community (alongside with other communities throughout Europe) decided

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[18] See Gautier, *Italia*, pp. 251-4.

[19] See Roth, Cecil (1926): 'In the Italian Ghetto.' In: *The Menorah Journal*, vol. XII, no. 6. A contemporary Italian version of this article appeared in the major Italian Jewish journal of the time, *La rassegna mensile di Israel*, December 1926, pp. 99-112. See also Roth, Cecil (1933): 'The Background of Shylock.' In: *The Review of English Studies*, pp. 1-9 (of the offprint), for brief references by Roth to his English predecessors visiting the Ghetto of Venice, including Israel Zangwill. For a recent assessment of Roth within Jewish historiography see Ruderman, David (1998): 'Cecil Roth, Historian of Italian Jewry: A Reassessment.' In: Myers, David N. and Ruderman, David B. (eds.): *The Jewish Past Revisited*: *Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 128-42.

[20] See Mendes-Flohr, Paul (1984): '*Fin-de-siècle* Orientalism, the *Ostjuden*, and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation.' In: *Studies in Contemporary Jewry and Society*, vol. I, pp. 96-139. For a more recent overview on Jewish orientalism and the orientalization of Jews, see Kalmar, Ivan D. and Penslar, Derek, eds. (2005): *Orientalism and the Jews*, Waltham: Brandeis University Press.

[21] Although with quite different implications these representations share also some of the power relations and political superstructures identified by Edward Said in his pioneering definition of orientalism. Said was actually the first to notice the ironic "resemblances" between orientalism and anti-Semitism: see Said, Edward W. (1978): *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Books, p. 28. Recent critiques of Said's work include Varisco, Daniel M. (2007): *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid*, Seattle: University of Washington Press.

[22] See Mosse, George L. (1977): 'The Jews and the German War Experience.' In: Mosse, Georg L. : *Masses and Man: Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*, New York: Fertig, pp. 263-83, and more generally Mosse, Georg L. (1990): *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars,* Oxford: Oxford University Press. On the Italian experience see Toscano, Mario (1993): 'Gli ebrei italiani e la prima guerra mondiale (1915-1918).' In: Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici (ed.): *Italia Judaica* IV. *Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita, 1870-1945*, Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, pp. 285-302.

to erect a monument to the memory of its members fallen in the war. One of the reasons for this was that many members of the community did not want Jewish names to appear on public monuments under a Christian cross. In his seminal analysis, George Mosse noted the ways in which the First World War created a Christian imagery of death, spreading and imposing it all over Europe on Christians and non-Christians alike. Likewise, in Catholic Italy, it was not uncommon that a Jewish soldier be put to rest under a cross. The Jewish community of Venice reacted negatively to this practice, even though some of its members still thought that the Jewish names should appear together with all the other fallen. In 1923, finally, a marble plate was mounted on the facade of the Levantine synagogue in the Ghetto, and it was inaugurated in the presence of public authorities in a patriotic ceremony.[23]

Only the Community archives reveal, today, the tensions behind this final decision. The Jewish Community board had in fact voted for a monument to be built in the Jewish cemetery on the Lido island, but the lower-income, and in some cases indigent, section of the community which still lived in the Ghetto protested that there had to be a monument also in the Jewish neighborhood, as a token and exhibition of the courage and patriotism of Venetian Jewish soldiers. Although both monuments were built in the end, the conflict revealed the ambivalence of the social elite of the community towards the Jewish neighborhood, still perceived as a surviving sign of poverty, absence of freedom and a stigma of the past centuries. The wealthier and more acculturated Jews of Venice wished to leave this past behind, as they had moved to more central areas of the town and strived to fully integrate with the Venetian and Italian society.[24]

The public ceremony accompanying the inauguration of the plaque on the synagogue's facade suggested a connection between Italian and Jewish (especially Biblical) history. The participation of Jewish soldiers in the First World War represented the full integration of the Jewish minority within the Italian society.[25] By turning the Ghetto into a patriotic "*lieu de mémoire*"[26] or site of memory, the Jewish Venice became not only a performer of the new Jewish and "civic rituals",[27] but also an audience, contemplating a new kind of national memory. Fifteen years later, in 1938, this tradition was tragically broken, as the commemoration of the Jewish participation in the Great War was outlawed by the racist and anti-Semitic fascist regime. At that point, the public authorities even forbade the Jewish school, forcedly created according to the new "racial laws", to be named after Roberto

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[23] See the correspondence and the reports on the project of the monuments and on the inaugural ceremonies (including clippings from contemporary local newspapers reports) in Biblioteca-Archivio Renato Maestro, Venice, Archivio della Comunità Ebraica di Venezia, busta 200 *Manifestazioni*, fascicolo *Comitato per le Onoranze agli Ebrei Veneziani caduti in guerra (1921-1923).*

[24] I have analyzed the formation of a real and imagined separation between the lower and the higher social scale of the community, based also on the proximity to or distance from the Ghetto of their residence, in *Una comunità immaginata*, pp. 56; 237-41. This separation, which is still in part present today in the informal discours of the Jewish community and which can be found in similar forms in most Jewish communities (and perhaps in most communities more generally), has been represented in the local Venetian Jewish dialect as a distinction between the higher ("*il su*" [the high]) and the lower ("*il zo*" [the low]) section of the Jewish society.

[25] For a fuller reconstruction of the ceremonies, references to official speeches and further analysis of the nature of, and tensions surrounding, this important episode in the context of the patriotic memory of the city of Venice and of the Jewish community, see my *Una comunità immaginata*, pp. 241-55.

[26] See the foundational project, edited by Nora, Pierre (1984-1992): *Les lieux de mémoire*, Paris: Gallimard. For the Italian context, see Isnenghi, Mario, ed. (1996-1998): *I luoghi della memoria*, Roma-Bari: Laterza.

[27] See Stow, *Theaters of Acculturation*, p. 34 where the formula "Jewish civic rituals" is used. Here I am referring more specifically to the context evoked by Mosse, George L. (1993): 'The Jews and the Civic Religion of Nationalism.' In: Mosse, George L.: *Confronting the Nation. Jewish and Western Nationalism*, Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, pp. 121-30.

Sarfatti, Venetian Jew honored with a golden medal for valor who was among the youngest Italian soldiers fallen in the First World War.[28]

Museumification

It should be noted that the official seat of the Jewish Community of Venice, the office of the President, the meeting hall of the Board and the Cultural Center did not return to the Ghetto until the early 1970s, and even then only after a lively debate among the community members. Most Venetian Jews had by then abandoned the Jewish neighborhood, having moved towards the city center. Especially the wealthy would return to the Ghetto only for the services in the synagogues during the Jewish high holidays.[29] Until the aftermath of the Second World War, almost two hundred years after its gates had been torn down, the ancient Jewish quarter was still perceived by some as the site of segregation and a symbol of isolation and poverty. For a century and a half after its gates had been shattered, the Ghetto still persisted not simply as a physical site, but also as a section of the community which, especially in the first decades of the twentieth century, was still assisted through philanthropy by the wealthy members of the Jewish community.[30] These charitable activities were aimed at supporting the poorer and less fortunate who had remained in the Jewish district, and who still needed to be "regenerated", if the complete abolishment of any social and cultural distinction was to be achieved.[31] These processes lasted for a limited time after the Second World War and the Holocaust, as the socio-economic transformations of the Italian society at large gradually erased most of the remaining differences (although the perceived social separation between the poorer and the richer members of the community still partly persisted).

The return of the Community Center to the Ghetto in the mid-seventies was a final result of the rising attention towards the neighborhood. The city of Venice, the Italian state and international committees (for example Save Venice, which had started working for the rescue and safeguard of the city since the great flood of 1966) became increasingly interested in the ancient buildings of the Ghetto and its architectural treasures. Thus, in the course of the 1970s and with an increased intensity between 1979 and 1981, a fund-raising campaign and restoration works took place, aimed at preserving the seventeenth-century synagogues in the Ghetto. Out of five synagogues, which are major landmarks and tourist destinations of the district today, only one remains open for religious services all year round, on Saturdays and the holidays; two others open once a year, on *Yom Kippur*.

The process of rediscovering the Ghetto, led by the Jewish Community and supported by the local public authorities as well as international organizations, reached the first major conclusion in 1986, with the inauguration of a new Jewish museum in the Campo di Ghetto Nuovo. The museum was part of a larger revitalization project referred to as the "new Ghetto"

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[28] For further details on the episode, see *Una comunità immaginata*, pp. 254-5. Roberto Sarfatti, who had died on the battlefield aged 17, was the son of Margherita Sarfatti, the critic and writer known for her *liaison* with Benito Mussolini (see Cannistraro, Philip V. and Sullivan, Brian R. (1993): *Il Duce's Other Woman*, New York: Morrow and Co).

[29] A testimony of these visits in the first decades of the last century, by someone who had been born and had lived in the Ghetto during his youth, can be found in the booklet: Pardo, Emilio (1965): *Luci e ombre. Il Ghetto di Venezia alla fine del 1800 ed al principio del 1900*, Roma: Tipografia Sabbadini.

[30] I have reconstructed some organizational and socio-economic aspects of this philanthropic activity in *Una comunità immaginata*, pp. 78-84.

[31] On the origins of the notion of "regeneration" in Italy, stemming originally from French revolutionary ideals, but largely present in the European discourse on Jewish emancipation, see Luzzatto Voghera, Gadi (1997): *Il prezzo dell'uguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia 1789-1848*, Milano: Franco Angeli.

or the "*open* Ghetto".[32] The terms "new Ghetto" and "open Ghetto" symbolize a process of the re-invention of the Ghetto in which the Jewish community became, more than ever, both an actor and the audience. Venetian Jews were both participating in the re-invention, and at the same time becoming its spectators, reflecting on the new representations of Italian Jewish identity in the context of which the project took place.

These processes of the late 1970s and early 1980s should in fact be set in the context of a broader rediscovery of Jewish culture in Italy. The publishing industry, exhibitions, theater and film makers started recognizing Italian Jews, and Jews more generally, as an attractive, even fashionable subject.[33] After 1989 especially, the pursuit of ethnic and religious minority identities was in many ways becoming a substitute for the great narratives and for the traditional poles of identification represented, until very recently, by political ideologies, now in a clear decline. The revival of Jewish culture had been fueled by Isaac Bashevis Singer's Nobel Prize in literature in 1978 and by the rise of a new historiographical and cultural interest in the Jewish heritage of Central Europe. The gradual opening of the borders of Eastern Europe, and the renaissance of its remaining Jewish heritage found its reflection also in Italy, especially through translations of literary and scholarly works.[34] Italian Jewry also increasingly reflected on the new representations of its past prompted by the international and especially the American Jewish community, and nourished by cultural exchanges between both sides of the Atlantic.[35]

For the Jews of Venice this, however, became also a phase of an increasing "museumification" of Venetian Jewish culture, a phenomenon which coincided with the surge of collective interest in the Holocaust.[36] This new trend, both on the part of Jews and non-Jews resulted in a monumentalization of Jewish history and memory. When the restorations of the synagogues were first announced, the Committee for the Jewish Historic Center of Venice officially stated that the works would be dedicated to the memory "of the two hundred

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[32] Jona, Renato: 'Nel Ghetto open il museo d'arte ebraica.' In: *Il Sole-24 Ore*, 30 June 1986 (emphasis added).

[33] A token of this trend may be seen, for example, in the appearance of a popular guidebook to Jewish landmarks in Italy: see Sacerdoti, Annie (1986): *Guida all'Italia ebraica*, Genova: Marietti, later reprinted and reissued (a recent English translation appeared as Sacerdoti, Annie (2004): *The Guide to Jewish Italy*, D. Kerr transl., Venezia: Marsilio). This was followed by the publication of regional guides to the Jewish monuments and sites in Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna etc., witnessing a new fashion for Jewish tourism and an architectural and urban renaissance of ancient Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues and museums in many, especially smaller, Italian cities.

[34] For the international context (and a few, brief references to the Venetian case) see Gruber, Ruth E. (2002): *Virtually Jewish. Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press. A recent re-assessment of this investigation by the same author is 'Beyond Virtually Jewish: New Authenticities and Real Imaginary Spaces in Europe.' In: *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 99, no. 4, Fall 2009, pp. 487-504.

[35] In 1989 the Jewish Museum of New York organized the exhibition *Gardens and Ghettos: the Art of Jewish Life in Italy* (see the catalogue edited by Vivien B. Mann, Berkeley: California University Press 1989). The title *Gardens and Ghettos* well represents the continued idealized and aestheticizing representation of the Italian Jewish experience, including that of the Ghetto. The following year the same exhibition was on display in the Italian town of Ferrara (known internationally also as the setting of Giorgio Bassani's novel *The Garden of the Finzi Continis* of 1962, and of the award-winning filmic adaptation of the novel by Vittorio De Sica, which probably influenced the original title of the American exhibition). See the resulting catalogue Mann, Vivien B., ed. (1990): *I Tal Ya', Isola della Rugiada Divina. Duemila anni di arte e vita ebraica in Italia*, Milano: Mondadori.

[36] Recent analyses of the display of Jewish culture in exhibitions and museums include Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara (1998): 'Exhibiting Jews.' In: Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara: *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 79-130. For the transformations and re-invention of Jewish culture in Jewish spaces, see the variety of contexts and experiences explored in Brauch et al., *Jewish Topographies*.

Jews deported and killed by the Nazis".[37] We should note here, however, that the deportations and arrests had taken place only in part in the Ghetto, so that there was no direct, or exclusive, relation between the site and the deportations. In 1980, a Holocaust memorial was unveiled, also in the Ghetto. The monument, consisting of a series of bronze reliefs by the Lithuanian-American sculptor Arbit Blatas, represents deportations and mass killings. The reliefs were inspired by Blatas' drawings produced as the opening images for the TV series *Holocaust*. As historians have noted more recently, the TV series represented an important episode in the international resurgence of the memory of the Holocaust, contributing, for better or for worse, to the diffusion of the very term "Holocaust".[38]

In the 1980s and 1990s, Venice thus faced the advent of what has been called the "era of the witness" which gradually set in with lasting consequences in Europe and America.[39] The Ghetto thus became a site where the rediscovery and museumification of Jewish heritage converged with the rise of a collective memory of the Holocaust, now turning into a new "civic religion"[40] for the Western world. Both of these processes contributed to the monumentalization of the Ghetto.[41]

The Ghetto as an Empty Stage and a Metaphor

A novel by two popular Italian authors, Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, *The Lover without a Fixed Home* (*L'Amante senza fissa dimora*), of 1986, pictures the more recent developments of the image of the Ghetto in the collective mind. The protagonist of the story is David Silvera, a modern but mysterious Jew, half Marrano, half Wandering Jew. Silvera, in search of his own identity, visits the Ghetto, where some of his ancestors might have lived many centuries earlier. His impression of the Ghetto, however, is still that of a dirty, decadent and oriental quarter, which appears to be not so much of a real and physical space, but more of a symbol of instability, precariousness, even menace:

> Life, not only of the Jews, but also mine, was so precarious, menaced, hanging by a thread […]. Was this perhaps what [David] had tried to tell me and I could not understand? That there were no true certainties for anybody, no true roots anywhere, that the same *chazer* [i.e. courtyard: the Jewish name for the Ghetto] floated freely on the waters and could arrive who knows where, drifting?[42]

In 1997, the Ghetto featured in a TV advertisement, aimed at raising funds for the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities.[43] A year before, the district appeared for the first time on the

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[37] See 'Salviamo cinque gioielli ebraici.' In: *Il Gazzettino*, 4 April 1979. This connection is underlined again in the press reports about Blatas' monument and the new Jewish museum: Sirena, Toni: 'Nel primo ghetto d'Europa i bassorilievi di Blatas ricorderanno lo sterminio.' In: *L'Unità*, 25 June 1979; Brandes, Francesca (1986): 'Percorso fra argenti e canali.' In: *Shalom*, July.

[38] See Sullam Calimani, Anna-Vera (2002): *I nomi dello sterminio*, Torino: Einaudi, pp. 96-7.

[39] See Wieviorka, Annette (2006): *The Era of the Witness*, transl. J. Stark, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, and Novick, Peter (1999): *The Holocaust in American Life*, Boston and New York: Hougthon Mifflin.

[40] See on these processes, among a constantly expanding literature, Traverso, Enzo (2005): *Le passé mode d'emploi. Histoire, mémoire, politique*, Paris: La Fabrique.

[41] One may also suggest that in Venice the two memories tended to merge also through the conflation of the references to the Ghetto as the ancient Jewish neighborhood and to the modern ghetto of the Nazi "Final Solution".

[42] See Fruttero, Carlo and Lucentini, Franco (1986): *L'amante senza fissa dimora*, Milano: Mondadori, p. 140.

[43] Jesurum, Stefano: 'Lo spot esce dal ghetto.' In: *Sette* of *Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 1997.

Internet with a virtual itinerary through its monuments.[44] In many ways, at the end of this imaginary journey, the Ghetto, devoid of a thriving Jewish life, seems to have been gradually turned into a monumental empty stage.[45] The literary representations of the Ghetto have now turned it into a universal symbol of precariousness, isolation and menace and – thanks also to its virtual existence in the internet – into an existential metaphor for postmodern, not necessarily Jewish, identities.

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[44] 'Il Ghetto di Venezia viaggia in Internet.' In: *Il Gazzettino*, 28 March 1996. The newspaper title translates: "The Ghetto of Venice travels in the internet", as if the Ghetto itself had now become a traveller.

[45] Recent perspectives on possible developments of the life of the Ghetto, in the context of its historical transformations through the centuries, are analyzed in Bassi, Shaul (2002): 'The Venetian Ghetto and Modern Jewish Identity.' In: *Judaism*, Fall, pp. 469-80.

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Simon Levis Sullam

Visual Semiotics of "Jewishness" in Kazimierz

Agata Dutkowska

Abstract

Kazimierz, the district of Kraków that for centuries was home to a large Jewish community and today hosts one of the most emblematic revivals of Jewish heritage in Europe, is replete with visual signs of "Jewishness." The surface of the city bears not only the traces impressed on it by pre-war Jewish life and the scars left by the Holocaust but also new manifestations of rising popular interest in the Jewish past. Thus Hebrew inscriptions, holes left by removed *mezuzahs*, commercial ads, art installations and football graffiti all contribute to this incoherent and fragmented urban representation of Jewish heritage.

Taking the perspective of visual sociology, I map and examine different types of visual representations of "Jewishness" in Kazimierz, the Jewish district of Kraków, trying to identify not only the producers / performers and the addressees of these signs, but also the context of this visual production and its cultural, economical and political consequences. Do visual representations in Kazimierz and their reception indicate a mere reinterpretation and recontextualisation of existing stereotypes, or the emergence of new interpretations?

The major caesuras in the history of Kazimierz were marked by the Holocaust and the present gentrification of the district. Until 1941, Kazimierz was the home of a large and thriving Jewish community. After the Jews were removed from the district into a nearby ghetto and transported to concentration camps, the history of Kazimierz as the Jewish quarter came to an abrupt end. The postwar years were marked by a decline of Kazimierz to a second class district. This changed only with the post-1989 systemic changes, which brought about the revitalization, but also gentrification of the quarter.[1]

Why the visual?

As Gruber has already implied in her notion of "virtual Jewishness", the production and reinvention of Jewishness in places like Kazimierz has, to a large extent, a visual character.[2]

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[1] See Legutko-Ołownia, Agnieszka (2004): *Kraków's Kazimierz, Town of Partings and Returns*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Bezdroża.
[2] See Gruber, Ruth Ellen (2002): *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

What interests me in this analysis are the images one can find in the urban space, on the surface of the city. There are three basic categories of signs that I deal with here: pre-Second World War traces of Jewish life, official and commercial signs, and graffiti and tags that relate to the football team "Cracovia".

The pressure to create more profitable surfaces within the urban landscape has been the dominant tendency of Kazimierz's revitalisation since the early 1990s.[3] Jewish symbols and aesthetic elements relating to Jewishness have been frequently used in this process. The main actors of the renovation of Kazimierz are, next to entrepreneurs and official authorities, also institutions like the Centre for Jewish Culture or the Galicia Jewish Museum, which actively participate in the process of renegotiating the cultural landscape of Kazimierz. Apart from the institutionalised forms of cultural production, however, Kazimierz is also the site of sub-cultural activity. The graffiti war taking place between the fans of the two local football clubs: "Wisła" and "Cracovia" unfolds also in the urban spaces of Kazimierz, claiming the dilapidated areas of the district and marking the resistance to the aesthetics of profit. This counter-mainstream and seemingly displaced phenomenon, surprisingly, also draws on the Jewish past of the district.

Methodology

Visual studies are a young discipline in Poland, which is not yet academically established as an autonomous field of study. The need for interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary studies of images is therefore all the more pronounced.[4] Having its roots in anthropological and ethnographic research, the visual approach relies on semiotic methodologies of interpretation. Photography is the main method of inquiry, adopted not only as an illustration, but as a tool of documentation, heuristic inquiry and for explanatory purposes.

My project has to a large extent a non-theoretical character and focuses on mapping the symbols relating to Jewishness in the urban space. Nonetheless, I believe that it can have a documentary and heuristic value for further research. The iconography of Kazimierz can be examined in the context of the studies on new forms of tourism, post-modern modes of leisure and urban regeneration. I will offer some preliminary interpretations of the collected material, hoping to inspire further discussion and other possible applications.

Traces

The first group of signs I analyse are the traces from before the Second World War, such as holes in the doorframes where *mezuzahs* where placed, inscriptions in the Hebrew alphabet, etc. I examine their complex status both in the period of the postwar degradation of Kazimierz and its revitalization, when the rapidly expanding tourist industry redefined these traces as significant sights.

The postwar Kazimierz was an extremely neglcted district. Today, the photos of that time are often used as a contrast to emphasise the transformation that the district has undergone. Although conservation works were taking place in Kazimierz also before 1989, they focused solely on preserving some of the synagogues. Other traces of everyday Jewish life were not

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[3] See Murzyn, Monika (2006): *Kazimierz. The Central European Experience of Urban Regeneration,* Kraków: International Cultural Centre, p. 80.

[4] See Sztompka, Piotr (2006): *Socjologia wizualna. Fotografia jako metoda badawcza*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.

considered as worth retaining. They were irrelevant, if not problematic, to the newly settled non-Jewish inhabitants. They were also a reminder to the new Communist regime that a quarter of Kraków's population was murdered in the Holocaust and that the Jewish life could never be restored to its former state.

Photo 1. A Yiddish inscription at the entrance to the former meat shop: "*fleysh ferkoyf* (?)" – "meat vendor", Bożego Ciała Street, 2008.[5]

Photo 2. A sign of a *mezuzah* on the door frame, Szeroka Street, 2008.

As soon as consumerist logic superseded real socialism, the demand for Jewish traces rapidly increased. Today, the material signs of the Jewish presence in Kazimierz lead the eyes and the steps of tourists. An almost faded inscription or a *mezuzah* hole are images that convey authenticity and symbolise in a powerful way the contrast between the presence and absence. The new tourist, whose gaze is conditioned by the postmodern practice of image consumption, is very sensitive not only to physical features of the visited places but also to their symbolic connotations and the aesthetic stimuli they provide.[6] It is also for this reason that the tourist industry narrates the history of Jews in Kazimierz with the images the visitors know through filmic representations. And thus the set locations of Spielberg's *Schindler's List* are among the must-sees along with the historic synagogues.

Jewish traces seem to be attractive not only as signifiers, but also as purely aesthetic forms. An example can be found in Bożego Ciała Street, where a restaurant was adorned with freshly repainted Yiddish inscriptions resembling an authentic old shop sign a few houses away. During the restoration of the façade, workers uncovered old Yiddish inscriptions of a kosher restaurant. The owner of the new restaurant opening there had them repainted, adding some new inscriptions. The fresh paint of the new inscription and the peeling paint of the one from before the war stand in an opposition, but at the same time, correspond to each other. For the purpose of creating a new aesthetic space in Kazimierz, the difference between the authentic and reinvented is no longer of crucial importance.

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[5] All photographs by the author. Translation of Yiddish inscriptions: Janina Wurbs.
[6] See MacCannell, Douglas (1999): *The Tourist: a New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Photo 3. The freshly painted Yiddish inscriptions on a new restaurant, Bożego Ciała Street: "*restoratsye / yeder tsayt / frishe shpayze / frishtik / mitog / vetshere*" - "restaurant / fresh food at all times / breakfast / lunch /dinner", 2010. Photo 4. and 5. Details of the inscriptions; right: "Kosher beer", left: "*kavehoyz / kuglmakher / tsholnt / knish / beyglekh*" – "coffee house / kugl-maker / tsholnt / knish / bagels".

As the Jewish traces on the walls of Kazimierz wither away with time, they are either replaced with new ones, or preserved in their original form. An interesting solution was adopted in the case of the sign of the Talmudic society in Józefa Street. The Hebrew inscription "Kowea Itim La-Tora" ("setting time for Torah study") marks the entrance to what used to be a prayer house. The inscription, now an integral part of every Jewish heritage walking tour, was in fact easy to overlook before, in September 2009, the sign was copied and installed on a metal board directly over the semi-faded original. Additionally, a new information plaque, founded by the Israeli memorial delegations to Poland, explains the origin and the meaning of the inscription in English, Hebrew and Polish (the order of the languages is probably not coincidental, as it is addressed more at tourists than locals). The multiplication of the original sign, both in one-to-one scale above the original, and on the information plaque changes the status of the inscription. It has not only been saved from disappearing, but has also become a commemorative "project".

Photo 6. The former prayer house Kowea Itim La-Tora, with the copy of the old inscription over the original, Józefa Street, 2010.

Photo 7. The new information plaque with a photo of the inscription, 2010.
Photo 8. A tourist photographing the information plaque, 2010.
Photo 9. and 10. Chalk silhouettes on the walls of Kazimierz, 2008.

Another such commemorative attempt was the project realised by Galicia Jewish Museum in March 2007. A number of art students involved in this street art enterprise, drew chalk silhouettes on the housefronts of Kazimierz. The idea behind the project was to commemorate the absent inhabitants of the district. The form, a chalk outline of a human body, evokes the atmosphere of the crime scene, but also refers to the haunting presence of the former inhabitants. Although the chalk traces are subtle and easy to efface, some of them are still visible and become yet another sight for passers-by.

Commercial and official signs

Prior to 1989, tourist traffic in Kazimierz was almost non-existent. Today, the visitors come across a whole range of information plaques and maps meant to guide them through the newly created Jewish Monuments Trail. The first tourist information signs appeared in Kazimierz only in the 1990s and they were promptly followed by those of a strictly commercial nature. To attract the eye of the potential customer, the signs of Jewish-style restaurants and cafés advertise pleasures not only for the stomach but also for the imagination. Evoking the atmosphere of Bruno Schulz's stories, they convey a romantic and nostalgic vision of Jewishness and promise a travel back in time. Establishments with Jewish names, adorned with lions, menorahs, and other biblical symbols, are concentrated around Szeroka Street, a rectangular square adjacent to the oldest synagogue in Kraków and a Jewish cemetery. The aura of the Jewish space is not only supposed to attract the city flaneurs, but also open the wallets of potential customers. Using Jewish symbols for marketing purposes has become a common practice and the question of the authenticity of these "Jewish businesses" is rarely pondered.

The showpiece among the Jewish-style destinations in Szeroka Street is the restaurant "Once Upon a Time in Kazimierz". Its façade resembles four small craft workshops and a store. The visitor faces at once not only a piece of the "old" Kazimierz, but also a vision of a harmonious Christian-Jewish past with Szymon Kac, the tailor, and Benjamin Holcer, the carpenter, living side by side with Stanisław Nowak, the grocer. The presumed authenticity of the restaurant is further enforced by the plaque on its external wall. The short note in Polish and English, modelled on the official tourist information plaques, suggests that the row of shops is actually a reconstruction:

> As one turns from Miodowa into Szeroka Street, for so long the very heart of the Jewish quarter, one suddenly finds oneself confronted with a row of curious shop fronts that *must have had their origins in those days*: weather-beaten window shutters, shabby-looking display windows and signboards still proudly announcing their owners names, *today with their much weathered paint* and names flaking off ... The interiors of these business premises, be they little grocery stores or dimly lit workshops are *fitted exactly as they used to be*. Now they are separated from each other only by imaginary partition walls, as the real ones have long been pulled down, turning the adjacent premises into a single, cosy and inviting space, symbolising integration between the peoples and their religions and culture…(emphasis mine)

As if to confirm the restaurant's role in the inter-denominational dialogue, the owners add a recommendation from a rabbi and a Polish priest, who unanimously praise the establishment for offering not only delightful cuisine but also a "sentimental journey into the past". Thus a contemporary commercial act is presented in the context of the visual codification of memory. The stage-set like environments purport to be a realistic reconstruction, although the "much weathered paint" had to be made to look old with great effort.

The "journey in time" that the visual makeovers of the district offer is usually a journey with an undefined destination, the only clear signpost being the Second World War and the Holocaust. "Once Upon a Time in Kazimierz" clearly takes its customers on an imaginary trip beyond that point in time. However, the mythical period when Poles and Jews lived side by side, "mingled and rubbed shoulders", as the restaurant plaque states, is never named.

Photo 11. and 12. The café "Once Upon a Time in Kazimierz", 2010.

Alluding to a historic continuity, or "tradition", increases the appeal of businesses and therefore the references to the Jewish tradition are particularly common across Kazimierz. A newly opened bakery in Józefa Street, for example, uses Yiddish signs to advertise its "traditional" bagels. Józefa Street, which was a busy Jewish retail centre before 1945, has recently undergone a major functional change. Grocers and other local shops have been almost entirely replaced with catering and leisure establishments, souvenir shops and art galleries. The "Yiddish" bakery, located alongside a chocolate gallery, a perfume boutique and a coffee shop, clearly capitalises on the Jewish history of its location and translates it into an attractive trademark.

Not only tourists and commercial establishments participate in the Jewish heritage boom in Kazimierz. A number of local initiatives, NGOs, media, cultural programmes and foundations with a non-local character also sustain the popular interest in the Jewish quarter. From the point of view of visual sociology the presence of these various agents also means that more eyes are directed towards the district. And these eyes are, to a large extent, influenced by a consumerist approach.

Photo 13. Bakery "*Bajgiel*" in Józefa Street, 2008.

Photo 14. A photographer taking pictures of the wall of Isaac's synagogue.

Photo 15. Stars of David and an old inscription on the former prayer house Kowea Itim La-Tora, Józefa Street, 2008.

Photo 16. A tourist, who noticed the author taking the previous picture, is also photographing the inscription, 2008.

The central cultural event in Kazimierz is the annual Jewish Cultural Festival which, in 2010, celebrates its 20th anniversary. Turning many of the district's locations to concert and performance venues, the festival has a strong presence in Kazimierz also for the rest of the year. Three large billboards with the posters of the last festival editions are a permanent visual representation of the event. Located on the back walls of the building hosting the festival office, the billboards dominate a small square between two synagogues and Hotel Eden (the only place in Kraków serving kosher food and housing a *mikveh*). The display, updated every year, can be read as a performative statement that stresses the continuity of the festival but also the continuity of interest in Jewish culture, mainly on the side of gentiles.

Photo 17. and 18. Banners of the Jewish Culture Festival, 2008.

The Cheder Café, which opened in the same building in 2007, is also a space where the festival idea can reverberate during the year. Run by the Jewish Culture Festival Association, the café accommodates a small library and hosts meetings, concerts and lectures. Understood "as a part of the wide-ranging educational process that has been underway in Kazimierz for almost 20 years", the café is meant as a site of learning and cultural exchange. Unlike many other Jewish-style cafés in Kazimierz which try to restage the Jewish past, Cheder offers fresh, contemporary cultural events, which present Jewishness in a new context.

Photo 19 and 20. Cheder Café, Józefa Street, 2010.

There are sound installations with Hasidic poems as well as "musical laboratories of Jewish culture" and cooking workshops. The novelty of Cheder among other Jewish-style cafés in Kazimierz lies, however, not only in its cultural offerings, but also in the aesthetics it employs. By advertising its cultural programme on large outdoor banners, Cheder not only conveys a clear message of its mission, but also frames Jewishness in a contemporary urban design.

Graffiti and tags

Not all the signs that are to be found in Kazimierz relate to tourism or business. The third group of visual representations I discuss here consists of graffiti and tags that relate to the football team "Cracovia". "Cracovia", which boasts the title of the oldest Polish football club, used to have a number of Jewish players. Although it has never been a Jewish sport club, competing teams already in the 1920s referred to "Cracovia" as the "Jewish team". With time, its fans adopted the nickname, using it to express their club pride, despite the fact that today both the team and the hooligans affiliated with it are non-Jewish.

"Cracovia's" football opponents, as it is also the case with "Ajax" Amsterdam, often use anti-Semitic language to express their hostility towards the team. While the "Ajax" fans have developed a tradition of using Jewish and Israeli symbols to express their football allegiance, Cracovia's fans and opponents alike usually use the German word "Jude" instead of the Polish word "Żyd". The German word "Jude" is known and used in the Polish language through the context of the Second World War and the Nazi slogan "Juden raus" is well understood by an average Pole. The Polish "Żyd" is also a charged word; it denotes Jewish ethnicity (not necessarily religion or citizenship) but may also be used in Polish as an insult.[7] The use of the

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[7] Tokarska-Bakir, Joanna (2008): *Legendy o krwi. Antropologia przesądu*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAB, pp. 42-5.

German "Jude", however, creates an immediate connection to fascism and the Holocaust, whereas the word "Żyd" has a broader semantic field of connotations. For this reason, operating with the word "Jude", football fans can establish a direct connotation with victimhood. To take on the identity of the victim is a common subcultural practice, even though sometimes the connection between the groups (the subculture and the victimized group) is of an only symbolic nature and no communication or contact occurs. In an act of subversion, the symbols of victimization are turned into symbols of power and pride.[8] What is more, the use of the German "Jude" as a foreign word, allows to bypass the negative connotations that the word "Żyd" has in Polish. As a rule, "Cracovia" fans call themselves "Jude", or "Jude Gang", whereas their opponents call them "Żydzi".

Photos 21.-24. Clockwise: 21. "Jude rauss" – a graffiti found in a house in Brzozowa Street; 22. Tag of the "Antifa Jude gang", Plac Nowy; 23. Tags in Berka Joselewicza Street, among them: "*Jude kradnie i morduje*" – "The Jew steals and kills", 2008; 24. A small philo-Semitic graffiti in Miodowa Street.

Given that Kraków has three football teams: the current Polish champion "Wisła", the likewise premier league "Cracovia" and the fourth league "Hutnik", football preferences are

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[8] Hebdige, Dick (1979): *Subcultures and the meaning of style*, London: Methuen.

often district and class-dependent. For the last century, Kazimierz has been the territory affiliated with "Cracovia". Football tags and graffiti, which are an important tool of subcultural production of meaning, feature prominently in the less renovated parts of the Jewish quarter. Particularly the staircases and house entrances of the less gentrified streets, like Berka Joselewicza, Starowiślna, Bocheńska, and Skałeczna Street, become the backdrop of the hooligan subculture. The exchange of invectives, including phrases like "Jude Gang", "Anty Jude", "Jude Raus" or "Żydzi won" (away with the Jews) takes place in many open spaces in Kazimierz, perplexing foreign tourists.

Tags and graffiti serve in this case the purpose of communicating, expressing emotions and demarcating space. The more neglected, residential neighbourhoods, bear the mark of the football gangs much more often than the areas of Kazimierz, where hotels and expensive apartments replaced the tenement houses. "Cracovia" tags are therefore, to a certain extent, a sign of resistance against the commodification of the district, but also a marker of the way popular subcultures perceive Jewishness.

Football graffiti referring to Jews is an example of a cultural practice which "incorporates" Jewishness, although it has little to do with the actual Jews. At the same time, the hooligan subculture reflects a revival of the traditional anti-Semitic sentiments and stereotypes. Many slogans on the walls of Kazimierz refer to race, or the "innate" nature of football fandom. The use of language in the Cracovian football conflict points to a "fascistisation" of this kind of discourse. Incorporating Nazi slogans, like "Jude raus" in the anti-"Cracovia" graffiti, or names like "Antifa Jude Gang" among the club's supporters are good examples of the trend.

Kazimierz can be therefore regarded as a space where the discourses of different interest groups intersect. The recent process of rediscovering and redefining the Jewish heritage has to a large extent a visual character and is being actively performed in the urban space. The resulting picture is, however, marked by incohesiveness and fragmentation. Jewishness is at times understood as an open set of symbolic references, instrumentalised by different groups, according to their specific needs. The functional and aesthetic transformation of the district is likely to fuel this process also in the future. Gentrification and the rising importance of the tourist industry lead to a commodification of "Jewishness". New "Jewish" cultural products are bound to follow, even if, eventually, Kazimierz is likely to turn into a site of nightlife entertainment where Jewish symbols might slowly lose their visibility and their central role.

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Agata Dutkowska

Clichés Reinforced, Clichés Challenged?

Visitors' Perceptions of the Jewish Museum Berlin

Victoria Bishop Kendzia

Abstract

The Jewish Museum Berlin has become the central site of commemorative culture in contemporary Germany. At the same time, it provokes heated public debates on how to remember, and what narratives to include, in the sweep of German-Jewish history. Interviews with German high school students indicate the impact that both the museum's exhibition and its unique architecture have in reinforcing and challenging pre-existing clichés about Jews and Judaism. How this much contested museum is approached by Berlin high school students indicates not only the potential of commemorative spaces to evoke emotional repsonses but also the importance of practices of remembrance for the processes of collective identity building.

Writing in 1947, Theodor Adorno describes the role that clichés can play in society at large: "With all the progress of presentation techniques, the rules and specialities, with all the floundering bustle, the bread on which the culture industry dines remains the stone of stereotyping."[1] More pointedly, he asserts that "In the place of experience, treads the cliché."[2] The research, I have conducted into visitor response to the Jewish Museum Berlin, points in many ways to the validity and continued relevance of Adorno's statements. I conducted an ethnography of Berlin-area high school students, the aim of which was to explore how they experience the museum and relate to the history it portrays.[3]

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[1] Adorno, Theodor and Horkheimer, Max (1997): 'Dialektik der Aufkärung,' cited in Theodor W. Adorno: *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. 3.* Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, p. 171. Unless otherwise stated, all translations of German texts into English are my own. This includes, of course, all the excerpts from the visitor questionnaires and interviews, which were originally in German.

[2] Ibid., p. 227.

[3] Namely, research sessions with high school students from seven Berlin-area schools, three being in the former West and three in the former East, and one in a region of the former West with a majority Turkish/Arab population. Each session included a pre-visit questionnaire, participant observations while the students visited the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB), a post-visit questionnaire, and a focus group interview lasting between 45 and 75 minutes with each student group, with a total of 128 respondents. The target group of this study is specific in that it is comprised of high-school students who might be likely to influence the future of this field. With this in mind, the individual participants are all senior high-school students, grades 11-13, who are completing or will complete what is called the *Abitur*. This qualification is a prerequisite for university entrance. The groups were

Some interesting findings have emerged regarding the manner in which particular images of Jews predominate in visitors' statements about their museum experiences. Whether such images can rightly be called clichés or stereotypes in their own right is a question, which remains open for debate and discussion. However, if one takes a commonly accepted definition of the word cliché as: a trite, stereotyped expression, usually expression a popular or common thought or idea, that has lost originality and impact by overuse, then this would apply.[4] The statements of many of the students within the research groups attest an automatic and overwhelming immediate association with Jewish history directly and almost exclusively with the Holocaust, fitting into a narrative of Jewish victimhood and German guilt. In addition, and likely as a consequence of this dominant Holocaust narrative, many of the students talk of Jews in Germany as having only existed in the past, and having once been important and influential. Indeed most of those I surveyed had never consciously met any actual living Jews and rely completely on the surrounding culture for their information and impressions. Nevertheless, a few of the visitors, most notably those who took more time to explore the upper floors of the museum, did indeed have their preconceptions challenged through the museum visit, expressing surprise at the richness of Jewish life as opposed to only sorrow over Jewish death.

