

## A New Jewish Identity for Post-1989 Europe

*'If Europeans must adjust to the reality that they are living in a brand new continent, Jews- and European Jews in particular-must come to grips with an even more startling fact: never in the history of Europe has a moment been so propitious for its Jews as the present.'*

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### Summary

Since 1989 a new Europe has emerged. The fall of the Berlin Wall has not merely resulted in the redrawing of geographical boundaries, but in a new intellectual freedom and democratic pluralism. This sea change presents many challenges, but none greater than to Europe's Jews, whose communities were decimated by the Holocaust. Conditions are now in place for a possible Jewish renaissance. The new, politically open Europe, free from ideology - stretching from Portugal to Russia - provides its states as well as its citizens with a unique opportunity to rethink their identities and their histories. A new European paradigm-eschewing the nationalist conceptions of the past in favour of a less unified, more dynamic as well as more uncertain kaleidoscopic model - should be embraced by all Europeans. Freed from the age-old choice between total assimilation and ghettoization, Jews, in many ways the prototype of the new European, have the chance to belong in Europe as never before - as well as the chance to participate fully in the construction of the new, pluralist Europe. Various factors make the moment propitious for European Jewry. Above all, the inclusion of the Holocaust as an integral part of European history has meant the absorption of Jewish concerns into each European nation's domestic reflections on its own past. Jews in today's Europe are 'voluntary' Jews: they are no longer anywhere defined by the state or officially constrained in any way. Jews are free to stop being Jews, to emigrate and, most importantly, to define their Jewishness in whatever terms they like. Jewishness has ceased to be something shaped by the state and has become an integral component of European civil society. Jews must have the courage to identify themselves with that civil society, to loosen their anachronistic ties to the state and to encourage greater flexibility in the definition of who is or is not a Jew. They must look beyond the Holocaust, to regard themselves not as victims but as a vibrant force engaged in the ongoing creation of their country's cultural identity. Jewish history and culture have been rooted in Europe for more than two thousand years - and the products of Jewish creativity have long enhanced European culture. A European framework is the logical dimension for the future. It is up to European Jewry to become the third, equal, partner - with the United States and Israel - in building a revitalized, world Jewish identity.

### Introduction

The open pan-European space, which emerged as a consequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, is barely five years old, a mere flicker in contemporary European history and even less in the multi-millennial history of the Jews. The consequences and possibilities of its emergence are only now becoming apparent. Yet, despite the fact that so few years have elapsed since the fall of the Wall, commentators and analysts have been quick to pass negative and often contradictory judgements on the transformation of the eastern half of the European continent and on the steadfastness of Western Europe itself. European Jews—like all Europeans at the end of the twentieth century—are living in an entirely different continent from that of their pre-war forebears, their post-war parents or even their own post-war selves.

Europe is a new entity, not in the much heralded (and often disappointing) sense of a multinational and technocratic European Union, but in far more profound historical terms. One must not confuse the Europe of economic integration and Maastricht with the Europe in which culture and history can finally be reconsidered, released from

the strait-jacket of nationalist or ideological imperatives. Nor is post-1989 Europe, as most present-day Cassandras would claim, merely a paler version of its own often turgid pre-war past, replete with a range of unsolved problems, from unfettered nationalism and economic depression to racism, xenophobia and, of course, antisemitism. All these scourges persist but they are cast in an entirely different historical configuration, for the fall of the Berlin Wall inaugurated a new historical paradigm, for all Europeans and, above all, for Europe's Jews.

If Europeans must adjust to the reality that they are living in a brand new continent, Jews—and European Jews in particular—must come to grips with an even more startling fact: never in the history of Europe has a moment been so propitious for its Jews as the present. In order to understand why this is so, Jews must have the courage to make a conceptual break with their own haunted, immediate past. They must accept the emotionally unacceptable: that the Holocaust destroyed forever the pre-war Eastern European Jewish way of life. Although considered by most of world Jewry to be the essence of European Jewish identity, its destruction did not mean the end of any Jewish presence in Europe. European Jews must have the intellectual vision to realize that the Jewish world which developed in Eastern Europe constituted only one part of the whole of continental Jewish experience; that Judaism recovered from other devastating historical experiences: the Spanish expulsion, for example, which, at the time, constituted a catastrophe for world (i.e. European) Jewry as a whole. The Marranos and their descendants came out of Spain to resume their Jewish life—often as late as a century after their forced conversion. This should be sufficient evidence to disprove the claim—a mere fifty years after the Holocaust and only five years after the reopening of the European continent—that the Jewish presence in Europe is disappearing. Such historical myopia is not in keeping with the tenacity and wisdom of the Jewish people.

Jews must also realize that they are now living through their own collective sea change. For European Jews, that sea change is evident in four major, long-term transformations which carry the seeds of a possible European Jewish renaissance. What Europe's Jews will make of their new circumstances is another matter. It is the purpose of this paper to describe some of the new roads open to European Jewry.

## **1 / The post-1989 European sea change**

The four long-term transformations were thrown into relief by the following events: the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 which created an open, democratic, pan-European space; Israel's peace process with the Palestinians and its subsequent recognition by virtually every Arab state; the diplomatic recognition of the state of Israel by the Vatican, the culmination of the efforts of Vatican II to promote the religious and cultural openness of the Catholic Church towards Judaism; and the fiftieth anniversary of the Holocaust which marked the inclusion of that catastrophe at the heart of Europe's own history, releasing it from its characterization as a site of exclusively Jewish horror.

**The fall of the Berlin Wall** The fall of the Wall, the demise of the Communist regime and the opening of a vast pan-European space mean that for the first time in Europe's long history there are no longer any 'captive' Jews on the continent—or anywhere else for that matter. Every Jew in Europe can now, so to speak, reach Eretz Yisrael. The less often mentioned corollary is that now every Jew in Europe is a voluntary Jew. This has for a long time been technically true for Western European Jews. But new generations of Eastern European and former Soviet Jews are, for the first time, actively choosing to define themselves as Jews while remaining in their respective countries, now freely part of Europe. Whether or not these Jews continue to remain will have major implications for the future of a European Jewish identity.

**The Arab-Israeli peace process** The influx of former Soviet Jews has undoubtedly given Israel critical mass precisely at a time when its Middle East peace initiatives were opening up the possibility of regional normalization and international consolidation. At the same time, Israel's brash Sabra identity has been mellowing and gradually discovering its own complex Jewish roots.

Increasingly comforted by growing international recognition and legitimacy, yet profoundly chastened by the Rabin

assassination, Israel is now in the midst of a major crisis of political identity, a crisis exacerbated by the recent series of bombings and the election results which illustrate the deep divisions in Israeli society. New generations of ultra-orthodox Sabras (and some North American immigrants) deny any intellectual or emotional affinity with western democratic values and culture; indeed Rabin's assassin came from this milieu. In the face of such circumstances, Israelis might turn back to the European world which moulded their founding fathers, and rediscover some of the links which unite them with Europe. Those who fought to create a Jewish state, the Zionist pioneers at the turn of the century, as well as the Holocaust generation, shared Europe's humanist, cultural and political values. But these values were overtaken by the need to achieve Zionist goals. This is no longer the case. Confronted with Jewish zealots, Israelis must now renew their ties to their European diasporic past and reaffirm the universal principles on which the state was founded.

