

JEWISH CITIZENS OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA: POLITICS  
OF JEWISH IDENTITY IN A SOCIALIST STATE, 1944-1974

by

Emil Kerenji

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Todd M. Endelman, Co-Chair  
Professor John V. Fine, Jr., Co-Chair  
Professor Zvi Y. Gitelman  
Professor Geoffrey H. Eley  
Associate Professor Brian A. Porter-Szűcs

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ABSTRACT

JEWISH CITIZENS OF SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA: POLITICS  
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Co-Chairs: Todd M. Endelman and John V. Fine, Jr.

This study investigates the process of Jewish communal rebuilding in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust. Focusing on the activities of the central Jewish organization in the period, the Federation of Jewish Communities, it explores linkages between Jewish identity, politics, social memory, and ideology in the context of a multiethnic socialist state. It tells the story of the Jewish rebuilding efforts in the post-Holocaust era in Yugoslavia in order to show how commemorative practices and processes of identification emerge, position themselves in, and are shaped by a matrix of conflicting state and non-state political projects.

Taking advantage of the political climate in postwar Yugoslavia, the leadership of the central Jewish organization situated its rebuilding efforts within a wider narrative of Yugoslav reconstruction spearheaded by the Communist government. From rebuilding communal infrastructure to dedicating monuments to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities pushed through a rebuilding agenda that was a part of a wider Yugoslav narrative, and that defined Jewishness as an identity



firmly rooted in the new Yugoslav political project. By focusing on several micro-level debates about the boundaries of Jewishness in Yugoslavia, the dissertation shows how patterns of Jewish identification formed within the discursive framework provided by the new Yugoslav socialist ideology.

This dissertation aims to contribute to the integration of seemingly separate “Jewish” and “non-Jewish” histories, provide insights into the processes of creation of space for Jewish identification in socialism and the forging of diverse Jewish identities after the Holocaust, as well as into the politics of memory and the competing narratives of victimhood in postwar Europe and their consequences for different politics of nationhood.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

To choose as one's dissertation topic the history of a Jewish population decimated by the Holocaust and further diminished by emigration in the aftermath of the infamous and well-televised disintegration of the very country whose citizenship they chose to embrace seems at first glance like a foolish enterprise. Indeed, presenting a paper focusing on Jewish history in Yugoslavia at a major American academic conference is likely to raise eyebrows and invite the well known "so what" question that young academics entering the job market fear most: why is the history of the Jews of Yugoslavia or any of its aspects relevant for us today? This dissertation shows how focusing on several specific aspects of post-Holocaust Jewish history and politics in socialist Yugoslavia can serve as a starting point for addressing broader questions about post-Holocaust Jewish diaspora identity, memory and commemoration of the Holocaust, and relations of ethnic and national minorities in Central and Eastern Europe with the state in the postwar period. By taking as its center of attention the small, but socially and politically prominent group of Yugoslav Jews in the period of socialist Yugoslavia from the liberation of Belgrade in 1944 until the passing of the 1974 constitution, the dissertation seeks to fine-tune key analytical concepts, such as identity and memory, that have framed our understanding of historical developments in Jewish history in the European context.

The temporal and conceptual settings of this dissertation seek to question several frameworks of interpretation that have dominated debates about post-Holocaust Jewish history in Central and Eastern Europe in general, and in the Balkans and Yugoslavia in particular. First, using the example of Yugoslavia, the dissertation situates post-Holocaust Jewish history within the larger context of Central and Eastern European history after World War II. Furthermore, it moves away from the notion of “the surviving remnant” in its analysis of Jewish history in this region after the Holocaust, and posits that questions we can ask about the Jews in post-Holocaust Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans should not necessarily be limited by the concepts of identity, memory, and antisemitism. In other words, the dissertation claims that the questions with which we approach the study of Jewish history in this context should be related to wider questions that we ask about this region in this period: questions of politics, power, and nationalism. Finally, the dissertation claims that not only can we better approach these questions by redefining the concepts of “identity” and “memory” as relevant for the study of the history of Central and Eastern Europe after World War II, but that studying Jewish history in this context is a fruitful way of embarking on the path toward such redefinition.

### Jewish and Non-Jewish European Histories

The Holocaust decimated the Jewish populations of Europe and destroyed the traditional bases of Jewish identity in much of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. New communist regimes swept across the region following the end of World

War II. Apart from extreme outbursts of antisemitic rhetoric for legitimizing purposes, as in the cases of Slansky and Rajk trials in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and the post-1968 antisemitic backlash in Poland, these regimes relied, more generally, on the ideological narrative of socialist internationalism, and were generally deeply distrustful of Jewish populations and their suspected Zionist leanings.<sup>1</sup>

The devastating impact of the Holocaust on the numbers of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe, the impossibility of the continuation of Jewish life based on traditional prewar foundations, and Jewish emigration to Israel and the West, provided a bleak setting for the study of post-Holocaust Jewry, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Few scholars were interested in researching the history of Jews in Europe after 1945; the influential, albeit polemical, interpretation of Jewish history in this context has been Bernard Wasserstein's *Vanishing Diaspora*, a social and political history published as late as 1996, in which the author posited that, for a variety of demographic, political and cultural developments, Jews did not have a future in Europe.<sup>2</sup> At the time of publication, Wasserstein's account was also virtually the only scholarly account of this topic, which is indicative of the extent of the scholars' interest in pursuing this issue. In the period in which Jewish life in Europe, as well as the possibility for its meaningful regeneration, did not seem feasible, research in the field focused on other Jewish populations, mostly in

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<sup>1</sup> For an unorthodox, but excellent account of the Stalinist years in Hungary, including the Rajk and Nagy trials and their consequences, see István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). For Czechoslovakia, see Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Latham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). For Poland, see Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York: Random House, 2006). For the general European context of the legacy of World War II in Europe with respect to collaboration and the general war experience—much of which was very relevant for Jewish life in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust, see István Deák, Jan Gross, and Tony Judt (eds.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000)

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe Since 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Israel and America. Especially important in this period was the expansion of research on the *yishuv* and Israel, which, in accordance with the Zionist view of history, was a natural focus of post-Holocaust Jewish life. The periodization of modern Jewish history in Europe has therefore been divided by the watershed event that the Holocaust undeniably was. Pre-Holocaust history of the Jews in Europe in the modern age thus became a history of successes and failures of integration into European societies; questions of acculturation, emancipation, and Jewish politics, with their various facets that were approached from different analytical frameworks and with a variety of research agendas, became key topics of scholarly debate.<sup>3</sup> After the Holocaust, however, it seemed that *European* Jewish history was no more; the paradigm of the unviable “surviving remnant” thus dominated—sometimes implicitly, sometimes more openly—the scholarship about the history of European Jews after the Holocaust for a long time.

This development has partly been the result of the inaccessibility of archival collections in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to scholars, and the particularly sensitive nature of the topic. Research about the rebuilding of Jewish life in the aftermath of the Holocaust and the relations of the Jewish communities with the new states in the Soviet orbit—and all this in the geographical heartland in which most of the Holocaust had taken place—was very difficult in the circumstances in which most of these countries have, at one time or another in the postwar period, mobilized antisemitic rhetoric in order

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<sup>3</sup> For some excellent contributions on these topics, see Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: Roles and Representations of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class: Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Zvi Gitelman, *The Emergence of Modern Jewish Politics: Bundism and Zionism in Eastern Europe* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002); Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Todd Endelman (ed.), *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); etc.

to pursue their specific political goals. For political reasons, therefore, it was mostly impossible for native scholars to pursue this research topic, while foreign scholars were mostly unable to access national archives of these countries. But even this undeniable historical development cannot account for the lack of such research initiatives in other European contexts.

Even the works that did address aspects of Jewish history in Europe after the Holocaust mostly adopted the Zionist view of Jewish history, to the extent that they implicitly negated the possibility of meaningful Jewish life in Europe. Several works on DP camps, a topic that has recently generated much scholarly interest, have stressed the Zionist character of political agitation in the camps, or the fact that most camp inmates eventually emigrated to Israel. While these works are well-researched and ultimately do contribute to our better understanding of this important topic, they nevertheless regard this period of immediate post-Holocaust Jewish history in Europe as transitory, an episode in the larger story of Jewish emigration from Europe, mostly to Israel.<sup>4</sup> While it is undeniable that large numbers of Jewish survivors did emigrate from Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust, it is important to note that comparable numbers decided to stay. Few scholars were interested in doing research on the ones who did stay, although the issues they had to deal with—rebuilding individual and communal lives in the aftermath of destruction, property issues, forging new relationships with new states and regimes—were interesting research questions that were inextricably linked to political, social, and cultural processes in the postwar history of Europe. Jewish history in Europe

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<sup>4</sup> Zeev Mankowitz, *Life Between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Hagit Lavsky, *New Beginnings: Holocaust Survivors in Bergen-Belsen and the British Zone in Germany, 1945-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998).

after the Holocaust, however, remained uncharted territory for a long time.

Recently, however, scholars have begun to question this framing of post-Holocaust Jewish history in Europe. Michael Brenner returned to the study of DP camps, but went on to investigate Jewish life in Germany beyond them.<sup>5</sup> Jay Howard Geller mapped out Jewish institutional developments in both western and eastern Germany in the first eight years following the end of the war.<sup>6</sup> In an excellent comparative study, Maud Mandel studied issues facing post-genocide Armenian and Jewish communities in France.<sup>7</sup> Atina Grossmann has shown us how to integrate successfully postwar Jewish and German histories.<sup>8</sup> Several forthcoming doctoral dissertations will investigate similar topics in the eastern European context.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from filling the gap in postwar European Jewish history, these works have, more importantly, placed the history of the Jews within the larger framework of European history. This is hardly a new development in the field: in the last two decades, a number of works have situated Jewish history more firmly in its European context, and sought to go beyond the dichotomy of “Jewish” vs. “European” (or “German,” “French,” etc.—and thus implicitly “non-Jewish”) history that characterized the works of early historians in the field. Scholars have investigated different aspects of acculturation, gender, Zionism, and other topics in modern Jewish history, positioning their research firmly within the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See the forthcoming dissertations by Anna Cichopek at the University of Michigan, and Karen Auerbach at Brandeis University, both on Jewish history in postwar Poland.

wider European context.<sup>10</sup> In the period following the Holocaust, however, such works are conspicuously missing. The numbers of Jews who either decided to stay in Europe after the Holocaust, or were prevented from emigrating were not negligible, and even though they were a mere shadow of their prewar numbers, the “vanishing diaspora” argument seems to be less than convincing as a rationale for not writing the social or cultural history of the Jews in Europe after the Holocaust. Surely, Bernard Wasserstein did not argue for such silence: he himself wrote a history of the Jews in postwar Europe, and presented a cogent, if controversial, argument. But the mere fact that the number of works about this period in modern Jewish history is much lower than the number of Jewish populations and different fascinating aspects in their history in Europe after the Holocaust warrants, is telling. It is all the more disturbing since the period exhibiting such paucity of works on history of the European Jews after the Holocaust follows temporally the attempt by the Nazis to annihilate not only the Jews in Europe and everywhere else where they (the Nazis) could reach them, but also traces of Jewish culture and existence in Europe.

I situate my dissertation in the context of the emerging scholarship on Jewish populations and Jewish history after the Holocaust. Like authors of other works comprising this body of literature, I regard the study of post-Holocaust Jewish history in Europe as a relevant academic pursuit in the sense I have outlined above. Moreover, I

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<sup>10</sup> The body of literature I am alluding to is enormous. It will suffice here to mention just several such excellent works, which have pursued topics in modern Jewish history in a wider European setting. See footnote 3, as well as Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); etc.



consider the study of aspects of Jewish history in this context as one of the more interesting and fruitful ways of approaching issues in postwar European history. In this dissertation, I study the ways in which the central Jewish organization reformulated the meaning of Jewishness in socialist Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and recreated space for what they saw as a meaningful Jewishness; but this work is also about how a particular understanding of Jewishness reflected a wider debate about communist legitimacy, the particular understanding of the history of World War II in Yugoslavia as the basis for that legitimacy, and the formation of a multiethnic socialist state in the Balkans after World War II on the basis of that understanding. Similarly, by studying antisemitism in Poland after the Holocaust, Jan Gross has engaged in a wider discussion of the uses of history, the nature of historical memory and the politics of exclusion of European nationalism after World War II.<sup>11</sup> Robin Ostow has studied the new immigrant Jewish communities in Germany after 1989, in order to address wider academic debates about diasporas, immigration, and transnationalism.<sup>12</sup> And Atina Grossmann has studied the intertwined lives of Jewish and non-Jewish Germans and non-Germans in occupied Germany as a way of interweaving Jewish and non-Jewish histories in post-Holocaust Europe, and raising, in this way, questions of identity and normality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Gross, *Fear*; see also Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> See Robin Ostow, "The Post-Soviet Immigrants and the *Jüdische Allgemeine* in the New Millennium: Post-Communism in Germany's Jewish Communities," *East European Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 2003), 54-70. See also Robin Ostow, *Jews in Contemporary East Germany: The Children of Moses in the Land of Marx* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies*.

## The Holocaust, Memory, and Identity

In contrast to the scarcity of studies of Jewish history in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust, works on memory of the Holocaust and post-Holocaust Jewish identity have proliferated. This body of literature has encompassed a large number of works from a variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches.<sup>14</sup>

The focus of most of these studies has been Jewish identity after the horrifying destruction that the Holocaust wrought on Jewish communities in Europe. The concept of “identity” in most of these works, furthermore, is used as a self-evident category of analysis. Such customary use of this term has usually been divorced from historical or sociological analysis of identity formation, and even when a habitual nod is given to its constructedness, the term usually remains a reified concept whose “persistence,” “decline,” or “lack” authors then go on to explore. Whereas terms such as “identity” and “identity politics” have thus become categories of everyday use, the analytical value of “identity” as an analytical concept has remained problematic. In a fairly recent article, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have pointed to some of the important shortcomings of the term as a category of analysis, and suggested several alternative approaches that should help us theorize the understanding of the self and social groups.<sup>15</sup>

In a more narrow context—that of Jewish studies and Jewish communal leaders and

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<sup>14</sup> Again, the number of these works is too large; some of the more well-known ones include Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Where Memory of the Holocaust Ends and History Begins* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); Jeffrey Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Jonathan Kaufman, *A Hole in the Heart of the World: Being Jewish in Eastern Europe* (New York: Penguin, 1997); Lynn Rapaport, *Jews in Germany after the Holocaust: Memory, Identity and Jewish-German Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Ruth Gruber, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society*, No. 29 (2000), pp. 1-47.

institutions—the concept has likewise remained vague, and usually undefined; its existence or lack are presumed. The concept is usually approached in unhistorical ways, and without analyses of discursive practices that shape individual or collective identities in specific contexts.<sup>16</sup>

The concept of memory and commemoration has, similarly to that of identity, been used as a framework for understanding the way in which images of the past are employed in the present in order to delineate and reinforce a particular understanding of a personal and group belonging. Most of these works go back to the pioneering study of Maurice Halbwachs, who studied the subject already before World War II, and who argued that the formation and transmission of such particular and always selective images of the past cannot be understood outside the social context.<sup>17</sup> While the basic thrust of his analysis has been widely accepted by scholars of memory, who have produced a number of works of commemoration of landmark events such as wars and the Holocaust, it has remained unclear how exactly this social context works in order to produce particular understandings of the past, the present, and the self.<sup>18</sup> In a classic work in which he argues that social memory functions through commemorative ceremonies and the ordering of bodily practices, Paul Connerton critiqued Halbwachs' understanding of

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<sup>16</sup> For another critique of the concept in a Jewish context, see Laurence J. Silberstein (ed.), *Mapping Jewish Identities* (New York: New York University Press 2000), especially 1-36.

<sup>17</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> The literature on public memory, commemoration, monuments, etc. is enormous. For more famous exemplars, see Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989), 7-24; Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); John Gillis (ed.), *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Jan-Werner Müller (ed.), *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); etc.

the term “social memory.” Connerton argues that if we are to continue studying social memory along the lines suggested by Halbwachs, we should focus on communication between individuals through the generations; it is at this site that “social memory” is ultimately formed.<sup>19</sup> Moving away from Halbwachs, however, Connerton suggests that processes of social remembrance are situated in, and transmitted through, ritualized social practices.

Taking Connerton’s argument as a point of departure, my work focuses on the specific context in which the need to identify as a member of a Jewish community in a very specific way, and the need to commemorate mass murder of the Jews within a discursive field limited by political and ideological concerns, emerged in the postwar period. Rather than understand the history of Yugoslav Jews after the Holocaust in terms of analytical categories of “memory” and “identity,” and thus force, as it were, the history of Jews in Yugoslavia into an analytical straightjacket, I am interested in exploring how these categories were formed as categories of practice in specific historical circumstances. Why were the Jews in Yugoslavia eager to officially commemorate the Jewish victims of World War II carnage in Yugoslavia as early as 1952 (at a time when very few organized Jewish communities elsewhere were interested in pursuing similar activities)? I argue that in order to understand the processes of commemoration and identification, we need to move beyond the reified concepts of “memory” and “identity,” and take a closer look at specific contexts in which the needs to identify on ethnic or national grounds, or commemorate historical events, are debated. In the case of Yugoslavia, understanding Yugoslav Jewish “identity,” and the “memory” of the Holocaust that the Jews of Yugoslavia developed through commemorative practices, are

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 36-38.

inseparable from the processes of institutionalization of the rule of the Yugoslav Communists and their particular vision of history, especially that of World War II.

### Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Jews

This dissertation is also about a period in the history of socialist Yugoslavia.

The history of Yugoslavia remained on the margins of scholarly interest until the 1990s; few scholars were working on its history before the breakup.<sup>20</sup> After the outbreak of the wars in the 1990s, however, literature on Yugoslavia boomed; the dominant paradigm of this new historiography, fuelled by a well-televised war and the seemingly incomprehensible eruption of mass violence, became—with almost no exceptions—a history of a failed cultural, political, and economic project. Historians of Yugoslavia thus attempted to identify the roots of disintegration, continuities of centrifugal forces and processes, persistence of cultural difference and intolerance, and other teleological explanations that would account for Yugoslavia's ultimate demise. Most authors came to the conclusion that Yugoslavia was an artificial creation, economically, politically, and culturally unviable, and that it was bound to disintegrate sooner or later. The titles of some of the standard studies of Yugoslavia and aspects of its history refer to it as “impossible,” “contested,” as a “paper house,” as a nation that was “made” and then “broken,” a country that was either “twice” or “three” times, which then “fell” and

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<sup>20</sup> Two classic works about the history of Yugoslavia published before its breakup are Dennison Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), and Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

“died.”<sup>21</sup>

While some of these works are undoubtedly well-researched and interesting, most of them fall into the teleological trap and accept the categories that have served the nationalists in their project of breaking Yugoslavia apart.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, few of these works concentrate on the formative years of socialist Yugoslavia, the period from the liberation until 1962, when the new constitution inaugurated the process of political and economic decentralization.<sup>23</sup> In this first period of the history of socialist Yugoslavia, the government tried to institute a cultural policy that would forge supranational Yugoslavism, a socialist identity that would replace ethnic affiliation that, in their view, was responsible for the especially vicious form that World War II had taken in the Yugoslav context. Although this policy was ultimately abandoned, the Yugoslav communists were serious about implementing this policy and had support from significant strata of the population in this period—which is essential for a fuller understanding of the history of Yugoslavia and, ultimately, its breakup.

This dissertation contributes to the understanding of this crucial period, as well as

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<sup>21</sup> See, among other examples, Misha Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (London: Penguin, 1992); Mark Thompson, *Paper House: Ending of Yugoslavia* (London: Hutchinson, 1992); Laura Silber and Allan Little, *Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation* (London: Penguin, 1996); Brian Hall, *The Impossible Country: A Journey through the Last Days of Yugoslavia* (London: Secker & Warbury, 1994); Aleksa Đilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); John Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There was a Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918-2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). The list is too long to be exhausted here.

<sup>22</sup> Among the works that have challenged the dominant historiography of Yugoslavia are Carol Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944-1953* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), and Valère Philip Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War: Serbia and Croatia in the 1990s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> For some good work that constitutes an exception to this rule, see Tvrtko Jakovina, *Američki komunistički saveznik: Hrvati, Titova Jugoslavija i Sjedinjene Američke Države, 1945.-1955* (Zagreb: Profil, 2003); Bogdan Denitch, *The Legitimation of a Revolution: The Yugoslav Case* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

the decade beyond it, through the lens of Jewish history. It focuses on the period from 1944, when Belgrade was liberated and the office of the Federation of Jewish Communities was reestablished in the city, until 1974, when a new constitution brought further decentralization, and in effect created a Yugoslav confederation.<sup>24</sup> In these three decades, the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities negotiated a new meaning of Jewishness, within the boundaries set by the Yugoslav state. These boundaries, in turn, reflected the Yugoslav communists' understanding of ethnic politics, nationalism, and the Yugoslav past. Studying the reconstruction of the Jewish community, sparse and marginal as it was, we can gain insight into the workings of the Yugoslav state in this period, and its conceptualization of basic categories that were to characterize Yugoslav politics in the postwar period: nation and nationality.

Like Yugoslavia itself, its Jewry goes back only to the beginning of the twentieth century. After the political unification of the south Slavs, the new state, called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, became home to different Jewish populations who lived in different territories of the western Balkans. The connections of these Jewish populations to their former cultural centers in Vienna, Budapest, or Salonika, were severed after the unification and the establishment of new boundaries and markets; the Serbo-Croatian-speaking Zionists, in their turn, embarked on the political project of creating a Yugoslav Jewry, a community that was to be forged out of those culturally and economically disparate populations. On the eve of World War II, a community of Yugoslav Jews was indeed created, with common institutions, concerns, and sense of

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<sup>24</sup> For a good analysis of the 1974 constitution, see Vojin Dimitrijević, "The 1974 Constitution as a Factor in the Collapse of Yugoslavia or as a Sign of Decaying Totalitarianism," in Nebojša Popov and Drinka Gojković (eds.), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 399-424.

destiny, which, as elsewhere in Europe, was bleak. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, and after emigration to Israel of a substantial part of the surviving Jews by the early 1950s, the community was rebuilt in socialist Yugoslavia, as a pan-Yugoslav group that had to negotiate the coordinates of this new kind of Jewishness within the discursive boundaries imposed by the new socialist state. While some aspects of this new identity were symbolically connected to the new state and the communists' understanding of Yugoslavism and identity, some were clear continuation of prewar efforts of the Zionists: even when, for example, in 1967 Yugoslavia severed diplomatic relations with Israel, Yugoslav Jews held on to their commitment to the Jewish state and the Jews from Yugoslavia who lived there, and refused to denounce publicly what was habitually referred to as "the Zionist imperialist aggression" in Yugoslav politics and media. This dissertation is also about all these developments. While telling the story of the Jews in Yugoslavia, it will highlight the historical and political processes in socialist Yugoslavia.

Few authors have worked on the history of the Jews in Yugoslavia, or even the Balkans. Apart from Benbassa's and Rodrigue's magisterial study of Sephardi Jewry in the early modern and modern Balkans, there have been very few other works that have engaged with this topic, either as general syntheses or studies of individual Jewish populations in the region.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, Yugoslavia and its Jews were topics of only a handful of scholarly studies. The definitive one, entitled *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, was written by Harriet Freidenreich in 1979.<sup>26</sup> Freidenreich's is a study of interwar Jewish

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<sup>25</sup> Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15th to 20th Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). See also Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Harriet P. Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979).



life in Yugoslavia, with a closer focus of three different communities—Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo. A classic work of social history, *The Jews of Yugoslavia* addresses issues such as the Jews’ linguistic assimilation, occupational structure, social mobility and social and political institutions. Freidenreich argues that by the time World War II began in Yugoslavia in 1941, the Jews had forged a unified community, with some important differences remaining among the three major communities she focuses on. The discussion of the postwar period is assigned to a short epilogue, entitled “The Surviving Remnant,” in which Freidenreich lists the major developments in Jewish history in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust. She concludes that “[t]he vibrant Jewish communities of interwar Yugoslavia, well adapted to survival in a multinational state, live today as memories, not as realities.”<sup>27</sup>

Other works on the Jews of Yugoslavia have been less well-known. Benjamin Gordiejew, an American anthropologist, studied Yugoslav Jewish identity after World War II, by analyzing its performative aspects (commemorations, celebrations of Jewish holidays, attendance at synagogues, etc.), mostly through interviewing selected Yugoslav Jews, among whom individuals from Belgrade are disproportionately represented.<sup>28</sup> Gordiejew claims that the Yugoslav Jewish identity after the Holocaust was created as a “collective voice of submergence,” and that the Jews in Yugoslavia conducted “an experiment in secular Jewishness.” Although Gordiejew’s work offers the reader some important insights into the peculiarities of the situation in which the Jews in Yugoslavia found themselves after World War II, his claims and methodology are sometimes problematic. He seems to take “identity” as an unproblematic analytical category, and

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<sup>27</sup> Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia*, 210.

<sup>28</sup> Paul B. Gordiejew, *Voices of Yugoslav Jewry* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

goes on to posit frameworks of interpretation (“collective voice of submergence,” “experiment in secular Jewishness”) that are neither grounded historically, nor very useful for a better understanding of Jewish history in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust. In addition, Gordiejew’s analysis is mostly divorced from the Yugoslav context in which his subjects found themselves living. Similar to his work is a study of the post-Yugoslav Jewish community in Croatia by another American anthropologist, who applied a somewhat oxymoronic framework of “renewed survival.”<sup>29</sup>

Finally, a Finnish historian, Ari Kerkkänen, published a monograph about the Jews in Yugoslavia after World War II.<sup>30</sup> Kerkkänen was interested in two important junctures in the history of the Yugoslav Jews: the immediate post-World-War-II period, when the communities were rebuilt and Jewish life rekindled after the Holocaust (1944 to 1952), and the late 1980s and early 1990s, when Yugoslavia disintegrated, and the Jews of Yugoslavia found themselves living in the newly created successor nation states. The author pays special attention to the relief efforts organized by the Federation of Jewish Communities immediately after the war, through the creation of the Autonomous Relief Committee (ARC) at the offices of the Federation in Belgrade. Although Kerkkänen’s work is important and well-researched, his interest is limited—perhaps due to his limited access to the relevant archives—to several isolated periods in the history of the Jews in Yugoslavia. His study thus remains an interesting contribution to the study of this topic, but limited in its import.

In addition to these works in English, there has been a limited number of works in Serbo-Croatian addressing the history of the Jews in Yugoslavia. Some of these works,

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<sup>29</sup> Nila Hofman, *Renewed Survival: Jewish Community Life in Croatia* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Ari Kerkkänen, *Yugoslav Jewry: Aspects of Post-World War II and Post-Yugoslav Developments* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2001).

such as Ivo Goldstein's history of the Holocaust in Zagreb, deal with the Holocaust or the prewar period; others, such as the publications of the Federation of Jewish Communities itself, are very brief and non-academic accounts of successes in the rebuilding of various aspects of Jewish life after the war.<sup>31</sup> Although a number of the latter works can be used as primary sources in an attempt to recreate the image that the Federation wanted to project at specific points in time after World War II, the fact remains that important aspects of the post-World-War-II history of the Jews of Yugoslavia (with the exception of parts of Kerkkänen's work) has not been explored.

This dissertation builds on Freidenreich's and Kerkkänen's fine work, and takes the history of the Yugoslav Jews into the post war period. Unlike Freidenreich, who has done excellent work exploring aspects of social history, I am interested in cultural aspects of this history as well. I investigate the discursive strategies through which the leadership of the Yugoslav Jewry forged a community, as well as the political and social implications of this process. And building on Kerkkänen's study of isolated developments of postwar Jewish history in Yugoslavia, I put the period into perspective, connect it to major developments in the history of postwar Yugoslavia, and argue that the Jews in Yugoslavia formulated and instituted their patterns of national identification within a system of discursive possibilities offered by the Yugoslav state.

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<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji, 1918-1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997); Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2001); Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu, 1918-1941* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2004); David Levi (ed.), *Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije. Spomenica, 1919-1969* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1969); etc.

## Chapter Outlines

Chapter II is a brief historical overview of the Jewish communities in the “Yugoslav lands”—areas of the Western Balkans, parts of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires in which a “south Slav” ideas about political independence, unification, and the forging of common history and language emerged in the nineteenth century. I point to major differences between these populations, in order to set the stage for the argument of the next chapter, and, more broadly, for the dissertation itself.

In Chapter III, I examine the emergence of Yugoslav Zionism in the period from 1896 to 1941. I argue that the Zionists were the first group to imagine a unified Jewish community comprised of all the disparate Jewish populations from the western Balkans. They worked toward uniting the Jewish populations in Yugoslavia for their own political purposes; the Yugoslav Jewish community in the interwar period, however, was institutionally well organized thanks to the early efforts of the Zionists. The chapter examines debates about Yugoslav Jewish unity, visions of modernity and backwardness, and institutional projects and developments debated on the pages of the emerging Zionist press in Serbo-Croatian—the annual reports of *Bar Giora*, an association of Yugoslav Zionists in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century, *Židovska smotra*, *Židov*, and *Jevrejski glas*. I argue that particular conceptions of what a Yugoslav Jewry is and should be first emerged through debates in these newspapers. After the Holocaust, some important aspects of the prewar Yugoslav Jewish community forged by the Zionists—its persisting ideology of unity through cultural diversity, its tenacious support for the *yishuv* and a Jewish state in Palestine, and its sense of mission in international Jewish politics—

persisted into the new era.

Chapter IV is a brief historical account of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, and important aspects of World War II in the country. Since the federal state that the communists built after the war rested on the foundations of a particular understanding of what had happened during the war, it is important to outline briefly the history of the war in Yugoslavia, as well as the narratives that emerged in its wake. It was within this specific conceptual and historical environment that the Federation of Jewish Communities led the rebuilding effort and situated Jewishness in the new country.

Chapter V concentrates on the years immediately following the end of World War II. I argue that it was in this early period that the Federation of Jewish Communities assumed the leadership position among the Jews of Yugoslavia that it never had before the war. This mostly happened due to a number of urgent problems that needed to be solved (relief efforts, property issues, reestablishment of communities), which necessitated a central coordinating body. The leverage of the Federation as such a body was established by its ability to channel aid funds received from international Jewish organizations, primarily the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), through the Federation bodies. The existential dependence of all remaining Jewish communities in Yugoslavia on this relief effort created strong (and hierarchical) bonds between the Federation and the communities, and allowed the Federation to formulate, through discussions at the meetings of the Executive committee, consultations with JDC officials, and taking into consideration the situation on the ground, the criteria according to which Jewishness was defined. Although initially this Jewishness was defined for the purposes of establishing eligibility criteria for humanitarian aid, important bases were set

for the later understanding of Jewishness in socialist Yugoslavia.

Chapter VI looks at the activities of the Federation in the early 1950s, regarding the arguments about the need to commemorate the Jewish victims of World War II as one of the most important missions of the organization. The words “Holocaust” and “Shoah” were not current at the time, and the Federation framed its rhetoric within the larger narrative about the “victims of fascism” that was one of the legitimating discourses of the new socialist regime. This was not due to the regime’s repression or negation of the story of Jewish victimhood, although it was ambivalent about the uniqueness of Jewish suffering during the war. However, the phrase “victims of fascism” was employed differently in the official discourse of the regime and the rhetoric of Jewish public workers, although the latter never attempted to frame the story of the Holocaust outside the official narrative of the “victims of fascism.” This ambivalent discursive position of the story of Jewish suffering allowed the Federation to connect it firmly to one of the legitimizing narratives of socialist Yugoslavia. In this way, the story of the Jewish experience was framed discursively as a part of a wider Yugoslav experience, while specific Jewish sites of this narrative were preserved. The important coordinates of this complex relationship can be seen from the Yugoslav-wide campaign that was led by the Federation in 1953 and 1954. In 1953, the Federation decided to commemorate the “Jewish victims of fascism” by planting a “live monument” of 60,000 trees in Israel, one for every Jew from Yugoslavia who had perished in the war. Since the funds for the “Forest of the Martyrs” could not be collected by relying merely on Jewish individuals and communities in Yugoslavia, the Federation appealed to Yugoslav political institutions and organizations, state-owned firms, trade unions and other organizations to

contribute to this effort, which was widely publicized and closely followed by the Yugoslav press. Specifically, however, I concentrate on the building and unveiling of five major monuments to the Jewish victims of fascism in 1952 in order to show strategies through which the Federation symbolically connected Jewishness to socialist Yugoslavism.

Chapter VII explores the discursive boundaries of Jewish socialist Yugoslavism in the period from the 1950s to the 1970s. I focus on the journal of Yugoslav Jewish youth, *Kadima*, as well as on the annual gatherings of the young members of Jewish communities across the country, in order to trace the changes in the understanding, among those young members, as to what constituted “Jewishness” in Yugoslavia. Rather than being “the last generation of Yugoslav Jewry,” as the leaders of the Federation feared, these young men and women debated a Jewishness that was divorced from its traditional bases—such as, for example, religious observance—but nevertheless created a sense of community and common destiny that was reinforced through *Kadima* and the annual gatherings.

## Chapter II

### Jews in the South Slav Lands in the Nineteenth Century

In the century preceding the creation of Yugoslavia, the various Slav domains of the Austrian and the Ottoman empires—realms of the “Slavic South,” as the region had been romantically imagined by the Illyrian renaissance men—were inhabited by different Jewish populations. Those Jewish groups differed from one another in the specific areas they inhabited, the conditions of settlement under which they had been allowed to reside, and political, economic and cultural patterns that characterized both their communities and the political units and societies in which those communities resided. The main Jewish divide (Sephardi/Ashkenazi) in the region ran along the frontier between the two empires; however, this traditional division was by no means the only one that separated the Jewish communities of the region. From the first Serbian uprising of 1804, and throughout the nineteenth century, the imperial borders shifted as the national movements gained strength at the expense of the imperial regimes, inaugurating tectonic changes laden with political, economic and cultural implications. The new realities affected everyday lives of different Balkan populations; for the Jews, the sweeping changes often meant that, along with many other realities that had been taken for granted, their political status was going to be questioned and redefined. In the course of the nineteenth century, for example, Serbia first became an autonomous principality and then a full-fledged independent state; Bosnia-Herzegovina was an increasingly autonomous Ottoman



province occupied by Austria-Hungary in 1878 (and formally annexed thirty years later); Croatia, a collection of hereditary provinces of Hungarian kings, was engaged in a long legal battle with Hungary over historical and legal rights; and Macedonia was fought over by the new Balkan nation states at the expense of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. The political, economic, and cultural imprints that differing imperial regimes as well as the changing circumstances and their implications left on their Jewish populations lasted well into the era of the creation of Yugoslavia. The social transformations the Jewish populations faced in the region, as well as the political debates concerning their status, therefore differed somewhat from those encountered by Jews in Europe (Western, Central and Eastern) and Jews in the Ottoman Empire; these differences influenced both the brand of emerging south Slav Zionism by the end of the nineteenth century, as well as the character of the Yugoslav Jewish community after the creation of Yugoslavia in 1918.<sup>32</sup>

In the Ottoman realm, the Jews were almost exclusively Sephardi Jews. They

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<sup>32</sup> For a general introduction to the academic debate about different models of Jewish emancipation and acculturation in different parts of modern Europe, as well as for their critiques and case studies, see Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979); Jacob Katz (ed.), *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish model* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987); Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (eds.), *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (eds.), *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Calvin Goldscheider and Alan S. Zuckerman, *The Transformation of the Jews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron and Uri R. Kaufmann (eds.), *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History: The Roles and Representation of Women* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Paula Hyman, *The Emancipation of the Jews of Alsace: Acculturation and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance israélite universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

settled in the Ottoman Empire following the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and founded communities in Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that since their settlement in the Balkans in the sixteenth century they had followed the common Ottoman Jewish model described by Benbassa and Rodrigue in their landmark study of the Balkan Sephardim, by the middle of the nineteenth century the northwestern Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire increasingly became peripheries that diverged politically from the Ottoman center.<sup>34</sup> From the early stages in the social transformation of Balkan societies in the nineteenth century, the Sephardim of Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and eventually (albeit to a lesser extent) Macedonia diverged from what Benbassa and Rodrigue have, somewhat unfortunately, termed the “Sephardi *Kulturbereich*.” Even though the Sephardi diaspora in all corners of the Ottoman Empire shared, to a large extent, communal structures, occupational patterns, economic and political positions, and cultural identity from the post-Iberian settlement into the twentieth century, these were increasingly being questioned in some Balkan provinces from the beginning of the nineteenth century. From very early on in the century, since the uprisings in the *pashalik* of Belgrade in 1804 and 1815, and especially after 1830, Serbia became ever more independent from the Porte; its nation-building project, eventually legalized at the Congress of Berlin, had direct implications for the fate of the Jews—so much so, that the emancipation of the Jews became a formal condition for independence in 1878. The position of the Jews in Serbia from the beginning of the nineteenth century presented a radical discontinuity with the Ottoman model, as they

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<sup>33</sup> For an overview of the Sephardi Balkans in the modern period, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans: The Judeo-Spanish Community, 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> For the outline of the Ottoman Jewish model I rely on Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, 1-64.

were faced with a Serbian nation-building program with visions of exclusion that was entirely different from the traditional Ottoman one.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the other hand, even though the province was under Ottoman rule until 1878, local circumstances created conditions that made life quite different from the political mainstream in the Ottoman heartland. In addition, the Austrian occupation of 1878 changed both the legal and cultural landscape of Bosnian Jews. It was only in Macedonia that the Ottoman system persisted for much of the nineteenth century, and that one can properly speak, as Benbassa and Rodrigue do, of the common Sephardi cultural and political patterns. In other words, the Ottoman Balkan provinces that would eventually be encompassed by the new Yugoslav state in 1918 started diverging from the imperial political system and the “Sephardi *Kulturbereich*” from the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup>

The autobiography and diary of Gabriel Arié, a prominent Bulgarian Jewish leader and the official of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, is an illustrative example of the centrifugal nature of these processes.<sup>36</sup> Born in Bulgaria in the second half of the nineteenth century, and a native speaker of Ladino, he was educated in *Alliance* schools and eventually started working on behalf of the *Alliance* as well. However, it was

Bulgaria, Asia Minor, and the Middle East that were the focus of Arié’s cultural and

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<sup>35</sup> In the words of Benbassa and Rodrigue: “The creation of [the] new nation-states did not definitively undermine Eastern Sephardi unity. Nevertheless, although the Sephardim preserved the same language, traditions, and culture with some variations, they were henceforth destined to adapt themselves to local circumstances and follow the evolution of the different states. The policies undertaken by these nation-states, the rights granted to their minorities, the degree to which the Jews identified with the ideology of their new masters, the nature of the regime and the directions it chose, were some of the factors which determined development of those communities,” *The Jews of the Balkans*, 66. Even though Benbassa and Rodrigue contend that in spite of these developments, “it was still possible to talk about a Judeo-Spanish *Kulturbereich* in the Levant until the Second World War” (66), it is clear that the fundamental transformation of Jewish life in the new Balkan nation states rendered that *Kulturbereich* less relevant than the immediate “national” concerns of the new Jewish communities.

<sup>36</sup> Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue (eds.), *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe: The Autobiography and Journal of Gabriel Arié, 1863-1939* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

educational efforts, and not the western Ottoman provinces in which, save for Macedonia, there were no *Alliance* schools because of the changed local legal and political circumstances. Arié's frame of reference—political, economic, and cultural—was constituted by the triangle of Salonika, Istanbul, and Smyrna; Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Monastir, which only a century previously would have been important centers in a cultural geography of any Balkan Sephardi leader, were already “off the map” by the time Arié started his work.<sup>37</sup> The fact that a century previously a Balkan Sephardi leader would certainly not have been a “modernizer” *a là* Arié, and would probably have been an incarnation of a more traditional Jewish leader steeped in Rabbinic Judaism—such as, for example, the Zemun rabbi Yehuda Alkalay, whose teachings reverberated across the Jewish Balkans—only reinforces the point about the changed political, economic and cultural circumstances of the Balkan Jews by the second half of the nineteenth century and the gradual slip into relative insignificance of the common political, cultural, and economic Balkan Sephardi space.

Similarly, the major Ladino newspapers that had emerged by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and that had large Sephardi readerships in the Ottoman Empire, were not widely read in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia, although they had been available, at least in the beginning. The Ladino press in Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, was not only out of touch with the mainstream Ottoman Jewish press (the Istanbul-based *El tiempo*, and the Smyrna-based *La buena esperanza*, to name just two important periodicals), but its main local counterparts (the Belgrade-based *El amigo del pueblo* and the Sarajevo-based *La alborada*) were short-lived, confined to a

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<sup>37</sup> For Arié's biography, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *A Sephardi Life in Southeastern Europe*, 3-55.

narrow readership, and ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>38</sup> A prominent Sephardi intellectual from Belgrade characterized the situation in the city at the turn of the twentieth century: “The time of [Ladino] script and [Ladino] publications is over.”<sup>39</sup> This, however, is not to claim that Ladino publishing and culture had withered away in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and Macedonia by the beginning of the twentieth century; indeed, important works such as Laura Papo Bohoreta’s *La mujer sefardi de Bosna*, an interesting ethnography of traditional Bosnian Sephardi life and the position of women in Bosnian Sephardi society, were being written in Ladino as late as 1931.<sup>40</sup> However, by that time, such publications were marginal with respect to their position in both local and heartland Ottoman Jewish societies. Bohoreta’s work differed in style and tone from didactic Ladino works dedicated to “modernization” that saturated the Ottoman Jewish Ladino reading market; the concerns of the mainstream Ottoman Ladino intellectual orbit, in which political and cultural responses to the rapid transformation of Ottoman society were first formulated, were quite different.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Bohoreta’s manuscript remained unpublished until it became useful for recreating the Bosnian “multicultural past” in the first decade of the twenty-first century in the newly independent, post-genocide Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the first history of the Bosnian Sephardim had been published almost a century earlier—not in Ladino, but in German, in 1911, by a young Sephardi intellectual from Sarajevo with a

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<sup>38</sup> Milica Mihailović, *Jevrejska štampa na tlu Jugoslavije do 1941. godine* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1982), 5-20.

<sup>39</sup> Benko Davičo, a letter from 1900, published in Madrid in 1905, in a collection edited by Angel Pulido, entitled *Españoles sin patria*. Quoted in Milica Mihailović, *Jevrejska štampa*, 20 (n. 9).

<sup>40</sup> Laura Papo Bohoreta, *La mujer sefardi de Bosna*, published as *Sefardska žena u Bosni* (Sarajevo: Connectum, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> For an excellent discussion of the Ladino press in the Ottoman Empire in from its beginnings to the interwar period Turkey, see Sarah Abervaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern*.

doctorate in law from the University of Vienna.<sup>42</sup>

### Jewish Communities in the Ottoman Realm

The community of Monastir, today Bitola in Macedonia, was founded in the sixteenth century by settlers from Salonika, and was one of the first settlements of Sephardim in the south Slav lands.<sup>43</sup> In the first half of the nineteenth century, Monastir was a relatively well-to-do community of some 7,000 Sephardim. Their prosperity was exemplified by prominent synagogues, whose names—Portugal and Aragon—indicated Iberian community origins.<sup>44</sup> Sephardim founded other communities in Macedonia, such as Skopje, Veles, Dojran, Prilep, Ohrid, and Štip.<sup>45</sup> After the demise of Monastir, which suffered from the mid-nineteenth century through a combination of natural and political disasters, as well as severe destruction and depopulation during the Balkan wars, Skopje developed as a regional center and an important Sephardi community. Monastir's fate was sealed with the severing of its economic connection to Salonika in 1913, when Macedonia was partitioned, and Bitola (the new Serbian name) became a distant

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<sup>42</sup> Moritz Levy, *Die Sephardim in Bosnien: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Juden auf der Balkanhalbinsel* (Sarajevo: D.A. Kajon, 1911). The Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia published a Serbo-Croatian translation in 1969, as *Sefardi u Bosni: Prilog istoriji Jevreja na Balkanskom poluostrvu* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1969). The last Serbo-Croatian/Bosnian translation was published as *Sefardi u Bosni: prilog historiji Jevreja na balkanskom poluotoku* (Sarajevo: Bosanska biblioteka, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> Krinka Vidaković-Petrov, *Kultura španskih Jevreja na jugoslovenskom tlu* (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 2001), 17. Originally published in Sarajevo by Svjetlost in 1986.

<sup>44</sup> Vidaković-Petrov, *Kultura španskih Jevreja*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> For a history of Macedonian Jews, see Ženi Lebl, *Plima i slom: Iz istorije Jevreja Vardarske Makedonije* (Gornji Milanovac: Dečije novine, 1990).

provincial town in “southern Serbia.”<sup>46</sup> Characteristic of the Sephardi Jews of Macedonia was their traditional way of life within the realm of the Ottoman *millet* system, their conservatism and religious piety, and their dependence on the fortunes of Salonikan economy.<sup>47</sup> Apart from traditional Jewish schools, there were three schools operated by the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Macedonia, one each in Monastir, Skopje and Štip.<sup>48</sup> Although the Jewish economy of Salonika, the largest Jewish center in the Ottoman Balkans, experienced a degree of prosperity at the end of the nineteenth century, by this time its large Jewish population lagged economically behind its Greek and Armenian competitors.<sup>49</sup> This gradual decline of the Jewish Salonikan economy in the latter part of the nineteenth century, coupled with the physical and economic destruction and depopulation followed by the establishment of new borders in the aftermath of the Balkan wars, contributed to the impoverishment and outright destitution of the Macedonian Sephardim.<sup>50</sup>

Up until their incorporation into the expanding Serbian nation state in the aftermath of the Balkan wars, and until they became the citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, the Sephardim of Macedonia remained largely on the

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<sup>46</sup> For an interesting history of the Monastir Jewish community in English, see Mark Cohen, *Last Century of a Sephardic Community: The Jews of Monastir, 1839-1943* (New York: Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the concept of the Ottoman *millet* system, see Benjamin Braude, “Foundation Myths of the Millet System,” in Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Central Lands*, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1982), 69-90; Daniel Goffman, “Ottoman Millets in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *New Perspectives on Turkey* 11 (Fall 1994), 135-158; and Paraskevas Konortas, “From Tâife to Millet: Ottoman Terms for the Ottoman Greek Orthodox Community,” in Dimitri Gondicas and Charles Issawi (eds.), *Ottoman Greeks in the Age of Nationalism: Politics, Economy, and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 169–79.

<sup>48</sup> Lebl, *Plima i slom*, 190-194.

<sup>49</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, 80-81.

<sup>50</sup> For a good overview of the fate of Sephardim in the Ottoman economy, see Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry: A History of the Judeo-Spanish Community, 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 36-49.

margins of Ottoman political, economic, and cultural life. Macedonia was an Ottoman backwater in the nineteenth century, and this marginal status extended to the Macedonian Sephardim. In the aftermath of the Sabbatean debacle in the seventeenth century, intellectual life in the Sephardi realm was characterized by rigidity and religious orthodoxy.<sup>51</sup> This intellectual climate persisted among the Sephardim in Macedonia until the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the only major intellectual activity in Macedonia developed in Monastir, and consisted of a series of responsa and religious literature by the Monastir rabbis.<sup>52</sup> On the whole, the Sephardi communities in Macedonia remained innocent of the larger political debates concerning emancipation, integration, Zionism, and secular Jewish politics that were being fiercely debated among the Jewish populations in Europe and, by the late nineteenth century, even in the Ottoman Empire.

This inert intellectual atmosphere among the Macedonian Sephardim also contributed to the fact that the question of Jewish legal emancipation did not become a cause for any organized Jewish movement in the region. Even though the Ottoman state made some initial steps toward dismantling the corporatist political system based on religious organization and the primacy of Islam by issuing reform laws and a short-lived constitution that aimed at establishing the legal equality and rights of Ottoman citizens regardless of religion, the situation on the ground did not change in any significant way, and was in fact in some aspects reinforced.<sup>53</sup> Legal emancipation of the Jews, an issue

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<sup>51</sup> Benbassa and Rodrigue, *The Jews of the Balkans*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> Lebl, *Plima i slom*, 173-176.

<sup>53</sup> From the beginning of the nineteenth century, there were a number of attempts at reform of the political and legal system in the Ottoman Empire. In 1839, the Sultan issued the so-called imperial rescript of *Gülhane*, which, among other things, guaranteed equality before the law for all Ottoman subjects, regardless of their religion. Its main tenets were confirmed by the 1856 decree. However, both these documents, although theoretically far-reaching and seminal, were in fact issued after pressure by the



that the Jewish communities faced across Europe, remained “off the table” in the Ottoman Empire, and especially so in its remote corners such as Macedonia; it could not have been otherwise, since the Ottoman political system did not recognize the category of “rights.”<sup>54</sup>

In Bosnia-Hercegovina, the Sephardim settled in the sixteenth century, and organized a community in Sarajevo. Far away from the imperial capital, Sarajevo long remained an intellectual, political and economic Jewish backwater. The situation changed somewhat in the mid-eighteenth century, when a Venetian rabbi, David Pardo, founded a yeshiva in the city, in which a number of religious leaders were educated.<sup>55</sup> The eighteenth century also saw the founding of community in Travnik, an important seat of provincial governors.<sup>56</sup> It was only in the nineteenth century, with the *Tanzimat* reforms, that the Sephardim of Bosnia-Hercegovina saw some economic prosperity; the development of Sephardi trade dates to that period, as do the new communities of Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Zenica, Bihać, Višegrad, Mostar, and some other Bosnian towns. The reforms also allowed for limited participation of Jews in the Ottoman provincial administration.<sup>57</sup> As in Macedonia, however, the Sephardi communities of Bosnia-Hercegovina were mostly conservative; and unlike in Monastir, Skopje, or Štip, there was

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European powers, which sought to establish a formal system of protection of the Ottoman Christians. The 1876 Constitution was the result of the same effort, although it was suspended after only one year of its passing. A number of laws promulgated in the 1840s, on the other hand, reinforced the organic division of the Ottoman subjects based on religion, and reinforced this central aspect of the Ottoman political system. See Carter Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); Roderic Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); and Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>54</sup> See Haim Gerber, *State, Society, and Law in Islam: Ottoman Law in Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994); Ruth Miller, “The Legal History of the Ottoman Empire,” *The History Compass* Vol. 6, No. 1 (2008), 286-98; and Colin Imber, *Studies in Ottoman History and Law* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 1996).

<sup>55</sup> Levy, *Sefardi u Bosni* (Sarajevo, 1996), 34-36.

<sup>56</sup> Vidaković-Petrov, *Kultura španskih Jevreja*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Vidaković-Petrov, *Kultura španskih Jevreja*, 20.

no *Alliance* school in Sarajevo. For the most part, Sephardi life in Bosnia-Herzegovina remained dominated by traditional forms of communal organization, and economic and cultural patterns until the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup>

Austro-Hungarian occupation (1878-1908) and annexation (1908-1918) of Bosnia-Herzegovina changed the political outlook of the province. Despite the rhetoric about modernization and cultural elevation of the benighted Bosnian lands and populations, the involvement of Austria-Hungary in the Balkans was based on the demands of *realpolitik* that dictated blocking off Serbia from the western Balkans, thereby preventing it from becoming a Balkan Piedmont that would incite irredentist movements in the Slavic Balkan provinces towards a creation of a large and independent state of south Slavs. Other than this main concern, Austria-Hungary did not have a clear vision of how to “modernize” Bosnia-Herzegovina, and its political and legal moves remained contradictory, experimental, and incomplete.<sup>59</sup> On the whole, however, the Dual Monarchy pursued what could be termed, somewhat oxymoronically, a conservative policy of modernization, leaving some fundamental Ottoman legal frameworks in place, while reforming other sectors of society. Bosnia-Herzegovina was never integrated into the political system of Habsburg dualism, remaining for the entire period of Austro-Hungarian rule a separate political entity under the supervision of the joint Ministry of Finance. Despite the claims to modernization, the Ottoman form of serfdom that had

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<sup>58</sup> For a summary of the position of the Jewish population under the Ottoman rule in Bosnia-Herzegovina, see Avdo Sućeska, “Položaj Jevreja u Bosni i Hercegovini za vrijeme Osmanlija-Turaka,” in Muhamed Nezirović (ed.), *Sefarad 92: Zbornik radova* (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju and Jevrejska zajednica Bosne i Hercegovine, 1995), 33-46.

<sup>59</sup> For Austro-Hungarian policies in Bosnia-Herzegovina see Mustafa Imamović, *Pravni položaj i unutrašnji politički razvitak Bosne i Hercegovine od 1878. do 1914.* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1976), and Hamdija Kapidžić, *Bosna i Hercegovina pod austrougarskom upravom* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1968). For a summary in English, see Robert Donia, *Islam under the Double Eagle: The Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1878-1914* (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 8-36.

provided the central institution for the Bosnian political system was not abolished; the subjects of Bosnia-Hercegovina were not entitled to Austro-Hungarian citizenship, which would have guaranteed them full civic rights; a representative legislative body was not established until 1910; and it was only after the granting of the Bosnian Constitution by the Emperor in 1910, that full civic rights for the citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina were guaranteed.<sup>60</sup>

The period from 1878 until the outbreak of World War I, however, is usually described as the era of political, economic, and cultural development. Indeed, despite the contradictory and often illogical turns of Austro-Hungarian Bosnian policies, in the four decades of Habsburg rule Bosnia-Hercegovina underwent fundamental economic, political, and social transformation. It was in this period that the first significant wave of industrialization spread to Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>61</sup> A large influx of settlers from other parts of the Monarchy—who were mainly lured to Bosnia-Hercegovina by the promise of administrative jobs in the ever expanding bureaucracy—changed the urban landscapes of Bosnian cities. These changes had far-reaching consequences for Jewish life in Bosnia-Hercegovina as well.<sup>62</sup> Virtually absent from this Balkan land, the Ashkenazim started settling in Bosnia-Hercegovina immediately following the occupation, and by 1910 numbered 3,649, which, along with 8,219 Sephardim, amounted to a total of 11,868 Jews in Bosnia-Hercegovina.<sup>63</sup> The Ashkenazi Jewish community was founded in Sarajevo in

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<sup>60</sup> Imamović, *Pravni položaj*, 12-68, 259-261; Hamdija Kapidžić, “Pripremanje ustavnog perioda u Bosni i Hercegovini (1908-1910),” in *Bosna i Hercegovina pod austrougarskom upravom*, 45-99.

<sup>61</sup> See Peter Sugar, *Industrialization of Bosnia-Hercegovina, 1878-1918* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963).

<sup>62</sup> For a summary of the position of the Jewish population during the Austro-Hungarian period in Bosnia-Hercegovina, see Dževad Juzbašić, “Nekoliko napomena o Jevrejima u Bosni i Hercegovini u doba austrougarske uprave,” in *Sefarad* 92, 93-110.

<sup>63</sup> *Popis stanovništva Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo, 1912), quoted in Avram Pinto, *Jevreji Sarajeva i Bosne i Hercegovine* (Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1987), 15. According to these numbers, the Jews

1879, followed by official Ashkenazi communities in Banja Luka and Tuzla.<sup>64</sup> However, it was not only the Ashkenazim who were agents of change of the Jewish cultural and political landscape in this period: various Sephardi cultural societies, such as *La Benevolencia* and *Lira*, were formed as institutions that crossed the boundaries of traditional Jewish life in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The first Sephardi men—among them Moritz Levy, the famous author of the history of the Bosnian Sephardim and the future Sephardic rabbi—returned to Sarajevo with Viennese academic degrees. It was during this period that *La Alborada*, the first Bosnian Sephardi newspaper in Ladino, appeared in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The nineteenth century in Bosnia-Herzegovina, therefore, was a period of flux with important consequences for the local Jewish communities. The traditional structure of the Ottoman *millet* system was, by the mid-century, increasingly being challenged by the reformers in Istanbul; starting in the last quarter of the century, however, Bosnian society was transformed much more radically by the experience of the Austro-Hungarian occupation, which, even though it was fundamentally conservative in social and political terms, had nevertheless been underpinned by the rhetoric of modernization, and had a critical transformative impact on the Bosnian society. The first generation of secular Sephardi intellectuals came of age in this period. They had internalized the dominant Western discourse about the “backwardness” of Bosnian society, while at the same time they had also become aware of the larger debates going on among the Jews in Europe; in fact, these two intellectual preoccupations became intimately related in the worldview of this generation and provided a basis for their political involvement in Jewish affairs. It

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constituted 0.62 percent of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Sarajevo, however, the percentage of the Jewish population was significantly higher.

<sup>64</sup> Pinto, *Jevreji*, 14.

was this first generation of educated Bosnian Sephardim—who were in a unique position to be connected both to their traditional Ottoman Sephardi heritage and to the intellectual ferment that permeated Jewish circles in Vienna at the time—that was to play an important role in the south-Slavic Zionist movement that started in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century.

The experiences of Jews in nineteenth-century Serbia differed from both those of Bosnian and Macedonian Jews. The Ottoman Sephardim first settled in Belgrade after 1521; however, more substantial numbers of settlers arrived in the city in the mid-eighteenth century, after the Ottomans had retaken Belgrade from the Austrians after a period of occupation of twenty-two years (1717-1739). Since Belgrade was a frontier town, its Jewish population was more diverse than those in other Ottoman centers. Some Sephardim settled across the Danube and Sava rivers in the Habsburg empire (in Zemun and Pančevo, today parts of the Belgrade metropolitan area), while some Ashkenazim came to live in Belgrade.<sup>65</sup> Belgrade, therefore, has a relatively longer history (compared to other south Slav lands) of being inhabited by both Ashkenazim and Sephardim; the latter, however, were much more numerous.

From the uprising in the *pasalık* of Belgrade in 1804, Jewish life in Serbia took a quite different turn from that of the Jewish populations in the neighboring Ottoman provinces. Hundreds of Jews fled Belgrade together with their Ottoman Muslim neighbors during the uprising; in 1807, after taking control of the city, the Serbian peasant insurgents under the leadership of Karađorđe Petrović expelled the Jews from

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<sup>65</sup> Ignjat Šlang, *Jevreji u Beogradu* (Belgrade: Hicad, 2006), 56-57. Originally published in Belgrade in 1926.

Belgrade by decree.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the position of the Jewish population in Serbia remained tenuous; in general terms, Serbian modernization efforts were characterized by ideas of territorial expansion and ethnic exclusion based on linguistic criteria and discriminated against Jews and other groups—primarily urban Muslims—who were considered different. In the early years of Serbian autonomy from the Porte, the Jewish artisans and tradesmen who had not fled Serbia and had decided to stay and live in the Serbian principality emerged as dangerous competition to the nascent Serbian bourgeoisie; so long as Miloš Obrenović was the prince, however, the Jews were protected, and their rights guaranteed, despite calls from local governments in some cities to limit Jews' economic activity and residence rights in the Serbian countryside.<sup>67</sup>

Things took a rapid turn for the worse when, in the early 1840s, Serbian politics became dominated by modernizers who had politically matured as opposition leaders to Miloš Obrenović's autocratic rule. Even before they seized power—first by forcing Miloš Obrenović into exile, then manipulating his successor, and finally, in 1842, consolidating power by restoring the Karađorđević dynasty in Serbia—they had campaigned among their constituencies on an explicitly anti-Jewish platform.<sup>68</sup> Once in power, the government passed a decree (in 1844) that limited Jewish residency rights to the area just outside the Belgrade city walls; in theory, there were to be no Jewish residents in the Serbian countryside. At the same time, a decree limiting Jewish immigration was passed as well.<sup>69</sup> The Serbian modernizers, who were dedicated to building a modern state apparatus and expanding the Serbian territory into neighboring

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<sup>66</sup> Avigdor Levy, *The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 94.

<sup>67</sup> Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji, 1918-1941* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1997), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Ženi Lebl, *Do "Konačnog rešenja": Jevreji u Beogradu, 1521-1942* (Belgrade: Čigoja, 2001), 82.

<sup>69</sup> Lebl, *Do "Konačnog rešenja,"* 85-86.

Bosnia-Hercegovina, Macedonia, and Albania—Ilija Garašanin's *Načertanije*, the first modern political program in the history of Serbia, dates back to this period—were keen to make the lives of the Jewish citizens difficult and encourage emigration. Many Jews left Serbia under the weight of restrictions imposed on them, and only in Belgrade did the Jews constitute any significant part of the population (around ten percent of all Belgrade citizens in 1844, when they were confined to living in the capital).

After the return to power of Miloš Obrenović in 1859, the legal position of the Jews in Serbia improved, as the rights of all Serbian citizens were guaranteed by his decree, which abolished all legislation that was contrary to it.<sup>70</sup> However, the respite was temporary; the decree was itself rescinded very soon after death of Miloš Obrenović in 1860. In February 1861, an anti-Jewish campaign was launched in one of the first newspapers in Serbia, *Svetovid*, and the government, under pressure from powerful guilds who resented Jewish economic competition, expelled sixty Jewish families from the Serbian countryside; the situation of the Jews in Serbia became critical, and Jewish leaders appealed to the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, which was, however, banned from establishing an office in Serbia.<sup>71</sup> In the summer of 1861, after the intervention of the *Alliance*, the British consul in Belgrade demanded from Mihailo Obrenović, the new Serbian prince, that the new decree that had reinstated restrictions on the rights of the Jews be rescinded. A new decree was passed in November 1861; it guaranteed some rights to the Jews who had settled in the countryside in the brief period between 1859 and 1861. However, the newly guaranteed residence rights of those Jews were not extended to their heirs, who, in addition, were now explicitly banned from owning private

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<sup>70</sup> Lebl, *Do "Konačnog rešenja,"* 100-101.

<sup>71</sup> Lebl, *Do "Konačnog rešenja,"* 105.

property.<sup>72</sup> The bombing of Belgrade from the Ottoman fortress in 1862 further aggravated the position of the Serbian Jews. The bombing itself was prompted by the massacre of the city's Muslim population, who fled the city (and, later, the country) *en masse*. As the Jewish refugees deserted their quarter located between the city and the fortress and fled to Zemun and Pančevo across the Sava and the Danube, respectively, the Serbian army pillaged Jewish property.<sup>73</sup>

The tenuous existence of the Serbian Jews continued through the 1860s and beyond the Congress of Berlin in 1878. In the early 1860s, the anti-Jewish campaign in the Serbian press was followed by a series of blood libel cases and several murders of individual Jews. In an 1865 letter to Paris, a prominent Jewish leader and a local representative of the (still illegal) *Alliance* in Belgrade, David Ruso, informed Adolphe Crémieux that “any demand for granting of equal civic rights [to the Jews in Serbia] in the current conditions would be superfluous, since all we can do now is try to protect ourselves from a possible upcoming massacre.”<sup>74</sup> The new constitution, passed in 1869, after the assassination of Mihailo Obrenović, reaffirmed the restrictions placed upon the Jews. The Constitution stated that “all Serbs [were] equal before the law,” and guaranteed personal liberties; however, it was clear that the Serbian Jews were not really considered “Serbs,” since article 132 stated explicitly that the laws from 1856 and 1861—passed specifically to limit the rights of the Jews—were to stay in place.<sup>75</sup> Interventions of foreign consuls and *Alliance* envoys with the Serbian authorities did not change the legal position of the Serbian Jews. The foreign pressure eventually resulted in

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<sup>72</sup> Lebl, *Do “Konačnog rešenja,”* 106.

