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Manfred Hutter (ed.)

Between Mumbai and Manila

Judaism in Asia since the Founding of the State of Israel (Proceedings of the International Conference, held at the Department of Comparative Religion of the University of Bonn. May 30, to June 1, 2012)

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Introductory Notes: The Context of the Conference in the History of Jewish Studies in Bonn

Two days of discussions and exchange about the knowledge of modern Jewish history and communities in Asia, starting from the Indian sub-continent and reaching to the Far East in Japan, marked the international conference “From Mumbai to Manila”, organized from May 30, to June 1, 2012 by the Department of Comparative Religion at the Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies of the University of Bonn. The idea for the conference was inspired by a research scholarship from the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation (Germany) for Dr. Alina Patru (from Sibiu, Romania) who worked on Jews in contemporary China at the department. Therefore the conference was intended to provide a possibility to present her research results to international colleagues. The other aspect which fostered the idea for this conference was the “Working Group of Contemporary Asian Religions” (officially in German: “Arbeitskreis Religionen Asiens der Gegenwart”) within the German Association for the Study of Religions (DVRW), which sometimes convenes workshops or conferences on topics of contemporary religions. On behalf of this working group, the Department of Comparative Religion organized the conference even if studies on Jewry in Asia have not been very prominent in Germany. Meeting for this conference with colleagues from countries in Europe, Asia, Australia and America in Bonn can lead to an exchange of experiences to further the future studies on Jewish history in Asia and also raise the interest in Jewish Studies at the Department of Comparative Religion.

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1. Jewish Studies at the University of Bonn

Since 2005, the Department of Comparative Religion is part of the newly created Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies. All so far independent departments related to Asia or the Orient form this new Institute. Comparative Religion is now affiliated with Asian and Islamic History of Art, Indology, Islamic Studies, Japanology, Sinology, Southeast Asian Studies, and Tibetan Studies. In the Institute there is no department for Jewish Studies (“Judaistik” in German) – that is to say the scientific and historical study of Judaism as religion and as a culture based on religion. Despite the lack of such a specialized department, the University of Bonn in its almost bicentennial history had some prominent scholars who were engaged in Jewish Studies. So it might be suitable to mention in short, how scholars here in Bonn contributed to Jewish Studies.

Let us start with the two theological faculties, one Faculty of Protestant Theology and one Faculty of Catholic Theology. In both faculties you can find basic instruction in Biblical Hebrew and an exegetical approach to the Hebrew Bible, but based on the Christian faith. This is Christian theology and not what we may call Jewish Studies. But we have one exceptional case: in the Faculty of Protestant Theology there was a Jewish scholar, Charles (Chaim) Horowitz, who from 1956 until his death in 1969 taught “Rabbinistik”, as his scholarly subject was named in the official documents (Faulenbach 2009: 436 – 438). Charles Horowitz was born in 1892 in Silesia; he was educated in some *jeschiwoth* (Torah schools) and after World War I he worked as a merchant. From 1928 on he was in close contact with Adolf Schlatter and Gerhard Kittel at the University of Tübingen, regarding both teaching and researching. His lectureship and his cooperation with Schlatter and Kittel ended in 1933. Horowitz emigrated first to the Netherlands, then to France. After World War II, he returned to Germany in 1951 and worked again as a merchant. Nevertheless, he tried to continue his academic career. The University of Bonn offered him the opportunity. By his own request, he started to teach at the Faculty of Protestant Theology, as he did in Tübingen. From the winter term 1956 – 57 on he gave courses covering four hours per week. In each term usually one course was devoted to the lecture of a Talmudic treatise, in the other course he dealt with general topics of the Jewish religion, like the history of the Kabbala, the Jewish divine service both in the synagogue and in the temple, or with the rabbinic exegesis of the Bible. In these years he published the translation of some treatises of the Palestinian Talmud. On account of his merits, the title Honorary Professor was bestowed on him in 1965. The last announcement in the course catalogue can be found in the winter term 1968 – 69. Charles Horowitz died in September 1969. After his death, the Faculty of Protestant Theology tried to continue the lectureship, but due to lacking means all the efforts failed. In defiance of this lack of means, the Faculty

of Catholic Theology has offered – next to the elementary training in Biblical Hebrew – from winter semester 1994 – 95 onward, courses in Modern Hebrew. The courses are given by native speakers; currently there are not only introductory courses, but courses on an advanced level, too.