Israel's ties with Europe are anyway bound to be strengthened for simple geopolitical reasons. The gradual development of diplomatic, trade and other relations with Israel's Arab neighbours will bring home to Israelis the degree to which they remain linked to Europe by a shared culture. Rendered more secure by its demographic consolidation and its new-found acceptance in the Arab world, Israel will at last be able to come to grips with the fact that Europe is its cultural and historical backyard. Israel's connectedness to Europe and to European Jewry can only increase in the context of such changed national circumstances, in which fear for Israel's physical security and survival is replaced by the need to face up to the more complex issues of Israel's own identity and values.

**Diplomatic recognition of Israel by the Vatican** An intensified dialogue with various Christian denominations, and the Catholic Church in particular, has far-reaching consequences for the Jewish world. The Vatican's recognition of Israel brought to an end a 2,000-year cycle of official church-sponsored antisemitism and inherent hostility to Jews as a collective entity, religious, cultural or ethnic. And with this re-evaluation of the Catholic Church's links to Judaism, we are witnessing the gradual dismantling of one of the most destructive cornerstones of Europe's historical identity. By recognizing the ongoing validity of Israel's Covenant with God, and by recognizing the Israeli state itself, the church has at last accepted that Judaism is a living religion and a continually evolving force. The Christian world—primarily in its upper echelons but also increasingly at the parish level—is now intellectually prepared to listen to Judaism's eternal, but also modern, religious and spiritual message. The age of rigged medieval disputations is over. As a result, the burden is now on Jewish shoulders to present Judaism as a living, open and creative religion which is also concerned with non-Jewish 'others', rather than one of value only to the few. In order to hold on to its own Jewish flock while also establishing a place in a world willing to incorporate a Jewish religious message, Judaism must transcend its own traditional audience.

**Fifty years after the Holocaust** The integration of the Holocaust into the mainstream of European history, and its attainment of symbolic centrality in the contemporary European consciousness fifty years after the end of the Second World War, can only have a liberating effect on European Jews. Their personal and collective experiences as Jews have been woven into the fabric of the continent's own historical past in an unprecedented manner. This recognition of their inherent 'belonging', if only through suffering, has enabled Jews to re-examine their multiple pasts from a new perspective. It allows Jews to perceive Jewish life in Europe after the Holocaust in positive terms, and not only as a remnant of the rich, pre-war Jewish communal experience. Because it is now shared with others, that unspeakable caesura will, in time, become a bridge to a reconstructed European identity rather than an abyss.

The occurrence of so many positive turning-points in the life of European Jewry has proven to be just as daunting and even traumatic for Jews as the fall of the Wall was for Europeans in general. The opening up of new horizons has been greeted less with celebrations than with the political equivalent of agoraphobia. Rather than recognizing and pursuing the dazzling possibilities each of these turning-points offers, Jews caught in the post-1989 acceleration of history have found it easier to concentrate on all that was going wrong in Europe. The unresolved political, ethnic and nationalist conflicts which emerged after the fall of the Wall were, paradoxically, more than welcome: they 'reassured' those Jews wedded to a pessimistic plus ca change view of European history. And it relieved them (and other Europeans) of the need to confront and respond to the transformation of Europe.

With such a pessimistic perspective, it was easy for many Jews to misunderstand the four historical watersheds mentioned above, and to perceive them as deeply troubling events:

The creation of an open, pan-European space was construed by many as the return of the political instability, xenophobia and racism of pre-war Europe.

Israel's possible peace with the Arab world was considered a decided threat to its collective security and long-term survival.

The Christian world's new openness to Judaism was not only seen as a belated making of amends—largely to the advantage of the Christians themselves, since the strength of Judaism came from its religious self-containment—but as the development of a dialogue with Christianity which would only weaken Judaism.

Europe's acceptance of the Holocaust as an integral part of its history added to a new danger: its possible 'banalization' and relativization.

Anything that could possibly rock the post-war Jewish boat was perceived by many as a hostile force which could only sink it. At the end of the twentieth century the Jewish boat is indeed being rocked by new waves, particularly in European waters, but they can carry it—safely—in new directions.

## 2/ Jews in a new Europe: a change of paradigms

The newly united Europe has very little in common with the historical Europe which, until this century, constituted the centre of the western world—politically, economically and culturally. Today's Europe makes up only one part of the West; it has lost its historical hegemony. It has shrunk with respect to its previous self but, since 1989, it is slowly acquiring a new character: a continent united by a common, tormented, past and, more importantly, a common future. Europeans may have been the last to realize it, but what they perceived as a loose ensemble of distinct national parts has now become, for the rest of the world, a clearly demarcated European whole, no longer divided into warring camps. Since 1989, from Portugal to Russia, the whole of Europe has shared a common, uncertain but nevertheless open, political environment the countries of Europe, freed from the burden of the Cold War ideological divide, can now pursue their own cultural and political reckoning. Their citizens can rethink the foundations of Europe—its proclaimed values and assumptions—while assessing its horrors and challenges in light of their own respective national pasts. They are the children of a continent with a most complex human archaeology, and the heirs of an almost infinite array of ethnic identities, provincial aggregates and nation-states, each anchored by its own hallowed piece of history. Today's Europe, separated from the Second World War by the fifty-year caesura, is free to confront its own horrors and construct a new relationship to its motley pasts, as well as to build a more complex but less ideologically determined future.

**Europe as a new reference point** What is true for Europeans today is equally true for European Jews. For the first time ever, they are free to roam the continent, to choose their entrances and exits without the physical restrictions imposed by the former political and ideological divisions. The integration of the Holocaust into the mainstream of European history has given the Jews a significant role to play in the modern European drama. They belong—like everyone else: they too can rummage among Europe's multiple identities, taking up often damaged or scattered pieces and recombining them in a new, creative pattern. And they can do this freely under the protection of a growing pan-European acceptance of individual liberties and a free press. In both East and West there is now in the making a civil society in which all forms of expression are allowed. Democratic pluralism, however imperfect, misapplied or distorted, is at least acknowledged as a goal, no longer ideologically opposed even by Europe's resurgent neo-Communists.

True, neo-Communists have returned to power in most of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. True, some nations are emphasizing their own national identities at the expense of that of their minorities, and the western technocratic idea of Europe is in crisis. But these developments are far less important than the fact that, all across Europe, dissenting voices can not only be heard but are forcefully insisting on their rights. Such a qualitative change should encourage Jews across the continent to affirm their European identity all the more enthusiastically as the

best guarantor of their collective rights inside the new democratic and pluralist space. Only at a European level can Jews and all other groups combat the forces of intolerance. They should be defending a Europe that is variegated and multi-coloured: Europe as a kaleidoscope.