Jewish Victimhood – German Guilt

The victim versus perpetrator dichotomy has been a subject of much scholarly and public debate.[5] The curator of a recent temporary exhibition (also at the Jewish Museum Berlin) on clichés of Jews and others does recognise that the Jewish topos tends to be viewed through the lens of the Holocaust: "Present day or historical evaluations of all things 'Jewish' are formed today through the experience and the knowledge of the National Socialist mass-

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also from History or Political Science classes, having a pre-existing interest in historical matters. Indeed, participation in this study was completely voluntary and relied on the students' and teachers' willingness to give their time and active input. It is then clear that the material cannot be said to representative as such, but rather illustrative of experiences on the part of present and likely future visitors and more general history workers and as such could point to how memory work might be performed in Germany in the next generation. The dissertation itself will focus not on clichés or particular statements by visitors, but rather will explore and make visible the variations and complexities of situations in the museum, using a Grounded Theory (Graser/Strauss 1967, and Strauss/Corbin 1990), situational analysis (Clarke 2005) approach. I adapted a Grounded Theory approach to ethnographic field methods from the onset, so as to begin with a research situation and try then to understand or theorize about what is happening in the field. The dissertation then will necessarily explore the "performance" (Goffmann 1963) of the museum visit and the more general research situation as part of an overall interaction with myself, the museum, its staff, each other, the teachers and so on, all within the context of political education. The working title of my upcoming dissertation is: "Visitor Experience in the Jewish Museum Berlin in the Context of Political Education."

[4] *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (1989) editon, defines the term in this way (276). This basic definition of something rendered hackneyed by overuse is shared by comparable dictionaries (Oxford, Cambridge and Collins, for example) and a number of other sources such as Dictionary.com. It can be left to the reader to decide whether all the perceptions discussed in this paper fulfil this criterion.

[5] Much has been written on the issue of German guilt over the Holocaust and its role in forming post-war West German identity. Some key readings are: Bodemann, Y. Michal, ed. (1996): *Jews, Germans, Memory: Reconstructions of Jewish Life in Germany,* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press; Herf, Jeffrey (1997). *Divided Memory: the Nazi Past in the Two Germanys,* Cambridge; Gruber, Ruth Ellen (2002): *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe,* Berkeley: California University Press. I have also written a brief overview of this; which appears as 'Holocaust Memorialisation in Germany: A Paradoxical Landscape' (2008) in *Feldnotizen* 3, Berlin: Intitut für Europäische Ethnologie, pp. 86-98.

extermination."[6] This is certainly the case with most of the visitors in my study. For example, one young woman in a grade-thirteen history class, with a middle-class, educated background from a region in what was prior to her birth part of West Berlin, expressed her general impressions of the museum in the following terms: "I experienced it more as a memorial, and that was partly annoying, because one naturally has a little bit of a guilt feeling and comes to the museum ... burdened in advance and it is so that the Jews are always only portrayed as victims."[7] Here, it is clear that the pre-existing feelings of guilt are reinforced by the museum visit. This is the case for many of the visitors, despite the assertions by museum staff that the Jewish Museum Berlin is not a Holocaust Museum.[8] Indeed, the exhibition project director, Ken Gorbey, stated that: "We don't want to ignore the concept of perpetration, but to visit a guilt trip upon the German people is not the primary objective of this museum."[9]

A young man in the same group interview commented on the museum's exhibitions as compelling him to feel guilty:

> I always find it difficult, when one speaks concretely about an individual's life story, that is, of course, connected with the historical events, but also much irrelevant information comes along with this, that, like some have already said, that is meant to give such a feeling: "We made this person's life so difficult." It is just always for me that such an exhibition is always so supported with information that the people will always take a feeling with them... I personally do not like it, this tendency.[10]

This young man chose his words somewhat carefully, complaining about what he perceived as emotional manipulation. Another young man characterized his feelings in the museum as follows: "I found the Tower fascinating. Still, one had in the entire underground part the feeling of being guilty and with it of having to feel bad."[11] This sort of reception of the museum was shared by many visitors, especially those who had a significant amount of background on the subject at home, in school, and from the various media.[12] It is also significant that this young man mentioned the underground axes in particular. Despite Ken Gorbey's instance on not focussing on perpetration as such, the Libeskind building does act primarily as a Holocaust memorial. Social historian Robin Ostow comments:

> This structure presumes hard boundaries separating Germans and Jews. Most important, its design reduces German-Jewish history to the Holocaust. In fact, in 1998, historian Julius Schoeps suggested using the Libeskind building as a national Holocaust Memorial and housing the Jewish museum elsewhere.[13]

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[6] Heimann-Jelinek, Felicitas and Sulzenbacher, Hannes (2008): 'Zur Ausstellung.' In: *Typisch! Klischees von Juden und Anderen.* Berlin: Jüdisches Museum Berlin, p. 11. This is the catalogue, which accompanied the exhibition of the same name held at the Jewish Museum Berlin from March 20th to August 3rd, 2008, and at the Jewish Museum Vienna from February 7th to June 21st, 2009.

[7] Transcript (hereafter refers as TR) 4, from group interview recorded on 17 September 2007, p. 2.

[8] In my discussions with visitor services representatives in the museum, in June 2007, they stressed this fact.

[9] Cited in Klein, Julia M. (2001): 'The Jewish Museum – 'Not a Guilt Trip'.' In: *APF Reporter,* Vol. 20/1, p. 3, available at: www.aliciapatterson.org/APF2001/Klein/ (accessed 08 October 2008).

[10] TR 4, p. 3.

[11] Questionnaire (hereafter refers as QR) 27, Answer (hereafter refers as A) 2.3.

[12] We are reminded by the professor of social theory and cultural sociology, Detlev Claussen that the cliché as a "distorted perception is socially conditioned and communicated via the media." Claussen, Detlev (2008): 'Versuch über das Bekannte – Über Klischees, Stereotype und Vorurteile.' In *Typisch! Klischees von Juden und Anderen,* Berlin: Jüdisches Museum Berlin, p. 16.

[13] Ostow, Robin (2007): 'From Displaying "Jewish" Art to (Re)Building German-Jewish History.' In: Agnew, Vijay (ed.): *Interrogating Race and Racism*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p. 309.

The museum's actual construction then would certainly act both to reflect and reinforce the automatic association of Jewish history and Jews with the Shoah.[14]

In addition to the underground axes, another section in the museum, which received a lot of attention from the students, is the Kadishman installation called Fallen Leaves. The accompanying sign invites the visitors to walk over these metal masks piled on the floor of this long room, and dedicates the work not only to the victims of the Nazis, but to victims of violence everywhere. During a visit with a particular group of young women, I noticed that many were hesitating to walk over this installation. When asked about this in the group interview, typical replies were as follows:

> I also wanted to say, that it was for me also like a graveyard, as if one were to walk over the graves, jump up on the gravestones, or so. Thus, therefore it seemed to me like graves, because at that time the Jews were not individually buried, and that that is well a memorial to remember the dead. And so I would not have felt at all at ease with the idea of walking over them.[15]

And:

> I also did not walk over them, because I remembered a film, in which there were thousands of corpses and the soldiers walked over them, as if it was no bother, and therefore I could not do it. It also ought to be transmitted that it is connected with death."[16]

In these cases the young women associated the masks on the floor with death: graveless, dead Jews, specifically. The second speaker goes further picturing in her mind's eye the soldiers (perpetrators?) walking over dead bodies. She hesitates and then refuses to take on this role she has herself attributed to the act of walking over them.[17] It bears noting here that this visitor referred to having watched a film about the war and immediately "saw" the metal masks as "corpses." This is a case in point of how messages, often simplistic and clichéd, can be transmitted medially and remotely and then applied to seemingly disconnected situations. Further it also points to the interplay betwen agency and structure. This young visitor chose freely not to walk over the installation. This choice, however, seems to be influenced both by the structure of the museum and the discourses that surround it.[18]

It might well be that the museum did not aim to "visit a guilt trip on the German people"; the museum does not, however, exist in isolation, but rather as a part of the general culture of

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[14] I tend to use the terms "Holocaust" (the word from the Greek meaning "burnt offering", which has come to mean the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis, and "Shoah" (Hebrew for "great catastrophe") interchangeably, although this could also be a point of contention.

[15] TR 6, p. 2.

[16] Ibid.

[17] It should be pointed out that not all of the visitors reacted in this way, many ran over these masks with playful glee, others walked over them with sober respectfulness. The key to contemplating these differences is to fully explore the pre-existing positioning on this topic of the visitors in question. These differences will be fully explored in the upcoming dissertation.

[18] I want to take a moment to define my use of this term "discourse". I do not simply allude to the public ways of speaking on the topic, but rather as Wolfgang Kaschuba explains (in line with Foucault's use of the term) a "systematic category of communication... that is based on forms and rules of public thought, argumentation and rationale-requiring actions as basic principles of socialness." Furthermore, and most relevant to the ethnological nature of this present study: "Discourses also embody systems of social practice in that they bind ways of thinking and ways of acting together and in that they transmit values in social and cultural behaviour patterns, which can be quasi automatically followed." Kaschuba, Wolfgang (2003): *Einführung in die* Europäische Ethnologie, München: C.H.Beck, pp. 235, 237.

memory in Germany that does indeed revolve around a central theme of guilt and atonement. Holocaust memorial expert James Young also recognizes this as he writes:

> For whether Germans like it or not ... they will always be identified as the nation that launched the deadliest genocide in human history ... in its deliberate mass murder of some six million European Jews. It is not a proud memory. But neither has any other nation attempted to make such a crime perpetrated in its name part of its national identity.[19]

It should not then come as too much of a surprise that many young Germans, even those of the fourth post-war generation, reflect back much of this discourse.[20] This issue points to another more problematic construction: that of the essential and excluding category of "German." Kaschuba recalls that post-war representations of the German "we" were part of a "construction program of the national and the ethnic, the purpose of which was above all the legitimisation, making plausible, and activation of ethnic self-images and collective we-feelings on the one hand, and of opposite images of others as foreign on the other."[21] This point is brought home in the context of the victim/perpetrator opposition in the following excerpt of an interview by the scholar Karen Till with Christine Fischer-Defoy, Active Museum president, about the plans for the Topography of Terror exhibition on the site where the Nazi *Gestapo* leadership held its offices.

Karen Till (KT): Why is this separation [between victim and perpetrator] so important?

Christine Fischer-Defoy (CFD): Maybe because the commemoration of the victims would divert attention away from the perpetrators. The responsibility is so important for us – to keep an awareness of the perpetrators in the city and to deal with the people who did it. For German politicians, as well as for the German public, it is "easier" to identify with the victims than to deal with fact that their grandparents were perpetrators. When you mix the educational work about the history of the perpetrators with the commemoration of the victims, it becomes the "Kohl politics" of "we are all so sad, and let us forget that we were the criminals who did it." The mourning hides that, and the perpetrator is put in the background.

KT: When you make such a distinction between the places of the victims and the places of the perpetrators, does that mean that Jews or Sinti and Roma will never be seen as Germans?...

CFD: They are Germans as well. It is important that we are the country of the perpetrators and the country of the victims as well – Germans were also victims. I think that there are

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[19] Young, James E. (2008): "Berlin's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe." In Ostow, Robin (ed.): (Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium. Toronto. University of Toronto Press. p. 212.

[20] What might be unexpected, though, could be the level of emotion expressed in the words and actions of the students. Having said that, Diana Pinto aptly points out that "Memory as a source of emotion has often carried the day over History as a source of healing". See Pinto, Diana (2008): 'Can One Reconcile the Jewish World and Europe?' In: Bodemann, Y. Michal (ed.): *The New German Jewry and the European Context: The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 23.

[21] Kaschuba, Wolfgang (2007): 'Deutsche Wir-Bilder nach 1945: Ethnischer Patriotismus als kollektives Gedächtnis?' In: Baberowski, Jörg et al. (eds.): *Repräsentationen.* Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, p. 35, available at: http://www.kaschuba.com/texte/kaschuba_wir_bilder.pdf (accessed 28 August 2009), pp. 1-36.)

two different processes in your mind that you have to deal with: the crimes and the consequences, and the mourning for the victims – they are two different aspects.[22]

The difficulty that Fischer-Defoy has in addressing Till's question is evident. She has taken the essentialness of the category German = perpetrator so for granted that she seems to get thrown off-track and tries to go back to her original argument. It is also interesting that she uses the terms "we" to refer to the Nazi criminals, although she clearly was not an actual perpetrator. It is her "Germanness" that causes her to use this pronoun. Here we see how constructions of the self and the other can meet in clichés.[23] The mechanism of exclusion, however unintended and even well-meaning it may be, is made explicit here.

Images of Jewish suffering and horror present in the museum also left a lasting impression on the visitors I surveyed. Replies to question 2.10 on the questionnaire: ("What do you think you will most remember from your museum visit?") repeatedly contained such associations. Some examples follow:

"The lent objects of people who died in concentration camps."[24]

"We have already been in many exhibitions and concentration camps. These feelings have only been again confirmed."[25]

"The Holocaust Tower in connection with Sachsenhausen."[26]

"How many Jews from Europe that were exterminated (6,000,000) and everything they had to suffer."[27]

Reactions like these show how strongly the young visitors are influenced not only by their museum visit, but also by all their previous impressions on the topic. One is reminded of the pervasiveness of the image of Jews as victims and its effect on individuals in comments like the one cited in Gruber by the young German man who told his Jewish girlfriend: "No young German could develop a normal relationship with you. Every time I see you I think of Dachau."[28] Further, the results show how, as Claussen reminds us, "... clichés and stereotypes belong to daily life. Daily life is governed by the power of habit."[29]

Jews as Lost, Existing only in the Past

In her review of the field of Jewish Studies in Germany, Liliane Weissberg notes that:

> The research done in those departments still bears the tone of memorialisation, of dealing with a lost past. The new *Germania Judaica* consists of the publication of tombstone inscriptions, or the statistics of, and guides to, pre-Second World War Jewish populations in various villages.... contemplating the ruins of what has been lost. Much of this scholarship of the 1980s not only offers lists of lost artifacts, but the scholarship itself has

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[22] Till, Karen E. (2005): *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place,* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 128.
[23] Claussen, 'Versuch über das Bekannte…', p. 19.
[24] QR 73.
[25] QR 80.
[26] QR 76.
[27] QR 20.
[28] Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*, p. 53.
[29] Claussen 'Versuch über das Bekannte…', p. 15.

become a *Trauerarbeit*, a work of mourning for a part of German history that was and was not the researcher's own.[30]

This tendency is also evident in the museum itself, not only in the actual survey replies, but also among various group touring the museum. In a number of cases I listened in on tour guides asking young visitors to estimate the number of Jews that lived in Germany before the Second World War, and then to guess how many live here now. Invariably, the earlier estimates were largely inflated, while the present-day guesses fell far short of even the most conservative official numbers.[31]

The replies from the students I surveyed also reflect this tendency to see the Jewish world as a thing of the past. The language is almost invariably in the past tense, pointing to what has been lost. At times students referred to their visit as transmitting "historical information about Jewry's past."[32] Here it is not only the past (*die Vergangenheit)* that is evoked but also *Judentum* or Jewry as opposed to actual people called Jews *(Juden)*. During one of the research visit sessions I observed a group of young students going through the museum quite enthusiastically saying to each other: "Oh cool, the Jews did this!"[33] – only to be approached rather aggressively by a member of the museum staff who admonished them: "It is not called 'the Jews', but 'Jewry'!" [34] – not living people but an overarching idea. Here in the words of the museum staff member we can see clearly how clichés can work, as Jews – here as an imaginary notion of Jewry – are constructed according to the speaker's own wishes and notions.[35]

Other students replied that the museum showed "how the Jews lived back then."[36] Still others felt the museum belonged in Berlin because: "Berlin is the capital city of Germany and therefore also centrally affected by/responsible for the Jewish past."[37] Indeed, words like *damals* (back then) and *die Vergangenheit* (the past) were used repeatedly by the students when discussing the museum and the topic in general. Some were more direct stating: "Judaism is not widely distributed in Germany, because the Jews were 'wiped out' during the National Socialist reign"[38], while another stated: "I find it awful, how greatly Jewish life has disappeared in Berlin." [39]

Robin Ostow recognises that although Jewish museums in Europe "deliberately distinguish themselves from Holocaust Memorials and consciously aim to display Jewish life rather than death, each features a major Holocaust installation."[40] She goes on to point out that the

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[30] Weissberg, Liliane (2008): 'Jewish Studies or Gentile Studies?' In: Bodemann, *The New German Jewry*, p. 108. My own experiences in this field also confirm Weissberg's assessment. I remember a recent conference I attended along with many German scholars involved in Jewish Studies. I was immediately struck by the fact that none of the Germans were Jewish. Yet these young students were passionately working to reconstruct elements of a German-Jewish past.

[31] Generally, the official number of pre-1933 Jews in Germany is given as circa 500,000. Official present day numbers are estimated as 106,000 (with 12,000 in Berlin). It should be noted, though, that actual numbers can vary greatly and the official numbers only include those who are accepted members of the Jewish Community. For further reading on these statistics see Bodemann, Y. Michal and Bagno, Olena (2008): 'In the Ethnic Twilight: the Paths of Russian Jews in Germany.' In Bodemann, *The New German Jewry* pp. 158ff.

[32] QR 43, A 2.1.

[33] Taken from my participant observation notes 28 November 2007.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Heinman-Jelinek and Sulzenbacher, 'Zur Ausstellung', p. 13.

[36] TR 5, p. 4.

[37] QR 92, A 2.5.

[38] QR 72, A 1.11.

[39] QR 102, A 2.8.

[40] Ostow, 'From Displaying "Jewish" Art…', p. 310.

placement of the memorial axes at the beginning of the Jewish Museum Berlin means that "Libeskind's Holocaust installation frames the historical narrative that follows."[41] Indeed, it seems that the vast majority of the visitors I surveyed positioned the museum in these terms.

In an BBC radio interview in September 2004, Daniel Libeskind also stressed the liveliness of present-day Jewish life, saying that this should not be ignored. Still, the powerful memorial nature of his building does echo the loss of the once thriving German Jewish community. James Young describes the meaning he reads in the Voids which constitute a definitive feature of Libeskind's building:

> The absence of Berlin's Jews, as embodied by these voids, is meant to haunt any retrospective presentation of their past here... [referring] literally to the absence left behind a murdered people, and absence that must be marked and that shapes (however negatively) the culture and society that brought it about.[42]

It seems too that these elements which denote absence are not lost on the young visitors, rather those few elements which do attest to a Jewish presence are largely ignored. Of the three axes situated in the underground memorial section – the Axis of the Holocaust, the Axis of Exile, and the Axis of Continuity – the images and the exhibition content that relate to the first two featured most in the visitors' replies.

Jews as Rich and Influential

It has been shown that the way young visitors approach the JMB is part of the larger topic of relating to how the Jewish topos is generally understood. With this in mind it should not be too surprising that some of the old and hackneyed stereotypes do persist. Often museum exhibitions tend to highlight well-known and successful individuals and the JMB is no exception. Robin Ostow points out that "most of the installations focus on what Broder called 'good Jews', the upper middle classes, and especially those who contributed to German culture and industry."[43] This emphasis was picked up on by the students in expressions of wonder at the influential members of the German-Jewish society. One young man stated that what will most remain in his memory from his visit is that "Heinrich Heine was a Jew."[44] Another thought the museum was great because "the Jewish people are well-known."[45] In a group interview a young man summed up his impressions of the museum stating "that Jews, however, also always took on an important literary role."[46] Here then, images of certain successful and influential individuals dominate the statments of these visitors. This, coupled with the memory of the Shoah embodied in the Libeskind design, might be part of the context for the reply of one visitor to the question of whether her idea of Jewish history in Germany had changed after her museum visit. She stated: "No: I already knew that the Jews were once very rich and also held in contempt."[47] Clearly, some of these perceptions can indeed be called clichés and these are all the more difficult to counter – even for those who wish to do

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Young, James E. (2000): *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture.* New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 178.

[43] Ostow, 'From Displaying "Jewish" Art', p. 311. The 2001 article by Henryk Broder that she refers to is: 'Es ist vergeblich.' In: *Der Spiegel* no. 39, 24 September 2001.

[44] QR 32, A 2.10.

[45] QR 62, A 2.5.

[46] TR 7, p. 4, from group interview recorded on 03 December 2007.

[47] QR 19, A 2.8.

so – within a community where very few people have any conscious contact with actual living Jews.

Blaming Hitler and other Misconceptions

It is not only the perceptions of Jews that are often understood within the framework of clichéd images in German society, but the appreciation of the historical events relating to the Holocaust has also been formed by post-war narratives.[48] Despite the memory work that has been done in Germany, and Europe for that matter, since the 1980s, to try and come to terms with the historical injustices perpetrated under the Nazi regime, it seems certain alibis still persist, albeit not nearly as widely as they once may have.[49] One that came up in the replies of the students in my study was blaming Hitler almost exclusively for the persecution of the Jews. A young woman explains her personal feelings toward Jewish history in Germany as follows: "It makes me sad and upset that so many innocent people had to die only to make room for Hitler's world view.... I am in any event sad about what Hitler caused."[50] Another visitor asserts: "I cannot understand how Hitler could kill so many people in the most brutal way."[51] There is no mention here of the complicity of the people who supported Hitler and carried out the actual crimes. Other responses mention some accomplices but again only in a limited way, like the words of this student: "I can still today hardly imagine that Hitler with his followers caused so many victims and so many grave crimes."[52] Here too, Hitler is the prime mover. Although this reply does allude to a great number of "crimes," the emphasis remains on blaming Hitler and his "cronies." This is also the case with the young man who found the presence of the Jewish museum in Berlin meaningful for the reason that: "so the people again and again are faced with how cruel the crimes of Hitler and his fanatics were."[53]

In some cases the misconceptions of history seemed to multiply. The response below is indicative of this. Here a young woman wrote: "I can hardly comprehend how something so horrible, as in the Hitler time, could happen. I see conflicts of religion as superfluous."[54] This young woman uses the term *Hitlerzeit* employing passive language void of any actual criminals. Furthermore she refers to the persecution as a religious conflict rather than the racial-political one that the Nazi regime created. Here, a lack of knowledge of the nature of the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis is clearly evident. The same can be said of the next reply, as another young woman attests: "It was horrible what was done with them in the past only because they have other beliefs."[55] In this case, confusion over Jews as a religious

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[48] Much has also been written on this topic. For a good overview see: Stern, Frank (1992): *The Whitewashing of the Yellow Badge: Antisemitism and Philosemitism in Postwar Germany* (Studies in Antisemitism). Trans. by William Templer. London. Also see the dueling books by Browning and Goldhagen: Browning, Christopher R. (1992): *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland,* New York: Harper Perennial; Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1997): *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust,* New York: Vintage Books.

[49] I should point out here that the number of replies which indicated the almost exclusive blaming of Hitler amounted to only 8 individuals out of the total of 128.

[50] QR 6, A 1.11 and 2.6.

[51] QR 80, A 1.11.

[52] QR 49, A 1.11.

[53] QR 66, A 2.5.

[54] QR 44, A 1.11.

[55] QR 9, A 1.11.

group versus a racial group is transposed onto the past and leads to a misunderstanding of the specific history.[56]

Clichés Challenged? Images of Jewish Life

Some young visitors did indeed have preconceptions challenged by what they saw in the museum.[57] This was the case, for example, with three young women who toured the museum together and spent over three hours there, exploring the permanent exhibitions on the upper floors. During the visit, they seemed to enjoy themselves very much, often laughing and chatting with one another. They commented on their experiences in the museum as being remarkable, especially considering their pre-visit feelings on the topic of Jewish-German history. One of the young women expressed the following:

> The feelings that I associate with it [Jewish history in Germany] are bad! When I see historical reports, it is simply horribly painful to remember this. When one has personally been in a concentration camp (has visited a concentration camp) and has seen those ovens, then one can simply not believe that people were exterminated there!"[58]

This young visitor's emotional engagement with Jewish history in Germany is then coloured by her exposure to the very bleakest of accounts of Holocaust persecution. After the museum visit, she exclaimed: "I did not know before that 12-year-old girls had a 'Bat Mitzvah!'"[59] Further she noted that one of the things she will most remember is the pomegranate tree. This, also called the Wish Tree, is a colourful installation that denotes life and ongoing hope. It is likely precisely because these images of life were heretofore unfamiliar to her with regards to the Jewish topos, that they made such a strong impression on her.

Another one of the young women on this same visit recounted that she had a similar experience. She approached the topic in general with feelings of "sadness, anger, shame, horror."[60] Yet, after her visit she remarked that she was very surprised to learn "a lot about the Jewish culture."[61] She goes on to comment: "I did not think that a visit in a museum could be so much fun."[62] She continues: "I now also connect positive feelings with Jewish history in Germany."[63] And indeed one of the things she will most remember is the interactive installation with "the kids who were explaining Judaism,"[64] – happy scenes of life and renewal. These young women did not expect to be confronted with these joyful and even funny stories and they related to these in strongly positive emotional terms. Perhaps their pleasure at the visit and the extended amount of time they spent poring over these displays was partly due to the comforting feelings they associated with them, which stand in stark contrast to those they harbour about the Holocaust. One cannot help but be reminded of comments made by museum director W. Michael Blumenthal that the exhibitions should be

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[56] For further reading on the coinciding of religious and racial boundaries in the case of Jews see: Mock, Karen (1996): 'Anti-semitism in Canada: Realities, remedies, and implications for anti-racism.' In: James, Carl (ed.): *Perspectives on Racism and the human services sector: A case for change*. Toronto. University of Toronto Press, pp. 120-33.

[57] The number of visitors who indicated that they most remembered scenes of Jewish life and/or present day Jews amount also to only 8 out of the 128 surveyed.

[58] QR 48, A 1.11.

[59] QR 48, A 2.7.

[60] QR 51, A 1.11.

[61] Ibid, A 2.1.

[62] Ibid, A 2.2.

[63] Ibid, A 2.8.

[64] Ibid, A 2.10.

"entertaining for the whole family," and project director Ken Gorbey that "we want happy visitors."[65]

Not a Holocaust Museum?

At the opening of the JMB, German President Johannes Rau asserted that the Holocaust should not be "the sum total of German-Jewish history," and Michael Blumenthal stated that the museum is about "avoiding that Germans today when they hear about Jews or meet Jews immediately always only think of Auschwitz."[66] The difficulties of achieving these goals have already been explored above. However, at times, they do indeed seem to succeed to varying degrees, as the following comments on the museum attest: "Of course very Holocaust-biased, which is clear, but also a lot about the founding of Jewish communities (Middle Ages), trade relations, settlement areas, etc., which was good."[67] Another young visitor seemed impressed, stating: "I found it very interesting to also learn general things about the Jews and their history, and not always only about the Holocaust."[68] And another spoke of the upper floors as "more positive. They have something about Jewish history and way of life, and one did not have that shadow of war and such, but it was very friendly and all of that."[69] One young woman stated that the museum "shows that the Jews have a history even without Hitler."[70] In such cases the relief about not being confronted exclusively with the Holocaust yet again is almost palpable. Once more Broder's remarks about the JMB come to mind as he argues that "the Germans grasp the chance to free themselves from a heavy burden."[71] The young visitors above, while they do not appear to feel wholly free of this burden, did seem happy for the opportunity to take a break from it and spend some time enjoying the lighter components of the exhibition.

Present-Day Jews

In contrast to many of the visitors mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, a few did indeed recall impressions of present-day Jewish life from their museum experience. Some even used the present tense in their descriptions, like the young woman who remarked having learned something new "for I did not know how long Jews have been in Germany."[72] Or the young woman who was "amazed that such a culture has existed for thousands of years."[73] Another young woman commented that "in the Jewish museum one noticed that, not only the Second World War... that Jews were not only there, but also that the Jews have a history before the War and now well after." [74] Those who took the time to explore the contemporary gallery sections did indeed remember these well. One young woman wrote that what would remain most in her memory after her visit was "a film over a demonstration against an alleged (?) anti-Semitic theatre production."[75] Slowly then, in the words of some visitors, Jewish life

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[65] Cited in Broder, 'Es ist vergeblich…', p. 264.

[66] Ibid.

[67] QR 27, A 2.1.

[68] QR 20, A 2.4.

[69] TR 7, p. 3, from group interview recorded on 03 December 2007.

[70] Ibid. A, 2.7.

[71] Broder, 'Es ist vergeblich', p. 264.

[72] QR 123, A 2.7.

[73] QR 53, A 2.2.

[74] TR 7, p. 3, from group interview recorded on 03 December 2007.

[75] QR 93, A 2.10. (The demonstration she mentions was against the planned 1985 showing of the Fassbinder play "The Garbage, the City, and Death" in Frankfurt).

is making its way into the present. This is the case with another visitor who noted that she did indeed have new and unexpected impressions in the museum: "Yes, the history of modern Jews (Vladimir Kaminer, Ekaterina...) I had not heard of them before and I found them interesting!"[76]

Jews as not *so* "Other"

As perceptions of Jews by some young German visitors start to break out from the boundaries of the Holocaust, they seem to lose some of their "otherness". This young woman remarked that after her visit to the JMB: "Jewish history has for me lost something of its foreignness."[77] While another found it "nice that the museum portrays the Jews in a friendly and human way, thus totally different from how history does it."[78] And another young woman who enjoyed her visit tremendously remarked: "The Jews were shown from a side that one hardly thinks of today. I never thought about the time when they could live free and easily and I think it's good that this side is also shown."[79]

This friendly human picture perceived by these visitors puts one in mind of another one of Broder's more pointed critiques of the JMB, stressing the museum's key message, which is especially visible in the glass plaque in the entrance area. This plaque lists sponsors of the museum that include companies and businesses which used slave labour during the third Reich as well as descendents of Jews who were forced to toil in the concentration camps. Broder notes that the museum celebrates "not only the return of the dead Jews as ghosts ... , but rather their return as *Paten* [godparents] in a new centralized republic."[80] Robin Ostow's remarks on this message indeed apply to some of the visitor perceptions, as she asserts that "in this role, they [the Jews] no longer threaten Germany. Rather, they bless and protect it."[81]

The varying ways attest their experience the Jewish Museum Berlin demonstrate that certain clichés do prevail. These stereotypes are a function not only of the museum's design and exhibition content, but also of the surrounding memorial culture. The narrative of Jews as victims and Germans as perpetrators, with the Jews being a lost, exotic people of the past, are foremost in the visitors' indicated impressions of the museum. Some of the more stubborn, older stereotypes surrounding Jews and the understanding of the Holocaust also continue to persist, such as the image of Jews as particularly rich and influential, and the laying of blame for the Holocaust solely at Hitler's feet. It is remarkable that such stereotypes co-exist, albeit not so widely spread, with the victim/perpetrator discourse that has developed during Germany's attempts to come to terms with its past. Nevertheless, some of these images have found themselves challenged by the museum, as young visitors explore the celebratory scenes of Jewish life and the more light-hearted displays housed in the JMB. However, elements of these might also be interpreted as "newer" clichés. Such positive images are indeed being actively reinforced by the JMB within a spirit of reconciliation.

The vast German memorial landscape has room for all of these impressions to manifest themselves. James Young's comments regarding the JMB apply to the situation that this present study has endeavoured to explore: "All meanings, however contradictory and

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[76] QR 97 A 2.2. This is precisely as the reply appears on the questionnaire. The respondent did not include the last name, which is Kaufmann, FYI.
[77] QR 103, A 2.8.
[78] QR 4, A 2.5.
[79] QR 47 A 2.2 and 2.7.
[80] Broder, 'Es ist vergeblich…', p. 264.
[81] Ostow, 'From Displaying "Jewish" Art…', p. 310.

paradoxical, will be made palpable here in Libeskind's architecture: like uncanniness itself, such artifacts and works when thus contextualized will always contain their opposites."[82]

Conclusion

The implications of the varied responses of museum visitors, such as those explored here, will undoubtedly inform the continuing development of the JMB in particular, and the overall approach to German-Jewish history in general. While one cannot expect to accurately predict which form these developments might take, studies such as this one might help to hint at potential future directions. One could speculate that changes might come about, or are already in motion, based perhaps on a certain saturation with the existing guilt-based culture of memory – and/or adapt to include the significant and growing immigrant populations to a greater degree. Whether any potential developments reinforce, challenge or create "newer" clichés about Jews, however, will have to remain an open question.

The clichéd impressions, historical misunderstandings, as well as the persistence of the old and all too familiar notions of Jews illustrated above call into question the optimistic view held by Claussen that stereotypes lose their potency in our present-day mass-media conditioned society. He argues that "Adorno's productive reference to a 'disbelieved belief'... leads to the right path ... Everyone knows that things are not wholly just as they are expressed. Whoever has grown up in a mass-media-communicated world learns how to deal with readymade-categories without taking them too seriously."[83] While, Claussen may be partly right for those who take the time the reflect on the myriad of images with which they are bombarded – such as the visitors who spent hours exploring the upper floors of the JMB with their scenes of Jewish life – many more might simply not manage the work entailed in challenging the assumptions that clichés and stereotypes hold. Part of this work would involve reasoning, but far more might be accomplished if one endeavoured to take Adorno's premise (cited in the introduction) seriously and replace the cliché with experience. Indeed, the American feminist author and social activist, bell hooks, urges those who want to challenge consciously and/or unconsciously held prejudicial views to seek out contact with real people in communities where diversity is a given.[84] An effort made to meet actual Jews, for example, living in Germany might help mitigate the imaginary and often clichéd notions that abound.

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[82] Young, 'Berlin's Memorial…', p. 179.
[83] Claussen, 'Versuch über das Bekannte…', p. 25.
[84] hooks, bell (2003)*: Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope,* New York, London: Routledge, p. 65.

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Victoria Bishop Kendzia

Ordinary Jews. Holocaust Victims and Gentile-Jewish Relations in German and Polish Cinema after 1989

Małgorzata Pakier

Abstract

Two films dealing with Jewish–non-Jewish relations during the Second World War, the German *Aimée und Jaguar* and the *Polish Keep away from the Window*, were produced around the same time and share significant features. They both focus on female characters and play with the spatial dichotomies of public and private, outside world and internal hiding spaces. However, in their representations of the Jewish victims and the protagonists' relations they are radically different. The choices of style, perspective and focus of the films reflect the contemporary processes of collective remembrance in Germany and in Poland: the "normalization" of the Nazi past in Germany, and the traumatic and conflicted memories of the Second World War in Poland.

The German film *Aimée and Jaguar, Love Larger than Death* (1998) by Max Färberböck and the Polish film *Far away from the Window* (2000) by Jan Jakub Kolski both are characterized by a focus on individuals and their experiences of history and tell intimate stories about German-Jewish or Polish-Jewish relationships in the times of the Holocaust by employing conventions of melodrama. The concentration on individual experiences and intimate relations between the characters, at the expense of presenting a broader historical background, allows for the presentation of wartime stories in the form of universal tales about love and suffering. The emphasis on the singularity of situations and events, and complexity of individual experiences and choices facilitates the audience's emotional identification with each of the characters, in this way opening possibility for reinterpretation of the established collective categories of victims and perpetrators.

The aim of this chapter is to analyze and compare the images of Jewish victims and the representation of Jewish-Gentile relations during the Second World War in the two films. In what follows, I discuss the plots of the two films and common elements of their theme and style. I then analyze and compare the portraits of Jewish-Gentile relations in both films. Finally, the images of the Jewish heroines are discussed against the background of other postwar representations of Jews in Germany and Poland.

Aimée and Jaguar is based on a true story, first published in the book by Erica Fisher (1994). The film begins in the present time, when two older ladies, Lilly and Ilse, unexpectedly meet in an old people's home. The meeting evokes remembrances from the time of their youth during the Third Reich. In a retrospective way, the story of a lesbian love affair unfolds, between Lilly, formerly a loyal German housewife, and Felice, a Jew concealing her identity. The love story takes place in Berlin in 1943, when the last Jewish citizens are being captured and deported to the East, and the city is under heavy bombardment by the Allies. Felice is attracted to Lilly right from their first meeting at the concert at Philharmonic hall, and starts sending her love letters. Lilly is initially reluctant to get involved with Felice, but eventually falls in love with her, too, and decides to ask her husband for a divorce. The film portrays the bohemian fringe of society, which had not been entirely extinguished by the Nazis and which had a clear lineage in the Weimar period of the 1920s and early 1930s. It shows a thriving nightlife of Berlin, which includes numerous parties and concerts, etc. At one point Felice is offered a possibility to leave the Third Reich on a forged pass, but, hoping that the war soon be over, she decides to stay with Lilly. She is arrested, however, and is sent to the ghetto in Theresienstadt. Lilly follows Felice there, but her attempts to see her complicate Felice's situation even more. Title cards at the end of the film inform us that Felice was deported to Auschwitz and most probably died in one of the death marches. Just prior to this we see the elderly Lilly in a contemporary scene, in which she says that she has missed Felice all her life and has never found such a true love again.

The Polish film *Far away from the Window* is also based on a true story, first described by the Polish writer Hanna Krall in the short story "The One from Hamburg".[1] It is set in the middle of the war, a young Polish couple, Jan and Barbara, hide a young Jewish woman, Regina. Jan and Regina fall in love and Regina becomes pregnant. Upon discovering this, Barbara, the wife, flies into a rage and wants to denounce Regina to the Germans. Since she herself, however, suffers because she cannot have children, she eventually decides to incorporate Regina and the baby into her marriage. She starts pretending to be pregnant so that the appearance of a baby does not arouse suspicion of the neighbors. When Regina gives birth to a daughter, Barbara takes the child away from her and starts bringing it up as her own. As a result, the degraded, humiliated and helpless Regina runs away as soon as the front moves to the west, and the Soviet Army enters the town. After the war, two of Regina's envoys come to the house, offering a large sum of money in exchange for the baby. In this very dramatic scene, the envoys argue that it will break Regina's heart if they come back without the child, to which the Poles reply that if they let the child go, their hearts will be broken. The story continues into the postwar Communist period. For several years Regina strives to keep in touch with the child, sending her gifts, but eventually she gives up. Tormented by remorse and longing for Regina, Jan retreats into alcoholism and dies. The girl is raised unaware that Barbara is not her biological mother and only years later discovers the truth, which inspires her to set out to find Regina in Germany. The Jewish mother, however, does not want to talk to her anymore as she wants to forget the suffering and humiliation that she has been through.

The German film is a high budget production which employs aesthetics typical of heritage films. It is visually attractive and pays close attention to aesthetic details.[2] The Polish film, on

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[1] See Krall, Hanna (2002): 'Ta z Hamburga.' In: *Taniec na cudzym weselu*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5.