<sup>73</sup> Lebl, *Do “Konačnog rešenja,”* 109-111.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Lebl, *Do “Konačnog rešenja,”* 122.

<sup>75</sup> Lebl, *Do “Konačnog rešenja,”* 133.



the formal request that Serbia guarantee minority rights (“minority” being widely understood to refer to the Jews) in order to be recognized as an independent state at the Congress of Berlin; after the Serbian envoy at the Congress telegraphed Milan Obrenović that “the Congress is unanimous about the equality for the Yids [*čivuti*] in Serbia,” the Prince responded that this condition needed to be accepted.<sup>76</sup> Thus, Serbia was recognized as an independent state in 1878, but it was not until December 1888, when the new constitution was passed, that the rights of all citizens of Serbia, including the Jews, were finally guaranteed.

Despite this turbulent history, however, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Jews experienced a gradual process of integration into Serbian society, which set them apart from other Balkan Sephardim beyond Serbia’s borders. At the turn of the twentieth century, in stark contrast to the Sephardi heartlands in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia, 46 percent of the Serbian Sephardim considered Serbian their mother tongue. The Serbian army, traditionally a bastion of conservatism and prejudice against Jews, opened its ranks to Jewish officers. In addition to well-known traders and bankers, several Jews became prominent in Serbian political life, even becoming members of parliament, representatives of the leading Serbian political party, the Radicals of Nikola Pašić. By the end of the nineteenth century, several joint Serbian-Jewish societies were founded that promoted friendship between Serbs and Jews: in the 1880s, the Serbian-Jewish Choral Society and Serbian-Jewish Youth Community were founded with both Serbs and Sephardi Jews as members.<sup>77</sup> Serbian Sephardim increasingly felt a part of the Serbian national community, and many of them considered themselves to be “Serbs of

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<sup>76</sup> Quoted in Lebl, *Do “Konačnog rešenja,”* 145.

<sup>77</sup> Nebojša Popović, *Jevreji u Srbiji*, 20-22.

Mosaic faith”; that the state viewed the Jews in a similar fashion was illustrated by gestures such as the important one in 1907, when King Peter I laid a cornerstone for the new Sephardi synagogue in Belgrade, *Beth Israel*. While the Serbian national discourse towards Ashkenazim remained ambivalent, the Sephardim enjoyed security and good relations with the state; political antisemitism was virtually non-existent. The good image that the Serbian Sephardim enjoyed among the Serbian population was improved even more during the Balkan wars and World War I; Jewish officers and soldiers shared the enormous suffering of the Serbian army and the population in general, and participated in the “liberation” of Kosovo, long a fixation of Serbian nationalists and the state-sponsored expansionist program.<sup>78</sup>

The nineteenth century in the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire was a century of political and social change, and the gradual fragmentation of the Ottoman political realm. Different patterns of social transformation raised new questions about the legal and social positions of respective Jewish populations in the emerging new polities. But unlike in central and western European societies, where debates about legal emancipation of the Jews had been linked to wider discussions about social emancipation and modernization based on Enlightenment principles, and the pro-emancipation political position was usually part of a wider liberal ideology of political and economic modernization, the issues of Jewish social integration and legal equality in Balkan lands assumed very different guises and exposed different political and ideological fault lines. In Serbia, the nation-building project of economic and political modernization was quite

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<sup>78</sup> For a detailed account of Jewish participation in the Serbian “liberation wars,” see Mihailo B. Milošević, *Jevreji za slobodu Srbije, 1912-1918* (Belgrade: Filip Višnjić, 1995). The book is quite problematic on several counts, but its historical part about Serbian Jews in the Balkan wars and World War I documents well their participation in this important part of modern Serbian history. See also *Spomenica poginulih i umrlih srpskih Jevreja u balkanskom i svetskom ratu: 1912-1918* (Belgrade: Štamparija M. Karića, 1927).

explicitly based on fomenting ethnic homogeneity based on linguistic principles, and legalizing political and economic exclusion on these grounds; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the other hand, the issue of rights was less foregrounded, as the new imperial order, despite claims about the need of political, cultural, and economic modernization, was ambivalent about the project and refrained from imposing radical reforms of Ottoman political institutions and political culture, in which the notions of legal equality and emancipation were beside the point. Thus, at the very same time when the Jewish communities of the Ottoman heartland started debating appropriate Jewish responses to Ottoman modernity in the new Ottoman Jewish press in Ladino, the Jewish communities of the Balkan provinces of the Empire faced very different realities and political, economic, and cultural alternatives. The paths to citizenship and reform onto which these populations had embarked were to be different from both those of the Jewish communities of Istanbul and Salonika, and those in Vienna, Berlin, and Budapest.

### Jewish Communities in the Habsburg Realm

The Jews living in the southern provinces of the Habsburg Empire had very different historical experiences from those of the Jewish populations in the Ottoman Balkans. The Jewish communities inhabiting the Habsburg Slav provinces in the nineteenth century were descendants of Yiddish-, German-, and Hungarian-speaking recent immigrants. They were Ashkenazim, but like the Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire, they were not a homogeneous group. Even though they were heirs to the

common central European political tradition and similar restrictions on their residential and occupational rights, the nineteenth century was a period in which different patterns of reform had emerged among the Habsburg Ashkenazi communities. Most of the Jews in the southern provinces of the Habsburg Empire lived in two Croatian provinces—Croatia proper and Slavonia.

The first Jews settled in Croatia in 1780s, after Joseph II passed the decree that allowed the Jews to settle in all areas of the Empire. The history of the Jews of Croatia followed the general pattern of other Habsburg Jews.<sup>79</sup> In contrast to the Sephardi Jewish communities in the Ottoman Balkans, whose legal status had been regulated by the *millet* system based on concepts fundamentally incompatible with those of rights, citizenship, and legal equality—and the transformation of which, therefore, once it had become inevitable in the cases of Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, was bound to differ from the nineteenth-century experiences of non-Ottoman Jewish populations—the Jews in the Habsburg Empire, like elsewhere in central and western Europe, had encountered the nineteenth century with its liberal promise, mass politics, and illiberal reaction. The pattern of a liberal project defeated in the aftermath of 1848, the emancipation act of 1873, the antisemitic party politics and the emergence of Zionism among the young Jewish intellectuals of the *fin de siècle* was somewhat complicated by the specific vectors of Serbo-Croatian politics in a Hungarian province and under the Habsburg Emperor. But the Jewish communities in nineteenth century Croatia had experienced degrees of

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<sup>79</sup> For a brief summary of Jewish history in nineteenth-century Croatia, see Agneza Szabo, “Židovi i proces modernizacije građanskog društva u Hrvatskoj između 1873. i 1914. godine,” in Ognjen Kraus (ed.), *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1998), 142-155; Mirjana Gross, “Ravnopravnost bez jednakovrijednosti: Prilog pitanju mentaliteta i ideologije hrvatskih cionista na početku XX. stoljeća,” in *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture*, 106-126; and Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu, 1918-1941* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2004), 14-21.

embourgeoisement and acculturation comparable to any other Jewish population in central and western Europe.

At the turn of the twentieth century, there were around 20,000 Jews in Croatia, of whom around 3,000 were in Zagreb. Of all the Jews of Croatia, some 35 percent considered Croatian to be their mother tongue in 1900, while 41 percent claimed German and 21 percent Hungarian; at the same time in Zagreb, 54 percent of the Jews claimed Croatian, 22 percent German, and 20 percent Hungarian.<sup>80</sup> By the beginning of World War I, the community of Croatian Jews was a predominantly urban, linguistically heterogeneous Ashkenazi group, increasingly middle-class and upwardly mobile, with a clear trend towards acculturation to the local Croatian culture. The Jewish occupational structure was also as could be expected: in 1910, more than half the Jewish population in Croatia earned their living by engaging in trade, with significant portions of the population being artisans, practitioners of the free professions, and civil servants.<sup>81</sup> By the turn of the century, Zionism and Jewish politics in general had reached the communities in Croatia; it was the generation of Vienna-educated, middle class students returning to their hometowns with Zionist ideas that was to play a decisive role in politically planning and forging the very first political community of Jews from the south Slav lands.

In Vojvodina, the multiethnic region of southern Hungary, the profile of Ashkenazim was somewhat different. Unlike in Croatia, there was no clear trend among the Jewish communities in the region towards linguistic acculturation in a Slav language; this was mostly due to the fact that south Slavs (Serbs and Croats) were in the minority in

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<sup>80</sup> For information about linguistic acculturation, see tables in Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 18 and 19.

<sup>81</sup> For occupational patterns of the Croatian Jews, see tables in Szabo, "Židovi i proces modernizacije," 155.

that region. The majority of the population in Vojvodina was Hungarian and German, and the Jewish communities were overwhelmingly Hungarian- and German-speaking. Even in 1931, 43 percent of Jews in Vojvodina considered Hungarian their mother tongue, and 29 percent, German.<sup>82</sup> The Jews in Vojvodina also spoke Yiddish, and few spoke Serbo-Croatian. The Jewish communities in Vojvodina, compared to those in Croatia, were much more diverse with respect to the level of acculturation and the question of religion. Only in Vojvodina, of the whole of the future Yugoslav state, was there a substantial presence of strictly observant communities, the Orthodox. Although with respect to Jewish linguistic characteristics and religious practices Croatia and Vojvodina were different, both regions were relatively prosperous economically, and together with Slovenia, where negligible numbers of Jews lived, constituted the most economically developed provinces of the new south Slav state. This was true despite the fact that in Austria-Hungary they had been on the economic periphery.

## Conclusion

The Jews in inhabiting the current and former domains of the Ottoman and Habsburg empires in the western Balkans differed, therefore, in terms of their culture, politics, and economic status. Apart from the active Zionists, who were politically aware by definition, not many Jews in the Balkans followed the ups and downs of south Slav politics and the alternative visions of “liberation” from Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman domination. The Zionists, however, saw a great opportunity for themselves and for

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<sup>82</sup> Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu*, 17.

forging a strong community out of those disparate Jewish populations in the Yugoslav lands. It is to this process that we now turn.

### Chapter III

#### The Serbo-Croatian Zionist Press and the Emergence of Yugoslav Jewry, 1896-1941

Like Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Jewry was created. This chapter traces the process of imagining and debating Yugoslav Jewry on the pages of the Yugoslav Zionist press from its inception until the outbreak of World War II.<sup>83</sup> I argue that a group of Croatian Zionists educated in Vienna was the first to imagine, at the turn of the twentieth century, the possibility of a unified Yugoslav Jewry. These Serbo-Croatian speaking Zionists found themselves Zionist leaders with no Jewry; in order to become real leaders of a real Zionist movement, they set out to forge a Serbo-Croatian speaking Jewry that would eventually become Yugoslav Jewry. In the process, they encountered issues that had, by the outbreak of World War II, become the defining issues of the new community: its cultural diversity and its marginality in terms of both local non-Jewish and world Jewish politics. They confronted and debated these issues on the pages of Zionist publications in Serbo-Croatian, which they themselves started, and which themselves were a novel phenomenon. These debates reflected their particular brand of Ashkenazi Zionism dominated by notions of *Kultur* and visions of modernity. Their writings revealed all the

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<sup>83</sup> For a classic argument about the relationship between print media and nation-building, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For a recent excellent debate about Jewish press and its implications for modern Jewish identities in a comparative context, see Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Making Jews Modern: The Yiddish and Ladino Press in the Russian and Ottoman Empires* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). For a short overview of history of Jewish press in the Yugoslav lands, see Milica Mihailović, *Jevrejska štampa na tlu Jugoslavije do 1941. godine* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1982).



fault lines that lay between them and their newly discovered Zionist raw material— primarily the issues of culture and class—and they viewed Bosnian and Macedonian Sephardim as a malleable apolitical mass that they would modernize and incorporate into a Yugoslav Jewry.

By the outbreak of World War II, however, the disparate Jewish populations from the regions that became part of the new Yugoslav state in 1918 were institutionally integrated into a culturally diverse, Serbo-Croatian-speaking Jewish community whose leaders referred to it as “Yugoslav Jewry.” Half a century earlier, when the Croatian Zionists first started their work, this was not a development that the linguistically, culturally, and economically diverse Jewish masses in the Slavic Balkans would have thought plausible. An important factor in the process of forging Yugoslav Jewry was the emergence of the Serbo-Croatian Zionist press, which provided a forum for discussing common issues facing Jews in the south Slavic Balkans. It also created a community of readers across the region who considered, for the first time, that they were part of a larger Jewish group whose center was no longer in Vienna, Budapest, or Istanbul.

#### Jewish Academic Societies and the Origins of South Slav Zionism

In 1896, the same year in which Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* was published, an academic society that brought together young Sephardi students from the Balkans was founded in Vienna. Its name was *Esperanza* (Hope), and it presented itself as a “society of Sephardi Jews in Vienna” (*Sociedad de los Judios Sefardim en Vienna*). Its founders

were young intellectuals from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Bosnia-Hercegovina, a new generation of Vienna-educated Balkan Sephardim—Abraham Nisim, Samuel Baruch, Moric Levi, Isak Alkalaj, Bukić Pijade, and Leon Koen, among others.<sup>84</sup> This was the first organization that aimed at gathering Sephardi intellectuals from different parts of the Balkans in Vienna, and although little is known about its activities, *Esperanza* is illustrative of the important new trend that had emerged among the Balkan Sephardim in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As the first generation cut off from the traditional Ottoman realm, and born and raised under Habsburg rule, the new Sephardi intellectuals increasingly tended to be educated in Vienna and in German, rather than seek upward mobility through the Francophone *Alliance* network. Although the members of *Esperanza* apparently communicated among themselves in Ladino, as the name and the official title of the organization suggest, the new intellectual elite among the Jews from the Slavic-speaking Balkans (from Croatia to Bosnia-Hercegovina to Serbia, and to some extent Bulgaria)—both Sephardim and Ashkenazim—regarded Vienna, the German-speaking *Kulturbereich*, and the complex *fin de siècle* Zionist blend of cosmopolitanism and Jewish nationalism, as its true intellectual homeland.

In 1902, another Jewish academic organization was founded by south Slavic Jews in Vienna, with the name of *Bar Giora*. The organization was named after Simeon Bar Giora, the Judean general in the war against the Romans in the first century CE. Its founders declared that *Bar Giora* was a “society of Jewish academics from the Yugoslav lands.”<sup>85</sup> Membership in the organization was open to both Sephardim and Ashkenazim

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<sup>84</sup> Ljiljana Dobrovšak, “Prvi cionistički kongres u Osijeku 1904. godine,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* Vol. 37, No. 2 (2005), 479-495, 482.

<sup>85</sup> The official name of *Bar Giora* was “Društvo Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja.” That it claimed to be a society of academics from the “Yugoslav” (*jugoslavenskih*) as opposed to the “south Slav”

from the “Yugoslav lands,” but the overwhelming majority of members came from the latter group. Unlike *Esperanza*, the language of communication among the members of *Bar Giora* and, more importantly, the language of their publications was Serbo-Croatian.<sup>86</sup> *Bar Giora*’s publications, therefore—although they were technically

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(*južno-slavenskih*) lands was reflective of the contemporary debates in Croatia about different possibilities for south Slav unification into a political unit that would be eventually called “Yugoslavia.” For a classic discussion of the “new course” of Croatian politics at the turn of the twentieth century, and the push for Serbo-Croatian cooperation and work towards political unification, see Mirjana Gross, *Vladavina hrvatsko-srpske koalicije, 1906-1907* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1960).

<sup>86</sup> The language that was called Serbo-Croatian in the latter part of the twentieth century, and which was called Croatian in Croatia and Serbian in Serbia since the nineteenth century, carried with it connotations that had important consequences for Jews from the south Slav lands. The idea of national unity among south Slavs was first realized in the linguistic realm. In the early nineteenth century, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864) chose the Slavic vernacular spoken in eastern Hercegovina as the literary standard for the Serbian language; the Croatian Illyrianists, led by Ljudevit Gaj (1809-1872), abandoned their own dialect of Croatian (*kajkavski*, spoken in and around Zagreb at that time) and chose the *štokavski* dialect of Slavonia, as closest to the new Serbian standard. By the end of the century, *štokavski* was spoken by the majority of people in Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina and Serbia, and although some important regional linguistic characteristics that did not bear ethnic markers remained (the *ijekavica* variant is to this day spoken in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina, while *ekavica* is spoken in Serbia), for all practical purposes the language of the south Slavs constituted a single literary language. At the turn of the twentieth century, the previously unimaginable circumstance that, for example, an inhabitant of the Dalmatian port of Split could converse with someone from Niš in a single language paved the way for political union—the modalities of which were, of course, hotly debated, and the consequences of which were often tragic.

The language, however, had been standardized and thought out by a group of intellectuals; throughout the south Slav lands, people considered Serbian and Croatian their own languages, embodiments of their nationhood. Sometimes these sentiments were mobilized by the elites as justifications and pretexts for territorial expansion and ethnic hatred. Although Serbian could be written both in Cyrillic and in Roman scripts, for example, its Cyrillic variant had traditionally come to be understood as a marker of “Serbianness.” Even though some proponents of supranational Yugoslav culture, such as Jovan Skerlić (1877-1914), the editor of the leading Serbian literary journal, *Srpski književni glasnik*, proposed on the eve of World War I that the Serbs abandon the Cyrillic script and the Croats abandon *ijekavica* in the name of linguistic unity, Serbian politicians remained adamant about the importance of the Cyrillic script for Serbian national identity. The leaders of the long-ruling Radical party, including Milenko Vesnić (1862-1921), considered surrendering the Cyrillic script a “foolhardy” enterprise, and thought that the Roman script was “alien” and “unacceptable,” a harbinger of the loss of identity. The question of language reflected the wider conflict that characterized the new state from its very first day: the clash of centralism, which was a code name for Serbian domination, and some kind of decentralization and respect for regional and ethnic differences.

For a brief overview of the history of Serbo-Croatian linguistic unity in the nineteenth century, see Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 24-31. The Vesnić quotes are from Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji, 1918-1941* (Belgrade: Stubovi kulture, 1998), vol. 1, 194-195. For Skerlić’s proposal, see Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 29, 253n. Milenko Vesnić was the chief of the Serbian War Mission in the U.S. (and subsequently the prime minister of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes), and the author of the so-called “Serbian Balfour Declaration.” In December 1917, Vesnić sent a letter to David Albala, a captain in the Serbian army and a prominent Belgrade Jew who was at the time in the U.S. on the official mission to rally support for the Serbian expansionist cause (Albala was later the Serbian government expert for Jewish affairs at the Paris peace conference, and the president

published in “Croatian”—could be, and indeed were, read by readers all over the south Slav Balkans. Another novelty was that *Bar Giora* was explicitly political: it was a Zionist organization—its name of a Judean general exemplifying the new kind of upright, proud Jew it sought to create—with stated Zionist objectives. But in addition to pledging to work towards the eventual establishment of an internationally recognized Jewish state in Palestine, the organization’s first annual report also claimed on its first page that “*Bar Giora* aims to awaken and strengthen the Jewish national feelings of Jewish academics from the Slavic South, to nurture the Hebrew language [and] Jewish history, and to connect and unite Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews.”<sup>87</sup> From the very beginning, therefore, the leaders of *Bar Giora* recognized their role as twofold: on the one hand, they were in Vienna, the headquarters of the Zionist movement, and thought of themselves as followers—regardless of their cultural and linguistic background—of the political movement led by Herzl and Nordau; on the other hand, however, they realized that their different background necessitated a specific approach to Zionism, a language that was different (both literally and symbolically) from that of the generation of their upwardly mobile fathers, and a pronounced sensitivity to the issues of the political, cultural, and economic divide between the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim from the south Slav provinces. These concerns were to become increasingly important as soon as the

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of the Belgrade Sephardi community after World War I). “Dear Captain Albala,” the letter said, “I wish to express to your Jewish brothers the empathy of our Government and of our people for the just endeavour of resurrecting their beloved country in Palestine... You know, dear Captain Albala, that there is no other nation in the world sympathising with this plan more than Serbia... How should we not participate in your clamours and sorrows, lasting ages and generations, especially when our countrymen of your origin and religion have fought for their Serbian fatherland as well as our best soldiers? It will be a sad thing for us to see any of our Jewish fellow citizens leaving us to return to their promised land, but we shall console ourselves in the hope that they will stand as brother and leave with us a good part of their hearts, and that they will become the strongest connection between the free Israel and Serbia...” For the full text of Vesnić’s letter, see Zoran Pejašinović, *Cionistički pokret od Bazelske do Balfurove deklaracije* (Belgrade: Ars libri, 1997), 109. The letter was clearly an attempt by the Serbian government to rally Jewish support in the West, especially since it was originally published in English.

<sup>87</sup> *Gideon*, 9-11/1922.

organization ventured beyond academic circles and set to convert to Zionism the assimilationist Jewish populations from the south Slav Balkans. From its inception at the turn of the century, through the outbreak of the World War I, *Bar Giora* engaged Zionist ideology with these specific concerns in mind, negotiating in the process the coordinates of a particular brand of Yugoslav Zionism. This early process of negotiation was to play the crucial role in the eventual creation of a community of Yugoslav Jews in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes that emerged after the end of the war.

In the realm of ideology, the Zionism of *Bar Giora* adhered to the Basel program. From its surviving annual reports there emerges an idyllic picture of a mainstream Zionist youth organization, firmly dedicated to political and cultural Zionist work (even though those were often at loggerheads) that was going to work towards the establishment of a Jewish state and a new Hebrew culture. Herzl's obituary in the main annual publication of *Bar Giora* reflects the organization's adherence to the fundamental ideological tenets of Herzlian Zionism and reveals its deep rootedness in the culture of the German-speaking Viennese *fin de siècle*. The text of the obituary—most probably penned by Aleksandar Licht, who also authored the poem entitled “To Dr. Theodor Herzl,” which immediately follows the obituary—squarely conforms to the Zionist understanding of Jewish history, emphasizing the tragedy of Jewish exile, the failure of assimilation, and a Jewish state as the only guarantee for the future of the Jewish people.<sup>88</sup> But it is also a striking example of appropriation, so eloquently probed by George Mosse, of the ideal of classical beauty as part of establishing bourgeois respectability that underpinned the

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<sup>88</sup> “Dr. Teodor Herzl,” in *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), no page numbers.

modern nation-building project.<sup>89</sup> The “father of the Jewish nation” was, according to the author of the obituary, the embodiment, in a “most graceful whole,” of

all corporeal and spiritual beauty of our people. [In] him had strengthened the hopeful belief in the future of our unfortunate people. Of a beautiful body, and a magical face, whoever has seen him even once could never forget the refined and fervent, and yet so strangely soft and sad, gentle expression of his black eyes. Thus, the noblest and most ideal types of our tribe were united in characteristics of a single man [*muž*]. And what of spiritual beauty? It was incomparably greater than all of his corporeal beauties, even more beautiful than his eyes. It reflected tribal virility and love for the Jewish people, with which our people stands by its tribe and yearns for its fatherland, despite all wandering...<sup>90</sup>

Homoeroticism—which, according to Mosse, European nationalisms sought to domesticate and employ as a fascination with heroic beauty—was present in other textual and visual representations of Herzl by the early Zionists.<sup>91</sup> While this tendency testifies to the rootedness of Zionist national ideals in the contemporary political imagination—nation as a gendered embodiment of beauty and as an embodied national history—it reflects the classic Zionist ideal of the “new Jew,” a masculine, upright, proud individual, determined to break from the stereotype of the timid ghetto Jew and take Jewish history and political fate in his own hands. The contemporary visual art of Ephraim Moses Lilien, for example, especially the set of his *Jugendstil* illustrations for the collection of Morris Rosenfeld’s poetry, *Lieder des Ghetto*, is an excellent case in point: Lilien’s artwork glorifies the masculinity of the “new Jew” and is especially fascinated by Herzl himself.<sup>92</sup> Like other early Zionists—members of *Bar Giora* included—

Lilien was fascinated with, if not obsessed by, the meaning of the new embodiment of

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<sup>89</sup> See George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: H. Fertig, 1985), especially the introduction, 1-22.

<sup>90</sup> “Dr. Teodor Herzl,” no page numbers. The Serbo-Croatian word „muž“ is translated to English as „man“ (or husband), but carries much stronger connotations of masculine characteristics than the usual „čov(j)ek.“

<sup>91</sup> George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 16.

<sup>92</sup> For an excellent discussion of Lilien’s art and its Zionist connections, see “From Jugendstil to “Judenstil”: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism in the Work of Ephraim Moses Lilien,” in Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 98-115. My discussion of the early Zionists’ fascination with Herzl is indebted to Stanislawski’s analysis.

Jewishness (or, at least, of male Jewishness) so central to the Zionist creed in its earliest years, which sought the transformation of the so-called ghetto Jew—allegedly effeminate, weak, cut off from nature, cowardly, sickly, desexualized—into a physically robust, healthy, earthy man, tilling the soil and in the process rebuilding himself, his land, and his people.<sup>93</sup>

It is hardly a coincidence that it was Aleksandar Licht himself who translated into Croatian and published Rosenfeld's *Lieder des Ghetto* adorned by Lilien's artwork, and that the review of the collection featured in one of *Bar Giora*'s annual reports.<sup>94</sup>

Over the years, *Bar Giora* provided the intellectual basis and the institutional kernel of Yugoslav Zionism in Serbo-Croatian; in the early years, however, in addition to gathering Zionist students from the Balkans under one roof, it also gave voice, through its annual reports, to their counterparts and alumni in the “Yugoslav lands,” mostly in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina, but sometimes also in Serbia and Bulgaria. A full half of the regular contributors—and perhaps even more—to *Bar Giora*'s annual report were close friends and collaborators of the Viennese group, based in other parts of the Habsburg empire, mostly in Croatia and Slavonia, but in Bosnia-Hercegovina as well. Among the well-known Zionists around *Bar Giora* were Aleksandar Licht, who would go on to edit the first, Zagreb-based, Zionist periodical in Serbo-Croatian (*Židovska smotra*, 1906-1914), and who spent only one year studying in Vienna, upon which he returned to the Law School of the University of Zagreb; Lavoslav Schick, another ardent Zionist and a regular contributor to the organization's publications, a law student at the same school in Zagreb; and David Fuhrmann, a lawyer from Vinkovci in Slavonia and the original founder, with Jochanan Thau, of the organization. These Ashkenazi middle-class

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<sup>93</sup> Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siècle*, 113.

<sup>94</sup> Morris Rosenfeld, *Pjesme iz Geta* (Zagreb: Tiskara Mile Maravića, 1906). The edition states that the poetry was “translated from the Jewish [*sic!*] and introduced by Aleksandar Licht.” Max Lederer, “Židovski pjesnik Morris Rosenfeld,” in *Izvještaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), no page numbers.

Zionists from the Slavic provinces of the Empire would become important leaders of Yugoslav Zionism, and would found their own periodicals and Zionist political institutions; in the early years of the twentieth century, however, it was *Bar Giora*'s annual report, published in Serbo-Croatian in Vienna, that provided a forum in which pressing issues facing the Zionist movement were discussed.

The issues, of course, were many, but they were also predictable, since they were drawn from a pool of conventional issues in contemporary Zionist debate among middle-class German-speaking Jews in Central Europe. The remaining annual reports of *Bar Giora* chronicle, accordingly, the organization's Zionist mission in the Serbo-Croatian speaking Jewish world. While the students themselves participated in debates of a broad cultural character—*Bar Giora* organized lectures, mostly in German, on Weininger's *Geschlecht und Charakter* and modern world literature, among other topics—the articles appearing in the annual reports were much simpler, both in their themes and methods of exposition; this, of course, was in accordance with their goal of introducing the Serbo-Croatian Jewish population to Zionism.<sup>95</sup> The reports were adorned with photographs of Herzl and Nordau; the articles, for their part, dwelled on important topics in the history and practice of Zionism. David Fuhrmann, for example, wrote an article about Zionist institutions that detailed how and why the Jewish Colonial Trust, the Jewish National Fund, the *shekel*, and other institutions were established and functioned.<sup>96</sup> This was the first such Serbo-Croatian overview of the institutional tenets of the Zionist movement. Other articles also introduced and developed—in many cases for the first time in Serbo-Croatian—the main principles and goals of the Zionist movement. Contributors to the

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<sup>95</sup> *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), 23.

<sup>96</sup> David Fuhrmann, “Institucije cionističkog pokreta,” in *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), no page numbers.



annual report wrote on topics such as the renaissance of Hebrew, the need for the “national” education of Jewish youth, the history and future of Zionism, and other similar topics suitable for Zionist beginners.<sup>97</sup> And since *Bar Giora*’s annual reports were the first Zionist publications directed at South Slav Jewish populations, its leaders were well aware of their pioneering mission: “founded in the age in which darkness reigned everywhere around it,” an editorial by David Fuhrmann and Jochanan Thau read in 1912, “[*Bar Giora*] has become what we expected from it.” The expectations—and, consequently, the accomplishments—were, according to the authors, momentous:

the history of *Bar Giora* illuminates all individual phases of the development of Zionism in the Yugoslav lands. And vice versa: no one who wants to understand fully the historical development of Zionism in our lands will be able to escape the name of *Bar Giora*... [It] not only transplanted the seed of Zionism to the Yugoslav lands, but also worked, to the best of its abilities, on the development and strengthening of the Zionist idea.<sup>98</sup>

Of course, it is only natural that the editors of annual reports and newsletters of all kinds praise the achievements of their organizations and gloss over their failures; however, in the case of *Bar Giora*, it really was the first Zionist organization that adopted Serbo-Croatian as its language of choice and addressed its publications to Jewish readers in that language. As young Jews in the south Slav lands in the first decades of the twentieth century tended to regard that language as their mother tongue, *Bar Giora*’s potential readership was only going to grow. Along with organizations and publications that followed in its path—such as *Judeja* (Judea), a Zionist academic organization founded in Zagreb a few years after its precursor, and *Židovska smotra* (The Jewish Review), the first Zionist periodical in Serbo-Croatian established in Zagreb in 1906—*Bar Giora* set

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<sup>97</sup> See S. Pinto, “Renesansa hebrejskog jezika,” in *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja “Bar Giora” u Beču* (Vienna 1912), 15-19; Ludwig Bato, „Nacijonalni odgoj naše omladine,” in the same edition, 20-23; H. Kadisch, „Osvrt na prošlost i pogled u budućnost cionizma,” in the same edition, 27-30.

<sup>98</sup> David Fuhrmann and Jochanan Thau, “Našim komilitonima,” *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja “Bar Giora” u Beču* (Vienna 1912), 5, 8.

the coordinates of Zionist discourse in Serbo-Croatian. Sometimes it was the very same people, most notably Aleksandar Licht, who participated in the founding of all these early organizations and periodicals. But as small as the early Zionist scene in Serbo-Croatian was at the time, it was *Bar Giora* whose role was undoubtedly ground-breaking. The specific issues that emerged in its annual reports from the very beginning, such as the need to confront the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Croatian and later other south Slav Jewish populations, or the inherent marginality of Croatian, and later Yugoslav Zionism—set the terms of future debate among Yugoslav Zionists. In fact, they remained burning issues in the movement up until the outbreak of World War II.

The remaining annual reports of *Bar Giora* indicate that, while the organization was indeed preoccupied with general Zionist issues, it struggled with questions specific to the south Slav Jewish context. Lavoslav Schick, for example, authored an article on the question of the relationship between Zionism and patriotism.<sup>99</sup> Questions as to whether Zionists could, in fact, be patriots and whether their work was detrimental to the acculturated Jewish middle classes were classic. But apart from defending Zionism and underscoring the Jewish state as the only solution to the Jewish predicament, Schick foreshadowed the key issue that Zionists in the south Slavic context faced, namely, the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Jewish populations who inhabited the south Slavic provinces. Zionism, Schick argued, was not only going to instill pride among the Jewish citizens of Croatia, a necessary condition for their acceptance by the Croats, but it was also going to make them good Croatian citizens. Since, according to the 1900 census, only a minority of Croatian Jews declared Croatian as their mother tongue (the majority of the Jewish population being German- and Hungarian speakers), Schick maintained that

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<sup>99</sup> Lavoslav Schick, “Cijonizam i patriotizam,” in *Izvyještaj društva Židova*, no page numbers.

it was easy for Croats to dismiss Jewish claims of loyalty to the Croatian nation. But once Zionism took firm hold in the Croatian Jewish communities, he argued, the Jews would become “people of Jewish nationality, who live with the Croatian people [while] cherish[ing] the language of their fathers, the Hebrew language, but who only and exclusively use the Croatian language as their mother tongue and a general language.”<sup>100</sup> This, he went on, would make all the disparate Croatian Jews—in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Dalmatia, Zemun, places where significant numbers of Jews considered German, Hungarian, Yiddish, and Ladino as their respective mother tongues—“good Croatian citizens, Croatian patriots.”<sup>101</sup>

But even though Schick’s plea for linguistic assimilation seems to have been based on the assumption of a need for cultural loyalty, the Zionists ultimately did not regard the linguistic issue as a matter of ideology. Or, rather, the issue of the language of Zionism was twofold and not purely ideological. On the level of ideology, there was, of course, no question that the language of Jewish political regeneration, the language of the future Jewish state, was going to be Hebrew. But on a more mundane and strategic level, in a situation in which very few Jews—even Zionists—could read or speak Hebrew, the Zionists needed to adopt the language of the host nation in order to reach the assimilationists, whom they targeted for conversion to the Zionist cause. While in other settings, such as Germany and Hungary for example, the issue was self-evident and did not require a second thought, in the Balkan context it was more complex. In the south Slav lands, Jewish assimilationists were assimilated into different cultures, and spoke dialects of Croatian and Serbian as well as German and Hungarian. Furthermore, there

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<sup>100</sup> Schick, “Cijonizam i patriotizam,” no page numbers.

<sup>101</sup> Schick, “Cijonizam i patriotizam,” no page numbers.

were substantial Sephardi populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia who spoke Ladino. In these circumstances, the choice of Croatian as the language of Zionism did not at all appear natural or self-evident. This is not to claim, however, that the Zionists' choice was a gamble that eventually paid off but that could have been a dead end. The decisive element in their choice of language was their own upbringing: mostly Croatian speakers, often bilingual, they saw Croatian as the language that their fathers never mastered. This, in turn, opened their fathers to charges of disloyalty and contempt towards the Croats. By embracing Croatian, therefore, the Zionists found the way to claim Croatian patriotism, while distancing themselves from their "timid" German- and Hungarian speaking fathers. Since Zionism demanded a break with the past, one level on which that break was made was the linguistic one. The Zionists were also attentive to political developments in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia and to debates about south Slav political unification. To astute political observers, unification appeared a plausible political development, and, were it to occur, it was clear that Serbo-Croatian would be the official language. If the Jews from the Balkan provinces were going to live in a single polity, Serbo-Croatian was going to be their *lingua franca*; moreover, even before unification, it was the language that most Jews living among the south Slavs could understand. The fact that more and more young Jews from the Balkans spoke, read, and wrote in that language only reinforced this choice.

On the level of practical Zionist work, therefore, Serbo-Croatian presented itself as a prudent choice. However, most Jewish speakers of that language stemmed from the Ashkenazi bourgeoisie in Croatia; large numbers of Jews in other regions still spoke Ladino, German, Hungarian, and even Yiddish in Vojvodina. Once the Zionist

organizations in the new Yugoslav kingdom merged into a single infrastructure after 1918, this would become a problem. Not only German and Hungarian needed to be marginalized as languages of Zionist agitation, but so did Ladino, which large numbers of Sephardim still spoke and considered a natural part of their identity. And while the substitution of Serbo-Croatian for Ladino was not necessarily a problem *per se*—since the Bosnian Sephardi elite increasingly considered Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue at the time of Yugoslav unification—the connotations of cultural hierarchy and visions of backwardness and modernity that the new language was imbued with presented a major problem for Croatian Zionists, who dominated the leadership of Zionist institutions and sought Zionist unity. In the 1920s and 1930s, the major rift among the Jews in Yugoslavia ran along the Sephardi/Ashkenazi Zionist line, and major discussions and outright accusations and fights about the right kind of Jewish unity filled the pages of Yugoslav Jewish publications.

In the early years of the twentieth century, however, this was in the distant future, and the leaders of *Bar Giora* did not think about connotations of hierarchy and domination that were inherent in their use of Serbo-Croatian; at the time, they considered it as merely a medium of Zionist enlightenment. After all, it was the language that connected this generation of future Jewish leaders, the first generation of Zionists from the “south Slav lands.” Indeed, the 41 active members of *Bar Giora* in 1912 came from a number of south Slav Habsburg provinces and independent states (Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Serbia, and one member even from Bulgaria); they could certainly speak and write in German, but the language of their audience was increasingly Serbo-

Croatian.<sup>102</sup> There were also students at other universities (mostly Zagreb and Budapest) who were considered “outside members,” and graduates (*Alter Herren*) living across the Balkans, all of whom were affiliated with *Bar Giora*. The organization thus had the potential to create a Serbo-Croatian Zionist network that would connect the various Jewish populations in the “Yugoslav lands”; and although the beginnings of this network were at first tenuous, its very emergence and gradual strengthening were important in the future efforts of Zionists—many of them *Bar Giora* alumni—to create south Slav Zionist institutions. “This is the first Zionist brochure in the Croatian language,” announced the editorial in the annual report for the year 1903/1904, “and [...] it will serve as a cornerstone [for Zionist infrastructure in Croatia, Slavonia, and Bosnia].”<sup>103</sup>

The Kishinev pogrom in the summer of 1903 underscored the need to create such infrastructure. *Bar Giora* appealed to Jews throughout the Balkans to send humanitarian assistance to Kishinev survivors by approaching the editors of major newspapers in Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia and asking them to report the events and publish the organization’s appeal for help. A cordial response from the editor of the Sarajevo-based *Bošnjak* (The Bosniak) notwithstanding, the response of the major Balkan newspapers was poor, and the publications overwhelmingly remained silent, probably deciding that there were more important issues to cover than some distant anti-Jewish pogrom. *Bar Giora* eventually managed to collect a modest amount of money by appealing to Jewish organizations directly—which, according to the editorial in the annual report, was “certainly the first time that the Jews from the Yugoslav lands

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<sup>102</sup>“Aktivni članovi *Bar Giora* u XX. semestru,” *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja “Bar Giora” u Beču* (Vienna 1912), 60-61.

<sup>103</sup> *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), 21.

contributed anything to the Jewish national cause”—but the experience of impotence in the face of dramatic events made it clear that if *Bar Giora* was to accomplish its mission, it needed to have a strong organizational structure.<sup>104</sup> In addition, therefore, to its publishing activity, *Bar Giora* set out to organize a Zionist network in the Slav provinces of Austria-Hungary. It approached a group of Jewish students in Zagreb, who had formed a cultural group in 1897 that, however, was not yet Zionist. It also established closer contacts with the Zionist society *Teodor Herzl* in Osijek, founded in 1906 under the influence of *Bar Giora*.<sup>105</sup> Already in 1904, the first “public congress of Jewish academics from the Yugoslav lands,” as it was called in *Bar Giora*’s application to the Osijek magistrate, was held in this Slavonian city.<sup>106</sup> The congress was the first political gathering of Jews living in the Slav lands of Austria-Hungary, and it attracted considerable interest in the Slavonian press. Two political factions—the Zionists and the anti-Zionists—emerged in the course of the two-day debate: whereas the cadres of *Bar Giora* and their followers from Slavonia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Hercegovina pressed for forging a Zionist political network that would not be based in Vienna and for using the Croatian language in this undertaking, the anti-Zionists, who branded themselves as the “Osijek students of Mosaic faith,” argued that Zionism was dangerous, and that “it [was] going to bring Kishinev to Croatia.”<sup>107</sup> The question of language resurfaced again: Croatian was the language of the new Zionist generation, spoken across the south Slav lands. Even the Zionists whose Croatian was less than perfect insisted on using it, sometimes with grotesque consequences: Oto Kraus, who insisted in delivering his

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<sup>104</sup> *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja „Bar Giora“ u Beču* (Vienna, 1904), 21.

<sup>105</sup> Dobrovšak, “Prvi cionistički kongres,” 484.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in Dobrovšak, “Prvi cionistički kongres,” 486.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Dobrovšak, “Prvi cionistički kongres,” 490.

address on Zionism and political parties in Croatia in Croatian, was asked to switch to German, since his use of Croatian was obviously not satisfactory. It was important, however, to demonstrate that Croatian was the language of the future, the universal language of the south Slav Zionists, while at the same time it was meant to show the emerging Slav nationalist movements that the Zionists were not foreign German- and Hungarian-speaking agents and that there was no contradiction, as Schick argued, between Zionism and patriotism. In the end, the Osijek congress ended with the victory of the Zionists. By the outbreak of World War I, *Bar Giora* and their coworkers in Slavonia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina organized four more gatherings of south Slav Zionist students: in Osijek (1906), Zemun (1908), Slavonski Brod (1909), and Sarajevo (1910). Plans to hold a Zionist student congress in Belgrade fell through, but the intention, together with the congress held in Sarajevo, was indicative of the plans to include Bosnian and Serbian Sephardim in the project.

Apart from the issue of cultural diversity and the need for unity, another theme present from the beginnings of *Bar Giora* to the outbreak of World War II was the issue of the dedication of the Zionists and their potential to make a difference. The number of Jews in each of the Balkan Slavic lands did not offer the prospect of creating a mass Zionist movement; even if those populations overcame their cultural, economic, and political differences, they would still be marginal both in their visibility and leverage in local politics, and, more importantly, in the international Zionist movement. The Zionists were aware of this. Later, in the interwar period, they argued that only Zionism guaranteed the survival of the Yugoslav Jewish community by preventing its fragmentation. In the early days of *Bar Giora*, however, the occasional pessimistic



article questioning their prospects for success was far outweighed by the almost revolutionary fervor that permeated the organization's publications. However, even in those early years, some authors, like Lav Stern, a lawyer from Karlovac, publicly expressed their skepticism. He argued that the Zionism of his generation was "non-Zionist," *Tuchzionismus*, a comfortable political position that did not in fact aim at real reform. "By this I mean," Stern explained

the Zionism of us, thousands of organized payers of *shekel*, who follow the developments in the movement quite regularly, even though we do not subscribe to its publications; we, who attend Zionist parties and meetings, unless we have other engagements; [...] we, who will take the opportunity to do something for the Zionism of others, if the obstacles are not too high...<sup>108</sup>

Such "non-Zionist" Zionism was the plague, Stern argued, of his generation. They were self-congratulatory and self-satisfied, and thought of themselves as real Zionists while comfortably living their bourgeois lives. They accepted the tenets of Zionism and thought that was enough. Without spelling out the real targets of his criticism—the facts that almost no one could speak, read, or write Hebrew, that no one was ready to settle in Palestine, and that no one went out of his way to work for the cause if it meant giving up the comforts of bourgeois life—Stern was critical of their lack of commitment and skeptical about their future:

we are non-Zionist Zionists, Zionists only in appearance, *Tuchzionists* and philo-Zionists, because we don't travel the road, but rather stay at home; because we recognize Zionism without living it, while it would be better to live it without recognizing it; because we consciously think like Zionists, while it would be better to work like Zionists—even unconsciously...<sup>109</sup>

It is possible that Stern's portrayal of Zionists from his circle was more accurate than *Bar Giora*'s laudatory reports of annual activities. But even when their results were impressive—the series of Zionist congresses, for example, the establishment of Zionist

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<sup>108</sup> Lav Stern, "Nacijonistički cijonizam," *Izveštaj društva Židova akademičara iz jugoslavenskih zemalja "Bar Giora" u Beču* (Vienna 1912), 24.

<sup>109</sup> Stern, "Nacijonistički cijonizam," 26.

publications, the gradual Zionist takeover of Jewish institutions in Croatia, and, later, Yugoslavia—this early critical voice announced the kind of skepticism that was to haunt the Yugoslav Zionist leaders throughout the interwar period. This lack of self-confidence and concerns about marginality were to trouble Yugoslav Jewish leaders for a long time.

### *Židovska smotra*: The First Zionist Newspaper in Serbo-Croatian

As much as *Bar Giora*'s annual report was an important venue for debating questions of Zionist theory and practice in Serbo-Croatian, it was still only an annual report of an academic society based in Vienna. Its very format impaired its ability to follow political developments and provide a forum for discussion of current issues and questions of Zionist ideology and everyday work. *Židovska smotra*, a Zionist monthly, later a bi-weekly, founded by Aleksandar Licht in Zagreb in November 1906, aimed to fill this void. The publication was the first Zionist newspaper in Serbo-Croatian, with a substantial number of articles published in German; the number and importance of the latter, however, diminished over time, and by the end of its publication in 1914, *Židovska smotra* was a true Serbo-Croatian Zionist journal. After the outbreak of World War I, most of its editorial staff was drafted and sent off to the front lines; after the war, in significantly changed political circumstances, *Židovska smotra* ceased to exist and was replaced by another Zionist newspaper, *Židov* (The Jew), founded by the same people, which aimed to address the Jewish populations of the new Yugoslav state that was created in 1918.

The introductory editorial in the first issue of *Židovska smotra* was written by Aleksandar Licht on the topic of “modern Jewish culture.” At issue was the impact of Zionism on European Jewry: “[p]olitical Zionism...has annihilated the [intra-Jewish] border lines, and we are today heading towards a comprehensive unity of cultured Jewry in the West and in the East.”<sup>110</sup> This idealistic pronouncement both implied the political priorities of the south Slav Zionists, and anticipated the problems they were going to face. While they were obsessed with the need for Jewish unity—in the Jewish world at large in which, allegedly, a new culture was being forged, and in the south Slav context, in particular—the very notion of *Kultur*, which was to provide the basis for such unity was going to become a major problem in forging unity among the Jews from the “Yugoslav lands.” Although Licht optimistically announced that “[we] got rid of decadentism [*sic!*]...and all the other isms,” the battleground of culture and its framing of Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations in the “Yugoslav lands” was going to be a serious issue that the south Slav Zionists would need to confront.

*Židovska smotra*, therefore, saw as an important part of its mission the forging of closer ties among Serbo-Croatian-speaking Jews from the south Slav provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, as well as between them and their Serbo-Croatian speaking kin in the regions to the south and east of the Austro-Hungarian borders. One of the central sections of *Židovska smotra*, entitled “From the Yugoslav Lands,” published correspondents’ reports of Jewish news from all the regions in which the publication’s target audience lived: Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, and even—though very rarely—Bulgaria. It reported on antisemitism and antisemitic incidents in local politics and local Zionist activities, and republished articles about Jews

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<sup>110</sup> Aleksandar Licht, “Moderna židovska kultura,” *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (November 1906), 1-4, 1.

in the non-Jewish press. It also included reports on instances of benevolence towards the Jews, such as the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone for the Beth Israel Sephardi synagogue in Belgrade on 24 May 1907, which was attended by the Serbian King Peter I.<sup>111</sup> By being clearly separate from a similar section, “From the Jewish World,” which reported news from elsewhere in Europe, the section on the Jews from the Yugoslav lands conveyed to the readers that they were a population that was somehow delineated by its language and conditions of life among the south Slavs; perhaps they even shared a common destiny. This destiny, to be sure, was inseparable from the destiny of the Jewish people as a whole, but it was clear to the editors of *Židovska smotra* that Jews in the Yugoslav lands, despite their diversity, had things in common that at least necessitated a separate newspaper heading.

The purpose of the section “From the Yugoslav Lands,” however, was not merely to inform the Jews across the south Slav Balkans about each other’s problems and experiences. It was also aimed at informing the external Zionist and Jewish world about developments among the Jews from the “Yugoslav lands,” about which, it was assumed, very little was known outside the Balkans. Because of this, the section “From the Yugoslav Lands” was initially printed in German. “We carry the announcements and articles from the Yugoslav lands in German,” the introduction to the section in the first issue of the newspaper announced, “because they are to be the source of information to the outside world.”<sup>112</sup> In contrast, the section carrying the news “From the Jewish World,” since it was clearly directed at the south Slav Jewish audience, was always published in Serbo-Croatian. Some, though not all, of the other, longer articles in

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<sup>111</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 8 (June 1907), 216-217.

<sup>112</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (November 1906), 25.

*Židovska smotra*, detailing the history or the current position of various Jewish populations in Croatia, Bosnia-Hercegovina, or Serbia, were initially also printed in German; gradually, however, German gave way to Serbo-Croatian, and *Židovska smotra*—despite an article in German here and there—became a properly Serbo-Croatian publication. By the outbreak of World War I, not only was news about Jews in the various Balkan territories published in Serbo-Croatian, but news about the Jews from Serbia was published in the Cyrillic script and in the *ekavica* variant.

Whether in German or in Serbo-Croatian, however, the articles in *Židovska smotra* brought together the Jews from the south Slav domains of the Balkans. Articles on the Jews of Bosnia-Hercegovina, Serbia, and Croatia were numerous. In December 1906, for example, an article entitled “The Jews in Serbia” was published; it was a translation of an article by Arnold Wadler, published in the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden*.<sup>113</sup> Based on the statistical appendix of the state journal of the Kingdom of Serbia, the article provided a social description of Serbia’s Jewish population at the turn of the twentieth century. Wadler noted that the Jews constituted from 0.23 to 0.25 percent of the Serbian population; that the percentage was growing due to low infant mortality relative to the rest of the population; that 90 percent of the Jews were urban (“a rule when it comes to Jewish development”); that in the last decade of the nineteenth century, rapid linguistic acculturation took place, which resulted in 46 percent of the Jewish population speaking Serbian at the turn of the century; and that immigration, conversion, and intermarriage rates were negligible.<sup>114</sup> Articles and reports from Serbia appeared regularly in *Židovska smotra*, at a time, one should remember,

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<sup>113</sup> Arnold Wadler, “Židovi u Srbiji,” *Židovska smotra* no. 2 (December 1906), 39-45.

<sup>114</sup> Wadler, “Židovi u Srbiji,” 41-43.

when Serbia was the principal enemy of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The author of an article from 1910 complained about the weakness of the Zionist movement in Belgrade, and the reluctance of the “Serbs of Mosaic faith” to embrace Zionism, since they considered it unpatriotic.<sup>115</sup> “We should get rid of the appellation ‘Serb of Mosaic faith’ once and for all,” the author opined, “because even the Serbs now see that it is wrong. They know well that there are Serbs only of Orthodox and Mohammedan [*sic!*] faiths, and by no means of Mosaic faith.”<sup>116</sup>

Bosnia-Hercegovina and its Jews were also regular topics in the pages of *Židovska smotra*. Like its statistical survey of the Jews of Serbia, the journal published one as well about the Jews of Bosnia-Hercegovina, also translated from the *Zeitschrift für Demographie und Statistik der Juden*.<sup>117</sup> “This article was written for the circles in which little is known about the situation in Bosnia-Hercegovina,” an editorial remark accompanying the article told the reader, “and therefore it contains much of what we already know well.” However, as the first social scientific study of the Jews of Bosnia-Hercegovina, the editors of *Židovska smotra* considered it important:

Maybe this article will motivate an odd reader to dwell himself in more detail on the statistics concerning his co-nationals, i.e. neighbors, and contribute something to the research in that field. We translated the article with this in mind, with the intention of disseminating it in the environment that is its immediate concern.<sup>118</sup>

With some reservations about its statistical method, the author concluded that the Jews of Bosnia-Hercegovina (both Sephardim and Ashkenazim) were a literate, overwhelmingly urban population with an important role in the economy of the province. But even though the readers of *Židovska smotra*, as the editors had anticipated, knew all this quite

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<sup>115</sup> “Нешто о Јеврејима у Београду,” *Židovska smotra* no. 7 (March 1910), 5-6.

<sup>116</sup> “Нешто о Јеврејима,” 6.

<sup>117</sup> J. Segall, “Židovi u Bosni i Hercegovini,” *Židovska smotra* no. 8 (29 April 1914), 113-116.

<sup>118</sup> Segall, “Židovi u Bosni,” 113.

well, the text was presented as a means of creating a community of readers—“co-nationals, i.e. neighbors,” as the editors put it awkwardly—that would understand the Jews of Bosnia-Hercegovina as part of their own community. The other reason the editors decided to translate and publish the article was its potential to provide a basis for Zionist work in Bosnia-Hercegovina.

Zionism in Bosnia-Hercegovina, it seemed, was at a very low stage of development, compared to work being done in Croatia and Slavonia, and *Židovska smotra* devoted much attention to this issue. The author of a report from 1906 claimed that one could not be entirely dissatisfied with Zionist work in Bosnia-Hercegovina, given that the province was “more or less cut off from the world.”<sup>119</sup> “When one says that there is no antisemitism in Bosnia,” he went on, “this is an uninformed comment. There is antisemitism here just like everywhere else, only here it is not felt socially.”<sup>120</sup> But whether antisemitism was “felt socially” in Bosnia-Hercegovina or not, there was an urgent need to intensify Zionist campaigning in the province. Gustav Seidmann, in an article from 1909, after the annexation of the province by Austria-Hungary, complained about Zionist work in Bosnia-Hercegovina as well: “The annexation is here, and the new era begins,” he claimed:

It is up to the Jews to decide for themselves whether this era will be good or bad. So far the Jews have been doing well here. But who can say that this will not change? [...] Here in Bosnia, where the Croat works for its *Napredak* [Progress], the Serb for its *Prosvjeta* [Enlightenment], the Turk for *Gajret* [Zeal], the Jew should not forget the *Keren Kayemet*.<sup>121</sup>

Seidmann observed the process of political organization in Bosnia-Hercegovina along ethnic lines; unlike the Croats, the Serbs, and the “Turks” (which was a common

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<sup>119</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (November 1906), 28.

<sup>120</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (March 1906), 29.

<sup>121</sup> Gustav Seidmann, “Židovi i cionizam u Bosni,” *Židovska smotra* no. 6 (31 March 1909), 86.

appellation for the Muslim Slav population), who, in the absence of political parties, had their cultural organizations (*Napredak*, *Prosvjeta*, and *Gajret*, respectively), the Jews, according to Seidmann, should work for their national organization, the Jewish National Fund. Being a Zionist, Seidmann did not question the principle of ethnic political organization, which, he believed, was gaining ground in Bosnia-Hercegovina and which he welcomed. The Zionist solution in these circumstances, of course, mandated Zionist work that would bring about increased contributions to the Jewish National Fund and the strengthening of the Zionist infrastructure. However, even though this was not stated explicitly, it was apparent that there was no Zionist infrastructure in the province, and neither was there one in Croatia-Slavonia. As Seidmann wrote, the first institution of the Jews from Slavonia and Croatia—the Union of Jewish Religious Communities—had not yet celebrated its first birthday, and its mission was certainly not Zionist. Contributions to the Jewish National Fund by Jews from the Yugoslav lands—which *Židovska smotra* published regularly—were sporadic and made nobody proud. In the absence of a real Zionist network, it could not have been otherwise.

It is because of this realization that *Židovska smotra* closely followed institutional developments on the south Slav Jewish scene. At the time of the founding of *Židovska smotra*, there were no central Jewish—let alone Zionist—organizations that unified either the Jews of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, or all south Slav Jews. There were few Zionist student organizations on the model of *Bar Giora*, whose influence was limited, in any case. *Židovska smotra* eagerly followed any development that promised institutional organization of parts or the whole of south Slav Jewry, however defined, and with whatever mission. The Union of Jewish Religious Communities was founded in Zagreb



on 29 June 1908; *Židovska smotra* published an extensive report of this event in July, and the full statute of the new organization in May 1909.<sup>122</sup> The new organization was not Zionist and did not even encompass all Jewish communities in Croatia and Slavonia, which it purportedly represented. It was a loose federation of the Jewish communities of Croatia and Slavonia with a mandate to protect their interests and to “accomplish in reality the proclaimed equality of the Jews,” dating from 1873.<sup>123</sup> From the very name of the organization—it was a union of “Israelite” *religious* communities, even though at the original founding meeting it had used the appellation “Jewish”—as well as from its mandate, it is clear that it would work within the *status quo* that the Zionists sought to change, fitting the image of an assimilationist, defensive body that represented the Jews before the government and insisted on respect for their rights. Still, the editors of *Židovska smotra* devoted much space to the events surrounding the foundation and early history of this organization, since it was indeed the first one that aimed to encompass a part of the south Slav Jewish communities. An article lamenting the fact that no such organization existed in Bosnia-Herzegovina was also published; Sephardim and Ashkenazim in the province were divided, and a union of Jewish communities, the author argued, would “bring about the spirit of community and cultural and national unification of all Jews, Ashkenazi and Sephardi.”<sup>124</sup>

Much more enthusiastic, however, was *Židovska smotra* about the founding, the

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<sup>122</sup> “Savez židovskih bogoštovnih općina,” *Židovska smotra* no. 7 (July 1908), 155-157; “Štatut za Savez izraelitičkih bogoštovnih općina u Kraljevinama Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji,” *Židovska smotra* no. 9 (15 May 1909), 135-140.

<sup>123</sup> “Savez židovskih bogoštovnih općina,” 155. On 21 October 1873, the Croatian diet passed the Law Concerning the Equality of the Israelites, which is generally accepted as the law that completed the process of legal emancipation of Jews in Croatia and Slavonia. For an excellent discussion, see Mirjana Gross, “Ravnopravnost bez jednakovrijednosti: Prilog pitanju mentaliteta i ideologije hrvatskih cionista na početku XX. stoljeća,” in Ognjen Kraus (ed.), *Dva stoljeća povijesti i kulture Židova u Zagrebu i Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 1998), 106-126.

<sup>124</sup> “Savez židovskih općina u Bosni,” *Židovska smotra* no. 4 and 5 (15 April 1912), 50.

following year, of the Land Association of Zionists from the South Slav Parts of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Association was founded in Brod na Savi in Slavonia, on 22 August 1909, with delegates attending from all south Slav parts of the Monarchy—Croatia, Slavonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Dalmatia.<sup>125</sup> This was the first organization of Serbo-Croatian speaking Zionists from Austria-Hungary, and *Židovska smotra* enthusiastically welcomed it as such. From January 1910, *Židovska smotra* became the official organ of the new Zionist association.<sup>126</sup> The association was dedicated to the strengthening of Zionist work in all south Slav regions of Austria-Hungary, and *Židovska smotra* regularly reported—always in Serbo-Croatian—about its activities and campaigns. It also dedicated much attention to the continuing conferences of Jewish students from the Yugoslav lands—publishing announcements about the dates and agendas of these conferences, as well as their full proceedings.<sup>127</sup> These events were lauded as “manifestation[s] of national unity,” and were—together with the activities of the association—understood to be aimed at achieving the unity of the south Slav Zionists, who were the *avant garde* of the Jews in the south Slav lands.

With unity high on their list of priorities, the Zionists were sensitive to any hints of disunity. A commentator who attended the 1910 Sarajevo meeting of Jewish students noted that it was organized by three different Zionist associations, two from Vienna (*Bar Giora* and *Esperanza*), and one from Zagreb (*Judeja*). While *Judeja* and *Bar Giora* were Zionist, the commentator suggested that

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<sup>125</sup> “Zemaljsko udruženje Cijonista južnoslavenskih krajeva austro-ugarske monarkije,” *Židovska smotra* no. 16 and 17 (31 August 1909), 267-270.

<sup>126</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (5 January 1910).

<sup>127</sup> See the announcement of the Sarajevo conference scheduled for August 1910, signed by the representatives from *Bar Giora*, *Esperanza*, and *Judeja*, in *Židovska smotra* no. 13 (22 May 1910), 1; also, the proceedings from the conference, “Četvrti kongres u Sarajevu,” *Židovska smotra* no. 18 (31 August 1910), 1-2.

*Esperanza* should become a purely Zionist society, as *Bar Giora* has already done. And since their program would then be the same, those two societies should merge into one. This fusion would force each of the societies to make concessions—and the new society should have a new name.<sup>128</sup>

This, however, was not likely. *Bar Giora*'s activity, the commentator contended, covered all Yugoslav lands—Serbia, and even Bulgaria, in addition to the south Slav parts of Austria-Hungary, which were already organized under the new association. *Esperanza*'s activity, in contrast, covered “all the Orient”:

Ethnically, so to speak, the activity of *Esperanza* is narrower than that of *Bar Giora*, because membership of *Bar Giora* is open to all Jews, Sephardi or Ashkenazi, while membership of *Esperanza* is limited to Sephardi Jews. If the two societies were to merge, then either *Bar Giora* would have to extend its program to the Orient, and *Esperanza* abandon its stance that Sephardi Jews are *Jews par excellence*, and recognize and implement the equality of Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, or *Esperanza* would have to limit its territorial reach to *Bar Giora*'s region—which would be beneficial to the common Zionist cause, since work in the Orient is being done even without *Esperanza*, and it's not as if in Bulgaria they are holding their breath for it. Unfortunately, this idea—the idea of unification of these societies—does not seem likely in the near future. But some day it will happen.<sup>129</sup>

In the view of the commentator, the Sephardim are to blame for the rift. While he ironically proposes the idea of expanding *Bar Giora*'s field of activity to “the Orient” as a rhetorical device that does not require elaboration, the commentator lauds the prospect of confining *Esperanza*'s reach to the Yugoslav lands—in other words, cutting its relations with the Ladino-speaking populations in the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria—as “beneficial to the common Zionist cause.” At the same time, the commentator criticizes *Esperanza* for its cultural superiority, for holding that Sephardim are “*Jews par excellence*.”

Although this passage is only an opinion of a commentator speculating about the possibility of unification of two academic societies, its assumptions are characteristic of a wider understanding of the relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardim from the south

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<sup>128</sup> “Četvrti kongres u Sarajevu,” 1.

<sup>129</sup> “Četvrti kongres u Sarajevu,” 1.