**The need for a European identity** There is no new collective flag flying over Europe today, stirring a new, unified European patriotism to replace the many patriotisms of its member states. The new Europe does not demand assimilation of the Jews as many states have done in the past. The opposite is, in fact, the case: today's Europe can be the site of renewal for Jews in that it is precisely that place where cultural, political and historical contradictions are freely expressed. It is not a tranquil place; but it is a place where full acceptance of the 'other' is possible.

Jews can and should take advantage of this new paradigm and create a European identity for themselves. This can be done without reverting to anachronistic choices: to an unquestioning patriotism and total assimilation, or to an equally dangerous indifference to the surrounding culture. Europe can provide Jews with a framework in which they can identify common problems and challenges, distinctive ones that do not necessarily exist either in the United States or in Israel. For Jews, Europe is newly emerging. It is not a finished product. And it is precisely in this unfinished sense that its Jews can be 'European'.

Where Jews once claimed their 'rights' and even official identity from the state, in the new Europe they must identify themselves as full-scale members of their countries' respective civil societies. Of course, this paradigmatic change affects all groups in society, not just Jews. However, the creation of a broader European civil society provides Jews with the possibility of identifying themselves with the emerging pluralist forces across the continent, and of transcending their own necessarily complex ties to individual states. Jews unquestionably belong in European civil society; they have formed an integral part of it for centuries. And it is as part of this liberated post-1989 civil society that European Jews can make their most positive contribution to world Jewry, and where they can build a network of positive, tolerant and pluralist identities. This is the challenge for Jews (and non-Jews) in the new Europe.

### **3/ New Jews in Europe: a change of paradigms**

Parallel with the change of European attitudes and values is—or should be—a change in the attitudes and values of Jews, in how they live and, above all, in how they perceive themselves. Since Jews in today's Europe are first and foremost voluntary Jews, their continued presence in European societies demonstrates a conscious personal commitment, especially in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union. Jews who choose to remain there and openly embrace their Jewishness are, by virtue of doing so, deeply involved in the political renewal of those countries. Accordingly they have a two-fold commitment which should make their identification with Europe all the more relevant. It would be wrong to assume in this context that Jewishness for Eastern European Jews is a 'secondary' phenomenon. On the contrary, to affirm such an identity in the wake of the Communist steamroller requires a strong will and a positive outlook. Rather than bemoaning the unfillable post-Holocaust Jewish void and adopting a pessimistic attitude towards a Jewish future in Europe, these 'rediscovered' Jews have committed themselves to their Jewish identities.

Jews who choose to affirm their Jewish identities in our highly individualistic, materialistic and religiously indifferent democracies are making an existential statement. They could just as easily disappear into anonymity, stop being Jews, and they are of course free to do so: it is one of their 'rights' in a pluralist democracy. Only in a highly authoritarian society is one a 'Jew' in official terms and on a permanent basis. The fact that a significant portion of Jews has chosen not to disappear in a free society implies a strong motivation and, above all, a desire to define their Jewishness afresh in positive terms. It follows that such Jews can define for themselves what being Jewish means, for there are many ways of belonging to the 'tribe'. In a pluralist and democratic society, one can be Jewish in a religious, cultural, intellectual, ethnic, even a political sense. This has always been true in the state of Israel and, largely, in the United States. But it is also becoming true in Europe, for there is no longer either a state or a Jewish organization which officially decrees 'Jewishness' or bestows attendant rights and privileges. There are competing

bodies to be sure, including religious organizations, but none of them has a greater claim on today's Jews than any other. We have entered the age of Jewishness as an integral component of civil society rather than as something rigidly defined by the state—be it a generous and benign state or, indeed, a malevolent and even murderous one like Nazi Germany.

The creation of a new European Jewish identity will require Jewish institutions to identify themselves with their respective civil societies. They can no longer be single-mindedly devoted to the state, a devotion which has shaped many post-war Jewish communities to this day. This is so not only in Eastern Europe but also in the West, where prominent citizens still represent their communities. Such institutional arrangements can have a pragmatic value, but it is important for Jews in Europe to realize that if they can be protected by the state they can also be annihilated by it. Safety and freedom in the modern world depend on the relationship between communities and other civil organizations, not on any special relationship with the powers-that-be. Because Jews are fully-fledged participants in civil society, they can freely engage in special relationships with Jews from other countries, such as the United States or Israel.

The end of 'captive' Jewish communities has also meant the end of 'autarchic' Jewish communities—those that are supposedly self-contained and autonomous, with no ties to other Jews. Henceforth all communities can be linked to one another, they can help each other and co-operate at the most profound levels. The renaissance of Eastern European Jewish communities is proof of this new transnational Jewish network, combining European, Israeli and American forces. In the past such combined efforts were used to bring relief and help, or to send Jews to Israel. Now they can also ensure that Jews can remain where they want to remain, and continue to enrich a cultural legacy they will pass on.

**The voluntary Jew in a pluralist democracy** Voluntary Jews are of course products of their communities; but in more philosophical terms they are self-made creations. Assimilated Jews in the nineteenth century could not easily break free from their origins. They were Jews in the sense described by Jean-Paul Sartre: a Jewishness defined from the outside, by others, an identity that cannot be shed. Today's Jews are first and foremost Jews in their own eyes, and therefore endowed with a positive sense of themselves. Others only perceive them as Jews because they first choose to see themselves that way.

In a pluralist democracy one is above all an individual, an autonomous agent, whose particular religious or cultural identity is the enrichment, the fleshing out, of the abstract citizen. Such a society may even encourage the flowering of Jewish identities in order to increase its diversity. However, it is crucially important that neither state nor civil society have the right to label anyone, whether Jewish or otherwise. We have entered the age of plastic and flexible identities. In time, the Jewish identity will also become more flexible; the strict religious definition—in which someone is Jewish if born to a Jewish mother—will be relaxed. Moreover, being Jewish will neither facilitate nor preclude other identities; it might take on greater or lesser meaning at different moments rather than acting as a permanent and static condition.

Indeed, one of the identifying features of a new European Jewish identity might be that these voluntary Jews will express themselves not only as Jews, but also as Europeans. The two halves of their identity might be enthusiastically combined in order to emphasize the unique character of the European Jewish presence. (The European half of the equation was often minimized in the past in an effort to appear wholly Jewish to other Jews.) European Jews will be able to make a unique contribution to world Jewry principally through their active commitment to Europe.

**The creation of 'Jewish space' fifty years after the Holocaust** There is now a new cultural and social phenomenon: the creation of a 'Jewish space' inside each European nation with a significant history of Jewish life. There are two aspects to this 'Jewish space'. The first is the gradual integration of the Holocaust into each country's understanding of its national history and into twentieth-century history in general. And the second is the revival of 'positive Judaism'.