[2] Films like *Comedian Harmonists* (1998), *Marlene* (2000), and also *Aimée und Jaguar* have been ironically branded by some critics "heritage films about the Holocaust", or "Nazi-retro films". See Berghahn, Daniela (2006): 'Post-1990 Screen Memories: How East and West German Cinema Remembers the Third Reich and the Holocaust.' In: *German Life and Letters* vol. 59, no. 2; Koepnick, Lutz (2002): 'Reframing the Past: Heritage

the other hand, is a modest production characterized by a simple and restrained style. Despite the differences of budget size and the means of expression that the two films use, they share certain common features regarding the genre characteristics. Both films employ the same melodramatic narrative and style. Typically, melodramas emphasize sensational situations or crises of human emotion, failed romance or friendship, strained familial situations, tragedy, illness, neuroses, or emotional and physical hardship within everyday life. Instead of noble heroes concerned with national themes, divine law, or social order, the heroes of melodrama are usually ordinary characters.[3] Scholars of film have largely understood melodrama as an aesthetic experience that evokes emotions in the spectator.[4]

Aimée and Jaguar and *Far away from the Window* both tell stories about Jews and Poles or Germans, whose lives are inter-connected in dramatic ways. The depiction of the historical background of the events is very limited or symbolic, while the intimate relations between the characters are carried into the foreground of each plot. The war and the Holocaust merely provide a setting for the presentation of dramas experienced by ordinary people. There are two main reasons for such a structure of the films. Firstly, it is assumed that contemporary audiences have knowledge that allows them to easily identify the historical circumstances in which the stories are set. The films are meant to be watched by audiences belonging to subsequent post-war generations and therefore operate within the so-called "post-memory"[5] discourse. Secondly, the intention of both directors was to show the war and the Holocaust from the perspective of individual experiences and to emphasize the emotional aspects of the stories. The director of *Far away from the Window*, Jan J. Kolski, stressed that his film tells above all about feelings, "about love, fear, humiliation, and the loss of dignity".[6] Similarly, Max Färberböck underlined the role that emotions play in *Aimée and Jaguar*, referring to the frequent close-ups he uses in the film and stating that it is a film told through the women's faces.[7] Both films create in-depth psychological portraits of the characters, who are shown as "flesh-and blood" people, a factor which renders them familiar and understandable for contemporary audiences. The perspective of both films is also well reflected in the commentary of the writer, Hanna Krall, according to whom the best way to speak about the war is by telling stories "of one woman, one man, one fear, and one love".[8]

Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s.' In: *New German Critique*, no. 87, pp. 47-82. Originally, the term "heritage film" referes to a movement in the British cinema that has been developing since the 1980s. Its central characteristics are an artful and spectacular projection of a national past with a characteristically nostalgic overtone. See Higson, Andrew (1996): 'The Heritage Film and British Cinema.' In: Higson, Andrew (ed.): *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, London, New York: Cassel, pp. 232-49.

[3] See Kelley, Wyn: 'On Tragedy and Melodrama.' Available at: http://web.mit.edu/cms/reconstructions, 09 September 2001 (accessed 15 February 2007).

[4] Campbell, Jan (2005): *Film and Cinema Spectatorship: Melodrama and Mimesis*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 28.

[5] See Hirsch, Marianne (1997): *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge: Havard University Press.

[6] Kolski, Jan Jakub (2000): 'Jan Jakub Kolski o Filmie.' In: *Film Pressbook*, Gutek Film, Warsaw: Filmoteka Narodowa.

[7] See Färberböck, Max (1999): 'Der Klang eines Films. Űber die Inszenierung von Aimee und Jaguar.' In: Töteberg, Michael (ed.): *Szenenwechsel. Momentaufnahmen des Jungen Deutschen Films*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, pp. 167-72.

[8] *Rzeczpospolita,* 16 November 2000.

Gentile-Jewish Relations

As mentioned above, the choice of genre in both films thematizes a separation of the characters' individual stories from broader historical context. This separation is seen not only in the choice of the themes but also through how private and public spaces are defined and presented in the two films. The distinction between public and private marks two major subjects in the German film: While the public space is defined primarily as the domain of history, thus of the Second World War and the Holocaust, the separation of the intimate space in the film allows for the development of a story of a love affair between two women seemingly distant from each other: a Jew in hiding from Nazi persecution, on the one hand, and a German fellow traveler with the regime (*Mitläufer*), on the other. The outdoor scenes, therefore, often present images identified with danger, such as, for example, Jews being brutally thrown out from their houses and loaded onto trucks, or images of charred corpses of those killed during the bombings lying on the streets. Contrary to this, the space of home is a sphere where the characters sometimes can find ersatz of normal everyday life, as if beyond history. Thus, there are relatively numerous scenes presenting home parties of Felice and Lilly and their friends, or scenes picturing family life, in which Lilly and Felice are taking care about Lilly's four children, etc. In particular, a scene of considerable length, which depicts the first sexual intimacy between the two lovers is shot in such a way as to create an impression of a privacy from which the outside world is excluded entirely. It is filmed in two long takes that deploy a slowly moving camera pivoting around the two women, and emphasizing the private sense of the moment.[9] Thus the scenes set in the house often create an impression that it is possible to escape history. According to the actress Marianne Köhler, who played the character of Lilly, it is precisely this separation of the private and public which marks the novelty of the film in approaching the subject of the Second World War and the Holocaust: "[the film] views the war not from 'outside' but it shows people 'in' the war – at their homes, between the walls. This new perspective opens a way to understand people from the past better."[10] Drawing portraits of people living during the Second World War, the film seems to claim that historical time is not a sufficient criterion to properly describe these characters.

The cinematic distinction between the private and the public and the separation of an autonomous thread of the intimate relation between a Jew and a non-Jew creates a space in *Aimée and Jaguar* where traditional historical interpretations can be reformulated. The film shows the pain of both the Jewish Felice, and her Gentile partner Lilly. For example, after Felice has been taken away by the Gestapo, we see a relatively long scene showing Lilly writhing around on the floor suffering and screaming *"Nein!"*, which arouses the viewer's empathy for the non-Jewish German character, together with regret for the tragic ending to the love story.

The relation between the public and private spheres is also dramatized in the Polish film, *Far away from the Window*. However, here this relation is defined differently than in *Aimée and Jaguar*. In the Polish film, there is no distinct dichotomy between the private and the public and the story that is told is deliberately closed in the cramped space of the house, developing almost entirely in its interior. In *Far away from the Window* the space of home is shown as claustrophobic and as failing to give a sense of security. While in the German film

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[9] See Davidson, John E. (2002): 'A Story of Faces and Intimate Spaces: Form and History in Max Färberböck's *Aimee und Jaguar*.' In: *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 19, pp. 323-41.

[10] See audio interview with Marianne Köhler in bonus material 'Interviews mit 11 Cast und Crewmitgliedern', *Aimée and Jaguar* DVD edition, Senator Film, Zeitgeist Films, 2000.

the dichotomy private-public often helps to separate happy family life from the threats of history, in the Polish film it is only the temporal criterion that marks the distinction between normality and war. The otherness of the scenes set before the war is emphasized above all on the visual level, by a distinctly colorful and bright mis-en-scene in which costume and props are all arranged in pastel colors. In these scenes, we see the Polish couple, Barbara and Jan getting married and then playing and flirting in the house. In the scenes that follow, after the war breaks out, the colors tend towards more and more grayish tones and the lighting becomes darker. There are no more images of normal family life, while the space of Jan and Barbara's house seems to become smaller, bleak and claustrophobic. One scene instead depicts a caricature of a peaceful family atmosphere; we see the three protagonists sitting at a table in the kitchen, in complete silence. Suddenly, while getting up to wash the dishes, Regina, the Jewish woman, accidentally breaks a pile of plates. She reacts with fear and quickly apologizes, while Barbara, the Polish wife, comments on her behavior with disdain: "She can't do anything." Helping Regina to collect the broken pieces, the husband, Jan cuts his finger. Upon seeing this Regina grasps his bloody hand with worry, but Barbara gives her a menacing look indicating that it is her job to care about her husband's wounds. When Regina tries to run away furtively from the turmoil, she falls into a rack, knocking of a pistol that was lying there. Scared by the whole situation, she runs away to hide in the wardrobe. The scene takes place in the small and cramped space of the kitchen, in which the protagonists can hardly find room for themselves and we see a clumsy muddling of the three of them. At the same time this scene subtly frames the main themes of the plot: the nascent affection Jan and Regina feel for one another, on the one hand, and Barbara's and Regina's complicated relationship, on the other hand.

Far away from the Window stands out among other Polish films dealing with the Second World War and the Holocaust: The relations between Jews and Poles are captured here from a very intimate perspective. Instead of telling about two different ethnic- cultural groups during the Second World War, the film focuses on the relations between individuals. Viewers are presented with personal dramas of the characters, closely connected with each other by the figure of the child. However, if we consider the general filmic style of the director Jan Jakub Kolski, it is impossible to abstract the story of Barbara, Jan, and Regina from its historical context. The director exploits the focus on individual characters and their complex relations as a means of addressing broader historical issues. The film theorist Aga Skrodzka-Bates observes that most of Kolski's films are set in a place defined as peripheral, and because of this feature she defines his style as "vernacular", to stress the director's engagement with "the quotidian, the local and the private".[11] As in the rest of Kolski's films, the plot of *Far away from the Window* is set in the peripheries, in a small and anonymous Polish town. In this film historical time is marked only symbolically, through banners with the swastika decorating buildings. The director has explained his choice to move the action of the film to a small town in the following terms: "The real story took place in a big city, in Lviv. I could have filled the streets with people, it could have been noisy, and explosions could have been heard, showing that it was war. Instead, I preferred to narrow the stage on which the events were played – so that they become more visible."[12] Despite the seeming abstraction from historical realities, broader reflection about historical and political issues is still present in Kolski's films. In *Far*

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[11] See Skrodzka-Bates, Aga: 'History from Inside Out: The Vernacular Cinema of Jan Jakub Kolski.' In: *Kinokultura* 16.12.2005, available at: http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/2/skrodzka.shtml (accessed 20 March 2006).

[12] Kolski, Jan Jakub (2000): 'Jan Jakub Kolski o Filmie.' In: *Film Pressbook*, Gutek Film. Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw.

away from the Window the history of Polish-Jewish relations during and after the war is told through the story of Barbara, Jan, and Regina.

The former have been characterized by Barbara Engelking-Boni as exceptional and particular because of the fact that Poles were immediate eyewitnesses of the Holocaust.[13] Thus Polish Catholics were forcefully put in a situation in which difficult moral choices were unavoidable. They feared that the appearance of an old neighbor, an acquaintance, or a perfect stranger within their eyesight would make them "do something with that sudden … and personal Jewish presence, that they would have to behave somehow in relation to an individual needing help. They would have to make a choice which they did not want and could not make"[14] The claustrophobic space in *Far away from the Window* is an apt illustration of this sense of inescapability. Closing the film's action within the house of Barbara and Jan allows for an intimate portrayal of the Polish-Jewish relations in the times of the Holocaust and of the psychologically complex situation of Poles being forceful witnesses.

The Portrayal of the Jewish Character in *Aimée and Jaguar*

One of the most important aesthetic-political debates regarding the Jewish issue in post-war Germany was started in 1985 by a controversy around the staging of the play *Garbage, the City and Death* (*Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod*) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In the play there appears the character 'The Rich Jew' who is a son of victims of the Holocaust living in Germany. The way in which this character was developed was very controversial because it clearly alluded to a classic anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jew-exploiter, reminiscent of Shakespeare's Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* or the character of Süss from the Nazi propaganda film *Jud Süss*, which was in fact modeled on the former. The play suggested that the Jews in Germany enjoyed special privileges. The Rich Jew who speculates on the real estate market uses the memory of the Holocaust and the sense of guilt of the Germans in his business ventures.The protests against the play and occupation of the stage of the theater *Schauspielhaus* by the members of the Frankfurt Jewish community prevented its debut, which in turn led to protests against its censorship. In the opinion of many commentators, German public discourse had become oppressive by not allowing certain issues to become subject to public discussion.[15]

To date the play has not been staged in Germany, while the motivation of the director, who is recognized as an artist whose work is a significant contribution to German culture, is still an object of contention among the scholars and critics. Referring to the accusations of anti-Semitism directed against Fassbinder, Gertrud Koch observes that his allegoric representations are frequently and incorrectly interpreted literally. Koch notes that Jewish characters appear regularly in Fassbinder's films and constitute an integral element of his reflections on German history. She admits, however, that Fassbinder's work also manifests a certain distance towards the Jewish characters, who, contrary to his German characters, are not subject to penetrating psychological analysis, but are pictured as sedate, reserved and

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[13] See Engelking-Boni, Barabara (2003): 'Psychological Distance between Poles and Jews in Nazi-Occupied Warsaw.' In: Zimmerman, Joshua D. (ed.): *Contested Memories. Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and its Aftermath*, London: Rutgers University Press, pp. 47-53.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Schönborn, Susanne (2005): 'Juden reden über Gefühle, und die anderen über Kunst: Konstruktionen jüdischer Identität in der Fassbinder-Debatte 1984/85.' In: Hödl, Klaus (ed.): *Der "virtuelle Jude": Konstruktionen des Jüdischen,* Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, pp. 101-18.

excessively rational. Rejecting the accusation of anti-Semitism, Koch claims that Fassbinder's discourse as it regards Jews is laden with a complex of another kind, namely, with excessive attention and fear. She quotes the confession made by the director himself, who, when asked about his approach to Jewish issues, referred to a scene from his childhood, when his mother admonished him to behave well and with respect towards their neighbors, because "they were Jews".[16]

In post-1989 German cinema one finds diversified representations of German-Jewish relations. The idea of German-Jewish symbiosis from before the Holocaust appears as a point of reference and in a rather nostalgic manner in *Rosenstrasse* (2003) by Margarete von Trotta. The film depicts the courageous action of German women, who during the war stood in defense of their Jewish husbands, who had been arrested and were awaiting deportation. Picturing the bravery of German wives dominates the film while the perspective of husbands is practically absent. A much more critical reflection, regarding the post-Holocaust German-Jewish relations is present in the thriller *Giraffe* (*Meschugge*, 1998) by Dani Levy. It tells the story of the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors who suddenly discovers that in reality her grandfather is a Nazi criminal who stole the identity of a Holocaust victim after the war. The movie, with its interestingly constructed plot, can be read on a symbolic level as a question about the limits of identification with the victims of the Holocaust in German public discourse. One can also note the interesting decision of the director to give the role of the leading character to Maria Schrader, an actress who often plays Jewish characters (Felice in *Aimée and Jaguar*; *Rosenstrasse*).

Another important film in this context is *Just an Ordinary Jew* (*Ein ganz gewöhnlicher Jude*, 2005) by Oliver Hirschbiegel. Already in its title it formulates the question of Jewish identity in Germany and German-Jewish relations after the Holocaust. The main character is a journalist, Emanuel Goldfarb, a Jew born in Hamburg after the war and the son of Holocaust survivors. Goldfarb receives a letter from a German teacher who invites him to come and talk to his class. The letter is full of politically correct terms, such as "*Mitglied religiöser Gemeinschaft*" (here: member of Jewish community) or "*Jüdischer Mitbürger*" (Jewish fellow citizen), instead of the word "Jude" which is clearly problematic for the author of the letter, and finishes with a "*Grüßliches shalom!*" (kindly, shalom!), which enrages Goldfarb. The film consists of Goldfarb's monologue, as he composes a letter in which he explains his reasons for rejecting the invitation. At one point he refers to the speech of Martin Walser from 1998 accusing modern Germany of devoting obsessive attention to the past, but also of philo-Semitism, "tolerance fetishism" and turning Klezmer music into something fashionable. "What is the difference between a philo-Semite and an anti-Semite?" – asks Goldfarb in his monologue. "The anti-Semite takes action, the philo-Semite holds you in their arms. In both cases I can't breath." Exposing the dead-ends of the "fascination for things Jewish"[17], the film proves the impossibility of being an "ordinary Jew" in today's Germany.

The debates around the Fassbinder's play and the film by Hirschbiegel indicate that the dialectics of anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism are very important for the dynamics of German debate. The utopian concept of the "normalization" of German-Jewish relations,

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[16] See Koch, Gertrud (1986): 'Torments of the Flesh, Coldness of the Spirit: Jewish Figures in the Films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder.' In: *New German Critique,* no. 38, pp. 28-38.

[17] See Zipes, Jack (1994): 'The Contemporary German Fascination for Things Jewish: Toward a Jewish Minor Culture.' In: Gilman, Sander and Remmler, Karen (eds.): *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 15-45.

which is also formulated indirectly in the title of *Just an Ordinary Jew*, thus appears as an attempt to overcome this impasse.

The character of Felice in *Aimée and Jaguar* is another voice in this esthetic-political debate about the past. Felice is presented as an alluring, effervescent and thoroughly "modern" German Jew. She is hiding with forged "Aryan" papers, but she does not want to give up living a normal life. Instead of remaining in some hiding place and avoiding dangerous situations, she finds a job and actively participates in social and cultural life of Berlin, which, as the film shows, is relatively eventful in spite of the war. In one scene, when Ilse warns Felice not to engage in a relationship with Lilly as the consequences can be too risky for her, Felice answers in a characteristic way: "Don't make me into a victim. It is my god damn right to be free." In the last scene of the movie, which has the form of a reminiscence, Felice states her creed. She is sitting together with her friends at a table, in joyful mood, listening to the music and singing, and playing cards. They are talking about love and their dreams. Suddenly one of them asks Felice what her dreams are, to which Felice answers: "I want you. All of you. Everything! But I will be satisfied with even one moment."

The character of Felice is constructed in opposition to the image of Jews as defenseless and passive victims in the context of Nazism and Holocaust. Indeed, *Aimée and Jaguar* searches for new, more modern connotations for the Jewish character. Felice, with her attractiveness and liveliness, is supposed to arouse fascination of the viewers. This turn in the picturing of a Holocaust victim is well captured by the actress Maria Schrader, who played Felice: "She is aware that her life could soon be over, and this knowledge gives her the courage to live life to the full. Instead of pulling the cover over her head, she climbs to the top of the 10-meter high tower and jumps. That is what makes her a wonderful and intense person."[18]

In a comparative reading of the book by Erica Fischer and of the film, Muriel Cormican observes that the book deals in a much more extensive way with the historical context in which Felice and Lilly's love affair took place, and also with Felice's Judaism. It also meticulously spells out the increasing legalized persecution of Jews in the late 1930s and early 1940s.[19] The film, on the other hand, tells the story from the moment when Felice and Lilly meet for the first time until the moment when they are forcefully separated. In this way it reduces Felice almost entirely to the role of Lilly's great love.

In the film there are almost no references to Felice's Jewish origins. She is pictured as a completely assimilated Jew. On the symbolic level, her connections with the Germans are stressed in the scene where during the Allied bombardment she hides in the air-raid shelter together with other inhabitants of Berlin. Her cultural background is defined mostly by picturing her as a member of Berlin bohemia with its roots in the Weimar Republic, rather than any references to Jewish heritage. The architecture and exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which was designed by Daniel Libeskind, presents Jewish culture as an extinguished, irretrievably lost world. In *Aimée and Jaguar,* on the other hand, instead of reflection about lost heritage there is a reflection about the possibility of establishing positive German-Jewish relations. Showing the romantic love story between the two women against the background of the life style of the Weimar Republic, the film offers an idealized image of the German-Jewish symbiosis from before the Third Reich.

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[18] Presseheft, Senator Film, Deutsches Filminstitut DIF.

[19] Comican, Muriel (2003): '*Aimee und Jaguar* and the Banality of Evil.' In: *German Studies Review,* vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 106 and 13.

References to other historical periods also appear in the film – to the Weimar Republic and the contemporary Germany of the 1990s – which are viewed as an antithesis of the Third Reich. The conventional association of Jews with modernity and cosmopolitanism characteristic of the Weimar times[20] has been often used in Germany in the 1990s in media and politics to "underpin the commitment to openness and tolerance proclaimed by the former student radicals of '68 who have shaped the 'Berlin Republic'".[21] As Lutz Koepnick notices, in this view, contrary to the dominant post-war understandings, the position of Jews in German history is no longer defined as that of oppressed outsiders but as of a particular ethnic group within a multicultural nation.[22]

Thanks to such references a Jewish character is created that opens up the possibility for a new kind of empathy, not only that resulting from compassion or feelings of guilt, but also from positive identification with the character. In this way the film seems to make an attempt to overcome the post-war "negative symbiosis"[23], or mutual "obsession" between Germans and Jews[24] which manifests itself in the fact that they constantly reciprocally define themselves in relation to the other as descendants of the perpetrators and victims.

The Portrayal of the Jewish Character in *Far away from the Window*

In Polish postwar cinema Jewish characters have appeared mostly either in the martyrological or the nostalgic context, in the case of the latter the setting has often been inspired by adaptations of well-known literary works like *The Promised Land*, *Austeria*, or *The Wedding*, in which Jewish characters were portrayed as part of a broader picture of harmonious co-existence in former multiethnic Poland.[25] Contemporary characterizations of Jews, similar to those from the German films *Just an Ordinary Jew* or *Giraffe*, have been absent in Polish cinema, both before and after 1989. An interesting exception is the film *March Almonds* by Radosław Piwowarski (1989). It tells about the anti-Semitic campaign by the Communist regime and the following forced emigration of remaining Polish Jews, but in this case 1968 is shown as a clear caesura of Jewish presence in Poland. Another exception is *Weiser* by Wojciech Marczewski (2000). It presents a story of a Jewish boy who has magic powers and who one day disappears in mysterious circumstances. It is characteristic, however, that the Jewish character is shown as distant and mysterious, as if coming from another world. The Jewish world in the Polish cinema appears, therefore, mostly as strange, unreal or bygone. It is as if the Jews were closed in the past, in the reality of wartime nightmare or in the nostalgic images of the lost world of peacefully coexisting cultures. This absence may be interpreted in terms of avoiding problematic issues that are considered to be politically delicate.

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[20] See Brenner, Michael (1996): *The renaissance of Jewish culture in Weimar Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

[21] Taberner, Stuart (2005): 'Philo-Semitism in Recent German Film: *Aimee und Jaguar*, *Rosenstrasse* and *Das Wunder von Bern.*' In: *German Life and Letters,* vol. 58, no. 3, p. 358.

[22] See Koepnick, Lutz (2002): 'Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and Holocaust in the 1990s.' In *New German Critique,* no. 87, pp. 47-82.

[23] See Diner, Dan (1986): 'Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz.' In: *Babylon*, vol. 1, pp. 9-20.

[24] See Morris, Leslie and Zipes, Jack (2002): 'German and Jewish obsession'. In: Morris, Leslie and Zipes, Jack (ed.): *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis 1945 to 2000*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. xi-xvi.

[25] See Haltof, Marek (2002): 'National memory, the Holocaust, and the images of the Jew in postwar Polish films.' In: Haltof, Marek (ed.): *Polish National Cinema*, Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 222-42.

Far away from the Window stands out against this background. The film refers to the narrative about Polish-Jewish coexistence in a specific way. The daughter, Helusia is the fruit of love between Jan and Regina, but at the same time she is also a symbol of pain and suffering of two mothers, a Jewish and a Polish one. The past is not closed in this case, but it becomes a trauma, which prevents the characters from rebuilding their lives. In this way the film connects the past to the present with an inextricable link. Another feature that renders the meaning of the film more contemporary is that the story is constructed more as a universal than a historically specific one, since the film does not conform to the conventions of a historical drama.

For the filmic portrait of the Jewish character, Regina, three other Jewish female characters that appeared in the Polish post-1989 cinema constitute an important context. These are Irena in *The Holy Week* (1995) by Andrzej Wajda, Sara in *Farewell to Mary* (1993) by Filip Zylber, and the eponymous character of *Deborah* (1995) by Ryszard Brylski. The most conspicuous common feature of these characters is their clearly emphasized "Semitic" appearance, thus intensely dark hair and eyes. Interestingly, in all three films, the Jewish women are also portrayed to a large extent as objects of sexual desire, especially in *Deborah*, where the character is shown almost exclusively in this manner. This excess of erotic elements in the images of Jewish female characters was noted by Elżbieta Ostrowska (2006), who identified Lucy Zucker from the Polish novel *The Promised Land* by W. S. Reymont as the prototype of such a character. Finally, all these images present Jewish maiden as showing symptoms of insanity or possessed by an evil spirit. Irena from Andrzej Wajda's film is an unpleasant and provocative person. She is condescending to her Polish host, Anna. When Anna says that she tries to face the death of her dearest with humility, Irena asks her truculently, "Why? Because suffering ennobles?" Sara in *Farewell to Mary* unexpectedly appears at the wedding party on the "Aryan" side of the wall in Warsaw. Her presence is immediately noticed and it clearly disturbs the peace of mind of the young Poles who are trying to forget about the war. Her dissimilarity to the other guests is most strongly emphasized in a long scene of her solitary dance: Rotating, Sara forgets herself as if she has fallen into a trance and this obtrusive dance stops only when she falls, shot by a "blue" policeman. The film's director himself stressed the strangeness of this character, saying that she "propels the action, circles like a moth, perturbs people. In a sense, she provokes her own death."[26] The signs of some kind of psychosis are equally present in the thread about Debora's concealment in the basement, in the third of the discussed films. The film, which, from the artistic point of view, is decidedly the weakest of those discussed, connects the very serious issues of the Holocaust and hiding with eroticism in a somewhat inappropriate manner.

The three images discussed above show Jews as strange and anxiety-provoking figures. Against this background we can see that the character of Regina from *Far away from the Window* is constructed in a radically different manner, where an attempt to negate the image of a Jew as a stranger is made. Most of all, Regina is introduced to Jan and Barbara's home and, by giving birth to Helusia, becomes part of their family. Another way in which the "exorcism" of the figure of a Jew is performed is by showing Regina as a mother. The scene of childbirth, which is set to a beautiful score written by Michał Lorenz, is especially moving and pictures her as both lofty and mundane human figure. Finally, the film's narrative is often developed from the perspective of Regina. In a few scenes we observe the action as if peeking through a keyhole of a wardrobe in which Regina is hiding. At another moment the screen

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[26] Cited in Haltof, 'National memory'.

darkens for a moment as if we were closed in the wardrobe together with the character. These stylistic means facilitate the audience's identification with the Jewish character.

Also visually the figure of Regina stands out among the representations of Jews common to Polish cinema and, which was particularly noticeable, in the movies discussed above. In *Far away from the Window* it is Barbara and not Regina who has dark hair and eyes, and this reversal is emphasized in the scene in which Barbara is dyeing Regina's fair hair brown so that nobody passing by notices that another woman is living in the house.

Although Regina is clearly an assimilated Jew, this film, contrary to the German *Aimée and Jaguar*, contains references to the Jewish tradition. In a few scenes, which break the flow of the story and have surrealistic and fairy-tale like atmosphere, the world of a Jewish shtetl is evoked. We see a Jewish town in miniature and a somewhat older Helusia, who is walking its streets. The director explained that he included these scenes in order to introduce Regina's perspective into the story: "I thought it would not be enough to show only the darkness in the wardrobe. Regina has spent there plenty of time. She must have been doing something, she must have had some thoughts. This is why I created a world of her memory and imagination."[27]

Similarly to *Aimée and Jaguar*, the Polish film does not define the Jewish character mostly in reference to the Holocaust, rather it pictures her instead above all as a mother suffering from the loss of a child. Different to the German film, however, *Far away from the Window* does not attempt to avoid showing the Jewish character as a victim. On the contrary, it pictures her as humiliated and stripped of dignity. After the beginning of the story, when Regina and Jan begin to have feelings for each other, all the subsequent events, including the pregnancy that Regina spends closed in the wardrobe, and during which she is mistreated by Barbara, and the fact that her child is taken away from her, lead to gradual turning of this character into a victim deprived of her own will and entirely dependent on her saviors. In one scene when Barbara opens the door of the wardrobe asking Regina to get out to breastfeed the baby, Regina falls down on her knees and starts kissing Barbara's hands in an act of gratitude. Again, during Helusia's visit to Hamburg, the city to which Regina moves after the war, we can see that Regina has never managed to start a new life and that she has never been happy again. Thus, the film distinctly conveys an image of a Jew as a weak and vulnerable victim. Regina survives the war but she is tormented by memories, psychologically destroyed, and unable to build a new life. In the scene in which she meets Helusia, she shouts that she does not want to remember anything from what had happened: "You remind me of the fear. I don't want to remember! I don't want to remember the darkness, the humiliation!" The image of the Jewish victim in *Far away from the Window* differs, therefore, considerably from the picture of Felice, who is supposed to be an object of fascination and positive identification for contemporary German audiences. While in the first part of the Polish film the way in which the Regina character is developed invokes the compassion of the viewer, the last scene is a shocking picture of a person who is irreversibly psychologically destroyed by nightmarish wartime experiences.

The relation between an individual and history is shown differently in the two films. The characters of *Aimée and Jaguar* manage to break loose from the claws of history for a moment as they find some breathing space in love, which is suggested already by the film's

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[27] Kolski, Jan Jakub (2000): 'Jan Jakub Kolski o Filmie.' In: *Film Pressbook*, Gutek Film. Filmoteka Narodowa, Warsaw.

tagline, *A love greater than death*. The construction of the film characters also transcends the historically imposed categories of victims and perpetrators. We observe the transformation of a German *Mitläuferin* who abandons her husband, a soldier of *Wehrmacht*, and engages in a lesbian love affair with a Jew. The Jewish character, on the other hand, refuses to run and hide and to accept the role of a persecuted victim, choosing instead a brief moment of freedom.

The way the main characters in *Far away from the Window* are shown is different; the film presents a deterministic concept of man's place in history. The stories of the individual characters are composed into a story reminiscent of a classic Greek tragedy and in this context history manifests itself as fate. Closed in a narrow space, Regina and Barbara are condemned to each other. If Barbara tried to get rid of Regina, she would risk losing her husband or being accused of hiding a Jew. Regina, on the other hand, has to accept the way she is treated by Barbara and let her take away her child, if she wants to survive the war. Both characters remain connected for the rest of their lives by an enormous sense of grievance and reciprocal accusation.

Therefore, while *Aimée and Jaguar* constructs a vision of escape from history, *Far away from the Window* is dominated by the poetics of trauma and the idea of enslavement by history. The narratives in both films are also structured differently. The German film opens and ends with contemporary scenes in which the elderly Lilly meets an old friend and they reminisce about their past, while the story of Felice and Lilly is told in retrospect. The plot of the Polish film, on the other hand, begins just before the Second World War and then it continues into the Communist era to end sometime in the 1960s. The part of the film that takes place after the war is almost as long as the one that is set during the war. It is shot with unusually long takes and this creates an impression that the film is slowing down. In the final scenes the shots become even longer, while colors become cold and dark. The film finishes but no conclusion to the story is offered at the end.

As a result, in the German film the past is bracketed by the present and thus is symbolically closed. In the Jewish character we find features that negate the common associations of Jews with Holocaust victims. The film presents a vision of German-Jewish co-existence within a multicultural society which is constructed partly through references to the images of Berlin's bohemia of the Weimar Republic era and partly through projecting contemporary political and cultural models back onto the wartime period. In the Polish film, on the other hand, the Jewish character is still defined as a victim, while the past is still the point of departure for reflections on Polish-Jewish relations.

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The Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca: Formation and Reflection of contemporary Moroccan-Jewish Identity[1]

Sophie Wagenhofer

Abstract

The Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca, opened in 1997, is the only Jewish museum in the Arab world. Its permanent exhibition responds to the needs of the Jewish community in Morocco and to the general political climate in the country, which is rediscovering its cultural diversity. Even though the Jewish community counts fewer than 5,000 members, its presence in this Muslim country is of crucial importance for the image of a tolerant and modern country that Morocco tries to promote. Analysis of the visual symbols and the use of language in the museum sheds light on the processes of incorporating Jews into the concept of the Moroccan nation. Whereas the narratives of peaceful coexistence and cultural sameness are emphasized, sensitive issues like anti-Semitism and the mass emigration are not dealt with in the exhibition.

Some remarks on Moroccan Jewish Identity

At the beginning of the 1970s Mark Tessler conducted a study on the identity of religious minorities in the Middle East and North Africa, among them Jews in Morocco.[2] He examined the standing of the dwindling community in a predominantly Arab-Muslim society, looking especially at the self-perception of Moroccan Jews. The starting point for his research was the question as to how the Jewish community defines its identity in an Islamic society. His conclusion, or rather overview, stated:

> In Morocco, the community has not yet reached the point of social and cultural non-viability. And though movement is clearly in this direction, Moroccan Jewry is reconstituting itself in a setting which may permit its continued distinctiveness. There may even be an elaboration of the community's identity, as its locus expands and its operational definition shifts from the criterion of religion to that of national origin.[3]

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[1] This article was written as part of the joint research project SFB 640 'Representation of Changing Social Order' at the Humboldt University and the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin.

[2] Mark Tessler (1978): 'The Identity of Religious Minorities in Non-Secular States: Jews in Tunisia and Morocco and Arabs in Israel.' In: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 20, no. 3, pp. 359-73.

[3] Ibid., p. 373.

In this article I want to follow up this forecast in order to tackle the issue of contemporary Moroccan-Jewish identity.[4] This widely discussed and also criticized term is used here in Jan Assmann's understanding as "the image a group is constructing of itself and identifying with".[5] Stuart Hall states that identification is "one of the least well-understood concepts". He understands identification "as a construction, a process never completed – always in process".[6] Identity refers to the sense of belonging to one or more communities. This sense of belonging is not in time and space with a clear beginning or end. Following Benedict Anderson I understand these communities as imagined in the sense that people do not have face-to-face contact with other members of the group.[7] Stuart Hall is stressing the constructed character of identities and points at the influence of discourse in the process of creating a certain identity: "we need to understand them [identities] as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies".[8] Groups are not or essential entities. Collective identity does not exist per se, as something natural; rather it exists only in the hand of the members of a certain group.[9] In this article I want to ask where the Jewish community positions itself within Moroccan society and culture and through what representations – narratives, symbols or practices – the Jewish community confirms and stresses its Moroccan identity. I will explore how points of identification with the 'Moroccan nation' are defined and expressed. Finally, I want to see how present representations of Jews or Jewish culture are responding to changing circumstances.

In the last thirty years the standing of the Jewish community within Moroccan society faced considerable changes. For political, economic, and social reasons about 250,000 Jews left Morocco in the second half of the twentieth century; today the community numbers no more than 5,000 members.[10] Consequently, established structures and images of identity disintegrated and had to be reshaped and redefined. There is a long tradition of Jewish presence in North Africa. Researchers tend to assume that the first Jews came to the region in the sixth century BC, even though only a few sources from antiquity have survived. Nevertheless, it is taken for granted that Jewish communities had already been established throughout the country in pre-Islamic times.[11] Until the middle of the nineteenth century the concept of *dhimma* set clear boundaries between Jews and Muslims and structured social

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[4] Daniel Schroeter is problematizing the idea of a "Moroccan-Jewish identity" as a construction of the colonial and post-colonial period. See Schroeter, Daniel J. (2008): 'The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan Jewish Identities.' In: Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society 15, no. 1, pp. 145-64.

[5] Jan Assmann (1992): *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: C.H. Beck, p. 132 (translation by the author).

[6] Hall, Stuart (1996): 'Who Needs Identity?' In: Hall, Stuart and du Gay, Paul (eds.): *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, p. 2.

[7] Anderson, Benedict (2006): *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* 3rd ed., London and New York: Verso, p. 6.

[8] Hall, 'Who Needs Identity?', p. 4.

[9] Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 132.

[10] There is no precise figure for Moroccan Jews. The estimate of 3,000–5,000 corresponds with most of the research literature, with statements from representatives of the Jewish community and also with those used in the Moroccan media. See for instance Levy, André (2003): 'Notes on Jewish-Muslim Relationships: revisiting the vanishing Moroccan Jewish community.' In: *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 3, p. 370.

[11] On the first traces of a Jewish presence in Morocco, see for instance Stern, Karen (2003): *Inscribing Devotion and Death: Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Populations of North Africa,* Leiden: Brill; Hirschberg, Haim Zwi (1974): *A History of the Jews in North Africa: From Antiquity to the Sixteenth Century*, Leiden: Brill. For a far-reaching survey of Jewish culture and religion in Morocco, see Zafrani, Haïm (1998): *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc: histoire et culture, religion et magie*, Paris: Maisonneuve&Larose.

interaction in daily life.[12] As *dhimmī* the Jews were able to maintain their own institutions and to a large extent organize their own community life. With the growing influence of the European powers in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially of France, this system lost its importance. From the 1860s the Jewish-Moroccan school system was dominated by the French *Alliance Israélite Universelle*. Thanks to their language skills and European education, Jews were often favoured for administrative positions, as tradesmen or for the diplomatic service. Some Jews, especially those in higher positions, enjoyed special status as *protegées* granted by Europeans, which invalidated the regulations set up by the *dhimma*. Whereas this process was described by many researchers as major relief for the Jewish communities, it also destabilized the position of Jews in Moroccan society. Certain privileges granted by European powers as well as the assimilation of Moroccan Jews into a European way of life, expressed through language, lifestyle and fashion, led to tensions with the Muslim majority and to an estrangement.[13] Furthermore, the Jewish community underwent a radical demographic change. Many families left the rural areas in search of a better life in the larger cities. Many were forced to leave by a general economic decline and the extinction of traditional handcrafts caused by the increasing industrialization initiated by the French authorities. This development affected the social and economic relations between Muslims and Jews, especially in rural areas.[14] Even though all Moroccans are equal before the law since independence in 1956, social boundaries do still exist.[15] As they lack a legal basis they have to be newly defined. It seems that distinctions are stressed even more today because they are no longer clear.[16] The political climate, the foundation of Israel and the Arab-Israeli wars in the Middle East changed the perception of the Jews in Morocco and their relation to the Muslims dramatically. The State of Israel gave Jews a new frame of reference and a "real alternative to continue residence in Morocco."[17] André Levy also stated that the "strengthening of Morocco's Arab identity [has] reshaped and nourished the Jews' disengagement from Muslims."[18]

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[12] After the expansion of Islam the *dhimma* organized the relation between the Muslim rulers and non-Mulim, monotheistic communities, notably Jews and Christians but also Zoroastrians. They were granted security of their person and property, the freedom of worship as well as communal autonomy. However, the non-Muslims were facing various restrictions and had to pay a special poll tax in return for the protection. For more details on the *dhimma* see Cahen, Claude (1991): 'Dhimma', in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, pp. 227-31.

[13] See Laskier, Michel et al., eds., (2003): *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 485-90; Bensimon, Doris (1982): 'L'irruption de l'occident: les juifs du Maroc.' In: Chaouat, Bernard et al. (eds.): *Cultures Juives méditerranéennes et orientales*, Paris: Syros, pp.153-164; Stillman, Norman (1996), 'Middle Eastern and North African Jewries Confront Modernity. Orientation, Disorientation, Reorientation.' In Goldberg, Harvey (ed.): *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries. History and Culture in the Modern Era*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 59-72.

[14] See Laskier, *The Jews of the Middle East*, pp. 486-7 and Levy, Simon (2001): *Essais d'histoire et de civilisation judeo-marocain*, Rabat: Centre Tarik Ibn Ziyad, p. 33.

[15] See article 5 of the Moroccan constitution, available at: http://www.maroc.ma/NR/rdonlyres/B6B37F23-9F5D-4B46-B679-B43DDA6DD125/0/Constitution.pdf (accessed 18 July 2009). Concerning the *statut personnel*, the Jewish community is still autarkic and follows the religious law. See Levy, *Essais d'histoire*, p. 30.

[16] See Rosen, Lawrence (1984): *Bargaining for Reality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 133-64; Bilu, Yoram and Levy, André (1997): 'Nostalgia and Ambivalence. The Reconstruction of Jewish-Muslim Relations in Oulad Mansour.' In: Goldberg, Harvey (ed.): *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries*, pp. 288-311.

[17] Rosen, Lawrence (1972): 'Muslim-Jewish Relations in a Moroccan City.' In: *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, p. 448. See also Levy, André (1999): 'Playing for Control of Distance.' In: *American Ethnologist*, vol. 26, no. 3, p. 632.