Slav lands held by the predominantly Ashkenazi Zionists. The Zionist enterprise was a political project, and to the Vienna-educated Zionist leaders of the south Slav Jews, the concept of Sephardi Zionism was a problematic issue. “Almost all Sephardi Jews are instinctive Zionists,” wrote one of the founders of *Bar Giora* in 1906, “and they are worthy of all love and respect.”<sup>130</sup> This patronizing attitude, however, revealed a belief that the “Sephardi mass,” as the author referred to the target audience of *Esperanza*, about which he was writing, was not ready to embrace real political Zionism without instruction from the politically aware Ashkenazi leadership, and could only connect to it at the apolitical, “instinctive” level. “We Ashkenazi Jews,” he counseled, “should be of assistance.”<sup>131</sup> Other reporters of *Židovska smotra* also referred to the Sephardi Jews as “instinctive” Zionists, and called for “serious” Zionist work in Bosnia-Hercegovina, based on a “healthy Zionist base.”<sup>132</sup> These calls reflected the hierarchical understanding of the relationship between Ashkenazim and Sephardim in the Zionist realm: while Sephardi Jews were likely to become good political Zionists, in order to do so they needed to properly understand the political nature of Zionism—i.e. to become more like the Ashkenazi Zionists.

This understanding was part of a wider understanding by the educated elite of the German notion of *Kultur*: in other words, Sephardi Jews simply had no culture, and, in modernity—which had arrived in Bosnia-Hercegovina only recently, and with which they were unfamiliar—they faced a decisive challenge. According to one of the members of *Bar Giora* writing in *Židovska smotra* in 1914:

This Sephardi element...uncultured and primitive as it is, but led by purely Jewish

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<sup>130</sup> Jochanan Thau, “Španjolski Židovi,” *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (November 1906), 11.

<sup>131</sup> Thau, “Španjolski Židovi,” 11.

<sup>132</sup> *Židovska smotra* no. 1 (November 1906), 28; *Židovska smotra* no. 3 (2 February 1910), 1.

instincts, strong in national terms, stands before a process that once the Western Jews faced, and to which they had almost succumbed.

“Fortunately,” the author went on, “before this change in Sephardi life could bring negative consequences, they were caught up in the strong current of Zionism.”<sup>133</sup> In other words, political Zionism was the modernizing force that was to transform the “undifferentiated mass...untouched...by the influences of modern culture,” that the Sephardim were according to this understanding.<sup>134</sup> However, although the Sephardim in Bosnia-Hercegovina were “caught up” by political Zionism—understood, for all the talk of brotherly cooperation, to have been introduced to the province from the outside, by Ashkenazi Zionists, as the use of passive voice indicates—serious problems plagued the prospects for joint Zionist work. Needless to say, the blame was squarely put on the Sephardim:

It seems that some Sephardim do not understand the need for joint work. From my daily observations here in Vienna and also in Bosnia I know that there are those among the Sephardim—not in the masses, but rather in academic circles—who are reluctant to work jointly with the Ashkenazim, even if this work is Zionist. Distrust and prejudices that they hold against the Ashkenazim are capable of creating new divisions and quarrels in Bosnia. And instead of removing, as intelligent individuals, this abyss, which has unfortunately created misunderstandings many times, they are even widening it.<sup>135</sup>

Jacques Confino, a medical student from Serbia and a member of *Esperanza*, called such understanding of Zionism “superficial,” and rejected the idea that Sephardi Zionism was detrimental to the common Zionist cause.<sup>136</sup> In the article in *Židovska smotra*, which was accompanied by an editorial note stating the disagreement of the editors with the author “on many issues,” Confino confronted the heart of the disagreement:

Zionism was introduced by people who were, in all of their being and temperament, different from us, so that *Esperanza* needed to propagate Zionism in a Sephardi way. We did not want to embrace Zionism as an imitation of the Western Jews, without our own

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<sup>133</sup> S. Maestro, “Cijonistički rad kod Sefarda—napose u Bosni,” *Židovska smotra* no. 8 (29 April 1914), 119.

<sup>134</sup> Maestro, “Cijonistički rad,” 118.

<sup>135</sup> Maestro, “Cijonistički rad,” 120.

<sup>136</sup> Jacques Confino, “Konferenca Sefarada u Beču,” *Židovska smotra* no. 18 (17 October 1913), 286.

color; we wanted to embrace it as Sephardim, aware of our healthy spiritual Jewish content, our natural Jewish consciousness, our direct Jewish instinct. And we wanted to transplant it into our lives, because we expect only it to bring about the renaissance of the Sephardim. We wanted to avoid the notion that Zionism is an Ashkenazi movement because it is mostly spread among, and propagated by, them.<sup>137</sup>

But even as Confino defended the Sephardi rationale for Zionist organizing on a slightly different basis than that of the Ashkenazim, he too, as a Viennese student, subscribed to the notions shared by the members of *Bar Giora*: namely, that the Sephardim were “instinctive,” “natural” Zionists, untouched by modern culture, with a dormant but “healthy” Jewish consciousness. But whereas the Zionists from *Bar Giora* saw this combination of characteristics as a suitable material from which a modern political movement could be forged, Sephardi intellectuals like Confino regarded it as a distinct Sephardi heritage, which needed to be awakened for the Zionist cause in a separate way, which the Ashkenazim should recognize.

This issue, however, was not only the question of different paths to Zionism among the Sephardim and Ashkenazim from the south Slav lands. It had very real political implications. On 20 February 1910, the constitution of Bosnia-Herzegovina was proclaimed, with national elections to follow. Gustav Seidmann wrote an article about Jewish representation in the new Bosnian parliament. Since “the Spanish rabbi will be a member of the Bosnian *Sabor* by virtue of his position,” Seidmann argued that the other Jewish candidate for the diet—the Jews were allotted one representative in the urban curia—should be reserved for an Ashkenazi.<sup>138</sup> Seidmann welcomed the ethnic key according to which the parliament was to be elected; this, in his view, necessitated the unification of the Bosnian Jews, which was the only way to survive: “only in unity is

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<sup>137</sup> Jacques Confino, “Zadatak i rad sefardske akademske mladeži,” *Židovska smotra* no. 4 (20 February 1914), 55.

<sup>138</sup> Gustav Seidmann, “Židovski mandat,” *Židovska smotra* no. 5 (2 March 1910), 1.

power,” he concluded.<sup>139</sup> The editors of *Židovska smotra* recognized the question of Jewish political representation in Bosnia-Herzegovina as quite important: “We publish this article by a much esteemed fellow of ours,” the accompanying editorial note said and went on:

We note the importance of the question of Jewish representation in Bosnia-Herzegovina raised by this article. We are ready to publish in our newspaper further articles relating to this important issue. We therefore call on our esteemed readers, especially those in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to contribute their opinions on this question. We also note that there has been no agreement up until now as to the choices for the Sephardi rabbi and the Jewish candidate for the Bosnian *Sabor*.<sup>140</sup>

An anonymous contributor to this emerging debate called for a meeting of all Jewish communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which would result in the election of a single candidate. In the absence of this, he argued that a Zionist candidate should be put forth, regardless of whether he was Sephardi or Ashkenazi, because, “as a conscious Jew,” he would protect the interests of all Bosnian Jews.<sup>141</sup> Another contributor, after analyzing the provisions of the election law and showing that the Jewish candidate in the second, urban curia could be elected only if he won all Jewish votes, urged Jews to vote for the Jewish candidate; the question of whether this candidate was a Sephardi or an Ashkenazi was, according to him, irrelevant.<sup>142</sup> In the end, two candidates were nominated: Nathan Rosenzweig, the manager of the Austro-Hungarian Land Bank branch in Travnik, and Ješua Salom, the president of the Sephardi community in Sarajevo.<sup>143</sup> Salom was elected by a landslide: *Židovska smotra* reported that he won ten times as many votes as his

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<sup>139</sup> Seidmann, “Židovski mandat,” 1.

<sup>140</sup> Seidmann, “Židovski mandat,” 1.

<sup>141</sup> “Židovski mandat u Bosni,” *Židovska smotra* no. 7 (30 March 1910), 1.

<sup>142</sup> “Bosansko-hercegovački Sabor i židovski mandat,” *Židovska smotra* no. 8 (13 April 1910), 1-2.

<sup>143</sup> “Izbori u Bosni i Židovi,” *Židovska smotra* no. 9 (27 April 1910), 1.

Ashkenazi competitor.<sup>144</sup> The same issue of the newspaper published an anonymous letter denouncing Sephardi activists for circulating a flier urging Jewish voters not to vote for the Ashkenazi candidate; this, according to the author of the letter, was “disloyal” and “dishonorable.” Alluding probably to Salom’s call to the Ashkenazim to vote for him and his pledge to protect their interests as well, the author of the letter concluded that “those who swore to brotherhood are the first to violate it.”<sup>145</sup> Irritated by the developments around the selection of the Jewish candidate, Gustav Seidmann wrote that he was “deeply humiliated” and “dissatisfied” with the fact that a Sephardi candidate was elected.<sup>146</sup> He accused the Sephardim of being irrational, and claimed that the Ashkenazim worked for the Jewish cause much more than the Sephardim: “From Mr. Ješua Salom, who is able to donate [to the Jewish National Fund] an entire olive grove—not a single contribution.”<sup>147</sup> The editors of *Židovska smotra* disagreed; they blamed the stubbornness of Ashkenazi leaders for the failure to reach a compromise on the nomination of a joint candidate.<sup>148</sup>

Whoever was to blame, the fact is that the matter was perceived to be a national issue, relevant to the Serbo-Croatian speaking readers of *Židovska smotra*, who were spread over the entire region of the western Balkans. As with other publications, it is difficult to gauge the reception of *Židovska smotra* and estimate its impact; it is known, however, that it had subscribers across the south Slav regions of the Austro-Hungarian

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<sup>144</sup> “Rezultat izbora u židovskoj kuriji,” *Židovska smotra* no. 11 (25 May 1910), 1. Salom won 1126 votes, while Rothkopf [*sic!*] won 142 votes. The report also noted that a Serbian worker, a certain Kapor, won “15 votes from Jewish socialists in Sarajevo.”

<sup>145</sup> “Otvoreno pismo na Židove birače II kurije,” *Židovska smotra* no. 11 (25 May 1910), 4.

<sup>146</sup> Gustav Seidmann, “Moj epilog bosanskim saborskim izborima,” *Židovska smotra* no. 12 (8 June 1910), 2-3.

<sup>147</sup> Seidmann, “Moj epilog,” 3.

<sup>148</sup> Seidmann, “Moj epilog,” 3.



monarchy and in Serbia.<sup>149</sup> In this sense, *Židovska smotra* created a Serbo-Croatian speaking Jewish audience—tenuous and spread thin in the beginning, but ever growing—that spanned the future regions of Yugoslavia, and, more importantly, that new audience was able to read about debates that they recognized as specific to them: the issues of institutional organization, Zionist work, the marginality of south Slav Jewish organizations, and Sephardi-Ashkenazi relations.

### *Židov*: Zionism becomes Yugoslav

*Židovska smotra* ceased publication with the outbreak of the World War I in 1914, when most of its staff was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. However, towards the end of the war, another Zionist newspaper was founded in Zagreb, with a similar outlook and similar political and cultural concerns and editorial policies. The first issue of *Židov* was published on 16 September 1917, with the stated purpose of becoming a “forum for the Jewish people of Yugoslavia.”<sup>150</sup> It is difficult to claim with certainty that *Židov* inherited the reading public of *Židovska smotra*, but given the similarities in editorial policies, it is reasonable to assume that those who had read *Židovska smotra*

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<sup>149</sup> The breakdown of places where the newspaper was read was published in *Židovska smotra* no. 16 (3 August 1910), 6. Croatia and Slavonia: Bjelovar, Brckovljani, Brod na Savi, Daruvar, Divoš, Đakovo, Donji Miholjac, Dubrava, Dugoselo, Erdevik, Gjulaves, Gjuvgjevac, Hercegovac, Jamina, Kaptol, Karlovac, Kašina, Koprivnica, Kostajnica, Kratečko, Križevci, Kutina, Kutjevo, Lipik, Ludbreg, Martinskaves, Mitrovica, Našice, Nova Bukovica, Nova Gradiška, Orahovica, Osijek, Pakrac, Petrinja, Pitomača, Požega, Rakovica, Rijeka, Ruma, Sisak, Slatina, Stubica, Šid, Valpovo, Varaždin, Vinica, Vinkovci, Virje, Virovitica, Vučevci, Vukovar, Zagreb, Zemun, Županja. Bosnia and Hercegovina: Banjaluka, Bihać, Bilek, Bjelina, Breza, Brčko, Brod bosanski, Bugojno, Derventa, Dolac, Fojnica, Gračanica, Gradiška bosanska, Vitez, Jajce, Janja, Kladanj, Kotor-varoš, Kozluk, Livno, Modriča, Mostar, Olovo, Pale, Parčin, Petrovac bosanski, Prijedor, Sanskimost, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Šamac bosanski, Teslić, Travnik, Tuzla, Višegrad, Vlasenica, Zavidovići, Zvornik, Žepče. Dalmatia: Dubrovnik, Split. Serbia: Belgrade, Kragujevac, Niš, Požarevac, Smederevo, Šabac.

<sup>150</sup> “Naš program,” *Židov* (16 September 1917), 1.

until the end later read *Židov*. It was the only Jewish newspaper in Serbo-Croatian that spanned the interwar period, from 1917 until 1941, and although it is difficult to estimate its circulation, it was definitely the most widely read Jewish publication in all parts of the country.<sup>151</sup> Programmatic statements, news, reports, features, debates, quarrels, readers' letters and advertisements that filled the pages of *Židov* during the quarter century of its existence all contributed, in different ways, to the development of a sense of common destiny among its readers, diverse and disunited as they were. In that sense, *Židov* continued in the footsteps of *Židovska smotra*, but unlike the pre-World-War-I period, the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918 brought together the readers of *Židovska smotra* into a single polity for the first time in their history. *Židov* was the first publication in which the issues of the new—this time quite well-defined—community of the Yugoslav Jews was debated; and the publication, to its last day, aimed to speak on behalf of the whole of Yugoslav Jewry, even though it had a distinct and clear Zionist political orientation. As time went on, several other important Zionist publications emerged, all of them from Zagreb: *Gideon*, “the herald of the Jewish youth of Yugoslavia,” was published from 1919 to 1926; *Hanoar*, “the review of the Jewish youth of Yugoslavia,” from 1926 to 1937; and *Omanut*, “the Jewish culture monthly,” from 1936 to 1941. Although those publications were different from *Židov* (they were more oriented toward the field of culture, and did not carry news items either from Yugoslavia or abroad), they, together with *Židov*, contributed to the public debate among the Jews of Yugoslavia about their community, its past, present, and future.

All these publications were published in Serbo-Croatian. The language of *Židovska smotra* had been Croatian, and its aim was to reach south Slav Jewish readers.

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<sup>151</sup> Ivo Goldstein, *Židovi u Zagrebu* (Zagreb: Novi liber, 2004), 40.

From the publications of *Bar Giora*, through *Židovska smotra*, *Židov* and the other Zionist publications in the new kingdom, the language of Zionism was the south Slavic language. By the mere fact that they were published in Serbo-Croatian, *Židov* and other Zionist publications, therefore, found themselves in a potentially difficult situation of having to choose whether they were going to be “Serbian” or “Croatian” newspapers. While in the pre-unification period this had been a less important issue, in the period after World War I and the emergence of a Yugoslav state, this became important.<sup>152</sup> In the first two years of its life, *Židov* was a typically “Croatian” newspaper, indistinguishable in its use of language (Roman script, *ijekavica*, choice of “Croatian” synonyms over “Serbian” alternates, Croatian names for months, etc.) from other publications based in Croatia. But by the early 1920s, the time when most other publications in the kingdom that had published in both Roman and Cyrillic scripts (few and marginal as they had been in the first place) ceased this practice after it had become clear to many that the Serbian discourse of unity was a code for Serbian domination, *Židov* diversified its use of language. The first article published in Cyrillic was a report in January 1919 of a meeting that had taken place in Belgrade between Jewish leaders from Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Osijek; at that meeting, Aleksandar Licht, the leader of the Croatian Zionists and the *spiritus movens* of *Židov*, stressed the need for Jewish unity in Yugoslavia.<sup>153</sup> This looked odd at the time, since it was not immediately followed up by

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<sup>152</sup> Whether one’s publication was a “Serbian” one published in Cyrillic, or a “Croatian” one insisting on the “Croatian” variant of the language—became important because of the history of the political unification and the creation of the new state. The new Yugoslav state and its constitution were forced against the qualified majority of Croatian representatives; Croatian opposition to Serb-dominated Yugoslav politics—and sometimes even to the state itself—became a dominant feature in Yugoslavia in the interwar period. For good studies of the interwar period in Yugoslavia, see Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) and Dejan Đokić, *Evasive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>153</sup> “Dopis iz Beograda,” *Židov* (31 January 1919), 11-12.

any systematic editorial policy on this question, but by the mid-1920s, in complete reversal of the trend followed by other publications that had experimented with publishing in both scripts in the late 1910s and early 1920s, *Židov* started routinely publishing articles in Cyrillic. Or, rather, it seems that the editors of *Židov* decided to publish reports from their correspondents and articles by their contributors in the script and variant in which they had been received. So, from the mid-1920s, reports from Belgrade and Serbia in general, as well as from “southern Serbia” (Macedonia) and Bosnia-Hercegovina were sometimes printed in Cyrillic; sometimes even complete pages (including cover pages) were in Cyrillic, and sometimes the articles were published in Roman script, but in *ekavica*, the “Serbian” variant of the language. From the mid-1920s on, therefore, *Židov* opened its pages to different variants of Serbo-Croatian, and treated them equally. Again, as in the case of *Židovska smotra*, the question of language was not ideological, but since *Židov*’s audience was spread throughout the new state and spoke different variants of the language, editorial policy had to reflect that diversity, especially as the Zionist leadership insisted on the importance of Jewish unity. In other words, no one Jewish group and its language, theoretically, was superior to any other; and every variant of language—as long as it was still Slavic and related to some version of Serbo-Croatian, fluid as it was—was equally welcome in the newspaper. Incidentally, this editorial policy developed as many other non-Jewish publications in Yugoslavia “chose” a script, a variant of the language, and an audience. Other Zionist publications based in Zagreb, *Gideon*, *Hanoar*, and *Omanut*, although never publishing anything in the Cyrillic script, published articles in *ekavica* when they had been written by contributors who used that variant in writing.

This *de facto* refusal of the Zionist publications to take sides in the increasingly divided cultural and political landscape in Yugoslavia sometimes bothered non-Jewish readers. In 1939, a non-Jewish woman wrote a letter to *Omanut*, complaining about the linguistic rules it used in its articles. Although she complained about punctuation and the use of non-“Croatian” cognates, this, in fact, was a thinly veiled attack on *Omanut*’s perceived “anational,” that is, anti-Croatian use of language (although this was never stated explicitly): “I am not an antisemite... But why do you Jews always have to be the first to use foreign words, and do you not see that you are thereby insulting all that is holy to the Croatian people, amidst whom you live, and who is feeding you? ...And all that from you Jews, who are sensitive to the slightest of jokes or comments...”<sup>154</sup> The answer of the editorial staff was technical: their language use was provided for by the current authorized version of orthography. But whether their use of language was officially authorized or not, the fact remains that *Židov* and the other Zionist publications in the interwar period were much more flexible in their use of Serbo-Croatian, allowing for all its diverse variants and dialects, and treating them equally, unlike other publications in Yugoslavia, for whom the issue was political in a more narrow sense. For the Zionists, the issue was political as well; however, it had nothing to do with interethnic strife in Yugoslavia. Rather, the politics behind this decision was driven by the necessity to encompass different voices in different dialects from diverse Jewish populations of Yugoslavia who were on the road to becoming a community.

It was this very process—becoming a unified community—that articles in *Židov* promoted time and again. In a series of articles at the end of 1922 and the beginning of 1923, Aleksandar Licht provided a historical explanation for differences among the Jews

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<sup>154</sup> “Pismo i odgovor,” *Omanut* no. 9 (1939), 143-144.

of Yugoslavia, and explained why, from the Zionist point of view, it was necessary to overcome divisions and forge a strong, united, Zionist community. The series of articles represented the first comprehensive overview in *Židov* of the situation in which the Jews of Yugoslavia found themselves in the aftermath of unification. Licht stated that it was in the interest of the Jews, “especially those national ones,” to be “political Yugoslavs” and support the idea of national unity in Yugoslavia, even though they, as a non-Yugoslav national community, would refrain from taking an active part in solving the “ethnic question,” which, “over time, brought in some parties the need for hegemony, and in others the need for disunity.”<sup>155</sup> As “political Yugoslavs,” the Zionists could take advantage of the new political organization of Yugoslavia for their own goals; however, because of their disunity and lack of political consciousness, they were not ready for proper political organization (i.e., as a Jewish political party):

If we, therefore, recognize the need of the Jews to organize politically in [this] state, then there is little more to do [in the face of Jewish disunity on the ground] than wait for those generations whose Zionism would form their Jewish consciousness equally in all provinces of our state, and forge a spiritual and ideological homogeneity among our Jewry.<sup>156</sup>

Until those generations arrived, or, rather, in order for them to arrive, the Jews in Yugoslavia should “unite and become disciplined in the national and political sense.”<sup>157</sup>

In another article, writing about the divisions that characterized the Jews in Yugoslavia, Licht urged that

what is important is to break down the barriers between brothers, barriers that had emerged over the centuries by the force of the external circumstances of diaspora. Let us not take *external* characteristics, imposed by forces that were stronger than the internal resistance of our forefathers against them, as essential internal characteristics that would, if the separation were to last, persist. (emphasis in the original)<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> “Političko opredeljivanje,” *Židov* (26 February 1923), 1. The reference to parties of “hegemony” and “disunity” was a reference, respectively, to Serbian centralizers and Croatian federalists and secessionists.

<sup>156</sup> “Političko opredeljivanje,” 1.

<sup>157</sup> “Političko opredeljivanje,” 1.

<sup>158</sup> “Protiv separatizma,” *Židov* (8 February 1924), 2.

A 1924 article by Beno Stein hailed a resolution of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia that, “assuming the need for complete unity of all Jews” called for the “collaboration of all Zionists in Yugoslavia.”<sup>159</sup>

In 1928, Cvi Rothmüller published in *Židov* an article entitled “Why is Yugoslav Jewry Zionist?” Yugoslav Jewry, he wrote, “is a group without unity,” which “[had been] tied together nine years ago into a community by the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes...it has not succeeded yet in integrating into a real whole.” With the unification of the south Slavs, “the Jews who lived among them were united as well...creating a Jewry that [had not] existed before 1918.” However, on the question of prospects for unity of this new group, Rothmüller was an optimist:

So, a *Yugoslav Jewry* has emerged, which will, in the near future, be dominated by the Serbian or Croatian language. It will have its central institutions and newspapers, and the founding of a seminary will relieve it from having to depend on Jewish schools abroad. All traces of quarrels and discussions will disappear, and a unified Jewry will be created... The Zionism of the youth in Vojvodina has imposed the Serbian language on those who only until yesterday spoke Hungarian... (emphasis in the original)

But even though things were going well, Rothmüller was realistic about the position of the Jews of Yugoslavia in the wider Jewish world:

There is only one way in our midst of realizing our Jewish power. It is called Zionism. Is it not time to ask ourselves how it is so that everything here that is positive is connected to Zionism? How is it so that in Yugoslavia, apart from the old and indifferent mass, there are only “Narodni rad” [a marginal, Zagreb-based assimilationist society], a complete negation of Jewishness, and Zionism, the only affirmation of Jewish life in our midst?

It is only because of the fact that our Jewry is too weak to find a goal only in itself. It has to either disappear or join the movement which is indeed Jewish, but whose center and goal is beyond Yugoslav Jewry. Yugoslav Jewry needs, for its Jewish existence, a movement which will allow it to remain a periphery, but to be a Jewish periphery.<sup>160</sup>

Rothmüller’s reasoning is a good illustration of the way in which the Zionists around

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<sup>159</sup> “Rezultati i vidici: epilog Saveznom Vijeću,” *Židov* (11 July 1924), 1.

<sup>160</sup> All quotations of Rothmüller from “Zašto je jugoslavensko židovstvo cijonističko?” *Židov* (6 January 1928), 3.

*Židov* and other Croatian-based Zionist publications perceived the connection between forging a community of Zionists and the need for the existence of a Yugoslav framework in this process. The Jews' very existence in Yugoslavia was threatened because they were a tiny divided community at the periphery of both Jewish and non-Jewish political, economic and cultural trends. If they were going to survive, they would have to organize a stronger community, and Zionism, Rothmüller said, was the right way of achieving unity, because it envisioned one unified and indivisible people—in the Jewish world at large, but equally so in local circumstances as well, in Yugoslavia. From the very beginning, the Zionists recognized that they had a political task of forging a strong Jewry, and they eyed the diverse and unintegrated Jewish populations in Yugoslavia as raw material for their project. Because of the insignificant number of any one Jewish population in the new country, and the peripheral positions of all of them, the Zionists *had* to resort to forging a Jewry whose form was pan-Yugoslav, i.e., encompassing all Jewish populations in Yugoslavia. If they were to be serious about their Zionism, they had no choice but to become “Yugoslavs” in form—while, of course, retaining their Jewish nationhood (which was a foundation of their Zionism) and avoiding cultural projects that would be “Yugoslav” in content and not merely in form.

In the beginning, this was more a theoretical position than a well thought-out project. Indeed, the first encounters of the Croatian Zionists around *Židov* and other such publications with other Yugoslav Jewish groups—most notably, the Sephardim of Macedonia—resembled contemporaneous “Orientalist” encounters between Westerners and imperial subjects of distant non-European lands. Middle-class Zionist Ashkenazim were fascinated by the “exoticism” of the Jews of Macedonia. *Židov* published a series of



articles on the “question of southern Serbia,” which well illustrates the discursive arsenal of the Ashkenazi Zionist elite. “Southern Serbia,” wrote Aleksandar Licht at the beginning of 1923, “could in a certain sense, and a bad sense it is, be called a ‘colony’ of our state... The administration is for the most part extremely inefficient and corrupt... In those areas, so neglected by the Turks, and in that population, so subjugated economically by the *beys*, *agas*, and *pashas*, [there are no] carriers of the idea of democratic equality and the mission to elevate those people to the levels of higher civilization, equality and security.” It is in this political situation that the Jews of Macedonia lived: “their history has not been written, but it would be worth noting down”; they “never had political pretensions, as they could have none in the Ottoman Empire.” But, despite their “conservatism,” they were natural “friends of progress and civilization,” and because of that, they were considered worthy by the Zionists: “apart from Zionism, no other Jewish movement takes care of those nationally so important and conscious brothers.” The Macedonian Sephardim were therefore seen—in accordance with the Ashkenazi Zionists’ notions of modern culture and politics—as passive and apolitical subjects without history, whose timeless Jewish national potential (“their national characteristics should be treated as our most precious heritage of many centuries”) would be mobilized and politically transformed by the Zionists.<sup>161</sup>

Cvi Rothmüller traveled to Macedonia in 1927, one of his many trips as a Zionist activist. He wrote an article in *Židov* about the Jews of Bitolj (formerly Monastir), who, he thought, lived in a “primitive, good, unspoiled” atmosphere. He also wrote about dirty and unreliable trains in Macedonia, about the many children in the Jewish quarter of Bitolj, the “horror” of Jewish poverty and the “proletarian” Jewish youth; he also noted

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<sup>161</sup> All quotations of Licht from “Političko opredeljivanje,” *Židov* (5 January 1923), 1.

that there was only one Jewish lawyer in Bitolj, no physicians, and only “two or three” of those who had graduated from a *Gymnasium*. Rothmüller thought that all this was a good opportunity for the Zionists: “The material there is good. It just needs to be prepared and schooled well.”<sup>162</sup> A year later, Dr. Salomon Löwy noted the rapid improvement in Macedonia in the economic and cultural realm, claiming that “Skopje [was] moving away from the Levant...and [was] approaching the Central European way of life.” This development, Dr. Löwy continued, was visible among the Jews as well; in talks with Jewish leaders in Skopje and Štip, he noted a strong Zionist potential.<sup>163</sup> And about a conference of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia that took place in Skopje in 1928, a reporter of *Židov* wrote:

Where in the other parts of our Kingdom are there Jews who are so thirsty for mutual contacts, and for all that which Zionism brings? How strong their Jewishness must be, when they seek and receive words of the national renaissance... despite the hard conditions in which they live... And more than ever before, in personal contact with them we saw for ourselves that not only the progress of our movement [in Yugoslavia], but also the elevation and care about our brothers in southern Serbia demand that we forge a lasting bond with them.<sup>164</sup>

The reporter also urged the central Jewish institution in Yugoslavia, the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, which was weaker than the Union of Zionists, to pay more attention to the needs of the Jews of Macedonia in the interest of unity. In 1931, *Židov* published two articles by David Alkalaj, a Belgrade-based activist of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia and later the Belgrade bureau chief of *Židov*, about his trip through Macedonia.<sup>165</sup> Another article celebrated the successes of the most recent trip of

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<sup>162</sup> All quotations of Rothmüller from “S puta po Južnoj Srbiji: dojmovi i refleksije iz Bitolja,” *Židov* (7 January 1927), 2-3.

<sup>163</sup> All quotations of Löwy from “Dojmovi iz Južne Srbije,” *Židov* (22 June 1928), 5.

<sup>164</sup> “Južna Srbija,” *Židov* (13 July 1928), 1.

<sup>165</sup> See David Alkalaj, “Utisci s puta po Južnoj Srbiji,” *Židov* (30 October 1931), 2-3; David Alkalaj, “Utisci s puta po Južnoj Srbiji,” *Židov* (6 November 1931), 2-3.

Cvi Rothmüller in Macedonia, documenting his Zionist activity there.<sup>166</sup> And the newspaper continued covering the activities of the local Zionist infrastructure.<sup>167</sup> Other Zionist publications also lent their pages to the discussion of the question of southern Serbia; in 1940, for example, *Omanut* published a short article about “ours from the south,” on the history of the Jews from Skopje.<sup>168</sup>

Since they were concerned about the unity of Yugoslav Jewry, the Zionists were sensitive to manifestations of disunity and separatism. The most open conflict among the Jews of Yugoslavia in the interwar period emerged between the Ashkenazim and the Sephardim in Sarajevo.<sup>169</sup> The conflict had many facets and its manifestations were manifold, but at the heart of the problem were different notions about the importance of the Bosnian Sephardi heritage. While the Ashkenazi Zionists from Zagreb aimed at integrating the diverse parts of Yugoslav Jewry by “elevating” them from their premodern predicament, so that those parts resembled more closely the Ashkenazim in Zagreb (or, in the words of Dr. Löwy, “the Central European way of life”), the Sephardim in Sarajevo were concerned about the prospect of relinquishing their Sephardi heritage in the process. The major disagreement—which, in a sense, was an echo of the earlier Sephardi/Ashkenazi rifts covered by *Židovska smotra* before World War I—broke out in the local Sarajevo Zionist organization between two groups: one was supported by the central Zionist leadership in Zagreb, while the other had a local Sephardi base connected to the official Sephardi community. The two groups published separate

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<sup>166</sup> “Dani slavija u Južnoj Srbiji,” *Židov* (22 January 1932), 3.

<sup>167</sup> See, for example, “Cionističko izaslanstvo u Južnoj Srbiji,” *Židov* (6 December 1935), 5; “Cionistička delegacija u Južnoj Srbiji,” *Židov* (30 December 1935), 10.

<sup>168</sup> Dr. M. Levi, “Naši sa juga: Jevreji u Skoplju,” *Omanut*, no. 10-11 (1939), 162-170.

<sup>169</sup> For a longer account of the conflict, see Cvi Loker, “Sarajevski spor i sefardski pokret u Jugoslaviji,” *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja*, no. 7 (1997), 72-79.

newspapers until the end of 1927. *Židov* covered every aspect of the conflict in detail. “What is happening in Sarajevo?” was the title of a five-page article in 1924 about the developments in Sarajevo; it was followed in the coming weeks by more details, as well as reactions from different actors in the conflict.<sup>170</sup> The line that the Zionists from Zagreb defended in their publications was that there could not be separate brands of Sephardi and Ashkenazi Zionism and that a compromise had to be found.<sup>171</sup> They blamed the Sephardim for the split; however much they had been attracted to the Sephardi heritage and the potential in the case of the Macedonian Sephardim, they considered insistence on that heritage by the Bosnian Sephardim unproductive in the process of forging of a unified community.

The Sephardim in Sarajevo had their own publication, *Jevrejski glas* (The Jewish voice), which was published intermittently from 1927 until the outbreak of World War II. The newspaper targeted the whole of Yugoslav Jewry, but it emphasized the importance of the Sephardi heritage and resented the dismissive attitude of the Zagreb-based Zionist institutions and publications towards it. From March to June 1935, for example, *Jevrejski glas* extensively covered the festivities in Spain on the occasion of the eight hundredth anniversary of the birth of Maimonides. Contributors to the newspaper and the correspondents from Cordoba lauded the annulment of the expulsion edict of 1492 and the new Jewish policies of contemporary Spain.<sup>172</sup> It was clear from the reports that,

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<sup>170</sup> “Što se događa u Sarajevu?” *Židov* (21 March 1924), 1-5. For the follow up coverage, see, for example, “Dogadaji u Sarajevu,” *Židov* (28 March 1924), 5-6; “Sefardi i Aškenazi,” *Židov* (21 May 1925), 5; “Sefardi i Aškenazi,” *Židov* (12 June 1925), 2-3; “Sefardi i Aškenazi” *Židov* (19 June 1925), 1-2; etc.

<sup>171</sup> See, for example, the opinion of David Alkalaj, himself a Sephardi Jew from Belgrade loyal to the Zagreb center: “Sefardi i Aškenazi,” *Židov* (24 April 1924), 1-3.

<sup>172</sup> Ješua Kajon, “Istorijska satisfakcija Jevrejstvu,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 16 and 17 (17 April 1935), 4. See also “Španska državna svečanost,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 12 (22 March 1935), 1; “Impozantna proslava Majmonidesa u Španiji,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 14 (5 April 1935), 1-2; “Još o svečanostima u Kordovi,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 15 (12 April 1935), 1; Moritz Levy, “Osam stotina godina od rođenja rabi Moše ben

although romantic visions of a new Spain, different from the one engrained in the collective memory of the Sephardim, filled the pages of *Jevrejski glas*, it was not, as one of the contributors put it, “about some kind of solution of the Jewish question”; the loyalty of the Sephardi Zionists to Palestine was not questioned.<sup>173</sup> But unlike the Zagreb-based Zionist institutions and publications, the editors and the public of *Jevrejski glas* regarded their Sephardi heritage as an important part of their Jewishness, and showed open antipathy towards attempts from Zagreb to portray that loyalty as a divisive element among the Yugoslav Jews.

These frictions came into the open quite regularly. Braco Poljokan, the editor-in-chief of *Jevrejski glas*, did not shy from attacking *Židov* and the Zagreb Zionists and their understanding of unity. The controversy surrounding the election of Šime Špicar as the secretary general of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia was illustrative of the magnitude of the disagreement. Poljokan attacked David Alkalaj, the bureau chief of *Židov* in Belgrade (and himself a Sephardi Jew), for defending the election of Špicar, a corrupt man whose only claim to leadership, in the view of Poljokan, were his Ashkenazi credentials. Alkalaj, according to Poljokan, was

the exponent of a fratricidal campaign, and wants to [...] sow disunity between Sephardim and Ashkenazim with his intrigues... Another Sephardi is here who, in the name of some fake unitarism, sounds an alarm bell. We encounter once again, in the person of Mr. Alkalaj, a new Sephardi Mameluke, who is to salvage the idea of unity from us Sephardi “separatists” in Sarajevo.<sup>174</sup>

The drive for unity, therefore, was directed against Sephardi interests, according to Poljokan. And for all their talk about concord and unanimity based on equality, the

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Majmona,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 16 and 17 (17 April 1935), 1-2; Eliezer Levi, “Navještaj Majmonidesa,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 16 and 17 (17 April 1935), 2-3; “Proslava Majmonidesa,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 18 (3 May 1935), 4; “Nadrabin g. dr. M. Levi govori o utiscima sa proslave Majmonidesa u Španiji,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 21 (24 May 1935), 3; “Današnji režim u Španiji i Jevreji,” *Jevrejski glas* no. 26 (28 June 1935), 2; etc.<sup>173</sup> Kajon, “Istorijska satisfakcija,” 4.

<sup>174</sup> Braco Poljokan, “Intrige protiv ‘Jevrejskog glasa,’” *Jevrejski glas* no. 47 (27 November 1936), 5.

Yugoslav Jewish organizations, dominated by Zagreb Zionists, would never elect a Sephardi as their leader:

Mr. Alkalaj should ask Mr. Robiček, a member of the executive committee, what his motives were for his vote in favor of Mr. Šime Špicer. He would be convinced that he himself, Mr. David A. Alkalaj, would have been excluded from that election by Mr. Robiček, had he intended to run for office of the secretary general. For his commitment to unity, although absolute, is marred by a small shortcoming that cannot be eliminated.<sup>175</sup>

The situation was aggravated when prominent members of the executive committee from Sarajevo resigned in protest over the election of Špicer.<sup>176</sup> The affair assumed ugly overtones when *Jevrejski glas* referred to *Židov's* journalism as “the crusade of Lichian Zionism,” to Aleksandar Licht as “the *Führer*,” and to the session of the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia as “the Fascist parliament.”<sup>177</sup>

Clashes like this plagued the Yugoslav Jewish public sphere all through the interwar period. The Sarajevo split was not the only instance in which *Židov* was concerned about unity: it carried several articles on Orthodox Jews (most of them in Vojvodina, but some in Croatia as well), even though their potential for “disruption” of the Zionist project was far lower.<sup>178</sup> But the debate itself, and the major Jewish newspapers which carried it, testified to the irreversibility of the process of the emergence of the Yugoslav Jewish public. The Zionist publications insisted on unity and infrastructure, and criticized dissent and disunity; the voices of opposition were sometimes vocal, but did not question what was increasingly perceived as self-evident: that there was a Yugoslav Jewry, a group of Jewish Yugoslav citizens who had a common destiny and should organize common institutions.

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<sup>175</sup> Poljokan, “Intrige,” 6.

<sup>176</sup> Seven members of the Executive Committee from Sarajevo—including two Ashkenazim—resigned: Bukić Pijade, Moric Levi, Hinko Urbah, Mordehaj Atijas, Oskar Grof, Samuel Pinto and Mihael Levi.

<sup>177</sup> “Lice i naličje,” *Jevrejski glas* 6 (5 February 1937), 4-5.

<sup>178</sup> See, for example, “Naša ortodoksija,” *Židov* (1 August 1924), 5-6; “Okolo autonomne općine zagrebačkih ortodoksa,” *Židov* (4 December 1924), 9.

One of the ways in which *Židov* and other Zionist publications from Zagreb contributed to forging a sense of Yugoslav Jewish unity was writing about a common history and culture of the Yugoslav Jews. As has been noted above, the diverse Jewish populations of Yugoslavia had different histories and many of them did not share common cultural characteristics, but even though this could not be denied, it could be argued, as it indeed was in *Židov*, that their histories and cultures were branches of a common destiny. *Židov* published many articles that dealt with the history of the Yugoslav Jews. Already in 1920, Lavoslav Šik, an important Jewish leader from Zagreb, was preparing to write a history of the Jews in Yugoslavia.<sup>179</sup> In the years that followed, *Židov* and other publications published a number of articles on histories of Jews from different regions in Yugoslavia, as well as on the need to publish a joint history.<sup>180</sup> They also published numerous articles on Jewish literature in Yugoslavia, Yugoslav Jewish writers, sculptors, painters, and composers, and so on. If it was impossible to ignore the differences that had characterized Yugoslav Jewry, one could at least celebrate them and claim that they were not essential and were not an obstacle to Yugoslav Jewish unity. And that is precisely how the Zagreb-based Zionist press treated this issue.

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<sup>179</sup> "Povijest Židova u Jugoslaviji," *Židov* (27 April 1920), 3-4.

<sup>180</sup> "Za izdavanje istorije jugoslovenskih Jevreja," *Židov* (17 January 1930), 7; "Crtice iz istorije Jevreja Jugoslavije," *Židov* (21 April 1931), 7-8; "Otkriće sinagoge iz rimskog doba," *Židov* (5 June 1931); "Arheološki nalazi u Južnoj Srbiji," *Židov* (4 September 1931), 5; "Crtice iz istorije Jevreja Jugoslavije," *Židov* (11 September 1931), 14-15; "Dokumenti o Jevrejima u dubrovačkoj arhivi," *Židov* (11 December 1931), 3; "Veliki uspeh jugoslovenskih arheologa," *Židov* (9 June 1932), 3-4; "Prilozi povijesti Židova u Jugoslaviji," *Židov* (5 June 1936), 7; "Nešto arhivske građe za povijest Jevreja u Jugoslaviji, u 19. vijeku," *Omanut*, no. 7 (1937), 226-229; "Jevrejski rukopisi u sarajevskom Muzeju," *Omanut* no. 3-4 (1940), 33-43; "Dokumenti o zemunskoj židovskoj općini," *Omanut*, no. 12 (1940), 184-185.

## Conclusion

On April 6, 1941, Germany and its allies attacked Yugoslavia. In the most radical and horrific way, as the next chapter will show, World War II and the Holocaust permanently transformed the outlook of Yugoslav Jewry. However, some political and cultural assumptions around which Yugoslav Jewry had been forged before the Holocaust—its cultural and linguistic diversity, the importance of strong Jewish institutions, the struggle against marginality—survived into its aftermath and provided a basis for the rebuilding of community. The insistence on the unity of all Yugoslav Jews, the professed sensitivity to their differences and a degree of ambiguity about them, the commitment to pan-Yugoslav Jewishness irrespective of those differences, and steadfast support for Zionism (even when Yugoslavia broke off diplomatic relations with Israel in 1967), all characterized the post-World-War-II vision that the Jewish leaders—many of whom were actively involved in Zionist politics in the interwar period—shared about the present and future of a rebuilt Jewish community of Yugoslavia. All these assumptions were first debated on the pages of Serbo-Croatian Zionist press, from *Bar Giora*'s annual reports to the last issue of *Židov*.



## Chapter IV

### World War II and the Holocaust in Yugoslavia: Related Histories and Foundational Narratives

World War II in Yugoslavia was a complex web of interrelated civil wars, genocidal policies, occupations, partitions, and new patron-client relationships. On April 6, 1941, Nazi Germany and its allies invaded Yugoslavia, and overran the country in twelve days, amidst general demoralization and mass desertion. Serbia and Banat were occupied by the *Wehrmacht*; a few months later, Milan Nedić became prime minister of a collaborationist government in Serbia, which acted as a Nazi bulwark against Communist insurrection and a facilitator of the plan for the extermination of the Jews. An “Independent State of Croatia” (known as NDH, *Nezavisna država Hrvatska*), a Nazi puppet state run by the genocidal *ustaša* regime led by Ante Pavelić (1889-1959), was proclaimed on the territory of Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Hercegovina, with Italian and German troops occupying their respective spheres of interest. Slovenia was partitioned, its parts annexed by the Nazi *Reich* and Mussolini’s Italy. Parts of Kosovo and Montenegro were occupied by Italy, while Macedonia was annexed by Bulgaria. In April 1941, Yugoslavia ceased to exist.

The end of Yugoslavia changed fundamentally the rules of politics in the region. The Serbian nationalist movement of Colonel Dragoljub Mihailović (1893-1946) organized early *četnik* resistance against the German occupiers in Serbia, but later collaborated with them in their pursuit of Tito’s (Josip Broz, 1892-1980) Partisans. The

*četniks* were also responsible for massacres of Bosnian Muslims in Hercegovina, perpetrated allegedly in the name of protecting the Serb civilian population in NDH, but with an eye to territorial expansion of Serbia, now that Yugoslavia was no more. A civil war was raging among the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia, between the Communists and Serbian nationalists. In Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina, the *ustaša* state was implementing its own genocidal plan against Jews, Serbs, and Roma, and maintained close relations with its mentors in Germany and Italy, who guaranteed the political results of its territorial expansion. Some leaders of the Albanians in Kosovo were eyeing the possibility of creation of a greater Albania under the Italian protectorate. The Bulgarian state was “cleansing” ethnically the annexed territory in Macedonia, hoping to permanently keep it within its borders. The Hungarian occupying troops in Bačka implemented anti-Jewish and anti-Serbian policies. World War II in Yugoslavia, as in much of Eastern Europe, presented various right-wing militias and governments the opportunity to permanently settle old scores under the aegis of Hitler’s new European order. This meant, in effect, that the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) was the only non-nationalist, pan-Yugoslav patriotic movement to organize resistance against the various occupiers and puppet regimes on the entire territory of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> For the nature of Partisan pan-Yugoslav patriotism during the war, see Paul Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 60-100. Literature on World War II in Yugoslavia is extensive. Some of the more important introductory titles include Milovan Đilas, *Wartime* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Vladimir Dedijer, *The War Diaries of Vladimir Dedijer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990); Koča Popović, *Beleške uz ratovanje: Dnevnik, beleške, dokumenti*, edited by Miloš Vuksanović (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1988); Marko Attila Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance in Hitler’s Bosnia: The Partisans and the Chetniks, 1941-1943* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Tomislav Dulić, *Utopias of Nation: Local Mass Killing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1941-42* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2005); Jozo Tomasevich, *The Chetniks: War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Jozo Tomasevich, *War and Revolution in Yugoslavia, 1941-1945: Occupation and Collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Matteo Milazzo, *The Chetnik Movement and the Yugoslav Resistance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); Vladimir Velebit, *Jugoslavija u Drugom svetskom ratu* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska revija, 1987); and Bogdan Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i ustaše* (Zagreb: Globus, 1978). For an

Anti-Jewish policies and the respective dynamics of extermination varied with individual regimes that occupied the different territories of the dismembered country, but Jews across Yugoslavia experienced the fate similar to that of other Jews in Nazi-dominated Europe.<sup>182</sup> Serbia under German occupation had the dubious honor of being the first *Judenrein* territory in the whole of Europe: after all the Jewish males the Germans could capture were shot as hostages during the late summer and fall of 1941, as part of the reprisal policy aimed at quelling the popular uprising, the remaining women and children were murdered by the end of spring of 1942.<sup>183</sup> In Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the extermination of the Jews was part of a larger genocidal project of “purifying” Croatia from minorities, which included Serbs and Roma as well.<sup>184</sup> In Macedonia, the Bulgarian occupation forces deported nearly every last Jew to his or her death in Treblinka and Auschwitz.<sup>185</sup> Jews in the Hungarian-occupied Vojvodina were relatively safe until 1944—the January 1942 massacres in Novi Sad and its environs

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overview of historiography on NDH, see Sabrina P. Ramet, “The NDH—An Introduction,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 7, no. 4 (Dec. 2006), 399-408. For introductory overviews of historiography of Yugoslavia see Ivo Banac, “Historiography of the Countries of Eastern Europe: Yugoslavia,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 97, no. 4. (Oct., 1992), 1084-1104, and Wolfgang Höpken, “Von der Mythologisierung zur Stigmatisierung: ‘Krieg und Revolution’ in Jugoslawien 1941-1948 im Spiegel von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischer Publizistik,” in Eva Schmidt-Hartmann (ed.), *Kommunismus und Osteuropa: Konzepte, Perspektiven und Interpretationen im Wandel* (Munich, 1994), 165-201. See also Ljubodrag Dimić, “Od tvrdnje do znanja: Prilog istoriji istoriografije o Jugoslaviji u ratu 1941-1945,” *Vojnoistorijski glasnik*, vol. 1-2 (1996), 199-214. As has been the case with much of recent work on Yugoslavia, these overviews privilege fragmentation in order to trace the roots of Yugoslav disintegration. They nevertheless provide a good introduction to the historiography of Socialist Yugoslavia.

<sup>182</sup> For the detailed overview of crimes against the Jews in Yugoslavia, see Zdenko Levental (ed.), *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1952).

<sup>183</sup> See Christopher Browning, *Fateful Months: Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985) and Walter Manoschek, “Serbien ist judenfrei”: *Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1993).

<sup>184</sup> See Slavko Goldstein, *1941: Godina koja se vraća* (Novi liber, 2007); Nataša Mataušić, *Jasenovac, 1941-1945: Logor smrti i radni logor* (Jasenovac and Zagreb: Javna ustanova Spomen-područje Jasenovac, 2003); Melita Švob, *Židovi u Hrvatskoj: Židovske zajednice* (Zagreb: Židovska općina Zagreb, 2004); Ivo Goldstein, *Holokaust u Zagrebu* (Novi liber, 2001); Hoare, *Genocide and Resistance*; and Dulić, *Utopias of Nation*.

<sup>185</sup> See Žamila Kolonomos (ed.), *Evreite vo Makedonija vo Vtorata svetska vojna, 1941-1945: Zbornik na dokumenti* (Skopje: Makedonska akademija na naukite i umetnosti, 1986).

against Jews and Serbs notwithstanding—but were deported, with the rest of the Hungarian Jews, to Auschwitz during the murderous sweep of the summer of 1944.<sup>186</sup> The Jews in the Italian-occupied zones in Kosovo and Dalmatia fared better, but were persecuted as well, and some were delivered to the Nazis or their proxies.<sup>187</sup>

Many Jews survived because they had taken up arms and joined the partisan struggle led by the Communists, against the foreign occupiers and puppet collaborationist regimes. Several Jews became prominent partisans, and many were killed in battle and posthumously named “National Heroes of Yugoslavia.”<sup>188</sup> Although there must have been tensions between the mostly peasant partisan base and the urban Jewish intellectuals in the military units—this topic has not been researched in detail—the Communist-led resistance movement was the only place where the Jews were not discriminated against, let alone persecuted or exterminated. Unwelcome in any other ideological space dominated by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the domestic collaborationist regimes—and even in the *četnik* militia, which claimed to fight for the restoration of the Yugoslav Kingdom—Jews who decided to join the partisans were well received. As the Communist leadership realized that the success of the movement depended on the success of integrating different nations and ethnic groups under their aegis, Tito and the circle around him suppressed mercilessly, at least in theory, any instances of ethnic prejudice and discrimination. Many Jews, including well-known postwar dissidents, thus became

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<sup>186</sup> See Pavle Šosberger, *Novosadski Jevreji: Iz istorije jevrejske zajednice u Novom Sadu* (Novi Sad: Književna zajednica Novog Sada, 1988).

<sup>187</sup> See Pavle Dželetović Ivanov, *Jevreji Kosova i Metohije* (Beograd: Panpublik, 1988).

<sup>188</sup> See Jaša Romano, *Jevreji Jugoslavije, 1941-1945: Žrtve genocida i učesnici NOR* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1980). For a collection of testimonies of Yugoslav Jewish survivors, many of whom survived in the partisans, see Aleksandar Gaon (ed.), *Mi smo preživeli: Jevreji o holokaustu* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 2001).

ardent Communists and reliable resistance fighters.<sup>189</sup> The fact that the partisan movement in Yugoslavia was made up of all Yugoslav nationalities—although, admittedly, the proportions and times of joining varied—and that the Jews were accepted and welcomed in the movement was an important factor that influenced the postwar communal rebuilding process.

World War II in Yugoslavia: *Narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*

The pan-Yugoslav makeup of the Partisans and their *bratstvo-jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity) in *narodnooslobodilačka borba* (NOB, “the struggle for national liberation”) became the founding myths of the new Yugoslav state led by Josip Broz Tito and the Communists. The classic motifs and common ideological points—*narodnooslobodilačka borba*, for example, became the official designation for World War II in Yugoslavia in historiography, memory, and education—were developed and disseminated through the veritable flood of NOB historiography in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>190</sup> The main points, however, had been established already during the war.

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<sup>189</sup> See Slavko Goldstein, 1941.

<sup>190</sup> Starting in the latter part of the 1960s, the sheer quantity and ubiquitousness of the wave of NOB historiography normalized the founding myth and eliminated the possibility, at least for the time being, of alternative historical interpretations of World War II in the Yugoslav context. It seems that every last Partisan unit got an officially-sanctioned historical monograph about its role in NOB. See, for example, Ljubo Vučković, *Dalmatinski proleter: Druga dalmatinska proleterska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1968); Advan Hozić, *Banijski vatrometi: Osmo banijska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1968); Gavriilo Antić, *Južnomoravci: Četvrta srpska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1969); Milan Kavgić, *Papuk planinom: Osamnaesta slavonska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1969); Mladen Vukosavljević and Drago Karasijević, *Pedeset treća narodnooslobodilačka udarna srednjobosanska divizija* (Sarajevo: Zadrugar, 1969); Ignjatije Perić, *Petnaesta kordunaška narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 1969); Jovan Radovanović, *Rođendan na Drini: Treća proleterska (sandžačka) narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade:

As early as the summer of 1941, *Borba*, the official organ of CPY, published Tito's editorial about the role of CPY in *narodnooslobodilačka borba*.<sup>191</sup> In this short article, Tito explained the historic nature of the war for national liberation, and the historical role of CPY in organizing and leading this process. "In these most difficult days in the history of our peoples, CPY...put all its powers in the service of national interests," wrote Tito. "[I]t put in the service of the struggle for national liberation [*narodnooslobodilačka borba*] its organizational capabilities, its invaluable cadres. It has led the national struggle."<sup>192</sup> The struggle, moreover, was the most important historical process in the entire history of the Yugoslav peoples:

By forging brotherhood and unity [*bratstvo i jedinstvo*] of the peoples of Yugoslavia, CPY organized the armed struggle against the occupiers. It created Partisan units in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia, in Bosnia, in Hercegovina, in Slovenia and other provinces, it created a people's army of many tens of thousands, it created fearless people's Partisan fighters, who have been inscribing, in their own blood, the most glorious pages in the history of the struggle of our peoples for liberation.<sup>193</sup>

In a 1943 speech, Edvard Kardelj (1910-1979), a Slovenian Communist and the future main theoretician of Yugoslav socialism, reiterated that "the goal of the struggle for national liberation [*narodnooslobodilačka borba*]...[was] the national liberation of the peoples of Yugoslavia, their independence, and the realization of all their national rights."<sup>194</sup> And after the war, speaking at the Fifth Congress of CPY in 1948, Aleksandar

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Narodna armija, 1969); Jovo Mihaljević, *Zov Garača: Šesta crnogorska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1970); Ante Kovačević, *Lički rastanci: Druga lička proleterska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1972); Milorad Gončin, *Sinovi Kozare: Peta krajiška (kozarska) narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1972); Ljuben Georgievski, *U nedrima Kožufa: Druga makedonska narodnooslobodilačka udarna brigada* (Belgrade: Narodna armija, 1972); and so on. The titles abound.

<sup>191</sup> Josip Broz Tito, "Komunistička partija Jugoslavije u današnjoj narodnooslobodilačkoj borbi," reprinted in Josip Broz Tito, *Stvaranje i razvoj Jugoslovenske armije* (Belgrade: Glavna politička uprava Jugoslovenske armije, 1949), 16-19.

<sup>192</sup> Tito, "Komunistička partija," 18.

<sup>193</sup> Tito, "Komunistička partija," 19.

<sup>194</sup> Edvard Kardelj, "Sloboda naroda Jugoslavije i demokratska prava naroda—cilj oslobodilačke borbe naroda Jugoslavije," reprinted in Edvard Kardelj, *Put nove Jugoslavije: Članci i govori iz Narodnooslobodilačke borbe, 1941-1945* (Belgrade: Kultura, 1949), 375-378, 376-377.

Ranković (1909-1983), the Yugoslav Minister of the Interior and one of Tito's closest associates, said that

the end of the grand war for national liberation [*narodnooslobodilački*] saw our Party stronger numerically, united, powerful, with invaluable experience, with cadres educated and tempered in fierce struggles. The war for national liberation [*narodnooslobodilački*] minted cadres of our Party...<sup>195</sup>

It was thus in *narodnooslobodilačka borba* that the new, independent Yugoslav state was envisioned, and Party cadres forged; this ideo-political complex, firmly embedded in the narrative of heroism and suffering of the Yugoslav peoples during World War II, was crucial in the project of building the new Yugoslavia.

*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*—the idea that the peoples of Yugoslavia can forge unity through diversity, in “brotherhood and unity”—were the central ideological coordinates of that project. In his report about the Party's propaganda work in the first three years following the end of the war, Milovan Đilas (1911-1995), a high member of the Central Committee of CPY and Tito's right hand, emphasized the connection between *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and the new Yugoslavia:

We must base our new Socialist Yugoslav patriotism on the history of our Party, the history of our workers' movement, the history of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*. Without the proper elucidation of the struggle for liberation of the working masses of Yugoslavia, there can be no full ideological edification of the Party and the people. That is why one of the Party's most important tasks in the coming period is the organization of scientific work of theoretical and historical examination of the history of our Party, our workers' movement, and *narodnooslobodilačka borba*. (*Applause.*)

Closely connected to this is the history of the peoples of Yugoslavia... which is also constitutive of the ideational bases for the strengthening of our new Socialist order, the new Yugoslav patriotism.<sup>196</sup>

The struggle for national liberation was thus among the most important underpinnings of the new Socialist Yugoslavism. Unlike histories of the Party and the labor movement, however, which Đilas indeed regarded as equally important, but which unmistakably

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<sup>195</sup> Aleksandar Ranković, *Izveštaj o organizacionom radu Centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Jugoslavije: Referat održan na Petom kongresu KPJ* (Belgrade, 1948), 28.

<sup>196</sup> Milovan Đilas, *Izveštaj o agitaciono-propagandnom radu Centralnog komiteta Komunističke partije Jugoslavije: Referat održan na Petom kongresu KPJ* (Belgrade, 1948), 30.

belonged to the arsenal of Communist ideology, the narrative of a united Partisan anti-Fascist front against the various occupiers and puppet regimes appealed to a much broader base. The story of heroic resistance, of brotherhood forged in the crucible of war, and of new Yugoslav patriotism could, at least potentially, be divorced from immediate ideological connotations, and strike patriotic chords among the general population.

That is why the Communists also insisted, especially after the break with Stalin in 1948, that the Yugoslav *narodnooslobodilačka borba*, although it was helped eventually by the Soviet Red Army, was a homegrown, indigenous affair. Giving credit to the help of the Soviet Union in the liberation of Yugoslavia in 1944 and 1945, Yugoslav Communists were nevertheless adamant that it was their own Party that organized the initial resistance and the eventual army of national liberation. This fine theoretical point became much more important after the Yugoslav break with Stalin in 1948, but it had been present in the Communist rhetoric immediately after the war. “We, of course, will not and cannot forget,” wrote Moša Pijade (1890-1957), President of the Yugoslav National Assembly and one of Tito’s oldest and closest associates, “that we liberated our country with our own strength, our own struggle, our own people’s revolution, with some help of the Soviet Union.”<sup>197</sup> Although this question—i.e., the question about who eventually liberated Yugoslavia—could “seem to be a question of pride, honor, sensibility, or even vanity,”

in reality, it is a question much more important than it seems at first glance. [To insist that the Soviet Union had the crucial role in the liberation of Yugoslavia] is not only to deny everything we have accomplished in the war, but also to deny a possibility of successful armed struggle of oppressed peoples against Fascist imperialists and domestic traitorous bourgeoisie in the conditions of a world war in which the Soviet Union played

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<sup>197</sup> Moša Pijade, “O projektu Programa Komunističke partije Jugoslavije,” in Moša Pijade, *Izabrani govori i članci, 1948-1949* (Zagreb: Kultura, 1950), 39-85, 63.



the crucial role. This is in effect to call the people to inaction, to call them to wait for freedom won by the struggle and sacrifice of other peoples.<sup>198</sup>

In other words, it was not only a political question, but also one of theory. Leaving aside the rhetorical flourish about docile peoples waiting for the mighty Soviet Union to liberate them, the central issue at hand was the theoretical import of “[the] possibility of successful armed struggle of oppressed peoples against Fascist imperialists and domestic traitorous bourgeoisie in the conditions of a world war.”

In the view of the Yugoslav Communists, it was exactly this double war that the peoples of Yugoslavia had fought in *narodnooslobodilačka borba* that distinguished Yugoslavia from other people’s democracies in Eastern Europe.<sup>199</sup> For, unlike the Communist parties of Hungary, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, or Czechoslovakia, which could lead the proletariat and inaugurate themselves as leading forces of the Socialist transformation of these countries only at the heels of Soviet tanks, the Communist party of Yugoslavia, in this view, accomplished its double task by relying on its own strength and will. It successfully led the patriotic struggle against “Fascist imperialists,” while simultaneously dethroning the “domestic traitorous bourgeoisie.” *Narodnooslobodilačka borba*, in other words, was at the same time a war of national liberation and a Socialist revolution led by the Communist party of Yugoslavia. “The immediate creation, from the beginning of the national uprising,” wrote Moša Pijade, “of organs of new, popular government”—i.e., *narodnooslobodilački odbori* (“national liberation councils”), the cells of Communist control of the liberated territory,

was...an important condition for the successful development of the national uprising and the accomplishment of the ultimate victory of the working people in the war of liberation...*Narodnooslobodilački odbori* were, from their beginning, the direct

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<sup>198</sup> Pijade, “O projektu,” 64.

<sup>199</sup> Albania, China, and Vietnam were other examples of Communist Parties leading successful national liberation struggles.

expression of transfer of state government into the hands of the working people, organs of state government closest to the people. Apart from the national revolutionary army, they presented the people with the most basic guarantee against the return of the old oppression of the capitalist government and the Monarchy... That is why [*narodnooslobodilački odbori*] are... the most important legacy of our *narodnooslobodilačka borba*.<sup>200</sup>

Pijade concluded:

[T]he organization of popular government, i.e., the government of the working people under the leadership of the working class, constitutes the revolutionary political essence of our *narodnooslobodilačka borba*, constitutes *that moment that determines the Socialist essence of our popular revolution* [emphasis in the original].<sup>201</sup>

This vision of the war as the moment of both national liberation and revolutionary social transformation became dominant in the postwar rhetoric of the Yugoslav Communists. Variations on basic themes laid out in the above quotation from Pijade can be found in numerous speeches, articles, and programmatic statements from the period.

*Narodnooslobodilačka borba* thus became the mythical struggle of the peoples of Yugoslavia against foreign Fascist occupiers and their domestic collaborators, the various nationalist (i.e., Serbian, Croatian, etc.) bourgeoisies. In this titanic struggle, which could not have been carried out without *bratstvo-jedinstvo*, a new Yugoslavia was envisioned, one free from both foreign domination and domestic capitalist exploitation. Led by the Communist party, patriotic masses of Yugoslavia fought for this vision, and eventually succeeded in bringing it about. The story of the formation of the postwar Yugoslav state was thus firmly rooted in the Communists' understanding of World War II as the dual battle of the united peoples of Yugoslavia against foreign and domestic socio-political domination. This dual battle, to which the Communists invariably referred as *narodnooslobodilačka borba*, became the founding myth of the new Yugoslav state.<sup>202</sup> It

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<sup>200</sup> Pijade, "O projektu," 65-66.