As memories of the war recede, and the din of heroic battles and the pain of personal suffering fade, the Holocaust stands out sharply, not unlike a reef at low tide. The series of fifty-year commemorations—starting with the fiftieth anniversary of Hitler's coming to power and culminating in May 1995 with that of the end of the Second World War—has generated a number of newly erected Jewish memorials, newly built Jewish museums and specially held Jewish exhibitions, as well as the restoration of significant Jewish sites throughout Europe. The Jewish presence—and the Jewish absence—have become physically visible in ways that would have been unimaginable in the immediate post-war period and for many years hence. During that time remembering the Holocaust was either an internal Jewish affair or, more often, a footnote to the more pressing national preoccupation with anti-fascism or the Resistance. This new 'Jewish space' in European societies is undeniably linked to the belated recognition that a world was lost during the Holocaust. But if the Holocaust was the starting point for the creation of this 'Jewish space', its parameters have now been vastly expanded.

Each country is searching its history for the smallest sign of a Jewish presence, as though it would be a highly prestigious feather in its cap. Depending on a country's geographical and geopolitical position, this search might extend back to Roman times, to the early Middle Ages or only to relatively recent periods. This historical re-evaluation, taking place from Portugal to Russia, is significant because it coincides with Europe's coming to grips with its more recent migrants. As a result, Jews are increasingly being recognized as founding members of the European kaleidoscope.

**'Jewish space' and the revival of positive Judaism** The second aspect of 'Jewish space' is more important. It hinges on what one might call 'positive Judaism': the sense Jews have of themselves as a living, vibrant people, engaged in a symbiotic relationship with the cultures of their respective countries—rather than as victims. 'Positive Judaism' can be seen in such apparently superficial phenomena as the revival of local Jewish cuisine or seemingly endless Jewish jokes, or in more serious developments such as the increasing production and availability of recent Jewish fiction, music, photographs and art exhibitions—which are devoted to the portrayal of Jewish life rather than of Jewish death and the Holocaust.

It is important to stress that a rich 'Jewish space', containing a multitude of 'things Jewish', is not dependent on the size or even presence of a living Jewish community in any particular country. Indeed, it is possible that the larger the 'Jewish space', the smaller the number of actual Jews. In countries with sizeable Jewish communities, such as Britain and France, there is a lively and active Jewish community but perhaps less of that 'Jewish space' that is distinct from the community itself. Conversely, Germany—where the Jewish community is small by pre-war standards, and is not composed of descendants of the old German Jewish community—has without doubt the most impressive 'Jewish space' in Europe. That space appears to be limitless; non-Jews can embark on university degrees in Judaic studies confident of entering an expanding professional field. Other countries which are practically devoid of Jews, such as Poland or Spain (where important communities once thrived), have created vibrant 'Jewish spaces' in recent years. Other countries are following suit: for example, the discovery of the Belmonte community of Marranos in Portugal, or the celebration in Italy of centuries of Sicilian Jewish glory during the Middle Ages. Another example is the Ukraine which, since the demise of the Soviet Union, has become once again a land of ultra-orthodox pilgrimages to the graves of noted Jewish sages. There are in fact few countries in Europe today that do not choose to exploit the phenomenon of 'Jewish space' whether for noble or opportunistic reasons. The international media attention generated often paints a rosy picture of the country in question, especially in Eastern Europe, as a land of progress and tolerance—even when such tolerance is not necessarily being extended towards other, more visible, contemporary minorities.

A key question facing Jews today is how to interact with this 'Jewish space': should they fill it, accompany it, complement it or distance themselves from it? It is crucial for the creation of a new European Jewish identity that such a space not be monopolized by Jews, that it be open and open-ended. Without living Jews, however, such a space could become a museum. If a new European Jewish identity is to be created, it should be based on cultural encounters, joint reflections and activities in which Jewish identity and interests overlap with those of the wider national community. The religious and the non-religious can cohabit in such a space which is, after all, designed to

build bridges and enhance European consciousness.

European Jews must define themselves as active members of the new European democratic plurality, not simply as Jews who happen to live in Europe. They must—in the best European tradition—interact in an open and positive manner with the democratic forces of their societies. This requires above all a willingness publicly to acknowledge Judaism in all its complexity. European Jews must confront the fact that being a Jew is often mystifying for non-Jews who do not quite know whether such an identity is religious, ethnic, intellectual, cultural or even political. Openly allowing for the multiple aspects of modern-day Judaism—as well as its internal tensions—is the first step in the creation of a dynamic and pluralist European Jewish identity. In this way European Jews can confront the future serenely, without forgetting the past.

#### **4/ Towards a European Jewish identity**

Voluntary Jews in Europe today are free to choose their own form of Jewish identity. To envision which form might occupy the European Jewish centre-stage, it is helpful to look at the two opposite extremes of the spectrum. At one end are what might be described as assimilated 'Israelites' whose Jewish identity is based on tenuous Jewish roots and a certain humanistic, 'ancestral' respect for Jewish tradition. 'Israelites' have one ambition: to become just like everybody else in their respective nations. In order to prove that they merit such egalitarian treatment they have often been passionate patriots. Assimilation had its origins in the pre-Holocaust past, but it survived into the post-war period and has been gradually losing meaning ever since. Today Jews no longer have to demonstrate their patriotism in order to prove that they merit equal treatment. As fully-fledged citizens of a democracy, they belong. No one forces them to hang on to their tenuous Jewish roots. We may collectively regret or fear their withdrawal from the Jewish fold, but that freedom to withdraw is the other side of the positive coin of the voluntary Judaism of post- 1989 Europe. It is also interesting to note the virtual disappearance of another pre-Holocaust Jewish type, the self-hating Jew. Now that Jews are free to disappear into society at large, this sad and perversely poignant figure need no longer be bound to the identity of his forebears.

At the opposite extreme stand the ultra-orthodox Jews who define themselves in terms of a self-contained and eternal Jewish religious identity with quasi-racial overtones. These Jews live in their own voluntary ghettos, consciously cut off from the rest of society by their lifestyle and social contacts. Their only tie to the rest of the world is through the modern market economy in which they often play a highly functional role. As citizens of their respective democracies, they wield political influence through the ballot box, casting votes for the benefit of orthodox Jewry but without any particular sense of commitment to public life. Their only commitment is to the Torah. Everything else is historical contingency. This lack of commitment to democracy has been dramatically illustrated by the attitude of ultra- orthodox groups to the state of Israel, evident before the Rabin assassination. It would be ridiculous, therefore, to attribute to them any sense of European 'belonging'. Yet in a new pluralist Europe these pockets of ultra-orthodox Jews must not only be tolerated by other Jews but even appreciated, provided they too become sufficiently tolerant to accept other Jewish positions—as well as the rules of the game of the outside world. For these ultra-orthodox Jews do anchor Judaism to a living talmudic faith. Without them, Judaism as a whole would be immeasurably impoverished.

The range of possible European Jewish identities runs between these two extremes. Jews, like all other groups with a particular identity, pursue two parallel goals: on the one hand, to be treated as citizens like all others while, on the other, to be guaranteed the right to live as they wish. In post- 1989 Europe, regardless of the degree of democratization and pluralism, all countries, East and West, treat their Jews as full citizens with equal rights. Political and legal equality—as well as social equality—are no longer issues at a pan- European level. Jews are no longer pariahs in Hannah Arendt's sense of the term. They would no longer stand out as distinctive characters in a modern-day Proustian salon, for there is no longer only one ('Christian') route to success. The conversions to Catholicism and Protestantism which many prominent Jews were obliged to undergo in the first half of the century,

in order to pursue careers in Mitteleuropa (or in Western Europe), are unimaginable today.