Next to both theological faculties, the field of Oriental Studies may provide the scope for dealing with the Hebrew language and the Jewish culture. So to say: the orientalist as “the successors of the exegetes” – as it is said in the title of a book by Ludmilla Hanisch (2003) about the German research on the Near East. Just one year after the university was founded in 1818, Georg Wilhelm Freitag was appointed to the chair of Oriental languages. But it was not until 1914 that an official department was established. This happened at Carl Heinrich Becker’s urging, who was appointed in 1913, but soon left Bonn to become a state minister in the Prussian government. His successor Enno Littmann also stayed in Bonn only for a short time. In 1923, Paul Kahle came to Bonn from Gießen, and under his guidance the Oriental Seminar became a centre, not only for Oriental Studies in general, but also for Jewish Studies in particular. Unlike his just named antecessors, and unlike his successors Rudi Paret and Otto Spieß, who focussed their interests on Islamic studies and Islam-related languages, Paul Kahle was also engaged in the research of the oldest text of the Hebrew Bible by using the margins of the masorettes. So it was not by chance, that after the habilitation of Willi Heffening in 1926 and Otto Spies in 1927 – both for “Semitistic and Islamic Studies” – in 1928 Alexander Sperber (cf. Höpfner 1999: 49) obtained the lecturer qualification for “Semitistic with special consideration of the Judaica”, as it is said in the official documents. Alexander Sperber was born in 1897 in Czernowitz, which was then part of Austria (Ginsberg 1970 – 71). He went to school in Vienna. Then he studied in Vienna and in Berlin; in each case both at the university and at the rabbinic seminary. 1924 he gained his PhD in Bonn. After the habilitation until 1933 his academic teaching in most cases covered courses with the broad title “Selected texts of the Mishna”. Which texts he dealt with cannot be found out. In addition to these courses, there were courses with different titles, especially courses on the Septuagint. At the centre of Sperber’s scholarly interests stood – like in his teacher’s case – the reconstruction of the Bible text as close to the original as possible, by analyzing the old translations like the Septuagint or the Targumim. In 1933, Sperber was forced to leave the university. First he went to Palestine. From 1935 on he was connected to the Jewish Theological Seminary in different academic positions. Yet another student of Paul Kahle, who was involved in his research of the biblical text, was the famous Israeli poet and literary scholar Leah Goldberg (Weiss 2010). She came from Lithuania, but was born in Königsberg in 1911. She studied first in her hometown Kaunas, then in Berlin and from 1931 until 1933 in Bonn. In 1933 she gained her PhD. Her dissertation about the Samaritan Targum of the Pentateuch

was published two years later. In 1935, Leah Goldberg emigrated to Palestine. Later she taught comparative literature at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Leah Goldberg died in 1970. Paul Kahle had to emigrate to England in 1939 (Höpfner 1999: 418 f.; cf. also Kahle 2003). After World War II Kahle returned to Germany, but lived with one of his sons in Düsseldorf. He died in Bonn in 1964.

For the history of Jewish studies in the Department of Comparative Religion one can at first refer to Karl Hoheisel's short paper "The Treatment of Judaism in the History of the Department of Comparative Religion under Carl Clemen and Gustav Mensching" (Hoheisel 2009). Though the department was not established until 1920, the subject has been taught in the Faculty of Arts from 1910 on. In 1910, Carl Clemen left the Faculty of Protestant Theology and joined the Faculty of Arts. Because of his academic training, Clemen was a theologian with special emphasis on the exegesis of the New Testament. His position can more or less be described as close to the History of Religions School. While dealing with the religions and the religio-philosophical movements in the time of early Christianity he focussed his interests more and more on comparative religion. Judaism was not the centre of his interests, but he wrote about it considering different aspects. In 1931, Clemen published the second volume of his "History of Religions in Europe" which, according to the subtitle, dealt with the "still living religions". On nearly 100 pages Clemen gives an overview of the history of Judaism in Europe, beginning with the first mentioning of Jews in the Roman literature of the republic, up to the recent discussions on the different currents in contemporary Judaism (Clemen 1931: 1 – 96). It may be relevant for Clemen's fundamental appraisal, that he called Leo Baeck to write the chapter on Judaism in his book "The Religions of the World" (see Baeck 1927). The German edition of this book was edited three times, and it was translated into several languages.