<sup>201</sup> Pijade, "O projektu," 66.

<sup>202</sup> This claim is further corroborated if one looks at the process of the Yugoslav breakup from the late 1970s on. The symbolic ground at which the breakup started was the revisionist historiography of World

is within this narrative framework that the Federation of Jewish Communities organized its campaign for the unveiling of monuments to “Jewish victims of Fascism.”

### The Ambiguities of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*

One of the potential weaknesses of the narratives of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*, the central theme of the story of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*, was that it glossed over some problematic aspects of the history of World War II in Yugoslavia. Although the Communists emphasized the story of the brotherhood of the peoples of Yugoslavia precisely in order to heal the ethnic rifts that had proven so disastrous in the course of the war, they were still faced with the difficulty of creating a credible balance sheet, as it were, of heroism and suffering. It was very difficult—but politically extremely important—to persuade Serb peasants in Croatia, for example, or their Muslim counterparts in eastern Hercegovina, whose living memory included scenes of gruesome ethnic violence perpetrated against their families and communities often by their own neighbors, that their victimhood was part of a larger political project, one that transcended ethnic boundaries and included, moreover, the very ethnic groups in whose name horrible atrocities had been committed. In other words, there was a very real danger that different Yugoslav groups would perceive the narrative of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* as a whitewash, a ploy to diminish stories of suffering of individual ethnic groups, create a trans-ethnic story of victimhood that would seek to equalize the immeasurable, and level and limit

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War II in Yugoslavia. In order to create new national(ist) myths, nationalist historians first needed to undo the founding myth of Socialist Yugoslavia.

political responsibility for genocidal carnage to foreign occupiers and “domestic traitors.”

Since the very legitimacy of the new Communist-led government was potentially at stake, Yugoslav leaders considered this question to be singularly important.<sup>203</sup>

Analyses and programmatic reports at the 1948 Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia all pointed to the national question in Yugoslavia as one of utmost importance—both during *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and in the period of postwar reconstruction and laying the foundations for the new Socialist state.<sup>204</sup> In order to forge a new paradigm for national relations in Yugoslavia—which would be the single most important underpinning of the new state—the Communists needed to institutionalize *bratstvo-jedinstvo* as the normative discourse framing the history of World War II in Yugoslavia. This was a massive task, and it was accomplished using a wide variety of means. It is not possible, for reasons of space, to analyze in detail the wide strategy that the Communists developed for implementing this plan, but suffice it to say here that—apart from symbolic gestures, such as naming “*bratstvo-jedinstvo*” the first section of the trans-Yugoslav highway opened in 1950—the main means for accomplishing this task were the educational system and mass media.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> The question of national relations in Yugoslavia has also dominated scholarship on both Yugoslav states. For classic examples, see Shoup, *Communism and the Yugoslav National Question*; Banac, *The National Question*; Aleksa Đilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Rusinow, Dennison, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948-1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>204</sup> See, for example, the already quoted reports delivered to the Fifth Congress by Aleksandar Ranković and Milovan Đilas. See also the collection of reports delivered at the Congress, *Peti kongres Komunističke partije Jugoslavije: Izveštaji i referati* (Belgrade, 1948).

<sup>205</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of the institutionalization of Communist rule in the early years of Socialist Yugoslavia, see Carol Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944-1953* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001). The history of the *bratstvo-jedinstvo* highway is very interesting. The first completed section, connecting Belgrade and Zagreb, was opened for traffic on July 27, 1950. The highway was going to connect most Yugoslav republics, and span the country from its border with Greece in the southeast to the borders with Italy and Austria in the northwest. By 1992, when a para-Serbian “state” in Croatia occupied territory in western Slavonia and closed it down, the three-lane highway from Macedonia to Slovenia was almost completed.

The system of education was the primary mechanism through which a new understanding of the history of World War II in Yugoslavia was going to be forged. “As elsewhere in Europe,” writes Wolfgang Höpken, “education in the Balkans...played a crucial role in fostering a national identity that relied heavily on the memory of warfare and violent upheavals.”<sup>206</sup> In this sense, the Communists’ reliance on the system of education to forge a new understanding of Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism, and the emphasis on the memory and regularized knowledge of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* in this project was not new. The instrumental nature of history instruction at the levels of primary and secondary education appeared obvious to the Yugoslav Communists, and they had no qualms about using history instruction in order to achieve their goals. In the foreword to a 1948 edited volume, directed at history teachers in Yugoslavia, about Soviet experiences in teaching history to *gymnasium* students, the editor bemoaned the “insufficient and incomplete use of national history” in “ideological, patriotic, and moral education of students.”<sup>207</sup> The present volume was going to “help [instructors] interpret the materials in the right way, and...note the ideo-educational moments that need to be

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<sup>206</sup> Wolfgang Höpken, “War, Memory, and Education in a Fragmented Society: The Case of Yugoslavia,” *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 190-227, 192. For an introduction to the history of south Slav education systems before World War I, see Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalism: Textbooks and the Yugoslav Union Before 1914* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990). In his article, Höpken is interested in tracing the breakup of Yugoslavia, and focuses on the period of 1980s and 1990s. It is no wonder then, having in mind his teleological assumptions, that he finds “surprising,” given the “increasing autonomy the Yugoslav republics gained beginning in the early 1970s...how little the picture of the war differed among the textbooks in the individual republics.” Höpken, “War, Memory, and Education,” 199. This seeming contradiction points to problems of methodology: it is difficult to gauge how successful education curricula and instructors actually were in normalizing a particular narrative, and what other ways of transmission of knowledge about World War II—less formal, but possibly more powerful—were at work. In this chapter, I am less interested in inquiring whether a particular understanding of World War II in Yugoslavia was ultimately successfully transmitted through the system of education to a new generation of Yugoslavs or not, than in reconstructing the main ideological points of that discourse.

<sup>207</sup> Radovan Teodosić (ed.), *Nastava istorije u srednjoj školi: Izbor članaka* (Belgrade: Znanje, 1948), 5.

emphasized and used in the teaching of history.”<sup>208</sup> Just as explicitly, the author of the 1948 history curriculum for *gymnasium* students in Croatia stated:

The goal of history instruction in our high schools is to introduce students to the most important events of [our] and general history, to the mutual causation of historical events, and to the development, through contradiction, of all manifestations of economic, social, political, and cultural life; to introduce them to the creative role of the labor masses and the role of the individual in history, to introduce them to the just and progressive struggle of the labor masses, and especially to the historical struggle of our peoples against oppressors and conquerors; to develop in students an active and conscious love for everything historically progressive and humane, and hatred towards everything reactionary and inhumane; to turn students into conscious and self-sacrificing builders and defenders of our people’s homeland, the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, to give them the correct orientation in history and contemporary political life, [as well as] the correct understanding of laws of historical development, which brought to our country the victory of Socialism, and which will bring humanity to its ultimate goal—Communism, the society of unbound progress and humanism.<sup>209</sup>

It was the students’ “correct” understanding of history—in its teleological guise, history theoretically underpinned by dialectic materialism as understood by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia—that was, in other words, to provide the solid basis for the building and normalizing new Yugoslav patriotism. The instruction of history was going to forge patriotic Yugoslav citizens, fully conscious of the historical necessity of creating and defending Socialist Yugoslavia.

In this vision of “ideological, patriotic, and moral education of students” and the forging of “active and conscious love for everything historically progressive and humane, and hatred towards everything reactionary and inhumane,” the elaboration of the concept of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* and its importance ranked among the top priorities. Although the Communists decentralized education in the new Yugoslavia—there was no federal Ministry of Education—the content of school curricula in the republics was almost identical, and the existing differences did not indicate any ideological disagreements on

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<sup>208</sup> Teodosić, *Nastava*, 5.

<sup>209</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za gimnazije od I. do VIII. razreda* (Zagreb, 1948), 68.

any aspect of the recent history of Yugoslavia, including *bratstvo-jedinstvo*.<sup>210</sup> In the Croatian history *gymnasium* curriculum, *bratstvo-jedinstvo* was highlighted, already in 1945, as the first of the most important legacies of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*; in literature classes, students were to devote a significant amount of time to the study of “literature of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*,” an educational unit designed to emphasize—through the study of canonic texts by authors representative of all the constituent nations of Yugoslavia—“heroism, combative activism, brotherhood, etc.”<sup>211</sup> Identically, the 1954 curriculum for the instruction of history in elementary schools and *gymnasia* in Bosnia-Hercegovina listed *bratstvo-jedinstvo* as the first of the most important legacies of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*—the others being the establishment of popular government (i.e., the Socialist revolution), the establishment of the Yugoslav People’s Army, and the National Front.<sup>212</sup> *Bratstvo-jedinstvo* thus provided the key through which to understand not only *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and its history, but also the new Socialist order in Yugoslavia, as well as the normative way of grappling with the “national question.”<sup>213</sup> In

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<sup>210</sup> Andrew Wachtel analyzes primary school curricula from this period, and is careful to point out the “significant differences of emphasis in the various republics.” Andrew Wachtel, *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 136. As the unfortunate title of his work indicates, he is interested—as is Höpken and most other authors on this topic—in tracing the roots of Yugoslav disintegration. He nevertheless concludes: “On the whole, although the formal fact of educational and linguistic decentralization in postwar Yugoslavia might lead one to believe that central control over the educational process had become less intrusive than it had been in the interwar period, in reality such was not the case. Central authorities had ways to make sure that texts and programs in all languages followed the lead of the center when it came to the subject matter. Such an approach was entirely in keeping with the Stalinist formula that cultures could be “national in form” provided they were “socialist in content.” Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 140.

<sup>211</sup> *Nastavni plan i program za gimnazije i klasične gimnazije za školsku godinu 1945.-1946.* (Zagreb, 1945), 41, 26-27.

<sup>212</sup> *Privremeni nastavni plan i program za niže razrede gimnazija i više razrede osmogodišnjih škola* (Sarajevo, 1954), 59.

<sup>213</sup> The 1946 curriculum for a gymnasium class in Serbia called “The Constitution of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia” thus elaborated the topic of “brotherhood of the Yugoslav peoples” as “the most fundamental source of power of the Yugoslav Republic.” The solution of the “national question,” considered by the author of the curriculum to be “one of the most important and most complicated questions in Yugoslavia” clearly hinged, in this view, on constitutional codification of the paradigm of “brotherhood and unity.” The new state was thus defined as a “democratic state of equal Yugoslav

the view of the Yugoslav Communists, there would have been no Yugoslavia had there not been for a pan-Yugoslav, trans-ethnic popular resistance during World War II, idealized and institutionalized through the myth of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. And as a consequence, the story of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* became existentially important for the Yugoslav Communists. “Protect *bratstvo-jedinstvo*,” Tito entreated Yugoslavs, “as the apple of your eye”—an injunction known by heart by anyone who grew up in Socialist Yugoslavia.

While elementary and high school history curricula provide only general guidelines for teaching *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo* and their centrality to the existence of Socialist Yugoslavia, newspaper articles from the same period, about local World War II episodes, provide interesting insights into how these narratives were presented in the realm of the everyday. From the late 1940s, through the 1950s, numerous press outlets in Yugoslavia ran a series of stories about local war episodes in all regions of the country. The sheer volume of these articles, their distribution throughout national, regional, and local printed media—including those regarded as “national outlets” of various ethnic groups—and common themes developed and ideological points stressed over and over again leave no doubt that this was a fairly well orchestrated attempt to shape public understanding of World War II in Yugoslavia, and ingrain among the Yugoslavs the values of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. It is difficult, of course, to gauge correctly the reception of these texts by the general reading public, but what is more important in the context of this chapter is the reconstruction of the story that the authors of these articles sought to convey about World

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peoples.” *Nastavni plan i program za gimnazije: Dopune i izmene plana i programa za školsku 1946/47. godinu* (Belgrade, 1946), 7.



War II in Yugoslavia, particularly the visions of suffering, resistance, and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. It is also critical to note the ways in which the authors of those articles wrestled with the ambiguities of the official narrative, and to point to the strategies of reconciling the problematic aspects of local war stories with the normative larger narratives of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*.

The flood of articles in the 1950s about local war crimes, acts of resistance, and instances of suffering and heroism provide an important glimpse into the unresolved ambiguities of the official narratives of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. While it is fairly clear that there were instructions “from above” to dedicate significant amounts of print-space to telling these stories, it is also clear that different newspapers and magazines would exhibit important variations in their presentations. Such differences were a result of many factors; it is not unreasonable to assume that official party or army newspapers would have been more ideologically orthodox in their presentations, or that local newspapers would have had more interest in presenting local stories, rather than ones from other regions of the country. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to pursue and explain the differences exhibited in representations of violence, heroism, or suffering in this journalistic campaign, it is important to underscore the point that despite the Party’s unequivocal vision of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo* and the plan of the Yugoslav leaders to institutionalize these particular visions, especially through the system of education, there were difficulties and ambiguities that could not have been resolved that easily.

In the official view, there were two major groups of the dead who needed to be remembered, as their deaths were regarded as meaningful in the narrative of the creation

of Socialist Yugoslavia. The first group included Partisan fighters, who were most often referred to as the “fallen fighters” (*pali borci*); the second was an all-encompassing group of innocent civilians killed by different armies and militias, domestic and foreign. The latter group was most often subsumed under the broad category of “victims of terror” (*žrtve terora*) or “victims of Fascism” (*žrtve fašizma*). “Fascism,” in this view, was understood as an ideology encompassing all movements, militias, and individuals opposed to the Partisan struggle for the liberation of Yugoslavia.<sup>214</sup> Both “fallen fighters” and “victims of Fascism,” in this official view, were understood to be multiethnic groups: members of the former group understood the value of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* in their struggle against the foreign occupiers and domestic traitors, while members of the latter group were murdered irrespective of their ethnic origin in various parts of Yugoslavia.

This second presupposition was problematic. “Victims of Fascism” as a group, once conceived of in this way, did include members of all ethnic groups in Yugoslavia, and was indeed, technically, multiethnic; the problem, however, lies in the fact that most members of that group were killed on ethnic grounds, by members and in the name of their “rival” ethnic groups, often in genocidal acts. This fratricidal aspect of World War II in Yugoslavia—perpetrators and victims were often from the same village or region—was something that the Communists needed to play down if they were to build their legitimacy, and that of the new state, on the history and values of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. Victimhood of individual ethnic groups was thus glossed over in the official rhetoric.

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<sup>214</sup> Croatian *ustaše*, who organized a racial Croatian state and pursued genocidal policies against ethnic minorities (Jews, Serbs, Roma), for example, were in this view just as “Fascist” as the Serbian *četniks*, or anti-Communist members of the different ethnic intelligentsias. Ideological differences of the vanquished—whose common denominator had been the hatred for Communism and its proponents in Yugoslavia—were of little importance to the Communists.

What mattered was that the peoples of Yugoslavia suffered greatly and, though it was never stated explicitly, suffered *equally* during *narodnooslobodilačka borba*. The sacrifice of both the patriotic “victims of Fascism” and the politically conscious “fallen fighters” was not in vain: their blood, cementing the multiethnic foundations of Socialist Yugoslavia, was a guarantee that the carnage of World War II was the last in the history of the Yugoslav peoples.

Tensions between the official view of the past and what most people *knew* had happened remained, however, and could not have been just wished away. But contrary to the inflammatory claims of Serbian nationalists from the 1980s, who insisted that Serbs had been the most victimized nation in Yugoslavia, and that the narrative of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* had been a sinister strategy that the Communists devised in order to suppress Serbian victimhood from the memory of the Serbian people, articles from the 1950s about crimes of the occupiers and “domestic traitors” did not always erase the ethnicity of the victims.<sup>215</sup> In a report about the trial of Marijan Častimir Herman, for example, a former *ustaša* official, the Belgrade daily *Politika*—the oldest newspaper in Yugoslavia, close to the government in the interwar period, and widely perceived as a Serbian “national” daily—informed its readers that Herman was responsible for coordinating, with Pavelić, Kvaternik, and other high *ustaša* officials, “the mass slaughter of Serb peasants in the Glina [Orthodox] church,” and for “organiz[ing] the camp for the Serb populace in Jabukovac.” He also ordered that “three Serb peasants be cut in half with a

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<sup>215</sup> For the roots and consequences of Serbian revisionist nationalism from the 1980s, see Jasna Dragović-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation: Serbia's Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Nenad Dimitrijević, *Slučaj Jugoslavija: Socijalizam, nacionalizam, posledice* (Belgrade: Fabrika knjiga, 2001).

saw.”<sup>216</sup> The unusual openness about, even active stress on, the ethnicity of the victims probably had to do with the fact that Herman was a Franciscan friar, and an opportunity to denounce the Catholic Church in addition to NDH—“Herman appeared in front of the people on a motorcycle, in a Fascist uniform, with a Franciscan skull cap”—presented the author with a possibility to kill two birds with one stone.<sup>217</sup> Even *Borba*, the official Party mouthpiece, did not always shy away from noting the ethnicity of the victims. In a report from a trial of a former *ustaša* official and sixteen codefendants, for example, the author noted that they were responsible for a “mass slaughter of the Serb population” near Metković.<sup>218</sup> Similarly, local newspapers, such as the Novi Sad daily *Dnevnik*, sometimes did not hide the ethnic identity of the victims. Recounting the 1942 pogrom in Novi Sad perpetrated by the Hungarian occupation forces, the *Dnevnik* reporter wrote about “the bestial murder of innocent Serbs and Jews, citizens of Novi Sad.”<sup>219</sup>

Such explicit mentions of the ethnicity of “victims of Fascism,” however, were not typical. More characteristically, this information was toned down or glossed over altogether in favor of more general identities of the victims, such as “peasants,” “villagers,” or sometimes merely “men, women, and children.” Typical in this sense is an article published in a regional Slavonian newspaper, *Vjesnik komuna*, which described a mass execution perpetrated by *ustaše* in the village of Topolovica in 1942. Although the reporter noted that it was the Serbs that *ustaše* mostly cared to murder, and that Topolovica was a village in Croatia “mostly populated by Serbs,” it was “around 100

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<sup>216</sup> All quotations from “Nastavljeno je suđenje fra Hermanu, ustaškom zločincu iz Jabukovca,” *Politika* (13 October 1954).

<sup>217</sup> “Nastavljeno je suđenje fra Hermanu...”

<sup>218</sup> “Likvidacija nevinih ljudi Čapljine izvršena je uz puno učešće ustaškog logornika iz Metkovića,” *Borba* (2 July 1956).

<sup>219</sup> “Pokolj na novosadskim ulicama,” *Dnevnik* (27 January 1956).

men, 147 women, and 40 children,” as well as “47 elderly people” who were murdered.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, the author of the article did not recognize ethnic belonging as a reason for murder: the victims were “guilty merely because they were alive,” and there was “no reason” for the massacre except the perpetrators’ “wish to murder.”<sup>221</sup> Correspondingly, in an article recounting a similar massacre in the village of Bubanj in Croatia, the reporter for the local daily, *Ličke novine*, noted that *ustaše* murdered seventeen “persons.”<sup>222</sup> Despite the silence on the ethnicity of those “persons,” it was obvious what had happened: readers of this regional newspaper surely knew the ethnic makeup of the county of Donji Lapac, where the village of Bubanj was, and it was almost sure that the victims were local Serbs. That this was true was corroborated at the end of the article, by the authority of a local Partisan unit, whose members sang a song in memory of the victims—one that included lines such as “It happened on the third of July / When twelve Serb maidens were killed [*To je bilo trećeg jula / Kad pogibe dvanaest srpskih cura*].”<sup>223</sup>

Differences among the various accounts quoted above point to two related conclusions. Despite the control that the Party tried to assert over media outlets, there were possibilities to present *narodnooslobodilačka borba* in slightly different ways. But as long as accounts were underpinned by implicit or explicit ideological frameworks, such differences were permissible. In the article on the trial of the Franciscan friar, the author emphasized the criminal nature of the Croatian *ustaša* regime and the collaborationist role of the Catholic church; although the victims were identified as Serbs,

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<sup>220</sup> “Zvjerstva su bila svakodnevna,” *Vjesnik komuna* (1 April 1959).

<sup>221</sup> “Zvjerstva su bila svakodnevna.”

<sup>222</sup> “Pokolj u Bbnju,” *Ličke novine* (15 July 1955).

<sup>223</sup> “Pokolj u Bbnju.”

the nature of the crime—mass murder, genocide, war crime, whatever else an ethnically motivated murder of civilians could be termed—was not, and the goal of the article was clearly to reinforce the official view of NDH and the Catholic church, rather than point to the genocidal nature of the crime against a specific ethnic community. The story on the *ustaša* crime in Topolovica, on the other hand, opened with the following paragraph:

Led by their Communist party, our peoples won their freedom in the course of the great *narodnooslobodilačka borba*. Those heroic days were also very difficult, and the citizens of this country will never forget them. Known and unknown victims were countless. There were many heroes. Partisan units grew stronger. The occupiers and the quislings were bestial. Despite their technological [supremacy], they were unable to crush the Partisans. That is why they retaliated against unarmed civilians [*goloruki narod*].<sup>224</sup>

Again, the ethnicity of the victims was secondary to the story of senseless violence perpetrated by the occupiers and their domestic collaborators, the story so clearly framed ideologically by the opening paragraph. The story about Hungarian soldiers' murder of Serbs and Jews also served the same ideological purpose: bestial foreign occupiers murdered "citizens of Novi Sad," who happened to be Serbian and Jewish. In other words, even the stories in which the ethnicity of victims was not hidden served to reinforce already well-established ideological points; after all, "victims of Fascism" had many ethnicities, and as long as their murderers fell into the category of "Fascism," their ethnic diversity was seen as a confirmation of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. Importantly, however, the genocidal nature of several intra-Yugoslav conflicts that had raged during World War II was suppressed, although the question remains about how many people—especially in the 1950s, merely a decade after the war had ended—were convinced by this strategy of strengthening *bratstvo-jedinstvo*. The question also remains whether emphasizing the ethnicity of the victims, while still sticking to wider ideological orthodoxies, was perhaps not a ploy on the part of some of these authors to subvert the paradigm of *bratstvo-*

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<sup>224</sup> "Zvijerstva su bila svakodnevna."

*jedinstvo*.

Be that as it may, another strategy of strengthening the saga of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* included publishing stories that highlighted the multiethnic character of resistance. The author of a 1956 article published in the Priština daily in Serbo-Croatian, *Jedinstvo*, related a story about two Communists—Boro Vukmirović, a Serb, and Ramiz Sadiku, an Albanian—who died together fighting the enemy.<sup>225</sup> According to the article, their death was part of the “uncompromising [struggle] for widening *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and for *bratstvo-jedinstvo*.”<sup>226</sup> Joint trans-ethnic sacrifice at the altar of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* was a common theme in these articles, especially in multiethnic regions of Yugoslavia, where ideologically correct instances of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* needed such highlighting. The legend of “Boro and Ramiz,” as everyone in postwar Priština and around Yugoslavia came to know them, and after whom many schools, sports and cultural centers, and various other institutions were named, was an especially important story to be told in Kosovo, where the story of their fraternal sacrifice would provide the normative framework for a new relationship between local Serbs and Albanians.<sup>227</sup> Similarly, an article about the tenth anniversary of the liberation of Rovinj,

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<sup>225</sup> “Poslednji rastanak,” *Jedinstvo* (23 April 1956).

<sup>226</sup> “Poslednji rastanak.”

<sup>227</sup> When, in the 1980s, Serbian nationalists bemoaned the “Albanization” of Kosovo due to alleged massive waves of migration of the local Serbs to Serbia proper, a joke about “Boro and Ramiz,” the main sports center in Priština, illustrated the persistence of the legend about the two Communists:

- Did you hear that they changed the name of the sports center?
- No. Well, what is it called now?
- Ramiz.
- ?
- Boro emigrated. (“*Boro se iselio.*”)

For a good analysis of Serb migration from Kosovo in the late 1970s and 1980s, see Marina Blagojević, “The Migrations of Serbs from Kosovo during the 1970s and 1980s: Trauma and/or Catharsis,” in Nebojša Popov and Drinka Gojković (eds.), *The Road to War in Serbia: Trauma and Catharsis* (Budapest: CEU University Press, 2000), 212-245.

a coastal town in Istria, emphasized that a monument to “fallen fighters, Croats and Italians, in the struggle against Fascism” will be unveiled in town.<sup>228</sup> In another such instance, a feature about urban resistance to Hungarian occupation forces in the Vojvodinian town of Sombor highlighted “[local] Hungarian names,” alongside the dominant Serb ones, on plaques commemorating the deaths of Communist resistance fighters.<sup>229</sup> This, according to the subtitle of the article, illustrated how “*bratstvo*[-*Jedinstvo* of our peoples was born in the struggle against Fascist conquerors.”<sup>230</sup> There was a host of other such articles, most of them illustrating *bratstvo-jedinstvo* of (otherwise traditionally hostile) ethnic groups in Yugoslavia—Serbs and Albanians, Serbs and Hungarians, Croats and Italians, etc.—and providing normative examples of the new Yugoslav patriotism.

Yet another way of strengthening the *bratstvo-jedinstvo* paradigm was pursued through reporting, in newspapers and magazines associated with particular ethno-linguistic groups, on the suffering of “other” Yugoslav groups during the war. In one such instance, in a feature about Nazi atrocities in the central Serbian town of Kragujevac, where the *Wehrmacht* shot several thousand civilians in a single week in October 1941, the Zagreb daily *Vjesnik*—widely perceived to be a “national” Croat newspaper—described, in graphic detail, the suffering of the local population.<sup>231</sup> Similarly, the Skopje daily *Nova Makedonija*—again, a “national” Macedonian newspaper—ran a feature in 1956 on a concentration camp in Belgrade, run by the Serbian quisling government, in which Serbian Communists were tortured and

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<sup>228</sup> “Rovinj dobiva monumentalni spomenik palim borcima Hrvatima i Talijanima,” *Narodni list* (2 June 1955).

<sup>229</sup> “Mađarska imena na spomen pločama u Somboru,” *Somborske novine* (11 July 1955).

<sup>230</sup> “Mađarska imena...”

<sup>231</sup> “Četrnaest tisuća strijeljanih,” *Vjesnik* (4 July 1956).



murdered.<sup>232</sup> The ethnicity of the victims in these two articles was not mentioned. In these particular cases it was not crucial, since in the first instance victims were shot in retaliation as civilians of the conquered population, while in the second one they were murdered on ideological grounds—in other words, none of the victims was killed *qua* Serb. On the other hand, it was very clear that the victims had belonged to the Serbian people, and prominent placement of such stories in media associated with other nations of Yugoslavia was designed to contribute to the strengthening of *bratstvo-jedinstvo*.

These examples illustrate the ways in which the most important aspect of the war, *bratstvo-jedinstvo*, was presented in the local, regional, and national media in the 1950s, and how it was presented to the general reader at the level of the everyday. It is important to understand the nature of ambiguity that underwrote these articles: while in the case of “fallen fighters” the question of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* was quite simple, the category of “victims of Fascism” was much more problematic. The Communists needed to play down the genocidal aspects of World War II in Yugoslavia, emphasize the common suffering of all ethnic groups, but also avoid accusations that they were whitewashing major crimes against specific ethnic groups. Insisting on the ethnicity of the victims, therefore, was permissible only if one simultaneously downplayed the genocidal nature of these crimes and connected them to all other crimes that had been committed in Yugoslavia during the war. It was in this setting that the Federation of Jewish Communities unveiled the monuments to the “Jewish victims of Fascism.”

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<sup>232</sup> “Писма од логорот на смртта,” *Nova Makedonija* (4 July 1956).

## Chapter V

### The Autonomous Relief Committee, the Politics of American Jewish Humanitarian Aid, and the Emergence of the Federation of Jewish Communities, 1945-1950

On October 22, 1944, Fridrih Pops, the prewar president of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia, went to his old office in central Belgrade. The joint forces of Tito's National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Red Army had liberated the city two days earlier. Like most cities in Europe at the time, liberated Belgrade was a depopulated and destroyed urban wasteland. The Allies' bombing of the capital in April 1944 and subsequent bombings in the following months destroyed the remains of the city, which, in any case, never recovered from the Nazi bombing of April 1941. In addition to residential areas, most of Belgrade's infrastructure and economic base were destroyed.<sup>233</sup> Leaving his hiding place, Pops came to his old office, put up a sign in the doorway that said "The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia," and resumed his work.<sup>234</sup>

This iconic image marks the beginning, in the celebratory account by the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, of the period of Jewish reconstruction in the new Yugoslavia. In a volume published by the organization in 1969, marking its fiftieth anniversary, Pops's gesture signifies the continuation of the Federation's work that the war had interrupted. In the beginning of the chapter on "Renewal," the author

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<sup>233</sup> For descriptions of battles for the liberation of Belgrade, its destruction, and first days after the liberation, see Đorđe Piljević et al., *Beograd u ratu i revoluciji, 1941-1945*, vol. 2 (Belgrade, 1984), 594-665.

<sup>234</sup> *Spomenica, 1919-1969. Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije* (Belgrade, 1969), 115.

recognizes that the gesture was “more a noble motive...than a reflection of reality”; he nevertheless states that the symbolic opening of the office of the Federation represented an “appeal to all communities and their members to continue the thread interrupted by the war.”<sup>235</sup> Although the war had devastated Jewish communities in Yugoslavia and questioned the possibility of their very existence, as it did elsewhere in Europe, the task of the communities and their members was to continue their prewar work, and, under the leadership of the Federation, rebuild Jewish life in Yugoslavia. The Federation was to continue its work, and Pops’s symbolic announcement that the organization was open for business provided much needed reassurance.

While Pops’s motives are clear, the Federation’s notion of “thread” is problematic in light of “reflection of reality.” The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia, from its inception in 1919 until the outbreak of World War II, remained a weak organization that never managed—and, indeed, never tried—to overcome the diversity of its constituent organizations, their visions of Jewishness, Zionism, religion, Yugoslavia, and other issues relevant to Jewish life in the country. As such, it lacked any unified political or cultural vision, beyond an all-inclusive, broadly defined Jewishness that all Jews in Yugoslavia theoretically shared. Unlike the political program of the Zionists, who, as I showed in chapter III, sought to forge a Zionist community within a pan-Yugoslav political framework, the goals and functions of the prewar Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia were much more limited. They included legal representation of Jewish communities and their interests before the state, as well as securing conditions for unobstructed religious observance of all Jewish denominations. Although the activities of the Federation expanded somewhat in the late 1930s, the

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<sup>235</sup> *Spomenica*, 115.

organization never really assumed a role among the Yugoslav Jews that would transcend its responsibility as a representative body encompassing all Yugoslav Jewish organizations, diverse and sometimes antagonistic as they were.<sup>236</sup> The enormous and unprecedented task of rebuilding Jewish communal life in the aftermath of destruction of previously unimaginable magnitude presented the Federation, therefore, with a set of completely novel responsibilities. The most pressing of all issues was a thorough reorganization of the remaining Jewish communities in Yugoslavia. Along with this massive overhaul—or, rather, as part of it—came the task of redefining the Federation’s own role as a Jewish umbrella organization and of forging a new relationship with the authorities of the emerging socialist state.

By 1969, when the fiftieth-anniversary volume was published, these tasks had been accomplished, and the author of the publication could point to the imagined and seemingly natural “thread”—interrupted by the war, but nevertheless unquestioned and linear—that connected the Federation’s prewar and postwar activities. In the period from the liberation of Belgrade in October 1944 until the solidification of its position in the fall of 1952, however, the Federation was in the midst of reorganizing its role and formulating responses to the new circumstances that threatened the very existence of Jewish life in Yugoslavia, and that called for visions and abilities more substantial than those of its past leaders. In this chapter, I argue that the Federation emerged as the central organization of Yugoslav Jewry thanks to its ability to channel American Jewish aid and, through this process, forge a new relationship with the Yugoslav state. These developments were unprecedented, and represented a radical departure from the patterns

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<sup>236</sup> For a discussion of the Federation of Jewish Communities and its role in the prewar period, see Harriet Freidenreich, *The Jews of Yugoslavia: A Quest for Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 97-111.

of Jewish politics in the prewar period. Between the vital channel of American Jewish aid and the ideological coordinates laid out by the new regime, the Federation reinvented its role and formulated a new meaning of Jewishness in socialist Yugoslavia. These twin processes were embedded in the new political and cultural landscape that emerged after the war. Although the ideological constraints set by the new state threatened to limit more traditional manifestations of Jewishness, the new leaders of the Federation, most of whom had been invested in the Zionist project before the war, managed to push through a vision of Jewishness that could claim to be part of the larger nation building project embarked upon by the new state, while maintaining distinctly Jewish manifestations of this new pattern of identification. Moreover, their Zionist prewar past, with its embrace of Jewish diversity and insistence on the pan-Yugoslav framework, allowed these leaders to assert credibly their loyalty to the new concepts of Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism. These concepts were being forged by the new state at the very time the Jewish leadership was formulating the parameters of Jewishness in the new circumstances.<sup>237</sup>

### Prospects for Jewish Life in Yugoslavia after the Liberation

In late 1944 and all through 1945, the situation of Jewish survivors emerging from hiding or returning to Yugoslavia from camps in Europe was desperate. To be sure,

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<sup>237</sup> In his book on Yugoslav Jewry, Ari Kerckänen examines, quite thoughtfully and in detail, many aspects I treat in this chapter. I agree with many of the points he makes, including his idea that the Federation managed to centralize its role through distributing humanitarian aid; I am skeptical, on the other hand, of some of his interpretations, such as his claim that the Yugoslav Jewish leadership rejected Zionism. I fine-tune some of the claims he makes, and propose several other ones, as I was fortunate to work in the archives of the Federation of Jewish Communities, and the New York archive of JDC. See Ari Kerckänen, *Yugoslav Jewry: Aspects of Post-World War II and Post-Yugoslav Developments* (Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2001), 39-107.

everyone in Yugoslavia had gone through four terrible years of war, whose destructive impact could be seen everywhere. “When we reached Belgrade,” an especially insightful memoir of a Jewish partisan states, “[we encountered] pale, emaciated, gaunt people dressed in rags. On their faces one could discern the terrible weight of terror, war hardships, privation, destitution, hunger, and fear.”<sup>238</sup> Comparing degrees of victimhood is always risky, but it can nevertheless be argued that the Jewish population in this period faced hardships that distinguished them from other Yugoslavs. The most observable was that organized Jewish life in Yugoslavia, like elsewhere in Europe, had been destroyed, and with it the framework for immediate reconstruction. Related to this are the feelings of rupture and discontinuity with prewar life that many Jews felt, which are amply documented in the earliest accounts of the Holocaust by its survivors.<sup>239</sup> Those who returned found that their very lives seemed to have been erased, as it were, from the surrounding society. They found their apartments and houses occupied by new tenants; whether Jewish property had been “aryanized” by the criminal wartime regimes or occupied after the war by various refugees and partisans, it mattered little. The fact was that most returnees now faced a protracted struggle to reclaim their property—a struggle that did not at all look promising, since the new regime seemed to be reluctant to initiate a wide campaign of restitution of confiscated private property. As a quintessentially

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<sup>238</sup> Eva Grlić, *Sjećanja* (Zagreb: Durieux, 2001), 137.

<sup>239</sup> “It is no more than a sketch,” writes Rachel Auerbach in the foreword to the account of her visit to the remains of the Treblinka camp in 1946, “a fragment of a picture, which I would like to paint during the few years that are still left to me: how a whole living, shouting, roaring world was swept away into oblivion.” Rachel Auerbach, “In the Fields of Treblinka,” in Alexander Donat (ed.), *The Death Camp Treblinka: A Documentary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1979), 23. Auerbach’s account was originally published in Yiddish as Rahel Oyerbakh, *Oyf di felder fun Treblinka: Reportazsh* (Lodz and Warsaw: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna, 1947). In the Yugoslav context, the story of Hanna Levy-Hass is illustrative. After returning to Yugoslavia from Bergen-Belsen, she “personally felt like [she] was in a cemetery, in a desert.” The notion that she should find work and be employed in the future was “novel.” See Hanna Levy-Hass, *Villeicht war das alles erst der Anfang: Tagebuch aus dem KZ Bergen-Belsen, 1944-1945*, edited by Eike Geisel (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1979), 80-81.

urban population, without ties to the countryside that most other people could resort to in order to survive, the returning Jews faced an uncertain and discouraging future.<sup>240</sup>

Reports about the circumstances in which the Jews lived in Yugoslav cities immediately after the liberation, and estimates about their needs, stress the immediate and most basic nature of relief work that needed to be done. A Jewish member of an early American delegation in Belgrade reported in February 1945 that “approximately 2,000 Jewish families [were] in great need [of] clothing, blankets, linens, medicaments, housing.”<sup>241</sup> The situation in provincial communities was even worse. In Osijek, for example, the president of the Jewish community complained in spring 1945 that the community did not have a building, any money, and “[could] not claim to possess anything” that could be of help to the returnees from Italy and the various camps, including the six survivors who returned to Osijek from Jasenovac and Auschwitz.<sup>242</sup> A report from the fall of 1945 on the state of Yugoslav Jewry, written by its representatives and delivered to Moses A. Leavitt, then secretary of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in New York, by an American UNRRA officer on the ground, stated that about 80 percent of the returnees to Yugoslav cities (estimated at about 9,000 Jews already in Yugoslavia, and about 3,000 to 5,000 who were expected to return from the DP camps) were “without any means whatsoever and [were] absolutely

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<sup>240</sup> “Out of the total number of 1,200 people, which is the number of the Jews in Belgrade today,” Fridrih Pops wrote to the president of the Osijek Jewish community in June 1945, “there are no more 250 or 300 who are originally from Belgrade.” Belgrade and other large communities, such as Zagreb and Sarajevo, became new centers to which dispossessed Jews turned in search for most basic needs, such as food and shelter. Fridrih Pops to Lazar Margulies, 15 June 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade (henceforth JHM), box 806, folder 41e, “Prepiska dr. Fridriha Popsa.”

<sup>241</sup> Florence Hodel to Moses A. Leavitt, 26 February 1945, Archive of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (henceforth AJDC), collection #45/54, file #1005. It is, however, more likely that Pops’s number of 1,200 Jews in Belgrade is closer to reality than Hodel’s “2,000 families.” It is also possible that there were more Jewish displaced persons in Belgrade in January 1945, on their way to Palestine.

<sup>242</sup> Lazar Margulies to Fridrih Pops, 5 June 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41e, “Prepiska dr. Fridriha Popsa.”

without possessions and [were] therefore so much in need of assistance that the Communities have to take care of them.”<sup>243</sup> Since the returnees had no one else to turn to for immediate aid, the pressure of providing relief, therefore, fell on the destroyed and dispossessed Jewish communal infrastructure. “The Jewish community in Belgrade,” states the report that was discussed at a meeting of communal leaders on 8 July 1945, “today has an overwhelmingly social mission. It is expected to take delivery of the people returning from POW and deportation [*sic*] camps, and provide money, food, accommodation, and, if at all possible, clothing.”<sup>244</sup>

Jewish communities, at this point, did not exist as legal entities: like the Federation of Jewish Communities, they were legal successors to prewar organizations, but it was clear that at some point their status was going to be redefined. However, the highest Yugoslav authorities recognized the existence and mission of the Federation and the communities: Moša Pijade, a Serbian Jew and close associate of Tito, headed the delegation of high AVNOJ officials at the reopening of the only remaining synagogue in Belgrade, which the newly reestablished Federation of Jewish Communities organized in late 1944.<sup>245</sup> The Jewish leadership perceived this symbolic gesture as an opening of a possibility for a Jewish reconstruction effort.

The pressure on the communities to provide the basic means of survival for thousands of people was overpowering. “We who are still at the helm of the *Kehillah* have the will and the strength to steer this ship through the storm,” wrote Ašer Kišicki,

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<sup>243</sup> “Draft for Organizing Relief to the Destitute Yugoslav Jews,” an anonymous report appended to Nathan Reich’s letter to Moses A. Leavitt, 4 October 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, p. 1. The original report was written in German.

<sup>244</sup> “Izveštaj uprave Jevrejske veroispovedne opštine za opštinski odbor za sednicu od 8. jula 1945. godine,” no. 1005 (6 October 1945), JHM, unsorted, box “Beograd.”

<sup>245</sup> Kerkkänen, *Yugoslav Jewry*, 41.



the president of the Zagreb community, in a letter to JDC at the end of the summer of 1945, “[b]ut without help from the outside, this will be quite impossible.”<sup>246</sup> Individual communities, therefore, looked for help wherever they thought they could find it. In December 1944, Fridrih Pops appealed, in the name of the Jews of Yugoslavia, to Isak Alkalaj, the prewar Chief Rabbi of Yugoslavia, at that time in London with the Yugoslav government in exile, “to plead with the relevant groups in England and America, and especially our Jewish brethren, to send most urgently needed aid, so that at least these few living Jews [in Yugoslavia] could survive.”<sup>247</sup> Along with inquiries about the fates of individual Jews during the war, the issue of urgent humanitarian aid dominated the pages of numerous letters that circulated among Yugoslav Jews in the country and abroad in the early days after the liberation. This was clearly the most critical problem that needed to be solved: the survival of the remaining Jews hinged at this point on providing them with basic necessities.

Those who took the lead in solving this problem were the surviving Jewish activists from the interwar period. This was the generation of prewar students and young professionals active in the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia, *Židov*, and other, mostly Zionist, Jewish organizations in the country. Soon after the end of the war, those who survived managed to reestablish contact, and started thinking about how to organize a framework for supplying humanitarian aid to the Jews in Yugoslavia. The early letters they exchanged are poignant examples of their sense of obligation towards their community, and their wish to believe that at least a remnant of the old network of Jewish

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<sup>246</sup> “Excerpts from a letter of A. Kisicki from Zagreb, dated August 28, 1945,” AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, p. 3.

<sup>247</sup> Fridrih Pops to Rabbi Isak Alkalaj, 11 December 1944, JHM, box 806, folder 41d, “Prepiska sa jugoslovenskim Jevrejima u inostranstvu.”

activists managed to survive the Holocaust. “Fate has thrown me far from the place of my youth and my best years,” wrote David Levi, a prewar high official of the Zionist-dominated Zagreb Jewish community, from Jerusalem in late August 1945, “but distance can never diminish my love for that place and for my comrades there.” Levi invoked the Yugoslav Zionist community in Palestine, which was now ready to engage in work to help the surviving Jews in Yugoslavia: “Other comrades—Cvi [Rothmüller], Joel [Rosenberger], Meir [Weltmann], Lav [Stern], Hilel [Livni], and many others—will be looking forward to your reports.”<sup>248</sup> The “comrades” included some of the most ardent Zionist workers in prewar Yugoslavia, who were now leaders of the Association of Yugoslav Jews in Palestine, which expressed its readiness to help in organizing a relief operation for the Jews of Yugoslavia.<sup>249</sup> In a similar vein, and about the same time, Aleksandar Klein wrote from Switzerland offering the help of “1,400 Yugoslav Jews in Switzerland, especially Dr. Licht...Dr. Drago Rosenberg...etc. etc.”<sup>250</sup> Again, active prewar Zionists stand out.

Of course, the natural interest by the Yugoslav Jews abroad about the situation of the Jews in the country cannot by any means be reduced to groups of Zionists; indeed, many different names come up in numerous letters exchanged in this period. However, it was the Zionist activists from the interwar period who stand out—because of their

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<sup>248</sup> David Levi-Dale to Bata Gedalja, 30 August 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41d, “Prepiska sa jugoslovenskim Jevrejima u inostranstvu.” Levi continued working in the Zagreb Jewish community after the establishment of the Nazi-sponsored Independent State of Croatia in April 1941, but managed to flee to the Italian occupation zone in 1942. After spending some time in camps in Italy (Ferramonti) and Egypt (El Chatt), he immigrated to Palestine in 1944.

<sup>249</sup> David Levi-Dale to the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia, 1 August 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41d, “Prepiska sa jugoslovenskim Jevrejima u inostranstvu.” The name of the organization in Hebrew is התאחדות עולי יוגוסלביה. For the history of the organization, see Ženi Lebl, *Juče, danas: doprinos Jevreja iz bivše Jugoslavije u Izraelu* (Tel Aviv: Hitachdut Oley Yugoslaviah, 1999).

<sup>250</sup> Aleksandar Klein to Fridrih Pops, 24 June 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41d, “Prepiska sa jugoslovenskim Jevrejima u inostranstvu.”

political consciousness and history of political work, prewar networks, personal friendships, and their conception of Yugoslav Jewry as an indivisible group for which they felt responsible—as the most ardent advocates of providing humanitarian aid to the Jews in Yugoslavia. “After those terrible years filled with suffering, torments, and persecution,” wrote Pavle Neuberger, a prewar Zionist who had emigrated to the United States in 1940, in a letter to Albert Vajs,

[years] that wiped out almost 90 percent of our Jewish community in Yugoslavia, and with it many of our best Jewish activists—we are always filled with joy when one of our comrades writes us, who survived all that and managed to preserve his spiritual energy and the feeling of connection to his community. There are few of us left, my dear comrade, but everywhere some of ours sneak out, ready to work and fight for this “šeerit Jisrael [shaarit Yisrael],” as you call it. In Eretz Israel it is Dr. Rothmüller, Dr. Weltmann, Dr. Neumann, Otto Braun, Grossman, Lav Stern and others, in Switzerland Dr. Licht, Dr. Drago Rosenberg, in Italy Dr. Pollak, Julije Wiener, Aleksa Klein, there is our small group here [in the United States], and you [Albert Vajs], Dača [David Alkalaj] and your comrades in Belgrade—all of us fighting to help as much as we can, and continuing to be organized in favor of our community.<sup>251</sup>

Vajs replied a few months later. “Despite the long years of separation and the completely changed circumstances,” he wrote to Neuberger,

I feel that we—the remnants of Jewish workers in Yugoslavia—and you—Yugoslav Jewish workers abroad—have remained deeply connected. I can feel it from your letters, and I can also feel it from the letters from comrades in Switzerland, *Eretz*, etc. They fill me with joy all the more, since that connection is not based merely on memories of [prewar] cooperation and comradeship, but also on many common interests and tasks in the present and the future.<sup>252</sup>

Both men were active in the prewar Zionist movement, the principal political force among the Jews before 1941. The “comrades” and “Jewish workers” to whom Neuberger and Vajs referred were Zionist activists, an assemblage of people who certainly perceived themselves as part of a well-defined group of “Zionists”—of the kind organized into the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia, readers and contributors to *Židov*, and politically aware

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<sup>251</sup> Pavle Neuberger (in New York) to Albert Vajs, 29 April 1946: JHM, PR, box 902, “Korespondencija Alberta Vajsa sa Pavlom Neubergerom.”

<sup>252</sup> Letter from Albert Vajs to Pavle Neuberger, 11 June 1946, JHM, PR, box 902, “Korespondencija Alberta Vajsa sa Pavlom Neubergerom.”

Jews who had sought to forge an institutionally powerful Zionist movement in the country before World War II. After the war, it was they who worked most prominently towards organizing a relief effort for the Jews of Yugoslavia.

In Belgrade, where the Federation was reestablished, the Zionists played a significant role in the organization from the very beginning. Even though both Zionists and non-Zionists became engaged in this project, the leaders who were to leave their imprint on the policies of the Federation were well-known Zionists from before the war. They included not only Fridrih Pops, the prewar president of the organization, who belonged to the older generation of Zionists and had thus not been associated with the Union of Zionists of Yugoslavia, but also younger leaders such as Albert Vajs, Lavoslav Kadelburg, David Alkalaj, and Naftali Gedalja. This Zionist core, a group of activists who had come of age before the outbreak of the war and who had shared the brand of Yugoslav Zionism I described in the previous chapter, was to play a prominent role in making the Federation the central Jewish organization in socialist Yugoslavia, and defining Jewish life in the country for a long time to come. After World War II, Albert Vajs became the vice president, and, after Pops's death, the president of the Federation; David Alkalaj was the president of the Belgrade Jewish community and played a crucial role in the process of organizing the reconstruction effort; and Lavoslav Kadelburg succeeded Vajs as the president of the Federation after Vajs's death in 1964. One could even argue that the era of this generation's leadership extended until 1991, when Lavoslav Kadelburg stepped down from the Federation's presidency—his departure coinciding with the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. In the decades following the end of World War II, some of these men became members of the Communist Party, like

Kadelburg; others, like Vajs, did not. Some, like Alkalaj, eventually emigrated to Israel. Regardless of these personal decisions, however, they were bound by their prewar understanding of Zionism and its integrative importance—a pan-Yugoslav framework—for the Jewish community of Yugoslavia. None of them had been members of the Communist party before the war, and none of them joined Tito’s partisans during the war; Alkalaj, Kadelburg, Vajs, and Gedalja, along with around 200 other Yugoslav Jews, some of whom later became prominent Jewish workers in Yugoslavia, survived the war as Yugoslav POWs in camps in Nazi Germany.<sup>253</sup> In fact, Jewish life in Yugoslavia in the second half of the twentieth century was dominated by two men—Albert Vajs and Lavoslav Kadelburg—who spent their war years as officers of the Yugoslav army in POW camps in Germany.

In the first years after the liberation, Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia realized that their aid effort could not rely on local Jewish resources and infrastructure. As elsewhere in Europe, these were gone, along with people and a significant portion of communal property.<sup>254</sup> Yugoslav Jews could count on aid distributed to them as citizens of

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<sup>253</sup> See Naftali-Bata Gedalja, *Zeleni žabac krekeće: Događaji i ljudi*, unpublished memoir, in the Eventov collection of the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem (henceforth EC/CAHJP), E. 216.

<sup>254</sup> On January 22, 1948, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities received a report from the task force it appointed to examine the state of Jewish communal property in Yugoslavia. The task force concluded that Jewish communities owned immovable property in 151 villages, towns and cities, of which—“in accordance with today’s territorial breakup of our country”—9 were in Serbia without provinces, 76 in Vojvodina, 3 in Kosovo, 39 in Croatia, 3 in Macedonia, and 21 in Bosnia-Hercegovina. After the war, confiscated property was not returned to the existing Jewish communities in 8 towns. Jewish property had not been confiscated in 56 towns, but remained unclaimed because Jewish communities did not exist in these towns any longer; this property was administered, in most cases, by the local “people’s councils.” In 23 towns in which Jewish communities no longer existed, there was Jewish communal property that had been confiscated during the war. Major Jewish communities still formally owned immovable property: the Belgrade community, for example, formally owned two synagogues, houses, lots—15 objects in total. Some of unconfiscated property was confiscated later by the state, some was sold, and some remained in ownership by the Jewish communities. See report to the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities of Yugoslavia, 22 January 1948, JHM, PR, box 1201, “Opšti izveštaj o nepokretnostima.” Two things are worth noting in relation to the issue of property. First, Jewish communal property had been confiscated by anti-Jewish measures passed

Yugoslavia by international institutions such as UNNRA; beyond that, the obvious place to which to turn were international Jewish relief organizations that were running aid programs in Europe. As Kišicki's letter indicates, Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia understood this and did appeal to them. However, what was also clear was that any relief effort that involved aid from abroad had to be coordinated with state authorities. Although until late 1945 it was not entirely clear what kind of new political order would be established—until the elections of November 1945, the Communists were formally committed to the multiparty democratic political order—it was apparent that Tito and the Communists were going to play a prominent role in the country's political future; it was also clear that politics was going to be very different from what it had been in the old Yugoslavia.<sup>255</sup> Especially relevant to the issue of securing humanitarian aid from abroad was the emphasis that the new leaders of the state were putting on the unity of the Yugoslav peoples and the importance of supranational patriotism designed to efface ethnic difference. It seemed that any attempt to rebuild a separate ethnic infrastructure by relying on international sectarian assistance would be frowned upon, if not actively suppressed.<sup>256</sup> Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia thus had to walk a fine line between finding a way of providing immediate assistance and not alienating the authorities—since the

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by several different occupation/collaborationist regimes; some of this property was returned by the Communists to the Jewish communities, while some was not. The issue of restitution of Jewish *private* property, like that of other private individuals in Yugoslavia, came to the agenda only after the breakup in Yugoslavia in 1991. In Serbia it has not been returned or compensated to this day.

<sup>255</sup> For a brief summary of the early postwar years, see Carol S. Lilly, *Power and Persuasion: Ideology and Rhetoric in Communist Yugoslavia, 1944-1953* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 17-25. For a well-known argument about electoral politics in Yugoslavia in this period see Vojislav Koštunica and Kosta Čavoški, *Party Pluralism or Monism: Social Movements and the Political System in Yugoslavia, 1944-1949* (Boulder and New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Although Lilly does agree that the elections of 1945 were held in the atmosphere of pressure and intimidation of the political opponents by the Communists, her analysis is much richer than that of Koštunica and Čavoški, who rely on formalistic categories of "pluralism" and "monism" and fail to explain, as Lilly does successfully, the complex dynamic of Communist ideology and the situation on the ground.

<sup>256</sup> For a brief overview of the new values that emerged from Communist rhetoric in this early post-liberation period, see Lilly, *Power and Persuasion*, 78-80.

very survival of organized Jewish life depended on both.

### The Autonomous Relief Committee (ARC) and the Politics of Jewish Aid

In July 1945, representatives of the Federation of Jewish Communities traveled to Bucharest, to establish contact with the Rumanian office of JDC. By 1945, JDC was active in providing humanitarian assistance to Jewish communities throughout Europe, including the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>257</sup> After a series of meetings, Yugoslav Jewish leaders negotiated the establishment of a body called the “[Federation] of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia—Autonomous Relief Committee [ARC],” with its headquarters in Belgrade. Its mission was to coordinate the distribution of JDC-financed aid to the Jews in Yugoslavia.<sup>258</sup> David Alkalaj became president of ARC, as the Committee became known; the body was to have eleven other members, seven of whom were appointed by JDC at the meetings in Bucharest, and four by the Federation of Jewish Communities. All members were from Belgrade, and included, apart from Alkalaj, Albert Vajs and Lavoslav Kadelburg.<sup>259</sup> Although ARC was meant to be an independent body (“autonomous,” presumably from both JDC and the Federation on the one hand, and the Yugoslav authorities on the other), it operated within the institutional framework provided by the Federation of Jewish Communities. Its offices were in

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<sup>257</sup> “Expenditures from October 1914 through December 31, 1945 by Countries, Territories, Etc.” in *So They May Live Again: 1945 Annual Report of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee*, 31-32.

<sup>258</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 1.

<sup>259</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 1.

central Belgrade, in the same building that housed the offices of the Federation and the Belgrade Jewish community.

The establishment of ARC was an ad hoc solution. It is not clear whether the Rumanian office of JDC had formal authorization from the central office in New York to make an appropriation on behalf of the Jews in Yugoslavia; in addition, the development was coordinated with the Rumanian office of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and seems to have been the result of personal connections rather than systematic planning.<sup>260</sup> The impromptu nature of the establishment of ARC was the consequence of the very difficult material situation in which the Jews in Yugoslavia found themselves; unlike in other European countries, there were no international Jewish efforts to alleviate their plight. The sum that JDC approved for a three-month interim funding period for Yugoslavia was meant to cover urgent humanitarian needs: meals in Jewish soup kitchens, relief for various categories of vulnerable Jews (orphans, widows, the elderly, the disabled), and material aid to former prisoners of war, displaced persons, and “transients”—Jewish refugees passing through Yugoslavia en route to third countries.<sup>261</sup> Requests for more substantial funding that the leaders from Belgrade presented to JDC representatives—including large sums needed to “establish crediting and productive Cooperatives in order to found and secure human existences” and for “reconstruction of the communal buildings, synagogues, etc.”—were dismissed as too costly and

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<sup>260</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 3. See also the letter from the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Belgrade Jewish Community to the Rumanian office of the International Committee of the Red Cross, enclosed to the letter from David Alkalaj to Bertrand Jacobson, 6 May 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>261</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 3.



inappropriate in a package designed to meet an urgent need on an ad hoc basis.<sup>262</sup>

Negotiations in Bucharest and their outcome are illustrative of the trends that were to characterize the Jewish rebuilding process in Yugoslavia. By necessity, this process started as a humanitarian aid distribution project, as the communities in Yugoslavia lacked the most basic means for survival, and there were many individual Jews at risk. However, even though the character of the aid was humanitarian, the leadership in Belgrade realized that communal rebuilding involved more substantial projects, including rebuilding their infrastructure and creating an economically self-sufficient Jewish population. Even though such proposals were rejected at the meetings in Bucharest by JDC representatives, they were to gain in importance later, after hunger and shelter ceased to be the main problems that the Jews in Yugoslavia faced.

The process of aid distribution was centralized from the very beginning. Although the aid procured with the funds from Bucharest was eventually distributed to 75 communities, decisions about distribution were made by a handful of men in Belgrade.<sup>263</sup> This is not to claim that the process, or this particular round of distribution, was characterized by favoritism and injustice; in fact, the final sum was not enough to cover

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<sup>262</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 3.

<sup>263</sup> This first batch of JDC-sponsored aid was distributed to the following communities (amounts were proportional to the communities membership, in the following order): Belgrade, Zagreb, Subotica, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Sombor, Split, Osijek, Priština, Petrovgrad (Zrenjanin), Senta, Zemun, Skopje, Rijeka, Čakovec, Senta (Orthodox community), Pančevo, Mostar, Bačka Topola, Bitola, Kikinda, Ada, Bačka Palanka, Stari Bečej, Bačko Petrovo Selo, Tuzla, Stara Kanjiža, Dubrovnik, Zenica, Nova Gradiška, Ljubljana, Vršac, Kosovska Mitrovica, Murska Sobota, Đakovo, Vinkovci, Mol, Ilok, Novi Vrbas, Čonoplja, Bugojno, Zavidovići, Niš, Apatin, Horgoš, Varaždin, Slavonski Brod, Donja Lendava, Novi Pazar, Karlovac, Debeljača, Bačko Gradište, Prizren, Leskovac, Stanišić, Mali Idoš, Smederevo, Varaždin, Raška, Sremska Mitrovica, Novi Bečej, Stari Sivač, Sonta, Krnjevo, Šid, Travnik, Banja Luka, Susak, Opatija, Lovran, Bajmok, Čantavir, Bački Petrovac, Bihać, and Užice. Many of those communities had only a few surviving members, and were subsequently either abolished or merged with larger neighboring communities. By November 1945, for example, Belgrade received 2,328,000 dinars in aid, while Užice received only 600 dinars. “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 11.

the needs of Yugoslav communities, and the formula for dividing it was calculated on the basis of the number of remaining members of the communities. Such distribution probably favored smaller communities over relatively larger centers such as Belgrade or Zagreb, where the “life of Jews... would be much more difficult if there [had not been] communal dining halls.”<sup>264</sup> What did characterize this first distribution process, however, was the power of the Belgrade circle to draft budgets and decide on the kind of aid that was needed. This kind of centralized power was crucial, since JDC aid became essential to the reconstruction process; although several members from other communities were added subsequently to the ARC committee, the body was associated from its very first days with David Alkalaj, its president, and other Belgraders, most notably Lavoslav Kadelburg and Albert Vajs. In addition to their ARC affiliation, the latter two were to lead the Federation from its first days after the liberation until the very end of socialist Yugoslavia.

The Bucharest meeting between the representatives of Yugoslav Jews and JDC is interesting also because it pointed to the leverage that the Yugoslav state had with respect to the question of foreign aid. International Jewish humanitarian aid was not, in other words, just the question of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities; state agencies were running rebuilding and relief efforts of their own, and Jewish leaders needed to factor in the interests of the state—or, rather, their perceptions thereof—in the process of devising their aid and reconstruction policies. That this was going to be the case was obvious from a previous shipment of aid that had been delivered to Belgrade on behalf of OSE in the spring of 1945. On May 14, 1945, JDC was informed by an

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<sup>264</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 8.

affiliated person on the ground in Belgrade that “[t]he relief in question consisting of medicaments, instruments, milk, and so on did arrive,” but instead of reaching Jewish officials, it ended up in a warehouse of the Yugoslav Red Cross. “[A]s it was the case in Sofia,” the representative went on, “[t]he poor members of the Community could only ‘whistle for it.’” In the meantime, the “terrifying situation of the Jewish Community” was deteriorating further, with “children, women, men, refugees in transit arriv[ing] from Auschwitz, Dachau, from mountains and other hiding-places in a terrible state—without shelter, without means, helpless.”<sup>265</sup> The supplies that did not reach the Jews in Yugoslavia were delivered to the Rumanian Red Cross by the Bucharest office of JDC on behalf of OSE; the Yugoslav Red Cross took over the shipment in Bucharest, and was supposed to deliver it to the Jews in Belgrade.

If this was outright robbery, the treatment by Yugoslav state institutions of the first batch of JDC aid to Yugoslav Jews negotiated in Bucharest in July 1945 was only marginally better: of the total value of aid that Jewish leaders from Belgrade managed to negotiate, only about a third actually reached the intended recipients. Since JDC and ARC negotiated the aid budget in Rumanian lei, the Foreign Trade Administration of the Yugoslav Ministry of Commerce, which was responsible for the money transfer, imposed a much more unfavorable exchange rate for the lei—despite the existing, more favorable rate set by the Yugoslav National Bank—in order to skim as much off the sum in Yugoslav dinars as possible. In order to minimize the loss of cash, ARC decided to buy some goods (textiles, shoes, etc.) in Rumania—a difficult task, given the inflation and

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<sup>265</sup> Maximilian Hermann to Bertrand Jacobson, 14 May 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000. The letter was written in English; the expression “to whistle for it” is a literal translation of the German idiom “darauf kannst Du pfeiffen,” which can roughly be translated into English as “forget about it.”

shortages at the time—and ship them to Yugoslavia.<sup>266</sup> The goods were treated as imports and taxed at the border; ARC was also ordered to report the exact kinds of goods that were distributed, as well as to provide lists of aid recipients to the Extraordinary Bureau for Supplies within the Ministry—a request that could hardly be perceived as anything else than an attempt at intimidating the recipients.<sup>267</sup> In some cases, local authorities stopped the distribution of aid altogether: in Subotica and Senta, in the autonomous province of Vojvodina, for example, local People’s Councils ordered distribution of aid received from “associations of Jews from America” be stopped immediately until the matter was approved by proper Vojvodinian authorities.<sup>268</sup>

As it was effectively robbing and intimidating the recipients of foreign Jewish humanitarian aid, thereby also curbing potential economic or political leverage of organizations or groups distributing the aid, the state also attempted to take control of the process of rebuilding Jewish communal life by taking the leading role in financing the humanitarian needs of the communities. Already in May 1945, before the delegation from Belgrade departed for Bucharest—and possibly triggered by concerns within the upper echelons of the Communist leadership in Belgrade, which had just been informed about the plans of Belgrade Jewish leaders to establish formal contact with JDC—the Ministry of Social Policy of the new state awarded the Federation of Jewish Communities

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<sup>266</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 3-5. See also letter from David Alkalaj to Oskar Našić, 5 August 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, “Prepiska dr. Davida Alkalaja kao predsednika AO,” and letter from Oskar Našić to David Alkalaj, 4 August 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, “Prepiska dr. Davida Alkalaja kao predsednika AO.”