[18] Levy, 'Playing for Control of Distance', p. 371.

Inscribing a minority's identity in the national identity

The ethnographic Museum of Moroccan Judaism, *Musée du judaïsme marocain*, was founded in 1997 by the *Fondation du patrimone judéo-marocain*. It is the first and until now the only Jewish Museum in the Arab world.[19] The intention of the management, in addition to the conservation of objects of cultural value, was to promote information about Moroccan Judaism and to prevent the disappearance of Moroccan-Jewish traditions. In an interview Simon Levy, the director of the museum, mentioned two main target groups: Moroccan Jews living abroad and Moroccan Muslims who want to know more about their fellow citizens. His aim is to break down negative images and prejudices, mainly the result of media reports on the Middle Eastern conflict.[20] Another pronounced intention of the *Fondation* is to preserve the heritage for the second and third generation of Jewish Moroccans living abroad. The museum "is addressing the new generation of Moroccan Jews, in Morocco and in the Diaspora, to let them rediscover their historical roots".[21] As is clear from this quotation, the museum is also understood as a platform for the Jews still living in Morocco. It is intended as a manifestation of their past, and also of their present, a "vivid museum for a vivid community".[22] The majority of visitors are American or European tourists, usually organized tours and some individual travellers. Although firm statistics on visitor numbers are not available, it can be stated that they are not high.[23] Consequently one may ask how representative this museum is. I would argue that regardless of the low visitor numbers this museum has an important voice in the process of negotiating identity.

Even though the number of museums has doubled in the last 15 years, Morocco cannot keep up with the global museum boom, and so this institution has not yet the significance it would have in Europe or the United States. Until the 1990s most Moroccan museums were state-run and focused on archaeology or ethnography. Arab Muslim history, culture and tradition were stressed, while minorities were excluded from the narratives presented. However, interest in museums is growing, and marginalized groups are demanding their own museum as a platform and means to discuss, shape, affirm or question certain images of identity. A recent example is the claim of political prisoners from the 1970s to transform the former commissariat Derb Moulay Chèrif, a place where many prisoners have been kept and tortured, into a museum.[24] This example makes it clear that in Morocco, as elsewhere, museums have become sites of remembrance and places demonstrating the recognition of one's history or specific culture. The Jewish community was the first marginalized group in Morocco with its own museum, followed by museums for the culture and history of the Sahraoui in Laayoune in 2001 and for the Berbers (Imazighen) in Agadir in 2005.

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[19] A Jewish Museum exists also in Turkey, see http://www.muze555.com (accessed 20 July 2009). According to an article in the *New York Times*, there are plans to found a Jewish Museum in Cairo. See Slackman, Michael: 'Private Motive for Egypt's Public Embrace of a Jewish Past.' In: *New York Times*, 7 September 2009.

[20] Levy, Simon, personal interview, March 2007.

[21] Levy, Simon (1997): *Pour répondre à l'urgence: la Fondation du patrimoine culturel judéo-marocain,* Casablanca, typescript (translation by the author).

[22] Quoted from the brochure of the museum (translation by the author).

[23] This statement is based on personal observation during a four-month internship in the museum, interviews with the curator and the director and guestbook entries that give insights into visitor profiles.

[24] See Stora, Benjamin (2000): 'Maroc, le traitement des histoires proches.' In : *Esprit. Les historiens et le travail de mémoire*, p. 89. See also Slyomovics, Susan (2001): 'A Truth Commission for Morocco.' In: *The Middle East Report. Morocco in Transition,* no. 218.

The museum gives the Jewish community its own space within the field of museology and heritage, which means the acknowledgement not only of its past but also of its present existence. It attracts the interest of the media and is widely discussed. Understood as product and agent of social and political change, the museum not only reflects ideas of Jewish identity but is also a means of negotiating and shaping social relations.[25] In view of the difficulties of Muslim-Jewish relationship as a consequence of the political development in the Middle East, this becomes even more remarkable. Needless to say, the director of the museum has to be very sensitive in various ways. Even though Morocco is considered one of the most liberal states in the Arab world, censorship still exists, especially when it comes to political issues, religion or criticism of the royal family. To avoid restrictions, Moroccan media often impose self-censorship by evading certain topics. This is also true for museums, even if they are run by a private foundation.[26] The Jewish museum in Casablanca is not guarded like similar institutions in some European countries.[27] Nevertheless, the suicide bomb attacks in May 2003 at five different places in Casablanca, among them the Jewish community centre, a Jewish cemetery and a restaurant run by a Jew,[28] made it clear that Jewish institutions are vulnerable and potential targets of anti-Jewish violence. Thus a certain reserve is necessary to avoid provoking resentment or attacks. For this reason it is not surprising that the museum is located rather remotely, in L'Oasis, a prosperous suburb of Casablanca, in an inconspicuous villa marked only by a small sign with the word museum written in Arabic (*mathaf*) and French (*musée*).[29]

All these factors already confine the boundaries of a possible exhibition on Moroccan Judaism, which is also framed and defined by the available objects. To please different interests—the state, the public and visitors—certain topics have to be excluded. Among such are for example the mass emigration of Jews or anti-Semitism. Even though some questions are not tackled, the exhibition and the museum's supporting programme send a clear political message: Jews are an integral part of Moroccan society, an assertion already referred to in the official name of the museum, *Musée du patrimoine judéo-marocain*. This appellation indicates that Jews are not regarded as an isolated group but, rather, as part of Moroccan society. *Moroccan–Jewish* are two attributes that are not presented as antitheses but as coherent and interlinked. This idea is reflected also in the museum's homepage:

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[25] See Macdonald, Sharon (1998): 'Introduction.' In: Macdonald, Sharon (ed.): *Theorizing Museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world*, Oxford: Blackwell; Kaplan, Flora (1994): 'Introduction.' In: Kaplan, Flora (ed.): *Museums and the Making of 'Ourselves'. The Role of Object in National Identity*, London: Leicester University Press.

[26] More information about the freedom of speech in Morocco can be found in the *Report on Human Rights Practices*, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, US Department of State, February 2004, available at: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27934.htm (accessed 23 June 2009).

[27] Since the number of threatening calls increased in the course of the Gaza War in winter 2008/09, two policemen guard the museum 24 hours a day. However, there is no security check at the entrance as we know it from Jewish sites in Germany or other European countries.

[28] See Senkyr, Jan (2003): 'Marokko lanciert Kampagne gegen Islamismus'. Länderbericht der Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Rabat, available at: http://www.kas.de/proj/home/pub/25/1/year-2003/dokument_id-1984/index.html (accessed 10 June 2009).

[29] Even though the villa, a former orphanage adapted by the Moroccan architect Aimé Kakon, looks unimposing from the street, it was nominated for the Agha Khan award and the 'grand prix' of Moroccan architecture in 2000. See Zerhouani, Khaddouj (2002): 'Le musée judéo-marocain.' In: *AM*, no. 8 and Barte, Yann (2007): 'Casablanca. Images de fraternité.' In: *DM*, NO. 5.

> In two millennia the Moroccan Jewish community accumulated a cultural patrimony that is highly significant for its authenticity and its role as one facet of the pluralistic Moroccan civilization.[30]

This central assertion is also maintained through the exhibition, by religious as well as by secular objects. This analysis has focused on jewellery, including also religious decorative items, and on language, in religious as well as in everyday context. The exhibition also comprises other categories of objects;[31] nevertheless, jewellery as well as books are very prominent in the exhibition. And both jewellery and language are significant for the secular as well as the religious identity.

Jewellery and the language of symbols

As the quality of Jewish gold- and silversmiths is legendary in Morocco, it is no surprise that jewellery, coins and decorative items are prominently represented in the Jewish museum. Even a workshop with the original interior and equipment of the goldsmith Saul Cohen (1928–2007) has been brought from Fez and reconstructed in the exhibition as a demonstration of the central position of Jews within Moroccan jewellery production. In Morocco this was a Jewish domain until the end of the nineteenth century. Even though nowadays most of the gold- and silversmiths are Muslims, the production of jewellery is still associated with the Jewish community. No differentiation between "Jewish" and "Muslim" jewellery is made. Jewellery produced by Jewish gold- and silversmith is considered Moroccan, as part of the "national" handcraft tradition. A differentiation exists, rather, between rural and urban jewellery, between Berber (Amazigh) and Arab, whereas the jewellery of Jews and Muslims are seen as virtually identical.[32] The identification of jewellery as part of Moroccan culture is established by a complex language of symbols with roots in pre-Islamic time and shaped by various cultural and religious influences. As Geertz noted, these symbols are important as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which we communicate, perpetuate, and develop … knowledge about attitudes toward life".[33] This symbolism invests jewellery with a certain meaning, such as protection, fertility, health or wealth, and allows in some cases the classification of a piece as Berber, Arab, Jewish, African, and so on. At the same time, the use of strong symbolic language is also sign of cultural coherence, as Muslims and Jews connect the same meaning with certain symbols.

The most prominent symbol presented in the museum is the *Khamsa*, in the Islamic context "Hand of Fatima", in the Jewish culture also known as the "Hand of Miriam". The hand has

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[30] Quoted from the homepage of the *Fondation du Patrimoine judéo-marocain*, http://www.casajewishmuseum.com/index.php?page=fondation (accessed 25 June 2009, translation by the author).

[31] The objects presented in the exhibition are donations or estates from Moroccan-Jewish families or communities; some items also have been bought on markets. Three rooms are dedicated to religious practice, showing the interior of synagogues as well as religious items and books. In two other rooms, everyday life objects, costumes and jewellery are presented. For more detailed information on the collection see the Jewish museum homepage, http://www.casajewishmuseum.com/index.php?page=collections&slide=religieux (accessed 23 June 2009).

[32] See Rabaté, Jacques and Rabaté, Rose (1996): *Bijoux au Maroc*, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, pp. 8-15. See also Gotzmann, Andreas (1989): *Gold- und Silberschmuck der Juden in Marokko. Kunsthandwerk als ein Aspekt kultureller Zusammenhänge*, Heidelberg: Goltzmann, pp. 50-4.

[33] Geertz, Clifford (1973): *The Interpretations of Cultures*, New York: Basic, p. 89.

been a widespread symbol in North Africa since ancient times among Jews and since the expansion of Islam also among Muslims.[34] The name *Khamsa* derives from the Arabic or Hebrew term for "five", a number that is considered to be a protection against the evil eye. In the exhibition the *Khamsa* is presented in various forms and functions: as decoration, as pendant, earrings or as doorknockers and, in the religious field, as a hanger for oil lamps used in synagogues. The hand was also chosen by the *Fondation du patrimoine judéo-marocain* as an icon for its self-presentation. We find it as decoration on the homepage of the museum and as logo of the foundation. Here it is combined with two other symbols: the Menorah as the symbol of Judaism and a star with five branches, the icon on the national Moroccan flag. The choice of the *Khamsa* as icon and its frequent representation in the exhibition reinforces the *marocanité* of Jewish culture. Moroccans, Muslims and Jews are familiar with this symbol as it is still omnipresent in everyday life. The *Khamsa* is fully accepted as typically Moroccan. It is common as jewellery, as a house decoration, in showcases or as a company logo. It is used by a major Moroccan insurance company as well as by the Moroccan government, who chose the *Khamsa* for a poster campaign for tolerance after the bombings of Casablanca.

Another symbol that is very present as a decorative motif, be it on jewellery, coins or in architecture, is the star with five, six or eight branches. Whereas the star with five branches is today considered as *the* Moroccan symbol, used on the national flag and the royal emblem, the star with six branches is nowadays referred to as exclusively Jewish. However, in the past the different forms of the stars were not clearly attributed to a certain religion or a nation as is the case today. The star, as geometrical figures in general, was a universal decorative element in the Hellenistic-Roman tradition. The triangle as a symbol of femininity and fertility can be dated back even to pre-antiquity. The two triangles forming the hexagram represented femininity and masculinity but referred also to the two categories of sacred and profane.[35] Contrary to present connotations, the hexagram was not considered as a Jewish symbol. Six-branched stars can be found in a Muslim environment and five- or eight-branched stars in a predominantly Jewish context. The shift of meaning that the stars underwent is reflected also by the objects exhibited. The museum presents many examples of the hexagram being used in a non-Jewish context, for example on coins, as seals on edicts signed by the Moroccan Sultan and on all official documents certificated in Spanish Morocco.[36] Until the beginning of the twentieth century the six-branched star was even used as the emblem on the Moroccan flag, a fact that the director Simon Levy likes to stress and that is documented in the exhibition by the use of additional graphical material.[37] The strong reference of the Star of David to Judaism appeared only in the nineteenth century when it became the symbol of the Zionistic movement, whereas before the Menorah was the ubiquitous symbol in Judaism.[38] Consequently, the hexagram as a specific Jewish symbol appears predominantly on objects from the end of the nineteenth century, like the curtain in front of the ark (*Aron Kodesh*) from

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[34] According to Taufik Canaan, the Babylonians attributed the hand to Venus: see Canaan, Taufik (1914): *Aberglaube und Volksmedizin im Land der Bibel*, Hamburg: Friedrichsen. For its spreading in North Africa see e.g. Lausberg, Sylvie (2007): *Maroc. Deux passions, une mémoire*, Paris: Editions Place des Victoires, p. 62.

[35] Soltes, Ori (2005): *Our Sacred Signs. How Jewish, Christians and Muslim Art Draw from the Same Source*, New York: Westview Press, p. 127.

[36] With the treaty of Fez in 1912 sovreignty over Morocco was divided between France and Spain. Until 1956 the north of Morocco and the territory of West Sahara became a Spanish Protectorate.

[37] In the exhibition an excerpt from *Le protocole et les usages au Maroc* by Mohamed El Alaoui hangs on the wall, showing the national flag with the hexagram on an old photograph. The star was changed to a pentagram on the initiative of the French Marshall Hubert Lyeauty by a decree in September 1915; see also Lausberg, *Maroc*, p. 52

[38] Soltes, *Our Sacred Signs*, pp. 126-7.

the Pariente synagogue in Larache from 1930. The diffusion of various kinds of stars is for most of the visitors a surprise. To see the star with six branches on a Moroccan flag, on Moroccan coins or on a decree is as surprising as to see the five-branched star a decorative element in a Jewish context, for example on a hanger for oil lamps in the synagogue. This mirrors the categorization that defines our own notion of Jewish and Muslim and makes clear that this strong division has not always existed. Moreover, the use of the different stars in various contexts refers to a common language and understanding of symbolism, shaped and shared by Muslims and Jews alike.

Even though non-figurative motifs dominate in all kinds of decoration in Judaism and Islam, since representations of humans and animals are forbidden in orthodox exegesis,[39] animals are quite often used as decorative features. In this respect, normative religion differs from traditions of daily life, in Judaism as in Islam. A central symbol that is widely used is the bird, especially a dove, decorating all kinds of jewellery and *objets d'art.* The *Khamsa* is often decorated with a dove, the thumb formed like a small bird. The dove, also called the spirit of god, *Dhikr Allāh*, is considered to be divine.[40] It can be found in Jewish and Islamic tradition alike and thus serves, like the *Khamsa,* as a connective symbol.[41] In the context of religious items we also find the bird, for example on oil lamps used on the Hanukkah holiday**.**

It is obvious that the presentation of religious objects necessarily points up differences between Muslims and Jews. However, as the example of the Hanukkah lamp shows, also in the context of religion we find an emphasis on a particular Moroccan tradition. The shape and decoration of old Hanukkah lamps in North Africa differ from their counterparts in Europe. The Jewish Museum New York explains the particularity of Hanukkah lamps used in the Arab world as follows:

> Islamic iconoclasm limited the motifs with which Hanukkah lamps were decorated in the Middle East. The use of open-work arabesques and arcades with pointed arches is typical of Islamic architecture, on both secular and religious buildings such as synagogues and mosques. The peacocks employed here may have been intended to symbolize light and the kindling of the Hanukkah lamp, for Muslims associate the outspread tail of the peacock with light.[42]

Stressing the Moroccan particularity of secular and religious items indicates the affiliation of the Jewish community with a Moroccan heritage rather than with an Ashkenazi tradition dominant in Europe, the United States and also in Israel. Beside the Hanukkah lamps other items are specific to the Moroccan tradition such as the big glasses that serve as oil lamps in Moroccan synagogues and which are also present in the exhibition.

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[39] In Judaism aniconism is referred to in the Bible: 'Do not represent [such] gods by any carved statue or picture of anything in the heaven above, on the earth below, or in the water below the land': Exodus 20:3-6. The Qur'an is not explicitly dealing with aniconism, but references can be found in the *hadith*, oral traditions of the Prophet's sayings and actions that were collected and written down.

[40] Lausberg, *Maroc*, p. 44.

[41] See e.g. Qur'an, Sura II, Verse 262 and Solomon's Song of Songs 2,14.

[42] See the explanations on the homepage of the Jewish Museum in New York, http://www.thejewishmuseum.org/CollectionOverview/Ceremonial-Art (accessed 1 June 2009).

Language as expression of national belonging

"As the language is the surety for a people's memory, and if it is the fundament of its identity, which language is representing Moroccan identity?"[43] asks the Moroccan scholar Mouhssine Ouafae. Regarding the multilingual reality in contemporary Morocco this question seems more than relevant. Although Arabic is appointed as the official language of Morocco by the constitution,[44] many languages compete in everyday life, for example French, Spanish, the Moroccan dialect and various Berber dialects. Nevertheless, "few Moroccans would dispute the importance of Arabic as vital symbol of Moroccan national identity."[45] Particularly in the context of the struggle for national independence and after independence in 1956, the promotion of Arabic had a high political significance. The symbolic meaning of Arabic was and is related not only to national unity but as the language of Qur'an, also to Islam, the official religion of the state.[46] As Arabic was a central marker of national identity and unity the issue of language also concerned the Jewish community. Especially those involved in the nationalist movement called for the use of Arabic. The museum refers to this development with a placard entitled *Appel pour la population Israelite au Maroc*. This was printed in 1930 as an appeal for the use of classical Arabic as the language of education in Jewish schools. It was written by Azouz Cohen in French and Judeo-Moroccan. Azouz Cohen speaks of "true Arabic", which is expressed in Judeo-Arab by the term *l-arabiyya l-fsiha*. "It is not only the official language", Cohen argued, "it is also the language of your fathers and the lingua franca of your co-citizens."[47] This appeal to prefer Arabic to French was not an isolated activity. It has to be seen in the context of a nationalist movement within the Jewish community, a group that was neither supporting an affiliation with France nor with Zionistic groups, but rather fighting for a democratic and independent Moroccan state. The strategic use of Arabic by Jewish political activists during the struggle for independence was aimed at emphasizing the feeling of belonging to the Moroccan nation.[48] The placard was a reaction to the fact that, due to the influence of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, French had become the first language for Moroccan Jews.[49] A consequence of the permanent use of French was an estrangement from the majority of Moroccans. Little has changed today. Although Arabic is taught in francophone schools in Morocco, classical Arabic remains a foreign language for the majority of the Jewish community.[50] However, colloquial Arabic is still spoken by most Moroccan

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[43] Ouafae, Mouhssine (1995): 'Ambivalence du discourse sur l'arabisation.' In: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language. Sociolinguistics in Morocco*, Vol. 112, p. 46.

[44] See the text of the Moroccan constitution: http://www.maroc.ma/NR/rdonlyres/B6B37F23-9F5D-4B46-B679-B43DDA6DD125/0/Constitution.pdf (accessed 12 August 2009).

[45] Marley, Dawn (2002): 'Diversity and Uniformity. Linguistic Fact and Fiction in Morocco.' In: Salhi, Kamal (ed.): *French In and Out of France*, Bern: Peter Lang, p. 341.

[46] In the preamble of the constitution Morocco is referred to as 'Etat musulam', article 6 says: 'L'islam est la Religion de l'Etat qui garantit à tous le libre exercice des cultes.' See http://www.maroc.ma/NR/rdonlyres/B6B37F23-9F5D-4B46-B679-B43DDA6DD125/0/Constitution.pdf (accessed 12 August 2009). For more information on the languages debate after independence and the multilingual reality in Morocco see Howe, Marvine (2005): *Morocco. The Isalmist Awakening and Other Challenges*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 175-88.

[47] Quoted from the placard *Appel pour la population Israelite au Maroc* (translation by the author).

[48] On the participation of Jewish politicians in the 'national movement' see an article in the *Bulletin d'information* of the Foundation, September 2006, p. 5.

[49] The north of Morocco was under Spanish rule from 1912 until 1956; Spanish became the dominant language within the Jewish communities there.

[50] Being proficient in French, using dialect sporadically in daily life and learning classical Arabic as a kind of 'foreign' language is not exclusively a phenomenon among the Jews in Morocco; it can also be observed in

Jews, even though it is less prevalent nowadays. Simon Levy stated that Jews are often considered as "a kind of European to whom one replies in French even if they spoke in Arabic first."[51] The fact that Jews were and are still speaking Moroccan in daily life is no longer self-evident in present-day Morocco. Thus it is also stressed in the exhibition.

Among the objects referring to linguistic sameness we find historical and scientific texts, religious books and also examples of the use of Arabic in daily life. Moroccan Jews spoke Moroccan dialect with some particularities. Known as Judeo-Arab, or more specific as Judeo-Moroccan, Jews named their language *l-arabiyya dyalna*, the Moroccan term for "our Arabic", in contrast to *l-arabiyya dl-mslimīn*, the Arabic of the Muslims.[52] The font of Judeo-Arab is Hebrew, the phonetic is Arabic. As an example for a book in Judeo-Moroccan, a history book is presented in the exhibition with the title *historiah dl-yahūd dl-marok bl-arabiyya min-tarjmana min l-faranzīn* (*History of the Jews of Morocco in Arabic*, *translated from French*). Translated in 1953 the book was printed in the Razon publishing house in Casablanca. This translation from French to Judeo-Moroccan indicates that there was a preference among some Jews to read Moroccan dialect rather than French. The museum's archive and library also have religious texts in Judeo-Arab, among them prayer books, and biblical and Talmudic texts. Some of these books are shown in the exhibition, for example a translation of the Passover Haggadah. Judeo-Arab was used in the field of religion, for prayers or the liturgy, not only in privacy but also in the synagogue. Even today some services are still held in Judeo-Arab, not in French.[53] The use of Hebrew for prayers was rare and reserved for men, as women traditionally did not learn Hebrew in Talmudic schools, and so Judeo-Arabic translations of prayers and biblical texts were used.

An information sign from the *Sla l-Khadra* synagogue in Meknes, dating from the eighteenth century, shows that Judeo-Arab was also the language for community matters. The plate, written with Hebrew characters but with Arab phonetic, asks the community not to spit on the floor of the synagogue and not to accompany the cantor's recitation with a loud voice. This refers to the *marocanité* of Jewish tradition, even in the field of religion. What looks foreign and different at first glance — the Hebrew script — turns out to be Moroccan, a surprising effect that stresses how a Jewish tradition belongs to Moroccan culture.

Conclusion

As posited at the beginning of this article, the position of the Jewish minority within the Muslim majority is a major question and a point of uncertainty for the community in present-day Morocco. Thus it is not surprising that this issue is the focus for the exhibition that needs to serve as a reference for self-ascertainment. A vital message of the exhibition is to strengthen the sameness of Muslims and Jews, and this is done by reference to culture rather than religion. Muslims and Jews alike share the fields of culture, politics and economy as Moroccans in general, whereas from the point of view of religion the groups differ. Thus jewellery and other items of everyday life play a significant role. "It is here where we see that the culture is common", the museum curator, Zhor Rehihil, stated in an interview with the

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many middle- and upper-class Muslim families, where children get a French education and where French is the language of everyday life.

[51] Levy, *Essais d'histoire*, p. 19.

[52] See Stillman, Norman (1988): *The Language and Culture of the Jews of Sefrou, Morocco*, Manchester: University of Manchester, p. 9.

[53] See Levy, *Essais d'histoire*, pp. 16-9.

francophone Moroccan weekly *Telquel*.[54] Nevertheless, religious similarities, such as the rite of circumcision, and particularities that distinguish Moroccan Judaism from Ashkenazi traditions are also stressed. The exhibition points at the Jewish community as part of the Moroccan tradition and not of a global Jewish collective, which is often put on a level with Israel or the USA. To stress belonging to the Moroccan nation can be seen as an attempt of the community to distance itself from being equated with Europe, the USA or Israel, and thus to fight against the image of being strange and foreign.

A survey conducted by Moroccan historians and social scientists in 2006 concluded that "Muslim identity is the dominant identity" in Morocco and that "the majority of Moroccans define themselves as Muslims rather than as Moroccans."[55] However, the survey also stated the trend among the younger generation to define themselves first of all as Moroccans and only secondly as Muslims. Another point in the poll referred to the question whether a Muslim Moroccan feels closer to a non-Arab Muslim or a Moroccan Jew. Most people declared a stronger affiliation with non-Arab Muslims, but again, among younger people, this point of view is changing in favour of a feeling of closeness to Jewish co-citizens.[56] Looking at the examples taken from the exhibition of the Jewish Museum, Tessler's forecast that the community's definition might shift 'from the criterion of religion to that of national origin' proves true. Even though the community is vanishing it has not disappeared but rather found a new dynamic in recent decades. Moroccan Judaism is a popular issue in present-day Morocco. Films and books are released, conferences and cultural events organized, and heritage tours offered.[57] It is an issue that fits well in new images of a diverse and plural society, a narrative that is favoured by state representatives and, as the quoted survey suggests, also among the Muslim population.

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[54] Daïf, Maria (2004): 'Un musée très discret.' In: *Telquel*, no. 119 (translation by the author).

[55] El Ayadi, Mohammed et al. (2006): *L'islam au quotidien. Enquête sur les valeurs et les pratiques religieuses au Maroc*, Casablanca: Editions Prologues, p. 131 (translation by the author).

[56] Ibid., p. 132.

[57] For a detailed analysis of the increasing interest in Jewish history and culture in present-day Morocco see my article 'Jewish Heritage Re-visted.' In: Maffi, Irene and Daher, Rami (eds.): *Practices of Patrimonialization in the Arab World,* forthcoming 2010, London: I.B. Tauris.

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Report on Human Rights Practices, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, US Department of State, February 2004, available at: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27934.htm (accessed 1 May 2009).

Cross-Cultural Adaptation. The Role of Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman for the Contemporary Yiddish Music Scene in Germany[1]

Janina Wurbs

Abstract

Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman**,** the New York-based contemporary Yiddish poet, songwriter and painter, has exerted a strong influence on the Jewish heritage scene not only in the United States but also in Europe. Her poetry and charismatic teaching have also inspired a new generation of young German artists, to adapt her work for the European concert stage. One prominent of example of this phenomenon is the Berlin-based group Fayvish, who filters the heritage of Yiddish poetry through the aesthetics of pop music. Their "Yiddish Pop" attests not only to the expanding borders of "Jewish" music, but also to a change in the way young German musicians define their relationship to the past.

"Tsi vilt ir nisht pruvn a zing ton vus nay?" "Don't you want to sing something new?" asks Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman in her song "*Shvartse vorones*" [Black Crows]. She begs the birds to stop repeating the same tedious "kra-kra", suggesting instead that they listen to their surroundings, for inspiration to create new songs.

Only a small portion of the extant Yiddish song repertoire is performed on today's stages; even smaller is the number of Yiddish writers and composers actively producing new songs today. Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman is one of those few.

Born in 1920, she has sung, recorded and taught her songs since the 1990s; in 2004, she gave a workshop at the Yiddish Summer Weimar festival in Germany, an event which was to have a catalyzing effect on the German Yiddish music scene. Although several CDs with her songs have appeared in Germany since then, Schaechter-Gottesman's influence is most audible in the recordings of Fabian Schnedler, a young, Berlin-based singer. A performer who has appeared with various bands representing diverse approaches to Yiddish music, Schnedler can be said to be among the most prominent Yiddish singers in Berlin of the last decade.

In the present article, I will focus on Gottesman's influence on the art of Fabian Schnedler. After a few introductory remarks on the history of Yiddish music in Germany, I will describe the particular way in which Gottesman's artistic approach effected not only the artistic development of a single artist, but the character of the contemporary German Yiddish music scene in general.

The revival of Yiddish music[2] in Germany dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when singers, many of whom were politically motivated, began producing folk renditions of Yiddish songs. This movement went relatively unnoticed until the 1990s, when Germany experienced a literal "klezmer boom".[3] Although today klezmer music (that is, instrumental music derived from Eastern European Jewish instrumental music traditions) and Yiddish song often appear on the same program, they enjoyed varying degrees of popularity in Germany since the 1970s.

Although the last few years saw an increasing number of newspaper articles and documentary films on the subject of klezmer, not much research has been done on the recent development of Yiddish music in Germany. Aaron Eckstaedt and Heiko Lehmann are among the few scholars to address the issue in their publications.[4] Ruth Gruber dedicated a chapter of her *Virtually Jewish* to the topic of klezmer music in Germany; Rita Ottens and Joel Rubin briefly presented their perspectives on it in *Klezmer-Musik*.[5] In addition, Jeffrey Shandler's *Adventures in Yiddishland*, although focusing more on the U.S. and Canada, briefly deals with the situation in Germany.[6]

The perception of Yiddish music in Germany is dominated by a preoccupation with the history of the relationship between the two "types" of Jews – "German Jewry" and "*Ostjuden*"[7], a history characterized by stereotypes and prejudices. In fact, the very distinction between these two groups implies the acceptance of stereotypes. As Steven Aschheim has argued, this distinction, based on the categories of "West" and "East" and defining people

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[2] The term "Yiddish music" in this article refers to the music played, listened to and taught in German concert halls, stages, clubs and workshops; that is, klezmer music and Yiddish song. It does not refer to the whole legacy of Ashkenazic music - the music of the Eastern European Jews that includes also liturgical music. On the changing meaning of the term "klezmer" and "klezmer music", see Bauer, Susan (1999): *Von der Khupe zum Klezkamp. Klezmer-Musik in New York,* Berlin: Piranha Musik, pp. 30-5.

[3] Gruber, Ruth Ellen (2002): *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe,* Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 203. See the development described more detailed in Eckstaedt, Aaron (2003): *"Klaus mit der Fiedel, Heike mit dem Bass…"Jiddische Musik in Deutschland,* Berlin, Wien: Philo, pp. 13-64.

[4] Eckstaedt, *"Klaus mit der Fiedel…"*; Lehmann, Heiko (2000): 'Klezmer in Germany/Germans and Klezmer: Reparation or Contribution'. Lecture held at WOMEX, Berlin, Oct 19, 2000; Linernotes accompanying the CD anthology *Sol Sajn. Jiddische Musik in Deutschland und ihre Einflüsse (1953-2009)* [Yiddish music in Germany and its influences], 2009; interview with the editors of the CD anthology *Sol sajn. Jiddische Musik in Deutschland und ihre Einflüsse (1953-2009)* available at: http://www.buechergilde.de/sol-sajn/# (accessed 20 August 2009).

[5] See also Ottens, Rita and Rubin, Joel (1998): 'Der Klezmer als ideologischer Arbeiter. Jiddische Musik in Deutschland' [The Klezmer as Ideological Worker: Yiddish Music in Germany]. In: *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,* (1998) pp. 26-9, available at: http://www.rubin-ottens.com/rott/uploads/klezmer.pdf and "Sounds of the Vanishing World. The German Klezmer Movement as a Racial Discourse" (2004), available at http://www.rubinottens.com/rott/uploads/Ottens-Rubin_Vanishing.pdf (15 December 2009).

[6] Shandler, Jeffrey (2006): *Adventures in Yiddishland. Postvernacular Language and Culture*, Berkeley: California University Press

[7] Aschheim, Steven E. (1999): *Brothers and Strangers. The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press; Grossman, Jeffrey A. (2000): *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany. From the Enlightenment to the Second Empire,* Rochester: Camden House; also Gruber, *Virtually Jewish* still continues with this conception.

through one major component of their identity, was to a large extent an imaginary construct.[8] The move away from Yiddish as a vernacular of Jews in Germany was first advocated by Moses Mendelssohn, one of the outstanding representatives of the Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*. In the eighteenth century, Jews who wished to assimilate in Germany distanced themselves from everything that implied an attachment to Eastern European Jewry, for fear of becoming targets of German anti-Jewish propaganda. Although many German Jews in the nineteenth century considered the Eastern European Jews as brethren, at the same time, the "*Ostjuden*" seemed alien and exotic because of their very different culture, religiosity and way of life. Still in the 1920s, the attitude of German Jewry toward the East was ambivalent, and could be described as one of disrespect mixed with a certain fascination; this mixed attitude was captured in the works of writers such as Arnold Zweig who pictured Ashkenazic culture as a valuable asset, a legacy German Jews had lost in the process of acculturation.[9]

Despite this ambivalence, or perhaps as a result of it, Yiddish songs were relatively popular in Berlin in the decades before Second World War. The cultural magazine *Ost und West* (1901-1923), for example, organized a series of concerts which included Yiddish songs throughout Germany. The first of them, which was probably also the first concert of Yiddish songs ever produced in Germany, took place in 1902.[10] The last of the series, in turn, staged in Berlin in 1919, drew around two thousand spectators.[11] Other organizations staged similar concerts. Yet the genre was at that time, as was the whole of Yiddish culture, always associated with a certain exotic feeling, a feeling of "otherness".[12] Many German Jews approached this music as representing a world different from the one they identified themselves with and believed in.

Although the first to perform Yiddish songs in Germany after Second World War were the Jewish survivors in DP-camps in the early 1950s,[13] the phenomenon was, on the whole, one that appealed more to non-Jewish audiences. A central figure in the process of "Germanization" of Yiddish song was Peter Rohland, who performed at folk music festivals throughout the 1960s. By the beginning of the 1970s, Yiddish song can be said to have truly found a place in Germany in the socio-political context of the 1968 movement. It also became an important medium for those seeking to come to terms with the implications of the Shoah, particularly for the societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation (*Gesellschaften für christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit*). Parallel to the beginnings of the klezmer revival[14] in the U.S., at a time when old recordings of Yiddish music had not yet been reissued and were, consequently, unknown in Germany, groups like the West-German *Espe* and *Zupfgeigenhansel* interpreted

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[8] Aschheim, *Brothers and Starngers*, p. 81; for a more general approach to the problem see also Sen, Amartya (2006): *Identity and Violence. The Illusion of Destiny,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

[9] Zweig, Arnold (1920): *Das ostjüdische Antlitz*, Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1920 (with drawings by Hermann Struck).

[10] Nemtsov, Jascha (2009): *Der Zionismus in der Musik. Jüdische Musik und nationale Idee,* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag; and Maurer, Trude (1986): *Ostjuden in Deutschland 1918-1933,* Hamburg: Hans Christians Verlag, pp. 723-8.

[11] Maurer. *Ostjuden in Deutschland*, p. 723.

[12] Grossman, *The Discourse on Yiddish in Germany*, p. 25.

[13] So-called Displaced Person's camps existed in Germany between 1945 and 1953 for survivors of the Shoah, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

[14] On the history of the klezmer revival, see Bauer, *Von der Khupe zum Klezkamp*; Gruber, *Virtually Jewish*; Apfeld, *Klezmer – hejmisch und hip*. On the term klezmer "revival", see Slobin, Mark (2000): *Fiddler on the Move. Exploring the Klezmer World.* New York: Oxford University Press. On the term klezmer "revival", see Ottens, Rita; Rubin, Joel (1999): *Klezmer-Musik,* Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag.

Yiddish music alongside other folk music genres.[15] Popular folk songs as well as ghetto, workers' and resistance songs formed the core of the repertoire.[16]

It was, however, the American klezmer bands that toured Germany in the mid 1980s – such as *Kapelye* (1984), *The Klezmatics* (1988) and, from 1990, *Brave Old World* – as well as the Israeli clarinettist Giora Feidman that exerted the most profound impact on the emerging "klezmer boom". *Brave Old World* and Giora Feidman, apart from performing, gave numerous workshops around the country. *Kapelye*, *The Klezmatics* and *Brave Old World* (with singers Michael Alpert and Lorin Sklamberg), combined klezmer music and Yiddish song on the concert stage. At the same time, the mid 1990s saw a profusion of klezmer groups appearing in Germany, where klezmer music was increasingly perceived as a world music style.[17] Already before 1989, Berlin was the center for Yiddish music in Germany, and retained this status after reunification.[18] In the midst of its vibrant cultural life, with hundreds of venues ranging from night clubs to the *Philharmonie*, Berlin gradually developed into one of the most prominent European centers of klezmer music.[19]

The Jewish cultural festival *Yiddish Summer Weimar* was initiated by Alan Bern, the artistic director of *Brave Old World,* in 1999 (in the first years called "Klezmer Weeks Weimar"). Consisting of intensive workshops in Yiddish language, song, instrumental music and dance, the festival has experienced rapid growth, attracting hundreds of participants from throughout the country and abroad. Recently, introductory courses to Yiddish music, general music theory and folk music theory have also been offered. Every year, the program focuses on a specific topic, often a non-Jewish musical style and culture that in some way connects to Jewish culture. In 2005, for example, the theme was the relationship of Jewish and Greek/Turkish music. In 2008 and 2009, the focus was on the link between Jewish and Roma music. The concept, as Bern explains, is essentially intercultural:

> Yiddish culture is simply a starting point, because what is true of every culture [is that] … it constantly creates and defines and re-defines itself in relation to other cultures … This characteristic … can be called 'interculturality' … During the *Weimar Klezmer Wochen*, faculty and participants and audiences alike experience this calling-into-question of their 'own' and 'other' identities, not through academic theory or passive consumerism, but through living and being together for a month in a complex, self-aware, intercultural matrix. The experience changes us, changes our thinking and our feeling and our sense of self, which is perhaps the most important result of all.[20]

An important aspect of the Weimar workshops is thus the creation of a context in which participants are encouraged to reconsider their artistic approach. The result of this experience is often destabilizing: An effect which is confirmed by some of the festival participants and my own observations. As contemporary sociological studies have shown, theories of identity acknowledge the concept of a "mobile" self as opposed to the conception of social identity as something stable. The terms "own" and "other" are themselves constructs, with constantly

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[15] Sapoznik's judgement of *Zupfgeigenhansel* playing in "a naïve American 'folkie' style." Sapoznik, Henry (1999): *Klezmer! Jewish Music From Old World To Our World,* New York, NY: Schirmer, p. 275.

[16] For a more detailed and nuanced survey of this development, including the history of Yiddish music in the GDR, see Eckstaedt, *"Klaus mit der Fiedel…"*

[17] Ibid., p. 58.

[18] East Berlin hosted the *"Tage der jiddischen Kultur"* (Days of Yiddish Culture festival) from 1987 to 1996.

[19] According to Wiltrud Apfeld, exhibition panel 29, temporarily more than 20 klezmer bands exist in Berlin. See Apfeld, Wiltrud (2004): *Klezmer – hejmisch und hip. Musik als kulturelle Ausdrucksform im Wandel der Zeit*, Essen: Klartext Verlag.

[20] Liner notes for the DVD of Andrä, Yvonne and Blümel, René (2004): *Mit nigele, mit fidele, mit tsimbele, mit lidele… Klezmer Wochen Weimar Workshops '04.*

changing borders.[21] The workshops in Weimar imply not only teaching, but also the creation of a social context which invites the participants to radically reconsider their artistic outlook.

The Yiddish song workshop, which took place in July 2004, dealt with the overarching topic of that year's festival: improvisation. The workshop was named "*Zumerteg*" [Summer Day], after a collection of poems written by the workshop's guest speaker, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman,[22] and was taught, in addition to Gottesman, by Michael Alpert and Adrienne Cooper. The teachers of song accompaniment were Alan Bern (piano, accordion) and Marilyn Lerner (piano) with Roswitha Dasch and Katharina Müther - the *Duo Wajlu* - as workshop assistants.

