Cover photo: Akhalsikhe, South West Georgia—once home to a flourishing Jewish community. While leading a group of Israeli travelers in Georgia, we found ourselves in a restaurant with locals who came for a class reunion. Once they heard that we are Israelis, they related memories from their former Jewish classmates, and informed us where they now live in Israel. — Chen Bram (See page 31)
I'm very pleased to present no. 22 of haTannin, the UF Center for Jewish Studies' newsletter. Our intention in this issue is to significantly boost the content-driven quality of haTannin. The purpose of doing so is to give our own community both on and off campus a sense of the discipline of Jewish studies and its subfields by highlighting the work of our faculty, by presenting interviews with distinguished visitors, by demonstrating our efforts at teaching new subjects and, of course, by highlighting the achievements of some of our students. Almost everything featured here would not have been possible without the help of our many donors and the fact that we do so much, speaks well to the enormous support the Center has received within the community. There are far too many achievements that support made possible than I could highlight here, but let me at least mention a few recent developments. The Center's latest endowed professorship was made possible through a gift from Buddy Shorstein, a long time supporter of UF. Ken Wald, a political scientist and former director of the Center for Jewish Studies, was appointed as the first Samuel R. "Bud" Shorstein Professor of American Jewish Culture & Society. I'm also delighted to report that through gifts from Jack Price, Norman Braman, a grant from the Center for the Humanities and the Public Sphere, the Price Library of Judaica Endowment and a commitment from the Jerome A. Yavits Foundation the Center can now purchase the entire run of what is arguably the most important historical Jewish newspaper, the New York Yiddish daily, Forverts. Having these microfilms in the Price Library opens up a world of possible research on the modern Jewish experience for faculty and students alike. Also, we are very grateful to the Benjamin Greenbaum Family Visiting Professor Endowment and the Grass Chair for making possible a one year visiting appointment of Professor Vassili Schedrin to teach Russian Jewish history at UF. My thanks go to a number of our endowments, a generous grant from the Jewish Council for North Central Florida and the Shorstein and Levin families in Jacksonville that made possible the enormously successful "Playing For Peace" concert of Jewish, Arab and Iranian music last spring, featuring the renowned Iraqi-Israeli musician Yair Dalal. It’s events like that that highlight one of the most valuable contributions centers for Jewish studies make to the cultural life not only to our campus but also to our communities. Thanks also to the Posen Foundation which made possible the international conference “The Future of an Illusion: Israeli Secularism in Comparative Perspective.” And one final note, The Price Library of Judaica is inaugurating its very own reading room which will house our rare books and will be used for public events and lectures.
Why study the Jewish Diaspora of Latin America?
The history of Jews in Spain and the Jewish diaspora of Latin America is central to any analysis of the origins of modernity and the development of modern political systems. This is especially true when you consider that the imperial expansion of Europe was responsible for the emergence of capitalism and attending forced labor systems (such as slavery) in the New World: the Spanish Conquest of America in the sixteenth century and subsequent development of global trade in commodities like sugar relied on mass genocide—whether of indigenous people or of African slaves—as an acceptable and normalized system of public policy. This process is neither easy to explain nor easy to accept. Many years ago when I first began teaching at a small liberal arts college, I found that examining the history of Jews allowed students to understand the kinds of values that enabled and justified broad uses of violence. They didn’t do so overnight or upon arrival in America; the logic of racism, it laid the groundwork for extending that logic to people and places that would come under Spanish Catholic jurisdiction and control. What you get when you trace the history of Jews from the time of the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 and their dispersion throughout Latin America over the next four centuries is a history of how racial thinking evolved in tandem with political struggle. You see how it managed to reassert itself in the most liberal or progressive currents of thought, even when it came to the secular revolutionary ideas of the Mexican Revolution or the Marxist state in Cuba.

Isn’t the history of Latin American Jews a relatively new field?
Yes, we start in the thirteenth century with major shifts in Catholic doctrine leading to the rise of the Spanish Inquisition and end with the centrality of anti-Semitism to the ideology of protecting “Western Christian Civilization” that justified state terror during the Dirty War in Argentina. As early as the thirteenth century, Spanish Christians came to believe that the rite of baptism and Christian conversion did not necessarily transform the human soul anymore; instead, it was thought that one’s identity could be fixed in one’s blood. Belief in biological fixity of difference, superiority or inferiority, launched not only the logic of racism, but it laid the groundwork for extending that logic to people and places that would come under Spanish Catholic jurisdiction and control. What you get when you trace the history of Jews from the time of the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 and their dispersion throughout Latin America over the next four centuries is a history of how racial thinking evolved in tandem with political struggle. You see how it managed to reassert itself in the most liberal or progressive currents of thought, even when it came to the secular revolutionary ideas of the Mexican Revolution or the Marxist state in Cuba.

So your class on the history of the Jews examines the emergence of concepts of racial difference?
Yes, we start in the thirteenth century with major shifts in Catholic doctrine leading to the rise of the Spanish Inquisition and end with the centrality of anti-Semitism to the ideology of protecting “Western Christian Civilization” that justified state terror during the Dirty War in Argentina. As early as the thirteenth century, Spanish Christians came to believe that the rite of baptism and Christian conversion did not necessarily transform the human soul anymore; instead, it was thought that one’s identity could be fixed in one’s blood. Belief in biological fixity of difference, superiority or inferiority, launched not only the logic of racism, but it laid the groundwork for extending that logic to people and places that would come under Spanish Catholic jurisdiction and control. What you get when you trace the history of Jews from the time of the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 and their dispersion throughout Latin America over the next four centuries is a history of how racial thinking evolved in tandem with political struggle. You see how it managed to reassert itself in the most liberal or progressive currents of thought, even when it came to the secular revolutionary ideas of the Mexican Revolution or the Marxist state in Cuba.

Identity is knowing that most Jews arrived in Cuba as a result of British and French colonization of Middle Eastern countries and the simultaneous rise of pogroms in Eastern Europe in the first thirty years of the early twentieth century. Although most Jews were Sephardic, there were also a lot of Ashkenazim as well, making for very lively cultural exchanges and cultural fusions in places like Santa Clara, Santiago and Havana. In 1959, just over 95% of Cuban Jews left the island, long before the confrontations with the United States began and Fidel Castro consequently espoused Communism.

Why? Most scholars give the same answer: in the late 1950s, the hated dictator Fulgencio Batista made himself a major patron of the Sephardic Jewish community in Havana and that automatically made all Jews politically suspect once Batista fell—or so they assumed. That said, I don’t think we have studied the experience of Cuban Jews enough to know the answer.

Why isn’t there more scholarship on Cuban Jews?
How many Jews are there in Cuba today? Are they a focus of your own research? Today, there are about 1,400 or so Jews living in Havana. Arab Israelis, a synagogue in Old Havana with which I am most familiar, considers itself Orthodox but its leader is a rabbi-in-training and very few members actually know how to read Hebrew or know the prayers by heart. There is also a certain degree of guilt and anxiety. I think, among some older Jews who, on the one hand, might have been complicit in denying their religion publicly and now want to talk about that and, on the other hand, want to encourage young people—bejudas muertos (the new Jews)—to fully embrace Judaism. Talking about hard times now past seems, for some, to hold people back.

As for my own research, I have UF’s Jewish Studies program to thank for helping me so far. Funds that I received last summer allowed me to buy the equipment I needed to conduct several oral histories with two older Jews and one very young “new Jew.” I don’t know yet how they will contribute to a future scholarly project but collecting sources, learning my material any way I can has always been a fruitful modus operandi for me when it comes to researching Cuba. I am not Jewish myself, but this is actually an advantage, I think, since when I talk to Jewish Cubans on the island, they tell me that because I am not “legit,” they have nothing to prove to me and they can say anything they want without feeling pena (shame).

What have your informants taught you about being Jewish in Cuba?

I have a close friend named Samuel Weinstein in Havana who said to me on a trip this October, Lidy, aquí ser judío es saber que la sobrevivencia es fundamental. Tu haces lo que puedas, no lo que quisieras. (Lidy, to be Jewish here is to know that survival is essential. You do what you can, not what you would like to do.) I think that all Cubans fight battles on a daily basis because they have no resources and because the economic and political policies of the Communist state create what island Cubans call “the other Embargo,” a complement to the United States’ fifty-year-old embargo on Cuba. The combination of the two makes life extremely austere, a constant struggle to gain and retain the resources necessary just to get by. Those who decide to identify as Jews and effectively recover or become Jewish people must fight the same battles that all Cubans do but they take on even more. Their styles and forms of being Jewish are as vibrant as they are innovative; they are the people who, in denying their religion publicly and now want to talk about that and, on the other hand, want to encourage young people—bejudas muertos (the new Jews)—to fully embrace Judaism.