**How should Jews define themselves in society?** In Europe, post-1989, the question is not so much how different states treat Jews but rather how Jews define themselves with respect to their own societies. Do they wish to be perceived as fully assimilated citizens with a unique religious affiliation, as a religious minority, an ethnic minority, a freely constituted 'pressure group' with specific rights, a community or a people? A majority of Jews would probably feel most at ease with a composite definition of their identity. How they choose to define their sense of belonging and their otherness will influence the making of a European Jewish identity. Above all, it will offer a useful reference point for other groups in our modern pluralist democracies, for the complexity of the Jewish identity resembles many other existential situations in the new Europe. It is therefore important to analyse the possible definitions in greater detail.

The assimilationist definition of Jews as identical to all other citizens except for their religious affiliation collapsed under the weight of the Holocaust. Jews were not deported from their respective countries and killed by the Nazis because they had a different religion, but because they were perceived as a separate and distinct, and damned, race. Nor does the definition of the Jewish community as a religious minority prove any more satisfactory. The Holocaust was not the equivalent of the massacre of the Saint Barthelemy in France when Protestants were killed because they were Protestants but spared if they converted. Jews were killed because they were Jews even when they no longer identified as Jews.

In a pluralist democracy with a strong civil society, individuals are not just abstract citizens plus a religion; they are infinitely complex beings with multiple identities. For post-war Jews the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the creation of the state of Israel, on the other, reinforced the sense that they belonged to a people with a common destiny. No longer would they allow themselves to be splintered into exclusive, nationalist pigeon-holes or defined in purely religious terms, for, after all, not all Jews are religious.

Nor are Jews a minority (except of course in purely numerical terms). This notion—always resisted in the strongly consolidated Western European nation-states such as Great Britain and France—is commonplace in Eastern Europe where it has had a long and tormented history which has resurfaced with the collapse of Communism. A minority, however, is defined in relation to a majority, and here again it is not easy to define the minority status of Jews. Is it religious, ethnic or linguistic? None of these categories makes sense any longer, even in Eastern Europe where, before the Holocaust, Jews constituted an ethnic/religious minority held together by a common religion and a common language (Yiddish). Eastern European Jewry in this sense has disappeared utterly. Jews are no longer an ethnic group with its own identity, language or status. The *shtetl* is gone.

To this one must add another crucial factor: the existence of Israel. Because the Jewish people now has its own land, European Jews can no longer claim for themselves the status of a minority or an ethnic group, for this would imply that they are a piece of Israel in another land, namely Israelis in Europe. Few Jews in Europe or elsewhere would define themselves as such regardless of the intensity of their ties to Israel.

**The acceptance of multiple loyalties** In post-1989 Europe the time has come to confront the complex and often intertwined components of Jewishness, and to admit openly what every Jew in the Diaspora has always known: it is virtually impossible to work out a tidy definition of 'Jewish identity'. Clear-cut definitions of belonging have always been the trademark of nationalist or authoritarian states (whose slogans often turned on the notion of 'one' ruler, 'one' people, 'one' state). Pluralist democracies thrive instead on nuance and complexity. This is why it is possible for Jews to prosper in such circumstances, not only in economic and material terms (something possible even in non-democratic countries), but far more significantly in existential terms.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust when European Jewry was nearly annihilated, the Jews in Western Europe have been able to live out their complex identities by virtue of what can only be described as an implicit pact between them and their respective states. Jews have been not only obviously free to practise their religion or culture in whichever way they have seen fit; they have been able, more importantly, to carry on a special relationship with another country, Israel, as well as simultaneously to commit themselves fully to the political, religious and social

well-being of their fellow Jews elsewhere in the Diaspora. In other words, post-war Jews have been allowed free movement within a network of uncontested multiple loyalties. They could campaign on behalf of Israel or of Soviet Jewry (by way of example) with an intensity which often exceeded their own country's foreign policy, without being 'curbed' or censored. Western European Jews have obviously behaved as loyal citizens of their respective states, participating fully in the democratic life of their countries. The deep ties which bound them to Israel and to their fellow Jews elsewhere have been accepted by the Western democracies of which they were citizens largely because of the Holocaust, as though it is understood that Jewish citizens could thereafter no longer adhere to a simply national definition of their identity.

This acceptance of Jews' multiple loyalties has, however been only implicit. Nowhere was it decreed or spelled out. In tomorrow's pan-Europe such an acceptance must become explicit, and not only for Jews, but for other groups as well. The right to feel a special bond with a 'homeland or with people in other countries who share a common language, religion, history or culture should become an explicit right for all Europe increasingly diverse citizens. Multiple loyalties should be construed as a spin-off of the democratic right of expression, available equally to Hungarians in Romania, Russians in Estonia, and Turks in Germany. Multiple loyalties, however, are only acceptable if people behave as loyal citizens, playing by the democratic rules and respecting the legal framework of their respective countries. What was given implicitly to Jews out of guilt should be given explicitly to all as an inherent democratic right. It is in the nature of a general pluralist democracy that Jews are able to pursue their multiple loyalties, and in doing so forfeit any special agreements that may have previously protected them.

Jews should no longer feel defensive about their multiple loyalties or about their ways of feeling Jewish; they should instead proclaim them openly as legitimate *modi vivendi* in a pluralist democracy. Since non-Jews have equally complex identities, it is always wrong to jump to the conclusion that they are being antisemitic if they say something negative about Jews collectively. At present non-Jews are damned if they forget to emphasize a Jewish perspective, but they are also damned if they evoke one, for one Jew's stereotype is another Jew's truth. One must have the courage to admit that Jews are quick to sound the alarm of 'antisemitism' whenever non-Jews try often in a gauche manner, to touch on historical, personal, religious or political topics linked to Jews. Jews should also become less paranoid about cultural stereotyping and recognize that in the future, they may (and should) be treated as one group among many others. Jews should save their ammunition for the menace of real antisemitism: a collective psychological disease and a deeply embedded political mindset which must be attacked whenever and wherever it raises its head, but must not be confused with the informal, often ironic and harmless characterization of 'others' in a pluralist democracy. What is significant is that Jewishness is now one among the many specific manifestations of a working pluralist democracy rather than a special category with special rights and privileges (and taboos) which are not available to any other group. Only in this spirit can Jews participate in a newly defined sense of national and European 'belonging'.

## **5/ Defining a new national and European belonging**

A great many of the Jews who have chosen to remain as Jews in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union took an active part in the 'revolutions' of 1989, as well as in the reform movements in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. They therefore very much resembled their Jewish western European peers who, on the whole, have always been more politically active and socially conscious than the majority of the population. Because of their relatively small number and their pluralist political outlook, the Jews of Eastern Europe are no longer directly tied to the ethnic Jewish masses who were their ancestors. They have in effect become 'western' Jews, confronting the same complexities and multiple loyalties as their far more established British or French cousins.