Twenty-five participants attended the workshop, a fact which might account for its unusual intensity, given the teacher-student-ratio. Among them was Fabian Schnedler. Schnedler was born in 1973, and had been performing Yiddish songs since the early 1990s. He began learning Yiddish in 1997 at a Yiddish summer program in Oxford; it was there that he met *Brave Old World*, and its vocalist Michael Alpert, one of the finest Yiddish vocalists today. Alpert had conducted ethnological fieldwork and studied with old Yiddish folk singers such as Bronya Sakina. Soon after his return, Schnedler joined the klezmer band *Tants in Gartn Eydn* as a *poyker*[23] and singer. Other musical projects followed, with Schnedler seeking new opportunities to sing in Yiddish.[24] The Yiddish song workshop in Weimar 2004 proved to be just what he was looking for: it offered a way of engaging with the old song tradition, while at the same time encouraging a continuation of that tradition through creativity and improvisation.

Schaechter-Gottesman is among the few living representatives of the Yiddish song tradition still active as a writer and composer. Born in Vienna in 1920, she grew up in Chernovitz (present-day Chernivtsi), the capital of the historic region of Bukovina. The town had belonged to Austria-Hungary until First World War and the Habsburg empire strongly influenced its cultural atmosphere and the vibrant Jewish life. Beyle's father, Binyumen Schaechter (born 1890) was a staunch supporter of the socialist Yiddishist Zhitlovsky and is said to have followed him on foot from Deletin to the 1908 Chernovitz language conference, covering 99 km. The family regards this legendary feat as a symbol of the unlimited devotion for the cause of Yiddish, which they consider to be their heritage.[25]

Singing was very important in Schaechter-Gottesman's family. Beyle's mother, Lifshe Schaechter-Widman, was a great folksinger. Born in 1893 in Zvinyetshke, at the river Dniester (present-day Ukraine), she was both a business woman and a talented performer. Recorded in 1954 by Leybl Kahn and in 1972 by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, her songs are treasures of the old style Yiddish ballad tradition, of which only few recordings exist. Schaechter-Gottesman's immediate family survived Second World War after an odyssey that started in the Chernovitz Ghetto. After two years in Bucharest (1945-1947), Schaechter-

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[21] Welzer, Harald (2005): *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*. München: Beck, p. 30; Frith, Simon (1996): 'Music and Identity.' In: Hall, Stuart; du Gay, Paul (eds.): *Questions of Cultural Identity*, London: Sage, pp. 109ff.

[22] Schaechter-Gottesman (1994): *Zumerteg. Tsvontsik zinglider / Summer Days. Twenty Yiddish Songs*. NY 1990, 2nd ed. 1994. CD: Schaechter-Gottesman (1991): *Zumerteg / Summer Days*. Yiddishland Records. Austin, Texas, 1991. YDL 001.

[23] *Poyk* is the traditional acoustic percussion instrument that has been used in klezmer music. It is not a drum set.

[24] Schnedler, Fabian, personal interview, 1 October 2008.

[25] "*S'iz far im [= ir tatn] geven an iberlebung un far zayn mishpokhe – in yorn arum – a shtolts un a yikhes.*" [It was an event for him [= her father], and for his family – much later – a pride and a heritage.] Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman in Shekhter-Widman, Lifshe (1973): *Durkhgelebt a velt. Zikhroynes./A Full Life. Memoirs*. New York: Lifshe Widman-Bukh-Komitet, p. 273.

Gottesman managed to get to Vienna, where she stayed in the DP-camp Rothschild-Spital and, in 1951, emigrated with the family to the United States.

In addition to singing and songwriting, Schaechter-Gottesman also studied painting and attended art schools in Bucharest and Vienna. Upon arriving in New York, she worked as a Yiddish teacher in the Bronx, an activity she continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when she wrote poems, songs and plays for her children and pupils. She published two children's books: *Khayiml un Taybele* (1956) and *Mir forn* (1963) and she was active in "*Bainbridgevke*", a Yiddish speaking community on Bainbridge Avenue, where Schaechter-Gottesman and her neighbors sought actively to promote the use of Yiddish among the younger generation.

Since the 1970s, Schaechter-Gottesman has also been writing personal poems and songs. She has published five volumes of poetry, four of which have been issued only in Yiddish: *Steshkes tsvishn moyern* [Footpaths Amid Stone Walls] 1972, *Sharey* [Dawn] 1980, *Perpl shlenglt zikh der veg* [The Winding Purple Road] 2002 and *Der tsvit fun teg* [The Blossom of Days] 2007. Only one of them, *Lider* [Poems] 1995, includes English translations. As this small volume, containing 21 poems, was never made available in Germany, her work was inaccessible to the Weimar workshop participants, almost none of whom possessed a sufficient knowledge of Yiddish to be able to read her poems in the original. To describe this paradoxical situation, in which fluency in vernacular Yiddish has become rare, while the symbolic value attached to the language had grown, Jeffrey Shandler coined the term "postvernacularity".[26]

Although Schaechter-Gottesman's CDs, in contrast to her poems, had been relatively easy to obtain in Germany before 2004, it was the personal encounter with her that proved to be decisive for many of the musicians, among them also Schnedler. Schnedler, who had heard Schaechter-Gottesman's recording "*Zumerteg*" as a student, learned and rehearsed several of the songs from the collection, including "*Harbstlid*" [Autumn Song], which is perhaps Schaechter-Gottesman's most widely performed song. At that time, however, as he states in an interview, the songs seemed to him too westernized, folky and not "Yiddish enough". He was more interested in the older repertoire that Michael Alpert had taught in Oxford. This material consisted predominantly of Yiddish women's songs, which Alpert had recorded in the course of his extensive ethnographical fieldwork. Schnedler had taken these songs as a model for his exploration of the Yiddish song.[27] Thus, when he came to Weimar in 2004, it was not primarily in order to study with Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman:

> I did not know who Beyle was. I thought, oh, she is that woman with the recordings … I went to Weimar because I wanted to attend an intensive workshop on Yiddish – regardless of who would be teaching. "Weimar" stands for quality, for deep involvement with the music and its context. It was also important for me to study again with Michael Alpert.[28]

Schnedler arrived in Weimar, therefore, looking to meet new musicians and to try out new musical ideas, as well as to immerse himself in the tradition of old Yiddish folksongs – the repertoire and the technique of ornamentation taught by Michael Alpert. Hearing Schaechter-Gottesman's life story and her singing, however, had an unexpected effect on him. He discovered in her songs a striking narrative quality and moving simplicity that reflected the

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[26] Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland,* pp. 4 ff.
[27] Schnedler, personal interview, 1 October 2008.
[28] Ibid.

authenticity he had admired in the older style. Her music may have lacked that style's sophisticated ornamentation, yet it contained much of its rhythmic freedom. Schnedler acknowledges this experience to have been the decisive event which led to his creative engagement with Yiddish song. He started performing Schaechter-Gottesman's songs together with accordionist Franka Lampe, in the klezmer duo *Schikker wi Lot* they had founded in 2002. Lampe had also studied with Alan Bern for many years, already before the beginning of the Weimar festival.

So Long	**אזוי לאַנג**
So long, so long	אזוי לאַנג, אזוי לאַנג,
We've been saying farewell,	„זײַ געזונט‟, זאָגן מיר זיך
Almost from the first meeting.	שוין כמעט פֿונעם ערשטן באַגעגג'נען.
The sun rose	ס'איז די זון אויפֿגעגאַן
With all its flaming	מיט איר גאַנצן צעפֿלאַם
And the shadows of our parting.	און די שאָטנס פֿון אונדזער געזעג'נען.
Farewell, farewell,	זײַ געזונט, זײַ געזונט,
Time to go, I must go.	צײַט צו גיין, מוז מען גיין,
Farewell, time to go,	זײַ געזונט, צײַט צו גיין,
I must go.	מוז מען גיין.
The moments fly,	פֿליִען רגעס אַוועק,
One day becomes many	פֿון איין טאָג ווערן טעג
And suddenly it's been years	און סע זענען גאָר פֿלוצעם שוין יאָרן.
And we're still here	און מיר שטייען נאָך אַלץ
Saying good-bye,	און געזעגענען זיך,
Although it is getting rather late.	כאָטש ס'איז, דאַכט זיך, שוין שפּעטלעך געוואָרן.
Farewell, farewell…	זײַ געזונט, זײַ געזונט…

(translated into English by Charne Schaechter)

Figure 1: "*Azoy lang* / So long"[29]

Schaechter-Gottesman's poem is open to interpretation in its expression of a fundamental aspect of the human condition, yet at the same time, it sets a specific mood. *Schikker wi Lot's* interpretation of Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman's "*Azoy lang*" on their CD *Burves* [Barefoot]

[29] Schaechter-Gottesman, Beyle (1994): *Zumerteg. Tsvontsik zinglider / Summer Days. Twenty Yiddish Songs.* 2nd ed., New York: League for Yiddish; Congress for Jewish Culture (Yiddish and transcription: page 26; English translation: page 60).

2006 might not be the most representative example of their performance style; however, it illustrates well Schnedler's approach. The arrangement is simple, even minimalistic. The mood of the piece, in g minor, is mirrored by the descending accompaniment, in which Lampe recasts the melody in a creative way, taking the beginning notes of each phrase and placing an upper or lower third after each of them. This is a sensitive approach which respects the melody-driven, text or speech-oriented nature of Jewish music. *Schikker wi Lot's* arrangement of "*Azoy lang*" is, consequently, built more "horizontally" than "vertically" (the latter would imply adding harmonies). The harmonization is kept transparent throughout.

After the workshop in Weimar 2004, Schnedler began re-arranging Schaechter-Gottesman's songs, and dedicated himself with a new intensity to the study of Yiddish. He also toyed with the idea of labeling himself "*Fayvish*", pidgin-Yiddish for "Fabian". This idea, as he explains, had nothing to do with him wishing to become Jewish in any way, but rather with an attempt to find a new artistic persona. As he did not immediately find fellow musicians for his new project, he began working on his own. In order to further his knowledge of Yiddish, he created a small Yiddish reading circle. The discussions of this circle inspired the arrangements of several poems, including Schaechter-Gottesman's "*Mayn heym Nyu York*", first published in *Steshkes tsvishn moyern* [Footpaths Amid Stonewalls] in 1972.[30]

My Home, New York   מײַן הײם ניו יאָרק

You're ashamed to confess it,   שעמסט זיך אויסצוזאָגן,
    That the coal dust,   אַז דער קוילן־פּאָרעך,
    the gasoline smoke,   גאַזאָלין־רויך,
    the wild noise, the impetuous tumult   דער ווילדער געטומל, האַסטיק געטריב –
    is your home – and you love it.   איז דײַן הײם – און דו האָסט זי ליב.
You won't admit   ווילסט נישט צוגעבן
    that your life,   אַז אויך דײַן לעבן
    like the paved asphalt,   ווי דער ברוקירטער אַספֿאַלט
    has become congealed, stone cold.   איז געוואָרן פֿאַרגליווערט, שטיין קאַלט.
    Not uttering a word to anyone   נישט אויסצורעדן אַ וואָרט מיט קיינעם,
    for days on end.   טעג לאַנג.
    And this has become the pattern of your life,   און דאָס איז געוואָרן דײַן שטייגער לעבן,
    In fact, your preference.   אפֿילו פֿאַרלאַנג.
What is there to boast about?   און וואָס איז דאָ זיך צו באַרימען?
Those who don't understand   די וואָס פֿאַרשטייען עס נישט
won't agree;   וועלן מיט מיר נישט אײַנשטימען,
and the others – in any event – think: און די אַנדערע – סײַ ווי סײַ מיינען:
It's the best home anywhere.   ס'איז די בעסטע פֿון אַלע היימען.

(translated into English by Thomas E. Bird)

Figure 2: "*Mayn heym Nyu York* / My Home, New York"[31]

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[30] Ibid., p. 72.
[31] Schaechter-Gottesman, Beyle (1995): *Lider/Poems*, New York: Cross-Cultural Communications, p.14.

The instrumentation in *Fayvish's* interpretation suggests a musical approach different from that of any ensemble he had played with before.[32] In stark contrast to the "klezmer band" quality of *Tants in Gartn Eydn*, the main instrument here is the guitar, which produces an intimate atmosphere, evoking associations with the figure of the "singer-songwriter". The song extends into another musical world, drawing its rhythm very much out of the text itself. One hears jazz harmonies; the recitative-like beginning is followed by high, syncopated patterns that allude to Frank Sinatra's "New York, New York".

Schnedler, when he founded his trio *Fayvish* in 2006, defined its style initially as "Yiddish acoustic pop". Coming from the Yiddish folk song tradition, *Fayvish's* sound was to be exclusively acoustic. With time, however, the trio started experimenting with electronic sounds. Seeking to realize what Dan Kahn had insisted in 2007 should be the aim of everybody involved in Yiddish culture today - to "constantly [redefine] and [create] the definition of what Yiddish culture is in the 21st century",[33] Schnedler formulated his credo in 2008 as "Re:Yiddish": re-thinking Yiddish music, re-imagining what Yiddish music can be. *Fayvish*, therefore, was supposed to be a challenge to preconceived notions of "originality" or "authenticity"[34] as well as a response to the allegation of "klezmer kitsch", often raised against artists dealing with klezmer music in Germany, where klezmer is still often regarded as a nostalgic playing around, rather than a serious artistic style.

Schnedler's "YiddPop", which one might read as a reference to "BritPop", draws on various sources. The song "*Akhtsik er, zibetsik zi*" [He's eighty, she's seventy] combines, for example, Mark Warshavsky's song of the same title with a poem by Itzik Fefer, "*Yo, der alter vayn iz gut*" [Yes, old wine is good]. *Fayvish's* arrangement of Itzik Manger's poem "Ikh vel oyston di shikh" [I am going to take off my shoes][35] is yet another case in point. Schnedler modifies the atmosphere and the narrative of the story by adding a stanza "*Ikh vel onton di shikh*" [I am going to put on my shoes].

While with *Schikker wi Lot*, Schnedler concentrated on narrating the stories, *Fayvish* puts an emphasis on sound and atmosphere. *Fayvish's* music, integrating drums and sound effects, such as making the guitar sound like an electric guitar, is based on the groove. This music seeks to explore the limits of complexity possible with the sounds of pop music, yet at the same time, strives to be straightforward and comprehensible. Schnedler combines different sources: quotations from traditional texts and music, to create contemporary musical collages, with many fractures and dissonances. Recently, he also began composing his own songs.

Schnedler reports that he struggled for years with a series of dilemmas of how to prove himself a worthy representative of Jewish music, despite being a non-Jew. In an interview with the BBC in 2007, he stated that a mere interest in Yiddish music and culture was not sufficient to justify his activity as a musician, which he felt he needed, in some sense, to legitimize.[36] Finally, however, he arrived at a point where he felt he was ready to create new Yiddish music. In 2007, *Fayvish* was given the opportunity to present their music for the first time at the Yiddish Summer Weimar, as part of the concert "*Naye Khvalyes*" [Yiddish New Wave], featuring also Daniel Kahn.

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[32] Unpublished recording of *Fayvish* solo.
[33] In: Goldie, Caroline; Zanussi, Krzysztof, dir. (2007): *European Roots: Klezmer in Germany*. WDR/BBC
[34] Josh Horowitz calls the "authenticity" debate a "superficial semantic problem", see: http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/horowitz/horowitz.bride.html (accessed 2 September 2009).
[35] Chava Alberstein composed the music to the poem.
[36] Goldie and Zanussi, *European Roots*.

In their publicity announcements, *Fayvish* highlights the idea of connecting styles that until now had been carefully separated – acoustic pop and Yiddish songs.[37] Aware of the fact that anything that is labeled "Jewish music" becomes easily associated with commemorative events such as the anniversary of the pogroms of November 9 and of the liberation of Auschwitz on January 27,[38] Schnedler attempts to challenge some of the clichés about Yiddish music.

During his performance in Weimar in 2009, for example, he perplexed his audience, quoting a passer-by who, upon seeing a poster of *Fayvish*, announcing three non-Jews playing Jewish music, had called it "sick". "Enjoy this sick music tonight!" Schnedler jokingly opened his concert.[39] Later he stated: "*Fayvish* was inspired by Yiddish texts of great Yiddish poets, such as Itzik Manger, Peretz Markish, Peretz Miransky, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman or… Fabian Schnedler".[40] Placing himself in the same category with the great Yiddish poets, Schnedler introduced an element of humour. Using irony, Schnedler tried to bypass the tension surrounding the questions of ownership ("whose music is this?") and authenticity ("what is a non-Jew doing playing Jewish music and singing in Yiddish?"). More than merely expressing his distance from such essentialist categories, he subtly played on them, thereby seeking to overcome them.

Fabian Schnedler is the only artist among those who attended the workshop with Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman in 2004 who has begun writing his own songs in Yiddish. The work of the other artists, such as Lucette van den Berg, Andrea Pancur, Theresa Tova, and the *Duo Wajlu*, was restricted to interpreting Schaechter-Gottesman's songs. Several of these attempts have since appeared on CDs (Massel-Tov, *Shtile trit*, 2007; Lucette van den Berg, *Friling*, 2007). Although many musicians today have gone through a process of returning to the old style klezmer music in order to create a music of their own, experimental projects like "New Jewish music"[41] or "Radical Jewish music"[42] usually concern instrumental music, not Yiddish song. Only a handful of young people worldwide write original songs in Yiddish, for example, Sarah Gordon (NYC, b. 1979), Daniel Kahn (Berlin/U.S., b. 1978), Yevgenya (Zhenya) Lopatnik (Ukraine, b. 1977), Markus Müller (Germany, b. 1971), and Asya Vaisman (U.S., b. 1983).[43]

Schnedler believes his new Yiddish pop music is an important step on the way towards opening up the genre to creative experimentation, the process he sees as nothing less than a political statement. "What's political about it is that I'm making Yiddish pop music ... music

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[37] See the announcement for a concert in Weimar, Aug 2, 2007: "zusammen bringt, was bisher sorgfältig getrennt wurde: Akustik-Pop und jiddische Lieder".

[38] Liberation of the KZ Auschwitz in 1945. This date was chosen in Germany in 1996 to commemorate the victims of the Nazi regime ("*Tag des Gedenkens an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*"). Since a UN resolution in 2005, it is the "International Holocaust Remembrance Day."

[39] Schnedler introducing *Fayvish*: "Wir sind … Nichtjuden, die zeitgenössische Popmusik mit jiddischen Texten sich auf die Fahne geschrieben haben, … letztens [hat]… ein Betrachter unseres Plakates gesagt, der nicht in unser Konzert … gekommen ist …: 'Drei Nichtjuden, die jiddische Musik machen, das ist doch total…krank.' [the audience laughs and claps] – Also viel Spaß bei dieser kranken Musik heute…" [*Fayvish* starts playing].

[40] "*Fayvish* nimmt die Inspiration aus jiddischen Texten, d.h. die Texte zu diesen Liedern sind von bekannten … Dichtern verfasst worden… wie Itzik Manger, Peretz Markish, Peretz Miransky, Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman oder… Fabian Schnedler…" [the audience laughs].

[41] See Brave Old World, *Blood Oranges* (1997). For a description of this development, see Bern, Alan (1998): *From Klezmer to New Jewish Music. The Musical Evolution of Brave Old World,* available at: http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/bern.new.html (accessed 1 February 2010).

[42] John Zorn's *Radical Jewish Culture* and the musicians featured by the "Tzadik" label.

[43] I am not taking into consideration here the earlier generation of songwriters, like Michael Alpert, b. 1954; Efim Chorny; Josh Waletzky, b. 1948, who had grown up speaking Yiddish and were the teachers of the younger generation.

that makes a claim to a normality that is actually not there".[44] In 1995, Alan Bern, interviewed by Ruth Gruber in her *Virtually Jewish* was convinced that in Germany, "everything that one does connected to Jewish music is a big deal, there's no such thing as normalcy. … [S]ince the condition itself is one of unnormalcy or abnormalcy, then everything that one does is taken seriously, whether you want it to be or not."[45] Christian Dawid, clarinetist performing at that time with the Bremen-based *Klezgoyim,* was also of the opinion that it was impossible to play klezmer in Germany "without making a statement".[46]

Fifteen years later, many klezmer musicians see the situation changing. The accordionist Franka Lampe as well as the singer Jalda Rebling note that klezmer music is no longer alien to Berlin audiences and that it has lost the status of exotic.[47] More and more musicians also exercise a new artistic freedom within klezmer. Heiko Lehmann, who was encouraging German klezmer musicians at the World Music Expo in 2000 to make their contribution to klezmer music "[e]ven if it is hard",[48] recently included *Fayvish* in the klezmer anthology *Sol sajn.* And Alan Bern as well sees *Fayvish'*s approach as a breakthrough on the German scene of Yiddish music. In the liner notes of their forthcoming CD, he wrote: "[T]his is the most individual, natural, flowing, and deeply connected take on Yiddish language and song I've heard in a long, long time. … [H]ere's the CD, … play it whenever somebody starts to run that sleepy line about Germans playing Yiddish music because of guilt. This CD is the wake-up call."[49]

Fabian Schnedler carefully listened to Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman and, subsequently, to his own surroundings. Now, he has the courage to trust his creative impulse, to sing with "*an andern trel, a frishn tra-la*".[50]

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[44] Schnedler, Fabian, personal interview, 23 November 2008.
[45] Gruber, *Virtually Jewish,* p. 217.
[46] In 1997. Ibid., p. 188.
[47] Lampe, Franka, personal interview, 21 August 2009; in the original: "Exotenbonus verloren".
[48] Lehmann, 'Klezmer in Germany'.
[49] Bern, Alan: Linernotes of *Fayvish's* CD (to be released in 2010).
[50] "with a different trill, a fresh tra-la". From Beyle Schaechter-Gottesman's "*Shvartse vorones*".

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Janina Wurbs

The *Holy Letter* and Pop Culture Representations of Jewish Sexuality[1]

Evyatar Marienberg

Abstract

According to quite a few books and films produced in the last two decades in Europe and North America, sex is widely celebrated in Jewish sources. In "authentic Judaism," kosher sex between husband and wife is a sacred endeavor and a key to heavenly bliss both on earth and beyond. This representation of Jewish attitudes about sex is highly problematic and is often based on only one medieval Jewish source commonly known as *The Holy Letter*. This paper discusses the use of this text in a few works of pop culture in recent decades.

Since the fourteenth century, a Hebrew kabbalistic text on marital sexuality, known as *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* (may be translated as *The Holy Letter* or *The Epistle on/of Holiness*), or *Hibur ha-Adam ve-Ishto* (*The Union of Man and his Wife*), has been evoked in various works. Often, it was attributed to Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270), known in traditional circles as Ramban and in more scholarly ones as Nahmanides. This paper explores how this medieval text has been used in two films and one book from the last two decades of the twentieth century.

The *Holy Letter*

Nahmanides, one of the greatest Jewish minds of the thirteenth century, was a man of many talents. His works encompass Jewish law, Biblical and Talmudic exegesis, ethics, and more.[2] As is often the case with renowned authors, his fame caused some works to be attributed to him that he did not actually compose. This has been the case for centuries with *Iggeret ha-*

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[1] This paper is an offshoot of my ongoing attempt to understand how the regulation of marital, heterosexual sexuality has been transmitted in Jewish circles at different times and places, a project that began while I was a Starr fellow at the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard in the spring of 2008. A preliminary version of this paper was presented in the conference 'Representation of Jews in the Contemporary Popular European Culture' at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy, in November 2008. I would like to thank the organizers and participants of this conference for allowing me to present it there, as well as to Harvard and to my home institution at the time of writing this paper, the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, for their support. The comments of several readers of an early draft helped me to improve it. Its shortcomings are obviously my own responsibility.

[2] See for example Kaplan, Joseph; Preschel, Tovia; Ta-Shma, Israel Moses; Gottlieb, Efraim, and Pedaya, Haviva (2007): 'Nahmanides.' In: Berenbaum, Michael and Skolnik, Fred (eds.): *Encyclopaedia Judaica 2ⁿᵈ Ed.*, vol. 14, Detroit: Macmillan Reference, pp. 739-48.

Kodesh. Although some doubts about Nahmanides' authorship of the *Holy Letter* were raised centuries ago, it was Gershom Scholem (1897-1982), in many ways the father of the academic study of Kabbalah, who was the first modern scholar to seriously tackle this issue.[3] Today, following Scholem and other scholars' conclusions, the *Iggeret* is generally believed to have been composed at the time and place where Nahmanides lived, thirteenth century Catalonia, but certainly not by him. That the *Letter* goes unmentioned in Nahmanides' other works, along with the fact that it contains certain kabbalistic concepts, particularly vocabulary, which are absent from his other writings, all support Scholem's conclusion.

It is clear that the false attribution to Nahmanides did the work in fact a great service; without it the text could very well have remained an obscure work with little influence, or even disappeared.[4] It seems there was another reason, probably related to the first, that the *Holy Letter* became so widely known. It was a common practice to include it, frequently in its entirety, in many other works as a "ready-made" piece on sexual relations. Thus, editors or writers of prayer books, works on issues of purity, or even manuals for Shabbat practices who wanted to include something on the complex issue of sexual relations in their books, often quoted this letter. It was an easy, "kosher," and very practical solution. Therefore, for centuries, the text was effortlessly available, even to those who were not scholars.

The English-speaking Jewish world became aware of this unique text starting in 1976, when Seymour J. Cohen, a conservative rabbi in Chicago, published an impressive critical edition of the work, accompanied by an English translation.[5] It is imaginable that in the

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[3] In an article published in 1945 (Scholem, Gershom (1944-45): 'Did Nahmanides Compose the Holy Letter?' (Hebrew) In: *Kiryat Sefer* 21, pp. 179-86), Scholem suggested that the work was composed by the Castilian kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (1248-after 1305. See on him in Scholem, Gershom (1978): *Kabbalah*, New York: Meridian, pp. 409-11). In another place, Scholem's suggested author was Joseph of Hamdan (idem., p. 66). In 1963, an editor of Nahmanides' texts, Charles Chavel, suggested, without mentioning Scholem's classic article, that the *Iggeret* might be the work of the earlier kabbalist Azriel of Gerona (c. 1160-c. 1238). See Chavel, Chaim Dov (1963): *The Writings of Our Master Moshe ben Nahman* (Hebrew), vol. 2, Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, pp. 315-20 [the two volumes Chavel published 1978 in English, under the title *Ramban: Writings and Discourses,* New York: Shilo Publishing House, do not include the *Iggeret*]. In a Hebrew translation, published in 1977, of one of his major books, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, Scholem briefly said that he no longer holds the opinion that Gikatilla is the author of the work. Unfortunately, he did not explain what brought him to this conclusion, nor if he has thoughts regarding another possible author. In the original German edition, as well as in an English translation, both published in the 1960s, Scholem still held that attribution (in German: Scholem, Gershom Gerhard (1960): *Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik,* Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, p. 204 n. 72, "In dem später dem Moses Nachmanides zugeschriebenen '*Iggereth ha-Kodesch* des Josef Gikatila (um 1300)'"; in English: Scholem, Gershom (1965): *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 155 n. 1: "In Joseph Gikatila's '*Iggereth ha-Kodesh* (c. 1300), later attributed to Moses Nahmanides"; in Hebrew: Scholem, Gershom (1977): *Pirkey Yesod be-havant ha-Kabbalah u-Semaliah,* Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, p. 149 n. 72: "…I do not hold anymore the opinion that R. Joseph Gikatilla composed this work.") See also Abramson, Shraga (1982): 'The Holy Letter Attributed to Nahmanides.' (Hebrew) In: *Sinai* vol. 90, no. 5-6, pp. 332-53; Spiegel, Yaakov S. (1975-76): 'Do We Have a New Segment of the 'Holy Letter' Attributed to Nahmanides?' (Hebrew) In: *Kiryat Sefer* 51, pp. 488-91; Roi, Biti (2006): 'Iggeret Ha-Kodesh.' In: Hyman, Paula E. and Ofer, Dalia (eds.): *Jewish Women - A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, CD-Rom, Jerusalem: Shalvi Publishing. For a good summary of the debate (up to 1976) see Seymour J. Cohen's introduction to his critical edition of the text in Cohen, Seymour J. (1976): *The Holy Letter: A Study in Medieval Jewish Sexual Morality ascribed to Nahmanides,* New York: Ktav, pp. 7-27.

[4] A similar case is that of the greatest medieval kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*, which was—and is, in traditional communities—attributed to a rabbi of the Talmudic era when in fact significant parts of it were composed by a medieval kabbalist, Moses de Leon (c. 1250-1305).

[5] See the reference in the previous note. Cohen's translation was not the first translation of the *Iggeret* into a European language. Chavel mentions it was translated in the past to Latin and German. See Chavel, *The Writings of Our Master*, p. 320. A short time before Cohen's edition came out, an English translation of some paragraphs

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atmosphere of the 1970s, showing that rabbinic Judaism has its own *Kama sutra* was not an inappropriate feat in Cohen's eyes.

This unique "letter" contains an introduction and five "paths" or chapters. The first "path" explores what is referred to as "The Nature of the Union." It is this chapter that highlights the holiness of the properly done sexual act. First, it fiercely attacks a relatively famous statement from one of the most prominent Jewish authors of all times, Maimonides (1135-1204), who said, quoting Aristotle, "The sense of touch … is a disgrace to us."[6] The author of the *Iggeret* insists that sexual relations practiced in the appropriate manner are holy and clean. If done for the sake of heaven, "there is nothing holier and cleaner" than such relations. It is possible that this direct attack on Maimonides was at least in part what led some, including Israel Elnekaveh and Meir ben Isaac Aldabi, two fourteenth century authors, to attribute the work to Nahmanides. Not only are their Hebrew acronyms very similar (Rambam and Ramban), but they are perceived by many, not necessarily justly, to be opponents. It is also possible that because of this statement, the title "Letter on/of Holiness" was given to the entire work.

The second and third chapters or "paths" deal with the right time for the union and the appropriate foods to consume prior to it. Sexual relations should not be performed excessively, the reader is told, and the right time for those who study Torah is Friday evening, in the second half of the night, not immediately after eating a moderate amount of permissible food.

The fourth path explains that one should have the right intention about performing this unique activity. Several scholars have justly claimed that this long and complex chapter parallels Christian literature.[7] One doubts whether most readers of this work could understand the symbolic and cryptic language in this section. Still, the bottom line is clear and simple, even for lay readers: one must not have unclean thoughts during the union. The reader (a man, obviously) should make sure his wife is happy, as this will ensure that she also has right and holy thoughts. If they both think about "the Justs and the Pures," the child born of these relations will acquire the good qualities of these holy people.[8]

These first five sections—the introduction and the four "paths,"—provide information about the preparation for the coital act, not about the act itself. Only the last section, the fifth

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of the work was published in Lamm, Norman (1974): *The Good Society: Jewish Ethics in Action,* New York: Viking Press, pp. 102-08.

[6] *Guide of the Perplexed*, II, (transl. Shlomo Pines 1963), Chiacgo: University of Chicago Press, p. 36. A similar text appears in III, p. 8. We will refer to it later. For Maimonides' views on sexuality, see the excellent article by Berger, Michael S. (2005): 'Maimonides on Sex and Marriage.' In: Broyde, Michael J. and Ausubel, Michael (eds.): *Marriage, Sex, and Family In Judaism*, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, pp. 149-91. See also Rosner, Fred (1974): *Sex Ethics in the Writings of Maimonides,* New York: Bloch Publishing Company; Harvey, W. Zev (1993): 'Sex and Health in Maimonides.' In: Rosner, Fred and Kottek, Samuel (eds.): *Moses Maimonides: Physician, Scientist, and Philosopher*, Northvale NJ: Jason Aronson, pp. 33-9.

[7] See Cohen, Jeremy (1993): 'Rationales for Conjugal Sex in RaABaD's "Baalei ha-Nefesh".' In: *The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume* II, Haifa: Haifa University Press, pp. 65-78; idem., 'Intention in Sexual Relations According to Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Rabbinical Opinion.' (Hebrew) In: *Teudah* 13 (1997), pp. 155-72; In various works, Charles Mopsik, who devoted his doctoral dissertation (*Recherches autour de la lettre sur ls sainteté: Sources, texte, influences*, Paris: Université de Paris 1, 1987), to the Holy Letter, dealt with the issue as well.

[8] For information about the theme of the impact of what the parents (in particular the mother) see or think about during the early stages of conception and gestation (a common concern that anthropologists call "Maternal Impression"), see, for example, my discussion, in Marienberg, Evyatar (2003): *Niddah: Lorsque les juifs conceptualisent la menstruation*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres, pp. 245-84.

path, "On the Quality of the Union",[9] can truly be considered a practical guide for the intercourse itself. It is not surprising then that it is only this last chapter that is used in the works explored in this paper.

Yentl

Seymour J. Cohen seems to be the person who took the first step in bringing the *Holy Letter* out of the limited circle of Hebrew readers to a much larger public. The next step in its popularization occurred a few years later when the *Holy Letter* went to Hollywood. The text's cinematic debut was in the 1983 Hollywood film *Yentl*.[10] The film, it is well known, was based on the 1962 novel *Yentl the Yeshiva Boy* by Nobel Prize laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer,[11] who, together with Leah Napolin, later (1975) made into a play.[12] In Singer's texts there is no mention of the *Iggeret*, but the text is alluded to in the film, directed by Barbra Streisand (who also co-wrote the script and played the main role). One can imagine that Streisand, who was already planning to make Singer's story into a film only a few years after its appearance,[13] or Jack Rosenthal, the British playwright who worked with her on the script, learned about the *Iggeret* in the late 1970's or early 1980's through Cohen's translation.

This widely acclaimed movie portrays the fictitious story of Yentl (Streisand), a young Jewish woman in Poland at the beginning of the twentieth century, who decides to dress like a man in order to be able to study in a Talmudic institute, a *Yeshiva*.[14] Yentl, now called Anshel, chooses a specific Yeshiva after meeting a charismatic student named Avigdor (Mandy Patinkin). Very quickly, the two become friends and study mates. Later, when the betrothal of Avigdor to Hadass (Amy Irving), a charming young woman from the town, falls apart after the suicide of Avigdor's brother is revealed, Anshel becomes the new candidate for marriage to Hadass. The story thus becomes even more complex, raising the possibility of the marriage of two women, one of whom is not aware of the other's true sex.

Shortly after the middle of the movie, during Anshel and Hadass' wedding, Avigdor, who is also unaware of Anshel's big secret, brings him a small book. After saying, "I have a wedding present for you, for both of you. Nahmanides' *The Holy Letter*. He wrote it over five hundred years ago," Avigdor begins to read from it. Very quickly it becomes clear that he knows it by heart:

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[9] "הדרך החמישי - באיכות החבור". In printed editions, this is generally chapter VI because the introduction is counted as the first chapter.

[10] See also Sherwin, Byron L. (2006): *Kabbalah: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism*, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 123.

[11] Singer, Isaac Bashevis (1962), *Yentl The Yeshiva Boy*, transl. Marion Magid and Elizabeth Pollet, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

[12] Singer, Isaac Bashevis and Napolin, Leah (1975): *Yentl: A Play,* New York: Samuel French. The play was performed for the first time in 1975.

[13] Streisand optioned the film rights to *Yentl the Yeshiva Boy* in late 1968. See "Yentl—15 Years", available at: http://www.bjsmusic.com/Yentl15/chronology.html (accessed 19 February 2010).

[14] On issues such as homoeroticism, cross-dressing, and gender in *Yentl*, see Fernley, Allison and Maloof, Paula (1985): 'Yentl.' In: *Film Quarterly* vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 38-46; Garber, Marjorie B. (1992): *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety,* New York: Routledge, pp. 77-84; Tasker, Yvonne (1998): *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*, New York: Routledge, pp. 37-9. Bashevis Singer did not like the film, especially its ending, and wrote a rather harsh criticism of it: Singer, Isaac Bashevis: 'I. B. Singer Talks to I. B. Singer about the Movie 'Yentl'.' In: *New York Times*, 29 January 1984.

> Converse with her to put her mind at ease. Speak words which arouse her to love, desire and passion. Words of reverence, for God. Never force her; her mood must be as yours. Win her with graciousness and seductiveness; be patient, until her passion is aroused; begin with love, and when her mood is ready, let her desire be satisfied first; her delight is what matters.[15]

Hadass is not present in this scene: she is with the wedding guests in the adjacent room. When Avigdor says, "for both of you," he actually speaks only to Anshel. Clearly, the scene hints that the *Iggeret* is a text for men, although women might very well benefit if men would meticulously follow its instructions.

It is interesting that Nahmanides is evoked as the author of the text. This fact is most probably due to the title Cohen gave to his translation: *The Holy Letter: A Study in Medieval Jewish Sexual Morality ascribed to Nahmanides.*[16] The sentences from *The Holy Letter* (in Cohen's translation) that seem to be the basis of Avigdor's words are the following:

> You must begin by speaking to her in a manner that will draw her heart to you, calm her spirits, and make her happy … Speak to her so that your words will provoke desire, love, will, and passion, as well as words leading to reverence for God … A man should never force himself upon his wife … Rather act so that you will warm her heart by speaking to her charming and seductive words … Do not hurry to arouse her until she is receptive. Be calm, and as you enter the path of love and will, let her insemination come first …[17]

The cinematic rendering of the text in *Yentl* seems to be more or less reliable. One can note that the medieval medical concept of women's "insemination," to which we will return later, was replaced by what seems to be a hint of female orgasm: "let her desire be satisfied." Another interesting addition should be noted as well: Avigdor's concluding sentence, "Her delight is what matters," a statement that makes the text even more women-friendly, is not in the medieval text.

The efforts made by Streisand and her collaborators to present Jewish sexuality in a positive way in *Yentl* are most obvious when one compares the movie to the play written by Singer and Napolin. In the play, Avigdor, the parents of Hadass, and other community members explain to Anshel and Hadass, the newlyweds, that pain and sometimes even the use of force are a legitimate part of the sexual act. This is how Avigdor explains to Anshel what will happen on the wedding night:

> Anshel, tomorrow night, get ready to taste Paradise! Be firm! Even if she weeps and begs you not to, you must take her and have your pleasure.[18]

The following day, during the wedding itself, Hadass' parents and other members of the community instruct both Anshel and Hadass on the matter.[19] From her mother and other women, Hadass hears this:

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[15] In the VHS version, this scene occurs around minute 75.

[16] In his introduction, Cohen seems to accept though the suggestions of previous scholars that this attribution is, at the very least, problematic.

[17] Cohen, *The Holy Letter,* pp. 140-44.

[18] Play, p. 62. Avigdor might not necessarily be the best instructor on the matter. See Avigdor's earlier description on pp. 52-3 of his first night with his wife Pesha, during which he tried, unsuccessfully, to arouse her using erotic quotes from *Song of Songs*.

[19] Play, p. 66.

> [Hadass' mother:] My daughter, be strong! Eve was created out of Adam's rib and made to do his bidding. Everything your husband asks you to do, do it gladly … [Other women:] Even if it hurts, do it gladly! Give yourself to him … Try to please him … Accept him with love …

Anshel, at the same time, gets this information from the men:

> [Hadass' father:] Since you're a scholar I don't have to tell you about the commandment to be fruitful and multiply! [Hadass' father and other men:] First approach her with words of endearment … It's the Law! Kissing and caressing is not always a frivolity … as long as it's with your own wife!