<sup>267</sup> ARC to the Extraordinary Bureau for Supplies, no. 445, 18 February 1946, JHM, box AO 859.

<sup>268</sup> Order of the Department of Internal Affairs of the People’s Council in Subotica no. 910/1946, 12 January 1946, JHM, box AO 859; and Order of the Department of Internal Affairs of the People’s Council in Senta no. 565/1946, 6 February 1946, JHM, box AO 859.

500,000 new dinars, to be distributed as aid to the Jewish communities.<sup>269</sup> The fact that the sum was initially awarded to the Jewish Community of Belgrade, which then transferred the authority to distribute the money to the Federation, points to the role of David Alkalaj in the process of negotiating this aid package with state officials—an important indicator of the extent of early personal involvement on the part of the future leader of ARC, and the importance of proximity to the authorities. Be that as it may, the Federation appropriated money for individual communities on the basis of membership numbers and urgent needs. “We know your needs very well,” the circular letter from the Federation to the communities read, “[and] we know that the aid we have awarded you is insignificant in comparison to your needs”; however, the Federation was working on securing aid from JDC, the communities were informed, “[and] the Federation of Jewish Communities, in close cooperation with the Jewish Community in Belgrade, will do its utmost to secure the much needed aid from abroad.”<sup>270</sup> While Yugoslav authorities were trying to maintain control of the Jewish communities by financing their humanitarian needs, the Federation of Jewish Communities and the circle around David Alkalaj were emerging as the key Jewish agents in securing aid.

After substantially lowering the amount of aid ARC received from JDC in Bucharest by imposing an unfavorable exchange rate for the lei, the state “compensated” for the loss by providing the Federation of Jewish Communities, at the request of ARC, with a 3,000,000-dinar loan. In addition to this, in the report from November 1945 submitted to JDC, David Alkalaj stressed that “many communities were obliged to

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<sup>269</sup> The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities circular letter no. 305, 19 May 1945, JHM, box AO 769.

<sup>270</sup> The Federation of Jewish Religious Communities circular letter no. 305, 19 May 1945, JHM, box AO 769.

involve in debts [i.e., take loans] in order to maintain dining halls and other social institutions[;] these debts overpass surely several million Dinars.”<sup>271</sup> Although Alkalaj was not specific about where the loans came from, it is almost certain that they were disbursed by local People’s Councils, local Communist cells, which were coordinated from Belgrade. By providing financial aid for specifically Jewish humanitarian needs, the new regime found a way to take charge of the process of rebuilding Jewish communal institutions and infrastructure. On the one hand, it sought to minimize external influences that potentially came with foreign aid, while on the other it tied Jewish institutions to itself financially, and made the process of aid distribution—crucial for their very survival, as both Jewish leaders and state officials knew—dependent on the good will of the state. Although Jewish leaders in Belgrade were in no position to decline “offers” from state institutions, they must have sensed that the prospect of prolonged government-sponsored Jewish renewal would hijack the rebuilding agenda, which was to be formulated at some future point, after the very physical survival of Jewish refugees and survivors in Yugoslavia was secured. In a letter to JDC from January 1946, Alkalaj wrote that “[i]t is very important to stress that it must be taken into account that the American Jewry will have to assist their brethren in Yugoslavia during a longer period,” which he estimated to last “at least two years.”<sup>272</sup>

From the very beginning, therefore, the state appeared suspicious of, and, as in the cases of Subotica and Senta, outright hostile to, the Jewish relief effort, and sought to limit it by various means. Although the documentation from this early period after is scarce and silent on the question, it is plausible to hypothesize that the Communists, who

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<sup>271</sup> “Report on Activity of the Joint Delegation of Yugoslavia,” 10 November 1945, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 7.

<sup>272</sup> David Alkalaj to Maurice Dubin, 9 January 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

had not yet consolidated their power, were suspicious of any aid from abroad that would seek to benefit particular ethnic communities, even as marginal as the Jewish community. Bearing in mind their unquestioned devotion to Stalin and general distrust of the United States, as well as their dedication to forging a supranational Yugoslav patriotism, it is possible to understand why the Communists would have been suspicious of the Jewish rebuilding effort.<sup>273</sup> This atmosphere of suspicion and distrust presented a problem for Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia, since they knew that the process of rebuilding Jewish communal life had to be jumpstarted by international aid, and the only organizations willing to provide such aid were international Jewish organizations, most notably JDC. Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia, therefore, had to find a way of securing long-term supplies of American Jewish aid, while at the same time proving to the state that organized Jewish life did not threaten the Communist vision of what Yugoslavia should be.

This was an urgent question. After the Bucharest negotiations and the ensuing JDC aid package and loans from the state, the amount of aid that ARC was able to distribute was significantly reduced. Instead of organizing a permanent JDC mission in Yugoslavia, with an on-site representative and a long-term budget—a development envisioned at that first meeting in Bucharest—ARC merely managed to secure sporadic trickles of aid from various Jewish organizations, mostly from North America. This aid mainly consisted of used clothing, and did not do much to alleviate the dire situation. Even so, the influx of aid helped to cement ARC's position as the central Jewish institution in the country. As in the case of the Bucharest shipment, it was the few ARC officials in Belgrade who decided how the aid would be distributed. And, as in the case

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<sup>273</sup> For a brief summary of main coordinates of postwar Yugoslavism of the new regime, see Aleksa Đilas, *The Contested Country: Yugoslav Unity and Communist Revolution, 1919-1953* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 163-170.

of the Bucharest shipment, these odd shipments fortified the importance of ARC for the overall Jewish infrastructure in Yugoslavia. In one of the early sessions of ARC, its leaders decided that, as a matter of principle, the decision-making process regarding aid would be centralized in Belgrade, and that “ARC will distribute the incoming aid to all Jewish communities in the country.”<sup>274</sup> This decision had important consequences, since many Jewish communities were trying to secure aid through their own contacts abroad. The proximity of ARC to various offices of the state, which issued permits for shipments of aid, made it practical for the process to be centralized; the main consequence of such centralization, however, was the growing importance of ARC for individual communities. Even when the centralization policies of ARC were questioned or challenged, ARC stressed the importance of this process and ultimately prevailed. When, for example, in the fall of 1945 the communities of Senta and Subotica received humanitarian aid from abroad addressed specifically to their communities and asked ARC whether the principle of redistribution should be applied, ARC decided that, indeed, aid received by those two communities should be divided equally among all Yugoslav communities.<sup>275</sup> More confrontationally, when in November 1945 the Jewish community in Sarajevo argued that it alone should benefit from aid sent to it, ARC stressed that “it should be explained to the community in Sarajevo that it needs to rescind its position,” since most aid was administratively processed through Belgrade, and therefore “retreating from the matter of principle adopted by ARC would harm [all] communities,

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<sup>274</sup> Minutes from the 11th meeting of ARC, held on 1 November 1945, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-49,” 2.

<sup>275</sup> Minutes from the 11th meeting of ARC, held on 1 November 1945, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-49,” 1.



who will not receive aid.”<sup>276</sup> The argument ARC made was indicative of its strategy of centralization: although it was not clear what the relevance of central aid processing in Belgrade was for the eventual distribution to other communities, ARC invoked it as an important principle and consistently applied it throughout this period. Effectively, ARC managed to strengthen its position vis-à-vis the communities by pointing to the centralized political decision-making within state structures, arguing that its own position as a central Jewish institution was a way to benefit all the Jewish communities equally.

However, the very process of rebuilding Jewish communities was threatened by the thinning trickle of humanitarian aid. The ability of ARC to channel aid to all Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, while strengthening its central role in the process, would be frustrated without the existence of a sustained program of humanitarian and rebuilding assistance, which, it seemed clear, could only come from abroad. More state-controlled loans—such as one from the end of 1945, when ARC again approached the Ministry for Foreign Trade with a request for a 2-million-dinar loan<sup>277</sup>—were not a viable solution, as the state had no long-term interest in supporting the rebuilding of Jewish communal institutions, and its role in awarding financial assistance to the Federation was probably related for the most part to its aspirations to control the process. For this reason, establishing a permanent, JDC-funded relief program became a priority for ARC. This goal had been agreed upon already in Bucharest, but little was done to move the plans forward in the months following this initial meeting. This was mostly due to the fact that although ARC was established as a body that was going to be funded by JDC, there was

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<sup>276</sup> Minutes from the 12th meeting of ARC, held on 24 November 1945, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-49,” 2.

<sup>277</sup> Minutes from the 13th meeting of ARC, held on 20 December 1945, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-49,” 2.

no JDC representative in Yugoslavia who would be able to coordinate and supervise—to the extent possible in the Yugoslav circumstances—ARC’s work and distribution of aid. The absence of a JDC representative also underscored the fact that Jewish aid relief from abroad was not considered by the authorities as a desirable or permanent undertaking, as a project that could be regularized by admitting a foreign aid representative to oversee it. Because of this, ARC leaders understood that they needed a JDC representative in Yugoslavia if they were to organize a long-term operation that would be at least tolerated by the state. As David Alkalaj put it concisely: “We are all here convinced that without the arrival of the J.D.C. Delegate, there is no systematical [*sic*] work on the relief organization in Yugoslavia.”<sup>278</sup>

Bringing a permanent JDC representative to Yugoslavia thus became the first priority of ARC leaders. State agencies in charge of approving visas and residence permits did not appear very enthusiastic about this prospect, and were either openly hostile or dragged their feet. After rejecting the application of the first JDC candidate, the government seemed ready to approve Morris Laub as the JDC representative in Yugoslavia. In October 1945, Alkalaj wrote a letter to Laub, in which he expressed his sorrow at the fact that the previous JDC candidate was rejected by the government despite an “intervention” from ARC, and urged Laub to have “patience for the shortest time” before ARC members could “greet him in Belgrade.”<sup>279</sup> Shortly after this, Alkalaj cabled Joseph Schwartz at the JDC office in Paris, informing him about a “favourable government decision” concerning Laub’s entry to Yugoslavia, and urging Laub to apply

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<sup>278</sup> David Alkalaj to Joseph Schwartz, 23 March 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, p. 2.

<sup>279</sup> David Alkalaj to Morris Laub (in German), 12 October 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, “Prepiska dr. Alkalaja kao predsednika AO.”

for a visa in the Yugoslav mission in Rome.<sup>280</sup> By February 1946, several months later, there was still no JDC representative in Yugoslavia: after a game of hide-and-seek, the Yugoslav consulate informed JDC, when it was finally confronted about this issue, that it never received authorization from Belgrade for Laub's visa, despite Alkalaj's assurances to the contrary.<sup>281</sup> After this fiasco, it became obvious that Laub, like the previous JDC candidate, was unacceptable to the Yugoslav authorities. JDC then came up with a third candidate, Frederick White.

White's mother was born in Zagreb to a wealthy Jewish family. Her brother was a well-known industrialist, Armin Schreiner. During the last decade of the nineteenth century she immigrated to the United States; Frederick White was born in New York City in 1900.<sup>282</sup> However, the young White moved to Europe and settled in Vienna, where he completed his studies. He worked as a journalist for Austrian newspapers and journals—most notably, the *Wiener Abendzeitung* and the *Österreichische Illustrierte*—and was arrested after the *Anschluss* for his criticism of the Nazi regime. However, being a citizen of the United States, he was released, upon which he returned to the United States, where he started working at the Chicago branch of the American Jewish Congress. The end of the war found him again in Austria. After the war, he became involved in the efforts of American Jewish institutions to organize a relief effort for the surviving Jews of Europe, and thus became affiliated with JDC. White was probably chosen by JDC as a good candidate to organize the relief operation in Yugoslavia because of his familiarity

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<sup>280</sup> Cable from David Alkalaj to Joseph Schwartz, undated, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, "Prepiska dr. Alkalaja kao predsednika AO."

<sup>281</sup> Cable from Joseph Schwartz to the JDC New York office, 12 February 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>282</sup> Facts about White's background are taken from Rafael Montiljo's speech at White's funeral in Zagreb, in August 1959. JHM, PR, box 1149, "1959."

with the country. Even though he did not speak Serbo-Croatian, he was probably quite well-informed about the situation in the country and the problems the Jewish community would face at the time. In addition to that, he had friends and relatives in the country from before the war.<sup>283</sup>

But whatever White's qualifications, the Yugoslav authorities still viewed the potential JDC operation with suspicion. As late as mid-August 1946—fully six months after Laub had been dropped as a candidate unacceptable to the Yugoslav authorities and White had been nominated—JDC had still not overcome the most basic obstacle, processing White's paperwork and obtaining an entry visa. In the meantime, the financial situation of ARC's relief effort was deteriorating: on August 16, Alkalaj cabled Schwartz in Paris that ARC "[was] in desperate financial situation since long time[*sic*] needing not only funds for financial communities [*sic*] but lacking most necessary means for further maintenance [of] social activities." If JDC did not provide urgent financial aid, according to Alkalaj, ARC would be unable to continue its operations, and the Jews of Yugoslavia would "be obliged to immediately close [soup kitchens], paralyze [*sic*] communal activities[, and] dismiss all personnel [from their] institutions."<sup>284</sup> Alkalaj appealed for urgent financial assistance, which, as in the case of Bucharest, would be controlled and skimmed off by the state: the Trieste branch of the state-controlled "Centroprom" corporation would be the beneficiary of the foreign currency transfer, which would then be converted to dinars at the unfavorable exchange rate and put at the disposal of ARC. JDC decided to transfer \$25,000 urgently, through "Centroprom" in

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<sup>283</sup> Frederick White was buried in his family grave in Zagreb, next to his mother. In a letter from Los Angeles to Albert Vajs, dated 7 November 1959, Frank White, Frederick's brother, mentions a "dear cousin, Hugo Reich," who was living in Šibenik at the time. JHM, PR, box 1149, "1959."

<sup>284</sup> Cable from David Alkalaj to Joseph Schwartz, 16 August 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

Trieste.<sup>285</sup>

It is difficult to assess the actual urgency of a JDC grant to ARC at this particular time; it is in the nature of grant applicants to exaggerate their needs and write in dramatic tones. The remaining documents do not allow for a precise corroboration of Alkalaj's alarm. However, circular letters that ARC sent out to the Jewish communities in late summer and early fall of 1946 are characterized by a tone of desperation testifying to the difficult financial situation in which ARC—and, with it, the communities that depended on it—found itself. “Despite all efforts that ARC has put into finding a way to secure the financing of our communities to at least a certain extent,” a circular letter of August 5 stated, “this time we have to inform you that ARC is not able to provide you with even the most modest financial assistance. We beg you to understand that ARC has not received any financial aid from abroad in the last several months...”<sup>286</sup> Two months later, another circular informed the communities about the efforts of a three-member ARC delegation—David Alkalaj, Lavoslav Kadelburg, Martin Komloš—to persuade JDC and White about the necessity of a permanent funding operation. “As all our communities know very well,” the circular letter read,

in the last period the situation regarding financial aid has been more than desperate. The impossibility of establishing a permanent budget, on the basis of which we could know with a certain confidence how much money we have at our disposal for distribution to the communities, has made our work even more difficult. Our delegation had as its task to explain our difficulties and find a more permanent basis for financing our communities.<sup>287</sup>

It is obvious from these communiqués that ARC had come to regard funding from JDC as a lifeline, the only way to secure permanent financing of Jewish communities in

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<sup>285</sup> Cable from JDC New York office to JDC Paris office, 17 August 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>286</sup> ARC circular letter no. 2584, dated 5 August 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949.”

<sup>287</sup> ARC circular letter no. 3418, dated 21 October 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949.”

Yugoslavia. Also interesting in these letters are hints at other difficulties—the lack of JDC funding which made the work of ARC “even more” difficult—which, unnamed as they were, most likely referred to the environment in which ARC operated. In other words, the distrust and hostility of the state institutions were regarded as an equally debilitating obstacle to the organization of the relief effort. “It is only on the coming of [Frederick White] and the results of his negotiation with the representatives of our people’s authorities [*naših narodnih vlasti*],” ARC informed the communities, “that our [permanent] funding will depend.”<sup>288</sup> In other words, ARC knew very well that establishing a budget and securing regular funding cycles would have to be approved by the state, whose mark of approval would be the admittance of a permanent JDC representative in Yugoslavia. The funding would come from JDC, but ultimate approval—and, with it, the prospects for the very survival of the Jewish community in Yugoslavia—depended on the new Yugoslav authorities.

The few paper trails that can be used to document the early debates and concerns of the Yugoslav leadership in this early period are not at all helpful for venturing to explain why Tito and the circle around him might have been suspect of a more permanent Jewish reconstruction project funded from abroad. As I argued above, it is easily understandable why a sectarian effort at rebuilding ethnic infrastructure—for that is what the idea must have sounded like to the Yugoslav leaders—would have been politically suspect to a regime that privileged supranational Yugoslavism and shunned sectarianism. It seems, however, that exactly this was at stake. In the spring of 1946, in the midst of official foot-dragging over the question of a permanent JDC representative in Yugoslavia, Pavle Neuberger met in Belgrade with Dušan Nikolić, at the time secretary to the

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<sup>288</sup> ARC circular letter no. 2584, dated 5 August 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949.”

Yugoslav Minister of Foreign Trade, Nikola Petrović. At that time, Neuberger, a prewar Zionist living in New York since 1940, was chairing a Yugoslav committee of the World Jewish Congress, and was active in trying to organize a humanitarian aid effort on behalf of the Yugoslav Jews.<sup>289</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Trade, as I noted above, was the government office responsible for dealing with this issue. Back in New York, Neuberger informed JDC about his meeting with the Yugoslav authorities. “[Dušan Nikolić] is a Jew and his former name was Rosenberg,” Neuberger wrote. “He fought with the Partisans and is now inclined toward the Leftists.”<sup>290</sup> From these personal details, the conversation came to the issue of JDC’s relief work in Yugoslavia, and Nikolić pointed out that a permanent JDC representative would be problematic to the authorities on two grounds. “[H]e explained unofficially,” Neuberger’s letter to JDC went on, “that they were afraid that many other delegates of other organizations would also ask admission of their representatives”; in addition, Nikolić “also voiced some fears that it makes a bad impression with the non-Jewish population that special relief for Jews is controlled by delegates from abroad.”<sup>291</sup> However, despite all that, Nikolić

finally admitted that it would be valuable to have the Joint delegate in Belgrade, the more they would like to find some solution that the Joint would deposit funds abroad, and they would put at the disposal of Jewish communities necessary food and articles at the lowest maximum price [*sic*] which would give a greater buying power for these funds.<sup>292</sup>

There is no reason to doubt the veracity of Neuberger’s description of the conversation he had with the secretary to the Minister of Foreign Trade. It was an unofficial exchange of ideas, and an additional level of trust (and, one could even imagine, cordiality) was established with the moment of disclosure of Nikolić’s Jewishness. There is no way of

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<sup>289</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Albert Vajs, 5 July 1945, JHM, PR, box 902, “Korespondencija Alberta Vajsa sa Pavlom Neubergerom.”

<sup>290</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Henrietta Buchman, 22 April 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>291</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Henrietta Buchman, 22 April 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>292</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Henrietta Buchman, 22 April 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

gauging to what extent Nikolić's views could be taken as representative of the official position of the Yugoslav government, but taking into consideration that he was close to the Minister (Neuberger describes him as the Minister's "right-hand"), it is likely that he was closely connected to the negotiations concerning the question of JDC mission in Yugoslavia, and was privy to official thinking on that issue.<sup>293</sup> Moreover, Neuberger had a meeting with another, more senior Yugoslav official, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stanoje Simić, to whom he "point[ed] out the great work of the Joint," and with whom he seems to have come to a similar understanding.<sup>294</sup> All this points to the conclusion that the Yugoslav authorities were open to the possibility of a formal JDC mission, as long as they had financial control over its operations. What is more, they were even ready to abandon their ideological objections as long as the process was under control and not adverse to their political priorities.

These, then, were the two defining coordinates that the leaders of ARC had to take into consideration when thinking about ways to organize a more permanent relief effort. On the one hand, material assistance could come only from abroad, and JDC was willing to provide a budget for Yugoslavia; on the other hand, the operation would have to be acceptable to the Yugoslav authorities, who ultimately had the authority to stifle the operation, which would probably spell the end of organized Jewish life in the country. The most important way of balancing these two potentially conflicting necessities was the strategy of embedding the story of Jewish rebuilding and regeneration into the wider narrative of reconstruction that, as a theme, was predominant in Yugoslavia in the early years after the liberation. If the leaders of ARC and the Federation of Jewish Religious

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<sup>293</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Henrietta Buchman, 22 April 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>294</sup> Pavle Neuberger to Henrietta Buchman, 22 April 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.



Communities managed to present a case to the authorities that by no means was Jewish rebuilding threatening to the concept of Yugoslav patriotism, but was, in fact, its most natural part, they would be able to plan a wide variety of reconstruction programs based on foreign aid while remaining loyal and not alienating the regime. At least in theory, this was a productive way of organizing a relief effort in the circumstances: receiving JDC funds controlled by the authorities and perceived as non-threatening. In practice, however, ARC and Jewish leaders in general had to make important decisions about how far to push for “Jewish content” of the reconstruction process; in other words, they had to negotiate the limits of the authorities’ tolerance for the enterprise. In the circumstances in which various state institutions gave ambiguous signals, ranging from stopping the distribution of aid received from abroad and arresting ARC members,<sup>295</sup> to general statements from high offices about their agreement with the idea of a Jewish reconstruction process funded from abroad—this was not an easy task at all.

One way of persuading the authorities that negotiating humanitarian aid packages with Jewish organizations from abroad was not threatening to the country in any way was to remove the aura of secrecy from these negotiations and to keep the authorities fully informed about the process. This was usually mandated by the authorities themselves, who wanted to know everything about discussions between the representatives of the

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<sup>295</sup> At least two ARC members were arrested in the period before the formal approval of a permanent JDC representative in Yugoslavia. In October 1945, Oskar Našić was sentenced to two months of forced labor without imprisonment; in August 1946, Milan Medina was arrested. The documents are vague on the nature of charges brought against these two men. It is possible that they were arrested as private individuals, and that their alleged crimes had nothing to do with ARC or any other Jewish body; the verdict against Našić, however, specifically mentions that he “betrayed the trust that the Jewish community in Belgrade bestowed upon him.” Quoted in the minutes of the 10th meeting of ARC, held on 18 October 1945, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949.” It remains unclear why Medina was arrested. See ARC memorandum no. 2627, dated 9 August 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949.” Whether or not Našić and Medina were guilty of the charges, and whatever the nature of their possible transgression, there is no doubt that these arrests must have been understood by other ARC members as intimidation by the authorities, and quite relevant for their work as a Jewish institution.

Yugoslav Jews and JDC and other organizations, but ARC leaders did not hesitate to disclose fully the contents of their meetings. David Alkalaj reported the first Bucharest activities of the Yugoslav Jewish delegation in the summer of 1945 to the Yugoslav plenipotentiary in Romania: in a letter, he outlined the main points of the basic agreement about the necessity for a relief effort that the representatives of the Federation reached with JDC, enclosed a copy of a text about the suffering of Yugoslav Jews during the war he had previously circulated to JDC and Red Cross representatives, and gave him transcripts of statements Yugoslav Jewish leaders had given to the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and the correspondents of *Davar* and *Forverts*.<sup>296</sup> Even when uncomfortable issues were openly discussed with foreigners (such as, for example, the unfavorable exchange rates imposed on transfers), Jewish leaders kept the authorities fully informed. After all, in their view, there was nothing to hide: their relief efforts were in no way adverse to the regime, to which they genuinely wanted to be loyal. So when in January 1946, the president and vice president of the Zagreb Jewish community, Robert Glückstahl and Adolf Rothmüller, went on an official visit to Italy and Switzerland to negotiate with JDC representatives on behalf of ARC, the Croatian Ministry of Social Policy “recommended” that they submit a report from those negotiations to the office of the Minister. Upon return to Zagreb, Robert Glückstahl duly did so.<sup>297</sup> The language of the report is a bit toned down in comparison to the JDC record of these negotiations: for example, the JDC document points out that “help from Bucharest” was not coming through, “[d]ue to some differences caused by the Yugoslav authorities,” while the report

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<sup>296</sup> David Alkalaj, Martin Komloš and Oskar Našić to Grulović, the plenipotentiary of Yugoslavia in Bucharest, A NO 251, 17 July 1945, Archive of Yugoslavia (henceforth AY), box 642-5-13 Ministarstvo socijalne politike DFJ (FNRJ).

<sup>297</sup> Report no. 475-46 to the Ministry of Social Policy of the Federative Republic of Croatia, dated 4 February 1946, JHM, box 834, “Židovska općina Zagreb.”

to the Croatian Ministry expresses hope that ARC will come “to a more favorable solution” with the authorities regarding the issue of transfer.<sup>298</sup> What is conspicuously missing in the JDC document, however, is any reference to open hostility of the Yugoslav authorities, or complaints of the Zagreb delegates that their situation was dire or untenable in that sense—in other words, something that would have to have been passed over silently in the report to the authorities. Although a possibility that such moments did come up in these conversations has to remain open, it is likely that they did not. As information having direct bearing on attempts to organize a relief effort for the Jews in Yugoslavia, such complaints would most probably have been emphasized in the JDC report.<sup>299</sup>

Jewish leaders engaged in the relief effort did their best to portray their work as compatible with, part of, and even of the same ilk as, the rebuilding that the Yugoslav government was organizing at that time. In this way, Jewish relief work would be beneficial for Yugoslavia as whole, and not just for the Jews in the country. In his report

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<sup>298</sup> “Excerpts from a telephone report received on January 5, 1946, from the delegates of the Jewish Community in Zagreb now in Zurich, Switzerland,” AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 1; Report no. 475-46 to the Ministry of Social Policy of the Federative Republic of Croatia, dated 4 February 1946, JHM, box 834, “Židovska općina Zagreb,” 2.

<sup>299</sup> This is not to say that some Jews did not perceive the tensions with the authorities as critical and personally unbearable. Adolf Rothmüller did not return to Yugoslavia from a subsequent ARC-related mission in Switzerland, and instead joined his family in Palestine. “I have to say that I was simply appalled by such violation of official function, at the great expense of our community,” wrote Albert Vajs. “As a man, I have a certain dose of understanding for Rotmiller’s situation, whose family is in *Eretz* and did not want to return to Yugoslavia[. H]owever, he should have settled his question patiently and in a legal way, without compromising our entire relief effort in a major way, an effort so important and necessary for thousands of people.” Albert Vajs to Pavle Neuberger, 11 June 1946, JHM, PR, box 902, “Korespondencija Alberta Vajsa sa Pavlom Neubergerom.” The “legal way” of solving the situation probably refers to the 50 certificates for immigration to Palestine that the Federation received for distribution around that time. Moša Pijade, a Serbian Jew and a high Communist functionary close to Tito, indicated to the representatives of the Federation that the state was willing to approve individual cases of emigration to Palestine, but was against mass emigration. David Alkalaj to Albert Vajs, 15 May 1946, JHM, PR, box 1149, 2. Regardless of whether Rothmüller’s emigration was politically motivated, or whether he was a desperate man seeking a shortcut to joining his family after five terrible years of persecution, his case is indicative of the kinds of tensions and distrust that must have influenced relations between ARC and state officials.

to the authorities, Glückstahl wrote that “[w]e described the suffering of the Jews of Yugoslavia at the hands of the occupiers, and enormous shortages, but emphasized that our entire homeland experienced terrible suffering and plunder by the enemy, and that general aid is urgently needed.” JDC, according to Glückstahl, was “immediately ready” to contribute to that “general aid,” by putting at the disposal of the Yugoslav government a “certain portion” of its high-calorie food supplies (cocoa, sugar, sardines, figs) for distribution among the “non-Jewish youth.”<sup>300</sup> It is unclear whether some “non-Jewish” youngster ended up enjoying these foods, but the point is that Glückstahl symbolically connected the well being of the Yugoslav Jews with the well being of Yugoslavia in general. This was the argument many other Yugoslav Jewish functionaries made in communicating with the authorities.

Even the main organization of Yugoslav immigrants to Palestine—the Association of Yugoslav Jews in Palestine—actively contributed to the formation of this discourse. In June 1945, the Association, led by Alkalaj’s prewar Zionist friends, sent a letter to the Yugoslav General Consul in Cairo, in which it announced that its members “would like to participate in the moral and material reconstruction of our brethren, and, through this, the reconstruction of the entire country,” and asked the Consul to advise them about the best way to proceed on these twin tasks.<sup>301</sup> Helping the Jews—“morally” and “materially”—was thus presented by the Yugoslav Jews in Palestine as part and parcel of the general reconstruction project in Yugoslavia. Most letters exchanged between Yugoslav Jews in the country or abroad were characterized by this kind of

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<sup>300</sup> Report no. 475-46 to the Ministry of Social Policy of the Federative Republic of Croatia, dated 4 February 1946, JHM, box 834, “Židovska općina Zagreb,” 3.

<sup>301</sup> Yugoslav Consul in Cairo to the Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Yugoslavia, 27 June 1945, no. 283, AY, 642-5-13 Ministarstvo socijalne politike DFJ (FNRJ).

language. Sometimes, emphasis was put on Jewish loyalty. In a letter to the Association of Yugoslav Jews in Palestine from November 1945, David Alkalaj informed his friends about a new trade attaché—“a great and well-known friend of the Jews”—who was going to assume his post at the Yugoslav embassy in Cairo. “We have no doubt,” Alkalaj wrote,

that the Association of Yugoslav Jews in Palestine will fulfill its duty to its country, and contribute to the fullest extent to the establishment of trade between Yugoslavia and Palestine, whereby [Yugoslav Jews in Palestine] would contribute to the huge efforts in the reconstruction of our country [i.e., Yugoslavia].<sup>302</sup>

Jewish loyalty to Yugoslavia, however, was sometimes exaggerated. On May 23, 1948, the Belgrade Jewish community held a special mass meeting to celebrate the declaration of Israeli independence. In his speech, David Alkalaj underlined that

our gathering today is a manifestation of brotherhood and unity and an act of Jewish solidarity, expressed everywhere where there are Jews, in all countries and on all continents. Israel is the fulfillment of a thousand-year hope; the new Jewish state is an execution of a solemnly received covenant; the state of Israel is a need and a necessity for a burning Jewish problem in Palestine and for hundreds of thousands of Jews without a homeland.<sup>303</sup>

He then went on:

We are proud, we, Yugoslav Jews, that our homeland, Yugoslavia, stands together with those dedicated and friendly to the Jewish cause, shoulder to shoulder with the mighty Soviet Union, as a protector of small and persecuted peoples.<sup>304</sup>

This, of course, smacks of propaganda, and it is possible that Alkalaj had to emphasize certain ideological points in case an odd secret security agent was in the audience. But despite such openly ideological outbursts—which, in any case, were rare—Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia were by and large loyal to the new regime and dedicated to the concept of

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<sup>302</sup> David Alkalaj to the Association of Yugoslav Jews in Palestine, 15 November 1945, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, “Prepiska dr. Davida Alkalaja kao predsednika AO.”

<sup>303</sup> Speech of David Alkalaj at the mass gathering of Belgrade Jewish community on 23 May 1948, JHM, box 783, folder 8, “Izveštaji o radu JO Beograd 1946/47,” 1.

<sup>304</sup> Speech of David Alkalaj at the mass gathering of Belgrade Jewish community on 23 May 1948, JHM, box 783, folder 8, “Izveštaji o radu JO Beograd 1946/47,” 1.

a socialist Yugoslavia in which ethnic domination and violence, which had plagued the prewar Kingdom and had culminated in the slaughter of World War II, would be things of the past. To their minds, these commitments did not exclude their affection and even political dedication to Israel and professional Jewish work. In the words of Albert Vajs:

There are many of us who seized a chance and were courageous enough to learn what needed to be learned from everything we have gone through. In that sense, our people who participated in the struggle for national liberation [i.e., who had joined the partisans] in the country, or supported it spiritually (here I mean primarily the prisoners of war) have evolved the most. These people returned to normal life as consummate and steadfast supporters of the national liberation movement, as convinced defenders of its accomplishments and as dedicated builders...of further accomplishments. As they are today useful and positive in the general field, so are many of them useful, positive, and active in the Jewish sector as well. This is that important core, which took over the leadership in Jewish affairs, giving them direction, contemporariness, and in step with the general developments in the country. Enjoying support and trust not only of the majority of the Jewry in Yugoslavia itself, but of our people's authorities [*naših narodnih vlasti*] as well, it has all prospects to succeed in both directions.<sup>305</sup>

Vajs did not have to worry about ideological orthodoxy, at least not in this particular instance: this is a passage from the letter he mailed from Nuremberg, where he was, as an eminent expert on international law, a member of the official Yugoslav delegation at the trials of Nazi officials, to Pavle Neuberger, his fellow Jewish activist living in New York. The letter was certainly not going to be censored and it was “safe” to write to an old friend, and yet its tone reflects Vajs’s unwavering dedication to the cause of Yugoslavia, and the notion of compatibility of his concerns with the well being of its Jews with the larger political goals of the new country. According to Vajs, the new Jewish leadership in Yugoslavia—which, as I have pointed out, consisted mostly of the prewar Zionists—had enough political sense to understand that it was impossible to revert to prewar patterns of Jewish communal organization and infrastructure (hence their contemporariness”), and that the network of Jewish communities and institutions could

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<sup>305</sup> Albert Vajs to Pavle Neuberger, 11 June 1946, JHM, PR, box 902, “Korespondencija Alberta Vajsa sa Pavlom Neubergerom.”

only be built in “step with the general developments in the country.” In other words, Vajs was convinced that there was no contradiction between being engaged in Jewish work for the benefit of the Jews in the country, and being dedicated to, and even supportive of, the larger processes in the country, which had nothing to do with the Jews specifically, but which, to a significant extent, determined the boundaries of Jewishness, and provided direction for “proper” national identification. If Alkalaj’s programmatic praise of Yugoslavia as a country “dedicated and friendly to the Jewish cause” (along with the “mighty Soviet Union”) sounds a bit excessive and rings untrue, Vajs’s understanding of affinity between Yugoslav Jews and Yugoslavia is much more convincing. Once Alkalaj’s ideological excess is ignored, however, the views of these two men on this issue are not all that different; this was the official view of ARC and most Jewish leaders in the country.

This is not to claim, however, that this view was unproblematic. Relations with state institutions, as I pointed out, were often opaque and shrouded in distrust. Consensus about all aspects of the ARC relief program could not be taken for granted even among the Jewish leaders themselves. When Frederick White was finally appointed JDC representative in Yugoslavia and arrived in the country in the fall of 1946, he informed the JDC office in Paris that it was important to support the specifically Jewish aspects of aid:

Dr. Alcalay [*sic*], while being the prominent and most respected personality of the ARC, is not in full control of that body. On the contrary, there is a strong tendency amongst some of the most influential members, who hold official positions, of minimizing and gradually abandoning specific Jewish features of the program and adjust them to the new system which does not know differences of creed or nationality.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> “Program and budget for Yugoslavia,” memorandum from Frederick White to Joseph Schwartz, dated 28 November 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 4.

In White's view, the JDC mission in Yugoslavia was not only about "distribution of Joint funds, but also [about] the continuation and the functioning of Jewish communities which thus could maintain special Jewish installations."<sup>307</sup> Even though White was worried about "the younger generation, 20 to 30 years of age," which was "showing tendencies to give up their Jewish identity and to completely assimilate," he was reassured by "those...who have had pre-war experience and training," and, one might add, who were at the helm of both ARC and the Federation, and who "must be placed among the most conscientious [*sic*] Jews in Europe, with strong Zionist aspirations prevailing amongst them."<sup>308</sup> The fault line was not generational, however; disagreements ran between Communist party members—who, in fact, were few, even though they occupied several important positions—and Zionists, most of whom, however, were transformed by the experience of World War II in Yugoslavia, whether they had been in hiding, survived concentration or POW camps, or, most typically, fought with the partisans. There must have been old-generation Zionists as well—Fridrih Pops comes to mind—who were not able to grasp the nature and magnitude of changes that needed to be embraced if organized Jewish life was going to continue in Yugoslavia. In other words, White did not seem to be able to grasp how one could, like David Alkalaj, simultaneously be a Zionist, strongly supportive of the idea of a new Yugoslavia and its new leaders, and (privately) worried about the Communists hijacking the Jewish reconstruction agenda.

How this internal Jewish dissonance looked in practice can be gauged from the stenographic notes of the First Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious

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<sup>307</sup> "Program and budget for Yugoslavia," memorandum from Frederick White to Joseph Schwartz, dated 28 November 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 4.

<sup>308</sup> "Program and budget for Yugoslavia," memorandum from Frederick White to Joseph Schwartz, dated 28 November 1946, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 4.



Communities, held in Belgrade on March 29 and 30, 1947. This was the first meeting of representatives of Jewish communities from all parts of the country with the leaders of the Federation and ARC after the liberation, and it was attended by representatives from all the major, as well as some smaller communities.<sup>309</sup> The agenda included discussions of reports on the legal status of the Jewish communities in the country, “social issues” (which, in the language of ARC, was a code for humanitarian aid distribution), the issue of property, cultural issues, religious issues, and the issue of the relationship of Yugoslav Jewry towards Jewish organizations abroad (the last two reports written by David Alkalaj).<sup>310</sup> In his opening remarks, Albert Vajs specified that the “goal of our...conference is to attempt to define our Jewish reality within the framework and the boundaries of our general Yugoslav reality,” stressing that “such task requires most urgent attention and effort.”<sup>311</sup> Yugoslav reality, Vajs argued, “is the result of NOB [the struggle for national liberation], which brought us the fact that today we can live as free and equal individuals, as citizens and Jews”; Jewish reality, on the other hand, was reflected in the fact that Jewish survivors returned to their communities and “started to perform functions that they thought were most urgent at the time,” while simultaneously forging a strong relationship with the central Jewish institution in the country.<sup>312</sup> Thus, Vajs once again outlined the two framing poles of Jewishness in Yugoslavia in the years immediately after the liberation. The communities faced a completely novel task of providing humanitarian aid to their dispossessed and starving members; as they

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<sup>309</sup> “Delegati 29 i 30-III-1947,” JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947.”

<sup>310</sup> Agenda for the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947.”

<sup>311</sup> Remarks of Albert Vajs at the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947.”

<sup>312</sup> Remarks of Albert Vajs at the Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities in Belgrade, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947.”

discovered ways of organizing this endeavor, they forged a more centralized and hierarchical relationship with the main Jewish institution in the country, which was critical in establishing contact with, and obtaining funding from, a major American Jewish donor organization. All this, on the other hand, was coordinated with the authorities and was presented as a project of rebuilding which was not at odds with the reconstruction (physical and ideological) undertaken by the authorities, and also fit well in the overall story of the new Yugoslavia.

Not everyone agreed with Vajs's understanding of the situation. Some representatives, Communist party members or those close to the Communists ideologically, did not see Jewish reconstruction as entirely compatible with the overall process of rebuilding Yugoslavia. "One of the most urgent matters," a delegate from Belgrade and an ARC official argued, "is the need of the Federation to reactivate [*sic*] Jewish masses as much as we can to work on the reconstruction of the country. This," he added ominously, "would also solve the question of status."<sup>313</sup> The question of the legal status of the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia had not been solved at this time; it was clear that the prewar law did not apply, while a new law had not been passed yet, since the Yugoslav leadership clearly had more urgent issues to solve. According to this delegate, only a complete integration into the Yugoslav reconstruction process, without Jewish overtones and through existing organizations of the National Front, would genuinely harmonize Jewish interests with those of the larger Yugoslav community. The institution of the Jewish community, which reemerged without legal underpinning after the war, would probably "wither away," much like the state would in orthodox Marxist

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<sup>313</sup> Discussion of Bencijon Levi, Stenographic notes of the plenary session of the First Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, Belgrade, 29 and 30 March 1947, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, "Konferencija SJVOJ 1947," 1.

theory once the dictatorship of the proletariat was instituted, and social tensions between classes resolved once and for all. Although the delegate refrained from spelling out the ideological corollary of his argument, it was clear what he meant by “solving” the question of status. Another delegate criticized the reports for being “interspersed with particular Jewish interests.”<sup>314</sup>

The overwhelming majority of the delegates, however, agreed that the existence of Jewish communities was necessary and rejected the radical views of the delegate mentioned above. A predictable discussion developed over the question of whether Jews in Yugoslavia should be defined as a religious or an ethnic group—a sensitive issue, since it was well understood that religion was not favorably looked upon in the new circumstances—but there was no question as to whether the communities should be abolished. “Jewish communities exist,” Kadelburg answered to repeated pleas for some kind of formal underscoring of the importance of the communities’ existence, “and I don’t see any reason why we should adopt a resolution calling for their continued existence.”<sup>315</sup> Concerning the question of legal status, most delegates, including the most important Federation and ARC leaders, agreed that the question should remain open for the moment and should be settled “when the time is more ripe,” as Vajs put it. The reluctance of the Jewish leaders to press for a legal definition of the status of Jewish communities and their umbrella organization illustrates the delicate nature of the situation in which ARC and the Federation found themselves as they tried to organize their relief

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<sup>314</sup> Discussion of Duci Kohn, Stenographic notes of the plenary session of the First Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, Belgrade, 29 and 30 March 1947, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947,” 6.

<sup>315</sup> Discussion of Lavoslav Kadelburg, Stenographic notes of the plenary session of the First Conference of the Federation of Jewish Religious Communities, Belgrade, 29 and 30 March 1947, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947,” 7.

effort.

In the fall of 1946, White was finally approved as the JDC representative by the authorities and assumed his position in Yugoslavia. In his first telephone report from Belgrade, he outlined the difficult situation in which the Jews of Yugoslavia lived: of about 12,000 Jews in the country, about 4,000 were employed, but even those were considered in need of JDC help. In order to meet their needs, White “insisted” that the planned JDC budget for Yugoslavia be increased by about a third in 1947; he also mentioned old difficulties with money transfer.<sup>316</sup> A delegation of ARC members, including Alkalaj, joined White at a meeting with a Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade, in which they tried to argue that a much more favorable exchange rate was needed in order to execute the planned relief budget; they pointed to Italy, Rumania, and Bulgaria, all of which had allowed rates more favorable than official exchange rates in order to aid the JDC effort. However, in the words of David Alkalaj, “[i]n the course of discussion on this matter it became obvious, that other possibilities should be looked for in order to obtain a more favourable exchange rate,” namely “transfers of goods” and “arbitration of exchanges abroad.”<sup>317</sup> What this meant in practice was that JDC would deposit funds in dollars in the account of the Yugoslav Trade Commission in the United States, whereupon the state would put dinar equivalents at the disposal of ARC; however, the exchange rate in this case would be 100 dinars to the dollar, as opposed to the 75 dinars ARC was receiving via the Italian lire transactions through “Centroprom” in Trieste. White strongly favored this arrangement, although JDC officials concluded at a meeting

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<sup>316</sup> “Telephone Conversation Between Mr. Louis H. Sobel and Mr. Fred White in Belgrade, October 30th, 1946,” undated, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000.

<sup>317</sup> David Alkalaj and Naftali-Bata Gedalja to Joseph Schwartz, 2 November 1946, AJDC, collection 45/54, file #1000.

on Yugoslavia that “this plan would not be altogether official[,] although the procedure had been suggested by Yugoslav officials.”<sup>318</sup>

When it comes to the contribution of JDC funds to the ARC budget, the official ARC books show a more or less constant sum (about 30 million dinars annually) for the period from 1946 to 1948, with a sharp drop (less than 10 million) in 1949 and 1950.<sup>319</sup> It is difficult to imagine that ARC would engage in double book keeping, since the state knew exactly how much money was flowing in from JDC, whether through “Centroprom” or the account of the Yugoslav Trade Commission in the United States. Regardless of the nominal sums and their exact worth, however, what is important is that in the period from 1945 through 1950, the annual budgets of ARC were made up almost exclusively of funding that came from JDC. Although the loans taken from various state institutions in 1945 are not listed—presumably because they were paid off once JDC funding had become regular, and were thus “covered” by these funds—close to 100 percent (and sometimes the full 100 percent) of annual budgets in this period came from JDC.<sup>320</sup> Once the issue of funding from abroad had been solved and the cash flow had become regular, ARC became fully dependent on JDC funding for its aid program.

Full state control of funds disbursed from abroad on the one hand, and full dependence on JDC funding for the running of its program of aid and reconstruction on the other, determined the perimeters of the field of possibility in which Jewish leaders in Yugoslavia operated and in which they instituted their ideas about what Jewishness in

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<sup>318</sup> Notes from a meeting on Yugoslavia held on 2 December 1946 in Paris, attended by Beckelman, White, Bernstein and Goldstein, undated, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1000, 2.

<sup>319</sup> “Uporedni pregled rashoda i prihoda Autonomnog odbora od početka rada 27.VII.1945 do kraja 1951 godine,” JHM, box 783, folder 6, “Dokumenta iz rada AO.”

<sup>320</sup> “Uporedni pregled rashoda i prihoda Autonomnog odbora od početka rada 27.VII.1945 do kraja 1951 godine,” JHM, box 783, folder 6, “Dokumenta iz rada AO.”

Yugoslavia should be in the period after the Holocaust. The outlook of the Yugoslav Jewish community in the postwar period was shaped to a large extent by the tensions between these two poles.

### Centralization Through Aid Distribution and the Emergence of the Federation of Jewish Communities

The eventual appointment and arrival of Frederick White in the late fall of 1946 consolidated the position of ARC as the most important institution of Yugoslav Jewry in this period. Even before this landmark development, Jewish communities in Yugoslavia had increasingly come to depend on aid distributed by ARC; once humanitarian assistance from abroad became assured and started arriving in regular intervals, ARC further strengthened its central position and ability to shape Jewish life in the communities.

This newly regularized position of ARC vis-à-vis the state manifested itself in institutional consolidation and the adoption of formal policies and priorities. In coordination with White, who suggested that membership of the Committee should be expanded to include representatives from other Yugoslav regions and non-Belgraders, the membership of the Committee was increased to sixteen; the communities of Zagreb, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Subotica, and Skoplje, as the largest communities, nominated their representatives.<sup>321</sup> In addition, ARC established an office in Zagreb, to facilitate more efficient distribution and better communication with the communities. Committee

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<sup>321</sup> Minutes from the 33rd meeting of ARC, held on 9 November 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6c, "Zapisnici sa sastanaka AO 46-50," 1.

members also agreed that annual budgets would be drafted in coordination with Frederick White, who would have to approve them formally before they were submitted to JDC. ARC also agreed to tighten its aid distribution criteria: White insisted that the “Joint aids Jews,” as a reaction to practices in some communities in which humanitarian assistance was offered to non-Jews as well.<sup>322</sup> Most importantly, White and ARC representatives agreed that “the Autonomous Committee manage the affairs of the homes of aged persons, children’s homes, student hostels, dispensaries and sanatoria, and children’s recuperation homes.” This was agreed as a consequence of the recognized need for “concentration of social institutions”; in other words, the next phase of social care for various categories of Yugoslav Jews—beyond the distribution of urgent assistance—would be under full ARC control.<sup>323</sup> This decision had important consequences, especially in the period after the ARC operation was shut down in 1950: central Yugoslav Jewish institutions—student dorms, summer camps, home for the elderly—were administered by the Federation of Jewish Communities, which alone had the authority to plan their development and program of work.

Apart from institutional consolidation, ARC also engaged in more systematic work once White was formally appointed JDC representative in Yugoslavia. In late

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<sup>322</sup> Minutes from the 33rd meeting of ARC, held on 9 November 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6c, “Zapisnici sa sastanaka AO 46-50,” 2. White’s criticism came as a reaction to a practice in some communities, which allowed non-Jews in their soup kitchens, or distributed used clothes to them. In Sarajevo, for example, many non-Jews were allowed to eat in the soup kitchen operated by the Jewish community, while the Osijek and Sombor communities even included non-Jews in their membership lists. See Minutes from the 1st plenary meeting of the extended ARC, held on 30 March 1947, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “AOP 1945-1949,” 3. At a meeting with White (the 33rd meeting of ARC), ARC proposed the categories of citizens who would be eligible for ARC aid (“widows of killed Jews, who are Christians,” “wives of surviving Jews, who are Christians,” “Jewesses married to Christians, converted,” “Jewesses married to Christians, non-converted,” “Children, from marriages between Jewesses and non-Jews, converted (the wife non-converted)”); in response, White stated simply that “Joint aids Jews,” but allowed for some exceptions. His idea of eligibility for aid was much more limited than that of ARC.

<sup>323</sup> Minutes from the 33rd meeting of ARC, held on 9 November 1946, JHM, box 783, folder 6c, “Zapisnici sa sastanaka AO 46-50,” 5.

1946, ARC circulated a questionnaire to the communities, in order to get a better picture of the demographic, economic, and social status of individual Jewish communities, and assess their needs. This was the first systematic attempt to create an overall snapshot of the situation in which Jewish communities in Yugoslavia found themselves in the first years after the liberation, a picture that allowed ARC to set its priorities and plan its work in the years ahead.

Although the war had been over in Yugoslavia for more than a year and a half (and, in some parts, for more than two years), the economic situation of the communities was still very difficult at the turn of 1947, and most of them were still struggling to provide the returnees with the most basic necessities. The Novi Sad community estimated that only 10 percent of their members could be said to be in good economic condition: “good” in this sense meant “having property, with or without income.” The rest of the members were “destitute,” “weak economically” or “moderately well off,” that is, without property and with income that allowed them barely to survive.<sup>324</sup> “The overwhelming majority of our members earns their living by engaging in trade,” stated the report from Priština. “It is not necessary to explain what this means in today’s conditions, when social production is being socialized in our country.” Awkward new rhetoric aside, the Priština Jewish community was obliged to “help many members with money,” since “trade [brought] miserable income.”<sup>325</sup> The report from Dubrovnik simply stated: “[a]ll members of our Community have been completely devastated

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<sup>324</sup> “Ekonomsko stanje naših opština,” report submitted by the Novi Sad Jewish Community, no. 1772, 3 May 1947, JHM, box AO 885.

<sup>325</sup> “Ekonomsko stanje naših članova,” report submitted by the Priština Jewish Community, no. 53, 21 April 1947, JHM, box AO 885.



[economically] by the occupation and deportation.”<sup>326</sup> Communities were in dire economic conditions, and barely able to help their members, whose economic survival still depended on aid received from them. Help from JDC through ARC was thus indispensable, and most reports—even from the largest communities—were very explicit about this fact. “Thanks to the fact that we have been receiving the subsidy from the Joint regularly,” read the report from the Zagreb community, “we have been able to improve and organize better the work of our soup kitchen...[This improvement] is also reflected in the larger number of individuals who eat regularly in the soup kitchen.”<sup>327</sup>

Again, an historian has to be careful with such reports: applicants for aid probably tend to overstate their reliance on such grants. However, given that financial aid from JDC channeled by ARC was indeed the only significant aid available to these communities, it is reasonable to assume that it really did make all the difference in the everyday life of the communities. This is all the more likely when we take into account the fact that many communities complained about the quality of used clothing that they had received from ARC as part of their allotted aid package. The report from Novi Sad complained about “poor quality” of used clothes they had been receiving.<sup>328</sup> The report from Skopje noted that both suits for men and dresses for women were “used for too long a time” before being distributed to the members of the local Jewish community.<sup>329</sup> And the report from the Orthodox community in Senta simply stated that “[clothing] is

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<sup>326</sup> “Ekonomsko stanje naših općinara,” report submitted by the Dubrovnik Jewish Community, no. 83/47, 24 April 1947, JHM, box AO 885.

<sup>327</sup> “Izvještaj o Menzi,” submitted by the Zagreb Jewish Community, no. 1057/47-Le Pk, 17 April 1947, JHM, box AO 735.

<sup>328</sup> “Ekonomsko stanje naših opština,” report submitted by the Novi Sad Jewish Community, no. 1772, 3 May 1947, JHM, box AO 885.

<sup>329</sup> “Prilozi uz izvještaj Jevrejske veroispovedne opštine u Skoplju,” submitted by the Skopje Jewish Community, no. 211, undated, JHM, box AO 885.

overwhelmingly shabby.”<sup>330</sup> Communities, therefore, did not shy away from criticizing, where there was a reason to criticize, the aid they had received; this additional perspective makes the assumption that the expressions of gratitude and emphases on indispensability of aid distributed by ARC were genuine, and that this aid really did help the communities keep their heads above water.

Its importance to the reconstruction of the Jewish communities gave ARC leverage to make decisions about the future of Jewish life in Yugoslavia. An important example in this respect is the attitude of ARC and the Federation leaders toward the religious aspects of Jewish life in the communities. As the Communists were seizing power, it was obvious that manifestations of religious belief were not going to be perceived as compatible with the new Yugoslav values. On the other hand, the group that was leading both the Federation and ARC mostly consisted of prewar Zionists, who were secular and quite unsympathetic towards religion, and whose moderate hostility had been pronounced even in the prewar period. That the issue of religion was going to be a problem for ARC’s project of embedding Jewish rebuilding in the larger narrative of Yugoslav reconstruction could be seen when the five surviving rabbis met in Belgrade in March of 1947 and discussed the prospects for religious work in the communities. The fact that the group included Orthodox, Reform, and Sephardic rabbis points to the urgency that they assigned to the renewal of religious observance and its importance for Jewish identity: these men would never have come together had they not thought that extremely important matters were at stake. In their written statement, the rabbis stated that

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<sup>330</sup> “Ekonomsko stanje,” report submitted by the Senta Orthodox Jewish Community, no. 2001, 15 May 1947, JHM, box AO 885.

[a]ll of us today are lucky to enjoy freedom, and that we can contribute, with our work, to the progress and well-being of our great Homeland. But even as we are committed to our people's state [*našoj narodnoj državi*]...we must not forget that we are also sons of the Jewish people, the ancient people of the most ancient faith, the culture of mankind, which had revolutionized the ancient world several thousand years ago, and whose cultural mission is still present among the nations of the entire world; [faith] which presented the individual with most radical ideas of freedom, equality, justice, and love for all; [faith] which gave us rules about the protection of the weak and the infirm, of foreigners, orphans and widows, [faith] which highly regards the honor of human work in every field of human activity, and which expects for all humankind a happy messianic age of peace, unity, and well-being.<sup>331</sup>

It is interesting to note how the rabbis wove the universal ideals dear to Marxism into their interpretation of “the most ancient faith.” But even as they foregrounded equality, justice, and the dignity of labor, this kind of discourse was clearly at odds with the dominant values and normative relationship with the state that ARC and the Federation were trying to promote. Noting that “as Jews, we have the sacred duty to prevent with all our powers the decline of our sacred traditions along with our religion,” the rabbis fixed the firm boundaries of Jewishness, beyond which they could not go: “Saturday is one of the main pillars of our religious life...and so, communal institutions have to remain closed from the evening to the end of the holiday”; and “[c]ircumcision of Jewish men is the only sign of belonging to Judaism[, and] without it the child is lost to Judaism.”<sup>332</sup>

Their concerns were not something that ARC shared. Although the relationship between the rabbis on the one hand, and the high officials of ARC and the Federation on the other, appeared outwardly cordial, it was clear that the vision of Jewishness that ARC was promoting was very different. This difference explains the low rank of religious needs on the list of ARC priorities. How this played itself out in practice could be seen from the relationship between ARC and several Orthodox communities in Vojvodina. The Orthodox communities insisted on being separated from the main Jewish

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<sup>331</sup> “Zasedanje konferencije rabina na dan 25-26 marta 1947 god. U Beogradu,” JHM, PR, box 1149, 1.

<sup>332</sup> “Zasedanje konferencije rabina na dan 25-26 marta 1947 god. U Beogradu,” JHM, PR, box 1149, 1-2.

communities, since they privileged religious observance as the foundation of Jewishness. On the other hand, they felt entitled to aid from ARC, and felt that they were discriminated against because of the anti-religious bias of Yugoslav Jewish leaders. In late April 1947, just a month after the Belgrade meeting of the rabbis, a “prominent businessman and an Orthodox Jew” from Senta in Vojvodina, Josif Hauer, wrote a letter to Rabbi Lazar Schoenfeld of the Bronx, complaining bitterly:

About 300 persons are living in our community [of Senta, in Vojvodina] without any religious institutions. We have in Yugoslavia an organization named *Savez*, which means the [Federation] of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia. That [Federation] does not take any care of the religious needs of the Jewish population. Its only activities are charity, keeping up a *Menza* (eating place) and distributing the money and goods which the Joint Distribution Committee in America is sending them between the Jewish communities of Yugoslavia. We are very grateful to America that they have sent us Matzohs for Pesach, because if not for this we would have had no Matzohs for Pesach. I would like this letter to express deepest appreciation and thanks to American Jews and to the Joint Distribution Committee that they made possible for us to keep our Pesach.

(...)

It would be a great blessing to the Jews of this section of Yugoslavia if the Joint Distribution Committee would directly or indirectly instruct the [Federation] of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia to take care of the religious needs of the country, so that the few remaining Jews should not be spiritually and religiously destroyed.<sup>333</sup>

Such complaints were a culmination of a long tug of war between the Orthodox communities and ARC. Already in October 1945, the Orthodox community in Subotica asked ARC whether—knowing that the Orthodox separated from the “fraternal neologue community” in that city—it discriminated against the Orthodox, who were much more needy, by ignoring their needs and continuing to favor the central Jewish community in the city: “[w]e take the liberty of expressing our suspicion that, using an administrative measure [i.e., ignoring the needs of the newly independent Orthodox community and continuing to donate aid to the Jewish Community of Subotica disproportionately] your

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<sup>333</sup> Quoted in the letter from Rabbi Lazar Schoenfeld to the Central Relief Committee, 5 May 1947, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1006.

intention was to short-change innocent people.”<sup>334</sup> To these accusations, ARC responded that it was “at the moment impossible to change the current pattern of aid distribution,” noting at the same time that the separation of the communities was their internal matter and that it was going to continue to honor agreements it had with the main Subotica community.<sup>335</sup> In February 1946, the Orthodox community in Subotica again complained that it was not receiving enough aid through the main Subotica community, and cited some smaller Jewish communities that were receiving more aid per capita.<sup>336</sup> Even after ARC agreed to separate the two Subotica communities for the purposes of aid delivery and deliver aid to the Orthodox community directly, the Orthodox community complained that the quality of clothing it was receiving as aid was worse than that received by the main community, and speculated that this was a deliberate targeting of the Orthodox.<sup>337</sup>

The distrust between the Orthodox communities in Subotica and Senta, on the one hand, and ARC, on the other, continued until 1948, when almost all Orthodox Jews from Vojvodina emigrated to Israel. The exchanges between the Orthodox communities and ARC and the conference of rabbis of 1947 testify to the growing rift between ARC and Jewish groups that, unlike ARC, considered Judaism and religious observance the

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<sup>334</sup> Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica to ARC, 15 October 1945, no. 15/45, JHM, box AO 769.

<sup>335</sup> ARC to the Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica, 8 November 1945, no. 939, JHM, box AO 769.

<sup>336</sup> Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica to ARC, 20 February 1946, no. 17/46, JHM, box AO 769. It remains unclear whether the cited smaller communities (Bačko Petrovo Selo and Mol) that, according to the Orthodox community of Subotica, were receiving more aid per capita, were Orthodox or not. In any case, the tone of the correspondence between the Orthodox community of Subotica and ARC is unmistakably underwritten by mutual distrust. And even if the cited smaller communities were indeed Orthodox—and thus, one could argue, the issue of proportional aid distribution was indeed merely administrative—the only two sizable (in any meaningful sense in the circumstances at the time) Orthodox communities (Senta and Subotica) both had grievances against ARC about the same issue.

<sup>337</sup> See letters no. 18/46 from the Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica to ARC, 15 March 1946; no. 791 from ARC to the Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica, 19 March 1946; no. 1351 from ARC to the Orthodox Jewish Community of Subotica, 2 May 1946; no. 23/1946 from the Orthodox Jewish Community in Subotica to ARC, 13 May 1946; JHM, box AO 769.

primary bases of Jewish identity. Although the disagreement was often couched in terms of administrative issues in aid distribution, its essence was clearly ideological: Frederick White understood that “the chief problem of the Yugoslav orthodox group concerns the need for additional Shochetim, Moelim and one more orthodox rabbi.”<sup>338</sup> In other words, the lack of funds that the Orthodox complained about affected primarily religious issues, and the perceived foot-dragging on the part of ARC and JDC on these issues convinced the Orthodox that religious needs did not occupy a very high place on the list of ARC priorities. Frederick White went even further, suggesting that the Orthodox themselves should deal with this issue, since, according to him, “a rather large percentage of the Orthodox Jewish population is wealthy, although they contribute very little to the maintenance of the orthodox institutions.”<sup>339</sup> The issue, then, was about the centrality of religious needs in aid budgets: ARC was ready to provide humanitarian assistance that would alleviate the immediate plight of the communities; when it came to religious issues, ARC, and even JDC, were not ready to go as far as the Orthodox communities demanded. They pointed to resources beyond their budgets, just as the Orthodox sought help outside ARC (as Hauer’s letter to Schoenfeld well illustrates). The political line of humanitarian aid distributed by ARC became clearly visible when it came to the issue of supporting religious observance and providing aid for the maintenance of religious institutions in the communities.

The unimportance of religious infrastructure was confirmed once hunger and dispossession ceased to be primary problems that plagued the Jews in Yugoslavia. A year after White’s arrival and the beginning of uninterrupted flow of JDC funds, Jewish

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<sup>338</sup> JDC Paris to JDC New York, 22 September 1947, no. 6546, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1006.

<sup>339</sup> JDC Paris to JDC New York, 22 September 1947, no. 6546, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1006.

communities and their members could stand on their feet again. “After two and a half years of ARC work in the social sector...we have to recognize that the circumstances and the economic base of Jewry in Yugoslavia has changed,” claimed an ARC report from January 1948. “In their economic outlook, the Jews of Yugoslavia have for the most part...a normal expression.”<sup>340</sup> In these circumstances, ARC priorities changed: although they still included providing humanitarian aid for some categories of the Jewish population, emphasis was now put on “securing the development of cultural and social life,” as well as institutional strengthening of the communities.<sup>341</sup> Although the document paid lip service to the religious aspect of a Jewish community as an institution, it was clear that religion was not only not a priority, but that it was not even considered as a relevant aspect of the new Jewishness worth funding by ARC.