For many years, attempts to commemorate a distinctively Palestinian national past by the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel—especially the commemoration of 1948—were carefully monitored by the state. Arab teachers with a nationalist orientation were discovered. Another strictly monitored sphere has been political commemoration. For the military government officers and the Shabak (General Security Services) in the 1950s and 1960s, the celebration of Israel’s Independence Day was the litmus test that enabled the state to rank Arabs according to levels of obedience. Every year, all state institutions in Arab towns and villages were required to perform festive ceremonies and raise the Israeli flag. Police informants were instructed to report the atmosphere in their villages on the Day of Independence. Even the end of military government in 1966 did not immediately change this policy. Since the 1970s Arab citizens are not forced to celebrate Israel’s Independence Day, still, authorities show strong concern for how Arabs behave on that day.

On June 17, 2005 some 150 people, most of them Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, marched from the old prison in Acre to the Muslim cemetery in the city, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the execution of three Palestinian youths by British authorities. For Palestinians the three are national heroes, the first who gained the status of Palestinian national martyrs. The marchers met a group of Jewish protesters, waving Israeli flags and signs with the word traitors on them. From a Jewish Israeli point of view, this commemoration was outrageous. The three men had been sentenced to death for their part in the massacres of Jews in Hebron and in Tsfat/Safed in August 1929, an event which became a constitutive myth of victimhood in Zionist narrative. Subsequent short reports about the parade in the Hebrew media sparked furious reactions. The controversy divided even Arab and Jewish supporters of the Communist Party, who view differently the events of 1929.

This event, although low in scale and in public attention, was a faithful display of the complicated dynamics which shape the public memory of the Arab citizens of Israel (around 16% of Israeli citizens). Not only was the event interpreted in diametrically opposing versions but from the reaction of the Jewish demonstrators and commentators in the Hebrew news websites it seemed as if the parade was their first exposure ever to the Arab version of the story. Under the asymmetrical memory relations in Israel, the Jewish Zionist narrative has been heavily backed by the state apparatus while the Palestinian narrative has been excluded from the education system and has been produced and maintained mainly in the private sphere, and more recently by various elements of civil society. Furthermore, since the state was established, the 1950 execu-

TAMIR SORÈK
Associate Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies

The Struggle for the Past

Tämär Sörk is an Associate Professor of Israel Studies and Sociology at the University of Florida. He is the author of Arab Success in a Jewish State: The Imaginative Escape (Cambridge University Press, 2007) and published extensively on Israeli society and Arab-Jewish relations in Israel. Currently he is an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow at the Humboldt University in Berlin, where he is writing a monograph on Palestinian commemoration in Israel.
The implications of the Intifada on Arab citizens, and especially by abating existential anxieties and increasing the collective self-confidence of Jewish society in Israel. The Oslo process intensified this dynamic and introduced some “post-conflict” attitudes among the Israeli elite, who adopted the view in the late 1990s that the conflict had basically ended. At the same time, Arab society gained confidence with the emergence of new circles of educated elites, which led to the founding of an independent Arabic press in the 1980s, formalized leadership, and massive commemorative rituals intertwined with political protest.

The relative decline in the level of existential anxiety on the Jewish side during the 1990s was interrupted with the eruption of the second Intifada in 2000. Historian Tom Segev, who celebrated post-Zionism in a book published shortly before the Intifada, wrote: “Palestinian terrorism seems to push Israelis back into the Zionist womb.” Not so for Palestinian-Israelis whose socio-political developments have made it impossible to restore the old practices of disciplining memory.

The implications of the Intifada on Arab citizens, and especially the events of October 2000, were equally dramatic. During late September and early October 2000, with the beginning of the Palestinian uprising, tensions spread inside the 1967 Green Line, and the country witnessed a wave of demonstration, stone-throwing, blocked roads, and police gunfire against demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators. Inside Israel, police killed thirteen Palestinian demonstrators.

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The past decade witnessed an intensification of the struggles over the representation of the past between Arabs and Jews in Israel. These struggles have taken place in diverse spheres, including the Knesset (Israeli parliament), academia, the Hebrew and Arabic media, the education system, the judiciary, and on the popular level.

In recent years I have taken a close look at these struggles and analyzed them. I have investigated the elements of collective memories in both communities, how each side sees the memories of the other side, and how the public meanings of past events are contested or negotiated.

The main front in this context has been the struggle over the representation of the 1948 war, named by Jewish Israelis as the War of Independence and the Nakba (catastrophe in Arabic) by the Palestinians. One indication for the growing importance of this event is the sharp increase in the ratio of Arab citizens who reported that they have ever participated in a commemoration of the Nakba from 17% in 2003 to almost a third in 2009 (according to survey of the sociologists Sammy Smooha). These commemorations alarmed many on the Jewish side. On May 8, 2008, a group of Jewish activists for the first time confronted the annual Return Parade, the central event of Nakba Day among the Palestinian citizens of Israel. Several hundred people came to a massive picnic at the Jewish community of Tzori. The Nakba parade route was obstructed since, on its way to the destroyed village of Safuriye, it went through the community, which had been established in 1949 on Safuriye land. The event deteriorated into a violent confrontation between the Arab participants and the police. There were injuries on both sides, and 31 Arab demonstrators were arrested. These new counter-demonstrations signaled to Arab citizens that they are approaching a very sensitive nerve in the collective ethos of Jewish citizens.

Grass roots activism has not been the only sphere of memory struggles in recent years. Politicians, whether in office or aspiring to, have made public declarations which have the potential to alter Palestinian citizens from organizing or participating in commemorative events. For example, on December 3, 2007, the Israeli Knesset assembly gathered for a special festive session to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the UN decision to partition Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Arab Members of the Knesset boycotted this event, provoking furious reactions from some Jewish members. Two days later, representatives of the Arab municipalities informed the Israeli government that they would not take part in the celebrations of Israel's 60th Independence Day: “We are not part of these festivals because, in our view, the State of Israel was founded on the ruins of the Palestinian people and because of the expulsion of 80%, if not more, of the Palestinian residents who lived then in Palestine.”

Following this decision the public security minister and former head of the Shasak, Avi Dichter, declared, “Whoever cries about the Nakba year after year shouldn’t be surprised if they actually have a Nakba eventually.” He called on Israeli-Arab leaders to reconsider their decision not to take part in the celebrations. In the same context, the minister attacked the mere use of the term Nakba, and argued that it harms the Arab public: “From the Nakba they will not get any better education, from the Nakba they will not get better economic opportuni-ties.”

Recognizing that the authorities’ ability to discipline commemoration of the Nakba is restricted by the rule of law, right-wing politicians have been involved in recurrent attempts to outlaw Nakba commemorations. In July 2009 the Knesset approved a bill, which the Minister of Finance is authorized to halt public funding for organizations (read: Arab municipalities) who support the “negation of Israel as a Jewish state” (read: mourn the Day of Independence).

The examples presented above illustrate the importance that both sides ascribe to the representation of the past for legitimizing their collective aspirations in the present. It is evident, as well, that popularly Zionist and Palestinian national narratives are considered as maintaining a zero-sum-game relationship. Namely, it is widely believed that empowerment of either the Israelis or the Palestinian narrative could only mean the undermining of the other. The representation of the past and the future dynamics of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel are closely connected and mutually dependent.

The examples presented above illustrate the importance that both sides ascribe to the representation of the past. It should not be noted that in this respect the State of Israel is hardly unique in its attempt to monitor and control counter hegemonic national narratives. The Chinese authorities, for example, ban the commemoration of the Tibetan uprising in Tibet; Turkish authorities have been very sensitive to the commemoration of the Armenian genocide on their territory; and even an established democracy such as France took actions to restrict the commemoration of the massacre of Algerian demonstrators in 1961. One factor that intensifies the struggle in the Israeli-Palestinian context is that Zionist and Palestinian national narratives are popularly considered as a zero-sum-game towards one another; empowering one undermines the other. But the future of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel hinges on finding a different way to look at one another’s past. Whether or not both groups are openly willing to acknowledge it, Jews and Arabs in Israel have been and are likely to remain closely connected and mutually dependent.

image Yamit Cohen/Shutterstock.com
The past two years have proved a productive time for the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica in terms of outreach and development. In addition to purchasing general Jewish studies materials that facilitate the teaching and research at the University of Florida, particularly its growing Holocaust program, we have also strengthened our reference collection with major, award-winning encyclopedias such as the Treo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, the Encyclopedia of Ottobots and Camps, and the five-volume Encyclopedias of Jews in the Islamic World and increased the number of e-books and online resources with key databases such as Jewish Life in America, 1945-1954, sources from the American Jewish Historical Society.