Streisand was, understandably, not happy with some of these notions.[20] She thus replaced them with the text from the *Holy Letter*, much more marketable to modern viewers. Perhaps she found an allusion to it in the instructions the cantor gives Anshel in the play: "First approach her with words of endearment."

Although we should credit Streisand-Rosenthal for being the first to give the *Holy Letter* wide exposure, its place in the movie is, after all, minor. Quoted in the midst of a noisy wedding, and being only one of countless rabbinic quotations mentioned in the film, the text is probably hardly noticed by the average viewer. Luckily for it, this medieval work was given another chance on the silver screen.

A Stranger Among Us

In 1992, *A Stranger Among Us*, a film directed by Sidney Lumet, was released. For many, it seemed to be an attempt to repeat the earlier success of 1985's *Witness*. *Witness*, directed by Peter Weir, won two Oscars, and thus was clearly worth emulating. The similarities are indeed obvious. *Witness* starred Harrison Ford playing John, a policeman living undercover in an austere Amish community, gradually falling in love with his Amish host, Rachel, played by Kelly McGillis. *A Stranger Among Us* starred Melanie Griffith playing Emily, "a tough, super-modern blond policewoman" living undercover in a home of a Hassidic rebbe in "the seemingly archaic Jewish world of Williamsburg".[21] Her real task was to investigate a murder that had occurred in Manhattan's diamond district, largely controlled by Hasidim, but this did not prevent her from falling in love with Ariel, the rebbe's brilliant adopted son (Erich Thal).[22] The script for *A Stranger Among Us* was written by Robert J. Avrech, a Los Angeles screenwriter who describes himself on his website as an observant Jew.[23]

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[20] These differences are unquestionably related to the generally dark and even, at times, cruel representation of Jewish life and Yentl/Anshel's personality in particular by Singer, versus the much nicer depiction by Streisand. In the movie, the general feeling is that Yentl/Anshel is an innocent victim of circumstances. Referring to Haddas, Anshel sings, "She's an innocent maiden, but then so am I!" Yentl/Anshel is not an evil person as one might infer from Singer's original story and play.

[21] Barack Fishman, Sylvia (1998): 'I of the Beholder: Jews and Gender in Film and Popular Culture.' In: *The Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women Working Paper Series* no. 1, Waltham: Brandeis University, pp. 3-4.

[22] In a smart play with a Yiddish-like pronunciation, some critics referred to the film as "Vitness."

[23] See http://www.seraphicpress.com. Avrech very kindly answered many of my questions regarding this scene in a phone call we had on 7 May, 2008. The director, Sidney Lumet (born 1924), whose parents were both involved in the Yiddish theatre scene, is known to describe himself as "culturally Jewish." The main male character's name, Ariel, was dear to Avrech when the film was produced, as this was his son's name. It probably became even more meaningful some years later, when Ariel died of cancer.

One of the pivotal scenes in the movie happens during a chilly night, in what seems to be an inner courtyard of the rebbe's house. Emily, after hearing some noises, comes out wearing a nightgown (and a gun), only to discover that Ariel is sitting in the courtyard. As Emily is already awake, Ariel, in a very gentlemanly way, takes off his coat and covers her to protect her from the cold. Then, in an inner pocket of his coat, Emily finds a small book:

Emily: "What's this?"

Ariel: "Uh, that's the Kabbalah. I like to keep it close to my heart."

[Ariel shows her how to hold the book, they giggle]

Emily: "Will you read something? [she picks a page] This!"

Ariel: [looking into the text] "Uh, uh, I don't think…"

Emily: "What?"

Ariel: "You can't learn out of context. You need a lifetime of study."

Emily: "Well, I don't have a lifetime. Let's do the Evelyn Wood version. You know Evelyn Wood? [it seems he does not] Just read."

Ariel: [reads] "Therefore engage her in conversation that puts her heart and mind at ease. Speak words which arouse her to passion, union, love, desire and…"

Emily: "And what?"

Ariel: [after a long pause] "…Eroticism."

Emily: [laughing] "You little devil!"

Ariel: "No, you don't understand."

Emily: "Wait, now. So you don't do it through a sheet?"[24]

Ariel: "Wh… what are you talking about?"

Emily: "Never mind. Read… more."

Ariel: [reading] "Hurry not to arouse passion until her mood is ready; Begin to love her; Let her –"

Emily: "What? What?"

Ariel: [holds his head in embarrassment, continues to read] "Let her vaginal secreting take place first."

Emily: [giggling] "Very mystical."

Ariel: "It's… The Rabbis have a deeper intent here, which is that man and woman should be a holy union."

Emily: "Okey dokey."

Ariel: "The Kabbalah is filled with erotic imagery. Most of it is theoretical."

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[24] This is a reference to a sentence told to Emily earlier [min. 38] by a secular (and vulgar) Jewish colleague, Levine, regarding the Hasidim: "Hey, you know what I heard about how they do it? They do it through a sheet!"—[another male colleague]: "A sheet? Come-on"—[Levine]: "Yeah, they are so uptight about sex they make a hole in a sheet, and shtup away." At that point, Emily's reaction was "I'll get back to you on that one."

Emily: [laughing] "Vaginal secreting… it's very theoretical."

A few seconds later, Emily and Ariel engage in a heated debate about his upcoming wedding to a French Hasidic woman he has never met. Emily finds it very disturbing. She asks him, "But what about love?" His answer about reunion of souls intrigues her, but she is not fully convinced. Then she asks, "But what about sex?" This question startles Ariel, who probably thought he had already won the debate:

Ariel: "Sex?"

Emily: "Yeah, sex."

Ariel: "Emily, I just read to you from the Kabbalah. Sex is sacred, it is a Mitzvah, one of the positive commandments. Well I have a hot flash for you: sex is nice!"

Emily: "Sex is nice? How would you know? I mean outside of your little Jewish Kamasutra?"[25]

According to Avrech, many people consider the scene in the courtyard to be a fabulous one.[26] Avrech is very pleased with it as well. In his words, "if in the world to come I will be judged by one scene I made, I hope it will be this one".[27] Why is this scene so intriguing? The answer is complex. We have an erotically charged scene with a perfectly dressed, smart Hasidic man and a relatively covered non-Jewish and very charming policewoman, and they talk, in the middle of the night, about sex. With such a start, things can hardly become boring, and, indeed, they do not. Griffith discovers that very observant Jews are no different from other people in their desire to know more about sex.

As problematic and barely believable as it is,[28] the scene evokes, in a superficial yet concise manner, many interesting topics:

1. A mention of Jewish guides to sexuality in general, and kabbalistic ones,[29] in particular;

2. The fact that books with such content are considered a part of Jewish traditional literature;

3. Myths[30] about Jewish sexual practices;

4. The presumed respect for women's needs in Jewish sexual practices;

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[25] This long exchange begins around the 68th minute in the DVD version of the film.

[26] Personal communication, May 2008. Interestingly enough, most critics of the film I have found were interested in the general plot of the film and did not speak about this scene. Rita Kempley though, from the *Washington Post*, referred to it directly: "A future rebbe himself, [Ariel] knows that their love can never be. Things get a little iffy when one night at the rebbe's she responds to a prowler in her robe and the son reads to her from the cabala a passage on vaginal lubrication. Yes, really." See Kempley, Rita: ''Stranger': One Unkosher Cop.' In: *The Washington Post*, 17 July 1992, available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/longterm/movies/videos/astrangeramonguspg13kempley_a0a2c8.htm (accessed 19 February 2010).

[27] Personal communication, May 2008.

[28] In some moments, for example, the two protagonists sit extremely close to one another. It is even possible they happen to casually touch one another for split seconds. Such behavior is something that, certainly in a relatively public space, a Hasid in good standing would unquestionably avoid. It is also not clear if Ariel is supposedly reading from a Hebrew version and translating it on the fly or, surprisingly for a smart Hasid, from an English translation. In the second case, Griffith's not knowing how to hold the book is even more surprising. Avrech told me that obviously, in his mind, Ariel reads from a Hebrew text. Nevertheless, the actual gestures of the actors in the film were done according to the director's instructions, not his.

[29] Obviously, Ariel's declaration that this book *is* "the Kabbalah" is problematic, considering the evident fact that Kabbalah is a genre, a body of literature and knowledge not contained in any single book.

[30] By speaking of "myths," I do not claim they are false. I plan to explore, in a later study, the notion that observant Jews use a perforated sheet while having marital relations.

5.   The notion that marital relations are considered good and holy in Judaism.

As readers of this paper can imagine, the text read by Ariel comes from the *Holy Letter*. Apparently, its inclusion was not influenced by its use in *Yentl*: Avrech claimed he never watched Streisand's movie.[31] It is worthwhile to note that the seemingly erroneous connection of the work to Nahmanides is not present in the scene; in fact, even the name of the work is not given.

Ariel's words, though, are not taken verbatim from the *Iggeret*. It seems that the sentences Avrech used to create the actor's speech are those in bold in the following text:[32]

> **Therefore, when engaging** in the sex act, you must **begin by speaking to her in a manner that will draw her heart to you, calm her spirits**, and make her happy. Thus your minds will be bound upon one another as one, and your intention will unite with hers. **Speak to her so that your words will provoke desire, love, will, and passion**, as well as words leading to reverence for God, piety, and modesty. Tell her how pious and modest women are blessed with, honorable, and worthy sons, worthy of the highest crown, masters of the Torah, and having the fear of God and the ability to teach … [A husband should speak with his wife with the appropriate words, some of love, some of **erotic passion**, some words of fear of Heaven]... To conclude, when you check yourself and find you are ready for sexual union, see that your wife's intentions combine with yours. And when you cleave to her **do not hurry to arouse, so that her spirit calms**.[33] [Enter her[34] with love and will, **let her[35] insemination come first**, so that her seed be the substance and your seed like the design, as in the verse where it is said, 'When a woman has an emission, she gives birth to a male child.'[36]][37]

Avrech's reformulating of several ideas from the *Holy Letter* into a few short paragraphs is fair. His decision to combine a few sentences into one, thus adding the word "eroticism"[38] to Ariel's first sentence, is unquestionably legitimate. Interestingly, Ariel pauses before pronouncing it, reflecting the unique weight of such a term. His mention of "vaginal

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[31] Personal communication, January 2009.

[32] The translation is that of Seymour J. Cohen in his previously mentioned English edition, chapter 6, with a few changes. According to an edition published in Efraim Ariel Buchwald (Bnei Brak: n.p., 1990) as an annex to his edition of another related medieval work, *Sefer Baalei ha-Nefesh* (with which I plan to deal in an upcoming book), the words in brackets are absent from the version that Buchwald considers to be the best available. Nevertheless, as they appear in other versions, as well as in many popular editions and in Cohen's translation, Avrech had a perfect right to use them.

[33] Cohen: "she is receptive."

[34] Cohen: "And as you enter the path of love and will." It is possible that the meaning is less graphic and thus that it should be translated as "when you exchange/discuss/communicate with her" (similar to another Hebrew expression "להיכנס בדברים," which although literally means "to enter in words," should be translated as "to talk," to "exchange words.")

[35] Or: "so that."

[36] Leviticus 12:2. This reading, even if it is most certainly not the original intention of the Biblical text, is possible.

[37] ולפיכך יש לך להכניסה תחלה בדברים שמושכין את לבה ומיישבין דעתה ומשמחין אותה, כדי שתתקשר דעתה בדעתך וכוונתה בכוונתך. תאמר לה דברים קצתם מכניסין אותה בדברי חשק ואהבה ורצון, וקצתם מושכין אותה ליראת שמים וחסידות וצניעות. ומספר עמה בדברי נשים חסידות וצנועות, היאך יצאו מהם בנים הגונים וכשרים, ראויים לכתר עליון, בעלי תורה ויראה והוראה ... [ויכניס אותה בדברים אלו, מהם אהבים ומהם עגבים, ומהם יראת שמים]... סוף דבר, כשתהיה בודק בעצמך ותראה שאתה ראוי לשמש, עשה שתהיה דעת אשתך מוסכמת לדעתך. וכשאתה מתחבר עמה אל תמהר לעורר בה התאוה, כדי שתתישב דעתה, [ותכנס עמה בדרך אהבה ורצון, בענין שתזריע היא תחלה, כדי שיהיה הזרע שלה כחומר והזרע שלך כצורה, כענין שנאמר אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר].

[38] In the Hebrew "דברי עגבים," in Cohen's translation "erotic passion."

secreting" is understandable as well. Avrech's other option would have probably been to first have Ariel lecture Emily on medieval medical ideas about conception, explaining to her that according to the widespread Galenic system, women also had "semen," a secretion that was deemed necessary for conception,[39] and that many Jewish authors and physicians shared this opinion. But such an explanation would have probably bored many film viewers. From a cinematic perspective, even if not from an educational one, it seems that Avrech chose a better solution.

It is important to note that in addition to the aforementioned decisions, Avrech also "de-Judaised" the text, secularized it, removed medieval medical notions from it, and made it more politically correct. He did so by removing any hint of the recommended verbal exchanges between husband and wife regarding God, the Torah, and what seems to be the ultimate *raison d'être* of these practices: to produce worthy and kosher male children.

Kosher Sex

The last work to be analyzed in this paper is not a film but a book. It is included here to show that the *Holy Letter* has been a fundamental source in both visual and written contemporary popular recent presentations of Jewish sexuality.

In 1998, Shmuley Boteach, a rabbi then affiliated with the Lubavitch movement, published a book with the truly brilliant title *Kosher Sex*. As Sandee Brawarsky from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency put it in March 1999,

> Most—and there aren't many—books about Judaism and sexuality have titles that read like lists: 'God, Love, Sex and Family', 'Love, Sex and Marriage', 'God, Sex and Women of the Bible', and there's the poetically titled, 'Heavenly Sex'.[40] But no title stands out as boldly as 'Kosher Sex: A Recipe for Passion and Intimacy' by Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, just published (in the US) this week.[41]

Boteach, born in the U.S. to a Modern-Orthodox family, joined the Chabad/Lubavitch movement in a young age and was later sent by its late leader, Menachem M. Schneerson, to Oxford, England, to serve as chaplain. Although Boteach did not have any official status at Oxford University, he succeeded nevertheless in creating a vibrant and visible Jewish students' society. Nevertheless, financial irregularities in the society, his book on sex, and some other activities in which he engaged led to the severance of his connections with the Lubavitch movement and other British Jewish institutions. Shortly after, in 2001, Boteach returned to the U.S., where he became a popular speaker. At the time these lines were written, Boteach is, among other things, frequently collaborating with the American television megastar Oprah Winfrey.

Boteach's 1998 book *Kosher Sex* was a huge success. According to information that seems to have been provided by Boteach himself, it has sold more than one million copies and has been translated into more than a dozen languages. Sections from the book were even included

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[39] See, for example, Jacquart, Danielle and Thomasset, Claude (1988): *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages,* Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 48-86.
[40] The titles referred to are of actual books, by Michael Gold, Roland Bertram Gittelsohn, Shoni Labowitz, and Ruth Westheimer, respectively.
[41] See Boteach, *Kosher Sex*, available at: http://www.jewishaz.com/jewishnews/990319/kosher.shtml (accessed 19 February 2010).

in the 45th anniversary volume of *Playboy* in January 1999. Obviously, *Playboy* is not the type of publication that most Orthodox rabbis are eager to be associated with, but Boteach strongly defended this act. In addition to *Kosher Sex*, Boteach authored several other books, most of which touch on similar topics.[42]

Kosher Sex is a typical "self-help" book. Like many books of this sort, one should not expect to find footnotes, detailed references, or an index. On the other hand, one should expect to find in such books (and indeed, in *Kosher Sex*, one will find abundant examples) name-dropping, pop-psychology, pop-statistics, pop-medicine, pop-science, countless stories of friends whose lives were positively transformed after complying with the author's advice, simplistic generalizations about the nature of men and women, quotes from popular books and films, hints of the author's special relationships with VIPs, and so on.[43] However, if one is not bothered by all this, and would like to know more about Jewish sex, the book initially looks very promising.

In the forward to *Kosher Sex*, Boteach gives the impression that, very soon, readers will discover juicy rabbinic secrets about sex:

> Long ago, well before Christianity enacted legislation forbidding its clerics from marrying or having sex, the ancient rabbis were giving explicit sexual advice to married men and women as to how they could enjoy pleasurable yet holy intimate relations.[44]

The stage is ready: from the very beginning, Judaism is described as very open to sex, unlike Christianity, its (almost) eternal archrival. Soon after, though, on the same page, Boteach tries to cool down the expectations of his readers a bit:

> Rather than offering prescriptive rules about sex and marriage, Judaism offers guidelines, or what might be called *erotic channels of communication* … designed not to circumscribe our sexual routine, but to focus it and make it potent, so that sex becomes passionate and effective in conjuring up long-term emotions and commitment … Sex is a motion designed to engender deep and lasting emotions.[45]

If one expects to find in the book a thorough exploration of relevant Jewish sources, he or she will be disappointed. In reality, in the almost three hundred pages of the book, there are very few such references. Leaving aside sporadic references to the Bible (which is as Jewish as it is Christian), Boteach gives some thirty, rather vague, references (including false and insignificant ones) to Jewish sources, ideas, and practices.[46] He provides very few actual quotations of Jewish texts.[47] I cannot say whether this is due to the author's ignorance or his

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[42] Some examples: *Dating Secrets of the Ten Commandments* (2001); *Kosher Adultery—Seduce and Sin with Your Spouse* (2002); *Shalom in the Home—Smart Advice for a Peaceful Life* (2007). Boteach also authored at least two books that deal with more general questions of relations between the sexes in contemporary society: *Hating Women—America's Hostile Campaign Against the Fairer Sex* (2006) and *The Broken American Male and How to Fix Him* (2008). It seems that Boteach does not plan to drop this issue anytime soon. A book he published in 2009 is called *The Kosher Sutra—8 Sacred Secrets for Reigniting Desire and Restoring Passion for Life*.

[43] Regarding this common and influential genre, see the relatively recent and ground-breaking works of McGee, Micki (2005): *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, New York: Oxford University Press; and Justman, Stewart (2005): *Fool's Paradise: The Unreal World of Pop Psychology*, Chicago IL: Ivan R. Dee.

[44] Boteach, *Kosher Sex*, p. 10.

[45] Italics are Boteach's. Boteach repeats this expression on pp. 49-50.

[46] Boteach, *Kosher Sex*, pp. 49, 55, 69, 94-5, 122-5, 140-1, 156, 184, 190-4, 199, 202, 212, 216, 221-6, 233-4, 240, 250, 255-6, 260.

[47] Ibid., pp. 48, 65-6, 81-2, 119, 235, 247.

realization that most Jewish texts on the issue will not help him make his point. Perhaps it is merely his style.

The first concrete quotation of a Jewish source is found in page 48. It is a classic story, well known in learned Jewish circles. Boteach's retelling of it, although not perfect, is acceptable:

> Rav Kahana lay hidden under the bed of Rav (his teacher), who was carousing and speaking flippantly with his wife of sexual matters; afterward Rav had intercourse with her. Rav Kahana said to Rav: 'You appear to me to be like a hungry man who has never had sex before, for you act with frivolity in your desire.' Rav said to Kahana: 'Are you here? Get out! It is improper for you to lie under my bed!' Kahana said to him: 'This is a matter of Torah and I must study'.[48]

One of the few Jewish sources quoted by Boteach, and the longest quote of all, comes, of course, from the *Holy Letter*:

> The man's conjugal duties to his wife are not there to provide marital relations. They must be pleasurable to the woman, for without pleasure, the rabbis explain, there is no bonding. It is for this reason that Iggeret haKodesh, a fourteenth century "letter" written from a pious sage to his son on the occasion of his marriage, encourages a man to exert every effort to pleasure his wife: 'You should begin with words that will draw her heart to you and will settle her mind and make her happy … Tell her things which will produce in her desire, attachment, love, willingness, and passion. … Win her heart with words of charm and seduction. … Never have sex with your wife while she is sleepy, for your minds will not be united … Never hasten to arouse her desire. … Begin in a pleasurable manner of love, so that she will achieve satisfaction before you'.[49]

The sentences quoted by Boteach are, leaving aside a justified simplification needed for a popular book like his, correct. The story of the father who wrote the text to his son "on the occasion of his marriage" seems to emerge from Boteach's confusion of two texts: the first is the anonymous *Iggeret*; the second is another short text, written indeed by Nahmanides to one of his sons,[50] but in which no marriage or marriage-related issues are mentioned.[51] The

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[48] Ibid., p. 48. The original story is found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 62a: רב כהנא על, גנא תותיה פורייה דרב. שמעיה דשח ושחק ועשה צרכיו, אמר ליה: דמי פומיה דאבא כדלא שריף תבשילא! אמר לו: כהנא, הכא את? פוק, דלאו ארח ארעא. אמר לו: תורה היא וללמוד אני צריך

[49] Ibid., p. 66. The quotation given here is complete. The many ellipses are in Boteach's text.

[50] This letter of Nahmanides is extremely popular and has been included in many works, for example in prayer books. A critical edition was published by Chavel in the collection mentioned above. See Chavel, *The Writings of Our Master*, pp. 369-71.

[51] Boteach's sloppiness when using Jewish sources are so numerous that listing them would require a book of its own. Hopefully, two small instances, chosen randomly, will suffice to make the point. On page 194, Boteach confuses Rabbi Jonathan ben Uziel, a disciple of Hillel (and one about whom we know practically nothing), and Simeon ben Azzai, of about a century later, who, indeed, remained celibate. In view of such carelessness, one should not be surprised to find, on the page prior to the above quotation of the *Holy Letter*, that "The Talmud actually declared two thousand years ago that a woman's sexual passion is far greater than that of a man" (p. 65). Regardless of the actual content, which happens to be true, two thousand years prior to the writing of *Kosher Sex*, the Talmud was not even in the planning stage. To be honest and fair, one should note that Boteach makes similar errors when he deals with non-Jewish sources. Thus, for example, he can speak about the "Kama Sutra, with its hundreds of sexual positions" (p. 68). In reality, the *Kamasutra* actually speaks of sixty-four positions (see for example *Kamasutra* 2:10:34-39). Although the *Kamasutra* is not a book generally read in Talmudic institutes, Boteach mentions it so many times (see for example pp. 53 and 67), it might have been appropriate for him to have actually read it. On the counting of positions (among other "countable things") in the *Kamasutra* see in Doniger's and Kakar's introduction to Mallanaga, Vatsayana (2002): *Kama Sutra,* New York: Oxford University Press, pp. xxi-xxv.

Iggeret presents itself as a letter, but not only is "nothing … known of this young man,"[52] it is also very possible that this attribution is simply a literary device used often by authors for various reasons.

Conclusion

Jewish scholars of the nascent academic study of Judaism in the nineteenth century tried to show the rationality of their religion and its compatibility with contemporary culture. They proclaimed that Jewish culture is not an antiquated, outdated way of life, as was often claimed by their Christian counterparts, but one that is in some ways even more "modern" than Christianity.[53] The twentieth century works mentioned here are a small sample of a similar trend. They all claim that sex is widely celebrated in Jewish sources. Some of their authors, explicitly or implicitly, juxtapose their understanding of what Judaism says about sexuality with their own generally negative perceptions of Christian attitudes on the matter. The fact that such a trend exists today is probably related to the general culture, one in which proclamations that sex is not something to "celebrate" will be seen as strange at best or as fundamentalist at worst. In such a cultural environment, one can understand why declarations that Jewish culture is pro-sex seem to these authors to be of a great service to both the world and Judaism. Their efforts are therefore not surprising. What is surprising is the fact that so many writers base their representation of Jewish sexuality on a single ancient Jewish text, *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*.

One might ask whether, leaving aside the occasional incorrect information, the overall presentation of sexuality in Judaism in the three works explored in this paper is not basically and objectively true. Is it not true that Judaism's attitude towards sexuality is indeed very positive, as one hears so often? The answer is, obviously, not a simple one. Jewish literature certainly includes some very positive statements about heterosexual, marital sexuality (and only about it), but the Jewish tradition includes many negative statements about it as well. Boteach, Avrech, and many other contemporary authors rely on a remarkably small selection of Jewish sources about sexuality to make their point. The fact that all works explored here use *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* as a centerpiece for their arguments is not a coincidence. Being arguably the most remarkable positive traditional Jewish discussion of marital sexuality, their decision to include it is thoroughly correct and appropriate. Nevertheless, their direct or indirect claim that this unique text is representative of Jewish notions on the subject is not.

One could have easily brought many examples to show other, less positive traditional Jewish statements about sexuality, but two that are more or less contemporaneous with the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* and come from two of the most important Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages, should suffice to show the complexity of the matter. The first one is from Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed*:

> There are among men individuals to whose mind all the impulses of matter are shameful and ugly things, deficiencies imposed by necessity; particularly so the sense of touch, which, as Aristotle has stated, is a shame for us, and because of which we wish to eat, to drink, and to copulate. Consequently, one's recourse to these things should be reduced to

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[52] Harris, Monford (1962): 'Marriage as Metaphysics: A Study of the "Iggereth ha-Kodesh".' In: *Hebrew Union College Annual,* vol. 33, p. 200.
[53] See Hess, Jonathan M. (2002): *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity*, New Haven: Yale University Press. I would like to thank Jonathan M. Hess for his assistance.

the extent to which this is possible … one … should feel sorrowful because one does them, and not have them spoken of and discoursed about … This is what is required on man.[54]

Another important author, a generation later, is Nahmanides, to whom the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh* was erroneously attributed. This paragraph is from his unquestionably authentic commentary on the Pentateuch:

> You should know that coitus is a rejected and despised matter according to the Torah, unless if it is for the survival of the [human] specie. And coitus that does not lead to procreation is forbidden.[55]

Kosher Sex, *A Stranger Among Us*, and, less directly, *Yentl* are examples of a contemporary popular genre that claims, in various ways and degrees, that the traditional Jewish attitude to sex is very positive. Not surprisingly, they all quote the same peculiar medieval text. Although they surely have the right to do so, the recurrent use of it should remind us of how unique this text is.

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[54] Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III, p. 8 (Pines' translation).
[55] Nahmanides (1194-c. 1270), *Commentary on Leviticus* 18:6, ודע כי המשגל דבר מרוחק ונמאס בתורה זולתי לקיום המין, ואשר לא יולד ממנו הוא אסור

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The Magical versus the Political Jew:

Representations of Jews on the Polish and German Klezmer Scene

Magdalena Waligórska

Abstract

The images of Jews generated by the Polish and German klezmer scene not only reflect national traditions of representing Jews in both countries, but they also mark the boundary of local sensibilities. While the trope of the romanticised shtetl has an exceptional success on the Polish klezmer scene, it is rather marginal in Germany. The politicised klezmer repertoire, in turn, has its particular niche in Germany, while it is fully taboo in Poland. The chapter, illustrating the two representations with textual and visual examples, traces the myths and stereotypes feeding these two representations and considers this asymmetry in terms of cultural translation.

Klezmer, the instrumental music of the Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews, has witnessed a dynamic revival in the last decades. A Hebrew compound of *kley*, meaning a vessel, and *zemer*, meaning a song, klezmer signified initially a musical instrument, later a musician, and finally, also the musical genre. Today, klezmer has become not only a generic term for very different kinds of Jewish music, but also one of the most popular representations of Jewishness.[1] Heterogeneous in its original form, klezmer remained a genre which, also in its recent revival, draws from external influences and is in a dialogue with popular culture. Klezmer hip-hop, klezmer rock, or Latino-klezmer are modern exponents of the genre's hybridity.[2] The contemporary klezmer revival brought the genre to new contexts and new places. Played from San Francisco to Sarajevo, the music has reached both the philharmonic halls and the discos. Acquiring new functions and occupying new spaces, it has inspired a heterogeneous scene also in Germany and Poland.

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[1] I use the term "klezmer" here to refer not only to instrumental dance music, but also various other performances adapting Jewish heritage music. This might be inaccurate from the musicological point of view, but reflects the changing use of the term on the klezmer scene itself.

[2] New developments on the transnational, English-speaking, klezmer scene have been discussed for example in Wood Abigail (2007): '(De)constructing Yiddishland: Solomon and SoCalled's *HipHopKhasene*.' In: *Ethnomusicology Forum,* vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 243-70; and (2007): 'The Multiple Voices of American Klezmer.' In: *Journal of the Society for American Music*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 367-92.

The present chapter addresses two tropes on the German and Polish klezmer scenes: that of the "Magical" and the "Political Jew". While the romanticised images of *shtetl* Jewry are very popular among Polish klezmer revivalists, they hardly find an equivalent in Germany. On the other hand, the legacy of Communist, Socialist and Zionist songs, which appeals to some klezmer artists in Germany, is virtually absent from the repertoire of the Polish *klezmorim.* These areas of artistic fascination and taboo beg the question of what conditions representations of Jews in the respective popular cultures. Although the klezmer revival is a decidedly transnational phenomenon, with a growing network of klezmer festivals across Europe and North America, the local sensibilities and traditions of representing Jews set boundaries to what is perceived as appealing and acceptable. A caveat must be added here, however. The motifs of the "Magical" and the "Political Jew" by no means cover the wide range of representations on the klezmer scene in Poland and Germany, nor should they be treated as their defining traits. The chapter juxtaposes the two types as examples of cultural asymmetry and non-transfer, analysing what particular historic representations of Jews they feed on and the process of cultural translation behind them.

The Political Jew

In early 2009, the Berlin-based label Oriente issued a klezmer record under the intriguing title of *Partisans and Parasites*. The musicians opened the release concert in the Berlin *Volksbühne* with the Yiddish version of the "Internationale". The American singer and songwriter, Daniel Kahn, and his band *The Painted Bird* dedicate the worker's anthem to Rosa Luxemburg. Before they play the songs from the new record, they exclaim, in Russian, "Long live the working class!". The concert of political klezmer that follows crowns the "Partisans' Tour", which the band advertises as an "incursion into German territory, with an infectious program of all new incendiary Yiddish, carnivorous Deutsch, and clinically vicious English songs". "Be ready." reads the leaflet of *The Painted Bird*, "We may be coming invading your shtetl."

Daniel Kahn first invaded the German klezmer scene in 2005, when he came to Berlin from Detroit and founded his unusual klezmer band. *The Painted Bird*, named after the controversial novel by Jerzy Kosiński,[3] combines political contents of Yiddish songs, and the dark style of Tom Waits. It is a project inspired not only by the revival of Jewish heritage music, which has an almost three-decade-long tradition in Germany, but also by the Brechtian theatre. Kahn, who often performs in a Venetian mask in the style of *dottore peste*, and makes frequent use of the megaphone, challenges with his bold *Partisans and Parasites* not only clichés about Jews, but also those about the klezmer revival itself. "I could try to rationalize it and say that it's to counteract all of the sentimentality and kitsch, not only within the German Jewish music scene" states his intention Kahn, adding: "on the other hand, I think there is room for this music, there is room for like heavy, dark, punk-rock, gothic folk, negative and political. I think there is room for that in Jewish music … this music had teeth too."[4]

No doubt, the political klezmer by Daniel Kahn and *The Painted Bird* has teeth, indeed. One of the most controversial songs in their repertoire is "Six Million Germans", a ballad about Jewish partisans, which poses disturbing questions about the impact of the past on today's political reality. The lyrics narrate the story of Abba Kovner, a Jew from Vilnius, who

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[3] *The Painted Bird* is the title of one of Jerzy Kosiński's (1933-1991) novels, accused by some critics of being anti-Polish. *The Painted Bird* was banned in Poland until 1989.

[4] Kahn, Daniel, personal interview, 17 January 2006.

commanded the United Partisan Organisation and founded, in 1945, an underground Jewish cell *Nakam* (Hebrew: vengeance). *Nakam*, whose agenda was to avenge the Holocaust victims, was to carry out a terrorist attack to kill six million Germans.[5]

> Six million Germans / You might say it was insane
> Six million Germans / That it was misdirected pain
> Six million Germans / They didn't want the war to end
> Six million Germans / They wanted one thing- *Nakam*: Revenge
>
> For every Jew the Nazis gassed
> For every racist law they passed
> For every wrong that wasn't right
> For all the dead *Nakam* would fight

Kovner's failed operation, however, inspires Kahn to reflect on the issue of vengeance in the history of the State of Israel:

> And so Nakam was all disbanded
> On Palestina's shore they landed
> And Abba Kovner and his crew
> Became like many other Jews
>
> They put aside their rage and hate
> And worked to build a Jewish state
> With Jewish towns and Jewish farms,
> Jewish guns and nuclear arms
>
> Can vengeance put upon a shelf
> Be taken out later on someone else?
> Well careful how you read this tale
> 'Lest your own prejudice prevail.[6]

Kahn draws attention to the fact that Yiddish-language culture has had a "long history of the radical, political action and revolutionary culture".[7] In his opinion, this political and revolutionary dimension has been "purged" from the contemporary American Jewish culture he was brought up in. Therefore, he feels motivated to explore this half-forgotten heritage "to go against the conservative, nationalistic, victim-based version of what it means to be a Jew in the twentieth century".[8]

Revolutionary Jewish culture is also the focus of the CD Kahn recorded in 2008 with the Israeli band the *Oy Division* and the Russian klezmer rapper Psoy Korolenko. *The*

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[5] Tom Segev describes the story of Abba Kovner in his (2000): *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, New York: Henry Holt.

[6] Kahn, Daniel and The Painted Bird, "Six Million Germans", *Partisans and Parasites,* Oriente, 2009.

[7] Kahn, personal interview, 17 January 2006.

[8] Ibid.

Unternationale, whose liner notes are adorned both with the picture of the Zionist Jabotinski and Lenin, pays tribute to the Zionist and Bundist legacy of Yiddish songs. The contrasting messages of the Bundist and Zionist songs reflect the political ferment of the 1920s and 1930s and the Jewish dilemmas which are also relevant today. The lyrics of "*Dumay!*", adapted from a Hasidic nigun, are printed against the background of the Israeli Wall and are clearly a commentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

Hob ikh mir in harts a kholem	I carry in my heart a dream
heyb ikh oyf a fon fun sholem	A flag of peace and a land redeemed
Ober in mayn kholem shteyt a moyer	But in my dream is a wall of wire
ful mit payn un ful mit troyer...	Stone and iron, forged in fire...
Vos far a folk on a medine?	The land is holy, but for whom?
Say yisroel, say palestine	God of the star, or the crescent moon?[9]

Reflecting on the conflict in the Middle East, Kahn formulates troubling questions, but does not take sides in the conflict. He believes that the realm of culture is a space which should invite debates and allow for more than just strictly polarised stances. "This is a conflict about spaces", he states about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, "physical spaces, where people draw borders, where lines are drawn on maps, about who controls resources, who controls territory ... Because physical territories have become so contentious, it means that imaginary territory, the creative territory, cultural territory, the territory of thought has become just as much contentious. There is no more third space, there is no more zone where one can manoeuvre and have a more nuanced opinion."[10] His songs about Israel seem to be an attempt to reconquer this "third space".

The way *The Painted Bird* frames their concerts makes it clear that the physical space, which is even more central to them than Israel, is Eastern Europe. Performing together with the Berlin-based *RotFront* (representing the Eastern European "emigrantski raggamuffin style") and using on stage props such as the Soviet flag, Kahn's band functions within a larger cultural scene inspired by a subversive brand of *Ostalgie*, a nostalgia for the Communist Eastern Europe. Cafe Burger in Berlin, where *The Painted Bird* often performs, is also the site of the *Russendisko*, a popular dancing show organised by two Jewish emigrés from Eastern Europe, the writer, Wladimir Kaminer, and the founding member of the *RotFront*, Yuriy Gurzhy. *Russendisko*, an event initiated to challenge German clichés about the East, established itself with time as a cult venue of eastern flair, with its own merchandise labelled with a red five-point star.

The Painted Bird with their political klezmer operate at the same junction of club entertainment and Eastern European heritage, but distance themselves from uninformed "eastalgia". For Kahn, who declares that "contentless music" does not interest him, it is somewhat disturbing if his spectators dance to songs like "Embrace the Fascists" or "Six Million Germans". Club audiences craving the "exotic East" are, according to Kahn, likely to overlook the fact that his songs deal with a difficult part of Eastern European history, such as war, poverty, Communism and oppression. At the same time, *The Painted Bird* consciously choose dance clubs as their concert venues. Bringing what they call "*Verfremdungsklezmer*"

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[9] Kahn, Daniel "Dumay!", *The Unternationale,* Auris Media, 2008.
[10] Kahn, personal interview, 22 May 2009.

to spaces of entertainment, they introduce a dissonance between the function of the spaces they play at and the contents of their songs, alienating the spectator.

The *Verfremdungseffekt* of Kahn's performance lies not only in the lyrics of his songs, but also in how these are prefaced in the liner notes and introduced during the concerts. A case in point is the song "Borsht revisited" from *Partisans and Parasites.* The stanzas of the humorous Yiddish love song are performed here alternately also in the Russian and English translation. The actual circumstances in which the translated version took shape, however, are what provide for a disturbing dissonance. "Written in Radzilow, Poland", inform the credits of the song, "in order to avoid singing Yiddish on Lent and having to discuss the infamous barn burning of '41 with the locals".[11] Radziłów, where Daniel Kahn and Vanya Zhuk gave an improvised concert in 2007, is a village where, in 1941, the local population staged a pogrom against Jews, burning them alive in a barn. The story of a similar pogrom in the nearby town of Jedwabne was described by Jan T. Gross in his *Sąsiedzi* [*Neighbors*] (2000), provoking an extended debate on the Polish complicity in the anti-Jewish violence during the Second World War. Identifying the context in which the musicians improvised the translation of the song, Kahn invests the piece with a new layer of significance. The fact of having played a Jewish song in Radziłów is just as meaningful here as having substituted its original Yiddish lyrics with a translation. The concert invoked on the record is both a performance and non-performance, a statement in disguise. Reproducing the translated version and returning the song its original, silenced language, makes every subsequent performance after Radziłów charged.

Although Daniel Kahn and *The Painted Bird* represent quite a unique style on the Berlin klezmer scene, there are more musicians in Germany who have made use of the legacy of politically charged Yiddish songs. The towering figure of Yiddish music in the GDR, Lin Jaldati (1912-1988), performed, among others, partisan, Communist and other socially critical Yiddish songs. In West Germany, Peter Rohland (1933-1966), folk singer, was the first to incorporate Yiddish songs, including those originating in the Jewish resistance during the Second World War, into the repertoire of the youth protest movement of the 1960s.[12] The political Yiddish repertoire also accompanied the revival of Yiddish music in the GDR. Its pioneers like, for example, Karsten Troyke or the band *Aufwind* from Berlin, have had Socialist Yiddish songs in their repertoire from the beginning, but so do some emerging bands. The Berlin-based group *Fayvish*, who describe their music as "Yiddpop", have arranged, among others, the Yiddish anarchist song *"Daloy Politsey"* ["Down with the Police"].

Messages of social or political critique are, in fact, also not uncommon on the international klezmer scene. In 2008, the series "Music Rough Guides" issued a CD entitled *Klezmer Revolution*, which lists pieces by klezmer groups from all around the world who, as the liner notes promise, are "breaking taboos and pushing boundaries".[13] Among the klezmer revolutionaries are the celebrated American *Klezmatics*, who not only advocate progressive gender politics in their songs, but also refer to 9/11 in their version of Holly Near's "I Ain't Afraid", as well as the all-female klezmer band *Mikveh*, which emerged out of a feminist campaign to stop violence against women.[14] Other American klezmer revivalists do not shun

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[11] Kahn, Daniel and The Painted Bird, "Borsht Revisited", *Partisans and Parasites,* Oriente, 2009.