Carl Clemen retired on April 1, 1933, not because of political reasons, but due to reaching the retirement age. Nevertheless, he continued to teach until 1936 (cf. Vollmer 2001). In that year, Gustav Mensching succeeded him. He was a theologian by academic training, too. Despite his openness to other religions, his view of Judaism was limited in a very unaccountable manner. In his book "The World Religions" there is no chapter on Judaism, but only on the Religion of Israel; this chapter consists of just three parts "The Religion in pre-prophetic times", "The Prophets", "The Religion in post-exile times" (Mensching 1972: 157 – 180).

Two of Mensching's students gained habilitation: first, Hans-Joachim Klimkeit in 1968 and second, Karl Hoheisel in 1975. Klimkeit succeeded Mensching in 1970 as director of the "Religionswissenschaftliche Seminar". Hoheisel was in the position of a private lecturer for long time, and it was not until 1995 that he was appointed to the newly created second chair of history of religions. Klimkeit was the son of a Christian missionary, and was born and grew up in India. He

focussed his research and teaching on Hinduism, Buddhism, Manichaeism and the encounter of the different religions in Central Asia along the silk roads (Vollmer 2005). He had a good command of some oriental languages, but not of Hebrew. Despite his very special interests, he was open for topics his students dealt with. One of these students was Christoph Dröge, who was very interested in Jewish Studies (Dröge 1987; 1988). He wrote a PhD thesis about the Italian humanist Gianozzo Manetti and his encounter with the Hebrew language and Jewish religion. Dröge gained his doctorate in 1983; the thesis was published four years later. In 1988 Dröge published a book in one of Klimkeit's series which contained selected texts of the cabbalistic tradition, starting with the Sepher Yetzirah up to Baal Shem Tow. Unfortunately Dröge died at a very young age before he could gain further academic merits.

While Klimkeit supported the Jewish studies only indirectly, Judaism was one of the main subjects of Karl Hoheisel's research and teaching. Hoheisel was born in 1937 and studied Catholic Theology and Oriental languages in Rome (Vollmer 2011). After receiving his doctorate in 1971, he habilitated in Bonn in 1975. His habilitation thesis "Ancient Judaism in Christian perspective" was a critical survey of the theological interpretation of Judaism from the beginning of the 20th century, by the protagonists of the History of Religions School, to the changes after the experience of the Holocaust (Hoheisel 1978: 7 – 130). Therefore, it was obvious that Hoheisel would choose a subject from the field of Jewish Studies for his first lecture at the University of Bonn: his seminar during the summer semester of 1975 was titled "Separation or a new creation? Special developments in Judaism". In the course of his professorial career until 2002, he held numerous classes within a wide variety of aspects of Jewish studies such as "History of post-biblical Judaism" in the academic year of 1980 – 81, "Dimensions of modern anti-Semitism and the Jewish reactions" in summer 1981, which Hoheisel continued in the following semesters with a slightly different title; then "Female numina in Jewish faith and tradition" in 1982 – 83, and also "Jews and Christian mission in the first centuries" in 1985, a yearlong lecture about the Kabbala in 1986 – 87, "Eastern-European Chassidism" in 1991 – 92, the "Jewish holiday calendar" in summer 1993, "Jews and Christians in the Islamic world" in 1993 – 94. In 1998, the class "The image of the Rabbi and its change over the centuries" followed, then "Theoretical and practical (Jewish) Kabbala" in 1999 – 2000, and in 2002 once more "Eastern-European Chassidism in recent research". In addition to his extensive teaching activity, Hoheisel worked for the "Franz-Josef-Dölger Institute for Late Antiquity research" from 1981 to 1995, including as associate director from 1988 onward. Even after leaving that institute and joining the Department of Comparative Religion, he still remained a co-editor of the encyclopedia "Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum", in which he not only contributed numerous articles with an emphasis on Judaism (cf. e. g. Hoheisel

2002a; 2008), but was also responsible for the supervision and editing of the other authors' contributions.

Two substantial dissertations were written under his guidance: "Richard Beer-Hofmann. Jewish self-conception in Viennese Jewry at the turn of the century" by Ulrike Peters (1993), and "Gershom Scholem and the study of religion" by Elisabeth Hamacher (1999), which focusses on the tension-filled relations of Gershom Scholem with other scholars with special regard to methodology.