East and West, Jews in Europe today adopt positions in their daily political, cultural and social lives which are not always tied to their Jewishness or to what one may call the 'is it good for the Jews' reflex. Jews in Europe (like those in the United States) have multiple identities: they are not single-mindedly Jewish. While this state of affairs is often perceived as a sign of weakness and as proof of the imminent demise of European Jewry it might actually signal a

revitalization of Judaism on the European continent, by forcing it into dialogue with churches or groups which are now as never before, favourably disposed to such a dialogue. This perhaps more nuanced reading places Judaism in the context of a wider democratic pluralist commitment.

The creation of a new post-1989 European Jewish identity hinges on the fact that Europe's voluntary Jews consider themselves integral to each nation's identity, as well as to Europe as a whole as it is now being defined. In Eastern Europe, but in Western Europe as well, the Jewish approach to each country's national past, to its present circumstances, to its symbols and to its European future has changed perceptibly.

In the nineteenth century, the Jews in Europe sought assimilation, to become 'like everyone else', necessitating their full espousal of the grand historical narratives of their respective nations; they embraced the various mythologies, national heroes, battles and great historical turning-points as though the Jews had been participants in the epic national journeys from the very start. Much has been written on the French Republican tradition in which every child, regardless of personal ethnic origin, referred to *Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*. Similar demands were made in every other country as well, and Jews gladly complied. They would be moved to tears over the 'Saint Crispin's day' speech of Henry V, just as their equivalents in Germany were stirred by Wagner's evocations of the great Teutonic myths, or in Italy by Verdi's celebrations of *il popolo*. Such formative moments and references are crucial to a nation's history, and they must be perpetuated. The essential question today, however, is how? When Jews—in their assimilationist zeal—adopted as their own these classical defining moments of a national identity, it was assumed that they would not bring to bear any Jewish perspective on the national past. This was a non-negotiable condition which Jews had to accept.

Today the situation is totally different. European national identities are not frozen or carved in stone. Since the Holocaust, Jews can only have a dialectical, sometimes even suspicious, relationship to their country and its past. National myths may be preserved, but they are now to be understood symbolically, not literally. Modern historical scholarship which is rooted in a pluralist democratic world-view is gradually dismantling each of these national narratives. They are being re-examined according to new and critical methodologies which concentrate increasingly on civil society and the theme of exclusion and identity. In this context the Jewish perspective and the notion of memory become relevant and significant. Even more importantly, Jews in Europe expect their own specific history not only to be integrated into the appropriate national chapters of Europe's development, but also, in the process, to transform the standard readings. For example, previously revered and glorious rulers such as France's Saint Louis, or epic historical events such as the Crusades, take on entirely different meanings when seen through Jewish eyes. Similarly, the positive influence of rulers or societies that were well disposed to Jews are highlighted as part of the re-examination of the civil records of given periods. Jews and their collective history are thus entering into a dialogue with the various national pasts. There is now give- and-take as opposed to a one-sided process of historical 'conversion'. One could almost say that Jews are among the founders of the post-1989 reconstructions of the national pasts (East and West). They are becoming a normative influence in the recreation of a new European historical framework. The 'Jewish space' has penetrated into the heart of European national identity.

The gradual integration of the Holocaust into the consciousness of individual European countries— a phenomenon that took decades to be acknowledged openly by society as a whole—is of course largely responsible for this new integration of the Jews as Jews in national histories. But this process should not be limited to Jews alone. It should spread to all other ethnic groups, minorities and communities whose life experiences and cultural presences have been easily 'swept under the carpet' in the triumphalist histories of national consolidation. The open context of post-1989 Europe is finally enabling other hands to participate in the great rewriting of history which is slowly and patiently being undertaken. Jewish history is thus becoming a filter for a pan-European rereading of the past which can, by distinguishing national myth from historical interpretation, determine the nation's future.

While re-establishing the past is important, asserting a Jewish identity in the present is crucial. In a pluralist democracy, the Jewish dimension should be respected in all its complexity, and treated on an equal footing with other religions and cultures. As fully-fledged citizens of such a democracy, Jews are in a position to ask for rights, not special dispensations. This means that certain Jewish laws and customs, such as shabbat and kashrut, should be respected on state and public occasions when officials meet with Jewish representatives. There should not be

compulsory classes or exams on shabbat. Enough should be known about the Jewish calendar to make sure that no major activities or public meetings take place on Yom Kippur, for instance—or, for that matter, on the most important Muslim holidays. Obviously this does not mean that they should be turned into statutory holidays, like their Christian equivalents, but they should be taken into account when organizing the life of a country. Such a policy is crucial for a pluralist democracy: it allows observant Jews or Muslims to remain within the body politic and its social structures rather than having to banish themselves into voluntary ghettos.

Jewish rights, however, impose Jewish responsibilities. Nowadays in Eastern Europe, as in the West, Jews are free to enrol their children in Jewish schools and to live an independent Jewish existence. By choosing voluntarily to live in the Diaspora, however, these Jews must accept the laws of their state and, more importantly, they must also accept its culture and pass it on to their children. If they wish to live a totally Jewish life, they now have an alternative—they can move to Israel. European national identities, language and culture count. They are not merely scenic backdrops, but positive factors in the creation of a multiple Jewish identity.

**How Jews choose to relate to their country and society** The Holocaust destroyed forever the innocent patriotism which so many assimilated European Jews had embraced as an almost religious belief. Nonetheless the fact that nearly every war-time European country (with the obvious exception of Denmark and Britain) at best displayed indifference towards the plight of their Jews and at worst engaged in actual collusion with the Nazis cannot forever determine Jewish attitudes to Europe. Nor does it justify an unwavering hostility on the part of the Jews who live in these countries. Setting the historical record straight about the Holocaust is a moral imperative, as is the condemnation of all forms of racism, xenophobia and antisemitism. But those tasks cannot constitute the *raison d'être* of an entire community. There is life after the Holocaust. And, more importantly, those are tasks that can be shared with non-Jewish fellow citizens, as can many other activities which make life worth living. In a few years' time, the overwhelming majority of each country's population will have been born after the Holocaust, and the rest will have been mere children at the time. To adopt a single-mindedly combative attitude implies a belief in never-ending, collective guilt, in a national antisemitic 'essence', an evil which is culturally programmed and beyond redemption. More significantly, it assumes that Jews are, by definition, alienated from European society, thereby reinforcing the views of Europe's antisemites. Jews should instead be setting out to demonstrate the opposite.

Jews must therefore prepare themselves for the day (which is fast arriving) when the Holocaust will cease to be the *sine qua non* of their history, separating them from their fellow citizens. At that point it will be important to emphasize the other side of the identity equation—the positive links that connect the Jews in Europe to their non-Jewish fellow Europeans—and use it as the foundation for a new pluralist identity which transcends the specifically Jewish case.