[12] Holler, Eckhard (2007): 'The Burg Waldeck Festivals, 1964-1969.' In: Robb, David (ed.): *Protest Song in East and West Germany Since the 1960s*, Rochester, New York: Camden House, pp. 97-131.

[13]*The Rough Guide to Klezmer Revolution,* World Music Network, 2008.

[14] See Wood, ' The Multiple Voices of American Klezmer'.

the socialist content of Bundist songs, and have even recorded the Yiddish version of the "Internationale".[15] Indeed, not only klezmer, but also other genres inspired by Jewish heritage include political statements. The Canadian singer and songwriter, Geoff Berner, addresses police brutality and the complicity of the rich elite in global warming on his *Klezmer Mongrels* (2008).[16] The Australian Jewish punk band *Yidcore*, in turn, sing about terrorism, genocide and cover the Jewish partisan anthem "Never say that you're trodding the final path".[17] The American *Hip Hop Hoodios*, finally, campaign for the closing of the Guantanamo prison with their *Viva la Guantanamera*, and circulate an election song "Shalom Obama".[18]

With the international klezmer revolution invading the world music scene, it is all the more interesting that the genre of political klezmer is virtually absent in Poland. While the nostalgia for Communism is clearly discernible in the contemporary Polish popular culture and tourism, the local klezmer scene does not seem to be affected by it. Although the Jewish district of Kraków, Kazimierz, which is the Polish stronghold of klezmer, like many other urban spaces becomes affected by the commodified *Ostalgie*, this trend does not intersect with the Jewish heritage boom. And thus, the Kazimierz tourists can lodge in the "Good Bye Lenin" hostel and enjoy a drink named after Fidel Castro in the "Propaganda" bar, but at the same time remain unaware about the fact that Kazimierz had its own Jewish Socialist tradition.

In fact, politically charged Socialist songs constitute an integral part of Yiddish music originating in Poland. Mordechaj Gebirtig (1877-1942), the Yiddish bard from Kazimierz, whose songs are performed by many artists in the klezmer revival, was a Socialist and pacifist, closely related to Bundist circles. He not only wrote numerous proletarian Yiddish songs, criticising social injustice, but also satirical songs on the political situation in inter-war Poland and even militant songs for the Jewish militia protecting Kazimierz against anti-Semitic hooligans.[19] Although Gebirtig's songs are still performed in Poland, for example by Gołda Tencer, Bente Kahan or Urszula Makosz, his sentimental songs, ballads and lullabies are more popular and the political character of his proletarian songs is usually de-emphasised. The Varsovian band *Cukunft*, for instance, which 2004 produced a record of Gebirtig's songs [*Lider fun Mordechaj Gebirtig*], replaced singing with a sound of the electric guitar. Gebirtig's social message was, in this way, fully defused.

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[15] *The Upward Flight. The Musical World of s. An-sky,* a CD accompanying Safran, Gabriella and Zipperstein, Steven J. (2006): *The Worlds of S. An-sky: A Russian Jewish Intellectual at the Turn of the Century*, Stanford University Press.

[16] See "One Shoe" and "High Ground" on *Klezmer Mongrels*, 9 pm Records, 2008.

[17] Yidcore, *They Tried to Kill Us. They Failed. Let's Eat!,* Rubber Music, 2007.

[18] The digital only album *Viva la Guantanamera* is available at: http://www.myspace.com/hiphophoodios (accessed 4 February 2010), the song "Shalom Obama" available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDohR2r9Zlc (accessed 4 February 2010).

[19] Gross, Natan (2003): 'Mordechai Gebirtig: the Folk Song and the Cabaret Song.' In: *Polin,* vol. 16, *Focusing on Jewish Popular Culture in Poland and its Afterlife*, Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, pp. 107-17.

Photo 1. A souvenir stand in front of the former ritual slaughter house in Plac Nowy in Kazimierz, selling Soviet military hats and other *Ostalgie* merchandise alongside an Israeli and American flag, 2007.

Photo 2. Hostel "Goodbye Lenin" in Berka Joselewicza Street in Kazimierz, 2007.

Jewish heritage music in today's Poland is often framed as a symbol of peaceful Polish-Jewish coexistence, a medium of universal appeal and, at times, even ecumenical character. Not only the contents, but also the aesthetics of some klezmer records convey this message. Pastel colours, Chagallesque landscapes, doves and menorahs contribute to the image of the genre as essentially non-controversial and non-subversive. Sława Przybylska, who recorded a compilation of Yiddish and Hebrew songs *Ałef-Bejs* emphasises that the central message of the music presented is peace: "Shalom is the peace which permitted our Pope, John Paul II, to cross the threshold of the Great Synagogue in Rome and, together with the Rabbi of Rome, Mario Toaff, to pray in the words of psalm 133: Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity".[20] Klezmer in Poland appears, indeed, as a space where Poles dream their relations with Jews as those of harmonious and romanticised unity.

Although the beginning of the Jewish heritage revival in the 1980s did take place in a politically charged context of the anti-Communist movement and the organizers of the first festival of Jewish culture in Kraków, in 1988, spoke of "an amateur overthrowing of Communism",[21] the local klezmer scene has consistently kept clear of political messages ever since. Some of the Polish bands declare that they do not want their music to be "contaminated" by politics,[22] or that they do not play klezmer music "for ideological reasons".[23] This reluctance might in part be explained by the fact that coupling "Jewishness" with Communism touches the very nerve of the contemporary Polish-Jewish dialogue.

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[20] Liner notes of Sława Przybylska's, *Ałef-Bejs. Pieśni i piosenki żydowskie,* Tonpress, 2005.

[21] Gierat, Krzysztof cited in Radłowska, Renata: 'Dybuk nim trzęsie niemiłosiernie.' In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 June 2008, p. 23.

[22] Bester, Jarosław, personal interview, 17 April 2004.

[23] Wiercioch, Marcin, personal interview, 30 June 2006.

The term Judeo-Communism [*żydokomuna*] emerged as part of the Polish right-wing nationalist discourse in the inter-war period. Inspired by the French for "Judeo-Masonry" [judéo-maçonnerie], the term was the Polish expression of the commonplace nineteenth century European perception of Jews as conspiring to seize control of the world.[24] The myth of Judeo-Communism postulated that all Jews were Communists, and all Communists were Jews. After 1945, the stereotype was based on two assumptions: that the Jews had supported Communism before the Second World War making up a majority within the Communist Party of Poland, and that they had imposed the Communist regime on the Poles after the war, enjoyed a privileged position within the regime, and benefited from it.[25] Historians have dismantled this stereotype, pointing out that Jews were no more supportive of Communism than Poles, even though the percentage of highranking party officials of Jewish descent was higher than the percentage of Jews in Polish society. This, however, was due to a higher literacy rate among Jews as well as the fact that many in Poland's postwar Jewish community survived the Holocaust in the Soviet Union and saw in the Communists – first in the Polish Workers' Party, then the Polish United Workers' Party – the only force that could protect them after the war. Second, Jews did not necessarily profit from their leftist inclinations, given that the Polish United Workers' Party grew increasingly anti-Semitic over time and ultimately expelled the Jews from Poland in 1968.[26]

The link between Jews and Communism, however, is a recurrent topic in the public discourse in Poland, often used as a counterweight to the debate on Polish anti-Semitism. In 2006, the Forum for Dialogue among Nations together with the American Jewish Committee published a book addressing fifty "difficult questions" in the Polish-Jewish dialogue. The issues, selected on the basis of a survey among young Poles and Jews from the USA, Canada, Australia and Israel, included the question of how many Jews worked for the Ministry of Internal Security in the Stalinist period.[27] *Żydokomuna* was also one of the keywords in the debate on Jan T. Gross' *Strach* [*Fear*] in 2007, which deeply polarized Polish public opinion.[28]

Since Socialist and Communist Yiddish songs on Polish stages are likely to invoke the spectre of *żydokomuna*, Polish klezmer musicians prefer to stay away from political connotations. Although the nostalgia for the Communist past does emerge in Polish popular culture and inspires the local tourist industry, there is also a strong anti-Communist sentiment dominating the public discourse. In 2009, for example, the Polish Parliament introduced a change in the Penal Code, criminalising the production and display of Communist contents. This regulation, which has not yet come into effect, might have an additional censoring impact on artistic production.

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[24] Klugman, Aleksander (2003): *Żyd – co to znaczy?,* Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, p. 171; Steinlauf, Michael (2001): *Pamięć nieprzyswojona,* p. 64.
[25] Gross, Jan T. (2006): *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 192.
[26] Ibid., p. 199; Steinlauf, *Pamięć nieprzyswojona*, pp. 65-6.
[27] Kozłowski, Maciej; Folwarczny, Andrzej, and Bilewicz, Michał, eds. (2006): *Trudne pytania w dialogu polsko-żydowskim,* Warszawa: Jacek Santorski, pp. 91-4.
[28] See Gądek, Mariusz, ed. (2008): *Wokół Strachu. Dyskusja o książce Jana T. Grossa,* Kraków: Znak.

Magical Jew

In the autumn of 2007, the first channel of the Polish public TV (TVP1) launched one of its most expensive and broadly advertised Saturday night shows, which featured covers of popular international musical hits. The "Jewish Night", viewed by an audience of over two million,[29] was placed in the series between the British and the Latino episodes, and featured a mixture of music ranging from "Hava Nagila", through pieces from the *Fiddler on the Roof*, popular Polish songs by Jewish songwriters, to the performance of the Israeli Eurovision star Dana International. Interestingly, although the programme was dominated by songs in Polish, the "Jewish" edition was held distinctly separate from the "Polish" night, which, in turn, featured a selection of patriotic songs. The highlight of the Jewish edition was the production of "Sunrise Sunset" from Fiddler on the Roof with the singers posed as a young couple under the *khupe* surrounded by Hasidim with *peyes*, burning candles in their hands. The shtetl-aesthetics of the production seems to have appealed to the Polish viewers; many of them rated the show on the programme's website as "moving", "romantic", and even "divine".[30] The "Jewish Night" clearly spoke to the mass audience with the language of images that it recognised as essentially Jewish and enjoyed as such. The "Jewish Night" well illustrates the breathtaking career that the romanticised image of the Jew made on the scene of Jewish heritage music in Poland. Although there is also a number of Polish artists who try to challenge the shtetl cliché on the klezmer scene, folkloristic representations of Jews receive a lot of visibility and enjoy a considerable popularity.

The Warsaw-based festival of Jewish culture uses this nostalgic aesthetics too. In the run of the now week-long festival, the last surviving street of the Warsaw's ghetto, the forlorn Próżna Street, turns into a film-set-like "Jewish street". Populated with actors in costumes of Orthodox Jews, and adorned with Yiddish-language shop-signs, Próżna Street is one of the main venues of the festival and, according to the manager of the festival, is meant to "reconstruct the climate of the pre-war Warsaw".[31] *Tradition,* the musical production which crowned the 2007 edition of the festival, featured the shtetl world as a blissful and colourful microcosm of many cultures, where Ukrainian and Roma artists happily danced along the actors of the Jewish Theatre dressed in Jewish costumes. *Tradition,* which was to "remind" the spectator "of the experiences of different communities which, in their neighbourhood locality, shared their fate, their joys and sorrows",[32] made a heavy use of hyperbole. The actors of the musical were using scenic "Jewish" gestures, and were equipped with oversized "Jewish" props, such as watches, a rooster, or a fish.

The romantic and the dream-like images are also employed on klezmer CDs and as part of klezmer performances. Photographs used on CD covers and in the liner notes are often in sepia tones or black and white.[33] Other covers picture motifs associated with the shtetl idyll:

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[29]Statistical data by AGB Nielsen Media Research, available at: http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/article/2130897_TVP_1_konczy_Przebojowa_noc.htm (accessed 27 November 2007).

[30] http://v1.itvp.pl/blog/i.tvp/idb/24/idk/277 (accessed 3 December 2007).

[31] Hanna Pałuba, manager of the Shalom Foundation organizing the Jewish Culture Festival Singer's Warsaw, in an interview to TVP3, 28 August 2007.

[32] Jerzy Sokołowski in (2007): *Festiwal Kultury Żydowskiej Warszawa Singera,* Warszawa: Fundacja Shalom, p. 39.

[33] See, for example, Kahan, Bente, *Farewell Cracow. Yiddish Songs by Mordechai Gebirtig,* 1992; Lic, Lesław, *Piano Klezmer Music,* 2004; Warta-Śmietana, Ewa and Haskala, *Sztetełe Bełz,* 2008; Quartet Klezmer Trio, *8 p. m.*, 2008.

fiddlers on the roof, wedding couples, candles and pastel-coloured villages.[34] Jews in traditional attire, and Hebrew-stylized font are also a recurrent motif. The Jewish world is presented in this context, on the one hand, as distant in time, and on the other, as familiar, radiating safety and comfort.

Some of the images on Polish klezmer records not only picture the shtetl as enchanting, but also allude to the magical qualities of Jews. *Songs of the Jews of Odessa* (2000) by the Kraków-based *Teatr Zwierciadło* is a case in point. Against the background of golden coins, the CD cover pictures two personages, immediately recognizable as Jews for their well visible red yarmulkes, counting Polish banknotes. The leader of the band, who also posed to the cover picture, explains that his intention was to represent the "atmosphere of the Odessa bazaar".[35] However, what to the musicians of *Teatr Zwierciadło* seemed a cabaret-like image is received with perplexity by some Jewish tourists who come across the CD.[36]

The imagery used by the Cracovian band is reminiscent of the anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as usurers and financial exploiters that have been abundant particularly in the pre-1945 Polish popular culture, and are still reverberating today.[37] The image of Jews holding, or counting, money is, in fact, very popular on the Polish market of souvenirs and mass-produced "Judaica". The very restaurant which hosts the performances of *Teatr Zwierciadło* in Kazimierz, offers a wide range of wooden carved figures and paintings of Jews with money. In the Polish popular perception, shared by some of the Kraków klezmer musicians, these images are not anti-Semitic but perform a certain amulet function. Paintings of Jews counting money are, for example, a common gift to newlyweds, meant to bring good luck and prosperity to their household.

This magical function of the image of the Jewish usurer or banker might also have been in mind of the artists of *Teatr Zwierciadło*, who certainly did not intend to offend their partially Jewish audiences in Kazimierz with anti-Semitic clichés. Rather, the artists attempted to construct what appeared to them as a comic image of the Jew, using the building blocks drawn from the popular culture around them. The lack of awareness among some klezmer musicians in Poland about the anti-Semitic implications of such representations seems to be rather common. In 2006, I recorded the following exchange between two musicians:

> Musician 1: "Buying such a figure of the Jew is for good luck. A Jew must be in the house for protection."

> Musician 2: "Yes, in a Polish house, a painting of a Jew counting money or of a Jew in general, is for good luck, so that there is always money in the house."

> Musician 1: "Even if I didn't know about this custom that Jews bring good luck, I would still prefer to buy myself such a little Jew than, for example, a little Eiffel Tower in Paris…I love these little Jews!"[38]

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[34] See Przybylska, Sława, *Ałef-Bejs*, 2005; Urbańska, Irena, *Szabes*, 2003; *Chanuke,* 2004; *Purim,* 2005; *Kołysanki Żydowskie*, 2008.

[35] Petraniuk, Witalij, personal interview, 21 January 2008.

[36] The CD was brought to my attention by Stuart Brotman of the *Brave Old World*.

[37] Dunin, Janusz (1989): 'Postać Żyda w polskiej kulturze popularnej do 1945 roku.' In: Kowalski, Piotr (ed.): *Wszystek krąg ziemski – prace ofiarowane profesorowi Czesławowi Hernasowi,* Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, pp. 317-23.

[38] Interwiew K13 from 1 June 2006.

Photo 3. Portraits of Jews on sale at the flea market in the Jewish district of Kraków, 2006. Photo by Klementyna Chrzanowska.

Elements of the romantic, magical and supernatural in the musical representations of Jews in Poland correspond to Clement Greenberg's definition of kitsch as "the vividly recognizable, the miraculous and the sympathetic".[39] Greenberg's category of kitsch, defined as art that is easy to interpret, is useful to classify the outcome of a certain artistic process, but it does not explain its source. The "kitschy" representation of Jews in Poland seems to be fuelled by several different phenomena: the reinterpretation of the stereotypical anti-Semitic features of the Jews into new, positive qualities, Polish folk beliefs concerning the magical qualities of the Jews, and the romantic image of the Jews in the Polish literary tradition.

The recent Polish surveys show that the stereotype of the Jew has undergone a revaluation. Thanks to the more pro-capitalist attitudes of Poles after the fall of Communism, the stereotype of the Jew as a capitalist has gained positive connotations. Talent for trading and success in finance are described today as positive characteristics of Jews, even though the same features used to be assessed negatively before, and even employed in anti-Semitic propaganda.[40]

Another component of this popular stereotype of the Jew is the belief in the magical properties of Jews, which goes back to the beginnings of Christianity. The Jew as the biblical participant in the mystery of Christ's death was perceived as both terrifying and fascinating. The rural tradition in Poland often associated Jews with the devil, who was not only feared as

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[39] Greenberg, Clement (1961): *Art and Culture. Critical Essays,* Boston: Beacon Press, p. 14.

[40] Cała, Alina (1996): 'Autostereotyp i stereotypy narodowe.' In: Krzemiński, Ireneusz (ed.): *Czy Polacy są antysemitami? Wyniki badania sondażowego,* Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, pp. 199-228.

the god of evil, but also required in the natural vegetative cycle of the earth. The figure of the Jew was thus believed to secure the vital powers, fertility, and good fortune.[41] The old folk customs reverberate even in the post-Holocaust Poland. In surveys quoted by Cała in 1992, Polish peasants indicated that they believed that rabbis or older Jews could heal, curse, or tell the future.[42] The belief in the amulet-like power of wooden figurines or paintings of Jews seems also to be a remnant of those old folk practices.

The romantic period also contributed to the image of the Jew as mystic and potentially supernatural. Jankiel, who is a key figure of Adam Mickiewicz's national epic *Pan Tadeusz* (1832-1834), is a character endowed both with knowledge deriving from his position in-between the Jewish and the Gentile world, and with a "charismatic and shamanic aspect" related to his musical virtuosity.[43] The female counterpart of the patriotic Jew, Esterka, also inspired generations of novelists, playwrights and painters, as well as the modern tourist industry.[44] The legendary concubine of King Casimir the Great (1310-1370), Esterka, is believed to have been the inspiration for Casimir's privileges for Jews. Esterka, as the "ideal Jewess", is both educated and emotional and is cherished as a powerful protectress of Jews.[45] Sensuality and a tragic fate is, in turn, at the centre of the image of Lilith, the Hebrew goddess of dreams and death, popular particularly among Polish modernist artists.[46]

The romanticised, magical Jew on the klezmer scene is both familiar and otherworldly, both "vividly recognizable" and "miraculous". The Jewish world, as represented on many Polish CD covers resembles the rustic idyll of Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, but has, at the same time, wondrous characteristics. It represents domesticated otherness and promises harmony. The romanticised shtetl is a utopia which eclipses conflict.

While the topos of the romantic shtetl inspires some of the major cultural productions in Poland, it is rather marginal on the German klezmer scene. Most of the German klezmer musicians keep their CD design and scenic look neutral, transparent, and often devoid of any Jewish symbols whatsoever. Representing Eastern European Jews in Germany has, naturally, a different history than in Poland. In different time periods, Eastern Jews functioned there as an important reference point: first for the post-Haskala assimilating Jews, later for the Jewish modernists looking for authenticity, and finally, for the National Socialists who used the images of *Ostjuden* in their anti-Semitic propaganda.

In the period of the Jewish Enlightenment, Eastern Jews were viewed with disdain by their German coreligionists. Just as *Polacken* became the object of disdain among Germans, the Jews of the eastern shtetls became the Other to the assimilating German Jewry. The Jewish press at the end of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century portrayed *Ostjuden* as a negative photographic image of the native German Jewry. *Ostjuden* were in their eyes "backward and fanatical; they were mired in superstitious and unenlightened culture; and

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[41] Cała, Alina (1992): *Wizerunek Żyda w polskiej kulturze ludowej,* Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, pp. 178-9.

[42] Ibid., pp. 109-20.

[43] Feldman, Walter Zev, *Klezmer Music: History, Memory and Musical Structure, ca.1750-1950.* (work in progress).

[44] Halkowski, Henryk (2009): *Żydowski Kraków. Legendy i ludzie*, Kraków: Austeria, pp. 21-6.

[45] Shmeruk, Chone (2000): *Legenda o Esterce w literaturze jidysz i polskiej,* Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, pp. 9-35.

[46] Tytkowska, Anna (2004): 'Lilith. O obecności hebrajskiej bogini nocy i burzy w polskim dramacie.' In: Udalska, Eleonora and Tytkowska, Anna (eds.): *Żydzi w lutrze dramatu, teatru i krytyki teatralnej,* Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, pp. 121-33.

most were incapable of productive work. Instead, they tenaciously held fast to outmoded religious and social values".[47] The rural world of the shtetl they came to be associated with constituted the opposite pole to the urban values the German Jews cherished, and Westernisation was deemed its only way of improvement.

Around the turn of the twentieth century *Ostjuden* gradually won new appreciation. In the period of disillusionment caused by the new wave of anti-Semitism in Germany, the search for a new Jewish identity made native Jews rediscover the shtetl as a reservoir of authenticity. Writers like Martin Buber, who introduced his German audience to the Hasidic heritage, were trying to "bridge the old gulf between German and East European Jews",[48] but they also managed to reach young non-Jewish readers fascinated by the spirituality of "exotic" cultures. For many intellectuals of that period, such as Kurt Tucholsky, Alfred Döblin, Joseph Roth, or Else Lasker-Schüler, who grew increasingly critical of their German-Jewish contemporaries, the Eastern European Jew became "an external Jewish model".[49]

This idealised representation of the "true" Eastern Jew, which took shape in the period of modernism, was, however, permeated with new values and visualised with new means of expression. *Ostjude,* as portrayed by Roth in his *Juden auf Wanderschaft*, was a deeply spiritual figure. Roth saw the Eastern European Jews as intellectually superior to their surroundings: "While the other peasants only now begin to learn writing and reading, the Jew behind his plough struggles with the problems of the theory of relativity".[50] The references to the East were ubiquitous in the Jewish cultural activity of the early twentieth century. As Brenner notes: "[c]omposers of liturgy…claimed to base their compositions on oriental Jewish music, artists depicted Ostjuden in book illustrations, and Jewish museums displayed Jewish folk art." However, Brenner also emphasises that: "[o]n all levels, the rich cultural treasures of the Jewish past, unveiled by extensive ethnographic research, were combined with *modernist art tendencies*."[51] The image of the shtetl Jew at that time underwent a fundamental change not only because of its positive revaluation, but because it was visualised in the fresh, daring, modernist way. Ephraim Lilien's expressionist illustrations, or the performances of the Vilna Troupe, employing avant-garde stage design and direction, defined the new way in which Eastern European Jewish life was visualised in the inter war Germany.[52]

The onset of the economic crisis in the 1920s witnessed a radicalisation of anti-Semitic discourse in Germany. *Ostjuden* played a particular role in this anti-Jewish campaign: they were blamed for the lost war, economic depression and growing unemployment. Not coincidentally, the pogrom of 1923 in Berlin was initiated in the quarter inhabited by Eastern European Jews. The language of hate towards them became racist. Expressions like "*Ostjudenplage*" started to circulate in the public discourse.[53] Also the propaganda of National Socialism used the images of Eastern European Jews. The 1940 propaganda film

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[47] Wertheimer, Jack (1987): *Unwelcome Strangers. East European Jews in Imperial Germany,* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 148.

[48] Elon, Amos (2003): *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch 1743-1933,* New York: Picador, p. 239.

[49] Brenner, Michael (1996): *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany*, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 142.

[50] Joseph Roth cited in ibid. p. 146.

[51] Ibid., p. 156, italics mine.

[52] Ibid., p. 190.

[53] Heid, Ludger (1995): 'Der Ostjude.', In: Schoeps, Julius H. and Schlör, Joachim (eds.): *Antisemitismus: Vorurteile und Mythen,* München, Zürich: Piper, pp. 245-9.

Der Ewige Jude, shot in the ghettos of the Nazi-occupied Poland presented the image of the Polish Jews as the "proof" of the "true racial character" of the seemingly assimilated Jews in Germany.[54] This film, with its ghetto footage, has become, in the words of Jeffrey Herf, one of the most "familiar icons of modern consciousness and memory of the Nazi era".[55]

These three templates of representing Eastern European Jews in the German popular culture clearly differ from the images present in Poland. While in the Polish popular culture the image of the caftan-clad shtetl Jew with side-locks and a crooked nose is often deemed acceptable, the approval for such a representation in Germany is limited. *Ostjuden* have for centuries been represented in Germany as part of the dichotomy of the East vs. West. This comparison, unfavourable for the Eastern Jews, served to present the assimilationist model of German Jews as superior. The image of the shtetl was therefore explicitly negative, and perceived as non-German and alien.

The period of the first "renaissance" of Yiddish culture in Germany brought a change to this representation, but it did not offer a romanticised and folklorised vision of the *Ostjuden*, prevalent in the Polish romantic school. Instead, it produced avant-garde and modernist images of Eastern European Jews. Spirituality and mysticism played a dominant role in this representation, not the physiognomy or external attributes of shtetl Jews.

The focus on the Jewish body and physicality returned in the anti-Semitic campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. In the propaganda of National Socialism, Eastern European Jews had distinct facial features and characteristic attire. The often reproduced 1937 poster of the anti-Semitic exhibition "*Der Ewige Jude*" in Munich, picturing an Eastern European Jew with golden coins in his hand, was a quintessence of this kind of representation. In today's Germany, where school education puts an extra emphasis on the Nazi period and its propaganda, not only are such racist representations of Jews discredited, but any folklorised images of *Ostjuden* might carry a certain ambiguity for a German viewer, even if they are not meant as a caricature.

Conclusions

The images of Jews generated by the Polish and German klezmer scene not only reflect certain national traditions of representing Jews in both countries, but also resonate strongly on the Central European market of Jewish heritage, consolidating some stereotypes of Jews and Jewishness. Despite the similarities between the two revivalist scenes, the symbols, imagery and repertory in Poland and Germany differ. Historic representations of Jews in both countries provide the klezmer revivalists with topoi and archetypes they might reproduce or challenge. They also define the boundaries of acceptance and taboo.

This process of adapting the heritage of an ethic minority for a mainstream audience might entail simplification. As David Lowenthal observes, "[m]ainstreams trivialize minority legacies by standardizing them". Standardization implies, however, not only a reduction in which "[e]thnic legacies dwindle from living folkways to isolated emblems or events",[56] but

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[54] Hippler, Fritz, director, *Der Ewige Jude*, Deutsche Film Gesellschaft, 1940.
[55] Herf, Jeffrey (2006): *The Jewish Enemy. Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 14.
[56] Lowenthal, David (2005): *The Heritage Crusades and the Spoils of History,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 86.

also cultural translation. This is particularly true in the case of a revival, which, by definition, bases itself on reinvention.

Both the "Political" and the "Magical Jew" on the klezmer scene are products of translation. Klezmer artists render the original text, Jewish heritage music, for a prevalently non-Jewish audience, framing elements of Jewish culture in a way that makes them readable and relevant to their new consumers. The translation takes place in two dimensions. The former entails the crossing of the boundary between the present and the past. The klezmer *revival* attempts to build a connection between the present day audiences and the contents and aesthetics of a historic genre. The latter is the crossing of the boundary between the self and the other. The representation of Jewish heritage to non-Jews, or by non-Jews, opens up the space of "translatability", that is, of appropriation, incorporation, bracketing and reflecting oneself.[57]

Daniel Kahn, editing old Yiddish songs to comment on the contemporary political situation, projects new meanings on the cultural texts coming from the past. He invokes the historic Yiddish songs, documenting the political ferment of Jewish Zionist or Socialist circles, to serve as a commentary on the present. This act of appropriation reflects the anxieties of today and brings in relief the deficits of the present.[58] Reviving the subversive Yiddish heritage is here a way of complementing the definition of Jewishness as only victim-based. The old political Yiddish songs become an element in the identity-building process of the new generation of Jews. At the same time, they communicate a more universal message about the nature of political conflicts also to German non-Jews.

The Polish musical productions like the "Jewish Night", on the other hand, not only venture across the boundary between the present and past, but, perhaps more importantly, between cultures. Exploring otherness is a way of generating a collective identity. The "Jewish Night", kept separate from the Polish episode, made clear not only what images Poles understand as Jewish, but also how the public television conceptualises "Polishness". While the Jewish night featured several extremely popular Polish love songs, such as *To ostatnia niedziela* [It's the Last Sunday] (1935) or "*Już nie zapomnisz mnie*" [You Won't Forget me Any More] (1938) by Polish-Jewish composers and songwriters, the repertoire of the "Polish" night included patriotic songs and a biblical psalm. Arranging songs like "Ostatni mazur" [The Last Mazurka], written during the uprising of 1863, the anthem of the Pisudski legions in the First World War "*Piechota*" [Infantry], or a psalm "For God alone my soul waits in silence" in a Saturday night pop music show reveals a clear tendency to frame "Polish" music in nationalist and religious terms. Polishness emerged here through the prism of a series of independence struggles and religious devoutness. The folklore and romance of the "Jewish" night was hence a clear counterpoint to the solemnity and the nationalist ardour of the "Polish" show. Jewishness became translated as a playful, colourful and magical other of the militant and pompous Polishness.

The representations of the "Magical Jew" in Poland are clearly a form of domestication. They bring Jewish culture closer to its new "readers", the mainstream Polish audience. In order to do that, they produce an abridged version of Jewishness, purging it of the unwanted,

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[57] Wolfgang Iser uses "translatability" as an umbrella concept for various modes of cultural interpenetration, including appropriating, incorporating, etc. See: Iser, Wolfgang (1996): 'Coda to the Discussion.' In: Budick, Sanford and Iser, Wolfgang (eds.): *The Translatability of Cultures. Figurations of the Space Between,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 296-302.

[58] Ibid., p. 301.

disturbing, controversial elements. The trope of the "Political Jew" is a product of the opposite process, which the translation studies define as "foreignisation". It entails an exposure of the reader to the idioms of the foreign language, demanding of him or her more effort to understand, or to come to terms with, the presented contents. Both processes of translation, however, reveal not only how popular culture represents the past and the other, but also how it pictures the cultural reality of today, negotiating new cultural frontiers.

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The Jewish Giallo, or What's a Nice Jewish Motif Like You Doing in a Movie Like This?

Mikel J. Koven

Abstract

The Italian word *giallo* (lit."yellow") denotes today an entire genre of mystery novels and horror films. "Jewish" iconography occasionally appears in these productions as a synecdoche of an anomalous form of ancient, mysterious, but identifiable mysticism. Although they usually occupy the periphery of filmic narratives, Jewish motifs symbolize something beyond mere "arcane" lore. *Gialli* represent the real, historical Jewish presence in Italy, which was largely wiped out during the Fascist period and German occupation, leaving an ambivalent absence.

The word *giallo* simply means "yellow" and is the metonymic term given to a series of mystery novels that the Milanese publisher Mondadori began producing in the late 1920s. These paperback novels, often translations of English-language books by writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Ngaio Marsh, Agatha Christie and Edgar Wallace, were presented with vibrant yellow covers. A few years earlier, Mondadori had achieved success with a series of romance novels published with bright blue covers, and so their *giallo* series was an extension of this colour-coding of popular literature. The *giallo* series is still going strong, with Mondadori continuing to publish *gialli* paperbacks with these yellow covers. Very quickly other Italian publishers joined in on the demand (or at least availability) of mass-market murder mystery novels. Dozens of competing series were produced, all using the term *giallo*, further defining the literary genre within an Italian context. A quick perusal of a list of those books published in the 1930s and early 1940s reveals that Edgar Wallace was a particularly popular author – certainly translations of his novels are plentiful in the various series, followed closely by Agatha Christie, Conan Doyle, and Dorothy Sayers. The term *giallo* acts as a metonym for the entire mystery genre: in an American bookstore, if one wanted an Agatha Christie novel, one would look in a section labelled "Mystery" or "Crime"; however, in an Italian bookstore, that section would likely be called "*Giallo*". So at the most basic level, any murder-mystery narrative *could* be classed as *giallo*.

However, within an Italian popular culture context, *giallo* films are contextualized as a form of exploitation horror cinema, rather than crime films (although the two terms frequently cross-over). Mario Bava is largely credited with establishing the *giallo* film tradition. In two

specific films, *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (*La Ragazza che sapev troppo*, 1962) and *Blood and Black Lace* (*Sei donne per l'assassino*, 1964), Bava firstly establishes the *giallo* film's narrative structure: an innocent person, often a tourist, witnesses a brutal murder that appears to be the work of a serial killer, and then takes on the role of the amateur detective to solve the crimes. Bava then established the visual tropes which would quickly become clichéd: graphic violence against beautiful women, the diversity of murder weapons used, but most importantly the archetypal black gloves, black overcoat, wide-brimmed hat and stocking over the face which become the *sin qua non* of the genre. Obviously, at the time these films were made, Bava would have been unaware that he was establishing a new film genre. Nevertheless, Gary Needham reads the opening sequence of *Girl*, where we are introduced to Nora Davis (Letitia Roman) on an airplane arriving in Rome for a holiday, a *giallo* novel on her lap, as announcing the arrival of a new self-aware kind of genre, in what he sees as *mise-en-abyme*.[1]

The year 1970 is generally considered the key threshold for *giallo* cinema, due to the international success of Dario Argento's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'uccello dale piume di cristallo*), which takes the innocent eyewitness who becomes an amateur detective through a grisly series of murders from Bava's *Girl* and adds the graphic violence and iconically dressed killer from *Blood and Black Lace*. It is this combination that really defines the *giallo* film as it is more commonly understood. An avalanche of similar films was quickly brought out by Italian producers looking to cash in on Argento's success, all using combinations and variations on the complexity of the mystery, with the standard *giallo*-killer disguise.[2]

The *giallo* film is a kind of vernacular cinema. Its discourses, while neither subtle nor abstract in presentation, are directed towards a distinct vernacular audience, those predominantly of the *terza visione* (or 'third class') theatres of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As such, by approaching these films as vernacular discourses, we gain insight into the cultures for which these films were predominantly made. If I am correct in asserting that vernacular cinema depicts the cultural concerns of *vernacular* culture, then the *giallo* film depicts the cultural concerns of *vernacular Italian* culture. The *gialli* were never intended for consumption in the first-run theatres in Italy or meant to circulate internationally through film festivals and art-house cinemas. These films circulated on the margins of Italian, European and International film exhibition – the drive-ins and grindhouses, rather than art-houses. They appealed to the most salacious aspects of literary crime fiction, thereby making these films closer in spirit to horror movies than murder-mysteries. And within this context, not only in terms of production but perhaps more importantly consumption, a traditional aesthetic consideration of the *giallo* alongside high-art filmmakers such as Fellini, Bertolucci and Antonioni cannot work. The *giallo* is not high-art; it is *vernacular* in its marketing, consumption and production. And it is as *vernacular cinema* through which we need to look at the Jewish motifs raised in some of these films.[3]

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[1] Needham, Gary (2003): 'Playing with Genre: Defining the Italian *Giallo*'. In: Schneider, Steven J. (ed.): *Fear without Frontiers: Horror Cinema Across the Globe*, Godaling: FAB Press, p. 136.

[2] For more on *giallo* cinema, see Koven, Mikel J. (2006): *La Dolce Morte: Vernacular Cinema and the Italian Giallo Film*, Lanham: The Scarecrow Press.

[3] See Koven, *La Dolce Morte*; also Cawelti, John G. (1976): *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

While I have called this paper "The Jewish Giallo", it should be explained at the outset that these are not "Jewish" films (although a definition of what constitutes a "Jewish" film is up for considerable debate), nor are these films rooted within any kind of "authentic" Jewish experience. What I hope to explore here are the *perceptions* of Jews and Jewishness in a particular historical moment (the 1970s) for a particular audience, the vernacular audiences of the *terza visione* cinemas. I have two main points to make here: one is that "Jewish" iconography appears occasionally in these films as a synecdoche of some anomalous form of ancient, mysterious, but identifiable mysticism; and two, that the real, historical Jewish presence in Italy, which was largely wiped out during the Fascist period and German occupation, is represented in two of these films as an ambivalent absence for the vernacular audience, and these films try to understand that absence.

Exploring the Arcane

In Riccardo Freda's 1980 film *The Wailing* (*Follia omicida*, literally "Murder Obsession"), a group of young people visit a local castle and get mixed up with family curses and black magic. The film's heroine is protected by a talisman – the "Seal of Solomon" – and told that this is the only object powerful enough to protect her from the black magic of the "witches" in the film. As a piece of arcane lore, the image of the Seal has powerful occult, specifically cabalistic, associations. The "Seal of Solomon" in *The Wailing* is an amulet inscribed with the six-pointed star, the Magen David, derived from cabalistic tradition as a powerful symbol used to hold back evil forces. As Duling notes, as early as the third century C.E., the "Seal" "appears to be commonly accepted magical equipment".[4] Spier notes the proliferation of the image of the Seal on amulets and various (magic-oriented) papyri in the early centuries of the Common Era throughout the Hellenic world, with particular attention to Aramaic incantation bowls.[5] The seventeenth-century witchcraft collectanea purported to be once owned by Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General, include a Magen David/Seal of Solomon, fashioned out of lead.[6] Whether or not Hopkins' star talisman was fashioned out of lead because of the metals availability and its malability, or for some alchemical association the metal might have is up for speculation. Reference is made, in the three volume, sixteenth-century *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, by Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, to the six-pointed star as "Sigillium Salomonis" used as a talisman and as a cabalistic symbol.[7] The six-pointed Magen David mutates into the five-pointed pentagram as early as the Hellenic period, and the two seem to have co-existed in the symbology. As Spier notes

> Pentagrams are often associated with the 'Seal of Solomon' …. The meaning of 'pentagons' in Julius Africanus, the 3rd-century Christian writer, is unclear, although they are probably pentagrams drawn on amulets of various functions …[8]

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[4] Duling, Dennis C. (1975): 'Solomon, Exorcism and the Son of David.' In: *The Harvard Theological Review,* vol. 68, no. 3-4, p. 248.

[5] Spier, Jeffrey (1993): 'Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and their Tradition'. In: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 56, pp. 36 and 61. See also Duling, 'Solomon, Exorcism' p. 248 and Duling, Dennis (1985): 'The Eleazar Miracle and Solomon's Magical Wisdom in Flavius Josephus's "Antiquitates Judaicae" 8.42-49.' In: *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 78, no. 1-2, p. 22.

[6] See Gardner, Gerald Brosseau (1939): 'Witchcraft.' In: *Folklore*, vol. 50, no. 2, p. 189.

[7] Cited in Du Prey, Pierre de la Ruffiniere (1968): 'Symbolism in Borromini's Church of S. Ivo alla Sapienza.' In: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 31, p. 224.

[8] Spier, 'Medieval Byzantine', p. 41.

Gershom Scholem noted the frequent confusion in the symbology between the five- and six-pointed stars: "For a long time … the five and the six-pointed stars, were called by one name, the 'Seal of Solomon', and no distinction was made between them".[9] Despite Scholem not being unduly worried about the confusion between the two stars, it is significant that (assuming the collection Gardner discusses is authentic) Matthew Hopkins carried with him a six-pointed star, rather than a five-pointed one; perhaps by the mid-seventeenth-century, the pentagram had more popular connotations with witchcraft, while the six-pointed (Magen David) had popular connotations as a defence against witchcraft. This connotation is certainly borne out by *The Wailing*'s use of the six-pointed Seal of Solomon as a protective talisman against the dark arts.