From 1948 to 1952, about 7,000 Jews left Yugoslavia to settle in Israel. Less than 7,000 stayed in Yugoslavia.<sup>342</sup> The story of the *aliyot* is an interesting one, but lies outside the scope of this chapter. What is relevant for this argument is that the Yugoslav state allowed most Jews who wanted to emigrate to Israel to do so, provided that they give up their immovable property and Yugoslav citizenship.<sup>343</sup> It is difficult to gauge the individual motivations for what was a mass emigration to Israel; some individuals were

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<sup>340</sup> “Perspektive budućeg rada Autonomnog odbora za pomoć,” report submitted to the meeting of extended ARC held on 11 January 1948, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “Dokumenta iz rada AO,” 1.

<sup>341</sup> “Perspektive budućeg rada Autonomnog odbora za pomoć,” report submitted to the meeting of extended ARC held on 11 January 1948, JHM, box 783, folder 6, “Dokumenta iz rada AO,” 2.

<sup>342</sup> Stenographic notes from the Fifth Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on 23 April 1950, JHM, PR, box 1197, “Peta konferencija SJOJ,” 7.

<sup>343</sup> Some physicians and engineers, deemed essential to efforts in curbing the typhus epidemic in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the renewal of the country, were prevented from emigrating. See documents 9401/1949 and 123/49 in AY, box 31-108-158, “Komitet za zaštitu narodnog zdravlja Vlade FNRJ,” and 193/1949 in AY, box 15-27-384, “Prezidijum Narodne skupštine FNRJ.”

surely driven by ideological concerns, while others most certainly were not.<sup>344</sup> The remaining members of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia were tightly organized under the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities, which was led by the same people who closed down the ARC mission in 1950. Albert Vajs, who became president of the Federation after the death of Fridrih Pops, summarized, in 1950, the setting in which the work of the Federation had emerged after the liberation: “[f]rom the very moment in which we reestablished our Federation of Jewish Communities, our leadership was guided by two basic principles”: the first one was that “we were part of the larger Yugoslav community of our country, and that we are bound by thousands of threads to that community”; the second one was that “we are members of the larger Jewish community of the world.”<sup>345</sup> Furthermore, “[w]e regarded our efforts at reconstruction not to be contradictory to [the reconstruction of the country], and in this we were of one mind with the government. We wanted to be included in the new reality as an active factor.”<sup>346</sup> Through the process of reconstruction, the Federation forged new relationships with both the Jewish communities and the government.

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<sup>344</sup> The cases of David Alkalaj and Hana Levi-Hass are illustrative of problems one falls into when trying to reduce motives for emigration to matters of ideology: both of them emigrated to Israel; both of them also remained very committed to the politics of the left and ardent support of Yugoslavia. See over a hundred letters that David Alkalaj wrote to his friends in Belgrade from Israel, JHM, box 806, folder 41a, "Pisma Davida Alkalaja SJOJ"; see also the interview with Hana Levi-Hass in *Villeicht war das alles erst der Anfang*.

<sup>345</sup> Stenographic notes from the Fifth Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on 23 April 1950, JHM, PR, box 1197, "Peta konferencija SJOJ," 2.

<sup>346</sup> Stenographic notes from the Fifth Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on 23 April 1950, JHM, PR, box 1197, "Peta konferencija SJOJ," 3.



## Conclusion

In 1950, in a special feature of *World Jewish Affairs*, Albert Vajs, now president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, noted that the Jews of Yugoslavia were “a small community,” of whom “a considerable number...still desire to live Jewish lives.” He then noted that “[i]nterest in religious life has diminished considerably, particularly among the younger generation”; “what arouses more interest today,” however, “is in accentuated national cultural life.” What did this mean under the current circumstances? “In our conditions, it must undoubtedly be in harmony with the progressive aspirations of the socialist country in which we live. It cannot be divorced from the events in Israel, but equally it cannot be fully identified with them.”<sup>347</sup>

This vision, which emphasized a cultural Jewishness in harmony with Yugoslav realities and marginalized religion, had emerged in the immediate postwar period. It was certainly the result of the decimation of the Yugoslav Jewish population during the Holocaust, and the mass emigration of half the remaining population to Israel. However, it was also the result of the process through which Jewish communities in Yugoslavia were rebuilt after the war. It was the result of the policies of ARC, devised between the funding policies of JDC and possibilities allowed by the new Yugoslav state, and the ever-growing dependence of the communities on ARC and, after it, on the Federation. Prewar Yugoslav Zionists, who led ARC and the Federation in this effort, genuinely supported the new Yugoslav project, and wished to embed the story of Jewish reconstruction in the wider narrative of rebuilding of the new Yugoslavia. They met

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<sup>347</sup> Albert Vajs, “Yugoslav Jewry To-Day,” special feature 91E of the News and Feature Service of World Jewish Affairs, 8 December 1950, 3-4.

serious challenges in their dealings with the institutions of the new state, but ultimately managed to push through what they considered to be a meaningful Jewish infrastructure, a centralized system of Jewish communities loyal to the state, and led by the Federation as the main institution.

Once hunger, destitution, and the very physical survival of Jewish communities ceased to be a pressing issue, the Federation found another way of showing in public how it is possible to be Jewish while remaining true to the narratives and ideological concerns dearest to the new government. The next chapter tells this story.

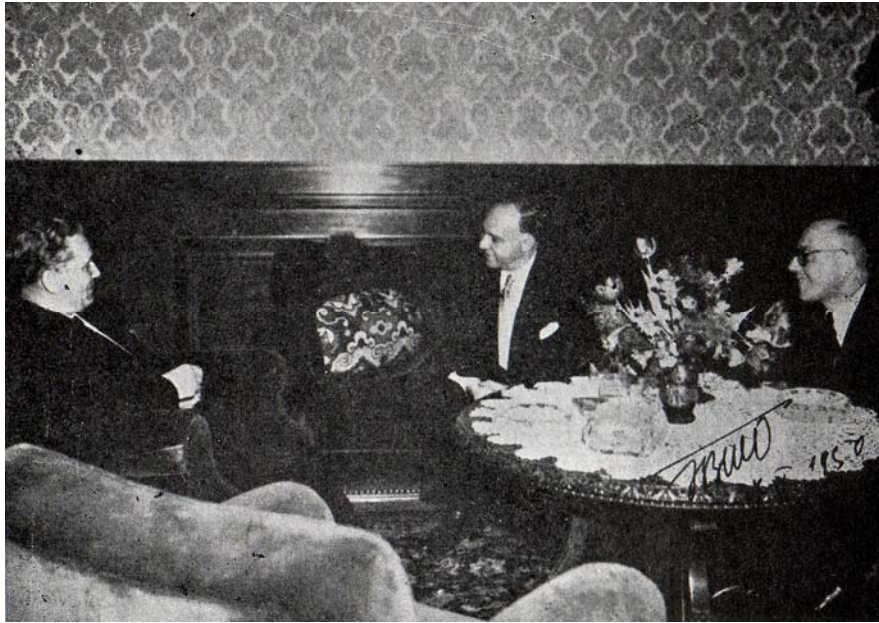


Fig. 5.1. Frederick White (center) and Albert Vajs (right) meeting with Tito, 1950 (Photo courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade).

## Chapter VI

### From Victimhood to Citizenship: The 1952 Monuments to “Jewish Victims of Fascism” as a Path to Socialist Yugoslavism and New Jewishness

In October 1952, the London *Jewish Chronicle* published an article on the “future of Yugoslav Jewry.”<sup>348</sup> The author of the article attended the dedication of monuments to the Jewish victims of war in Yugoslavia, organized in late August and early September of that year in five Yugoslav cities by the Federation of Jewish Communities. Along with Jewish leaders from the West, seizing a “unique opportunity of acquainting [ourselves] with the new pattern of Jewish life under Communist rule,” the author ended his introduction with a mild sense of bewilderment:

There was something strangely unreal about the hastily and fervently renewed activity of the Yugoslav Jewish community. And however impressive the ardour and piety of remembrance, one could not help asking: Why was so much energy expended by a mere 6,000 Jews to attract the attention of world Jewry? What was the purpose of inviting fraternal delegates from other countries, entertaining them at official functions, and taking them to provincial centres where there were no Jews to mourn the martyrs?<sup>349</sup>

In a letter accompanying the clipping of the *Chronicle* article that he forwarded to the New York office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Judah J. Shapiro, who had attended the ceremonies on behalf of JDC’s Paris office, expressed a similar sense of skepticism: “One wonders just why so much to-do is made by so small a community, although one respects the organization of the Jewish community and the

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<sup>348</sup> E. Bienenstok, “Future of Yugoslav Jewry,” *The Jewish Chronicle* (10 October 1952).

<sup>349</sup> Bienenstok, “Future.”

active tempo of its work.”<sup>350</sup>

These sentiments capture the sense of polite wonderment that probably prevailed among the foreign delegates at the ceremonies. In the late summer of 1952, the Federation of Jewish Communities organized a campaign to dedicate five monuments to “Jewish victims of Fascism”—Yugoslav Jews killed in World War II—at five major sites in Yugoslavia (Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, and Đakovo). The ceremonies lasted for two full weeks, were attended by Yugoslav state and Party officials, Israeli and international Jewish delegates, and were covered by the Yugoslav mass media quite extensively. Although some Jewish communities in the country had built memorials to the Jewish victims even before this widely publicized campaign led by the Federation, the ceremonies of 1952 were a watershed event, and Yugoslav Jewish leaders strove to portray them as such. The fact, however, remained that the festivities were organized by a Jewish institution claiming to represent a mere 6,500-strong community that remained in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust and three waves of emigration to Israel. To well-meaning outsiders, this could indeed appear as a case of much ado about nothing.

Yet the leadership of the Federation sensed that the events helped usher in the beginning of an important new phase in the life of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, and it is out of this impression of urgency that they considered it worthy of wide publicity and both domestic and international (Jewish) attention. In a programmatic article from 1954, “Jews in the New Yugoslavia,” Albert Vajs, president of the Federation, emphasized social and demographic stabilization as the turning point and the beginning

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<sup>350</sup> Judah J. Shapiro to Henrietta K. Buchman, letter no. 427 (23 October 1952), AJDC, collection #45/54, file #999.

of the new phase of Jewish life in Yugoslavia.<sup>351</sup> This phase, which started with the end of the last wave of emigration to Israel in late 1951, brought with it anxiety about demographic prospects for a viable Jewish life in the country—there were only 6,250 registered members of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia—but also satisfaction with the results achieved: “Today, in the tenth year after the Liberation,” wrote Vajs, “we can say that we mostly succeeded in achieving our goals. The Jewish community in Yugoslavia has been renewed. It lives and works. It represents a positive factor in the life of the new Yugoslavia and a positive part of the Jewish people.”<sup>352</sup>

In addition to mere physical survival and existence, upon which the new authorities appeared to look favorably, the Jews of Yugoslavia, according to Vajs, were connected to the new country on a much deeper level. The foundational narrative of the new state—World War II, codified in public life as the “struggle for national liberation”—was as important to the Jewish community as it was for the new socialist state:

Especially important for [future Jewish life in Yugoslavia] was the struggle for national liberation [*Narodno-oslobodilačka borba*]. It was the only place in the country where [Jews] could feel free and equal and where they could count on solidarity. Brotherhood and unity [*bratstvo i jedinstvo*] forged in the conflagration of the war for national liberation and the revolution of the Yugoslav peoples also included the Jews of Yugoslavia. Joint suffering and sacrifice brought Yugoslav Jews even closer to the

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<sup>351</sup> Albert Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” *Jevrejski almanah*, Vol. 1 (1954), 5-47, 35-37. The appearance of *Jevrejski almanah* (“The Jewish Almanac”), which the Federation started publishing in 1954, itself reflected the new era of Jewish life in Yugoslavia. It was a new bi-annual publication that featured articles on Yugoslav and international Jewish topics. The journal ceased publication in the early 1970s, to be replaced by a more academic *Zbornik Jevrejskog istorijskog muzeja* (“Journal of the Jewish Historical Museum”). The introductory 1954 editorial to *Jevrejski almanah* announced that the Federation “continues the venerated cultural tradition of the Yugoslav Jewry,” and that, “just as we used to speak through the columns of *Židov*, *Jevrejski glas*, *Židovska svijest*, *Gideon*, *Hanoar*, *Omanut*, and other Jewish newspapers and journals before World War II,” the Federation was going to speak through *Jevrejski almanah* about Jewish issues, while “being proud of our socialist homeland that allows each of its peoples to do so.” “Uvodna reč,” *Jevrejski almanah*, Vol. I (1954), 3-4, 3. For an analysis of prewar Yugoslav Zionist press, including many of the journals mentioned in the quotation, see Chapter I of this dissertation.

<sup>352</sup> Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” 30. The number of members of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia is from Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” 35.

Yugoslav land and its peoples.<sup>353</sup>

In 1952, the Federation of Jewish Communities published a volume, based on the findings of the official State Commission for the Investigation of Crimes of Occupiers and Their Collaborators, which presented documentary and archival evidence for the crimes against the Jews committed in all parts of Yugoslavia.<sup>354</sup> In the introduction to the volume, Vajs emphasized that the new equal and free status of the Jews, “and all other citizens of the New Yugoslavia, all of its peoples, nationalities [*narodnost*] and various minority groups” was “one of the important legacies of the grand struggle for national liberation [*Narodno-oslobodilačka borba*] and the revolution of the Yugoslav peoples.”<sup>355</sup>

The dedication of the monuments to the “Jewish victims of Fascism” that same year similarly reached to the ideological foundations of the new state exemplified by the narratives of the “struggle for national liberation” and “brotherhood and unity.” The monuments were going to commemorate the Jewish victims of war in a way that would not only be compatible with the ideological image of the war for national liberation, but that would actively reinforce it. On the other hand, they *were* going to commemorate specifically Jewish victims and underline the specific nature of the Nazi genocide against the Jews. Those twin functions of the monuments reflected the two major goals most clearly formulated by Albert Vajs, writing in the already quoted article about the prospects for Jewish education in Yugoslavia: the Federation strove to educate the youth to become “conscious, cultured, and useful members of a wider Jewish community,” in

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<sup>353</sup> Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” 27.

<sup>354</sup> Zdenko Levental (ed.), *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1952). Albert Vajs and several other prominent Jews had contributed to the work of the state Commission.

<sup>355</sup> Albert Vajs, “Predgovor,” in Levental (ed.), *Zločini fašističkih okupatora*, xi-xx, xix-xx.

addition to their development into “conscious, cultured, and useful citizens of socialist Yugoslavia.”<sup>356</sup>

The vision of becoming full Yugoslav citizens beyond the narrow, legal definition of citizenship, while organizing what they considered a genuinely Jewish life in the country, had topped the agenda of the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities since its reestablishment in 1944. In order to achieve that goal, Jewish leaders had to navigate the treacherous waters of the early Cold War years, and probe the boundaries of meaning of the adjective and noun “Yugoslav,” in the period in which the Communist leadership itself was formulating a new meaning of Yugoslavism. In the previous chapter I traced an important aspect of this process by focusing on the politics of American Jewish humanitarian aid, and argued that in order to rebuild basic communal infrastructure in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the leaders of the Federation had to accept American Jewish aid, while framing the story of Jewish reconstruction as part of a larger effort to rebuild Yugoslavia. This was a complex task in the atmosphere of distrust between Yugoslav authorities and American officials and organizations.

The 1952 campaign to build five monuments to Yugoslav Jewish victims of the crime that did not yet have a name was a similar attempt to balance the need for acceptable Jewish identification in the aftermath of an unprecedented Jewish tragedy with the rigidities of the early Yugoslav socialist state. But while the rebuilding efforts of the previous years had been mostly focused on logistics—i.e., on the question of how to dampen the suspicions of state institutions of a Jewish rebuilding campaign financed from abroad—the monument campaign reached to the ideological core of the new Yugoslav project. By unveiling monuments to the “Jewish victims of Fascism,” the

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<sup>356</sup> Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” 46.



Federation of Jewish Communities touched on the most important pillars of the new state: the official view of World War II in Yugoslavia as the founding moment of the new state, and the theme of common and equal suffering of all Yugoslav peoples during the war as a guarantee of Yugoslavia's legitimacy. The highly visible events around the ceremonies of dedication of monuments were aimed at inserting symbolically the story of Jewish suffering during the war into the larger founding myth of the new Yugoslavia, while delineating it as a separate historical narrative that would become an important part of Jewishness in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

The key to the success of this project was resolving the seeming contradiction of trying to narrate Jewish history as at once singular and part of a larger, common history. The monuments and the dedication ceremonies were planned carefully so as to strike the right balance between the need to commemorate Jewish victimhood—something that had been discussed by individual Jews, both in Jewish communities and the Federation for years—and the official story that was being created about World War II in Yugoslavia at the time, and that mandated a particular mode of commemoration. But while the leaders of the Federation planned this campaign carefully, and while their political acumen allowed them to use contemporary politics in pursuit of their ultimate goal—i.e., becoming “Jewish citizens of socialist Yugoslavia”—they also genuinely believed in that project. They found a way to map their own “culture of commemoration,” to borrow the term from Hasia Diner, onto what was becoming the ritual Yugoslav mode of commemoration of World War II victims and resistance fighters.<sup>357</sup> The monuments were to tell the story of Jewish suffering during the war in a way that would be firmly

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<sup>357</sup> Hasia Diner, “Before ‘The Holocaust’: American Jews Confront Catastrophe, 1945-1962,” David W. Belin Lecture in American Jewish Affairs (Ann Arbor, 2004), 2.

embedded in the discursive universe of the Communist government, but that would at the same time provide a basis, through commemorating specifically Jewish victims, for a new pattern of Jewish identification in Yugoslavia. The monuments, in other words, were as much about narrating the story of Jewish victimhood to the wider Yugoslav community—and, through its commemoration, legitimating a way of being Yugoslav in a “Jewish” way—as they were about demarcating a specifically “Jewish” history that was considered necessary for the reformulation of post-Holocaust Jewishness in Yugoslavia.

In this chapter, I focus on the ceremonies of dedication of monuments in five Yugoslav cities—Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, and Đakovo—in order to trace the ways in which they accomplished these seemingly contradictory objectives.<sup>358</sup>

### Holocaust Awareness in Yugoslavia and the Eichmann Trial

It is trivial to claim that the Holocaust is a watershed event of the twentieth century, and, indeed, in the modern history of humankind. The series of historical events comprising the planned and systematic murder of the Jews of Europe by the Nazi state

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<sup>358</sup> There is, of course, an immense body of literature on memory, commemoration, and monuments on which I build my argument. It is impossible to provide an exhaustive bibliography here, but more important works include, among others, Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-24; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); etc. In the context of memory and commemoration of the Holocaust, see James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), and, for the more specific Eastern European context, among others, Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003); Michael Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997); István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

and its satellites, which subsequently came to be known as “the Holocaust,” has had a number of aftermaths—legal, political, and cultural—that survivors, perpetrators, bystanders, but also generations of their offspring and their societies as a whole, have had to confront. From the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide<sup>359</sup> to the films of Steven Spielberg<sup>360</sup> and Roberto Benigni<sup>361</sup> and the expanding field of genocide studies,<sup>362</sup> contemporary societies have encountered and wrestled with history and legacies of the Holocaust in many different ways.

Despite these differences, however, at least in Israel, Europe, and the United States, the Holocaust has been memorialized, taught about, and invoked in various public contexts in similar, almost ritualized ways. In the past decades, Holocaust museums have been opened in many countries, including Germany; monuments and memorial centers have been opened at the sites of mass murder; and the Holocaust features prominently in school curricula in the European Union and most other European countries.<sup>363</sup> With a

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<sup>359</sup> The UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. The crime of “genocide”—the neologism coined by Raphael Lemkin—was codified in order to legally define and prevent organized state murder of national, ethnical, racial or religious groups, such as the Nazi murder of the Jews.

<sup>360</sup> On Spielberg’s award-winning film *Schindler’s List*, see Yosefa Loshitzky (ed.), *Spielberg’s Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on Schindler’s List* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). See also Geoff Eley and Atina Grossmann, “Watching *Schindler’s List*: Not the Last Word,” in *New German Critique* No. 71 (Spring, 1997), 41-62; also, Alan L. Mintz, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

<sup>361</sup> For a compelling critique of Benigni’s film *Life is Beautiful*, see Lawrence L. Langer, “Life is not Beautiful,” in Lawrence L. Langer, *Using and Abusing the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 30-47.

<sup>362</sup> For recent contributions, see Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert Gelattely and Ben Kiernan (eds.), *The Specter of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Eric Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>363</sup> For a history of the national Holocaust museum in Washington DC, see Edward Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York: Viking, 1995). For an overview of memorial and educational programs covering the Holocaust in Europe, see *Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism: An Overview and Analysis of Educational Approaches*, published by the

few important exceptions, the Holocaust has become a significant presence in many Western societies, and an often-invoked metaphor and example in their cultural and political debates.<sup>364</sup> For Jewish communities, especially in Israel, Europe, and the United States, awareness and memorialization of the Holocaust have become important pillars of contemporary Jewishness.

It is difficult, especially for younger generations of Europeans, Americans, and Israelis, to imagine a time when this was not so. But with the obvious exception of Israel, and for various political reasons, the Holocaust had remained on the margins of social debate for quite some time after the end of World War II. It was only after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, when the horrifying details of the apparatus of extermination emerged in court, that masses of people became aware of the magnitude of the Holocaust, and fascinated by its evil nature.<sup>365</sup> Worldwide television and press coverage of the trial allowed the horror of the Holocaust to reach wide segments of populations around the world, who seemed to be genuinely affected by the detailed testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Even in Israel, where Holocaust survivors constituted a sizable segment of the population, this was a novel and transformative experience: “None of us here left the same person,” Haim Gouri, a famous Israeli poet,

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Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Warsaw, 2006).

<sup>364</sup> About the marginalization of the Holocaust in the Serbian context, see a report of my roundtable discussion in Belgrade in February 2005. “Holokausta nema u udžbenicima,” *Danas* (16 February 2005).

<sup>365</sup> For a classic (and controversial) account of the Eichmann trial, see Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963). For a more recent rendering of the trial in which the author, according to the otherwise generous reviewer, “can’t quite figure out what to do with Arendt or indeed with the life of their joint subject,” and thus “does not take her on directly and resorts instead to potshots and dismissals of a position that is, in fact, very much like the one implicit in his book,” see David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (London: Heinemann, 2003). The quote is from Thomas Laqueur, “Four pfennige per track km,” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 26, No. 21 (4 November 2004). For various perspectives on Arendt, her “banality of evil” thesis, and the trial, see Steven Aschheim (ed.), *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

remarked after witnessing a series of court testimonies.<sup>366</sup>

The beginning of the Eichmann trial coincided with the publication of Raul Hilberg's magisterial study of the logistics of extermination, which was the first academic work on the Holocaust based on extensive archival documentation.<sup>367</sup> Emotional Jerusalem trial testimonies and Hilberg's cold, factual, almost dry narrative complemented one another to bring about a breakthrough in both academic and popular understanding of, and interest in, the Holocaust. Before the early 1960s and the Eichmann trial, few people—or, rather, few people who published in English—were interested in hearing about, or researching, the experiences of Jewish suffering or the dynamic of the Holocaust.<sup>368</sup> Hilberg's almost insurmountable difficulties in choosing his subject as a graduate student and ultimately publishing his doctoral dissertation well illustrate the general lack of interest in the topic in that period. "For many years after my decision to write the dissertation," he remembers,

I was alone... This was the time when those—like survivors—who were plagued by memories, were told to forget what had happened, and when the Nuremberg trials were conducted not so much to understand Germany's history as to conclude unfinished business in order that Germany might be reconstituted with a clean slate in the North Atlantic community of nations confronted with the threat of communism. Under these circumstances I was reluctant to mention my preoccupation in conversations with strangers.<sup>369</sup>

Survivors and an odd historian, it seemed, were the only ones interested in talking about the Holocaust (in English) until the sea change of 1961.

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<sup>366</sup> Quoted in Anita Shapira, "The Eichmann Trial: Changing Perspectives," in David Cesarani (ed.), *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and Holocaust Since 1961* (London: Routledge, 2005) 18-39, 23.

<sup>367</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961).

<sup>368</sup> There was a number of authors who wrote in Yiddish and Hebrew about the Holocaust and its aftermaths. See, for example, in addition to the already mentioned report by Rachel Auerbach, Joseph Gar, *Umkum fun der yiddisher Kovne* (Munich: Farband fun Litvishe Yidn in der Amerikaner Zone in Daytshland, 1948); Filip Fridman, *Oshvientshim* (Buenos Aires: Tsentral-farband fun Poylishe Yidn in Argentine, 1950); Mark Dworzecki, *Yerushalayim de-Lita be-meri uve-sho'ah* (Tel Aviv: Hotsa'at Mifleget po'ale Erets Yisra'el, 1951); and so on.

<sup>369</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 69-70.

Some scholars have argued, however, that it was not only societies in general that were not interested in hearing about or researching the Holocaust. Some Jewish institutions, according to this view, were invested in maintaining the “silence” around the topic of the Holocaust, and actively suppressed attempts at memorialization or discussion. In the American context, Peter Novick has argued that the Eichmann trial was “the first time that what we now call the Holocaust was presented to the American public as an entity in its own right, distinct from Nazi barbarism in general.”<sup>370</sup> But apart from the society at large, which perhaps did learn about the Holocaust as such for the first time, Novick has also claimed that major American Jewish organizations preferred to suppress the memory of the Holocaust because they feared that insistence on Jewish victimhood would hinder Jewish integration into American society.<sup>371</sup> It was only after 1967, the argument goes, with the combined effects of the rise of identity politics in America and turmoil in the Middle East, that organized American Jewry accepted the Holocaust as the important part of its identity.<sup>372</sup> While Novick’s account has received much attention, prominent scholars of American Jewish history have criticized it—in compelling ways—as flawed. “None of these books [i.e., those by Novick, Finkelstein, and Cole],” in the words of Hasia Diner,

rests on a solid base of empirical evidence, systematically and broadly gathered. This absence of data points to the linkage between their “scholarship” and their political agenda, one that is harshly critical of what they find offensive, inappropriate, misguided in contemporary Holocaust performances, let alone unaesthetic.<sup>373</sup>

In order to make their argument, according to Diner, these authors have silenced a

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<sup>370</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 133.

<sup>371</sup> Novick, *The Holocaust*, 63-123.

<sup>372</sup> Two other authors have made similar arguments, although they have put them forth more strongly and more cynically. See Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler; How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold* (New York: Routledge, 2000), and Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000). For criticism of these works, see below.

<sup>373</sup> Diner, “Before ‘The Holocaust,’” 21.

number of ways in which various Jewish individuals, families, communities, congregations, and schools framed, narrated, lamented and confronted the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath.<sup>374</sup>

Similarly, in the Israeli context, Idith Zertal has written about “years of organized silence” through the early 1960s, the period in which “the memory of the Holocaust [was] repressed” because of the Zionists’ decision to root the national myth about Israel in the distant past. “The State of Israel,” according to Zertal,

was, in its first, formative decade, a monument to selective amnesia and erasure of certain chapters in Jewish history that would have hindered its constituting effort and contradicted the state’s narrative of power and renewal.<sup>375</sup>

But while the official policy of the state may have been geared toward silencing the Holocaust, and while many of the 350,000 survivors (close to one third of the population of Israel at the time) did feel isolated in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, “[f]or many survivors,” according to Tom Segev, “telling their story seemed a patriotic duty...Each had a moral and historical obligation to preserve the memory of all the others.”<sup>376</sup>

Regardless of the political context and official state policies, then, survivors were telling their stories, and many felt a strong need and were doing their best to preserve the memory of their family members, relatives, and friends who had perished in Europe. Whether anyone was willing to listen, and whether state institutions regarded those stories, or the Holocaust as a whole, as relevant kinds of past, or as usable or even desirable, are related, but ultimately altogether different questions.

The third country in the post-World-War-II period with a sizable Jewish population—the Soviet Union—differed politically from Israel and the United States.

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<sup>374</sup> Diner, “Before ‘The Holocaust,’” 1-6.

<sup>375</sup> Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 93-94.

<sup>376</sup> Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Holt, 2000), 154-155.

Throughout the postwar period, and until its demise, there was, according to Zvi Gitelman, “a policy of repressing the Holocaust.”<sup>377</sup> It was reinforced by the fact that “conditions in the Soviet Union permitted neither [exploration of Jewish history]” nor open expression of Jewish national identity “until the late 1980s.”<sup>378</sup> We might still be missing a study on how individual Jews in the Soviet Union thought or spoke about the Holocaust, and how they struggled to preserve the memory of Jewish suffering in World War II. However, there is enough evidence to claim, as Gitelman does, that many Jews in the Soviet Union generally found the official marginalization of the Holocaust in public life personally offensive.<sup>379</sup> On the other hand, Ilya Ehrenburg’s and Vassily Grossman’s attempts to publish the *Black Book* of Soviet Jewry in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust testify that there indeed were attempts at writing about and memorializing the catastrophe, however cautious, diluted, or ultimately unsuccessful these attempts were.<sup>380</sup>

This knot of individual and collective needs for memorialization, official state policies, political contexts, and interests and agendas of Jewish institutions, invites a more detailed study of how these individual threads developed and came together in different settings. Rather than point to alleged political hypocrisies of Jewish organizations, and stress their “silencing” the memories of the Holocaust, we should pay

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<sup>377</sup> Zvi Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union,” in Zvi Gitelman (ed.), *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 14-42, 18.

<sup>378</sup> Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography,” 18.

<sup>379</sup> “Jews, especially younger ones, realized that a vital part of their recent history is being denied them. Hence, they felt that their worth and importance have been denigrated, their particular history and culture dismissed, and their claims to being discriminated against rejected.” Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography,” 15.

<sup>380</sup> For a brief history of the *Black Book*, see Gitelman, “Politics and the Historiography,” 19. The book was published in the United States in 1981. Ilya Ehrenburg and Vassily Grossman, *The Black Book: The Ruthless Murder of Jews by German-Fascist Invaders Throughout the Temporarily-Occupied Regions of the Soviet Union and In the Death Camps of Poland During the War of 1941-1945* (New York: Holocaust Publications, 1981).



more attention to the circumstances in which those very memories developed. Hasia Diner makes an important point in her article on early American Jewish “culture of commemoration”:

[P]ost-war American Jews had to create a culture of commemoration from scratch in the context of a global Jewish world which through the early 1960s lived with the aftershocks of the catastrophe. They had no precedent or example to follow as they took the steps towards creating ceremonies, texts, graphic images, and music to remember what had just transpired.<sup>381</sup>

Comparing these early commemoration attempts to those of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century is thus both anachronistic and disingenuous.<sup>382</sup> Instead, we should explore particular ways of commemoration that individual Jews and Jewish communities created in contexts that were wholly different from those in which the currently dominant forms of Holocaust commemoration have developed. In order to do so, we should understand the contemporaneous political and historical circumstances that shaped—to a large degree—those early Jewish attempts at commemoration.

The case of Yugoslavia is an interesting example of an early “culture of commemoration” of the Holocaust, and a good illustration of how to proceed with this research agenda. The campaign to dedicate five monuments to “Jewish victims of Fascism” and “Jewish fallen fighters” in Yugoslavia in 1952 illustrates well the process of the negotiation of political realities in socialist Yugoslavia, and the balancing of these possibilities with Jewish communal needs to commemorate the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In the early 1950s, the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia found a way to emphasize Jewish victimhood during World War II while conforming to fundamental postulates of Yugoslav socialist ideology, which, in principle, shunned ethnic particularism and favored—at that time—supranational Yugoslav

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<sup>381</sup> Diner, “Before ‘The Holocaust,’” 2.

<sup>382</sup> Diner, “Before ‘The Holocaust,’” 1.

identity. In embedding the story of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust (the word, of course, did not exist at the time) in the larger narrative of suffering of the Yugoslav peoples during the war, while maintaining distinctly Jewish motifs and foregrounding Jewish victimhood, and by embodying that particular vision of the past in the number of monuments and ceremonies, Jewish leaders did not “silence” or otherwise downplay the Holocaust. On the contrary, they found a way to create a “culture of commemoration,” to borrow the term from Diner, in circumstances in which they could rely on few precedents and no guidelines on how to proceed. They also—and this is no less important—inserted the narrative of Jewishness into the larger Yugoslav project, and defined the Jewish community of Yugoslavia as simultaneously properly Yugoslav and Jewish. As much as the monuments were conceived as physical embodiments of history of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, they were also meant to tell the story about belonging to the new Yugoslav state project.

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In Chapter IV, I outlined briefly the history of the Holocaust and World War II in Yugoslavia, and proceeded to show how a particular understanding of the history of the war served as a legitimating factor for the founding of the new socialist federal state. Before I analyze the 1952 monument dedication ceremonies, I will discuss briefly the history of Holocaust awareness in Yugoslavia. Like in many different contexts, it was the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem that presented the general population, for the

first time, with the magnitude and the realities of the Holocaust.<sup>383</sup>

Some haphazard stories about the Holocaust had reached the readers of Yugoslav newspapers earlier. The Belgrade daily *Politika*, for example, ran a feature, in 1956, about Eva Polaček, who was shot by the SS on a death march in January 1945, but survived miraculously and lived to return to Yugoslavia.<sup>384</sup> Although the informed reader could guess immediately that the main protagonist of the story was Jewish, by her name and brief biographical details provided in the article, the author of the text framed the story as “a curious experience of the Yugoslav Eva Polaček,” and never mentioned the wider context in which Ms. Polaček’s drama unfolded. While the text did mention Auschwitz, crematoria, and “the number 81083, which the Nazis tattooed [on her arm],” readers were informed neither of the main purpose of Auschwitz-Birkenau nor of the fate of millions of other victims who had been singled out for extermination, as Eva Polaček was, just because they were Jewish.<sup>385</sup> Several other Yugoslav newspapers published similar articles; the main thrust of these occasional texts was to foreground Yugoslav suffering during the war.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> The first edition of Anne Frank’s diary in Serbo-Croatian was published several years prior to the beginning of the Eichmann trial. *Dnevnik Ane Frank: Od 12. juna 1942. do 1. avgusta 1944.* (Belgrade: Nolit, 1956). Translated and edited by Zagorka Lilić. The book, however, remained on the margins until the late 1970s, when it became an important reading in elementary school curricula. Coverage of the Eichmann trial in the Yugoslav mass media, on the other hand, had immediate and much wider impact on the Yugoslav general public in the early 1960s.

<sup>384</sup> “Drugi put rođena,” *Politika* (28 October 1956).

<sup>385</sup> “Drugi put rođena.”

<sup>386</sup> See, for example, “Nenavaden muzej v Oswiecimu,” *Dnevnik* (Ljubljana) (20 July 1957); “U poseti logoru smrti Dahau,” *Svetlost* (4 July 1959); “Čovek—neka bude dobar: Zabeleženo u Buhenvaidu,” *Dnevnik* (Novi Sad) (1 November 1959); “Jedan dan u Buhenvaidu—logoru smrti,” *Vesti* (29 November 1959); and so on. An exception to this rule was the series of articles published over ten days in December 1959, on the specific topic of hiding of the Jews in occupied Belgrade from 1941 until 1944. “Bez žute trake,” *Večernje novosti* (14 to 24 December 1959). This series is virtually the only one that presented, very explicitly, the persecution and murder of the Jews in Serbia. The emphasis, however, was on the efforts of individual Belgraders to hide their Jewish friends (including Fridrih and Ruža Pops). Even so, these curious articles complicate somewhat the pre-/after Eichmann trial dichotomy that generally holds in the case of Yugoslavia.

The vocabulary changed significantly after the apprehension of Adolf Eichmann in Argentina. *Borba*, the official Party daily, reported in June 1960, a month after Eichmann was apprehended, that

[t]he Yugoslav public commends the news of the apprehension of Adolf Eichmann, and follows with full attention the preparations for bringing him to court. [Eichmann] is one of the biggest Nazi criminals, and the organizer of the extermination of six million European Jews. This interest [of the Yugoslav public] is all the greater as Eichmann, either personally or through his collaborators, coordinated the extermination of 60,000 Yugoslav Jews.

The peoples of Yugoslavia have not forgotten that the Nazis and their helpers exterminated tens of thousands of Jewish families in a very short time. Of 75,000 Jews living in Yugoslavia in April 1941, only 15,000 survived.<sup>387</sup>

The article then went on to describe, in broad strokes, how the murder of the Jews unfolded in Serbia, Macedonia, and Bačka. Within a month, an army organ, *Crvena zvezda*, ran an article linking Eichmann to crimes against the Jews in Croatia.<sup>388</sup> In the following months, newspapers and journals across the country published articles about Eichmann and his activities in Yugoslavia. Emphasis was put on the extermination of the Jews, and it is from this well-coordinated series of articles that Yugoslavs learned about the Holocaust. Standard Holocaust terms, such as Auschwitz, death camp, crematorium, “the Final Solution,” the six million, and similar ones that we take for granted today really entered the public realm in Yugoslavia only after the apprehension of Adolf Eichmann.

In contrast to earlier features on Nazi crimes, the articles focused explicitly on crimes against the Jews; they also, however, wrote about Yugoslav Jews as “our” Yugoslav victims, and stressed the instances of collaboration of local organs of government with the Nazis. Dailies and weeklies from Slovenia to Macedonia ran extensive articles about how the murder of the Jews unfolded in particular cities, regions,

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<sup>387</sup> “Ajhmanovi zločini u Jugoslaviji,” *Borba* (27 June 1960).

<sup>388</sup> “Ajhman odgovoran za zločine u Hrvatskoj,” *Crvena zvezda* (19 July 1960).

occupied territories and satellite states. The sheer number of these articles, their geographic distribution, and the stressing of common themes suggest that this was a well coordinated campaign, and that the decision to stress these issues was made at the high levels of Communist leadership. The goal of the articles was to simultaneously educate the public about the Nazi extermination project and how it was carried out in Yugoslavia, and to point an accusatory finger at high-profile collaborators—some of whom were still at large.

Articles stressing the general horrors of the Holocaust, although they did mention the Jews as the ultimate victims, emphasized the themes of man's inhumanity to man, and fostered the readers' fascination with evil. "The general public knows much less about the Auschwitz, or Oswiecim, concentration camp," announced a journalist of the Split daily *Slobodna Dalmacija*, "than it should, given the enormous number of those interned or exterminated in it."<sup>389</sup> A number of these articles introduced Yugoslav readers to the system of death camps, gas chambers and crematoria. "One should see Oswiecim," read the title of an article published in the Novi Sad daily *Dnevnik*; the camp was a place where, according to the author, "several million people gave up their hopes and joys."<sup>390</sup> The Zagreb daily *Vjesnik*, ran a series of articles providing details of the daily operations of the "Auschwitz hell."<sup>391</sup> Numerous other articles gave details of what was presented as the efficient Nazi plan of extermination in which millions of "people" perished across Nazi-occupied Europe.

More numerous than these universalist articles were the ones describing the murder of the Jews in Yugoslavia. Slavko Goldstein, the future president of the Jewish

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<sup>389</sup> "Proživio sam pakao," *Slobodna Dalmacija* (19 July 1960).

<sup>390</sup> "Treba videti Osvjencim," *Dnevnik* (8 January 1961).

<sup>391</sup> "Pakao Auschwitz," *Vjesnik* (5 to 18 February 1961).

community of Zagreb, authored a series of articles with the general title “Activities of Eichmann’s ‘Kommando’ in Yugoslavia,” published in the Zagreb weekly *Vjesnik u srijedu* from late January through March 1961.<sup>392</sup> These articles detailed the murders and deportations of the Jews from all parts of Yugoslavia—from NDH and Serbia to Vojvodina and Macedonia—and pointed to Eichmann’s role in these actions. The Belgrade edition of the Party daily *Borba* ran a similar series under the title “Eichmann’s Tentacles in Yugoslavia” in February.<sup>393</sup> At the very same time, the Novi Sad daily *Dnevnik* followed suit, with the general title of “In the Net of the Technician of Death: Yugoslav Documents on the Crimes of Adolf Eichmann.”<sup>394</sup> The Rijeka daily *Novi list* reprinted this series under the same title, but in *ijekavica* and the “Croatian” version of the language, and with several days’ delay.<sup>395</sup> The Skopje daily *Nova Makedonija* ran a series of articles on “The Tragedy of the Jews of Macedonia” in March.<sup>396</sup> *Dnevnik* ran another series, entitled “Death March,” about the fate of the Jews in Vojvodina, in April.<sup>397</sup> All these series and individual articles, cited here as representative of the large and synchronized campaign launched in the Yugoslav press to inform and educate the Yugoslavs about the crimes of Adolf Eichmann, spoke explicitly about the murder of the Jews.

The Yugoslav press, as could be expected, was mostly interested in covering those parts of the trial that related to Eichmann’s wartime activities in Yugoslavia. An important aspect of this interest, however, was the insistence on the connection between

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<sup>392</sup> “Djelatnost Eichmannove ‘Komande’ u Jugoslaviji,” *Vjesnik u srijedu* (January-March 1961).

<sup>393</sup> “Ajhmanovi pipci u Jugoslaviji,” *Borba* (February 1961).

<sup>394</sup> “U mreži tehničara smrti: Jugoslovenski dokumenti o zločinima Adolfa Ajhmana,” *Dnevnik* (February-March 1961).

<sup>395</sup> “U mreži tvorničara smrti: Jugoslavenski dokumenti o zločinima Adolfa Eichmanna,” *Novi list* (February-March 1961).

<sup>396</sup> “Трагедијата на Евреите од Македонија,” *Nova Makedonija* (March 1961).

<sup>397</sup> “Marš smrti,” *Dnevnik* (April 1961).

Eichmann's objectives (and those of Nazi Germany in general) regarding the extermination of the Jews, and local war criminals. Principal among those was Andrija Artuković (1899-1988), the Minister of the Interior of Pavelić's NDH, who at the time of the Eichmann trial was living in Los Angeles, out of reach of the Yugoslav authorities. The latter, however, made it their top priority to have Artuković extradited to Yugoslavia and put on trial there.<sup>398</sup> A report released by *Tanjug*, the official state news agency, just before the trial in Jerusalem began, and reprinted in the Belgrade daily *Politika*, well illustrates the kind of connection that the Yugoslav authorities sought to establish between Eichmann and Artuković:

[*Tanjug* has learned that] the Yugoslav authorities will hand over some additional documents that shed light on the activities of [Eichmann's] "department for Jewish affairs" on the territory of the so-called Independent State of Croatia to the Israeli authorities in Jerusalem, where the trial of the war criminal Adolf Eichmann will be held... In fact, the documents that have already been given [to the prosecution]—over forty in number—testify very clearly about grave crimes and the connection between Eichmann's apparatus and the *ustaša* police, which was led by the war criminal Andrija Artuković, Pavelić's minister of the interior.

Eichmann's men found in the *ustaše* the most dedicated collaborators for carrying out their racist actions, especially against the Jews. Artuković's *ustaša* police was authorized, through special instructions from Berlin, to carry out all assignments of the executive nature, a confidence granted by its Fascist superiors which it did not betray. The liquidation of the Jews on the territory of NDH was carried out in circumstances "different" from those in the other parts of Yugoslavia, supposedly in order to justify the "independence" of Pavelić's state project.<sup>399</sup>

In a similar vein, *Večer* from Maribor denounced the "collaboration of Eichmann and Artuković in the extermination of the Jews in the former 'Independent State of Croatia.'"<sup>400</sup> The Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje* pointed out that "Hitler's main thug found

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<sup>398</sup> Artuković was eventually arrested in California in November 1984, and extradited to Yugoslavia in early 1986. A Zagreb court sentenced him to death that same year, but the sentence was not carried out because of the defendant's ill health. Artuković died in a Zagreb prison in 1988. For more information on Artuković and the trial, see Đorđe Ličina, *Dossier Artuković* (Zagreb: Centar za informacije i publicitet, 1986); Jovo Popović, *Suđenje Andriji Artukoviću i što nije rečeno* (Zagreb: Stvarnost, 1986); Branimir Stanojević, *Ustaški ministar smrti: Anatomija zločina Andrije Artukovića* (Belgrade: Nova knjiga, 1985). Serbian revisionist nationalists continuously denounced the trial as a cover-up of NDH crimes against the Serbs.

<sup>399</sup> "Dokumenti o zločinačkoj delatnosti Ajhmana i Artukovića u FNRJ," *Politika* (8 April 1961).

<sup>400</sup> "Krvavo delo," *Večer* (8 April 1961).

in the *ustaša* police helpers who competed with their masters in bestiality.”<sup>401</sup> The special correspondent from the trial of the Belgrade daily *Večernje novosti* reported, under the title “Extermination—a joint undertaking of Eichmann and Artuković” about the testimony of a Yugoslav witness now living in Israel, which was “enough to testify to the soullessness of Pavelić’s minister of the interior.”<sup>402</sup>

In addition to establishing the link between the Nazi program of extermination of Jews and local collaborators, the Yugoslav press in this period also pursued the issue of forcible resettlement of Slovene civilians from the areas of Slovenia annexed by the *Reich* in 1941. In February 1961, *Politika* reported that the “Israeli state prosecutor charged Eichmann as directly responsible for the extermination of the Yugoslav Jews and the forcible resettlement of the Slovenes.”<sup>403</sup> Slovenian newspapers were especially interested in pursuing this issue, but reports about Eichmann’s responsibility for the forcible resettlement of Slovene civilians—as well as the details of this process—reached the Serbo-Croatian audiences across Yugoslavia through other newspapers.<sup>404</sup>

Of course, Eichmann’s organization of the extermination of the Jews—including his operations in the various parts of Yugoslavia—and the issues of collaboration of the *ustaša* state, or the forcible resettlement of a large number of Slovenes, have been well established. There is—and was, at the time these details emerged in the Yugoslav press—sufficient evidence to prove those charges. What is at issue here, however, is that while reports in the Yugoslav press did report in detail about Nazi crimes against the

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<sup>401</sup> “Ajhmanove čistke u Jugoslaviji,” *Oslobođenje* (12 February 1961).

<sup>402</sup> “Istrebjenje—zajednička akcija Ajhmana i Artukovića,” *Večernje novosti* (20 May 1961).

<sup>403</sup> “Ajhman optužen i za raseljavanje Slovenaca,” *Politika* (10 February 1961).

<sup>404</sup> See, for example, “Eichmann in Slovenci,” *Večer* (26 August 1960); “Na seznamu 260.000 Slovencev,” *Delo* (9 May 1961); “Nasilno iseljavanje Slovenaca,” *Oslobođenje* (15 February 1961); “Ajhman je dao uputstva za sprovođenje odluke o iseljavanju Slovenaca,” *Politika* (20 May 1961); and “Ajhman poriče odgovornost za hapšenje i deportovanje Slovenaca u Srbiju,” *Politika* (8 July 1961).



Jews, the main thrust of the campaign was the Yugoslav dimension of the suffering. Eichmann's Jewish victims from the various parts of Yugoslavia, according to my reading of these texts, were part of a larger Yugoslav group of victims. Eichmann was thus also responsible for the suffering of the Slovenes, and closely coordinated his actions with other criminal regimes, most notably NDH's *ustaša* police. As the *ustaša* state was considered (correctly) as a Nazi satellite state in the rhetoric of the Yugoslav Communists, it is easy to see how this attention to Eichmann's apprehension and subsequent trial served as a strong argument for the legitimacy of the new Yugoslav state. Full attention and description of crimes against the Jews, when the campaign is seen in this light, was necessary only to the extent to which it implicated anti-Communist collaborationist movements in Yugoslavia in "Eichmann's" (i.e. Nazi Germany's) larger Fascist project. In other words, the Eichmann trial validated the official Yugoslav version of history of the World War II: NDH was a Fascist satellite state, and Yugoslavs suffered greatly during World War II at the hands of Fascist occupiers and their local collaborators. The murder of the Jews as a separate narrative was used in order to connect the larger Nazi program of extermination in Europe with its local Yugoslav developments. As such, it served a political and didactic purpose at the time of the Eichmann trial, but, as a story, it did not warrant institutionalization: Yugoslavs could thus learn about details of Nazi extermination of the Jews in the press, even as their children were not taught about it at school.

## Early Yugoslav Jewish Discussions of Memorialization of Jewish Victims

While most Yugoslavs had to wait until the Eichmann trial to be informed about the extermination of the Jews in Europe and the suffering of their Jewish compatriots in their own country, the Jewish survivors knew about this all too well. Calls for some kind of commemoration of the Jewish victims came from survivors and returnees to Yugoslavia immediately after the war. Several memorials—impromptu, small monuments and plaques—were dedicated by several communities in Vojvodina, among them Subotica, Sombor, Stara Kanjiža and Senta, as early as 1947 and 1948.<sup>405</sup> Those were ad hoc, uncoordinated initiatives that were driven largely by the sense of obligation of the surviving Jews towards their murdered relatives and friends. Since the very survival of organized Jewish life in Yugoslavia was at stake due to the extremely grave economic situation of the Jews—which I discussed in the previous chapter—calls for memorialization of the Jewish catastrophe were not a top priority for the Jewish leaders in the country, even though most surviving Jews had lost relatives and friends during the war.

Already in 1947, however, at the first postwar conference of Jewish communities in Yugoslavia, the question of memorialization came up amidst more pressing economic and political issues. Several delegates raised the issue of remembering and commemorating Jewish victims. Nikola Santo, a delegate from Sombor, the community which had already shown initiative in this direction, appealed for the dedication of

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<sup>405</sup> Stenographic notes from the Fifth Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on 23 April 1950, JHM, PR, box 1197, “Peta konferencija SJOJ,” 11.

“monuments to those who perished at the hands of Fascism.”<sup>406</sup> Ruben Rubenović, a delegate from Belgrade, similarly suggested that “materials be collected in all towns about the victims, so that they be kept in memory, and [that it be known] that we suffered,” noting, in addition, that “we should especially remember the struggle against Fascism.”<sup>407</sup> In early 1948, a report by the Federation of Jewish Communities listed “monuments to the victims of Fascism” as one of the priorities for the coming year. “The Federation has received suggestions from many sides,” the report stated,

about the erection of monuments to the victims of Fascism, whether at the sites of execution or at the Jewish cemeteries of the communities whose members were deported to various extermination camps. The Executive Board of the Federation has considered this issue on many occasions, and it has decided to consult, through the communities, all members of our community, in order to propose the solution which will reflect our love and dedication to the victims of Fascism.<sup>408</sup>

The report went on to point out that “a monument was consecrated at the Jewish cemetery in Sombor,” and that a plaque with the names of 920 victims—“men, women, and children, members of the Sombor Jewish community killed by the Fascists in various death camps”—was dedicated in the presence of “the delegation of the Federation, representatives from other Jewish communities, local people’s authorities [*narodnih vlasti*] and member organizations of the Popular Front, as well as the Yugoslav Army.”<sup>409</sup>

The report also raised the issue of the 1200 bodies of Hungarian Jews killed during forced labor in the Yugoslav mine of Bor; the bodies started resurfacing from the shallow

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<sup>406</sup> Discussion of Nikola Santo, Stenographic notes from the First Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on March 29-30, 1947, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947,” no pagination.

<sup>407</sup> Discussion of Ruben Rubenović, Stenographic notes from the First Conference of the Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia, held on March 29-30, 1947, JHM, box 784, folder 11g, “Konferencija SJVOJ 1947,” no pagination.

<sup>408</sup> Untitled report by the Federation of Jewish Communities, JHM, unsorted, 17. The document is dated 2 January 1947; however, taking into consideration that the first sentence of the report reads “At the beginning of 1948, we deem it necessary and useful to review, even briefly, the activities of the Federation of Jewish Communities during the year 1947,” it is most likely that it is a mistake, and that the correct date is 2 January 1948.

<sup>409</sup> Untitled report by the Federation of Jewish Communities, dated 2 January 1948, JHM, unsorted, 18.

mass grave in which they had been buried due to severe weather conditions. Permanently solving this question was, according to the report, “a task which represents a debt of honor and piety towards our brethren, victims of Fascism.”<sup>410</sup> In the summer of 1948, the Jewish community of Subotica invited representatives from Jewish communities across Yugoslavia to attend the dedication of a monument to the Jews of Subotica who had perished during the war. “We, the remnants of the once large Jewish community of Subotica,” read the invitation, “consider as our most sacred duty to preserve, in an appropriate way, the memory of the killed and the missing friends. We have built a public monument which we will unveil in Subotica.”<sup>411</sup>

Related to the issue of commemoration was the question of Jewish cemeteries in Yugoslavia. Many communities were too poor to maintain existing cemeteries; other communities—and cemeteries—had been destroyed. The regional conference of the Jewish communities from Vojvodina, held in Subotica in October 1950, debated, among other things, the question of how to solve the issue of cemeteries, which was especially critical in Vojvodina. Cemeteries were proof of the history of Jewish life in Yugoslavia, and as such were very important; they were also often sites of mass murder and thus crucial as sites of commemoration and remembrance.<sup>412</sup> The conference charged the

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<sup>410</sup> Untitled report by the Federation of Jewish Communities, dated 2 January 1948, JHM, unsorted, 18.

<sup>411</sup> Letter no. 702/1948, dated 10 August 1948, JHM, box k68.

<sup>412</sup> See discussions of Nikola Santo, Nikola Halbror, Eugen Hercl and Mirko Gutman, Minutes from the Regional Conference in Subotica held on 21 October 1950, JHM, PR 1197. The conference coincided with the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the Subotica Jewish community. Official celebrations followed the conference and were held the next day. The report from the celebrations, attached to the minutes of the conference, and most probably intended to inform Jewish communities across Yugoslavia about the celebrations, deserves to be quoted in full, as it brings to life the curious reality of early postwar Jewish life in the country:

“On October 22, 1950, a celebration was held on the occasion of the 175th anniversary of the Jewish community in Subotica.

At 10 o'clock in the morning, services were held in the Great Synagogue. In attendance were 150 persons, representatives of the Federation and the Jewish communities, as well as members of the Subotica community.

Executive Committee of the Federation to inquire into possible solutions of the problem of Jewish cemeteries, suggesting that cemeteries that could not be maintained, due either to disappearance of communities that had sustained them or the lack of funds, be “liquidated” and turned into monuments.<sup>413</sup> Such monuments, according to this suggestion, would testify to the history of Jewish life in the area, and would inform the public, via plaques, both about Jewish suffering during the war and that a particular site used to be a Jewish cemetery.<sup>414</sup>

Jewish discussions about appropriate ways of commemorating the Jewish victims of the war thus commenced as soon as the material circumstances for Jewish survival in the new country were secured. Although the Federation of Jewish Communities did not initially consider commemoration a priority—since it was busy organizing the relief

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Mr. Moshe Ishay, the plenipotentiary of the State of Israel in our country, attended the ceremony with his wife.

The priest [sic] Mojse Trilnik, sang a psalm, while the choir sang other church [sic] songs.

The president of the Jewish community in Subotica gave a speech, in Hungarian, about the role and the development of the community in the last 175 years.

This event was finished at 10:45.

At 11 o'clock, in the conference hall of the Jewish community, which was decorated by flags of Yugoslavia and the Communist Party, and the picture of comrade Tito, as well as the flag of the State of Israel and the picture of Theodor Herzl, the president of the community, Dr. Zoltan Lorant, opened the festive session of the community. He warmly welcomed Albert Vajs, president of the Federation, Lavoslav Kadelburg, president of the Autonomous Relief Committee, Bencion Levi, president of the Belgrade community, representatives of other Jewish communities, as well as citizens.

He especially welcomed Dr. Stevan Braun, the representative of the Subotica city council.

Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel, Dr. Moshe Ishay and his wife, were likewise greeted warmly.

After these greetings, the member of the Jewish community in Subotica, Dr. J. Volf, gave a speech about the importance of the Subotica community in the past and today. Before the speech, he greeted, in Hebrew, the Israeli plenipotentiary and the young State of Israel.

Dr. Stevan Braun addressed the celebration in the name of the city council.

Our president Albert Vajs greeted today's gathering and offered several reflections on today's role of the Jewish community, as well as the participation of the members of our community in the building of the State of Israel. He also underscored the strong and friendly connections between our country and the State of Israel.

The president of the Belgrade community, Bencion Levi, greeted the gathering as well.

Dr. Moshe Ishay, the Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel, gave a speech as well.

The president of the community, Dr. Zoltan Lorant, read at the end a passage from the circular letter sent by the Federation, about the tasks and the role of the Jewish community in the present time.

This wonderful celebration ended with ha-Tikvah [Israeli national anthem].”

<sup>413</sup> Minutes from the Regional Conference in Subotica held on 21 October 1950, JHM, PR 1197, 9.

<sup>414</sup> Minutes from the Regional Conference in Subotica held on 21 October 1950, JHM, PR 1197, 9.

effort and the *aliyot*—individual members and communities succeeded in putting this question on the Jewish political agenda. From the very beginning, the issue of commemoration had been dominated by two determining features. The first one was that Jewish victims were perceived to be victims of “Fascists” (Hungarian, Croatian, Bulgarian, etc.). The second one was that Jewish cemeteries—often the sites of destruction, but also symbols of Jewish presence in the country—became important in the process of commemoration.

### 1952: The Five Monuments

In early August 1952, the Federation of Jewish Communities announced its plan to dedicate monuments “to the Jewish victims of fascism in five places in Yugoslavia,” and sent invitation letters to a number of Jewish organizations abroad, all three executive branches of the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund, the American Jewish Congress, as well as the associations of Yugoslav Jewish immigrants in Israel and the United States.<sup>415</sup> Apart from Jewish organizations abroad and representatives of Yugoslav Jews, the letter stated,

non-Jewish public in this country will be also widely represented at these ceremonies, ranging from high representatives of the Yugoslav civil authorities and the Yugoslav Army to the representatives of large social organizations and various associations, as also a great number of prominent representatives of public and cultural life of this country. The Israeli Legation in Belgrade will represent the State of Israel [English in the original].<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003.

<sup>416</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003, 2. The Federation invited Yugoslavia’s highest politicians to attend the ceremonies, including Tito and Moša Pijade. Although the latter two did not personally appear at the events, the ceremonies were attended by

The goal of the dedication ceremonies, according to the letter, was manifold:

We should like, indeed, to make these ceremonies a manifestation of the life and efforts of the small Jewish community in Yugoslavia, which to-day comprises only about 6,500 persons, in total (about 8,000 emigrated 1948-1952 to Israel under very good circumstances), but leads an active Jewish life in the very friendly Yugoslav environment, and whose life and work you will best be able to learn on this occasion. We should also like to make these ceremonies a manifestation of our friendly relations with the Jewish world at large, which we persistently and increasingly cultivate, the Jewish organizations which had also much helped us to rebuild and promote our small community after the unprecedented [sic] tragedy that had befallen us during the last war. Finally, we should like this to be also a manifestation of general Jewish solidarity and piety towards the our 60,000 victims, the 80% of the pre-war number of Yugoslav Jews, to whom these monuments are dedicated [English in the original].<sup>417</sup>

The ceremonies, in other words, were going to demonstrate the community's success in rebuilding Jewish life in the country, and full integration into "the very friendly Yugoslav environment."

In addition to the ceremonies themselves, the two weeks in late August and early September were going to feature several other watershed events. The Federation was going to open a central Jewish Historical Museum in Belgrade, "relating to the history of Jews in Yugoslav countries, covering the period from the first beginnings about 2,000 years ago up to the present days."<sup>418</sup> The sixth conference of Jewish communities was going to take place in Belgrade, coinciding with the events of the unveiling of the monument there; one of the most important resolutions of the conference was going to be the announcement of a campaign to collect funds for a "Forest of Martyrs" to be planted in Israel as a living memorial for the murdered Yugoslav Jews.<sup>419</sup> Finally, the Federation was going to publish a "documentary book on the crimes of the fascist occupants and

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Yugoslav state representatives from all levels. For letters of invitation, see JHM, box JIM, unsorted; and JHM, box k67.

<sup>417</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003, 2-3.

<sup>418</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003, 3.

<sup>419</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003, 3.

their treacherous collaborators against the Jews in Yugoslavia from 1941 till 1945.”<sup>420</sup>

Displaying success in rebuilding Jewish communities, while emphasizing good relations with state officials and the Yugoslav public, however, were not goals in themselves. Rather, the leaders of the Federation realized that after waves of emigration to Israel that further diminished the number of Jews in the country, and the relative economic recovery of the communities, the remaining communities needed a new framework for Jewishness in Yugoslavia. Seven years after the Liberation, problems that the Jews faced in the country were neither economic nor properly political: the Federation had organized a successful relief campaign, and state institutions and the Yugoslav population in general did not seem opposed to the activities of the Jewish communities. The problem, as the Jewish leaders in the Federation perceived it, was, rather, that the communities did not have a sufficiently “Jewish” framework that would provide a basis for Jewish identification. I will investigate the question of the “last generation of Yugoslav Jewry,” debated among the Jews in Yugoslavia and Yugoslav Jews abroad, in the next chapter; suffice it to say here that the leadership of the Federation sought to build a symbolic foundation—in the absence of a Jewish demographic core and tradition, both obliterated in the Holocaust, and religious

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<sup>420</sup> Albert Vajs and Solomon Kalderon to JDC, 8 August 1952, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #1003, 4. The book that was eventually published is the already cited book edited by Zdenko Levental (ed.), *Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji* (Belgrade: Savez jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije, 1952). The book received prominent official attention, and was reviewed in a journal published by the Institute for International Politics and Economics, affiliated with the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The reviewer argued that the “book represents an invaluable historical document, a monument to the dark age of Hitlerite medieval vandalism... It is the indictment...not only of Hitlerite darkness...but also of new dark forces, whether they be the old forces of Fascism rearing their ugly head in West Germany...or their brethren in the USSR and its satellites, where a new witch hunt is waged, by well-tested infamous Hitlerite methods, against those same innocent Jews, decimated in the last war.” Vera Nikolova, “Zločini fašističkih okupatora i njihovih pomagača protiv Jevreja u Jugoslaviji,” *Međunarodni problemi*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January-March 1953), 128-130, 128. The author thus used the review to distance Yugoslavia from both the Soviet Union and “reactionary forces” in the West. She ended the review quoting Albert Vajs from the introduction to the book, where he stated that “nowhere have war criminals and traitors been dealt with so strictly and justly as in our country.” Nikolova, “Zločini,” 130.



observance as both increasingly marginalized and shunned upon by the state—for a Jewish life in Yugoslavia.