We have likewise added numerous, significant microfilm collections to our library in order to support the various research projects at UF and further bolster our reputation as an institution that holds important primary sources. Three recently added collections are particularly noteworthy: the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Jewish Problems in Palestine and the Middle East, 1917-1947, the British and American committee set up in 1946 to tackle the collection of Jewish historical materials from this seminal American periodicals on the Dreyfus case: the largest corpus outside the Making of Modern France, 66 reels of books, pamphlets and periodicals, and the Zion National Kosher Sausage Factory Haggadah from 1902. The Price Library owns around 500 Haggadot, a number of which are scarce and unusual, and we intend to produce an exhibition based on this fascinating collection in 2014.

The Price Library has recently mounted several exhibitions and hosted related events in order to engage greater awareness of our collection. Our first major exhibition, 30 Years of the Price Library, was mounted in March 2011 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Isser and Rae Price Judaica Library. This exhibit highlighted treasures from the collection and representative samples of our key collecting interests and strengths. The 30th anniversary was marked by an event to rededicate the library and thank the Price family for its ongoing support. This special program, held on March 6, 2011, was opened by UF President Bernard Machen.

In April 2012, the Price Library created an exhibition entitled Jewish Jacksonville which presented unique manuscripts from the recently donated Reverend Benjamin Safer collection (see f.14, 2013) and other archives received from donors in Jacksonville. The opening event featured keynote speaker, Marcia Jo Zerivitz, the founding executive director of the Jewish Museum of Florida, who spoke about Jewish Jacksonville within 250 years of Florida Jewish History. This well-received talk and exhibition resulted in a number of additional donations of Jewish related materials from Jacksonville.

A collaborative exhibition, Imagining Jerusalem, was mounted in November, 2012. On display were antique maps, the James and Adina Simmons Holy Land Map Collection alongside rare materials from the Price Library. Dr. Elizabeth Ross, UF Associate Professor of Art History, opened the exhibition with a talk entitled “Perspectives on a Holy City: Jerusalem in Antique Maps,” and Sharon Simmons spoke engagingly about her parents’ map collection and its significance. Imagining Jerusalem was a much admired exhibition and even inspired the donation from Mr. Patrick Reakes, Chair of Library West, of a rare collection of stereoscopic views of Palestine produced by Underwood & Underwood at the turn of the last century.

We are now in the process of creating an online exhibition entitled The Gathering Storm: Jewish Life in Germany and Eastern Europe in the 1930s based on a small selection of scarce, hidden materials housed in the libraries’ storage unit. These include hard-to-find copies of Jewish journals such as the ‘Ehenเดีกüt นั้นที่วัยเด็ก’ and the Gla gmeni żydowśki. The online exhibition will serve to demonstrate the importance of online exhibits for highlighting hidden collections in need of preservation digitization, and this study will be jointly presented at the Association of College and Research Libraries annual conference in April, 2013.

Together with our online exhibits, we are making great strides forward in developing our digital collections. The Judaica Library now owns a digital collection of over 300 items, which are arranged into 12 sub-collections. These items are gaining wide interest and have received over 200,000 “views” or “hits” since January 2011. The most popular items viewed include materials from the Benjamin Safer Collection, as well as other items in the Jewish Jacksonville collection. Also proving popular is a small, born-digital collection entitled the Leah Stupniker Collection, featuring the diary of a talented young girl who died on Ellis Island at the age of 14 and related documents and photographs. Copies of Leah’s Hebrew diary are held only at UF, The Hebrew Union College, Harvard University and the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem. The Leah collection is likewise gaining attention. The most commonly accessed
In 2012, the Price Library received a special collection from Gainesville residents Rener A. and Stephen M. Sperling (UF alumni), who donated the Benjamin Saper collection, which consists of papers belonging to UF Emeritus Professor of biochemistry, Dr. Edwin Safer’s kind donation of his grandfather’s manuscripts, the Safer family and keen supporters of South Florida Jewish history from Bruce and Stacey Goldberg, also part of the Stacey Goldring, also part of the Stephen M. Sperling (UF alumnus), Gainesville residents Renee A. and David Stirt, who is a retired MD and visual artist and printmaker, Dr. A. David Crown. The gift comprises a series of 26 prints on paper, each numbered, signed, and cabled by Dr. Crown. Each plate had a potential edition size of 50 prints; however, only a few prints of each image were ever produced. On the creation of the “In My Lifetime” Holocaust prints, Crown explains: “in 1939… I was 14 and a very rebellious teenager. I had a regular dispute with my father about the state of the world. I was in about the 30’s, about poverty, The Depression, anti-Semitism, and WWII and its aftermath and the mess my family’s generation had made of the world.” And I would vow in my lifetime, things will be different. They were; they were much worse.” The Holocaust prints as well as a set of the original plates will be housed in the Special Collections Department for exhibition and teaching purposes.

Other recent gifts to the Price Library include several hundred books, including children’s literature, by former UF professor Shalom Synagogue, Jacksonville, over 500 books, including some scarce and rare books, from the personal library of Rabbi Martin Sandberg of Jacksonville, a small collection of books donated by former Price Library director of the Center for Jewish Studies, Dr. Warren Bargad, and a small collection of scarce edition prayer-books and commentaries from Judi and Phil Siegel in Ocala.

The donation of Rabbi Jacob H. Kaplan’s Magic Lantern Slides of the Holy Land in 2007 by his niece, Beth Pagel, has resulted in the production of a splendid album dedicated to Kaplan’s early life, researched and produced by the Price Library’s long-time assistant, Emily Maden. Two presentation copies of the album have been created, one of which was presented as a gift to Ms. Pagel. The album is partly digitized, and will be fully available once its citations and references have been completed. The hardcopy will be available for consultation in the Special Collections Reading Room.

Other current projects include an ongoing needs assessment for our uncarded, scarce materials and the identification of sources of funding for their preservation, digitization and transfer. We are also undergoing a major shelf-shift to create a separate sections and to transfer scarce materials out of the open, circulating stacks. Going forward, we will continue to engage in outreach projects to engage wider audiences with the collection, to bring in material donations to boost our holdings, and to seek further support to purchase major collections such as the Fortsors and other notable historical and archival collections such as "Di Preise, the Buenos Aires Yiddish newspaper on microfilm."
David Stirt is the President and owner of Florida Sports News Inc. He taught sports reporting at the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and served as the president and executive director of the College Sports Publishers Association for nine years.

The Price Library receives Irving Stirt Documents

Little did I know that when I traveled to Karmiel, Israel in August 2010 to attend my father’s funeral that I would discover 80 years of family history, a history I knew very little about, tucked away in a damp, dark basement of the group-living facility where my father resided for the last eight years of his life.

After gathering personal items from my father’s bedroom in the facility, I was led to the basement, where I was stunned to see some 25-30 boxes of materials that belonged to him. As I started opening the boxes, I couldn’t believe what I found. There were hundreds of books, record albums, articles of clothing and other tchotchkes that someone gathers over a lifetime. But there were also unimaginable treasures, items that may have seemed worthless to the average person but not to me.

I found three well-worn photo albums, strung together by shoelaces. When I opened one, the first page was dated “1938, Kaunas.” Suddenly, I had a window into my father’s teen years as a high school student in Lithuania, something I had never seen before. As I continued to search through the boxes, more and more treasures were uncovered, including the passport and identity card my father carried with him when he escaped from Kaunas, Lithuania in 1940 by traveling to Sweden and eventually boarding the passenger ship Drollingham for his trip to New York City.

My father’s identity card and passport confirmed what I had learned from other family members over the years—that Stirt was our anglicized family name. That picture of a 17-year-old staring at me from that identity card had the name Isakas Stirtas under it. I had always known my father as Irving Stirt. Now I knew something different.

As amazing as the documents and photos were, I found two other items that elicited stronger emotions from me than anything else among my father’s belongings. First, was a 120-page diary divided into two distinct sections. The first section, which started in the back of the diary, was written in Yiddish and commenced in 1939, a year before my father had to leave behind his father, mother and two sisters in Lithuania. That section carried through half the book before suddenly there was a page written in English. The second section of the diary, which started at the front of the book and was written in English, covered a period from 1941-43, when my father moved to the Midwest, met the woman who would become his wife and my mother, and continued until he entered the U.S. Army and was sent to serve his new country at war.

While the diary was a stunning find, just as remarkable was a large manila envelope that contained a series of letters that were written by my father’s family during their final years in the Simuliai, Lithuania ghetto. The letters covered a period from 1940-41 and it wasn’t until 1946 that my father learned that a letter he received in June 1941 was the last correspondence he would receive from his family.

My father returned to Lithuania on a visit in 1955, and among the pictures I found were photos from that trip, including ones of the house he lived in before coming to the United States. I guess he had finally come full circle.