Joseph Jacobs and M. Seligsohn, writing in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, note that the Seal of Solomon appears throughout legendry in the Jewish, Muslim and early Christian traditions, firstly as a signet ring owned by the biblical king and by which he was able to control demons,[10] including Lilith[11]. Later legend traditions hold that possession of the ring enabled the bearer to exorcize a variety of demonic figures[12], in the same way that King Solomon controlled "devils, spirits, and Night-Demons".[13] Duling also notes that, given Solomon's abilities as an exorcist[14], the liturgy of Jewish exorcism rites continuously invokes the Hebrew King's name.[15] Both Bonner and Knox identify that in the exorcism tradition, which Solomon is reputed to have begun, uses the Seal to enable the possessing demon to speak and be enticed out of the poor person being possessed.[16]

In *The Wailing*, the image and belief in the sign's occult power connect the film's modern-day setting with an eternal battle between good and evil, that the ancient Hebrew rites (which of course pre-date both Christianity and Islam) are the only real defence against the equally ancient forces of demonic evil, which it is assumed the witches in the film are conjuring. And yet at no point in the film is Seal of Solomon referred to as a Hebrew or ancient Jewish icon.

Dario Argento's 1975 *giallo*, and still considered both one of the director's best films and one of the best *giallo* films, *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*) features the Seal of Solomon in a different context. The first murder we see is the death of psychic Helga Ulmann (Macha Méril) by the crazed killer. She has had a premonition of her own murder, but the killer is still able to force their way into her apartment. In a previous sequence in the film, where Helga tells a friend of hers on the phone that she knows the identity of the killer and will tell all tomorrow when they meet up (a typical *giallo* motif which signals that the person who says that line is about to die), the soon-to-be-late psychic is sitting at her glass coffee table, the top of which is decorated with the said-same Seal – a blue Star of David whose points connect at

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[9] Cited in Du Prey, Pierre de la Ruffiniere, 'Symbolism', p. 224

[10] See Jacobs, Joseph and Seligsohn, M. (2002): 'Solomon, Seal of.' In: *Jewish Encyclopedia.com,* available at: http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=895&letter=S&search=seal%20of%20salomon (accessed 04 November 2009).

[11] See Patai, Raphael (1964): 'Lilith.' In: *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 77, pp. 295-314.

[12] See Jacobs and Seligsohn, 'Solomon, Seal of'.

[13] Duling, 'Solomon, Exorcism', p. 248.

[14] Ibid.

[15] See Duling, 'The Eleazar Miracle', p. 220

[16] See Knox, Wilfred Lawrence (1938): 'Jewish Liturgical Exorcism.' In: *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 31, no. 3, p. 195. Also Bonner, Campell (1943): 'The Technique of Exorcism.' In: *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 42.

the rim of the circular table. In *Deep Red*, unlike in *The Wailing*, the Seal is insufficient to save the victim (perhaps she should have been wearing the talisman, rather than using it as a coffee table). While the Seal of Solomon appears in Argento's film as part of Helga's personal decor in her apartment, no mention is made of it either before the murder or while the police are there investigating her death. It is simply part of the film's *mise-en-scene*. However, unlike the absence of any kind of Jewish or Hebrew referent in *The Wailing*, Argento does include a few seconds of Helga's funeral, and we can clearly hear the intonations of the *Kaddish*. Apparently, Helga was Jewish – or at least she is given a Jewish funeral. No further mention or significance of Helga's Jewishness is made, it is forgotten as quickly as it appears, but its inclusion in the first place is curious. Why make Helga so explicitly Jewish, particularly if you're not going to make any reference to it elsewhere in the film?

Marcia Landy noted that in Argento's *Deep Red* "In the case of Helga's death and the discovery of her Jewishness, the spectator is invited to make comparisons between these murders and the destruction of the Jews in the Holocaust".[17] While Helga's Jewishness is indeed curious insofar as it does not seem to serve any narrative or thematic purpose, Landy's identification that Helga's death should be read as a thinly disguised Holocaust reference is dubious. Argento's use of Jewishness and the Seal of Solomon is not terribly different than Freda's use of the Seal in his film: the Jew, Jewishness or even just the (sound) image of Hebrew is sufficient to connotate arcane wisdom and ancient (pre-Christian) power, perhaps even, but not essentially, cabalistic power. Helga has some kind of power, as a psychic, but rather than her power being a source of anxiety for the vernacular audience, who might ponder whether or not she is a witch (and therefore coded vernacularly as "evil"), her psychic powers are made safe by reassuring this audience that Helga is not a witch, she's a Jew, and therefore imbued with the mysterious ancient (and possibly cabalistic) powers of the Hebrews.

There is further evidence of this perception of the Jew, Jewishness and Hebrew as a synecdoche for ancient power in Argento's 2007 film, *Mother of Tears* (*La Terza Madre*, 2007). *Mother of Tears* is the third and final film in Argento's "Three Mothers" trilogy: the Three Mothers are powerful witches which originally appeared in Thomas de Quincey's *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845). In Argento's films *Suspiria* (1977) and *Inferno* (1980), the Three Mothers are ancient and evil witches attempting to bring about an "age of witches". Towards the finale of the film, as the protagonists Sarah (Asia Argento) and Michael (Adam James) creep towards the final coven that is welcoming the rebirth of the third Mother, graffiti written on the walls of these Turin catacombs are a variety of arcane symbols including runes and Hebrew lettering. Thirty-two years after *Deep Red*, Argento returns to Hebrew as signifier of ancient and mysterious power, only here it is associated with ancient evil rather than good as in the earlier film. Before an automatic assumption of anti-Semitism is made against Argento, although one cannot rule it out, the use of Hebrew here, and by extension its use (including the use of the Seal of Solomon) in *Deep Red* and in *The Wailing*, reflects the connotation of some kind of "mysterious and ancient power" with Jews. For these films' vernacular audiences, Jews are "different", they are "Other", but they are an older, mysterious and arcane Other. In many respects, the Othering of esoteric "Jewishness" in these films echoes the observations of Edward Said in *Orientalism*, in its perception of the "exotic East" with Western ethnocentrism.[18] To quickly connotate both that sense of Otherness and

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[17] Landy, Marcia (2000): *Italian Film,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 358.
[18] See Said, Edward (1988): *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient,* New York: Vintage.

antiquity, the simple presence of the Seal of Solomon (even as a coffee table decoration) or the immediately recognizable shape of Hebrew lettering on a wall is sufficient to make that connotation, without the need for any kind of explicit denotation.

The power of sign systems is such where the simple image or sound has the power to connotate immediately; but, and this is the power of vernacular cinema, that level of connotation is only really observable when "the wrong audience" encounters them. The likelihood of Jewish spectatorship of any of these films is not of primary consideration for their makers; but when a Jewish audience member does encounter the films, and is struck by the incongruity of the image's usage (this is not to suggest that all possible Jewish audience members would even notice), a rupture opens up in the film's meaning since the connotations the hypothetical Jewish spectator would have are unlikely to gel with the potential meaning the filmmaker intends. The usage just does not make cultural sense; and that rupture in the meaning-making paradigm is so foreign and strange that it becomes noticeable. The use of Hebrew or the image of the Magen David/Seal of Solomon should be familiar to any Jewish audience, but its usage within the context of the film feels wrong. Rather than just dismiss these moments as errors or misunderstandings of the meaning of these signs, we need to hypothesize what the film's vernacular audience might have connotated by their usage. And in this case that usage appears to be the connection between Jews and arcane magic.

The question remains, however, as to where this connection comes from. While it is certainly possible that the vernacular connection between "Jews" and "arcane magic" simply existed in the ether of 1970s Italy, we need to consider why that connection is manifested through the display of the Seal of Solomon and random Hebrew lettering. One major piece in this cultural puzzle could be the reception of Dennis Wheatley's 1934 horror novel *The Devil Rides Out*, at least by horror filmmakers. While translations of Wheatley's novels were produced by Mondadori as early as the 1930s, *The Devil Rides Out* (perhaps Wheatley's best known novel in English) does not appear until 1971 as *Il battesimo del Diavolo* (literally "The Christening by the Devil") and was not published by Mondadori, but by another Milanese publisher, Editrice Nord.

The Devil Rides Out, while not explicitly about Jews or Jewish issues, does feature one Jewish central character, Simon Aron, the best friend of the novel's heroes, the aristocratic Duke De Richelieu and the American Rex Van. Aron has fallen in with a black magic coven, led by the enigmatic Mocata, who is destined to be sacrificed by the cult in order to raise the Devil. Simon Aron has allowed Mocata to live at Aron's newly bought house as his guest, and it is in this house where the coven practice their rituals. Early in the novel, De Richelieu and Van pay a visit on their friend in the hopes of drawing him away from the evil witches. A party is going on before the evening's ritual, and Aron attempts to play the congenial host. De Richelieu in particular is concerned by the strange markings on the floor of Aron's observatory. Aron tries to dismiss these stating "They're only for fun – relics of the Alchemistic nonsense in the Middle Ages, but quite suitable for decoration" (p. 29). But De Richelieu, fully conversant with arcane symbols, is not fooled by his friend's dismissal. "The Duke was thoughtfully regarding a five-pointed star enclosed within two circles between which numerous mystic characters in Greek and Hebrew had been carefully drawn" (p. 29). I have already discussed the sign-slippage between five- and six-pointed stars and their associations with the Seal of Solomon, and noted how the Seal was associated as both an emblem of demonology and a prophylactic against such. Again, my supposition, noted earlier regarding Matthew Hopkins, that the five-pointed pentagram had a greater association with

witchcraft and the six-pointed Magen David with protection appears to be born out, despite the assurances of Gershom Scholem that the two symbols were synonymous in the cabalistic traditions. The association of one star with witchcraft and the other with protection against witchcraft, even if not scripturally or academically referenced, does appear to be manifest in the vernacular understanding of this symbology, as reflected in both Hopkins "protection kit" and Wheatley's pot-boiler novel. Later in the novel, as De Richelieu and Van sneak back to Aron's house in an attempt to rescue him from the black magic cult, De Richelieu discovers a cache of ritual ornaments including "an old bronze lamp, formed out of twisted human figures, which had nine wicks" (p. 54); a Hannukiah by any other description, albeit a rather macabre one.

The connection that Wheatley is making between Jewish symbols (and presumably cabalistic, although Wheatley never uses the word) and witchcraft is explicit. However, Wheatley takes pains to point out that he is not painting all Jews with that same anti-Semitic brush. Given that his novel was written in the mid-1930s, Wheatley demonstrates an awareness, if not actual sympathy, for Jews living in Nazi Germany. Having rescued their friend from his own home, De Richelieu attempts to protect Aron in his sleep by placing around his neck a talisman of "white magic".

> Only a certain blankness about the face betrayed [Simon Aron's] abnormal state [in an hypnotic trance conjured by De Richelieu so his friend could get to sleep], and he displayed no aversion as De Richelieu extended the thing he had taken from the drawer. It was a small golden swastika set with precious stones and treaded on a silken ribbon. 'Simon Aron,' the Duke spoke again. 'With this symbol I am about to place you under the protection of the power of Light. No being or force of Earth, or Air, of Fire, or Water can harm you while you wear it.' (p. 35)

Of course, the swastika here refers to its pre-Nazi meaning as a symbol of luck and good fortune. However, in a rare moment of comedy in Wheatley's novel, and in part to underline the sense in which he is using the swastika, the author has the American Rex Van exclaim "he'll [Aron] be pretty livid I'll promise you. Fancy hanging a Nazi swastika around the neck of a professing Jew" (p. 35). This misunderstanding of the meaning of the swastika sets the ground for Wheatley (in the guise of De Richelieu) to give a lengthy description of the history of the symbol prior to it being corrupted by the Nazis. Be that as it may, its inclusion is significant in that it confirms that the vaguely Jewish sounding name, Simon Aron, is in fact, not only Jewish, but a "professing Jew" (presumably meaning practising). Space and time does not permit me to go into further study about the subordinate and feminized role that this Jewish character is placed within by Wheatley, the naïveté of the character, or even the invisible Jewishness of this supposedly "professing" Jew. The connection of the *giallo* to *The Devil Rides Out* is, firstly, the identification of Hebrew/cabalistic symbols with witchcraft, and, at least in *Deep Red*, the Jewishness of this arcane symbology. In this sense, Helga, like Simon Aron before her, are images of "good" Jews, who may have access to this ancient and esoteric knowledge, but are domesticated into the hegemonic order[19]; they exist within the narratives to help, but are never given either agency or subjectivity (because that would require giving the Other a voice which could articulate such Difference).

Despite the relatively late translation of *The Devil Rides Out* into Italian, it is not impossible for these Italian filmmakers to have used this novel as inspiration for their films. The earliest film discussed here is *Deep Red*, made three to four years after the translation of

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[19] See Said, *Orientalism*.

the novel. Therefore, it is entirely feasible that Argento had read the book, whether in the original English, or Italian translation. However, a more likely connection between these *giallo* filmmakers and Wheatley's novel occurs a few years earlier with the release of Hammer Studios film version of Wheatley's novel. *The Devil Rides Out* (Terence Fisher, 1968) keeps fairly straight to the novel, however removes any reference to Aron's Jewishness. The closest the film approaches any explicit recognition of Jewishness is in its opening credit sequence, where "mystical" symbols swirl around the screen in red on a black background; and included amongst these "mystical" symbols are Hebrew lettering and the occasional Seal of Solomon. In the film version, whoever designed the opening credits pulls out random "arcane" references, devoid of context or meaning. These images exist merely as signifiers of "arcane" lore, with the signified absent.

Wheatley based his characterization of Mocata and his Satanic witches on the figure of Aleister Crowley.[20] Even a cursory awareness of either Crowley or his early connection with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn would recognize the random "mystical" signifiers these *fin-de-siècle* esoteric groups availed themselves to, including the Seal of Solomon. As Owen notes,

> Ritual magic … emerged most strongly in the nineteenth century in its Rosicrucian form, that is, as a particular configuration of seventeenth-century occult learning. The Rosicrucian tradition, with its roots in Jewish mysticism, Hebrew-Christian sources of ancient wisdom, and the powerful "Egyptian" writings of Hermes Trimegistus, was marked by the elaborate interplay of the philosophical or spiritual with the practical and magical.[21]

Despite Simon Aron's explicit Jewish identity (if not Jewishness) in Wheatley's novel, and the literally floating Hebraic signifiers in the opening credits of Fishers' film adaptation, the use of the Seal(s) of Solomon and Hebrew typeset in these films seems something of a dead-end; "Practical Magic" in the Crowley/Golden Dawn sense, while availing themselves to Cabalistic iconography for their rituals, had little to do with actual Jewish thought or teaching. To bestow on Dario Argento the cultural sensitivity or even awareness that Landy bestows on *Deep Red* in terms of her reading of Helga's Jewishness as referencing the Holocaust is to read too much into the film. That being said, the Holocaust does appear as a referent in two other Italian horror films of this period.

The Missing Signified

Despite the seemingly referentless symbology noted previously, two films emerge in the Italian 1970s vernacular cinemas which seem to posit a structured absence of Jews and Jewish life: Antonio Bido's 1977 *The Cat's Victims* (*Il Gatto dagli occhi di giada*) and Angelo Pannacciò's 1980 *Holocaust 2* (*Holocaust parte seconda: i ricordi, i deliri, la vendetta*). *Holocaust 2* is less a straightforward *giallo* and more of a psychological thriller, however no less curious than Bido's film. Pannacciò's film involves Dorothea (Kai Fischer), a woman who is haunted by memories of her mother's sexual debasement in a concentration camp.

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[20] See Ellis, Bill (1993): 'The Highgate Cemetery Vampire Hunt: The Anglo-American Connection in Satanic Cult Lore.' In: *Folklore*, vol. 104, no. 1-2, pp. 14-5. See also Freeman, Nick (2004): 'The Shrineless God: Paganism, Literature and Art in Forties' Britain.' In: *The Pomegranate*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 164.

[21] See Owen, Alex (1997): 'The Sorcerer and His Apprentice; Aleister Crowley and the Magical Exploration of Edwardian Subjectivity.' In: *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 101.

Dorothea becomes involved with a secret underground organization of camp survivors who travel about Europe vengeance killing escaped Nazi war criminals. Dorothea also has the ability to hypnotize anyone who stares into her eyes long enough, and seduces the innocent (and presumably Gentile) Lucilla (Susan Levi) to be a sleeper agent for the unnamed Jewish organization. Lucilla's orders, under hypnosis, are to seduce the young hunk Lorenzo (Andrés Resino), in order to get to his father, another escaped Nazi war criminal who has gone into hiding.

While the vigilante organization is said to be Jewish, there is no apparent Jewishness in the film. In fact, "Jews" in the film appear more as a historical absence, than narrative presence; a meaningless signifier for a vernacular thriller, much like the meaningless cabalistic signifiers discussed previously. *Holocaust 2* demonstrates an ambivalent sympathy for the Holocaust victims themselves – Dorothea is clearly insane, and the other members of the cartel we see are focused on nothing but vengeance – and yet the film seems to suggest, by both its full Italian title and the frequent use of flashbacks to scenes in the camps, that their experiences and memories are what made them insane. Dorothea, in particular, comes across like a tragic villain from an Italian opera: her concentration camp trauma explains her desire for revenge, but her "Otherness" (read "Jewishness"), like with Helga Ulmann in *Deep Red*, imbues her with special powers, like mesmerism. Likewise ambivalent is the figure of "victim" Lorenzo; while he himself is innocent of any wrong doings (to either Lucilla or Dorothea), he is made to suffer because of the sins of his father, a concentration camp doctor who experimented on children.

Antonio Bido's *The Cat's Victims* on the other hand makes the Jewish absence more explicit and more ironic. Someone is murdering the members of the jury at the murder trial of Pasquale Ferrante (Franco Citti) who always claimed he was innocent. In fact, the murders start around the time Ferrante escaped from prison. And yet, Ferrante not only still claims he is innocent of the original murder he was charged with, but denies all involvement with the current spate of murders. Amateur detective Lukas Karman (Corrado Pani) and his girlfriend Mara (Paola Tedesco) discover that all of the victims came from Padua, and all were involved in the denouncing of a Jewish man and his family to the Nazis. While the denounced man survived, along with his young son, the rest of his family were murdered in the camps. The man in question turns out to be the Judge who proceeded over the Ferrante trial (the irony in all of this, at the filmic level, is that that Judge is played by Giuseppe Addobbati, an actor who worked extensively at Cinecitta during the Fascist period). While Karman thinks he has this case solved (the police in *gialli* are usually useless at solving murders), it turns out that the worst thing the Judge actually did was manipulate the jury selection to see the faces of all who denounced him and was satisfied by how sad and pathetic their lives turned out to be. But the Judge's son, Carlo, was not so satisfied, and it turns out *he* was the real killer, punishing those his father would not.

The evidence which enables Karman to figure out that the Judge was the young Jewish man denounced to the Nazis was when the amateur detective spotted the Judge entering a synagogue, however, when we see that moment earlier in the film, there is no indication that the building the Judge entered was a *shul*, it just appears to be a non-descript municipal building. Having already established that the character is a judge, the assumption made, at the time this occurs in the film, is that that building in question was a court-house. It is only in the denouement of the film, when Karman gives his explanation of how he put all the pieces together that we discover that the building was a synagogue. With so little actual Jewish

content when Jewish characters or icons are used in these films, *The Cat's Victims* is unique in actually demonstrating an awareness that Jews attend synagogues.

Conclusions

So what are we to make of *The Cat's Victims* and *Holocaust 2*? On the one hand, they are the only films of this genre which avail themselves to a discussion of Jewish issues, namely the Holocaust, albeit superficially. And yet, in both films, the Jew is revealed to be the killer (or at least the organizer of the murders). The key here is ambivalence: the *giallo* is an inherently ambivalent form, as are perhaps all vernacular cinemas. On the one hand, these Jewish characters are murders, and stand alongside other murderous "Others" in the *giallo* like homosexuals, lesbians, transvestites and pederast priests. In the case of *Holocaust 2*'s Dorothea, she is even given mystical or magical powers of hypnotism to further underline her "Otherness", like Helga Ulmann's psychic abilities. The difference between many of the *giallo*'s monstrous "Others" and Dorothea and Carlo is how their monstrousness was created by a past trauma. Most *giallo* killers are haunted by some past trauma; it is what motivates them to kill. While much psychoanalytical hay might be made from how these films recognize the popular Freudian perspective on the significance of one's early childhood shaping adult behaviour, and while such theories are popular enough to be potentially recognized by the films' vernacular audiences, would these audiences actually care about such motivations? These two (and a small handful of other *giallo* killers) are not responsible for their past traumas. And these traumas almost ameliorate their monstrosity. But how is the vernacular audience to read these traumas?

These movies are thirty to forty years old, made (predominantly) in the early 1970s. The characters are approximately in their 30s and 40s, which means the characters would have been born between 1930 and 1950. If the past trauma these films' killers experienced was in childhood, or experienced by their parents, doing the math, we find many of these past traumas occurring during World War Two or under Mussolini's Fascist rule. The films' audiences are likely to be approximately the same age as the characters, so they would have had either early childhood memories of the war, or else be more than familiar with their own parents' experiences. Are these films reflecting the more cultural explanation of contemporary (1970s) Italian disassociation in light of the results of Fascism, military defeat (consider how many of the audience members, or their parents, would have been soldiers during the war, or Partisans), and post-war reconstruction? While these films clearly state a "murder is wrong" moral message, the reason for the murders is almost noble. Bido's film makes explicit what the other *gialli* imply: that the real past trauma is not about fathers raising daughters to be boys, or watching your brother fall to his death trying to rescue a little girl's doll, or even witnessing your crazy mother kill your father. The real past traumas are historical ones, including the complicacy with the Nazis and the destruction of Italy's Jewish population. And this trauma has been haunting Italians ever since.

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Mikel J. Koven

Silence and Cry. Judaism and Homosexuality in the Works of Julian Stryjkowski (1905-1996) and Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000)

Laura Quercioli Mincer

Abstract

The homosexual experience has often been considered one of the most radical and potentially devastating for the existing social order. Achieving a positive queer identity becomes even more complex when connected with the "deviation" par excellence of being Jewish. The parallel between the figure of the Jew and that of the homosexual might not be a novelty in literature, but the Jew and the homosexual were often understood as antithetical figures. Julian Stryjkowski (1905–1996) and Giorgio Bassani (1916–2000) provided a unique perspective on homosexuality in a Jewish context. Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro* [The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles] and Stryjkowski's *Milczenie* [Silence] raise the question of whether solidarity between the two essential "others" in European culture, the Jew and the homosexual, is possible.

The parallel between the figure of the Jew and that of the homosexual is not a novelty in literature; we owe one of its first analyses to the German scholar Hans Mayer.[1] In Mayer's view, the Jew and the homosexual are two paradigms of exclusion that stand on antithetical positions. The homosexual Antonio and the Jew Shylock and their cruel antagonism in the *Merchant of Venice* are the most famous literary example of this condition. Their otherness does not facilitate the creation of solidarity bonds between them. What connects them is only their *negativity* for the outside world. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, with the definitive segregation and the exclusion of the "others" that got under way in Europe in the first years of the nineteenth century, the homosexual began to be more and more often identified with the Jew.[2]

Scientific racism and nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century only crystallized the stereotypes and conspiracy theories already prevalent in the dominating discourse. The process of defining Jews as hybrids went hand in hand with their characterisation as a

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[1] See Mayer, Hans (1975): *Aussenseiter*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp [*Outsiders. A Study in Life and Letters*, transl. Denis M. Sweet, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1982].

[2] As it is still very much the case in present day Poland. See for example Graff, Agnieszka: 'Gej, czyli Żyd.' In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24-25 June 2006, pp. 24-5.

"damned race" and a political threat. Describing Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, Ann Pellegrini writes that "the feminization of the Jewish male body was so frequent a theme in this period that Jewishness – more precisely the Jewishness of Jewish men – became as much a category of gender as of race"[3]. Julian Stryjkowski (1905-1996) and Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000) are probably the only Jewish European post Second World War writers to face the issue of homosexuality inside the Jewish world. It is a central theme in Bassani's *Gli occhiali d'oro* [The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles], published in 1958, and in Stryjkowski's *Milczenie* [Silence]*,* published in 1993.

The question I will try to answer is whether, in these novels, there really does exist a connection between Jewish and homosexual identity, and whether we can recognize a chance for solidarity between them. In my opinion, the ambiguous answer to the question of homosexuality that these two very different writers provide is indeed connected with their rejection of Judaism. Their troubled identification with Jewishness corresponds here to the impossibility of accepting sexual diversity; their problem with homosexuality is deeply intertwined with Jewish self-hate. Bassani tells the story of a non-Jewish medical doctor in the fascist Ferrara in the period after the passing of the anti-Semitic racial laws in 1938, questioning the possibility of solidarity among outsiders, while Stryjkowski raises the issue of accepting the "Difference Inside the Self". Both writers face a similar problem: the acceptance of diversity, be it internal or external. However, for the homosexual Jew the question is more dramatic and more crucial. The issue of procreation in Judaism is probably even more central than in Christianity. In the Jewish tradition, which defines Jews as "the fewest of all people", family and progeny enjoy an ethical centrality that has perhaps few parallels in other religions. In this respect, homosexuality constitutes a threat to the Jewish identity in all its aspects; the lack of descendants can even put a person outside the Jewish context.

Bassani's answer to the question of a possible empathy between the outcasts of the society is a negative one. He seems to echo Hans Mayer's bitter conclusion that "[t]here is no coalition among the Different ones, and for sure there is no solidarity".[4] Stryjkowski, however, in his novel *Silence,* succeeds in showing a possible, albeit, difficult way to bring peace between the two identities.

In fact, Stryjkowski develops a notion of a multiple identity that would bring together his hidden homosexuality and his openly exhibited Jewish identity. Instead of focusing on the demise of the world of his childhood, a world that would never accept his diversity, Stryjkowski links here his personal sexual liberation with the concrete and symbolic liberation of the Jewish people, that is, the return to the Land of Israel. The originality of the novel can be seen in the way the author uses elements of Jewish traditional culture to build a new, liberated identity of his protagonist.

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[3] Pellegrini, Ann (1997): 'Whiteface Performances: "Race", Gender, and Jewish Bodies.' In: Boyarin, Daniel and Boyarin, Jonathan (eds.): *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, cit*.* by Levine, Andrea (2003): 'The White Negro: Norman Mailer's Racial Bodies.' In: MELUS, vol. 28, no. 2; see also Gilman, Sander L. (1986): *Jewish Self-Hatred. Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 159 ff.

[4] Mayer, *Outsiders*, p. 281. An analysis on how homosexuality, "the quintessential Fascist *bête noire*" would be used by Bassani as "logical metaphor of the Jewish condition during the Ventennio" is in to be found in: Schneider, Marilyn (1986): *Vengeance of the Victim. History and Symbol in Giorgio Bassani's Fiction*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, pp. 91-2.

Both Stryjkowski and Bassani place their narrating "I" in the time after the extermination of both the European Jewry and of thousands of homosexuals. In this way, the narrated events from before the catastrophe seem as an increasingly distant past. "Time has begun to diminish … the number of those who remember"[5] is Bassani's opening phrase in *The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles.* Stryjkowski's narrator, too, complains about the receding memory about the world from before the Holocaust: "How phoney it sounds now that I write it. Who cares today about Vladimir Zhabotynsky? Who cares about the divisions of Jewish boys and girls, marching in the Jewish quarters?"[6] The plots of both novels unfold at nearly the same time: 1919, creating not only a temporal, but also a psychological distance between the narrating "I" and the narrated events, or between the narrator and the "implied author"[7]. The stories in both novels take place in a world half-erased by oblivion and indifference, where events unfold half way between waking and dream-like suggestion.

The protagonist of *The Gold Rimmed Spectacles*, the Venetian Doctor Fadigati, is a highly respected specialist, living in the fascistic and overly-devout Ferrara. "The ambiguous, or at least unusual, use he made of his evenings" (p. 13) is accepted with high-minded tolerance: "Knowing meant understanding, not being curious any longer, letting the matter drop" (p. 21). The social integration of the homosexual doctor, who declares himself to be "apolitical by nature" is sanctioned by the Fascist Party Membership Card that is handed to him personally by the Federal Secretary (see p. 234).[8] Another sign of Fadigati's acceptance of the dominant values and, in particular, of the model of masculinity proposed by Romantic ideology, is reflected in his love for Wagner. He listens to his music, in an almost religious reverence, during the long, solitary bachelor's evenings. The idyll between the middle-aged doctor and the local bourgeoisie, with whom Fadigati fully identifies himself, ends abruptly in 1938. That year, Fadigati is carried away by a masochistic relationship with a much younger pimp, and he publicly demonstrates his fragile and "monstrous" diversity. Meanwhile, the promulgation of the anti-Semitic Racial Laws forces the narrator – a well-off student whose Jewishness has not yet been revealed – to a painful acknowledgement of his own, imposed, diversity. A short friendship between the two follows, which ends with Fadigati's suicide. Some critics interpreted this friendship in terms of solidarity. Neiger, for example, saw the protagonists as "two harmless and deprived, two offended creatures, unable to free themselves from the heavy burden of their diversity" who "meet, accept and seek each other out, console each other".[9] Other interpretations, however, point to the dominance of the discourse of the homosexual over that of the Jewish exclusion:

> The dominant discourse – that of Gentile heterosexuals – is completely internalized by
> Fadigati, with the logical consequence of his suicide, and almost completely internalized

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[5] Bassani, Giorgio (1958): *Gli occhiali d'oro*, Torino: Einaudi [*The Gold- Rimmed Spectacles*, transl. Isabel Quigly, London: Faber & Faber, 1960, p. 7. Page numbers will be quoted in the main text].

[6] Stryjkowski, Julian (1993): *Milczenie*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie. Page numbers will be quoted in the main text. If not specified differently, translations are mine.

[7] See Kroha, Lucienne (1990): 'The Structures of Silence: Re-Reading Giorgio Bassani's "Gli occhiali d'oro".' In: *The Italianist*, vol. 10, p. 74.

[8] On Wagner's representativeness for the new masculinity and on Theodor Herzl's predilection for this musician, see: Boyarin, Daniel (1997): *Unheroic Conduct: the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Berkeley-Los Angeles: California University Press, pp. 73 ff.

[9] Neiger, Ada (1995): 'Modelli di difformità. Ebreo e omosessuale negli Occhiali d'oro di Giorgio Bassani.' In: Carlà, Marisa and De Angelis, Luca (eds.): *L'ebraismo nella letteratura italiana del Novecento*, Palermo: Palumbo, p. 105.

by the narrator, with the result that the latter's attempts at constructing an alternative (Jewish) discourse are sporadic and subjective, and are thus doomed to failure.[10]

Both the homosexual and the Jew in *The Gold Rimmed Spectacles* are shown not as passive victims, but as active accomplices of the Fascist mentality that will soon crush them. They are actually, to quote Mirna Cicioni again, "part of the Fascist regime, conniving with it, helping to create its norms".[11] Equally radical is the interpretation proposed by Lucienne Kroha, according to whom the young narrator, because of his emotional passivity, participates in the doctor's marginalization and final suicide.[12]

Actually, the protagonists incessantly show their inability to express loyalty, the inability that could have its roots in their profound lack of self-acceptance. Not only does Fadigati internalize and share the contempt that the Ferrara bourgeoisie feels for him: the narrator himself experiences the same hatred of his own – Jewish – identity that the doctor feels towards his own, in his words, "bestiality" (p. 320). The following paragraph vividly illustrates the main character's failure to create positive Jewish coordinates, and his inability to revolt. Here the narrating "I", on the very day that the racial laws are promulgated, learns of his friend Bottecchiari's decision to become a member of the Fascist Party:

> I felt born in me, with unspeakable loathing, the Jew's ancient atavistic hatred for all that was Christian and Catholic: in fact, what was *goy … Goy, goìm*; how shameful, how humiliating, how disgusting to express myself so! Yet I managed to do it, like any eastern European Jew who had never lived outside the ghetto. In a more or less distant future, I was now certain that they, the *goìm*, would force us to live there again, in the medieval district we had emerged from only seventy or eighty years earlier. Heaped up behind the gates like so many terrified beasts, we should never escape again (pp. 110-11).

Here the legitimate anger for his friend's betrayal is transformed into a self-hating identification with a despicable "eastern European Jew". The only inner impulse of real revolt turns immediately into a very acute perception of the Jewish powerlessness.

Nothing similar to this terrible premonition can be found in Stryjkowski's novel. *Silence* is in fact a long *stream of consciousness,* where the author proceeds along a much more difficult path, seeking to free himself from the "curse" (p. 23) of homosexuality. Zionism, Communism, sexual intercourse with women and psychoanalysis are for him nothing but desperate attempts to escape from "nature". Though the story takes place in the years immediately following the regained Polish independence, in a period of increasing nationalism and anti-Semitism that would reach their peak in the 1930s, the description of any kind of opposition and conflict between Jews and non-Jews is almost absent. Politics is kept in the background; anti-Semitism and Jewish marginalisation have apparently nothing in common with the main character's despair and his profound inability to accept himself. At the centre of the narrative is his fight with God and with his alter-ego, his friend and rival Jakub (Jacob) Wald. A Jacob who, unlike the biblical one, awaits his defeat and will not wring a blessing out of the mysterious angel.

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[10] Cicioni, Mirna (1986): 'Insiders and Outsiders: Discourses of Oppression in Giorgio Bassani's Gli occhiali d'oro.' In: *Italian Studies*, vol. XLI, p. 101.

[11] Ibid., p. 114.

[12] Kroha, Lucienne (2000): 'Judaism and Manhood in the Novels of Giorgio Bassani.' In: Di Napoli, Thomas B. (ed.): *The Italian Jewish Experience,* supplement to *Forum Italicum*, New York: Stony Brook, p. 187.

A "dualistic friendship" (p. 8) unites the anonymous narrator, a Jew and a Communist, working as a translator and writer, and Jakub, his handsome schoolmate, and a Zionists. Jakub is "the measure and the model" of all things (p. 20) and the protagonist is desperately in love with him. Jakub's silence (a silence that means the denial of his own impulses) is broken only by his occasional and unexpected letters to the narrator, and by a deplorable final confession. His silence is in contrast with the uninterrupted monologue of the main protagonist, who continuously complains, groans and writhes in agony.

In this story, only partially autobiographical, we see an endless stream of departures, farewells, and breaks that closely recall the life of the author himself, as well as that of part of Polish Jewry. Stryjkowski personally explored nearly all the political and existential options then opened to the Polish Jewry. He was a Zionist and then rejected Zionism, he was a Communist and then abandoned Communism, he discarded Judaism and then returned to it; he lived in Poland, in the Soviet Union, in Italy, he travelled in Europe, the United States, and Israel. In his semi-autobiographical novel, the one to depart is Jakub, who leaves for Palestine soon after the end of secondary school. The narrator breaks with Zionism then and becomes a member of the underground Communist movement. Soon after his father dies, he notes:

> I came back for my father's funeral. He knew everything. When I would dress as a woman and feel happy he would shout at me … I took revenge: The funeral ended up with a scandal in the Jewish cemetery. Being a Communist, I refused to recite the *kaddish* (p. 19).

Soon afterwards, we witness the departure of the protagonist's mother; she leaves Poland forever to join her younger son in Palestine. The narrator is, consequently, expelled from his Communist cell because of the Zionism of his family. Despite that, he is imprisoned as a Communist and finds himself "isolated from the world and from the Communists in jail" (p. 22). Once set free, everything around him is "like a desert" (ibid.).What remains in his life is only Jakub. The narrator, who is still unable to openly admit his love for him, becomes increasingly afraid that Jakub is a threat to his psychological stability:

> I was feeling bad. I was beginning to believe in dreams. Jakub was digging underground. I am his slave forever. This is my doom. I was acting as if I did not know what we were fighting for. No! No! Jakub was a stranger to me! God Almighty! Set me free from your curse (p. 23).

His mother's death finds the protagonist dried up, drained of all ideological furore, a solitary fighter against his own passions: "an ascetic, a saint" (p. 39). But his journey to Palestine for his mother's final farewell brings him to a nearly magical solution of his conflicts: not only liberation from parental authority, but also the acceptance of his own sexuality and Jakub's coming out. A visit to the intensely desired friend seems one of the dreams that the protagonist, some time before, admitted he had "begun to believe in". The formerly extraordinarily handsome young man, not yet 30 years old, has been transformed into a trembling old man because of a mysterious accident, and is married to a monstrous dwarf. He clumsily hands the narrator a folder containing press clippings and school keepsakes:

> A letter fell down. My only letter, written after leaving school, about our separation. Like two lovers. And my picture. On its back the date and one word… My mind was clear again. I would not believe my own eyes (p. 69).

Stryjkowski does not explain why it was so important that Jakub kept the letter, nor which was the word written on the back of the narrator's portrait. The letter, the picture, and the unspoken word are testimonies of a sentiment which, although shared, remains untold and impossible to fulfil. Soon after leaving Jakub's house, the protagonist meets a man and, for the first time, is drawn into an erotic adventure.

The Jewish coordinates of Stryjkowski's character – even if they contribute to his oppression and guilt feelings – offer him at the same time a mythological framework into which he is also able to inscribe his way to redemption. Jakub-Jacob was not able to break his silence, to accept his own homosexuality, and failed in his solitary fight against God and men. But the narrator himself does not perish in this cruel battle; he finds himself finally ready to meet the stranger, the mysterious man "from the other side of the river". The stranger, in whose company the narrator finally succeeds in reading the blank spaces of his destiny, parts from him with a farewell that recalls "the dove set free from Noa's Ark" (p. 83): a sign of hope and regained peace.

From this perspective, it is easy to understand why the protagonist's liberation can only take place in Israel, in Jerusalem. "If a Jew can recover his sanity thanks to the air of the Promised Land, then Jerusalem smells of freedom" (p. 70), he repeats several times. Alessandro Amenta is surely correct when he notes the importance of emigration for homosexual Poles: "far from Poland, the Pole may mature a psychological distance that allows him to challenge himself and to redesign his identity thanks to a comparison with new ways of life referred to culture".[13] At the same time, it is necessary to remember that the land of Israel does not only mean geographical distance from Poland; for a Jew, this land, in its symbolic and concrete dimension, is a source of positive identification, the link with thousands of years of history and battles with God. In the land of the Jews, free from the severe cultural restraints of the Polish society, Stryjkowski's narrating "I" is finally capable of regaining the images of his own tradition and mythology. In this panorama, he can finally locate the dove announcing the end of the deluge.

Hans Mayer, analysing the figure of Shylock, identified him as an essential symbol of the failed Jewish emancipation. The moneylender of the Rialto bridge, as the empitome of the Diasporic Jew, stands in front of the choice between emancipation and Jewish messianism. This alternative is one between Auschwitz and Israel, that is, the German bourgeois-emancipation, which renounced the Jewish diversity and ended in Auschwitz, and the acknowledgement of diversity, symbolised by Israel.[14] This Jewish alternative, however, might extend also to other kinds of alterity and, as Stryjkowski and Bassani make clear, is also at the heart of a homosexual identity. For Auschwitz means the nightmare of the deceptive homogeneity of the human race, where "each and every outsider became a provocation"[15], and Israel means the acknowledgement of one's own existential diversity – and also that of others.

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[13] Amenta, Alessandro (2008): *Il discorso dell'Altro. La costruzione delle identità omosessuali nella narrativa polacca del Novecento*, Roma: Nuova Editrice Universitaria, p. 100.
[14] Hans Mayer, *Outsiders*, p. 265.
[15] Ibid., p.18.

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