The dedication of the monuments was just such a symbolic foundation. In 1951, the Federation approached JDC for financial assistance. Even after the official end of the JDC-funded ARC relief operation in 1950, JDC expressed readiness to continue to support the activities of the Federation, and the Federation asked JDC for financial aid for its project to build the monuments.<sup>421</sup> Several other projects were mentioned in the proposal, but the monuments project was the only one about which there was some debate between the Federation leaders and JDC representatives. When, at a meeting in Paris in December 1951, a JDC representative remarked that the monuments project could be financed only from leftover funds—i.e., that JDC did not see the monuments as a priority—Albert Vajs and Lavoslav Kadelburg, according to that representative, “spiritedly defended these aims saying that they are trying to maintain a conscious Jewish community.”<sup>422</sup> Vajs and Kadelburg stressed that the monuments, together with the publication of the monograph about crimes against the Jews, were meant “to keep the Jews who remain in Yugoslavia, even if only temporarily, united around vital issues.”<sup>423</sup> In other words, Vajs and Kadelburg considered the monuments as crucial in building a basis for Jewishness in Yugoslavia in the new circumstances. However, JDC would not budge, and Vajs and Kadelburg eventually “fully appreciated that it would not be fair to

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<sup>421</sup> Charles Jordan, “Memorandum for the Files on Discussions with Drs. Vajs and Kadelberg from Yugoslavia,” 28 December 1951, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #999.

<sup>422</sup> Charles Jordan, “Memorandum for the Files on Discussions with Drs. Vajs and Kadelberg from Yugoslavia,” 28 December 1951, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #999, 2.

<sup>423</sup> Charles Jordan, “Memorandum for the Files on Discussions with Drs. Vajs and Kadelberg from Yugoslavia,” 28 December 1951, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #999, 2.

ask JDC to provide funds for such activities.”<sup>424</sup>

The lack of JDC funds did not prevent the Federation from proceeding to plan the dedication of the monuments. Individual Jewish communities started appealing to their members and former members in Israel and the United States to contribute funds for monuments as part of their regular contributions to the upkeep of cemeteries, as it was decided from the very beginning that the monuments were going to be located in Jewish cemeteries.<sup>425</sup> In turn, the Federation appealed to the broader Yugoslav public for help for the monuments, and received contributions from individuals and organizations—trade unions, factories, other companies—from across Yugoslavia.<sup>426</sup> It remains unclear how these organizations were approached, as the campaign was not publicized before the actual ceremonies of the late summer of 1952. It is probable, however, that the leaders of the Federation appealed to their contacts in the high echelons of the federal government, who may have “asked” for contributions from a wide array of individuals and institutions. The sums received from these contributions were not vast, but they eventually secured the success of the campaign, and demonstrated, in practice, the acceptability of the project to the Yugoslav authorities.

Both the Federation and individual Jewish communities—especially those that were going to host the ceremonies and dedicate monuments in their cities—understood the ceremonies as watershed events, vitally important for reaffirming Jewish life in Yugoslavia. “Let this monument that we erect in memory of victims and fallen fighters

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<sup>424</sup> Charles Jordan, “Memorandum for the Files on Discussions with Drs. Vajs and Kadelberg from Yugoslavia,” 28 December 1951, AJDC, collection #45/54, file #999, 2.

<sup>425</sup> Especially active in this respect was the Jewish community in Zagreb. For correspondence with individuals and Yugoslav Jewish organizations abroad about the upkeep of the Mirogoj cemetery in Zagreb and funding the monument project, see JHM, box k67 and JHM, box 719, “ŽO Zagreb.”

<sup>426</sup> For copies of receipts issued to various contributors, see JHM, JIM, unsorted.

be the symbol of our suffering and the symbol of victory of new life,” read the announcement of May 1, 1952, by the Sarajevo Committee for the Erection of the Monument to Jewish Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Fascism.<sup>427</sup> The Zagreb community invited its members to participate as much as possible in all ceremonies, not just the one in Zagreb:

[We] believe that you will unconditionally attend our ceremonies and thus express our solidarity and joint piety. Although the monuments will be unveiled at different sites, all those victims are our joint victims, and therefore we believe that the entire Jewish community in Yugoslavia should participate in the ceremonies as widely as possible.<sup>428</sup>

The Novi Sad community also invited—“as an honor and a fraternal responsibility”—representatives of other Yugoslav communities to attend the ceremonies in Novi Sad.<sup>429</sup> The ceremonies were thus considered uniquely important: they were going to commemorate the victims, but also, as the Sarajevo announcement proclaimed, reaffirm the new life that Jews lived in Yugoslavia after the Liberation. They would also unite all Yugoslav Jewish communities in commemorating their victims and fallen fighters.

Because the events were considered so important, the Federation suspended its routine activities. “Tasks and activities regarding the ceremonies and the conference have absolute priority. Other tasks should be attended to only if they are absolutely urgent,” read one of the instructions that Albert Vajs gave to the employees of the Federation office in Belgrade before leaving for a two-week trip to attend the ceremonies.<sup>430</sup> Clearly, over the two weeks in late August and early September 1952, both the Federation and individual Jewish communities focused their work and resources on the success of the ceremonies and accompanying events.

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<sup>427</sup> “Proglas Odbora za podizanje spomenika Jevrejima palim borcima i žrtvama fašizma—Sarajevo,” JHM, PR, box 1149.

<sup>428</sup> “Našim općinarima,” letter dated 20 August 1952, JHM, box 67.

<sup>429</sup> Circular letter no. 5419, 21 August 1952, JHM, box 67.

<sup>430</sup> “Potsetnici i uputstva,” 27 August 1952, JHM, JIM, unsorted.

The dedication ceremonies and the monuments themselves reflected the dual goals of the Federation—the commemoration of specifically Jewish victims of the war in the context of confirmation of the officially revered legacies of the “struggle for national liberation” (*narodnooslobodilačka borba*) and “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo-jedinstvo*). Monuments were thus meant to commemorate both the “Jewish victims of Fascism” and “Jewish fallen fighters,” in accordance with the ritual mode of commemoration of World War II that was being established in Yugoslavia at the time, and which I outlined earlier in this chapter. The monument in Belgrade, for example, was dedicated to “Jewish victims of Fascism and fallen fighters from the People’s Republic of Serbia” (figs. 6.1 to 6.5); the monument in Zagreb was similarly dedicated to “Jewish fighters fallen in the struggle for liberation of the peoples of Yugoslavia and to Jews victims of Fascism” (figs. 6.6 to 6.8); and the one in Sarajevo commemorated “Jewish fallen fighters and victims of Fascism of Bosnia-Hercegovina” (figs. 6.9 to 6.12).<sup>431</sup> The monuments in Đakovo and Novi Sad conformed to this pattern as well. In

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<sup>431</sup> Another curious strategy through which the Sarajevo monument rendered the Jewish victims and “fallen fighters” into patriotic Yugoslavs was a quote from a canonic 19th-century “Yugoslav” text (canonic both before and after World War II), *Gorski vijenac* (“Mountain wreath”) by a Montenegrin ruler Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851). On the occasion of one-hundredth anniversary of the publication of the epic, in 1947, an article in the Montenegrin daily, *Pobjeda*, explained why it was important: “*The Mountain Wreath* has played a gigantic role in the patriotic and martial upbringing of our younger generations over the past 100 years. This role is no smaller today. Quite the reverse. The War for National Liberation, the most difficult and the most glorious period in the history of our peoples brought it closer to us than it had ever been. Tito’s generation embodies, in new conditions and in broader fashion, those very qualities of our people which were the key factor in all their triumphs, those qualities that are sung, with unheard of poetic strength, in *The Mountain Wreath*: self-sacrifice, heroism, the refusal to give in, and the noble hatred of enemies of and traitors to the fatherland, the highest conscience and answerability to the people and history. That is why, during the course of the War of National Liberation, the verses of *The Mountain Wreath* sounded like a password on the lips of our fighters, and they could achieve their heroic feats... which enabled the realization of the ideals of national freedom and a better life. That is why when we read *The Mountain Wreath* today we see in its heroes the same qualities we see in the heroes of our war of national liberation. Those same people who perfectly developed and completed the struggle for national liberation, fulfilled the ideals and dreams of the great Njegoš and the heroes of *The Mountain Wreath*. That is why *The Mountain Wreath* is today a true textbook of patriotism for today’s and future generations. That is why we celebrate its hundredth anniversary not only as the most important cultural event of the new Yugoslavia, not only as a confirmation of a new attitude toward great people and events from our past, but

addition to inscriptions in Serbo-Croatian, all monuments featured inscriptions in Hebrew. While those inscriptions were slightly different in their word choices from the Serbo-Croatian originals, there was no substantive difference in the meaning between the messages conveyed in two languages: both explicitly reinforced the framework and the revered heritage of *narodnooslobodilačka borba*.<sup>432</sup>

The monuments did, however, feature Jewish motifs that were immediately recognizable to Jews, and that invoked cultural connotations that were of an entirely different order than those provided by the discourses of “victims of Fascism” and “fallen fighters.” The main feature of the Zagreb monument, for example, was a larger-than-life statue of Moses holding the tablets—allegedly with the ten commandments, although only two of them (“Thou shalt not kill” and “Thou shalt not steal”) were carved across them in Serbo-Croatian (figs. 6.6 and 6.7). The Belgrade monument prominently displayed a menorah and a star of David, in addition to the Hebrew acronym “תנצבה”—“תהי נפשו צרורה בצרור החיים,” a gravestone formula that is routinely translated into English as “may his soul be bound in the bonds of eternal life” (figs. 6.1, 6.2, and 6.5). And the monument in Sarajevo was built as a tombstone, but with stone blocks that resembled those of the Western Wall in Jerusalem (fig. 6.9). In addition, the Sarajevo monument

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as a true national holiday.” Quoted in Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, 143-144. For a history of *The Mountain Wreath* and its canonical status, see Wachtel, *Making a Nation*, especially 45-51, 102-107, 142-146. What is conspicuously missing from the values of the struggle for national liberation that *The Mountain Wreath* supposedly exhibits is brotherhood and unity; it could, however, hardly be otherwise, since one of the books of the epic is literally called “The Extermination of the [Muslim] Converts” (*Istraga poturica*). This particular book demonstrates the virtues of religious and ethnic purity. How a work open to interpretations that are so radically different from official ones could make it into the canon in early Socialist Yugoslavia—it is a canonic text in Serbia today, where official historiography demonizes that period of history—could be an interesting research question.

<sup>432</sup> The only substantial difference between the texts was in the case of the Zagreb monument. While the Serbo-Croatian inscription mentioned the “struggle of the peoples of Yugoslavia” and “Jewish victims of Fascism,” the Hebrew version explicitly commemorated Jewish fighters and victims from Croatia. Although we can only speculate about reasons for this difference, it is likely that a memorial with a Serbo-Croatian inscription that mentioned “victims of Fascism in Croatia” would inevitably raise the question of Serbian victims—an unwelcome political question that was explained in Chapter IV.

prominently listed names of death camps in the Third Reich in addition to camps and places of execution in Yugoslavia (fig. 6.9); while the rationale for this was that the Jews from Bosnia-Herzegovina perished in all those camps, this feature of the monument also connected local Jewish suffering to the wider tragedy of the Holocaust. These features, none of which would have been understood with all cultural connotations by non-Jews—with the exception of the star of David, which would immediately be recognized as “Jewish”—were meant to stress the Jewishness of the victims, and reinforce the Jewish character of the monuments, even as most of their Jewish connotations escaped non-Jewish audiences. The monuments thus simultaneously conveyed two different cultural contexts—one compatible with the reigning ideological mode of commemoration of World War II, fully and literally translatable into Hebrew, the language of the new Jewish culture; and one more elusive, and accessible only to those familiar with Jewish culture and tradition.

In this sense, the monuments were a good example of the phenomenon that Naomi Seidman describes in the introduction to her work on Jewish translation.<sup>433</sup> Just as the different cultural universes that commemorative inscriptions in French and Hebrew were meant to invoke as a prelude to one of Levinas’s essays—one in French conforming to the French universalist discourse about the inhumanity of the Holocaust, and one in Hebrew invoking the commemorative forms of Jewish liturgy—the Jewish motifs of the monuments reinforced the difference between the stories of victimhood under Fascism and the struggle for national liberation on the one hand, and the implicit story of Jewish

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<sup>433</sup> Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

suffering and victimhood free of ideological lip service to Yugoslavia on the other.<sup>434</sup> It was the latter story—the untold, but very present narrative of the Jewish tragedy—that was the core of the monument campaign. It provided those “vital issues,” to go back to Vajs’s and Kadelburg’s “spirited” defense of the idea of the monuments, around which the Jews of Yugoslavia could unite and function as a truly Jewish community.

It is important to understand, however, that it was the ideological framework of official modes of commemoration of World War II that provided the basis and the very possibility for the monuments in the first place. The narratives of *narodnooslobodilačka borba* and *bratstvo-jedinstvo*—as well as the value of federalism, confirmed by explicit references in the monuments’ inscriptions to Yugoslav republics from which the victims and the fighters came—were indeed acceptable to large numbers of Jews in Yugoslavia, many of whom had survived precisely because of their participation in the Partisan struggle. That is why those ideological narratives were fully translatable into Hebrew in the monument inscriptions; awkward translations aside—one thinks of “People’s Republic of Serbia” rendered as רפובליקה העממית סרביה—these inscriptions officially marked the commemorated victims and fallen fighters as Jewish (in Serbo-Croatian and Hebrew, a Jewish language), and integrated them symbolically into the story of the new Yugoslavia. But what was considered Jewish in the eyes of the authorities was not enough to provide a full basis for a new pattern of Jewish identification; for this reason, the monuments told another story, meant to be understood only by Jews, a story whose focus was on Jewish suffering free of ideological frameworks.

The monuments to the “Jewish victims of Fascism” in Yugoslavia thus had two different layers of Jewish associations. One, official, simply explicitly identified the

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<sup>434</sup> Seidman, *Faithful Renderings*, 29-30.

victims and fallen fighters as “Jewish”; the other provided the surviving Jewish communities with a basis for identification that was connected to a broader Jewish narrative. In this sense, the monuments were a rare occurrence in Europe in the early 1950s. Even where there were monuments to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the early 1950s, they would either not feature Jewish motifs, or would be couched in the language of the “victims of Fascism,” and the Jewishness of the victims was omitted altogether. The most extreme example of this was the monument at the site of Babi Yar in the Soviet Union (today in the Ukraine); it commemorated "Soviet citizens and POWs shot by German fascists at Babi Yar," and displayed no Jewish motifs. Whoever did not know that it was the site where the Nazis had murdered more than 30,000 Jews in just two days was not going to learn that from visiting the monument, which was dedicated only in the 1970s.

One important caveat regarding the monuments in Yugoslavia, however, is that they were located in the Jewish cemeteries. They were thus removed from the full view of the general Yugoslav public. They were located at the periphery. Monuments to general, unnamed “victims of Fascism” and “fallen fighters” were being built across Yugoslavia, in central locations in cities, towns, and villages. Monuments to Jewish victims, however, because they commemorated a specific ethnic group, could not vie for those locations. But since their primary importance for the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia lay in their potential to rally the remaining Jews in the country around a new basis for Jewish identification, their placement at Jewish cemeteries was not a drawback; on the contrary, ritual commemorations that developed over the years around these monuments only confirmed their Jewish character. Even as the legacies of



*narodnooslobodilačka borba* were being confirmed, the Jewish context of the cemeteries secured the Jewish character of the ceremonies.

The dedication ceremonies, however, contrary to the later annual commemorations, were very visible to the general Yugoslav public. They were widely covered by the press across Yugoslavia. The numerous articles stressed predictable themes: it was only in Yugoslavia that there was a resistance movement led by the Party in which the Jews could participate freely and as equal members; the Stalinist purges with open antisemitic overtones in the Soviet satellites were reminiscent of the Nazi persecution of the Jews; Jews finally felt free and equal in the new Yugoslavia, in which the national question was solved; numerous international Jewish delegations in attendance testified to this fact, as did the presence of state representatives and the general public at the ceremonies.<sup>435</sup> The monuments and the ceremonies, then, also had an important role apart from their “Jewish” mission: they were staged not only as commemorative events, but also celebrations of the new Yugoslav project. In the difficult times of the developing Cold War and the aftermath of the break with the Stalinist Soviet bloc, the ceremonies presented the Yugoslav Communists with a modest opportunity to illustrate Yugoslavia’s uniqueness and the success of its independent international politics.

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<sup>435</sup> See, for example, “Dosad je podignuto 12 spomenika 60.000 poginulih Jevreja,” *Politika* (25 August 1952); “Svečanosti povodom otkrivanja spomenika Židovima palim u NOB-i,” *Vjesnik* (25 August 1952); “Spomenik Židovima palim u NOB-i,” *Vjesnik* (18 August 1952); “Spomenik Židovima—žrtvama fašizma,” *Narodni list* (21 August 1952); “Otkrivanje spomenika Jevrejima—žrtvama fašizma,” *Borba* (27 August 1952); “Svečano je otkriven spomenik palim Židovima—žrtvama fašističkog terora,” *Riječki list* (29 August 1952); “U nedjelju će se otkriti spomenik židovskim žrtvama fašizma u Đakovu,” *Glas Slavonije* (29 August 1952); “Svečano otkrivanje spomenika palim Židovima—žrtvama fašističkog terora,” *Narodni list* (30 August 1952); “Otkriven spomenik Jevrejima—palim borcima i žrtvama fašizma,” *Slobodna Vojvodina* (2 September 1952); “Svečano otkrivanje spomenika žrtvama fašizma i palim jevrejskim borcima Srbije,” *Politika* (5 September 1952); “Otkrivanje spomenika Jevrejima—palim borcima i žrtvama fašizma u Sarajevu,” *Oslobođenje* (10 September 1952); “Svečano otkrivanje spomenika Jevrejima—palim borcima i žrtvama fašizma,” *Oslobođenje* (12 September 1952); etc.

Mass non-Jewish attendance at the ceremonies and the participation of foreign delegations, as well as those of Yugoslav state authorities from all levels, infused the events with an air of political importance. Programs of commemoration, not surprisingly, were thus planned in accordance with protocols that almost seemed diplomatic. The Zagreb community, for example, planned the three days of the ceremonies in Zagreb as a high-profile political event. The monument was going to be unveiled at the Jewish cemetery on the first day (August 28, 1952); after a religious ceremony followed by a performance of the Jewish community choir, a ceremonial unit of the Yugoslav People's Army was going to fire an artillery salute. Several speeches were going to follow—by

the president of the Jewish community, a representative of the government, a representative of the Federation [of Jewish Communities], representatives of organizations, associations, foreign and domestic delegates and well-known public personalities...The performance of the choir will end the ceremony.

That same evening, a recital was going to take place in a local Zagreb theater. The following day (August 29, 1952), members of the Zagreb Jewish community were invited to meet with various delegates from "Israel and abroad," as well as those from Yugoslavia, at a formal reception. The morning of the last day of ceremonies (August 30, 1952) was reserved for a reception by the "highest representatives of the people's government [*narodnih vlasti*]." <sup>436</sup>

The dedication ceremony in Novi Sad similarly included speeches by Albert Vajs, Franja Fišer, president of the Jewish community, Đuro Đerić, a representative of the Novi Sad People's Council, Zvi Loker, First Secretary of the Embassy of Israel in Yugoslavia, and Meir Weltmann from the Association of Yugoslav Immigrants in Israel. The ceremony also included a Jewish religious ceremony, an artillery salute, and the

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<sup>436</sup> Program of the ceremonies in Zagreb is from the invitation letter sent by the Jewish community of Zagreb to Kata Pejnović, Vice-President of the Presidium of the Assembly [*Sabor*] of the People's Republic of Croatia (20 August 1952), JHM, box k67, 2.

performance of the Yugoslav and Israeli national anthems.<sup>437</sup> The ceremonies in Belgrade, taking place over one entire week, included the screening of the first Yugoslav film about the camp at Jasenovac, visits to the newly opened Jewish museum and the Jewish kindergarten, a reception by the authorities, the ceremonial opening of the conference of Jewish communities and plenary events with all the foreign and domestic delegates, etc.<sup>438</sup> The events around the dedication ceremonies were thus planned almost as high-profile political events: they included ceremonial events such as receptions with high representatives of the government, artillery salutes fired by units of the Yugoslav People's Army, and receptions and talks with foreign delegations. This high-profile treatment of the ceremonies by both the Federation of Jewish Communities and the Yugoslav press is illustrative of the importance both the Jewish communities and the Yugoslav media—for different reasons—assigned to these events.

Speeches at the ceremonies reflected the dual goal that the monument campaign was going to accomplish. At the dedication of the Zagreb monument, Albert Vajs stressed that the five monuments that the Jewish communities in Yugoslavia were dedicating were not the first of their kind; however,

while the monuments erected so far have been of only local significance, these five that we are building and unveiling now are of greater and more central importance, because they are being erected in the seats of the People's Republics, in memory of Jews from entire regions of our country.<sup>439</sup>

By commemorating specifically Jewish victims and fighters, Vajs continued,

we never and in no sense wanted to separate them from other victims and fighters... Victims of the Yugoslav Jewish community... can be separated neither from the two million other sons and daughters of Yugoslavia, nor from the six million victims of the

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<sup>437</sup> "Redosled programa prilikom osvećenja spomenika," undated, JHM, PR, box 1197.

<sup>438</sup> "Program svečanosti u Beogradu," undated, JHM, JIM, unsorted. The documentary film, *Jasenovac*, directed by Gustav Gavrin, was produced by the Yugoslav state in 1945, and is one of the first films on any camp in Europe. It is a 16-minute compilation of footage about life and death in the camp at Jasenovac.

<sup>439</sup> "Govor dr. Alberta Vajsa, predsjednika Saveza jevrejskih opština FNRJ (glavni sadržaj)," dated 28 August 1952, JHM, PR, box 1197.

Jewish people... Even though this monument [commemorates] specifically Jewish victims and fallen fighters from Croatia, it is also a monument to all other victims and fighters.<sup>440</sup>

And those victims and all that suffering was not in vain:

From the temporarily dismembered Yugoslavia, which the criminals wanted to enslave once again, a new socialist Yugoslavia emerged by the power and will of its peoples, a country recognized today as a country of brotherhood and unity of all its peoples, nationalities, and minority groups, a country of true and genuine equality of all its citizens... The Jewish community in the new Yugoslavia, although decimated so terribly, found in this newborn country a consolation for its eternal sorrow and a motive for a new life in freedom.<sup>441</sup>

Vajs's speech illustrates well the kinds of chords that the campaign needed to strike in order to be acceptable as a series of commemorations of specifically Jewish victims and fighters. By dedicating the monuments in the central Yugoslav republics, the Federation was careful to confirm the new value of Yugoslav federalism. The monuments were also connected symbolically to "brotherhood and unity" and the legacy of the "struggle for national liberation," central narratives in the official Yugoslav self-perceptions. And, in a rhetorical move, because the victims and fighters were Jewish but were also Yugoslav citizens, the monuments were, in Vajs's words, "monument[s] to all other victims and fighters."

The monuments were widely understood as affirmation of the most important Yugoslav narratives and values. The Osijek branch of the Federation of Trade Unions of Yugoslavia, which sent a delegate to the ceremony of the dedication of the monument in Dakovo, responded to the letter of invitation by stressing that

[w]e are proud that the sacrifices of our peoples and the citizens of Yugoslavia were not in vain. The legacy of our struggle and the Socialist reconstruction led by the Communist Party and our Marshall Tito are the surest guarantee that no one will ever enslave our country or bring us back to the old days of persecution and extermination. Brotherhood and unity of our peoples forged in fiery battles, into whose foundations are built the

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<sup>440</sup> "Govor dr. Alberta Vajsa, predsjednika Saveza jevrejskih opština FNRJ (glavni sadržaj)," dated 28 August 1952, JHM, PR, box 1197.

<sup>441</sup> "Govor dr. Alberta Vajsa, predsjednika Saveza jevrejskih opština FNRJ (glavni sadržaj)," dated 28 August 1952, JHM, PR, box 1197.

almost two million lives of our citizens, including the comrades perished at Đakovo, victims of Fascist beasts—is another such guarantee. May the monument built in memory and gratitude for those [sacrifices] be a covenant for all of us to follow the heroic route of struggle and freedom that our peoples chose in those difficult times.<sup>442</sup>

Similarly, the municipal council of the Popular Front in Osijek, another institution that was going to send a delegate to the Đakovo ceremony, was convinced that “the monument is an obvious sign of proper solution of the national question in our socialist homeland.”<sup>443</sup> Similar conclusions, which posited that the monuments, while commemorating Jewish victims also stood as the confirmation of the correct path onto which the new Yugoslavia has embarked, flooded the articles that covered the unveiling ceremonies in the Yugoslav press.<sup>444</sup>

The Jewish communities, in their turn, reinforced this rhetoric. Several days after its unveiling, the monument in Zagreb was vandalized. Someone effaced the “Thou shalt not” in one of the two commandments featured across the two tablets held by Moses, giving the visitor an injunction to “kill.” In the official report filed with the Zagreb police, the Jewish community of Zagreb described the incident, and ended the letter with a suggestion that criminal investigation be initiated:

We take the liberty of adding that this is an act by the reactionary and subversive elements, who seek to undermine brotherhood and unity of our peoples and thus sow hatred and discord among the peoples of Yugoslavia.<sup>445</sup>

Although it is not sure what the purpose of the offenders was—it could have ranged from antisemitism to political subversion to pure youthful transgression—such an attack was understood as an attack on the most cherished Yugoslav values.

That Albert Vajs could stand in front of the monument depicting Moses with the

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<sup>442</sup> Letter no. 3116, dated 30 August 1952, JHM, K30-5-3/20.

<sup>443</sup> Letter no. 3115, dated 29 August 1952, JHM, K30-5-3/21.

<sup>444</sup> See footnote 126 in this chapter.

<sup>445</sup> Arpad Hahn and Moric Ozmo to the Secretariat of Internal Affairs of the People’s Council of the City of Zagreb (25 September 1952), JHM, box k67.

commandments and featuring an inscription in Hebrew that dwarfed its Serbo-Croatian equivalent, and, furthermore, claim in all earnestness that “this is a monument to all other victims and fighters”—is illustrative of the nature of a new “culture of commemoration” that the Federation had created. The campaign to unveil the monuments to Jewish victims was an answer to the ever more vocal demands to find a way to commemorate the murdered Jews, demands that were coming from below ever since the economic situation of the Jewish communities had stabilized and food and shelter ceased to be the main problems that individual survivors and returnees faced. The only way to make commemoration of victimhood and suffering of a specific ethnic community acceptable to the Yugoslav authorities was to embed the story of Jewish suffering into the larger narrative of war carnage and suffering. The most important bases of new Yugoslavism—mythic stories of *bratstvo-jedinstvo* and *narodnooslobodilačka borba*—provided the framework in which to situate that Jewish story. These narratives, however, were narratives that the majority of the remaining Jews would not question, as most had survived as Partisan fighters and were sympathetic to the values of the new Yugoslavia. At the same time, the unveiling ceremonies came as a helpful demonstration to the outside world that Yugoslavia was truly different from other people’s democracies, something that the authorities insisted on, and could not forego a chance to point out. Under all these layers of meaning, however, there was another one, hidden to most non-Jews—one that provided a more “Jewish” story, a story of death, suffering and survival that was free of the outward Yugoslavist ideology. Jewish motifs of the monuments, invisible to most non-Jews, thus constituted a basis for a new Yugoslav Jewishness, one based around a culture of commemoration and remembering the tragedy, one embracing

a connection to the wider Jewish destiny while being embedded in the new Yugoslav reality. It was this peculiar symbiosis that the author of the *Jewish Chronicle* did not understand; for him, the Yugoslav community merely exhibited “strange Jewishness.”<sup>446</sup> But for people who envisioned and carried out this campaign, the achievement was extraordinary; it is out of that sense of pride and success that the Federation invested so much energy into the ceremonies—something that most foreign Jewish delegates apparently could not grasp.

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<sup>446</sup> Bienenstok, “Future of Yugoslav Jewry.”



Fig. 6.1. The monument in Belgrade, circa 1952. Albert Vajs is directly below the menorah; Lavoslav Kadelburg is to the extreme right. (Photo courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade).





Fig. 6.2. The monument in Belgrade today. The plaques with individual names of victims were added subsequently, starting in the 1980s (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.3. The monument in Belgrade, detail. The inscription in Serbo-Croatian reads: “To the Jewish Victims of Fascism and Fallen Fighters from the People’s Republic of Serbia, 1941-1945” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.4. The monument in Belgrade, detail. The inscription in Hebrew reads: “To the Jews Victims of Fascism and Fallen Fighters in the People’s Republic of Serbia, 1941-1945” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.5. The monument in Belgrade, detail. The Hebrew acronym is usually translated as “may his soul be bound in the bonds of eternal life” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.6. The monument in Zagreb, circa 1952 (Photo courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade).



Fig. 6.7. The monument in Zagreb today. The inscription in Hebrew reads: “In memory of Jewish soldiers fallen in the war against Fascism and Jews murdered by Fascists in Croatia, 1941-1945” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.8. The monument in Zagreb, detail. The inscription in Serbo-Croatian reads: “This monument is built to [commemorate] Jewish fighters fallen in the struggle for liberation of the peoples of Yugoslavia and to Jews victims of Fascism, 1941-1945. Bones of Jewish victims excavated at the Jasenovac-Gradiška camp are buried in this grave, and they represent all victims whose names are written and saved in the urn” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.9. The monument in Sarajevo. The inscription lists camps and execution sites in NDH (Jasenovac, Stara Gradiška, Đakovo, Jadovno, Loborgrad) and in Nazi Germany and occupied territories (Auschwitz, Bergen Belsen) (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).





Fig. 6.10. The monument in Sarajevo, detail. The inscription in Hebrew reads: “To Jewish Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Fascism, 1941-1945.” The monument was damaged by heavy Serbian shelling of the city during the siege (1992-1995), as the Jewish cemetery was on the front line (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.11. The monument in Sarajevo, detail. It is damaged by shrapnel from the period of the Serbian siege of the city (1992-1995). The inscription in Serbo-Croatian reads: “To Jewish fallen fighters and victims of Fascism of Bosnia and Hercegovina, 1941-1945”

(Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.12. The monument in Sarajevo today, damaged by shrapnel. The inscription is a quotation from *Gorski vijenac* by Petar Petrović Njegoš, and reads: “Die in glory if you have to die!” (Photo: Emil Kerenji, 2006).



Fig. 6.13. The ceremony in Sarajevo, September 1952. Zvi Loker, the First Secretary of the Embassy of Israel (Photo courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade).



Fig. 6.14. The ceremony in Zagreb, August 1952. Albert Vajs, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia (Photo courtesy of the Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade).

## Chapter VII

### The Last Generation? Jewish Youth Journal, the Summer Camp, and the boundaries of Yugoslav Jewishness

On October 8, 1952, upon his return to Israel after attending the monument ceremonies in Yugoslavia, Cvi Rotem, a prominent prewar Yugoslav Zionist and one of the leaders of the Association of Yugoslav Immigrants in Israel at the time, wrote an article in *Naš list* (“Our Newspaper”) on the topic of “The Last Generation of Yugoslav Jewry.”<sup>447</sup> “Unfortunately,” wrote Rotem,

While the reinvigorated Yugoslavia, despite all the difficulties it is going through, inspires admiration, the sad pittance [*šaka jada*] of the remnants of Yugoslav Jewry—despite all its activities that were especially visible during our stay there—makes for a tragic impression. . . . From our journey through Yugoslavia, from our incessant conversations with friends from our youth, we carried this gloomy impression that we are faced with the last generation of Yugoslav Jewry.<sup>448</sup>

Rotem was the first to spell it out aloud, but the image of the “last generation” had haunted organized Jewish life in Yugoslavia ever since the beginnings of the rebuilding project, and until the very end of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. It is clear in retrospect that it was the breakup of the country at the end of the twentieth century

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<sup>447</sup> Cvi Rotem, “Poslednja generacija jugoslovenskog jevrejstva,” *Naš list* (8 October 1952), 1. Rotem had been active in the prewar Yugoslav Zionist movement. He emigrated to Palestine in the mid-1930s. His original name had been Zvi Rothmüller (or, in the Slavicized spelling increasingly used by the Zionists in the 1930s, Cvi Rotmiler). For language politics of the prewar Yugoslav Zionists, see Chapter III of this dissertation. *Naš list* was a Serbo-Croatian bulletin of Ben Gurion's ruling MAPAI party (*Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael*, מפלגת פועלי ארץ ישראל, Land of Israel Workers' Party); in the three years of its existence, from October 1949 to October 1952, the newspaper, rather than merely being a party organ, reached the bulk of Yugoslav immigrants in Israel, and became a forum for discussion of their pressing issues. It was effectively controlled by Rotem and his comrades in the Association of Yugoslav Immigrants in Israel. For a brief history of *Naš list*, see “Tri godine *Našeg lista*,” *Naš list* (22 October 1952), 1.

<sup>448</sup> Rotem, “Poslednja generacija,” 1.

that ultimately spelled the end of organized Yugoslav Jewry and challenged definitively the feasibility of Jewish life in all Yugoslav successor states; but the uncertainties about viability and “proper Jewish character” of the community in Yugoslavia had dominated the discussions among the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities about the future of Yugoslav Jewry through the postwar period.

The year 1952 announced symbolically the arrival of the Yugoslav Jewish community on the national stage, as well as its stabilization. The uncertainties and fluctuations of the first postwar years were over. Survivors and former Partisans were starting to rebuild their postwar lives—a difficult and traumatic process, to be sure, but one that was at least finally free of the early postwar pressures of economic hardship; it was also free, unlike in several other countries of the Soviet orbit, of state-organized anti-Jewish agitation or the wide persistence of antisemitic prejudice among the general population. The large waves of emigration to Israel were over, and the number of the Jews in the country finally become stable at about 7,000 members in over thirty Jewish communities across the country—numbers inversely proportionate to the exposure the Jewish communities and Jewish suffering received in the Yugoslav media in 1952 and during the Eichmann trial, as well as to the prominence of individual Jews in Yugoslav public life, such as Moša Pijade, Oskar Danon, Isak Samokovlija, Oskar Davičo, or even Albert Vajs.<sup>449</sup> Relations with the government were cordial, and the story of Jewish suffering was recognized—to some extent ambiguously, as I showed in the previous chapter, and definitely in order to

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<sup>449</sup> Pijade (1890-1957) was a painter and a prominent Jewish intellectual, a member of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and Tito’s close associate during the war. Danon (1913-) is a famous composer and conductor, and a one-time director of Belgrade opera, who currently lives in Belgrade and Zagreb. Samokovlija (1889-1955) and Davičo (1909-1989) were prominent literary figures.

serve political purposes of the Communist government, but recognized nevertheless—as a story that was an integral part of the narrative on which the new Yugoslavia was being built. The monuments to the “Jewish victims of Fascism” embodied all these themes: reconstruction, stabilization, prominence, and the kosher Yugoslavism of the surviving community. It seemed that conditions for Jewish life and work in Yugoslavia were favorable, and the leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities certainly projected a sense of optimism.<sup>450</sup>

The public acceptance of the story of Jewish suffering as part of the wider suffering of the Yugoslav peoples during World War II, however, even as it opened up a space for Jewish communal work in Yugoslavia, legitimized it, and raised the profile of the Yugoslav Jews in a positive way, could not provide the answer to what was increasingly becoming an important question facing the Jewish leadership in the country: namely, the question of the cultural content of being Jewish in Yugoslavia. Up until the early 1950s, Jewish leaders had been concerned with the most pressing problems of Jewish survival; but once it became clear that the regime was not going to interfere with the Federation’s program for rebuilding Jewish communal life—as long as the well-understood limits were respected, and as long as the story of Jewishness did not challenge the story of socialist Yugoslavia, in ways I have discussed in previous chapters—a new, more systemic problem emerged. Without external pressure and official anti-Jewish or antisemitic rhetoric, with the state actively suppressing the extremely rare instances of antisemitism, and with the

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<sup>450</sup> “Today, in the tenth year after the Liberation,” wrote Vajs in 1954, “we can say that we mostly succeeded in achieving our goals. The Jewish community in Yugoslavia has been renewed. It lives and works. It represents a positive factor in the life of the new Yugoslavia and a positive part of the Jewish people.” Albert Vajs, “Jevreji u Novoj Jugoslaviji,” *Jevrejski almanah*, Vol. 1 (1954), 5-47, 30.



possibility—theoretical at the very least, and often very real—of full integration into Yugoslavia’s multiethnic society, the problem of defining the minimum of what it meant to be Jewish in Yugoslavia gained in urgency.<sup>451</sup> As a draft report on Jewish cultural work in that period put it:

One of the central questions that emerged from the general discussion at the last conference in September 1952 was the question of cultural work in our small community. After the end of the *aliyot*, and after the successfully completed initiative to unveil the monuments to the victims of Fascism, the most important question posed by delegates from all communities was the general desire to provide our youth and grown-ups with more Jewish content, more Jewish education, more Jewish expression.<sup>452</sup>

In other words, if they were going to continue claiming plausibly that Jewish life in Yugoslavia exists and is even relatively vibrant, considering the circumstances, the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities had to define what else was “Jewish,” apart from the public mourning ceremonies and the memory of the Jewish victims.

This question, however, was never confronted head-on, and discussions about the Jewish future in Yugoslavia were framed as discussions about—and usually as apprehension and dissatisfaction with—Yugoslav Jewish youth. The new generation, the one that was coming of age after the tragedy of World War II, was the generation which, Yugoslav Jewish leaders hoped, would be the one to finally take advantage of

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<sup>451</sup> In his report to the Seventh Conference of the Federation of Jewish Communities, which took place in Belgrade on 27-28 October 1956, Albert Vajs stated: “We can say that there are no instances of antisemitism. There were two or three well-known incidents of this kind by drunken people, and in each individual case [Jewish] communities alerted people’s authorities [*narodna vlast*], upon which these individuals were put on trial and punished... We can also say that this period has been characterized by the state’s public recognition of individual Jews, living or dead, for their [public] contributions, and also state’s recognition of our Federation [of Jewish Communities] and individual communities as our institutions. It is enough to remind ourselves that streets have been named after Jewish fighters in Belgrade, Subotica, and Skoplje, for example, and that several Jews were recognized as “National heroes” [*narodni heroji*]... All this points to the fact that contributions of Jews to general public life are substantial, and are being recognized publicly.” *Stenografske beleške sa VII konferencije Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije* (1956), JHM, unsorted, 22-23.

<sup>452</sup> *Kratak osvrt na kulturni rad Saveza jevrejskih opština od septembra 1952 godine do juna 1956*, JHM, PR, box 747, 1.

full Jewish equality in Yugoslavia and the lack of legal and *de facto* discrimination, and define the new content of Jewish life in the country. Exactly how this was going to be achieved was never really discussed; but the almost obsessive focus on “youth,” the “new generation,” and ways in which it could be relied upon to carry the torch, as it were, of Jewish life in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust, revealed the inability of the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities to formulate a basis for this new project, beyond the programmatic, if a bit hollow, statements about the need to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and the apparently excellent conditions for Jewish life in socialist Yugoslavia.

This chapter tells the intertwined stories of Jewish official debates about Jewish youth and Jewish education, of *Kadima* (קדימה, *kadimah*, “Forward”), the journal of Yugoslav Jewish youth, and of the summer camps for Yugoslav Jewish youth in the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s, in order to argue that despite the lack of clear vision on the part of the Jewish leadership about what exactly constituted Jewish life in Yugoslavia in the postwar period and doubts about the “Jewish character” of communal work, a kind of a tentative yet distinct Yugoslav Jewishness emerged among many active young members of Yugoslav Jewish communities in this period. Although the cultural content of this new Jewishness was undoubtedly very different from other patterns of Jewish identification in post-Holocaust Europe, the concerns and themes that dominated the Jewish spheres of the lives of Yugoslav Jewish youth attending the summer camps (the majority of young members of Yugoslav Jewish communities) and reading and contributing to *Kadima* nevertheless created a sense of belonging to a distinct group that was defined as

“Jewish,” despite general disinterest in religion or more traditional aspects of Jewish history and culture.

Three broad processes characterized the shaping of this fluid and never explicitly delineated or prescribed sense of common Jewish belonging. The first one was a reworking, on a level broadly defined as “cultural,” of the themes such as Jewish victimhood during World War II, or the question of youth culture; in their literary attempts and critical articles about the Holocaust or on youth and popular culture, the authors of *Kadima* challenged the dominant views of the older generation of Jewish leaders. The second one was the cultivation of Zionism—broadly understood as support for, and love of, Israel as the Jewish state—as an important tenet of this sense of belonging, even as the word “Zionism” was not used, and even after 1967, when, in the aftermath of the Six-Day war, Yugoslavia followed the countries of the Soviet bloc and cut off diplomatic relations with Israel. The third one was the development of a very specific understanding of the postwar Yugoslav project, and genuine adherence to a broader Yugoslav identity, independently from official ideology.

#### Anxieties About the “Last Generation” and Critiques of Cultural Work

Rotem’s 1952 lament about the “last generation” merely spelled out what was increasingly becoming one of the major concerns of Yugoslav Jewish leaders. A representative from Zagreb at the conferences of the Federation in both 1952 and

1956 insisted that “we can be saved only by intensive cultural work with children and youth. If we do not manage to achieve this, then we are the last generation.” He went on:

The most important question is what communities do with their children, whether they are trying to attract them to be future Jewish workers. Communities that don't do it can be sure to disappear in a very short time... We hear [about this issue] from session to session, from conference to conference, but time is running out, and we have no time to lose... When we work with our youth today, with high-school students and children, we are faced with insurmountable difficulties.<sup>453</sup>

Other delegates echoed these concerns. Representatives from Belgrade and Zagreb emphasized that Jewish work with children and youth was of paramount importance for the future, and pointed to the role Jewish kindergartens and women's sections of Belgrade and Zagreb communities contributed to cultural work with children and youth.<sup>454</sup> A representative from Sarajevo praised the development of awareness about the importance of work with youth, and expressed optimism about the role of Jewish summer camps for the forging of Jewish identity. He concluded that “our youth is absolutely receptive to our values.”<sup>455</sup>

While many Jewish officials stressed the need for closer work with the youth and the threat of the “last generation,” few were ready to explicate what this kind of work would entail, and what its content would be—beyond the blurry visions of “coordination” and “intensifying of work.” The already mentioned 1956 draft report about cultural work opened with the statement about the urgency of cultural work and the pressing need for providing the youth with “more Jewish content, more Jewish education, more Jewish expression,” but never went into any specifics about how this would be done. It mentioned several developments in the period under discussion

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<sup>453</sup> Discussion of Dr. Ozmo, *Stenografske beleške* (1956), 53.

<sup>454</sup> Discussions of Edita Vajs and Blanka Doner, *Stenografske beleške* (1956), 57-59, 60-62.

<sup>455</sup> Discussion of Haim Kamhi, *Stenografske beleške* (1956), 75-79, 76.

(from 1952 to 1956), but the general assumption was that Jewish kindergartens in Belgrade and Zagreb, the newly organized annual Jewish summer camps, and a series of publications were self-evident bastions of Jewish identity and culture. The general conclusion was that “the Federation pursued the raising of the national consciousness in our youth, finding the way for every member of even the smallest community to realize that there is something beautiful, valuable, and lofty in being Jewish.”<sup>456</sup> That “something,” however, remained unspecified, and not a single word provided insight into the cultural contents of these efforts.

One of the themes that many discussants at the 1956 conference of Jewish communities did share and agree on was important was the significance of Israel for this new Jewish identity that the youth was going to be introduced to. As a delegate from Travnik put it, “they [the youth] are our eyes, they are our future...they are the ones who will carry our Jewish name with pride, defend the interests of Jewry, and proudly carry the names of Israel and Jerusalem.”<sup>457</sup> But beyond such individual declarations of general directions—and few disagreed that awareness about the importance of Israel would not play an important part—policy directives about concrete Jewish education of children and students were not formulated. Some delegates proposed complex bureaucratic structures that would be in charge of this task, a proposal that led one participant in the discussion to observe that

we are a small community, but a successful one, and I want to say that we have to have a sense of measure. We should not create bodies or organizations just for their own sake, some Potemkin’s villages, if we do not need them. I agree that we create a coordinating body, or a department, however you want to call it, under the auspices of the Federation, with the purpose of directing cultural work... I am afraid...that if we start branching off...we will get distracted and lose sight of the whole.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> *Kratak osvrt na kulturni rad*, 7

<sup>457</sup> Discussion of Avram Altarac, *Stenografske beleške* (1956), 51.

<sup>458</sup> Discussion of Bencion Levi, *Stenografske beleške* (1956), 64-68, 66-67.

The problem, thus, seemed to have two facets. Everyone seemed to agree that, if the current generation of Yugoslav Jews was not going to be the last one, the Jewish education of the youth needed to be developed. Few, however, had ideas about the scope, logistics, or content of such a program.

This kind of impasse seemed to dominate Jewish public discussions throughout the 1950s. As late as 1959, at the eighth conference of the Federation, delegates were still discussing the same issues. Even though there had been several important developments in the period since the early 1950s—such as, for example, the establishment and gradual standardization of Jewish youth summer camps, the appearance of *Kadima*, and the establishment of a body at the level of the Federation of Jewish Communities in charge of coordinating the work of youth sections of individual communities—delegates still routinely emphasized the importance of cultural work with the youth and criticized relentlessly its seeming inadequacy. The shadow of the “last generation,” it seemed, was still hanging over Yugoslav Jews; or, more precisely, such were the anxieties of the Jewish leaders. “The future work and the physiognomy of our communities,” warned a delegate from Osijek, “depends on the nature of our work with the youth.”<sup>459</sup> A delegate from Zagreb was content that “[at least] we understand the time in which we live, and we in Jewish communities implement the base of our work with youth.”<sup>460</sup> Albert Vajs stressed, on the other hand, “certain mistakes, especially concerning the insufficiency of Jewish content [of]

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<sup>459</sup> Discussion of Hinko Vajs, *Zapisnik VIII konferencije Saveza jevrejskih opština Jugoslavije održane u Beogradu 26-27 decembra 1959*, JHM, unsorted, 11-12, 11.

<sup>460</sup> Discussion of Misa Montiljo, *Zapisnik VIII konferencije*, 15-16, 16.

general cultural work [with youth].”<sup>461</sup>

Constant references to cultural work, and habitual invocations of the image of the “last generation” and the threat to Jewishness in Yugoslavia posed by the general lack of interest and enthusiasm for things Jewish testified as much to the perceived urgency of addressing the problem of formulating a Jewish basis for a common identity, as to the inability of the Jewish leaders to face up to this self-imposed task. However, the second half of the 1950s witnessed the emergence of two major vehicles through which a sense of Jewish belonging in Yugoslavia was discussed and challenged among many youths in the country. The first one was *Kadima*, the journal of Yugoslav Jewish youth; the second one was the annual Jewish summer youth camp. Both these institutions facilitated closer interaction of Jewish youngsters from individual communities. Although both *Kadima* and the summer camps developed with the full support of the Federation of Jewish Communities, the ultimate “Jewishness” of the youth in Yugoslavia was very different from what the leaders of the Federation expected it to be—even as those expectations were vague, and even as that outlook developed without a careful plan on the part of young leaders working in *Kadima* or organizing cultural work in the summer camps..

### *Kadima*

The first issue of *Kadima*, a new Jewish youth journal—the only one in the country—was published in the summer of 1956. This was the bulletin of the newly

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<sup>461</sup> Discussion of Albert Vajs, *Zapisnik VIII konferencije*, 16-18, 17.

formed youth section of the Belgrade Jewish community. Asking rhetorically, “What is the basis for the need for a journal of this kind?”—the editorial board stressed, in block capitals, that “Jewish life in Yugoslavia must [continue to] exist!”<sup>462</sup>

This was a noble call, but the editors themselves recognized the difficulties that lay ahead. The principal one was a lack of agreement about what was “Jewish” about Jewish life in Yugoslavia:

This journal is not, and cannot be... a carrier of an ideology. Things are the exact opposite: it should be a forum for formulating an ideology... For, the fact is, we haven't managed to find a true expression as far as Jewish work is concerned [because]... as today's Jewish youth, we have begun our work without the roots that [the older generation of Jewish activists] possessed.<sup>463</sup>

Notwithstanding the somewhat loose employment of the term “ideology” and problems with style, the editors implied that the inner content of Jewishness in Yugoslavia—the outer limits being delineated by the “Jewish” monuments and their embodiment of inclusion through participatory public commemoration of victimhood and resistance—was more or less a blank slate, with room for creativity. Importantly, because they allegedly lacked “the roots” that had determined the outlook of Jewish identities of the previous generations, the editors realized that they were starting a new project and called on “all Jewish youth (and not just the youth) [in Yugoslavia] to contribute its writings so that we can achieve the best results in this new form of our work.”<sup>464</sup>

Another—anonymous—contributor to the inaugural issue of *Kadima* posed two “provocative” questions about the newly formed youth section in Belgrade. One was whether “there exists, in our generation, an interest in gathering in a purely

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<sup>462</sup> “Uz prvi broj,” *Kadima* no. 1 (1956), 1.

<sup>463</sup> “Uz prvi broj,” 1.

<sup>464</sup> “Uz prvi broj,” 1.



national cultural club [*u čisto nacionalnom kulturnom klubu*]”? The other was whether it was “possible to sustain a youth organization such as this one without any guiding idea.”<sup>465</sup> In the end, the author, very critical of the apathy of Jewish youth in Belgrade, answered both questions hoping that “perhaps this journal will help us find that without which we cannot go on.”<sup>466</sup> The elusive “that,” without which Jewish youth could not do, again remained unspecified, but there was a clear recognition that this was the main issue at hand. The editorials and opinion pieces in the first issue in *Kadima*—including another one, in which the author argued that the “central question” was “the form of [cultural] work and its content”—thus all pointed out that youth clubs that were being formed in the larger communities (Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo) could not survive without a guiding idea in the form of a specific program for Jewish cultural work.<sup>467</sup>

There was a sense, then, among the young Jewish leaders involved in forming Jewish youth clubs in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Sarajevo, that what was lacking was a clear cultural content to their work. There would be no point, in other words, in “gathering in a purely national club,” as the anonymous contributor to *Kadima* put it, if there was nothing specifically “Jewish” about it. The experience of the first two years of the club in Sarajevo, for example, demonstrated the combined shortcomings of the lack of a clear vision of what “Jewish content” should be, and the lack of interest of the local Jewish community leaders—despite their concerns about the issue of the “last generation”—to support the cultural work of the youth.<sup>468</sup> If cultural

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<sup>465</sup> “Biti ili ne biti (ili: da li je ovo najbolji način bivanja?),” *Kadima* no. 1 (1956), 9.

<sup>466</sup> “Biti ili ne biti,” 9.

<sup>467</sup> Tugomir Brukner, “Aktuelno,” *Kadima* no. 1 (1956), 10-11, 10.

<sup>468</sup> Albi Atijas, “Pismo iz Sarajeva,” *Kadima* no. 1 (1956), 15.

work, however understood, was to make sense and bring results, it needed clearly formulated cultural content, something that would provide a positive basis for Jewish identification in Yugoslavia. This basis was clearly lacking.

This basis, moreover, did not come from sessions of various bodies coordinated by the Federation of Jewish Communities, either. Invariably, they seemed unable to move beyond the bureaucratized ways of thinking and offer anything genuinely useful for the project—the elusive “cultural work with the youth”—that everyone was allegedly interested in pursuing. “The Jewish community in Yugoslavia has a character of a national minority,” stated the author of a “platform for Jewish work” published in *Kadima* in 1957,

and therefore has not only the need, but also the right, to its specific cultural life. Because of its makeup, small size and dispersion in many communities, its schooling is limited to kindergartens only. Youth clubs and summer camps are thus of special importance as educational forums and centers for cultural expression.<sup>469</sup>

The author went on:

The content of work of Jewish youth clubs primarily has to be Jewish, that is, they lose their *raison d'être* if they cannot offer their members that which they [i.e., the members] cannot already get in other youth or general social organizations.<sup>470</sup>

Again, as with all the previous and current discussions of the issue, the platform offered nothing new. And again, the bulk of the discussion revolved around administrative issues hidden behind bureaucratic language, while literally nothing was said about the content of cultural work, except for several vague statements about the desire of the Yugoslav Jewish youth to follow the work of Jewish youth in Israel and in other countries, and the work being organized as a “series of cycles of lectures and seminars in history, contemporary political problems, literature, folklore, music,

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<sup>469</sup> Zdenko Levental, “Platforma našeg omladinskog rada,” *Kadima* no. 3 (1957), 1-2, 1.

<sup>470</sup> Levental, “Platforma,” 1.

youth organization, and so on.”<sup>471</sup> The tautological definition of “the content of work of Jewish youth clubs” as “Jewish” notwithstanding, there was nothing in the platform that even hinted at the possible themes or topics which activists dedicated to Jewish work would be interested in pursuing. The remaining part of the article instead concentrated on questions of logistics—how many times per week the youth clubs should meet, how to include youth from smaller communities in programs of the nearby youth clubs of larger communal centers, what kind of cadres should lead the clubs and how to interact with the non-Jewish society at large.<sup>472</sup>

The elusive cultural content of Jewishness ultimately came from the editorial eclecticism of *Kadima*'s revolving editorial boards and numbers of individuals ready to explore Jewish topics and questions of identity in a public forum. In the pilot issue of *Kadima*, a member of an “older generation” who had emigrated to Israel in the late 1940s offered his vision of what the work of Yugoslav Jewish youth should consist of, in an “open letter to the Jewish youth in Belgrade.”<sup>473</sup> “As you well know,” he wrote, “there have been more and more discussions recently in our community about youth work, about a ‘lost generation,’ etc.”<sup>474</sup> He then went on to compare the youth of his generation to the one of the editors of *Kadima*:

Our youth—and we are just 10 to 15 years older than you—was spent in a self-sacrificing work towards a lofty ideal: the establishment of a Jewish nation state in Israel. That work fulfilled our youth. We worked toward that ideal irrespective of ideological differences, irrespective of differing views about the means of struggle... I also have to remind you that we spent our youth in the shadow of Fascism and Nazism; that we experienced insults and humiliation; that we had to fight so many

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<sup>471</sup> Levental, “Platforma,” 1-2.

<sup>472</sup> The language of the “platform” was hopelessly bureaucratic and vague, and resembled reports from Party meetings from the same period. It advised, for example, “communal leaderships [to] discuss the platform and the directives for work with the club collectives as soon as possible, so as to avoid, as in one particular community, constant misunderstandings, attrition, and criticisms from various positions.” Levental, “Platforma,” 1.

<sup>473</sup> Đorđe Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo jevrejskoj omladini u Beogradu,” *Kadima* no. 1 (1956), 6-8.

<sup>474</sup> Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo,” 6.

times in order to defend ourselves from Fascist bandits. I also have to remind you that we spent the best years of our lives in Nazi camps, watching our loved ones being led to their deaths...

In contrast, “today you live a free life, in a socialist country, where you are protected by the constitution from all that we used to experience.”<sup>475</sup> These conditions were, according to the author, conducive to the free expression of Jewishness, and two themes were particularly important in such expression: first, “as part of the Jewish people, you...are obliged to use all your intellectual powers...in order to spread the *truth* about Israel [emphasis in the original].” Second, “*we should never forget* [emphasis in the original].”<sup>476</sup> What should not be forgotten, according to the author, was both the Holocaust itself—of course, he did not use that word, and instead referred to a 1946 exhibit in Vienna about the Nazi atrocities during World War II entitled “Niemals vergessen” (never forget)—as well as the alleged continuation of Nazi policies against Israel in the Arab world.<sup>477</sup>

Such early strong ideas about the program of youth work were, however, rare. More revealing, and much more important for this analysis, were the kinds of articles, interviews, editorials, as well as literary texts that successive editorial boards of *Kadima* published. From its third issue, *Kadima* branded itself as “the journal of Jewish youth,” and from its fourth issue in November 1957, “the journal of Jewish youth in Yugoslavia.” These moves reflected the growing reach of the publication, which spread through the network of Jewish youth clubs in Zagreb, Sarajevo, Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, and several other smaller communal centers. “*Kadima* gathered together young contributors from all parts [of Yugoslavia],” wrote one of the

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<sup>475</sup> Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo,” 6.

<sup>476</sup> Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo,” 7.

<sup>477</sup> Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo,” 7-8.

editors in November 1957. “It is the youth that makes *Kadima*. It brings our original *belles lettres*.” And,

with its informative and critical reviews in the field of Jewish work of the youth, it spreads the familiarity [of all] about the life of Jewish youth in socialist Yugoslavia.<sup>478</sup>

One has to be cautious about the unbridled optimism of *Kadima*'s editors, and these statements very well may have been too optimistic and may have overestimated the real effect that the journal had among young readers in the country. It is indeed difficult to gauge the reception of *Kadima* and measure its impact on readers. On the other hand, *Kadima* did indeed reach increasing numbers of readers, as it was distributed through the network of Jewish communities and youth clubs; it also received a number of letters of approval and inquiries about subscriptions—a hint, at least, of its growing popularity and eagerness to read about things Jewish and discuss matters of Jewishness in Yugoslavia among at least some Jewish youth.<sup>479</sup>

This very demographic—“Yugoslav Jewish youth”—did not exist in any policy directives of the Federation of Jewish Communities, apart from habitual invocations of the threat of “the last generation” and usually empty commitments to working with the youth. Just as it promised to do, *Kadima* did “spread the familiarity” about “the life of Jewish youth in socialist Yugoslavia” on its pages, and this was, in fact, the first sustained initiative—admittedly, often without any long-term planning, without clear explication or guidelines, and heavily dependent on good will and enthusiasm of members of successive editorial boards—to try actually to formulate what it was about Jewish youth in Yugoslavia that distinguished it from

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<sup>478</sup> Tugomir Brukner, “Uz četvrti broj,” *Kadima* no. 4 (November 1957), 1-2, 1.

<sup>479</sup> Brukner, “Uz četvrti broj,” 1.

other youth populations and organizations, and why it was important to have a journal in which this awareness would be cultivated. In contrast to *Bilten*, the official bulletin of the Federation of Jewish Communities, which was dominated by dry reports about sessions of different Federation committees and news about relations of the Federation with various state institutions or international Jewish organizations, *Kadima* focused on youth issues and problems, from new poetry and prose written by young members of the Jewish communities, to features about Jewish history, Israel, current events in the Middle East, as well as reports from annual summer camps and intra-club meetings.

From the very beginning of its publication, and completely in line with its dedication to informing its young readers about the lives of other Jewish youth in Yugoslavia, *Kadima* published regular and ever more extensive reports about the work of youth clubs in different Jewish communities, their experiences in organizing youth events, lectures, seminars, outing trips, and other activities. Even though the publication of the journal was irregular—there were periods in which only a single issue would be published in a year, and there were times when *Kadima* was a quarterly publication—these sought to create a kind of sense among the readers that they were witnessing a joint, country-wide project that young Jewish leaders were spearheading. “I ask questions, I express my interest,” reported one of the editors of *Kadima* from Belgrade—at the time when the journal was still a magazine of the Belgrade youth club—about his early visit to the Jewish youth club in Zagreb. “They are asking about *Kadima*... Many would like to know [what we do in] our club.”<sup>480</sup> He went on to describe in detail the activities of the Zagreb club. In the first issues of

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<sup>480</sup> Tugomir Brukner, “Mala reportaža,” *Kadima* no. 3 (1957), 15-16, 15.

*Kadima*, its readers in Belgrade thus had the opportunity—for the very first time—to learn about the activities of their peers in Sarajevo and Zagreb.

In the following years, reports from youth clubs across Yugoslavia became *Kadima*'s regular feature. In the same issue in which he wrote about his visit to the Zagreb club, the young editor also included a detailed report of the activities of the youth club in Belgrade. Giving brief reports from events organized by the club—a lecture on the Warsaw ghetto uprising, visits to the play “Anne Frank’s Diary” in Belgrade’s National Theater and exhibition of Moša Pijade’s paintings, a hiking trip to mount Avala just outside Belgrade—the overview ended with a plea to “all youth clubs in the country to send us news about their work and events in their midst.”<sup>481</sup> The call was answered, and the pages of *Kadima* were regularly filled with news and reports of activities in youth clubs—the three major ones in Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo, but also the ones in Osijek, Subotica, and Novi Sad, as well as about informal meetings of leaders of those clubs.<sup>482</sup>

*Kadima* also followed “official” developments in public Jewish life pertaining to Jewish youth. It published reports about the founding and the subsequent meetings of the Coordinating Committee of Youth Sections, as well as articles and discussions about its work and importance. This body was founded in January 1958 by the Executive Committee of the Federation of Jewish Communities; its task was to

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<sup>481</sup> “Naše vesti,” *Kadima* no. 3 (1957), 18-19, 18.

<sup>482</sup> See, for example, the report of the visit of youth leaders from Novi Sad and Osijek to Belgrade, where “special attention was given to the question of founding the youth club in Osijek and the aid in [cultural] materials to the just founded club in Novi Sad.” “Naše vesti,” *Kadima* no. 5 (February 1958), 23-26, 24. For examples of news from other clubs, see any issue of *Kadima* starting with no. 3 (1957).

coordinate cultural work with the youth at the level of the Federation.<sup>483</sup> The role of the Committee and its ultimate success in giving guidelines and coordinating the work of youth clubs is rather dubious. On the one hand, it did gather representatives of Jewish youth clubs in the country in one forum with specific goals; its debates, meetings, and reports, however, were still characterized by bureaucratic language, endless arguments, and doubtful effectiveness for the overall goal of coordination. A report prepared for one of the meetings, for example,

stressed that apart from a number of instances of useful and successful work, especially regarding the summer camps for children and youth, there were many shortcomings as well, which had their consequences for the implementation of Committee's directives, as well as for the organization of work of this body.<sup>484</sup>

Such oblique language characterized most debates within the Committee itself, and saturated reports of its meetings published in *Kadima*.