What is most amazing is that he somehow managed to collect and then shlep all of this stuff with him from Lithuania to Sweden, to New York City to Wisconsin, to Chicago and eventually on to Israel, where he lived in at least a half dozen locations after arriving for good in 1979. And I’m thankful he did. Otherwise both my family, and everyone who will have access to his collection, would have missed out on some insightful, poignant and relevant historical documents and lessons.
I was born and raised in Mandatory Palest-
ina. You see, that I expe-
rrienced was intellectually and culturally a very
interesting place. We had the Zionist, eastern
European establishment behind us, that obvi-
ously informed the whole of the discipline. What was it about? It was about secular Hebrew
writing in the last two hundred years, heading from the Haskalah to Zionism.

I was a student at the Hebrew University in
the 1940s. And the Hebrew University was still
at the time a small Heidelberg, manned
by those professors who came from Germany
in the 1920's, refugees from the Nazis, and some
Russian intellectuals as well. We studied philosophy, we studied Jewish history, and I started studying Jewish
literature which was mainly Hebrew literature at the time. And immediately I felt hemmed in, kind of uneasy in the definitions
of the discipline. What was it about? It was about secular Hebrew
writing in the last two hundred years, heading from the Haskalah to Zionism.

IYIDDISH

I came to New York in 1964 and registered as a doctoral student at
Columbia University. But I also got into the Bundist circle
of Yiddish thinking the YIVO Institute of Jewish Research at the time. The
YIVO was still very much steeped in the tradition of Vilnius, Eastern Europe. My teachers, Max Weinreich, and the
historians that worked there, the librarians...they adopted me.

And I know why. At that time they were excommunicated by the
Zionist establishment, and I was the person from the other
camp who came to them for knowledge, and said I want to
expose myself to what you can teach me.

So I was, as you put it, a little trophy, a little victory for people who had very
little victories.

And I met some wonderful people there, wonderful human beings and also great
scholars. And immersed myself in it. I can still see myself at the time— I read
endlessly. Somehow I decided to absorb the newspapers, the periodicals, the Yiddish
periodicals of the last hundred years. And I sat there in the library morning to eve-
neging. I didn’t go to many of my lectures, I just read. Finally Max Weinreich de-
cided that I was an expert, and they of-
fered me a position, they wanted me to teach Yiddish Literature at the
YIVO. But I went back to Israel and I started my academic career there as a
professor. First at the University of Tel Aviv and then at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where I stayed for many years.

But America and New York became part of me. And I would come and go and come
and go and finally I managed to split the
academic year between Columbia Univer-
sity and the Hebrew University. That was in 1987. And now retired at the
Hebrew University I teach at Columbia Univer-
sity year round.

I would say writing in English is an impor-
tant experience to me. Writing in Hebrew,
for me the pen runs before the brain, very
carefully. It’s like moving through water
compared to moving inside: some liquid
which is viscous, which is heavy, and you
have to move very carefully. It’s a different
type of writing, but I think that by just
uprooting myself from this one language
atmosphere, into two, three languages, I
did something important for myself.

It’s important for your mind not to stay in
one language.

FRANZ KAFKA

Kafka had an avid interest in Yiddish. It was of the utmost importance to him
that it would not anymore be the
language of the mouse-folk. But Yiddish
should be the language of the mice, the
little victories.

And the Messiah will come
from the Yiddish writers of modernism, of modernity.

SHOLEM ALEICHEM

Sholem Aleichem is, of course, tremen-
dously popular, and has always been tre-
 mendously popular, read, translated, written about. But I felt that something
there was not fully understood. What was
his role? What was important about him
was kind of a decision that he took up on a
creative level. Unlike his predecessors,
unlike most of the people around him, he
did not want to judge those Jews. And
furthermore, not only was he not going to
judge them, but he was going to let them
attack the institution of ideological judg-
ment, of being judgment ideologically.

So Yiddish was against the odds. The fact
that a modern Jewish culture would de-
vote itself completely to the vision, to the
nation and fashioned by his view of Ger-
man Jews. Therefore it was idealized,
naive, and in a way, funny, because he
said there in, you know, the little theatre, at
the Savoy Hotel, which was semi-profes-
sional and very, very tawdry, and he would
come back and write a synopsis of a play
that you wouldn't waste ten minutes on
reading, as if there was some truth there:
"Ah! It’s actually an opera, it’s not an op-
eretta." When such a clever person could
say to be stupid, what does it mean?
Where does it come from? It comes from his sense
that Judaism had reached a point of impos-
sibility. You can't be a German Jew You
cannot be an eastern European Jew unless
you are traditional, with the sidelocks and
kaftans. But that was not western Jewish
at all. It was already semi-
modernized.

And the Messiah. Yes, he was interested
in Zionism. He thought Zionism would
result in some kind of agricultural people,
half-naked who would go and till the soil.
You know that he would go to the student
camps every so often, when he wanted
really to relax? When he went to the Zionist
Congress and looked at Zionism, with
people speaking bad German, and you
know, developing these visions of self-
empowerment. He was disgusted with it.
And he took care never to come to Pales-
tine although he always said that he wanted
to. And his friend Hugo Berg-
mann, who was also my teacher, gave him
his apartment in Jerusalem. He said,
"Come!" He already had tuberculosis, and
he was supposed to come for his health.
But, he wouldn't.

So it was impossible and nevertheless you
had somehow to exist, not only person-
ally, but also in terms of social interaction
as part of a community in a way, and that
was to him, finally, the only authentic way of
existing, in spite of, against the odds.

DAN MIRON

The interview was conducted by Dragan Kujundzic.
not for us.

That’s exactly where I thought these two Jews, Katka and Aleichem, really saw something that was of universal impor-
tance. It is a kind of humanism. Gender also plays a role. Sholem Aleichem—and even Franz Kafka, too—were tremendously interested in the issue of gender identity of communities, of individuals and in this case, the Jews, that somehow insist on the importance of secondary gender charac-
teristics. They tell you all the time that they are learned, they have beards, they show their hair. “We are males, we are males,” they say, behind this question: “Are we males? This is what makes us different from the world? This is what father does?” And yes it’s an-
other facet of weakness and power, because who’s powerful in the story or can really manage life? Usually it’s the women.

WOMEN WRITERS

I wrote a book which went through a few editions, the title of which was Founding Mothers, Stepisters. It was about the four or five major figures who established a Hebrew that’s kind of women’s Hebrew rather than male’s Hebrew, a Hebrew that is not canonical, not based on the sources, that has no historical depth, and from that thinness you can draw power. The thinness that has no historical depth, and from that thinness you can cut through the verbiage of Hebrew modernism is so important, that Hebrew literature that is tremendously heavy-laden can cut through the verbiage of Hebrew literature that has no historical depth. That’s the power of Hebrew literature that is thin and relatively simple.

To me always, I hear behind this question: “Are we males? This is what makes us different from the world? This is what father does?” And yes it’s another facet of weakness and power, because who’s powerful in the story or can really manage life? Usually it’s the women.

They tell you all the time that they are learned, they have beards, they show their hair. “We are males, we are males,” they say, behind this question: “Are we males? This is what makes us different from the world? This is what father does?” And yes it’s another facet of weakness and power, because who’s powerful in the story or can really manage life? Usually it’s the women.

Then there was a Russian woman—actu-
ally half Russian: her father was a Russian
priest, her mother Irish. Her name was Elisha Zhirukova. She married a Hebrew
writer and started to write Hebrew po-
cetry and called herself Elisiahe. She was
also, for her time, tremendously popular.

And then there was Esther Raah, who was
one of the first writers to be born in Pal-
estine. She was born in the 1890s and started writing right after World War I.

And then there was someone whom I
dearly loved, and knew her for many years, Yekhered Zhichkhalin. She called herself
Bat-Miriam, the daughter of Miriam. She
was the first to think of women’s poetry
in terms of genealogy. She’s the daughter
of Miriam, of course the biblical Miriam,
that was the first woman poet in the history
of the nation. And her mother’s name was
Miriam, so she was called that.

And then a fifth character, a fifth figure,
My best friend, the friend of my youth a tremendously tal-
ented writer, well known, Yaakov Shabtai who died thirty years ago, wrote two novels that are as good as anything written in French or German or English, or anything at the time. They are both translated into English. One of them is called Past Continuous, and the other is The End of the Affair, or The End of the Matter, which was also translated as Past Perfect. So, there’s a neat turn, in Hebrew writing. It’s very, very vibrant. The

The End of the Affair
Past-Perfect
The End

YIDDISH AND HEBREW TRADITIONS

If you want, you can talk for a moment about what’s been going on in Hebrew writing. It’s very, very vibrant. The

HEBREW LANGUAGE

It’s true that in Hebrew writing—Sholem

Yiddish, because there were other people

wrote about the language in general, about Hebrew as the language of daily

and with Hebrew poetry was

destroy this kind of edifice, Hebrew with

feminist way, was relatively simple. To

to use them. This was a decision of a high,

writers used them, but then decided not
to use them. This was a decision of a high,

ideological voltage, and this voltage is

there, this electricity is there for better or

worse. It raises the level of this literature.