One of the most basic of these links is language. Diaspora Jews are not Israelis; for them Hebrew—however much of it they may know—will always remain a second language. Their principal language is that of their native country. It is important that the non-Jews who share those languages realize that they have been enriched and to some degree shaped by their Jewish fellow citizens who are an intrinsic part of the national culture. The same applies to literature: the works of Jewish writers should not be relegated to a separate category nor should their Jewish content be ignored. This is the meaning of Jewish complexity: to be equal and different at the same time. It is only in this sense that pluralist democracies can have a cultural identity. The institution of the 'national' writer—one animated by the collective 'soul' of the nation—has disappeared. We now live at a time when groups can express themselves in national terms through the unifying medium of a common language, whose importance as a bonding agent will actually increase over time. Jews imbued with the language and culture of a given country are in an ideal position to interpret its cultural subtleties for fellow Jews elsewhere in the world. The medieval tradition of a Jewish transnational network thus takes on an entirely new meaning: Jews can and should be a new transnational network at the heart of Europe.

**Why become European Jews?** Why should Jews—loyal citizens of their respective countries and bound by special ties to Israel and to their fellow Jews elsewhere—take on yet another identity as Europeans? One answer is that a European framework—a compromise between world citizenship and one's own national identity—is the logical dimension for the future. However, for the Jews in Europe, there is a far more important reason. Jews have been in

Europe even before the idea of Europe existed, even before the fall of the Temple. They are not an older version of today's Sri Lankan asylum-seekers. There is no reason for Jews to exclude themselves from European society today because they were traditionally excluded from it by those in power (the Roman Empire and, later, the Catholic Church). Europe's Jews have a perfect right to assert that they belong in Europe because they were always there—an existential affirmation that can be compared to Martin Luther's 'Here I stand'. Exercising that right is one way of overcoming Hitler's legacy; the specific intention of the Nazis was, after all, to rid Europe of a Jewish presence.

Furthermore, there is not one European Jewish family whose ancestors were not forced into peripatetic journeys across the continent by the vicissitudes of Europe's complex history. If the descendants of the 'wandering Jew' have accounts to settle with the past, it is with the pan-European past. In today's post-1989 Europe any positive Jewish identity can only be European. Such a European identity may add a layer of complexity, but complexity is what being Jewish is all about. (Even Israel, founded on the principle that Jews at last could become 'normal' like every other nation, is learning this quintessentially Jewish lesson as it tackles its own identity demons.) Because of their post-war experiences, Jews in Europe can look beyond the Holocaust and help reshape Europe as committed Europeans. Only they can do so, for many of their fellow Jews elsewhere are absorbed almost exclusively by the Holocaust and the squaring of accounts with the past, and still regard Europe as the source of evil.

The long process of Jewish-European reconciliation, now beginning on the pan-European stage, will constitute a crucial chapter for all Jews, a missing piece in their own cultural puzzle, for Jewish history is also European history. This chapter need not be a closed one—if Jews accept their European identity in positive terms. And, furthermore, the manner in which they do so will prove crucial for all other minorities in European societies.

## **6 / Towards a new 'belonging': between assimilation and multiculturalism**

In his highly pessimistic book, *The Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945*, Bernard Wasserstein concludes that in the near future there will be virtually no Jews left in Europe except for a few pockets of self-contained, ultra-orthodox Jewish communities, not unlike the Amish in the United States, and a mass of people with a vague sense of having had Jewish ancestors, not unlike Native Americans, happy to wear their tribal gear once a year for folkloric purposes. This scenario spells out the dangers which European Jewry must avoid if it wishes not only to survive but to develop as a new and dynamic presence on the pan-European continent. Self-contained, ultra-religious communities take to an extreme the communitarian model, which has become increasingly accepted in the Anglo-American vision of a multicultural democracy. It could be said that such groups enter into an implicit pact with the state (the Germans call it 'constitutional patriotism'): they play by the rules of the game in political and economic terms provided they are allowed to pursue their religious and cultural identities without state interference. Their vision of the *res publica* is minimal, and when they do participate in wider debates it is on an 'issue-oriented' basis. Such 'glass-covered ghettos' are spreading on the continent, well beyond the traditional communities of Antwerp and Strasbourg. They must be accepted and, ideally, encouraged to interact more constructively with the wider community of both Jews and non-Jews which could be enriched by their religious values and talmudic scholarship.

There are, however, limits to multiculturalism and communitarianism in Europe, for constitutional patriotism alone cannot hold people together (even in the United States). In Europe, moreover, each country is steeped in such a profound history and cultural tradition that it cannot easily adopt a purely abstract political notion of national belonging. Not only Jews in Europe but other groups as well must realize that, when they interact with the national majority, they are interacting with a complex identity based on history, language, literature, pride, fear and ancestral relationships. This complexity cannot be ignored, but it is not an insurmountable obstacle to pluralism or to Jewish integration. Pluralism should be articulated around a collective identity that is voluntary; it can be based on a common language, history, geography or even common conflicts. Without such a collective identity, there can be no dialogue or meaningful interaction. It is the pre-condition for 'the third way', the alternative to both assimilation and

ghettoization: integration.

**Creating a European Jewish identity** The situation of Europe's Jews after the Holocaust is interesting for other groups in Europe to ponder. Jews today have moved away from the old assimilationist ideals of their pre-Holocaust forebears. An integral part of their life as citizens in the public arena has been to reaffirm their religious and cultural identity. In his classic study, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, Peter Gay described the extraordinary generation of intellectuals, artists, writers, architects and musicians, whose collective existence was brought to a halt by Nazism, as those who in reality—because of the collapse of Wilhelmine Germany—had become 'outsiders as insiders'. This predominantly Jewish group found itself catapulted from the political, cultural and even social margins of society into the heart of the short-lived Weimar Republic. For Gay, the extraordinary vitality of this group derived from the tension created by their paradoxical status.

For Jews in post-1989 Europe exactly the opposite is true: they are 'insiders as outsiders'. Fully integrated in their respective countries in political, economic, social and intellectual terms, they choose to exceed their national identities by voluntarily assuming a Jewish identity. It is important to understand, however, that this 'outsider' status is complementary to, and not in conflict with, their status as 'insider' citizens because, in a pluralist democratic culture, the two can be integrated.

Whereas the tensions of the Weimar Republic were explosive, the tensions produced by the 'insider as outsider' today are much gentler for they exist within a democratic consensus. In the long run, however, they can prove even more corrosive, for they undermine cultural certainties and challenge long-held taboos. In this way the 'insider as outsider', whether Jewish, Arab or a member of any minority group, is uniquely equipped to redefine the foundations of a European identity *from within*.

The creation of a European Jewish identity is neither obvious nor simple. It requires effort and the will to build a positive relationship between Europe and its Jews. The ambition to do so is as novel as the Jews who can carry it out, and both are as new as the continent itself. When Raoul Hillberg wrote his classic *The Destruction of European Jewry*, he referred to the Jews of the European continent almost as if they were a geographical location; a resident of a *shtetel* in remote Galicia had literally nothing in common with an assimilated Jewish university professor in the French Third Republic. They were, however, reunited at Auschwitz. But their real or symbolic descendants who remained in their respective parts of Europe were only reunited seven years ago, hence the crucial importance of 1989 as a new point of departure for European Judaism.