Just as high-level meetings of Jewish leaders could not provide guidelines for cultural work with Jewish youth—one could argue that it was precisely for this reason that *Kadima* was able to carve out a niche and become a meaningful forum for work and expression of young people who thought of themselves as Jewish in Yugoslavia—so were the reports from those meetings the least interesting texts in *Kadima*. Much more important for the formation of perimeters of Yugoslav Jewishness were the seemingly non-programatic and apolitical texts that the editors chose to publish. Many aspiring writers and poets published their early works in *Kadima*; some of these authors, such as Danilo Kiš, David Albahari, or Judita Šalgo,

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<sup>483</sup> For *Kadima*'s coverage of work of the Coordinating Committee, see, for example, "Osnovan je koordinacioni odbor omladinskih sekcija pri izvršnom odboru saveza," *Kadima* no. 5 (February 1958), 1; Gabriel Deleon, "Izveštaj sa sastanka Koordinacionog odbora omladinskih sekcija," *Kadima* no. 6 (July 1958), 3-4; Tugomir Brukner, "Značaj i uloga Koordinacionog odbora omladinskih sekcija (prilog za diskusiju)," *Kadima* no. 6 (July 1958), 7-8; Gabriel Deleon, "III sastanak Koordinacionog odbora omladine održanog u Sarajevu 23. XI 1958," *Kadima* no. 7-8 (February 1959), 3-4; etc.

<sup>484</sup> Deleon, "III sastanak," 1.



became some of the most prominent writers in Yugoslav literature in the second half of the twentieth century.

Of the literary works that *Kadima* published in the late 1950s and early 1960, ones dealing with the themes of the Holocaust dominated the journal. It is particularly interesting to observe the way they addressed the issues raised by the recent historical events—ways that were radically different from the official modes of remembrance and commemoration instituted through the dedication and annual ceremonies at the monuments by the Federation of Jewish Communities. Unlike the 1952 push to dedicate the monuments to “Jewish victims of Fascism,” through which the story of Jewish suffering during World War II was connected symbolically to the foundational myths of the new Yugoslav federation, the early literary accounts published in *Kadima* were based on the assumption that the Holocaust was a much broader historical event, one transcending Yugoslav history, and with much more powerful implications for post-World-War-II Jewish identity than the narrative endorsed and disseminated by Yugoslav Jewish leaders.

One of the first poems that *Kadima* published was a poem entitled “A Biography,” by Danilo Kiš. As a short text indicative of broader trends that will be discussed below, it deserves to be quoted in full:

#### A Biography

Eduard Kon was a wonderful drunkard.  
He had glasses made of gleaming prisms, and through them  
He observed the world as if through a rainbow.

As a child at school he even had to urinate after everyone else,  
Because he was circumcised.  
He was sometimes in love with the baker’s daughter and was a bit happy.  
When she learned that he was circumcised, it appeared to her that she  
Could not share a bed with him.  
Since then he would fold his money into the strings playing *csárdás* and  
Kiss gypsy women.

Then—as a consolation—he fell in love with Deliria, and she  
Took him under her fold.

Wind blew his ashes through the lean chimney  
Of the crematorium, high up, high...  
All the way to the rainbow.<sup>485</sup>

The image of Jewish fate during the war that Kiš's poem paints is very different from the projected image of suffering and resistance of Jews along with other Yugoslav peoples that predominated in the official publications and communications of the Federation of Jewish Communities. In fact, the most striking feature of Kiš's rendering of Holocaust themes is their utter disconnectedness from the Yugoslav context. The short life story imagined in the poem is, in fact, a generic biography of a Central European Jewish victim, a mythical diasporic Jew, the traces of whose very life had been obliterated by the barbaric events of the Holocaust. From the protagonist's non-Slavic name to the images of Hungarian dances and Romani women—and with hints of *shtetl* mythology conjured up by the image of the baker's daughter—Kiš's Holocaust imagery is completely divorced from any Yugoslav references, and is, rather, rooted in the symbolic geography of Central and Eastern Europe, the heartland of Jewish life destroyed in the Holocaust. Furthermore, the alcoholism and the absence of any kind of rebellion against the forces that excluded him from society and assigned him to the position of an underdog worthy of elimination—evoked by the image of the protagonist's circumcised penis—is a direct opposite of the story of heroic resistance of Jewish fallen fighters that the 1952 monuments in Yugoslavia embodied, even as the same fundamental masculinity (albeit epitomized by different imagery—and again, the image of Kon's circumcised penis comes to mind) underlies it as well.

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<sup>485</sup> Danilo Kiš, "Biografija," *Kadima* no. 4 (November 1957), 5.

In another early literary text in *Kadima*, a short story entitled “Galicia,” Kiš reinforced the non-Yugoslav themes in his artistic rendering of questions raised by the Holocaust.<sup>486</sup> The protagonist, a young man, perhaps a student, meets a drunken *Volksdeutcher* in an unnamed provincial Central European town. The drunken man refers to himself as a “Kraut” [Švaba], claims to be a painter, and repeats obsessively that he would like to talk about Galicia. Taking pity on him, Andreas, the young man, invites him for another drink in a local tavern, where the troubled German confesses that he used to be a guard at a concentration camp:

—You know, then, where Galicia is? said the man when they took a table in the corner.  
 —I do, said the young man.  
 —I was in a camp there, said the man.  
 —In a camp?  
 —Yes, said the man. I was, you know, a guard, *Volksdeutcher*... You probably don’t even know what a *Volksdeutcher* is.  
 —I do, said the young man. And then, after ordering wine:  
 —Why didn’t you return home?  
 —I have no one, said the man.  
 —Killed?  
 —Yes.  
 They sat in silence for a long time, smoking.  
 —What about yours, where do they live?  
 —I have no one.  
 —Killed?  
 —Yes.  
 (...)
 —Are you from Galicia? asked the young man.  
 —No, said the man. That was where the camp was, the one in which I was a guard. There were many Jews there, you know.  
 (...)
 —You surely don’t even know where Galicia is.  
 —I do, I know, said the young man, and thought to himself: What if I told him that... Somewhere in Galicia...  
 But he said nothing.<sup>487</sup>

Again, a radically different rendering of the Holocaust. Galicia—and, especially, hints of Auschwitz, a camp in Galicia where the German was a guard and where the young man’s family was exterminated—is cast as the geographical epicenter of the

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<sup>486</sup> Danilo Kiš, “Galicija,” *Kadima* no. 5 (February 1956), 4-5.

<sup>487</sup> Kiš, “Galicija,” 4-5.

Holocaust. In addition, the thrust of the story is the pity that the young man feels for the perpetrator, even as his own family might have been killed in the very camp where that perpetrator served as a guard. The story juxtaposes the suffering of the Germans after the war with the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust—the latter, however, remaining unspoken. And even though the story is not questioning Jewish victimhood in any way, the complexity it introduces with the idea of multiple suffering and perpetrators-turning-victims, it presents a radically different picture of Jewishness underwritten by Yugoslavism and the legitimacy of the new state based on a particularly black-and-white image of World War II in Yugoslavia. The story also raises the issue of silence—dominant in Yugoslavia both before and after the Eichmann trial, during which the relatively brief media spotlight exposed Jewish suffering during the Holocaust to the Yugoslav public, as I discussed in the previous chapter—silence both about the atrocity itself (the crime against the Jews is merely hinted at in the story) and its implications for the society at large (the terrible violence took place somewhere far away, in a province with a strange name and an uncertain geographical location).

Other *Kadima* stories of Danilo Kiš also deal with Holocaust themes. A short story entitled “The Redhair” is about an unnamed young woman—all the reader knows about her is her prisoner’s number, “2071”—in a labor camp for Jewish women, who commits suicide because of sexual humiliation she experiences in the camp.<sup>488</sup> An excerpt from another story, “Judas,” is about Easter day in a provincial town in wartime Hungary, where a Jew named Kon, marked by the yellow star of

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<sup>488</sup> Danilo Kiš, “Ridokosa,” *Kadima* no. 6 (July 1958), 9-10.

David, is abused by a mob chanting anti-Jewish slogans and charges of deicide.<sup>489</sup> And an excerpt from Kiš's 1962 first novel, *Psalm 44*, featured in *Kadima* a year before it was published officially, describes a scene in which two former camp inmates, husband and wife, visit with their son the memorial complex at the site of the concentration camp in which they were incarcerated during the war—the solemn atmosphere being disturbed by loud American tourists.<sup>490</sup> Short stories and poems of other authors also dealt with the Holocaust in interesting and unorthodox ways: “Rain,” a story by Đorđe Fišer, for example, was about a young camp inmate named Lea and her internal dialogue about Jewish destiny and universal hatred of the Jews.<sup>491</sup>

All these texts addressed Holocaust themes in ways radically different from the officially sanctioned story of Jewish victimhood and resistance, along with other Yugoslav peoples, during World War II. In all these stories and poems, Jewish suffering during the war—what in Yugoslavia came to be known as “the Holocaust” only much later—emerges as a much wider historical experience, one that concerned only the Jews (and, at least in its aftermaths, possibly perpetrators, bystanders, and liberators, as in the two stories of Danilo Kiš mentioned above), and certainly had very little to do with the local Yugoslav context and the suffering of other groups. The named and unnamed geographical regions in these texts, the protagonists’ unfamiliar non-Slavic names, mostly very Jewish (Eduard Kon, Lea, Jakob, or even “2071”), the camps and crematoria—all these pointed to the formation of a memory of the Holocaust that was entirely different from, and ran counter to, the one

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<sup>489</sup> Danilo Kiš, “Juda,” *Kadima* no. 7-8 (February 1959), 5-7.

<sup>490</sup> Danilo Kiš, “Made in Germany,” *Kadima* no. 10 (April 1961), 7-8.

<sup>491</sup> Đorđe Fišer, “Kiša,” *Kadima* no. 4 (November 1957), 2.

performed in annual commemoration ceremonies by the Federation. It is also worth remembering that, as I showed in the previous chapter, images and concepts related to the Holocaust that we take for granted today—death camps, for example, as well as crematoria, dehumanization of the Jews, etc.—first made it into the Yugoslav public sphere through the Yugoslav media around the time of the Eichmann trial. The early works of Danilo Kiš and other young Jewish authors in *Kadima* thus signaled the emergence of an entirely different sphere of memory—wholly out of tune with the official ways of remembering and commemorating the carnage of World War II in Yugoslavia—in which the Holocaust was seen as a traumatic event affecting primarily Jewish self-understanding, a historical development that had little to do with the general institutionalized imagery of the war and suffering that were projected by the Federation of Jewish Communities and Yugoslav authorities.

This, of course, is not to claim that this was a planned, sustained effort on the part of the editors of *Kadima*; neither can we infer that there was a generation of young Jewish writers who self-consciously tried to challenge the rigors of established Jewish life in early socialist Yugoslavia. Rather, what is important to observe is that the official mode of commemoration of Yugoslav Jewish victims did not contain the immense impact of the Holocaust on the first postwar generation of Jews in Yugoslavia, and that at least some of this excess of memory—amorphous and ill-defined as it was—found its way into a publication that claimed, from its very first issue, that “Jewishness” of the new generation needed to be defined culturally. In other words, there is strong evidence to suggest that it appeared to editors of *Kadima* in the late 1950s and early 1960s that representing the Holocaust (again, *avant la*

*lettre*) in literature in ways that were different from official representations of this topic, and publishing those representations in a Jewish youth magazine was an important part of this process of cultural definition of Jewishness.

It is also important to note that while there was a number of young authors who published these stories and poems in *Kadima*, it was Danilo Kiš who gave this new impetus a definitive shape. A young student of comparative literature at Belgrade University, Kiš was an emerging and ambitious author. From the early 1970s until his premature death in 1989, Kiš was considered one of the most prominent Yugoslav authors, and certainly one of the most translated in the West.<sup>492</sup> As someone who clearly dwarfed other amateur authors in *Kadima* in terms of the literary quality of his work, he set very forcefully the tone for the kind of Holocaust literature the journal was out to publish. However, even though his work dominated the early issues of *Kadima*, there was a number of other authors who pursued similar themes. The appearance of literary works in *Kadima* in the late 1950s and the early 1960s that questioned, even if in most subdued and unselfconscious ways, the dominant understanding about Jewish suffering and challenging the commemorative paradigm of the Federation of Jewish Communities, provided an alternative basis for Jewish memory of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, and was, significantly, not a project of a single person. Importantly, young editors of *Kadima* regarded this kind of literary expression as part of their project of Jewish cultural work.

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<sup>492</sup> For Kiš's literary career, see Ivana Vuletić, *The Prose Fiction of Danilo Kiš, Serbian Jewish Writer: Childhood and the Holocaust* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003). For a sample of Kiš's work in English, see *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (New York: Harcourt 1978); *Encyclopedia of the Dead* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998); *Garden, Ashes* (New York: Harcourt, 1975); *Hourglass* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998); *Early Sorrows: For Children and Sensitive Readers* (New York: New Directions, 1998); and *Homo Poeticus* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003).

Not all pieces published in *Kadima*, on the other hand, dealt with the Holocaust. There was a number of other poems and stories that had little or nothing to do with the topic, and were included in the publication because their authors were members of Jewish youth clubs. Judita Šalgo, for example, another budding author who later became one of the most well-known Serbian authors in the late 1980s and early 1990s, published her first experimental literary works in *Kadima*.<sup>493</sup> Similarly, David Albahari, who in the late 1980s and early 1990s also became one of the finest Serbian authors, started his literary career publishing short stories—on strongly Jewish topics, sometimes addressing Holocaust themes, but usually not—and critical articles in *Kadima*.<sup>494</sup> And Dragan Klaić, who later became one of the finest Yugoslav theorists of theater and performance art, internationally renowned today, also started his publishing career in the journal of Yugoslav Jewish youth—publishing, for example, an interview with Shlomo Carlebach, a famous singer known as the “singing Rabbi,” during the latter’s visit to the Yugoslav Jewish youth summer camp in 1966.<sup>495</sup>

By the mid-1960s and early 1970s, a shift became noticeable in *Kadima*’s editorial policies. Unlike in the early 1950s, when Holocaust themes and concern with the logistics of cultural work comprised the backbone of *Kadima*’s publishing activity, in the next two decades the main interests of successive editorial boards changed somewhat, and *Kadima* became more open to other kinds of texts. The

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<sup>493</sup> See, for example, “Ostala bih samo okvir,” *Kadima* no. 4 (November 1957), 11; “Lepota” and “Skica,” *Kadima* no. 5 (February 1958), 3; “Ogledala,” *Kadima* no. 6 (July 1958), 27-29; etc.

<sup>494</sup> For David Albahari’s early works published in *Kadima*, see “Roš Ašana 1960. Moja sestra Berta,” *Kadima* no. 25 (1971), 81-82; and “Priče koje jedan drugom (moj otac i ja) pričamo,” *Kadima* no. 26 (1972), 26-28. For a sample of Albahari’s work in English, see *Tsing* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997); *Bait* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001); and, most recently, *Gotz and Meyer* (New York: Harcourt, 2005).

<sup>495</sup> Dragan Klaić, “Rabin sa gitarom,” *Kadima* no. 19 (December 1966), 20-22.



pages of the journal opened up to Western popular culture—especially the kinds of culture that the editors considered somehow “Jewish”—as well as to news about, and contacts with, Jewish youth organizations in the West and in Israel. Although the Holocaust was still addressed as a topic in published literary texts and at the occasions of important anniversaries, new issues became more interesting to the editors of *Kadima* in this period.<sup>496</sup>

This shift partly reflected the changing editorial staffs of *Kadima*, and the new outlooks of these new generations. Unlike their counterparts who had come of age during the war and in the immediate postwar years, these new youngsters profited from the more open atmosphere Yugoslavia experienced in the 1960s and the early 1970s. This was the period in which Western popular culture was increasingly available in the country, as was the possibility of international travel. As the Federation of Jewish Communities maintained good relations with Jewish organizations in the West and with the Association of Yugoslav Immigrants in Israel, increasing numbers of Jewish youths from Yugoslavia came into contact with their counterparts abroad. *Kadima* reported all those contacts; what was interesting in all

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<sup>496</sup> Here as well, as in the literary texts discussed above, the themes discussed encompassed a much wider range of issues raised by the Holocaust and its implications for postwar Jewishness, and were not limited to the context of Yugoslavia, although it was discussed as well. See, for example, Mirjam Štajner, “Ustanak u getu—pobeda poraza,” *Kadima* no. 25 (1971), 26-28, in which the author discussed the issue of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Having described the Warsaw ghetto uprising, she concluded the article: “This is, comrades [*drugovi*], the history of our brethren, the history of ourselves. For us, they should not smell of incense and prayers. We are the people who survived small and large Warsaws, who fought, were humiliated, and flourished again in our eternal determination that we are living for today—to be men [*čovek*], not despite of, but because of being Jews. Jews of a new generation. Men living for the present, thinking about the future, and not forgetting the past.” Štajner, “Ustanak u getu,” 30. The word “*drugovi*,” by which the author addressed the readers, can be translated as both “comrades” and “friends.” As the text itself is not only free of Communist rhetoric, but connects, early in the text, Jewish resistance to the existence of Israel (in the period in which Israel was routinely referred to as a “Zionist aggressor” in the Yugoslav press), in my reading this address serves as an invitation for a stronger, Jewish camaraderie, and certainly carries strong overtones of friendship as well.

these texts—mostly reports from international seminars for Jewish youth or Jewish youth summer camps—were the opportunities for reflection about contemporary Jewishness in Yugoslavia and abroad that these events presented the young Yugoslav visitors.

“This seminar was useful and interesting,” wrote Judita Šalgo of a seminar for *madrichim* and Jewish leaders she attended in Strassbourg in 1962,

despite the radically different conditions under which Jewish communities [in Western Europe] live... These conditions are different from ours both in ideological and the material sense. But even despite these differences, the main problems are the same in all [communities]: how to survive, and how to organize and educate the youth in the sense of this survival of Jewishness... Of course, our conceptions regarding the essence of religion and traditionalist forms of life differ [from those at the seminar]...but the seminar left fairly wide possibilities of choice and endorsement of different concepts and ideas...<sup>497</sup>

More to the point, a young student from Rijeka was “impressed” by Jewish customs observed in Camp Pembroke for Jewish girls, outside of Boston, which she visited in the summer of 1966:

Of all the work and life in the camp, I was mostly impressed by the way they observed Jewish rites, which consisted of greeting the Saturday on Friday afternoon and lighting candles, while the entire rite was followed by singing. Apart from that, everyone in the camp wore a uniform.

Comparing life of children and educators in the camp with the life of youth and leaders at our summer camp in Yugoslavia, I think there are many things we could easily apply in our case as well... Considering [the large number of children and students in the camp] we could form five to seven groups, and each one could be named after something Jewish—a city, or something connected to Jewish history. More Jewish songs and dances would also have to be mandatory, as well as the study of Hebrew. I am not saying that we do not do these things in our summer camp, but I think these things should be mandatory for all, and not just for the ones who want them.<sup>498</sup>

Two young Jewish leaders, from Subotica and Zagreb, attended the summer part of the Eisendrath International Exchange Program in Warwick, New York in 1970. The Program was run (as it is today still) by the Union for Reform Judaism, and its summer component was, according to one of the two Yugoslavs attending it, “to form

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<sup>497</sup> Judita Šalgo, “Seminar u Strasburgu,” *Kadima* no. 11 (June 1962), 4-6, 5.

<sup>498</sup> Elizabeta Gal, “U kampu Pembrok,” *Kadima* no. 19 (December 1966), 16-17, 16-17.

a leadership of youth groups similar to our youth clubs.”<sup>499</sup> As Yugoslavs—and probably the only eastern Europeans around—the two young youth leaders had to answer many questions about “whether the Yugoslav government [was] oppressing the Jews and in what way,” to which they invariably replied that “our socio-political bodies help and support the work of the Federation [of Jewish Communities] with great understanding.”<sup>500</sup> But apart from defending the Yugoslav image abroad, the two young leaders also observed that apart from Jewish education,

one of the main preoccupations of the entire camp was peace in the world. Young leaders learned how to strive within their congregations for peace in Vietnam, against air and water pollution, etc. Since we cannot transplant such lectures to our clubs, Mladen and I mainly attended lectures such as “Hassidic legends” or “Great Jewish thinkers of this century.”<sup>501</sup>

Other young Jewish activists from Yugoslavia regularly attended other similar seminars and camps, mostly in Western Europe, and *Kadima* published reports from these trips regularly.<sup>502</sup>

Two interesting developments characterize these reports. The first one is the understanding of the authors of these texts—and probably the readers of *Kadima* as well—that organizing Jewish life took many forms, and depended on local conditions—which, in Yugoslavia, were different from those in Western Europe or the United States. This meant that being Jewish in Yugoslavia had to exclude “religion and traditionalist forms of life,” and that American Reform Jewish engagement with progressive politics was impossible to duplicate. Rather, what fascinated young Yugoslav visitors to those camps and seminars were themes and

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<sup>499</sup> Miroslav Blumenberg, “Letnji kamp u Vorviku,” *Kadima* no. 24 (February 1971), 15-17, 15.

<sup>500</sup> Blumenberg, “Letnji kamp u Vorviku,” 15-16.

<sup>501</sup> Blumenberg, “Letnji kamp u Vorviku,” 16.

<sup>502</sup> See, for example, Vesna Najfeld, “Seminar u Finskoj,” *Kadima* no. 24 (February 1971), 11-12; Jelena Biro, “Seminar u Oksfordu,” *Kadima* no. 24 (February 1971), 13-14; Miša Levi, “Seminar u Dublinu,” *Kadima* no. 25 (1971), 24-26, etc.

topics with which they were unfamiliar, but which they thought could provide a stable and uncontroversial basis for understanding of the importance and boundaries of Jewishness. In other words, Jewish history, Hebrew, support for Israel, and certain forms of traditionalism divorced from religious connotations could all be adopted and instituted through the youth summer camp and the youth clubs at home, without probing the boundaries of acceptability. It is also interesting to note that these themes were more appealing—because of their potential to set boundaries—than more general topics, such as peace activism and environmentalism, progressive causes that would presumably have been more in tune with the official Yugoslav communist ideology.

Interest in Israel played a crucial role among these concerns. Since the first issue, *Kadima* published numerous articles on Israel, the history of Zionist politics, everyday life in the country, and other political, economic, and cultural topics related to Israel. These ranged from spirited articles praising Israel as the most important national accomplishment in the history of the Jewish people—such as in the letter discussed at the beginning of this chapter—to more sober travelogues and reports about the country and its problems, accounts of individual and group visits to the country, articles about its history and culture, and so on.<sup>503</sup> From the very beginning of *Kadima*, therefore, Israel as a theme, and unspoken Zionism—since the word itself carried unwanted imperialist connotations in the context of Yugoslav public

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<sup>503</sup> See Vajs, “Otvoreno pismo”; Bogdan Brukner, “Jevrejski univerzitet u Jerusalimu,” *Kadima* no. 3 (1957), 2-3; Bogdan Popović, “Monografija o Teodoru Herclu,” *Kadima* nos. 7-9; Judita Šalgo, “Izrael kao domaćin,” *Kadima* no. 12 (February 1963), 8-10; Slobodanka Petrović, “Nazaret,” *Kadima* no. 12 (February 1963), 10-11; Judita Šalgo, “Jedna razglednica sa Mrtvog mora,” *Kadima* no. 13 (December 1963), 3-5; Brane Popović, “Bili smo u Izraelu,” *Kadima* no. 15 (November 1965), 7-8; Olivera Mirković, “U Gatu,” *Kadima* no. 15 (November 1965), 8-9; etc.

awareness and discussions of Middle Eastern politics—were very present as a prominent part in the context of discussions about cultural content of Jewishness in Yugoslavia. Even though a long, almost three-year pause in the publication of *Kadima* coincided with the breaking of diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Israel—this concurrence seems to have been coincidental, although it is possible that the editors of *Kadima* or, more likely, the leaders of the Federation of Jewish Communities, decided that a youth journal praising Israel in almost every issue would not contribute best to the interests of the Jews in Yugoslavia—the journal continued to feature positive articles about Israel even as the official Yugoslav position towards Israel was quite hostile.<sup>504</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, coinciding with the increase in reporting about experiences of young Jewish Yugoslavs at seminars and camps abroad, *Kadima* started publishing articles and reviews of foreign, mostly American, cultural developments that were somehow considered “Jewish,” and thus of interest to Yugoslav Jewish youth. These reports and overviews covered both domestic and international events. The staging of Arthur Miller’s plays in Belgrade theaters, for example, was worthy of coverage in the view of the *Kadima* editors; in an article focusing specifically on the play *The Price* (1968) and the novel *Focus* (1945), the author foregrounded Jewish themes and discussed the issue of antisemitism in America and elsewhere.<sup>505</sup> Similarly, the author of a feature about the staging of *Fiddler on the Roof* claimed that

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<sup>504</sup> See, for example, features “Hapoel—Radnički iz Jerusalima,” *Kadima* no. 26 (1972), 23-26; “Autostopiranje pod izraelskom zastavom,” *Kadima* no. 26 (1972), 82-85. For details about the breaking of diplomatic relations between Yugoslavia and Israel, see Aleksandar Lebl, “Prekid odnosa SFRJ-Izrael 1967. godine,” in *Tokovi istorije* No. 1-4 (2001), 39-75.

<sup>505</sup> “Artur Miler,” *Kadima* no. 23 (1970), 49-52.

when I write about [Tevye the milkman], I write about my grandfather, about my other grandfather from Bijeljina [a town in Bosnia]... I have a sense that whether they come from Kiev or Guadalajara or a Broadway musical, all of them have several common features... Maybe because they are Jews.<sup>506</sup>

These events that were otherwise a part of a wider, Yugoslav cultural scene, were thus covered as important for the young Jewish readership. They raised issues that were, according to the views expressed in those texts in *Kadima*, specifically important for, and of interest to the Jews.

Similarly, *Kadima* published articles about Jewish stars of international popular culture. The already mentioned interview with Shlomo Carlebach stressed the power of Carlebach's songs to ignite the feeling of Jewishness even among those far removed from tradition and national identity.<sup>507</sup> Arguing that "chess, just like sports, science, and the arts, is a field of human activity in which Jews take a prominent place," the author of an article on Jewish chess players counted the Jews among the most famous players, including Bobby Fischer and the Soviets.<sup>508</sup> Features about Bob Dylan and Simon and Garfunkel did not stress the Jewishness of the popular icons openly, but it was clear from the tone of the texts that their importance for the readership of *Kadima* had to do with this fact.<sup>509</sup>

From the early postwar years to the mid-1970s, *Kadima* thus provided a space for discussion of various aspects of Jewishness in Yugoslavia and abroad. This was a "discussion" only in a very loose sense, as there seems to have been no real politics or

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<sup>506</sup> "Guslač na krovu," *Kadima* no. 25 (1971), 83-85.

<sup>507</sup> Klaić, "Rabin sa gitarom," 21.

<sup>508</sup> "Jevreji na šahovskom meču stoleća," *Kadima* no. 24 (February 1971), 41-43.

<sup>509</sup> The author of the feature about Bob Dylan, for example, stressed that Dylan's real name was Robert Zimmerman and mentioned his "curly hair... and a curved Semitic nose"; s/he also quoted a stanza from Dylan's song "With God on Our Side": "When the Second World War / Came to an end / We forgave the Germans / And we were friends / Though they murdered six million / In the ovens they fried / The Germans now too / Have God on their side." See "Portret jednog genija," *Kadima* no. 24 (1971), 35-40, 35, 36. See also Paja Vujković-Cvijin, "Simon i Garfunkel," *Kadima* no. 25 (1971), 56-59.

a long-term plan as to what exactly it was that was going to be “Jewish” about Jewish youth in Yugoslavia; nor were there contested well-entrenched positions, or serious disagreements about this issue. Rather, the role of *Kadima* was important in an entirely different sense: it presented its readers with a window into other ways of Jewish identification, multiple ways that were different from the one formulated in the forums of the Federation of Jewish Communities. From literary representations of the Holocaust that silently subverted the dominant modes of commemoration of Jewish suffering to news and information about Jewish issues and ways of identification in the West, *Kadima* opened a space for a different, if ever elusive, understanding of Jewishness in Yugoslavia. And although this alternative pattern was never elaborated upon in any serious manner, and reading *Kadima* might well have been the only constant pillar of this unorthodox view of Jewish identification—it is impossible to understand the process of Jewish identification in Yugoslavia in the postwar period without paying attention to the traces of nonconformist—if unselfconscious—voices that probed the official coordinates of Jewishness and sought to understand this identity in a context much wider than that in which the Federation of Jewish Communities operated.

### Summer Youth Camp, Club Visits, and Maccabi Games

Another venue through which questions of Jewish identity in Yugoslavia were broached in informal settings was a series of annual meetings of young members of

Yugoslav Jewish communities. These meetings were haphazard at first, but from the late 1950s and into the 1960s, they assumed a regular form that revolved around the Yugoslav calendar. Every year, the Federation of Jewish Communities of Yugoslavia ran a summer camp for Jewish children and youth during the summer school vacation. This camp, organized at various coastal resorts in Croatia or Montenegro (and one year on a mountain in Bosnia-Herzegovina) until it stabilized in the northern Dalmatian resort of Pirovac in the mid-1970s, was typically attended by large numbers of young members of Jewish communities across the country, as well as guests from abroad—mostly from Western Europe, the United States, and Israel. During the long weekend around May 1, which was, as elsewhere in Europe, an official holiday in Yugoslavia (International Workers' Day), Jewish youth clubs organized Maccabi sports games, attended by young members of Jewish communities from around the country. And during four-day weekends around November 29 (“Republic Day,” commemorating 29 November 1943, when Tito’s Partisans proclaimed themselves a provisional government of a future federal state) and New Year’s Day, one youth club hosted a gathering of young members from Jewish communities across the country.

In the summer of 1955, the Federation of Jewish Communities organized the first Jewish summer youth camp outside the city of Rovinj in Istria (Croatia). The camp hosted around 250 children from across the country—from Jewish communities of Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Osijek, Subotica, Novi Sad, Skopje, Zemun, Mostar, Split, and Sombor. A report in the official bulletin of the Federation summarized the first camp experience as follows:

In general, the summer camp was very successful, except in several lesser



organizational and technical questions. Children from across Yugoslavia had a chance to meet and get to know each other for the first time after the Liberation. Many gained in weight and became stronger. In addition, cultural-educational program was developed for children and the youth, which will doubtlessly yield certain results. And finally, the experience acquired during this joint summer camp, will contribute in many ways that the next summer camp be organized even better, without the mentioned weaknesses.<sup>510</sup>

The language of the report reflected the priorities of the Federation of Jewish Communities: the forging of a new generation of Yugoslav Jews through Jewish cultural work and development of personal connections (and, not the least, physical strength). The camp became an annual event, an important venue for “cultural work with youth,” the topic that dominated, in the way I outlined above, the discussions of the various bodies of the Federation. In the words of one of the Jewish officials, “the goal of the joint [Jewish] summer camp, apart from providing our youth with vacation and physical strength, should serve educational purposes as well.”<sup>511</sup> A committee formed by the Executive Committee of the Federation was charged with developing the program of cultural work with youth in the summer camp, but its success was dubious: the so-called “cultural work” in the summer camp—the planned cultural events, lectures, and educational programs in general—was often a matter of improvisation and, as such, a constant source of frustration for the leaders of the Federation.

The official reports of the summer youth camp, published regularly in the Federation’s bulletin, even as they praised the general success of the annual gathering of Jewish children and students, hinted at the constant sense of frustration:

It is undeniable that the summer camp generally yielded good results. First of all, the mere fact that our children and youth spent twenty-five days swimming, sunbathing, playing sports and games in a really beautiful place on the Adriatic, is positive in

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<sup>510</sup> “Letovanje jevrejske omladine,” *Bilten* Vol. VI (July-August 1955), 8-10, 10.

<sup>511</sup> “Kulturni program prilikom letovanja naše omladine,” *Bilten* Vol. VII, No. 9-10 (September-October 1956), 3-5, 3.

itself. Apart from that, cultural work and manifestations that were organized have generally, if not always, also yielded somewhat positive results, as those attending had a chance to learn about certain historical and cultural achievements of the Jewish people.<sup>512</sup>

Sometimes, the dissatisfaction was expressed more openly: during the 1962 summer camp at the island of Cres, despite massive attendance (about 360 children and students), *madrichot* from Israel and “well-known Jewish public workers,” who “took responsibility” for “cultural work,” and who “gave lectures on Jewish, general, and Yugoslav topics,” there was a clear lack of enthusiasm about cultural work, as the author of the report noted. The dissatisfaction was so pervasive, that communities in Zagreb and Belgrade organized follow-up meetings in order to discuss the failure of cultural work, and lack of discipline and interest among some camp attendants.<sup>513</sup> More or less open dissatisfaction with the theory and practice of “cultural work” remained a constant feature of reports in *Bilten* about summer camps for children and youth.

The cultural content of this “work” varied during the years—and it is this fact that casts doubt on the purported vision and success of the Federation-appointed committee in charge of cultural work—but the topics covered always seemed to have been planned to include mostly topics from Jewish history and culture, discussions about Israel and contemporary politics in the Middle East, and, occasionally, selected topics from Yugoslav history and culture. Emphases of these lectures and varied over time, and depended mostly on the availability and good will (and interests) of qualified lecturers and public workers. In the first camp in 1955, Albert Vajs, for example, gave lectures on “Contemporary World Jewry,” “The Diaspora and Israel,”

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<sup>512</sup> “Letovanje jevrejske omladine u Rovinju,” *Bilten* Vol. VIII, No. 7-8 (July-August 1957), 7-11, 8.

<sup>513</sup> “Letovanje na Cresu,” *Bilten* Vol. XIII, No. 3-4 (March-April 1962), 9-14.

and “Jewish Labor Movement”; Lavoslav Kadelburg on “Short History of Yugoslav Jewry: Organizations and Institutions”; Shimon Tzahor from Israel spoke on youth and sports in Israel; and a university professor from Belgrade, Solomon Kalderon, gave a lecture on “The Historical Importance of Jewish Holidays.”<sup>514</sup> Over the years, the lecturers included guests from abroad—Israel, the United States, Britain—but the topics covered the same gamut of issues. In 1970, for example, the lectures included the topics from “Jewish Holidays and Customs” and the “Scientific Interpretation of *Kashrut*” to “Some Questions of Contemporary Jewry,” “Jewish Communities in the World” and “Jewish Identification and Identity,” a lecture by a British professor that “provoked a lively discussion,” according to the author of the *Bilten* article, “as students had different opinions on this issue.”<sup>515</sup>

But despite the annual lecture offerings and summer camp seminars, the pervasive feeling of failure permeated discussions about “cultural work” with the youth. In the beginning of the 1970s, just like in the 1950s, the leadership of the Federation was still not satisfied with how this important task was being carried out. “Whenever we talk about whatever aspect of Judaism,” wrote Lavoslav Kadelburg, the president of the Federation in 1970, “the first question to pose is the question of survival, continuity, even the question of our very existence.” Because of this,

Our priority should be cultural work in all its forms: seminars, lectures, discussion sessions, libraries with Jewish literature and press, publishing, concerts of Jewish music and choral singing, museum exhibits, and so on.

There are difficulties in this activity, objective as well as subjective. The objective ones primarily come down to the fact that our local communities are mostly so tiny that the organization of systemic cultural work is faced with almost impossible difficulties. The subjective ones lie mostly in the insufficient engagement of those community members qualified for such work because they are busy pursuing their careers and existence... Jewish activities should be made

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<sup>514</sup> “Letovanje jevrejske omladine,” 8-10.

<sup>515</sup> “Naša ovogodišnja letovanja,” *Bilten* Vol. XXI, No. 9-10 (September-October 1970), 13-18, 14-15.

attractive and interesting. There is a number of possibilities in this respect. Attempts with the joint summer camp for the young generation have yielded limited results up until now... We haven't gone too far.<sup>516</sup>

The results of cultural work with the youth were thus not satisfactory, despite the Jewish summer camp, all the lectures and Federation forums in charge of formulating and implementing the cultural program.

But however gloomy things might have seemed to the leaders of the Federation, the summer camp did create a sense of belonging among the young members of Jewish communities who attended the annual gathering. Even if attendance at lectures and other forums of “cultural work” was wavering, the summer camp was very popular among the youth, despite all the shortcomings—in “cultural work,” accommodation, or other questions of organization and logistics. *Kadima* regularly published reports from the summer camp written by young people who attended it. Although this specific genre mocked the organization of the camp and caricatured its different shortcomings—in contrast to the “serious” analyses in *Bilten*, the *Kadima* reports were written as burlesques—it also testified to the sense of a shared experience that was reinforced year after year.<sup>517</sup>

This is not to say that there were no “serious” articles about the summer camp in *Kadima*; on the contrary, some young Jewish leaders were worried about the failures and the shortcomings of the cultural program—primarily the lack of attendance at lectures and workshops—and their implications for Jewish work. An

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<sup>516</sup> Lavoslav Kadelburg, “Neka aktuelna pitanja,” *Bilten* Vol. XXI, No. 11-12 (November-December 1970), 1-6, 2-3.

<sup>517</sup> See, for example, Ratko Alfandari, “Rovinjnski dnevnik,” *Kadima* No. 4 (November 1957), 20-21; Judita Šalgo, “I ponovo Rovinj...” *Kadima* No. 5 (February 1958), 20-21; Dalia Grin, “O jednoj posjeti našem ljetovalištu u Splitu,” *Kadima* no. 7-8 (February 1959), 45-46; Josip Klajn, “Bilo je lijepo i korisno,” *Kadima* no. 7-8 (February 1959), 46-47; Judita Šalgo, “Letovanje naše nasušno,” *Kadima* no. 7-8 (February 1959), 48-49; Žak Beraha, “Naše letovanje (kozerija),” *Kadima* No. 9 (November 1960), 24; Dragan Klaić, “Razsentimentalisaše li vam se misli?” *Kadima* No. 15 (November 1965), 20-21; etc.

especially bitter account by one youth leader illustrated the extent of frustration some people invested in young Jewish leadership felt. “Maybe not everyone will agree with me,” wrote Dalia Grin in 1963,

but we really haven’t been able to eliminate—and this is entirely our own fault—that eternal “oh, not the lecture again!” and managed to substitute it with general enthusiasm and will to participate actively or passively in what should pass for Jewish cultural work.<sup>518</sup>

But despite the open frustration, such accounts testified, on the other hand, to the popularity of the summer camp, and the interest of young members of Jewish communities in attending it:

There you have it, us! We frowned every day at the mention of the lectures, we didn’t sit in a room in front of a flickering screen—we were running around in blue jeans to the Riviera, kissed on the boardwalk, lost other people’s rows, ignored the existence of all the equipment and did not manage to organize a dance evening in the dusty courtyard with several records of older dance music... We drove the manager crazy, who, with best of intentions, paid the orchestra once a week to play between 5 and 7 (during their only free time), when we didn’t feel like dancing, because it was before sunset... In the first group, for the youngest participants, we published one issue of “Little Kadima” as a typical ambitious work for an annual school exhibit—after long persuasion in breaks from swimming, lectures, meals, some material was created, which then a group of people put together and multiplied on an old machine...<sup>519</sup>

The tone, of course, is accusatory, and Dalia Grin could not understand how it was that the entire generation would rather dance and kiss than learn about Jewish history and engage in Jewish work, which was the whole point of the summer camp.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Dalia Grin, “Nešto o našim ljetovalištima i kulturnom radu (Nakon Cresa),” *Kadima* No. 12 (February 1963), 4-7, 4.

<sup>519</sup> Grin, “Nešto o našim ljetovalištima,” 7.

<sup>520</sup> A sample program of cultural work during the summer camp from Split in 1958 provides the example of the extent of the work that was done. That year, according to one of the participants in the oldest, student group, the following lectures were given: “Jews as Creators of Music” and “Music in Israel,” by Andrija Preger, the famous pianist from Belgrade; “Jewish Communities in the World,” by Davor Gavrin, a student from Zagreb; “The Kibbutzim in Israel,” by Reuben Livni, a youth leader from Kibbutz Sha’ar Haamakim, Israel; “The History of the Split Jews,” by Jakov Morpurgo from Split; “Dr. Theodor Herzl,” by Bogdan Popović, a student from Belgrade; “Israel through Words and Images,” by Aleksandar Kreutler, a student from Sarajevo; “A Report from the World Congress of Jewish Students in Jerusalem,” by Gabriel Deleon from Belgrade. In addition to the lectures, there was a workshop for learning Hebrew songs, led by Boaz Givan, a student from Israel; a cultural program prepared for the visit of Deborah Miller, who visited the camp on behalf of the JOINT; and the “Evening of *Kadima*,” a showcase of cultural programs prepared during the time in the camp. The

However, the passage above is hardly a description of a failed summer camp; and even though some of the described transgressions and little misbehaviors could be ascribed to spoiled summer camp participants, the atmosphere described conveys the image of good spirits and good times. Although the example with the camp bulletin (the energy and persuasion it had taken even for the most modest issue of “Little Kadima”) was invoked as an illustration of sluggish cultural work, the work was done, after all, and—unless the creators of the cultural program had imagined some solemn gathering of scholarly minds interested in different interpretations of Jewish history and culture—the camp seems to have worked. The large number of mocking texts describing the wild atmosphere and cultural failings in the camp published in *Kadima* (to which I referred above) also testifies to this fact.<sup>521</sup>

It is this specific atmosphere in the summer camp—short, perhaps, on the Jewish content that the organizers had imagined would underpin its existence, but very successful in forging a sense of closeness and friendship of the new generation of young members of Jewish communities—that contributed to the need for more frequent gatherings of this kind. From the mid-1960s, gatherings of Jewish community youth clubs became more or less a regular entry in the Jewish calendar in Yugoslavia. For holiday breaks around November 29 and New Year’s Day, youth

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camp participants also made trips to Makarska and Trogir, nearby coastal resorts, and organized visits to the gallery of Ivan Meštrović (a famous Yugoslav sculptor) in Split, the Split synagogue, museum and aquarium, as well as to Marjan, the local picnic area. Đorđe Popadić, “Kulturni rad omladine u Splitu,” *Kadima* No. 7-8 (February 1959), 33-34.

<sup>521</sup> “As it always happens, that which is pleasant passes fast. Twenty days went by very quickly. The last evening organized by Kadima united us all, and reminded everyone what we went through during our sojourn in Split. Useful, informative, and light-hearted. It was difficult to part from new friends, who, during this time, became close and dear like old friends. And instead of being sad, we parted lightly, since we were sure that we will meet again next year. This is a wish of all camp participants: the Sarajevans, jokers and great friends, the Belgraders, who shared the same characteristics, friends from Zagreb, Novi Sad, Osijek...” Klajn, “Bilo je lijepo i korisno,” 47.

clubs from across the country would organize trips to different cities in which local youth clubs would host the guests. These events were covered extensively in *Kadima*.

The gathering of youth clubs in Novi Sad in 1965 is a good example of what these annual meetings looked like. “For three days, the youth from all parts of our country were guests in Novi Sad,” wrote Dragan Klaić in the report for *Kadima*.

In this short time, we tried to fulfill the wishes of our youth for more frequent gatherings, exchange of experiences, and possibilities for presenting their work in their youth clubs. The gathering in Novi Sad was attended by some 60 young guests accommodated in [private] homes, and is another proof of deep connections among the Jewish youth [in Yugoslavia].<sup>522</sup>

The number of guests does not seem impressive at first, but considering that the summer camps were attended by between 250 and 300 people of all age groups annually, then the number of 60 guests, in addition to the hosts from Novi Sad itself, means that this particular gathering in Novi Sad was gathered a number of student members of Jewish communities comparable to that attending the summer camp; moreover, the hosts even had problems accommodating such relatively high number of guests.

The formal part of the gathering included discussions of ways to improve cooperation between youth clubs, and about the policies formulated by the Coordinating Committee of Youth Sections at a meeting earlier that year. But the real point of the gathering was for the members of Jewish youth clubs to spend time together and forge even closer friendships. “When we were putting together the program for the gathering,” wrote Klaić, “we took care that it be filled with events,

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<sup>522</sup> Dragan Klaić, “Susret klubova u Novom Sadu,” *Kadima* No. 16 (February 1966), 7-8, 7.

but not overcrowded... The door of the club was always open.”<sup>523</sup> The program, according to both the author of the *Kadima* article and the interviewed participants, “showed the deep connectedness of the Jewish youth from different cities and their wish to meet as often as possible.”<sup>524</sup> Gatherings in other cities in the following years were characterized by the similar atmosphere: programmatic meetings in which cultural work, *Kadima*, the summer camp, or coordination of work between the youth clubs were discussed, followed by informal gatherings and a good time.<sup>525</sup>

In addition to the fall meetings coinciding with Republic Day, since 1966 members of youth clubs of Jewish communities met for the May 1st holidays, and competed in various sports. Although these gatherings were not organized every year, they were very important for the outlook of the young Jewish clubs in the country. “For many years, or more precisely, since the prewar period,” wrote the author of an introductory article on the “Little Maccabi Games” held in Subotica in 1966, in the issue of *Kadima* which allotted a fair amount of space to that event, “our Jewish youth has not organized a single substantial sports event. This year, during the time of the May 1st holiday, we reestablished the traditional Maccabi Games.”<sup>526</sup> Jewish youth clubs competed in soccer, table tennis, chess, and basketball—and *Kadima* covered all the games and published their scores. However, as in the case of the November meetings of the clubs, the point was not just the sports competition; “dancing, charades, guitar sounds, songs in the warm night” accompanied the events,

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<sup>523</sup> Klaić, “Susret klubova u Novom Sadu,” 7.

<sup>524</sup> Klaić, “Susret klubova u Novom Sadu,” 8.

<sup>525</sup> See, for example, reports in *Kadima* of the gatherings in Belgrade and Zagreb in 1969 and 1970, respectively: “Beogradski susreti,” *Kadima* No. 23 (March 1970), 7-8; “Šta nam se sve desilo u Zagrebu,” *Kadima* no. 24 (February 1971), 7-8.

<sup>526</sup> “Subotica 1966,” *Kadima* no. 18 (June 1966), 3-4, 3.



and entertained the crowd of Jewish youngsters as well. And, at least for the author of one of the *Kadima* reports of the Maccabi games, there was no doubt that this was all about continuing friendship and ties to other Jewish communities: among the trains leaving the station and taking the participants of the games home, “one silent thought materialized in the air—see you soon in the summer camp...”<sup>527</sup> And, as in the case of the annual November meetings, the Maccabi games became regular events attended by relatively large numbers of young Jewish community members from across the country.

According to the poll that *Kadima* published after the first Maccabi games in Subotica, most of those in attendance were there because they wanted to meet old friends from other Jewish communities, or meet new friends, who were Jewish. Sports games and discussions about inter-club cooperation or cultural work were clearly of secondary importance. In the words of one of the persons in attendance interviewed, the purpose of the Maccabi games was “for those who don’t already know each other to meet, and for these connections to be nurtured.”<sup>528</sup> Similar sentiments characterized the gathering in Sarajevo the following year, and several other Maccabi games in the following years.<sup>529</sup>

Although the meetings and gatherings of the youth clubs in May, November, and December were not regular—they were still held most every year since the mid-1960s until 1991—they provided a space for young members of Jewish communities to meet and forge close friendships and relationships with members of other clubs.

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<sup>527</sup> Ivan Ujhazi and Petar Klajn, “Utisci (reportaža),” *Kadima* no. 18 (June 1966), 6-8, 8.

<sup>528</sup> Tamara Štajner, “Naša anketa,” *Kadima* no. 18 (June 1966), 10-14, 11.

<sup>529</sup> See, for example, “Sarajevo 1967. II Mala Makabijada,” *Kadima* No. 21 (May 1967), 9-16; “Mala Makabijada 1973. Beograd,” *Kadima* No. 28 (1973), 6; etc.

This was a generational issue, and many young members of Jewish communities in Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Novi Sad, and other communities, organized their yearly calendars around events for youth that took place in Jewish communal contexts. Although the substance of these meetings was not “Jewish” in the sense that the leaders of the Federation, perennially concerned with “Jewish cultural work,” had imagined, most of these youngsters’ free time was thus organized through events that were constructed as “Jewish.” And despite the lack of any traditional aspects of Jewishness that would underpin these events—even the sparse demands of official cultural programs were not always met at these gatherings—they were understood to be parts of Jewish “identification,” as the increasingly popular word among the Jewish youngsters around that time testified.

## Conclusion

From the mid-1950s on, a space was created in Yugoslavia for an understanding of Jewishness that ran counter to the ossified conceptions prescribed and performed by the Federation of Jewish Communities and the generation of the Yugoslav Jewish leaders who had come of age before World War II. The process of creation of this space was not a self-conscious, planned undertaking carried out by a dedicated group of people who wanted to subvert the established patterns of Jewish identification in Yugoslavia, and challenge the leadership of the Federation. Rather, this new Jewishness emerged as an undefined, malleable identity that addressed—in

subdued and non-threatening ways—the silences and uncharted aspects of Jewish identity that the official position on Jewishness could not provide. The different themes and issues raised with respect to the Holocaust in the early literary attempts published by *Kadima* are a good example how members of the “new generation,” about whom the leadership of the Federation was so worried, addressed the issue of “cultural work” that the latter seemed incapable of formulating.

Through *Kadima*, as well as by way of utilizing annual meetings and gatherings attended by increasing numbers of young members of Jewish communities over the years, those young members of Jewish communities created a sense of common destiny and connectedness that had a potential to create boundaries between them and other young people in Yugoslavia. This was not a dramatic process, and these boundaries were all but invisible; but the subdued “struggle against spiritual assimilation coming from the unlikeliest of sources—total equality,” as an Israeli journalist characterized it in 1961, rendered the amorphous space delineated by these semi-permeable boundaries important.<sup>530</sup> The generations of young members of Jewish communities that came of age after World War II were thus, in their view, not the last generations of Yugoslav Jewry, a prospect so feared by the leaders connected to the prewar patterns of Jewish politics and identification. *Kadima*, the summer camp, the Maccabi games and other gatherings of young members of Yugoslav Jewish communities therefore, created the space, in the eyes of these young members, for a Jewishness that may have been divorced from its many traditional aspects, but which was still a valid Jewish—if elusive and incomplete—way to identify oneself as Jewish.

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<sup>530</sup> Itzhak Ziv-Av, “Tito be-shanut im Herzl,” *Ha-Boker* (21 July 1961).

## Chapter VIII

### Conclusion

In 1991, Slovenia and Croatia formally declared independence from the Yugoslav federation, and Yugoslavia ceased to exist. Prompted by the ensuing violence, scholars have made different arguments about the roots of the conflict of the 1990s and the viability—or, rather, the lack thereof—of any Yugoslav state. The questions we ask and research directions we take, however, should not obscure a different reality that followed the end of World War II: the period of forging a common Yugoslav identity and rebuilding a Yugoslav federation—projects that were embraced by the leadership of the remaining Jewish communities in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

The story of the rebuilding of Jewish communal life in Socialist Yugoslavia is a story with many twists and subplots. It is a story of a community leadership that tried to reach for continuities with prewar Jewish politics, as a way of both finding a basis for a viable Jewishness after the Holocaust, and affinities with the emerging narrative of legitimation of the new Yugoslav project. It is a story about the various and changing bases of Jewish identification in Yugoslavia—from official embeddedness in the early Yugoslavist narrative to more fluid explorations of what it meant to be Jewish in Socialist Yugoslavia. It is also a story about the early attempts of the new Yugoslav government to control the Jewish rebuilding process and utilize some of its aspects for its own self-

definition as a political entity and system different from both the increasingly alienated Soviet bloc and the West.

The history of the Yugoslav Jews is also a history of South Slav, and later Yugoslav, Zionism. It was the early group of Croatian Ashkenazi Zionists who, at the turn of the twentieth century, were the first to imagine the possibility of a unified Yugoslav Jewry. By the outbreak of World War II, their political efforts had borne fruit; but even in the aftermath of the Holocaust, when the political, cultural, and economic landscape changed radically, the new Yugoslav Jewish leadership looked to the prewar traditions of Yugoslav Zionism as one of the pillars of new Jewishness. Although “Zionism” as a classical political ideology was alien to the leadership of the post-Holocaust Yugoslav Jewry, the traditions of Yugoslav Jewish cultural diversity, broad support for Israel, and interest in international Jewish political affairs—features of the prewar Yugoslav Jewishness forged by the Yugoslav Zionists—provided a link to a tradition on which the new Jewishness could be based, even in new circumstances. Most of all, Yugoslav Zionism, in addition to providing a framework for forging a community out of diverse Jewish populations, also provided a framework for a secular Jewish identity in Yugoslavia, both before and after World War II.

The story of the Jews of Yugoslavia also exposes an interesting dynamic between two very different political projects—different both in magnitude and content: on the one hand, the forging of Yugoslav Jewry, and on the other, the rise and fall of Yugoslavia. To say that the Jews were the only true Yugoslavs (especially in the postwar period), and compare their political loyalties to those of Habsburg Jews, would be historically inaccurate and simplistic; but it is nevertheless possible to note that the dynamic of the

forging and reconstructing Yugoslav Jewishness was inextricably linked to the dynamic of Yugoslav history. That the Yugoslav Jewry, marginal and demographically insignificant as it is, has outlived Yugoslavia—Jewish communities from across the former Yugoslavia still meet regularly, in growing and significant numbers, in a Croatian sea resort, one much like the summer camp discussed in the last chapter—is an ironic coda to the story told in this dissertation; but it is also a reminder of an important difference between Jewish “Yugoslavism” and the Yugoslav political project.

For both prewar and postwar Jewish leaders, “Yugoslavism” provided a framework for integrating the diverse Jewish populations through politics of inclusiveness, language openness, and pan-Yugoslav territorial and “national” focus. All these aspects were devoid of Yugoslavist cultural connotations: the substance of this political work was the forging of a nationally conscious Jewish community. In contrast, the new early postwar Yugoslavism as envisioned by Tito and the Communists adopted all those aspects precisely to forge a new cultural meaning of being “Yugoslav”; when, by the early 1960s, it became obvious that these early efforts were not successful, new policies were adopted, but the meaning of Yugoslavism was always defined culturally. It is precisely because it never had any Yugoslavist cultural connotations that “Yugoslav Jewishness” survived the final collapse of the Yugoslavist cultural paradigm.

The story of the Jews in Yugoslavia after the Holocaust is also a story of the institutionalized meanings of the past and memory as grounds for forging national identities and imagining political communities. The new Yugoslavia’s founding narrative was one of equal suffering of all Yugoslav peoples during World War II, and their joint heroic resistance, under the Communist leadership, to the “fascist occupiers

and their domestic collaborators,” as the phrase went at the time. This particular view of World War II in Yugoslavia became a basis for nation building after the war, and lay at the heart of the Communists’ efforts to forge a supranational Yugoslav identity. The leadership of the Federation of Jewish Communities saw in this discursive universe an opportunity to insert symbolically the story of Jewish victimhood into this larger narrative of victimization and suffering. Unlike in the Soviet Union, however, where a similar story of joint suffering and heroism during the war was being created, but in which foregrounding Jewish suffering—or heroism, for that matter—was unacceptable and was suppressed, or in the Soviet bloc countries such as Poland and Hungary, where both nationalists and Communists saw danger in open discussions about Jewish suffering, in Yugoslavia this kind of open commemoration of Jewish suffering was acceptable, as long as the narrative it weaved conformed to the ideological coordinates set by the communists. So, as long as Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide were presented as “Jewish victims of fascism,” and as long as monuments also commemorated “Jewish fallen fighters”—both requirements being part of the ritual mode of commemoration of World War II victims in Yugoslavia at the time—the monuments were understood to reinforce the official understanding of World War II in Yugoslavia.

The push to dedicate the five monuments to “Jewish victims of fascism” in 1952, therefore, was planned by the Federation of Jewish Communities as a way of legitimating the Jews’ Yugoslav credentials and presenting the community as part of the larger community of the Yugoslav peoples whose “brotherhood and unity” was forged in the crucible of war; at the same time, however, the monuments were meant to delineate a specifically Jewish realm, a space for Jewishness that would be accessible only to the

surviving Jews, and as such serve as a legitimate basis for a new way of identification in the multiethnic Yugoslav environment. The visual, spatial, and commemorative aspects of the monuments reflected these dual goals. The monuments, grand and imposing as they were, were erected either at execution sites or at Jewish cemeteries. In this way, their location on the margins of Yugoslav public space mirrored the community's pretenses to the centrality of the Yugoslav national project: while the monuments themselves testified to the importance of the specifically Jewish victimhood in the overall story of Yugoslavia, there were more central aspects of the narrative that needed to be commemorated. Furthermore, the careful selection of five sites where the monuments were erected—in four major federal units of the new state, which saw in federalism a part of the solution of the ethnic problems it inherited from the prewar period—the main Jewish organization reinforced one of the major pillars of new Yugoslav socialism.

The monuments in Yugoslavia were a rare occurrence in Europe in the early 1950s. Even where there were monuments to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in the early 1950s, they would very rarely feature Jewish motifs—as was the case in Warsaw; most often, however, they were couched in the language of the “victims of fascism,” and the Jewish identity of the victims was omitted altogether. What is therefore interesting about the monuments to “Jewish victims of fascism” and “fallen fighters” in Yugoslavia, is both the Jewish strategy to insert the narrative of Jewish suffering into the larger Yugoslav narrative, and the political decision of the Yugoslav leadership to allow this. By dedicating the monuments to the Jewish victims, the central Yugoslav Jewish organization found a way of simultaneously connecting to its Zionist past and legitimating itself as a leader of a bona fide “Yugoslav” community.



It is in this context of Jewish attempts to rescue the continuities of Jewish politics while at the same time trying to forge a new relationship with a new Communist regime that we can understand the seemingly puzzling remark of the leader of the central Jewish organization in the country, that monuments to the Jewish victims were meant to commemorate all other Yugoslav victims. The single most important property of the monuments, as far as the new Yugoslav regime was concerned, was their unambiguous confirmation of the particular image of the past on which new Yugoslavia was built. At that very time—the early 1950s—Yugoslav communists were pushing through a country-wide campaign of erecting monuments to “victims of fascism” and “fallen fighters,” as a means of instituting their vision of World War II in Yugoslavia. This project was threatened from many quarters: instances of ethnic-based mass murder during the war—of Serbs by the Croatian puppet state, for example, or of Bosnian Muslims by the Serb *četnik* militias in Bosnia—still constituted large part of people’s living memory, and it was as politically important for the Communists as it was difficult to push through the vision of World War II in Yugoslavia that rested on the idea that all Yugoslav peoples both suffered at the hands of the “fascists” and contributed, in the grand fraternal struggle, to the Yugoslav resistance against them. While it was out of the question to allow monuments commemorating, for example, the “Serbian victims of fascism”—for this would foreground Serbian victimhood at the hands of the Croats, and inevitably question the equilibrium of suffering of all Yugoslav peoples on which the new Yugoslav federation was being built—monuments to the Jewish victims were acceptable to the regime precisely because they did not question the official understanding of World War II, and, in fact, reinforced it.

Efforts to create a meaningful Jewish space in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Holocaust were thus connected in important ways to the prewar patterns of Jewish politics, while at the same time they were interlocked in a wider new constellation of social, political, and cultural factors. Although the claim borders on the trivial, it is important to contemplate this fully, for only by taking the implications of this proposition seriously can we move beyond the approach to the postwar Jewish history in Eastern Europe that has been prevalent until recently. The Holocaust, as it of course should be, is considered a watershed event and a landmark in the periodization of modern Jewish history. But the body of literature on Jewish history in Europe in the period after the Holocaust has until recently been very scant, as most scholarship has concentrated on larger Jewish communities in the United States and Israel, which seemed to be vibrant and worthy of study in ways that the communities of Eastern Europe—and, one could even argue, in Europe in general—were not. Jewish history in Europe after the Holocaust has too often been seen as history communities steeped in mourning, or histories of oppressed communities in the case of Eastern Europe, or else, as the title of one of the influential accounts on postwar Jewish history in Europe suggested, as history of a “vanishing diaspora.”

This dissertation was written in the hope that it would contribute to the emerging body of scholarship dedicated to the study of Jewish history in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust. There has been a growing number of works, in the last decade or so, on Jewish history and experience in various European contexts—from Germany, Poland, and France in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, to Europe after 1989. Some of these, such as the one by Michael Brenner in the context of West Germany, or my own

work in Yugoslavia, have concentrated on the process of Jewish communal rebuilding and its implications for the forging of post-Holocaust European Jewish identity.<sup>531</sup> But by no means have studies of Jewish history in Europe after the Holocaust been limited to the questions of communal infrastructure and institutions. Maud Mandel's work in France, for example, has engaged in a comparative analysis of communities affected by genocide, and has illuminated, by focusing on Jewish and Armenian communities in France, ways in which these communities have negotiated their identities in the arena of national French politics.<sup>532</sup> István Rév's amazing work on Hungarian twentieth century has shown the importance of understanding aspects of Jewish history in the twentieth century for the better understanding of Hungarian and Central and Eastern European history, especially in the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>533</sup> And Atina Grossmann has written a stunning account weaving postwar Jewish and German histories.<sup>534</sup>

Apart from engaging in recovering the complexity of Jewish life and experience in Europe in the aftermath of the Holocaust—which, I think, is important in itself—these few studies that I mentioned, in the otherwise growing body of literature, share a dedication to bringing together the fields of modern European and modern Jewish history, and to studying Jewish history in Europe not only for the sake of illuminating the previously understudied Jewish life and experience after the Holocaust, but also, and more importantly, as a way of studying important processes in European history by taking into consideration the methodological and theoretical concerns of the field of

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<sup>531</sup> Michael Brenner, *After the Holocaust: Rebuilding Jewish Lives in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>532</sup> Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>533</sup> István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

<sup>534</sup> Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

modern Jewish history. Studying the ways in which Jews and Germans interacted and constructed their narratives of victimhood in postwar West Germany—to take the example of the work by Atina Grossmann that I just mentioned—provides an excellent point of entry into studying the struggles over memory of World War II and their implications for national identity. My own work on rebuilding Jewish communal infrastructure and delineating the symbolic coordinates of Jewishness in Communist Yugoslavia opens up, in a similar way, a space for discussion about the nationalities policies of Eastern European states, as well as the politics of identity in multiethnic states and struggles over memory and history of World War II. By working on this particular part of modern Jewish history, therefore, I think we can engage in wider debates in modern and contemporary history of Europe.

It is because of such promises that I think it is important to study what otherwise may seem marginal strands in the modern history of Europe or of modern and contemporary Jewish history. The fascinating history of the Jews in Yugoslavia both before and after the Holocaust—both before and after Yugoslavia, even—provides exciting insights into the processes of creation of space for Jewish identification and the forging of diverse Jewish identities, as well as into the politics of memory and the competing narratives of victimhood in postwar Europe, and their consequences for different politics of nationhood. The study of Zionist politics and its continuities in the western Balkans in the twentieth century, or of the curious relationship of Jewish institutions and the Yugoslav Communist state, can thus help us illuminate the complexities of contemporary European history and some of its most important processes and developments.

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