It’s a very tense and self-conscious litera-
ture. But at the same time it’s dangerous. It can be a trap of big words without authentic con-
tents. The differences between the Hebrew
written before the Haskalah, before the
Enlightenment and after the Enlighten-
ment is like another language. Hebrew
was changing all the time. And the Hebrew
written by the Hasidim was absolutely
different than that of the secular writers.
So it was a living language. It was not
spoken. But it was not really dormant in
any way, it was not fossilized, it changed
tremendously. Once the community in
Palestine was established, the community
could not go on speaking Russian and
Yiddish, because there were other people

who came in and were not speaking Russian or Yiddish, they spoke

German, they spoke Arabic, or they spoke other lan-

guages. Hebrew was a common denominator and a necessary

lingua franca, for them. Then the Zionism of Hebrew, which was

historically never really extinguished, came into being and showed
its force.

TRANSLATING SOHELM ALEICHEM

I started to translate at least some of the best works of Sholem
Aleichem into current Israeli idiom. I said to myself, OK, the
language he was using was spoken Yiddish, Ukrainian Yiddish
at the beginning of the 20th and the end of the 19th century.
Why not use Israeli Hebrew, as it is? All of the translations of
Sholem Aleichem were somehow heavily laden with literary
vestiges of these languages.

So the stories became available to Israeli society because I

wrote it in Israeli—really the language of the last ten years.

Every year I come back to Israel the first thing I do is listen

to something new, and I try to catch it and use it.

And yes it was very successful commercially and culturally it

made a dent. And I said that Israeli Hebrew is the Yiddish of
our time. Therefore, everything which was written in Yiddish,
the truth is that even if it were written in Hebrew one-hundred years
ago, should be translated into modern Israeli idiom, for the
reader of our time. I firmly believe in the conception of
translation formulated by Jacques Derrida. The process of
the formation of language is a process of translation.

YIDDISH AND HEBREW TRADITIONS

I think the special models of continuity—of coming in touch
and going out of touch of continuity and discontinuity, of

looking in both ways. You can read

about Hebrew as the language of daily

writing is being done, and the Israeli condition is reflected,

and going out of touch—is more important to us intellectually

at this point than that of continuity, of really finding long lines

that connect so many points along the way. I think that this
obsolescence with continuity is the ultimate result, the
underlying paradox of the biggest ideologies of the 19th and 20th centuries.

And that led us to a fragmentation of Jewish history. You

create narratives, you create continuous narratives, but then you

have to exclude and exclude and exclude because otherwise you

won’t have your continuous flow.

It takes a certain kind of courage to say, “OK, I’m going to live

with the Holocaust, and with the Holocaust.” I think we all

have to admit this, we all have to accept this, the

reality of continuity and even the reality of no contact all, as is. And

Jewish history, Jewish literatures, the development of Jewish, even religion, as that, as many things happening spatially and

chronologically, equally out of conjunction, coming in touch, each of them going on their own way, and this is the Jewish

reality of now.
The group effort devoted to the Holocaust, I watched Lanzmann’s Shoah with my colleagues and read, at my colleagues’ suggestion, some Holocaust novels, especially Imre Kertész’s great novel, Fatelessness (1975). The group met later with Kertész in Berlin. I became fascinated by the question of whether fiction can be valid testimony to Auschwitz and by the question of the way fiction can appear in retro- action as a premonition of the future. The Configura- tion of Community was the result. It is the product of several years of earnest thinking, reading, and writing.

Responding to your question about the inspiration of Judaism in this book or from my long-time friendship with Jacques Der- rida and his writings on “being Jewish,” I know relatively little about Judaism. Most of what I know comes from Jewish friends, from some reading, and from my knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. I have often asked myself, however, why it is that I, brought from some reading, and from my knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. I have often asked myself, however, why it is that I, brought from some reading, and from my knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.

In what ways does the work of Franz Kafka anticipate the Holocaust? Kafka’s work, I claim, present by anticipation in the experiences of their individual pro- tagonists something like what collective life, as a whole, has known, in various European countries was going to be like just a few years after Kafka’s death from tuberculosis in 1924. Other critics have also made this claim, beginning with Walter Benjamin. More specifically, I dem- onstrate in my book that the last chapter of Kafka’s Amerika on Katurat. My book attempts to demonstrate that, on the contrary, after Auschwitz literature is needed more than ever as testimony to the Shoah, lest we forget.

This book came about because I was part of a research group in Oslo that had Holocaust literature as one of its projects, as well as Kafka and Conrad. In order to participate in the part of the group effort devoted to the Holocaust, I watched Lanzmann’s Shoah with my colleagues and read, at my colleagues’ suggestion, some Holocaust novels, especially Imre Kertész’s great novel, Fatelessness (1975). The group met later with Kertész in Berlin. I became fascinated by the question of whether fiction can be valid testimony to Auschwitz and by the question of the way fiction can appear in retro-action as a premonition of the future. The Configuration of Community was the result. It is the product of several years of earnest thinking, reading, and writing.

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NEW CONFERENCE AND BOOK
Norman Goda

In Spring 2014, thanks to the generosity of Norman and Irma Braman, the Center for Jewish Studies will sponsor an international conference, “Justice and the Holocaust: New Approaches to Punishment, Restitution, and Memory.”

The conference will host scholars from all over the world who have studied the topic of Holocaust justice from different perspectives. Its chief questions will concern the ways in which scholars have approached these topics, what kinds of proceedings have not been sufficiently studied—or studied at all—and what approaches might yield greater understanding of the problem of justice and national memories in the next several decades.


YIDDISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
Course Description

Yiddish is the language of European Jews, and before the Holocaust it had been the language of Jewish secular culture, literature, music, theater, drama and even a vibrant Jewish film industry at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The course is intended for beginners and beginning intermediate students of Yiddish, and will include both a linguistic component and an introduction to Yiddish life, history and culture. Students are encouraged to engage with the language personally and creatively through writing assignments, group work and a personal project.

Course codes: HBR4930/JST4936/EUS4930
Contact Dr. Dror Abend-David for further details: dabend@ufl.edu

In his novel, Operation Shylock, Philip Roth includes a well-known anecdote about a customer who is very impressed with a meal at a Jewish restaurant on the Lower East Side. He compliments the owner on the great food and service, and the Chinese waiter who speaks excellent Yiddish. “Not so loud” says the owner, “he thinks he’s learning English.”

I will be telling this anecdote next semester when teaching a section of the University of Florida’s (Un)Common Reading Program (IDH3931) dedicated to Operation Shylock. This is one of several courses that I teach at UF on Jewish languages and literatures. But what I probably will not share with my students is that this anecdote is in some way a part of my own life story. I attended both high-school and graduate school in the United States, and it was at age sixteen that I fell in love with the poetry of T.S. Eliot and decided to study English literature. Much as in the case of the Chinese waiter in Roth’s anecdote, Yiddish was an uninvited, sometimes uncomfortable detour that the move from my native Hebrew literature into English and American literature necessitated.

As I was studying for a master’s degree in English literature at SUNY Binghamton, I couldn’t help but make the comparison of Emily Dickinson’s poetry to that of a number of modern and contemporary women poets in Hebrew. But the conundrum of where some of the earlier Hebrew women poets might have read or even heard of Dickinson was solved in the most unexpected manner. While Dickinson’s great acclaim only began in the 1950s, and her first translations into Hebrew appeared much later, Dickinson was already translated into Yiddish in 1937 by Michl Licht who predicted that she will be recognized as one of the most significant modern American poets.