In his paper for the memorial volume dedicated to his late colleague Hans-Joachim Klimkeit who died in 1999, Hoheisel mentioned two projects which he had planned to realize with him. The first project was a joint lecture about the comparison between structures and developments in rabbinic Judaism and Hinduism – the two religions that represented the research focus of the two scholars, respectively. Due to the untimely death of Klimkeit, the lecture could not be realized. They also planned another seminar "The presence of Jews and the form of Judaism on the Silk Road/s" which stagnated at the stage of material collection. In the just mentioned paper, Hoheisel presented a short synopsis of the collected materials and methodological problems (Hoheisel 2002b). So one can see the present volume as the most recent contribution to the history of Jewish Studies in Bonn which gives new insight into the variety and the pluralism of Jewish life and Jewish thought in contemporary Asia, continuing at least partly and in variation the project ideas of both Klimkeit and Hoheisel.

2. Between Mumbai and Manila

In general the spread of Judaism across Asia, from Baghdad along the Silk Road to Bukhara and further to the East, and across the Indian Ocean to India and China since early times, is well known (cf. the various entries in Ehrlich 2009a). When Bombay (now Mumbai) became the British "gateway of India" in the 18th century, a starting point was laid for the establishment of networks of Jewish traders and commercial interests, but also of community building. As the number of Jewish communities remained low during the course of history, this may be one reason why "Asian Jewry" has not often been the topic of research in the academic study of religions, even if it focuses on minority traditions. If we look at some calculations of the numbers of Jews in Asian countries, starting with Pakistan in the west and continuing eastwards to Japan, one can give the following numbers of Jewish people living in those countries in the year 2000 (cf. Gilbert 2010: 136 f.):

China	3,100
Hong Kong	2,500
India	6,000
Indonesia	16
Japan	2,000
Korea, Republic of	150
Myanmar	25
Pakistan	25 (?)
Philippines	250
Singapore	300
Taiwan	120
Thailand	250

These numbers – compared with those from the first half of the 20th century – generally show a strong decline of Jewish people living in these Asian countries. This is due to the foundation of the State of Israel which attracted Jews from Asia to move to this new state. Thus Jewish communities have played an important role in the social and political context of modern “Asian” countries since the foundation of the State of Israel. Therefore – without doubt – one also has to say that the situation of Jewish communities in Asia for the last decades has been closely interrelated with the diplomatic situation between a given country and the State of Israel, as Israel maintains bilateral diplomatic relations to most of the Asian countries, cooperating also in the fields of economics, technical and rural development. So it is an interesting topic to look at Jewish traditions, communities and developments in Asia during the last decades, as can be seen from contributions presented in this volume.

The following papers are presented in three thematically arranged sections. The volume starts with descriptions of Jewish communities in Asia today, bringing to light the current situation of these local communities and the changes which arose during the last decades. Gabriele SHENAR’s paper gives a thick description of India’s Bene Israel in their new environment in Israel, where they resettled during the second half of the 20th century. In the paper the author discusses the *malida* ritual which has become the core symbol of Bene Israel ethnic identity, but she also outlines how other Bene Israel customs are still in practice in order to help these Jews of Indian origin to imagine and celebrate the “Indianness” in the “new” homeland Israel. Creating or shaping identity is also one of the topics in Edith FRANKE’s paper on traces of Judaism in Indonesia. There are hardly any traces of the traditional Jewish community in Surabaya or Jakarta, but in a Christian environment in North Sulawesi one can observe a revival or implantation of Judaism; this is – differing from other areas in Indonesia – possible because the local Christian minority in this area allows such

an exceptional development. Some other papers show that Jewish communities also profit from activities of the Lubavitch-Chabad movement (cf. Ehrlich 2009b with references). The idea of this movement is to provide centres for all Jewish people all over the world, and the presence of the Chabad rabbis also backs the small local communities. Vera LEININGER shows the situation in Singapore, with its history of Jews having started in the 1830s and the Israel-Singapore contacts in the military field (since the 1960s). The recent activities of Chabad – following strict halachic laws and representing Jews in the Singaporean public – are of importance on the religious level, but at the same time one can observe that a strong Jewish expatriate group, and immigrants from the USA and Israel, bring pluralism to Jewishness, by using the religious service of Chabad on the one hand, and by organizing their own secular cultural functions on the other hand as well. In a comparable way, Manfred HUTTER gives a short religious-ethnographic description of the tiny communities in Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia; while Myanmar's Jews consist only of a handful of people, Thailand has a longer – and more diverse – history which since the last two decades was also religiously stimulated by the Chabad movement to foster the community's awareness of its Jewish way of living. Highly interesting within this paper is the situation in Cambodia, where since a few years, Jewish life has been developing “out of nothing”. Based on field research and interviews in Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai, Alina PATRU gives stimulating insights into the dynamics of intercultural exchange in the community of Hong Kong. As can be seen from her results presented along the lines of an interview, the situation in Hong Kong is highly complex, bringing Jewish people with very diverse cultural backgrounds together, who refer to different “homelands”. In this way Hong Kong's community is on the one hand arranged along the lines of different Jewish congregations, often staying apart from each other, but on the other hand they have to mix with each other because of the host country's tendency to avoid interactions between locals and foreigners. This mixing for Hong Kong's Jews creates greater transnational bonds than in other communities. Suzanne RUTLAND focuses on the role of Australian Jewry in bringing the small communities in Southeast Asia into contact and providing a framework for their cooperation on an organized level, by arranging conferences and educational projects to give religious assistance. In this way her paper not only widens the geographical focus out of Asia to the Pacific rim, but the paper makes clear how such cooperation – from 1969 to the mid-1990s – had a deep impact on the development of local communities in Southeast Asia. But at the same time such cooperation between Australian and Asian Jewry also played a helping role in the course of establishing diplomatic relations between Israel and some Asian countries, including the PR China.