Furthermore, European Jewry has become enriched by Jews whose communities were not touched by the Holocaust: France's North African Jews, Italy's Libyan and Lebanese Jews, Switzerland's and Sweden's Jews together with Soviet Jewry constitute so many offshoots of a non-Holocaust past. They are, however, becoming European Jews as they absorb the implications of the Holocaust and, simultaneously, transcend it. They have accordingly joined hands with the actual descendants of Holocaust victims, the assimilated and ethnic Jews of old. Out of these three separate strands a new European Jewry will be born, one which accepts Lubavitchers in Milan while regarding today's Polish Jews as the equivalent of Italy's old and tiny community.

This contemporary reunification is not only being conducted under the banner of life rather than death, but also between equals. In today's Europe the differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim will gradually disappear, leaving simply the common defining traits of being Jews in a pluralist Europe. In terms of numbers, wealth and organization, the substantial communities in France and Britain can certainly not be compared to their fledgling counterparts in Eastern Europe or even Russia. What counts, however, is that there is no longer any note of condescension in the relations between the Jews of the European continent. This was not the case in the past when the European Jewish hierarchy was strictly applied: *Ostjuden* were looked down upon by German Jews, who in turn were perceived as *Ostjuden* by French and Italian Jews, while British Jewry remained as aloof as the British themselves from the continent. Jews everywhere have become urban incarnations of modernity. In the West the process took place incrementally, as a steady social transformation. In the East, the Holocaust and subsequently Communism accelerated the tempo in a brutal manner. But sociologically the result was the same: the vast majority of European Jews today belong to the urban middle classes and live in the continent's great metropolises. The great

Jewish human community with its own Balzacian lower depths is gone. We are dealing with a well-educated, urban group. Those remaining Eastern European Jews have become like western European Jews. There are no more *Ostjuden*. Those who still practise their religious orthodoxy and retain an exclusive Jewish identity do so voluntarily and as members of modern communities which play by the democratic rules. The exclusion is gone.

In the post-war period, however, a new hierarchy emerged in the three leading centres of world Jewry: Israel, the United States and Europe. To the Israelis it was obvious that they represented the new Jewish future and had become the centre of world Jewry. American Jews, while wholeheartedly standing behind Israel, felt that they too personified a different type of Jewish future and that without their presence the threatened state of Israel would cease to exist. Both Israel and the United States did agree on one point, however: the future did not depend on European Jewry, which was a spent historical force. They regarded the Jews of Europe with a paternalistic (in the case of the United States) or pragmatic (in the case of Israel) eye. Inside Europe, a similar desire to separate the wheat from the chaff was at work. British and French Jewry condescended to Jews in other parts of Western Europe, such as the smaller communities of Holland, Belgium, Scandinavia or Italy. As for Eastern Europe, the Iron Curtain prevented any serious dialogue between its Jews and the other half of European Jewry. These attitudes became all too visible with the fall of the Wall in 1989.

The change of paradigm which we have examined has one final consequence: the end of what I call the Jewish paternalistic *matryoshka*. The political *matryoshkas*, the traditional Russian dolls, on sale today in Moscow have a tiny Lenin contained inside a larger Stalin who is in turn contained by Khrushchev; Gorbachev contains Khrushchev before being contained by Yeltsin. World Jewry- using numbers and the intensity of Jewish life as the measure rather than the previous measure of degree of cultural assimilation—sometimes seems to think of itself in these terms as well: a tiny European Jewish doll contained inside a larger British doll, itself contained inside a French doll which is in turn inside an American doll, the whole set of dolls inside a gigantic, triumphant Israeli *matryoshka*. This Israeli *matryoshka* is of course the only one visible at first glance; the fact that it contains (and hides) all the other dolls is justified on the grounds that Israel will soon contain the majority of the world's Jews.

Such a paternalistic *matryoshka* would be catastrophic for world Jewry, for even Israel is not in a position to look down on the other Jewish communities despite the fact that their numbers are declining or that in Eastern Europe their attempts at renewal are as yet feeble. The Holocaust has made the Jewish people prisoners of 'numbers', lest, so it seems, they face extinction. On this point a historical perspective is once again in order: the Eastern European Jewish masses are not the historic constant for Jews in Europe, but rather the exception. Pre-eighteenth-century European Jewry was numerically small, scattered in many communities but nevertheless very much present. There is no reason why small but committed communities cannot survive in the contemporary world, when European Jewish networks can easily provide the necessary 'marriage pool' and cultural contacts. Jews, even in tiny homeopathic doses, can create a strong Jewish presence in any society. The 'electronic fax Jew' need no longer feel isolated and lost. It is important to have a Jewish presence in as many places as possible as living proof of a pluralist Jewish identity. World Jewry cannot be completely contained in one nation-state with its own internal and external problems.

A European Jewish identity will help to bring about the end of this paternalistic *matryoshka*. It will help Jews everywhere to realize that European Jews have a strong and legitimate place in the Jewish family, regardless of their absolute numbers. What counts is the role they play as Jews in their respective democratic pluralist societies, both in reconstructing the past and living the future. They should no longer be considered the weakened remnant, the potential defectors, the smallest and least visible of all the *matryoshkas*.

Europe is not Australia. It is a place where Jewish history, culture and creativity have been rooted for more than two thousand years. That history cannot be reduced to a mere episode of colonization in an Israeli rewriting of history; nor should it become a latter-day version of post-1492 Spain in which Jews exist primarily as a symbolic memory. It is up to us, as Europeans and Jews to turn Europe into the third pillar of a world Jewish identity at the cross-roads of a newly interpreted past, and a pluralist and democratic future.

## Report author

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Across the former Iron Curtain, a new eastern identity is taking root, undermining the joyful narrative that dominated the reunification story on past anniversaries. "It's an existential moment for the country," said Yury Kharchenko, a Berlin-based artist who defiantly identifies as a German Jew despite "and because of" the armed guards outside his son's nursery in Berlin. "Everyone is searching for their identity." Overcoming the past, especially the Nazi ideology that gave rise to the Holocaust, has been a guiding precept of German identity since World War II. In West and East alike, the Jewish identity "or the interest in it" has created a wild, carefree hybrid culture that's young, hip and an antithesis to the way this New York Jew and 2G was raised. To those of us whose Jewish identity was predicated on Holocaust trauma and tragedy and who, like Woody Allen, wonder why anyone would voluntarily want to claim a piece of this guilt pie, the festival's take on Jewish heritage presents a glowingly positive picture of what it means to be Jewish, and one that for once isn't propelled by the Chabad, or right-wing Orthodoxy. Still, I wonder, isn't it a paradox that of all places, Who are the Jews? What does it mean to be a Jew? Is there a difference between Judaism and Jewishness? Is it a religion, a family, a tribe, a nationality or something entirely different? Solving the Mystery of Jewish Identity. By Tzvi Freeman. 234 Comments. Why Is Jewishness Matrilineal? Maternal Descent In Judaism. By Tzvi Freeman and Yehuda Shurpin. The Code of Jewish Law states that a child of a Jewish mother is Jewish, regardless of the father's lineage.