While my first intention was to write a paper on Emily Dickin- son, I soon found myself at the Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO), then on Fifth Avenue in New York City. There I met the legendary librarian Dina Abramowicz who was impressed by how little I knew about anything. But since I am a Litvak (a Lithuanian Jew, like her), I enjoyed the benefit of the doubt. I presented this paper at a conference in Oklahoma to a silent audience who had neither comments nor questions. But as I walked slowly down from the podium I was approached by a short man with a colorful handkerchief in his breast pocket. He introduced himself as Djelal Kadir, then the editor of World

NOT SO LOUD! HE THINKS HE’S LEARNING ENGLISH

Dror Abend-David graduated with a doctorate in Comparative Literature from New York University in spring 2001. His first book, based on his dissertation, was published in 2003 by Peter Lang under the title “Scorned My Nation: A Comparison of Translations of The Merchant of Venice into German, Hebrew, and Yiddish. His new book, Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach, is forthcoming in summer 2013 with Continuum Press. He is currently working on a book project that considers new readings of the poetry of Louis Zukofsky. In addition to his work on Hebrew and Yiddish Literatures, Dror published various articles about media, cultural Studies and translation theory, modern poetry and drama. Dror Abend-David teaches Hebrew, Hebrew Literature and Yiddish at UF.
As I look back, I can certainly understand why my mentors at the English Department at SUNY Binghamton couldn’t make heads or tails of what I was doing. My preoccupation with English, Hebrew, Yiddish and eventually German, forced me to move slightly away from the English Department, and I soon found myself at the Comparative Literature Department at New York University. My mentor, Prof. Richard Sieburth, suggested that I combine an interest in Shakespearean drama, Hebrew and Yiddish, and theory of translation into a dissertation that would compare translations of The Merchant of Venice into German, Hebrew and Yiddish. With this dissertation I became a scholar of comparative Jewish literature and translation studies. The dissertation itself was published immediately as a book by Peter Lang and received the Koret Jewish Publications Program Award. Among a number of positive reviews was that of Dirk Lang and received the Koret Jewish Publications Program Award. I have found inspiration for my courses and scholarly work in the most unexpected places and texts. I was recently invited to participate in the symposium “Jewish Literature Beyond Borders.” My talk was about a 1924 film version of The Merchant of Venice which was presented in the Warsaw Yiddish press as “our just revenge against non-Jewish persecution.” The names of the German cast, however, reveal that this is a German film that was directed in 1923 by Peter Felner. The film was therefore both “translated” into Yiddish and repackaged as a Philo-Semitic production. A famous children’s book that tells the story of a young girl who takes over the government and persecutes innocent victims on the basis of their ancestry and purity of blood, has led to my dissertation. Hebrew and English in various venues. And I have found inspiration for my courses and scholarly work in the most unexpected places and texts. I was recently invited to participate in the symposium “Jewish Literature Beyond Borders.” My talk was about a 1924 film version of The Merchant of Venice which was presented in the Warsaw Yiddish press as “our just revenge against non-Jewish persecution.” The names of the German cast, however, reveal that this is a German film that was directed in 1923 by Peter Felner. The film was therefore both “translated” into Yiddish and repackaged as a Philo-Semitic production. A famous children’s book that tells the story of a young girl who takes over the government and persecutes innocent victims on the basis of their ancestry and purity of blood, has led to my dissertation.
These dynamics evoke some important questions concerning the future of any complex, multi-ethnic, diverse society, especially one in which materialism, both secular and religious, reflects public culture and may even be the underpinning of its legitimacy as a Jewish state. In October 13-14, 2011, ten experts of Israeli secularism convened for an interdisciplinary conference at the University of Florida to discuss these questions. While Israeli secularism is not a new topic for academic investigation, this conference analyzed it from two different, although related, angles.

Historically connected to the enlightenment and the emergence of modern nationalism, Israeli secularism incorporates prominent characteristics with secularism in other countries. At the same time, the Israeli case emerged out of the peculiar social and economic circumstances of European and so-called Oriental Jewry. The conference keynote speaker, Barry Kosmin of the Institute for the Study of Secularism in Society and Culture at Trinity College, presented a typology of secular revolutions. He distinguished between “hard secularism,” characterizing the revolutionary tradition of countries like France and Russia (which is unservingly antagonistic to religion), and “soft secularism,” characterized by tolerance towards religion like in the U.S. and India. Kosmin argued that Israel is situated in between these categories and that its history is influenced by both traditions. Therefore, in Israel we witness paradoxes between these categories and that its history is influenced by both traditions.

In my current research projects—the history of nineteenth-century Jewish historiography in Russia, the historiography of Russian Jewish history, and Russian imperial policies toward the Jews. My forthcoming book, Jewish Souls, Bureaucratic Minds: Jewish Bureaucracy and Policy-making in Late Imperial Russia, 1850-1917, examines the phenomenon of Russian Jewish bureaucrats, or expert Jews, as a crucial development for the modernization of Russian Jewry. These formed a distinctive modern Jewish identity with a commitment to change and with loyalties as much to the government and biographers, the towering figure of Mikhoels still awaits further exploration, and his full authoritative biography has not been written yet.

Rather than chronicling Mikhoels’s spectacular rise to fame and his tragic end, as previous scholarship did, the focus of my research will be Mikhoels’s gradual development as a person, artist, actor, director, and public figure, along with the development of his ideas by answering the following questions: how were these ideas shaped by Mikhoels’s life and work? How did these ideas shape the art of Mikhoels himself, the art of his theater, the art of his world? My current research projects—the history of nineteenth-century Jewish historiography in Russia, and the biographies of Solomon Mikhoels, best known for his theatrical role as the “Jewish King Lear,” and for his political activities in the Soviet Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee during World War II. Limited to these roles by historians and biographers, the towering figure of Mikhoels still awaits further exploration, and his full authoritative biography has not been written yet.

My research interests lie in the social and cultural history of Russian Jewry from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. I have published several articles on the history of Yiddish theater in Russia and America, documentary sources on Jewish history in Russian libraries and archives, the development of academic Jewish studies in Russia, the historiography of Russian Jewish history, and Russian imperial policies toward the Jews. My forthcoming book, Jewish Souls, Bureaucratic Minds: Jewish Bureaucracy and Policy-making in Late Imperial Russia, 1850-1917, examines the phenomenon of Russian Jewish bureaucrats, or expert Jews, as a crucial development for the modernization of Russian Jewry. These formed a distinctive modern Jewish identity with a commitment to change and with loyalties as much to the government and world art?
REWRITING THE JEWISH HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST
NEW TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

The diversity of sources creates still another problem. They range from those found to those forever lost, from institutional to the personal, from the contemporaneous to those recorded years after the fact. At the same time, we are constantly revising what we mean by certain terms that in normal circumstances would be descriptive— including “collaboration” and “resistance.” Under the pressure of the Nazi program of mass murder, what do such terms mean? In the meantime, scholars are exploring newly available, or at least newly appreciated sources, ranging from the hidden Oyneg Shabbes archive of the Warsaw Ghetto to Memorial Books of lost shtetlakh to recently discovered records concerning the reactions of American Jews. It is perhaps not the Jewish history of the Holocaust that is being rewritten, but rather the many Jewish histories that reflect the many communities of Jews.

Thanks to a gift by Norman and Irma Braman and additional support from the Harry Rich Endowment for Holocaust Studies, the Center for Jewish Studies hosted a major international conference from March 17-19, 2012 titled “Rewriting the Jewish History of the Holocaust.” Invited were more than twenty scholars, the three-day meeting was an unqualified success, and a conference volume of expanded papers will appear in 2014. The challenges of the archive lies in the vast quantity of documents collected and hidden by a team assembled by Emanuel Ringelblum before and during the Holocaust’s liquidation. The proceedings with a keynote address that argued that the Jewish dimension of the Holocaust itself could be in dire straits. Michman noted that at present in Europe and the US, the Holocaust is increasingly subsumed within larger narratives of genocide studies, Nazi imperialism, and inter-ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust as a singular attempt to rid the world—and not just Eastern Europe—of Jews is thereby in danger of being lost. Michman, who is correct, and a great deal of recent scholarship would seem to bear him out—then making sense of Jewish historical experiences during the Holocaust would be all the more critical. In many cases, the uniqueness of Nazi Germany’s attempt to murder all of Europe’s Jews is to be found in the Jewish narratives themselves.

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The themes within the conference were varied. But all reflected the problem of a Jewish history of the Holocaust. Dan Michman (Bar Ilan University), the head of international research at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, opened the proceedings with a keynote address that argued that the Jewish dimension of the Holocaust itself could be in dire straits. Michman noted that at present in Europe and the US, the Holocaust is increasingly subsumed within larger narratives of genocide studies, Nazi imperialism, and inter-ethnic conflict in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust as a singular attempt to rid the world—and not just Eastern Europe—of Jews is thereby in danger of being lost. Michman, who is correct, and a great deal of recent scholarship would seem to bear him out—then making sense of Jewish historical experiences during the Holocaust would be all the more critical. In many cases, the uniqueness of Nazi Germany’s attempt to murder all of Europe’s Jews is to be found in the Jewish narratives themselves.
suspicious of the Soviet Union’s Jews in general and of Zionism in particular. Thus the September 1941 massacre at Babi Yar, in Moscow’s retelling, killed “Soviet citizens” rather than Jews. Gershenson’s findings however, include films such as Mark Donskoy’s The Uncanny (1943), which contained moving scenes of the Germans murdering Jews at Babi Yar. Stalin’s approval of the film— he was the final censorship authority—remains a puzzle. Whatever the reason, it was, however, a brief interlude before his resumption of tighter censorship and the purge of Yiddish cultural leaders in the Soviet Union.