As one cannot study Judaism without taking Israel's political role into con-

sideration, there are papers arranged in the second section of the book, which mainly focuses on such relations between religion and politics. Meron MEDZINI provides as lively overview on Zionist federations and Zionist diplomacy which struggled to win votes from Asian countries for the United Nations' plan of partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and a Palestinian territory. As Medzini can show the influence of Zionist federations on Asian countries was rather limited because voting in favour of partition from the side of Asian countries was mainly the result of America's political weight to influence Asian countries. When Zionist spokesmen realized this they shifted their focus from Asian countries to American politicians to find in them allies who could bring other countries to vote for the partition, thus laying out the field for the creation of an independent State of Israel. Other papers to follow illustrate a number of political detail studies. For the Philippines, Jonathan GOLDSTEIN and Dean KOTLOWSKI in a joint paper, clearly document the role of Jews in the Philippines in assisting Holocaust refugees, focusing also on the activities of Paul McNutt, who was the US High Commissioner to the Philippines between 1937 and 1939. Due to his efforts in cooperation with Manuel Quezon, the then president of the Philippines Commonwealth, in 1938 and 1939 many German Jews could find a safe haven, having escaped the Nazi terror of the "Reichskristallnacht". Thus during the first years of World War II the number of Jews in the Philippines significantly increased, but after the war – and the Philippines' independence – many of them left the country for the USA and for Israel. In the political sphere, the Philippines were among the first countries to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel after 1948. A less prosperous relation exists between Pakistan and Israel, as Malte GAIER shows in his paper. The Pakistani-Israeli history can mainly be described as a neglected history, and until 1997 when the foreign ministers of both countries met in Istanbul, there had hardly been any official contacts between the two countries for five decades. Since then, Pakistan looks to Israel mainly from a military and economic perspective. As both countries are nuclear powers, this can be seen as the main aspect of their mutual relation, as they both see each other from the angle of strategic security interests. In the context of military-orientated estrangement, most Jews of Pakistan (mainly of Bene Israel background) have left the country for Israel. The bilateral relations between Israel and the PR China are studied by Pingan LIANG and Zheng LIANG in their co-authored paper. In the first years after the foundation of Israel, there were incentives to promote bilateral relations which stopped and later turned to hostility between 1955 and 1978, also due to the cultural revolution in China. It took all the 1980s to slowly change the situation of cold or frozen bilateral relations, until in 1992 full diplomatic relations were taken up by the two countries. Neglecting Jewish / Israeli presence in the Straits is the topic which is analyzed by Theo KAMSMA. Looking on the surface, one cannot see traces of

Jewish culture or Jewish and Israeli activities in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. But under the surface Israel is highly active in the fields of military contacts like training of pilots or selling of equipment, but also in the fields of water supplies and in humanitarian support after the tsunami catastrophe in Aceh, Indonesia. In all these cases, the Israeli / Jewish identity of the participants has to be hidden, but it is also a node from where new connections between Israel and Southeast Asia can be built.