David Engel of New York University summed up the conference by asking what a Jewish history of the Holocaust might be. Can it ever be part of the narrative of Jewish history more broadly given that the Holocaust was imposed upon the Jews? Is it a continuum of Jewish history; or is it, as is often understood, a terrible break, a one-time, counterfeiting, and smuggling. Understood the netherworld of hiding, the search for useful narratives. As Hebrew University’s Manuela Poznanski summed up the conference, could we understand them? Poznanski suggested that this was another form of Jewish resistance that helped defeat Nazism. The Warsaw Ghetto, but—international communist narratives notwithstanding—a Jewish resistance nonetheless. Bob Moore of the University of Sheffield added that escape networks in the Low Countries, another form of resistance, depended on Jewish-Gentile contacts from before the war, to say nothing of shady characters who understood the netherworld of hiding, counterfeiting, and smuggling. Our definition of resistance, therefore, needs broadening. It includes not only different kinds of Jews, but different kinds of bystanders, some of whose previous criminal activities was put to different uses during the war.

Yet Jewish narratives, aside from existing on the local or political level, are also deeply individual. Sara Henower of York University in Toronto examined the terrible stories of infertility in the ghettos, placing them within the gendered perspectives of the family—mothers and fathers alike who killed their own children to spare others. Tuvia Fuling of Ben-Gurion University presented his research on Elezer Grymbaum, a Polish Jewish communist who in 1942 became a block leader in Auschwitz-Birkenau, a position through which he survived the war. Despite the post-war efforts by his father, a prominent Zionist in Israel, to rehabilitate his son, Grymbaum’s argument that he served in Auschwitz as a way to aid other Jews is not accepted. The decades-long argument over his memory and the importance of individual Jews during the Holocaust speaks volumes concerning Jewish Holocaust memory and the search for useful narratives. As Hebrew University’s Manuela Consolini noted on this panel, the Holocaust contains no master narrative of redemption. Most Jews under the Nazi occupation were murdered. “There is,” she said, “nothing to redeem.” And the lack of redemption was heavily aided by the powers that defeated Nazism. In a unique presentation, Olga Gershenson (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) shared her work on previously unknown Soviet feature films of the Holocaust that she recently discovered in Russian archives. It has long been known that Joseph Stalin downplayed the Jewish dimension of the Holocaust during and after the killing. He was
became the pioneers of the 1990s post-Soviet migration of more than one million Russian-speaking Jews to Israel.

At the very same time that Margilan Jews were on the way to Israel, I started my own journey along the Silk Road. The journey started in a Circassian-Muslim village in the Galilee, the site of my first field work. Circassians were transferred from the Caucasus following the invasion of this area by Tsarist Russia. They were dispersed across vast areas of the Ottoman Empire, including the Galilee and the Golan Heights. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union they reestablished connections with their former homeland, and many considered repatriation, although most of Israeli Circassians, a tiny but relatively flourishing community, stayed put.

In 1990, the last year of the Soviet Union, I was a graduate student and fellow in the Raul Wallenberg leadership program at the Hebrew University. We, the students of the program, organized a conference on human rights in Moscow. I was already interested in the Circassians but was refused a permit to the Caucasus by the Soviets. “These are nashe Everei (our Jews),” explained my Circassian host. What did she mean by “our”? I asked myself. This journey to the crumbling empire took part during the eruption of ethno-national movements on the one hand, and the beginning of mass migration of Jews on the other. Over the next few years, I wrote about both subjects. However, my visit to the Circassian areas in the Caucasus also became an important step in being accepted as an anthropologist in the closed society of Israeli Circassians.

In 1991, I decided to go back to school for a Ph.D. I had a few articles already written on the immigration of Jews from the Caucasus, and plenty of additional material. I wondered why it was so difficult for policy makers and social services providers to differentiate between groups that seem to me to be completely different, such as Jews from Georgia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. I became especially interested in issues of ethnic categorization which became the subject of my dissertation.

In the early 2000s I decided to go back to school for a Ph.D. I had a few articles already written on the immigration of Jews from the Caucasus, and plenty of additional material. I wondered why it was so difficult for policy makers and social services providers to differentiate between groups that seem to me to be completely different, such as Jews from Georgia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. I became especially interested in issues of ethnic categorization which became the subject of my dissertation.

My current study in Ramle and among Central Asian Jews gave me an opportunity to do a comparative study of Jewish-Muslim relations in different parts of the former Soviet Union while conducting research on intergroup relations in the new location—material I was writing up during my stay at the University of Florida's Center for Jewish Studies.
greater religious independence, even if hating and conflicting, fits a mold so fa-
miliar from colonial historiography. It is important to realize that while part of the
process was the result of the creativity, intended or unintended, that emerged from
the encounter with a new physical and cultural environment.

One interesting exam-
ple of this move to reli-
gious independence involves the shift to-
ward life in the south-
ern hemisphere, and an
encounter with its en-
vironment. As Jews settled the Americas,
especially the southern hemisphere, they were confronted with questions such as
when prayers for rain should be said, given the new seasonal and environmen-
tal realities. Portuguese Jews responded to such queries in creative ways that at
once recognized traditional Jewish litera-
ture and their new reality.

The center of the daily Jewish liturgy is the shemone esre, the eighteen benedictions.
The ninth of these blessings, 'Arket ha-
sham, is a petition for a bountiful harvest
and a good agricultural year. During cer-
tain times of the year, a brief statement is
made to the effect that the blessings are
intended or unintended, that emerged
from the encounter of religious
authorities, Rabbi Shabti concludes:

In summary it appears that the aforesaid
prayerful words did not mention or petition the rains in holy ha-sham (the
ninth of the eighteen benedictions of the
daily prayer liturgy), except in the case
that this blessing is said in the rainy season from Passover on...So it appears in
my humble opinion, I, the junior [schol-
ar] [Hayyim Shabti].

The Brazilian congregation that initiated
the question is not identified, nor is the
date of the response, although 1712, the
date of its publication, is a clear terminus.
Irrespective of these details, this question
might have been central to any Jewish
congregation in the southern hemisphere.
But the question clearly continued
to trouble the southern congregations, and
we find in the late 18th century that some
of their representatives were no longer
interested in seeking out the opinions of
northern rabbis in providing for the reli-
gious needs of their community.

In 1773, Haham Mendes de Sola wrote a new prayer book, a praza^ta (Prayer for Rain), which was specifically
a prayer service for rain. The book consists of a series of entreaties for rain, beginning
with a description of their place in the
liturgy, namely in the repetition of the
shemone esre, at which point the prayer
leader says:

We have come to beseech You, for grace
and truth; for help; for rain...may we send
rain from Your abode.

The book consists of more than fifty
pages of blessings and supplications for
divine forgiveness and, more concretely,
rapine. The prayer book ends with in-
structions regarding how to proceed if the
petition for rain is granted before noon
(if there is a fast it is ended and addition-
al psalms are recited at the afternoon
prayer) or after noon (one completes the
fast but does not recite prayers of forgive-
ness in the afternoon). Though printed
in Amsterdam, the book was written in Cu-
raçao and is tailored to the needs of Jewish
communities south of the equator.

By attending to both the continuities and
changes in the communal life of Carara's
Jews, I aim to demonstrate both the cen-
trality of religious life to the Jewish At-
lantic diaspora and the creative adapta-
tions of Caribbean Jewish life that resulted
in a transatlantic renegotiation of religious
authority.

In an important sense, then, the goal of this project is to extend analyses of A Nação as a religious group, to the Americas. To
portray the community as centered around synagogues, com-
mittled to religious education, and in constant contact with
halakhic (Jewish legal) authorities in Europe and the Ottoman
Empire on a wide range of issues. In this, the
present study underlines the continuity be-
tween Europe and the Americas.

A second historiographic claim challenged in
this study is one championed by the same schol-
ars that study Dutch Jews as a religious commu-
nity. Namely, that the Dutch Caribbean communities
were so thoroughly subservient to the Amsterdam mother-
congregation as to make them unworthy of independent study
qua religious communities. In fact, Carara's (the most signifi-
cant of the Dutch Caribbean communities) close ties with Am-
sterdam did not prevent it from becoming an independent
center of Jewish religious creativity and authority and, eventu-
ally, to function as mother-congregation to other Americas
communities, partially displacing Amsterdam from its tradi-
tional role. This shift was in part a function of Mikel Israel's
(he island's main congregation) increased prosperity and pres-
tige, but also due to the need to adapt religious traditions to the
new environment, which led to a transatlantic renegotiation of
religious authority. This is the second part of my thesis, that the
Caribbean Jews constitute an Atlantic community and should
be studied in these terms. This argument underscores the change
between Europe and the Americas.

My research focuses primarily on the Dutch Caribbean (Carara, Sunime, and Dutch Brazil). And, many of my findings construct
the Dutch Caribbean's religious independence in oppositional
terms, a series of encounters with and resistance to the hege-
mony of the Amsterdam community. Since the Caribbean com-
munities were explicitly established as colonies—albeit consent-
ing ones—it is not surprising that their gradual move toward

HILIT SUROWITZ-ISRAEL
Hilit Surowitz-Israel is an Instructor in the Jewish Studies and Religion departments at Rutgers, The State
University of New Jersey. She earned her Ph.D. from the University of Florida's Religion Department in
discipline, authority, and the complicated intersection of race, religion, and nation for Portuguese Jews in the early modern
Atlantic world. Her research interests include religion in the
Americas, the Jewish communities of the Atlantic world, diaspora theory and Atlantic history.
New Certificate in Holocaust Studies

Danielle Gach ('14), Hana Green ('15), and Macy Ross ('14) are among the first UF students to earn the Center for Jewish Studies undergraduate Certificate in Holocaust Studies. Inaugurated last year, the interdisciplinary program is open to all undergraduates and is intended to provide a firm grounding in the history of the Holocaust along with an understanding of recent approaches to Holocaust memory, the nature of testimony, relevant theory within the social sciences, comparative literature, and the interpretive arts. The Certificate provides an excellent background for a variety of careers both within and outside of academia, including the study of law, the advocacy of human rights and employment with NGOs, to education and international business.

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MAURY WISEMAN

Earned a Ph.D. from the History Department at the University of Florida in December 2011. He is currently revising his dissertation, Railroad Baron, Fire-Eater, and the ‘Alien Jew’: The Life and Memory of David Levy Yulee, into a monograph while teaching history at Sacramento City College in Sacramento, California.

David Levy Yulee (1840-1886) was a pioneer in nineteenth-century Florida’s economic and political development. As a leading figure in Florida’s Democratic Party and a two-term senator (1845-47, 1855-61), Yulee helped bring the Florida Territory into the United States before leading the state out of the Union and into the Civil War. During this time he amassed a great fortune as a real estate speculator, planter, and railroad developer by touting Florida’s natural resources and commercial prospects and spurring internal improvements. He was also the first senator of Jewish descent in the history of the predominantly Christian United States, and in a time and place—the nineteenth-century South—that was not generally recognized as open or tolerant. Yulee’s Jewish identity seems ironic since he did not self-identify as a Jew; practice the Jewish religion, maintain Jewish cultural practices, or associate with Jewish communities. Quite the opposite, Yulee engaged Christian society, married a Christian woman, occasionally attended church, and adhered to Christian religious dogma. He even changed his surname from Levy to Yulee, presumably to avoid any Jewish connections, upon entering the U.S. senate in 1845. Why, then, did most people recognize him as a Jew? How did Yulee comprehend his Jewish identity? And how, if at all, did his Jewish identity affect his claims to political and social status?

As one of the leading public figures in Florida’s political and economic history, Yulee was forced to confront the fundamental crisis faced by Jews in the formation of modern Jewish identity: the conflict between assimilation and anti-Semitism in an overwhelmingly Christian environment. Several factors made it possible for Yulee to navigate this dichotomy. Florida, a borderland on the geographic and socio-political fringes of the nineteenth-century U.S., presented a unique setting where talented, wealthy, and connected men like Yulee could overcome traditional constraints placed on Jewish political or social achievement found in the more established and heavily populated regions of the U.S. by bringing political and economic benefits to the under-populated and cash-strapped region. Within this context, Yulee appeared the largely Christian society surrounding him by immersing himself in the dominant culture of Florida’s white planter elite while simultaneously distancing himself from Judaism. Performing the role of a Southern white gentleman, a model of white Southern manhood, Yulee conveyed superiority while evincing an ability to assimilate. He reinforced this image by aligning with Christianity and mingling with the elite of Southern Christian society, where he, as a slave and plantation owner, fiercely advocated the Southern political position of states’ rights and the corresponding right to own slaves. While his public image earned him admission into the upper echelons of Southern society and political life, personal and political animosity continued to compel anti-Semitic attacks against him revealing a perpetual bond with Judaism that could not easily be displaced by public performances.

This persistent connection to Judaism illustrates the importance of race in nineteenth-century Jewish identity. Most people considered Yulee to be a Jew because of his family and ancestry.
lic history about Yulee illuminates our understanding of the role of assimilation. Benjamin Disraeli, England's three-term conservative Prime Minister, and Judah Benjamin, a senatorial colleague of Yulee's from Louisiana, claimed Sephardic ancestry because race, like whiteness, is a malleable social construction. As such, a socio-cultural subtext existed that portrayed its positive and negative qualities. Jews may have been viewed as religious and racial others, but they were also inextricably linked to the Judeo-Christian foundation of western civilization. Moreover, Sephardic Jews, the descendents of fifteenth and sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese Jewish exiles, developed a myth of superiority that simultaneously linked them to Judaism and their cosmopolitan Iberian Jewish exiles. They used this myth to separate themselves from inferior sorts, including other Jews and common peasants, while aggrandizing their background to validate their expanding wealth and status. This myth set a precedent for post-Enlightenment Jews to implement when confronted by the modern dilemma of assimilation. Benjamin Disraeli, England's three-term conservative Prime Minister, and Judah Benjamin, a senatorial colleague of Yulee's from Louisiana, claimed Sephardic ancestry and utilized this myth to enhance their racial heritage. Unlike Dioraels and Benjamin, Yulee, the descendent of a politically powerful and wealthy Sephardic family, never directly acknowledged his Jewish heritage, but any allusions to his Sephardic ancestry referred the public to a discourse that illustrated precedence for some Jews to assimilate mainstream culture while justifying their leadership position.

Analyzing changes over time in the transmission and reception of memories found in the obituaries, historical texts, and public history about Yulee illuminates our understanding of the role of memory in the construction of history and community identity within shifting historical contexts. Since his death in 1886, many people remembered Yulee in the context of the Old South, but those memories were waning as Floridians' residents increasingly remember him as a community builder, railroad entrepreneur, and Jewish senator, memories that project inclusion and prominent Jewish role in the state's history. My investigation of Yulee's life discloses much about the elastic nature of identity and the need to construct cultural identity through personal and public discourse that correspond to late-twentieth-century endeavors in creating more cohesive communities out of diverse social sectors. In particular, Jews in south Florida, one of the nation's largest Jewish communities, use Yulee to illustrate the enduring and prominent Jewish role in the state's history.

In his controversial 1955 documentary Nuit et Brouillard, director Alain Resnais constructs a provocative work of contemplation that calls for defiance in the face of receding memories of World War II. Moreover, the film's depiction of the Jewish experience in postwar films inspired me to examine the shifts in French Jewish cultural memory. In order to adequately track the evolution of a Jewish cultural narrative, my analysis is structured into three phases: post-war repression of the 1950s, the Jewish cultural reawakening of the 1970s-80s, and modern-day demystification of the dark zones of France's past. Because the medium of film has served as a vehicle for French memory debates and has a more far-reaching effect than other types of art, the critical analysis for my thesis focuses on one representative cinematic work per memory phase. Alain Resnais's La Sympathie de Vichy (1955), Louis Malle's Night and Fog (1955), Amos Gitai's Plus tard la compréhension (2008) act as the central pieces for each phase because they revive the past by using particular images and a specific historical narrative to stir memory.

Following the war, General Charles De Gaulle reinforced the emotional attachment to “une certaine idée de la France” (i.e. Napoleonwhite glory, baroque grandeur, imperialist xenophobia, etc.) by
centering collective identity and national pride on “Resistancismus,” the myth of a united France that fought the Nazis. Any trace of a culpable past was concealed behind the national tapestry and any challenge raised to the grand image of France was censored. Reflecting the mental paralysis of the traumatized diktat, postwar cinema dealt with the Occupation in political terms while remaining numb on “La question juive.” With Night and Fog (1955) and Hiroshima mon Amour (1959), Resnais confronted la mémoire—understanding the force of active forgetting by showing how the past permeates the present. The literary works of Patrick Modiano (La Place de l’Étoile, La Ronde de Nuit), Marguerite Duras (La Douleur, Hiroshima mon amour) and Jean Cayrol (Poèmes de la Nuit et Brouillard) also analyzed how the past is remembered.

Today, “the grandchildren of the Holocaust” continue to negotiate with the image of a World War II French dystopia. France lagged more than other countries in coming to terms with its past. In 1945, Germany indicted the crimes of National Socialism with the Nuremberg Trials and in 1947, the president to publicly acknowledge the spectacle, yet it represented the first time French Jewish victims were allowed to give testimony on a national stage. In 1955, fifty-six years after the Liberation of France, Jacques Chirac became the first president to publicly acknowledge the culpability of the French government in the persecution of not only foreign Jews, but of its own Jewish citizens. The age of demystification began anew after these monumental trials and works like In Den Bussen der Juden (1976), Le Chagrin et La Pitié (1974), and Marcel Ophüls (Le Chagrin et La Pitié, 1974) reexamined the Resistance and exposed “The Jewish Question,” which at the time had been cinematically neglected.

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