The papers in the third section show that studying Jews in Asia not only refers to religion, but Judaism is also part of everyday history – in society and culture in general. Heinz Werner WESSLER's paper on Jewish authorship in India analyses some works of Nissim Ezekiel, Sheila Rohekar, and Esther David. While in the writings of Ezekiel and David, Jewish background is clearly visible, Rohekar's Jewish topics are less obvious and only detectable at second glance. But all three authors provide – from their Indian background – glimpses on Jewish identity and life in an Indian (and Hindu) society. Two complementary papers by Yudit Kornberg GREENBERG and Annette WILKE describe, analyse and comment on the Hindu-Jewish summits. The first leadership summit in 2007 and the following one in 2008 resulted in a joint Hindu-Jewish declaration which initiated a dialogue between the two religions. Participants of the summits were high ranking Hindu swamis and religious leaders, including representatives of the Shankaracaryas, as well as people from the Israeli foreign ministry, the Rabbinate of Israel, and the American Jewish Association. Central topics of the meetings were shared values and the common recognition of One Supreme Being, but also hot discussions about the Hindu "idolatry" and "lack" of monotheism which are hard to be understood by some Jewish participants. So despite the summits, the overcoming of old theological preconceptions regarding each other's faith, symbols and practices is still a task for the future. Even if some misunderstandings remain throughout the ongoing discussions and dialogues between some participants of the summits, partly due to the lack of skills in dialogue processes and in-depth-study of the other religion in all its historical, cultural and everyday setting, the meetings represented a major step forward in Jewish-Hindu interreligious dialogue. Also in a comparative way, Ping ZHANG focuses on Jewish wisdom, as it was understood or misunderstood and partly even faked in China during the last two decades. What is highly interesting is the way of perception, because Zhang clearly shows that "Jewish wisdom" is mainly based on secondary or tertiary sources which are often not named as such, and even sayings or legends can be presented as "Jewish wisdom". This means, there is an interest and market for presenting ideas which are labeled as "Jewish", but serious introduction of knowledge of Jewish *halacha* in China has still to be established. Of course, besides the book market presenting such faked "Jewish wisdom" for a larger audience, there is also academic interest in studying Ju-

daism, as Gilya Gerda SCHMIDT works out in her article on Chinese people's interest in Judaism, based on her personal encounters with Chinese people. Some of the main topics (or perceptions) of Chinese interest in Judaism are the perception that Judaism is an old civilization, comparable in age to Chinese civilization, but also the comparison of Confucius and the Hebrew prophets. Stressing the value of education and family life, as well as the experience of persecution in the course of history, makes Judaism interesting for Chinese. So Chinese people regard Jewish culture worthy of study despite the very limited number of Jews living in China.

In this way, the papers in the volume offer a diversity of facets of Jewry between Mumbai and Manila. While some papers make references to the important factor how politics and religions are often intertwined, other papers are arranged along the lines of "area studies" – from South Asia via Southeast Asia to China and the Far East. Even if these papers at first glance concentrate on "local" minority communities they always refer to a broader approach bringing Jewish Studies into international links and "crossing borders" – thus also opening comparative perspectives to broaden our knowledge of Jewish history. Many of the papers put a lot of questions which clearly reach far across the local Asian countries: What is Jewry? Is it "really" a minority? What's the importance of Israelis in Asia now? Are they (secularized) "Jews" or are they "only" citizens of Israel (or other "Western" countries), just living and working in an Asian country? So from the contributions in the papers of the proceedings we surely can reconsider many aspects of Jewish studies for the future, which can also take into account that the Jewish communities in Asia take part in interactions of religions which can help to foster mutual understanding.

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Part 1: Jewish Communities in Asia

Gabriele Shenar¹

Bene Israel Transnational Spaces and the Aesthetics of Community Identity

1. The Imagination of Diaspora, Aesthetics, and Identity

In Amitav Ghosh's view, the links between India and her diaspora are lived within the imagination and the Indian diaspora is "a diaspora of the imagination" (Ghosh 1989: 76). He places the specialist of imagination – the writer – at the centre of this imagining process, and, in so doing, points to the importance of aesthetics in the perpetuation of identity. By contrast to Ghosh my concern with diaspora, identity and aesthetics in the present context does not, however, rest solely with a cultural elite placed at the centre of acts of collective imagination. Clearly, like other communities too, the Bene Israel, the largest Indian Jewish community, boasts its own writers and artists who explore their roots through various genres and styles. Moreover, there are numerous Bene Israel community activists and historiographers who endeavour to bring their community's concerns to a wider national or transnational audience. While acknowledging the significance of artists and community leaders, my own particular concern here is with a cluster of "ordinary" Israelis, Bene Israel immigrants and their Israeli-born children, who collectively create and reproduce for themselves, in various settings, both religious and secular, their own version of an "Indian" ambience, staging, performing and experiencing in meaningful, and sometimes playful ways their Bene Israel, Indian Jewish or Indian Israeli identity. Significantly, this imagining process of a diasporic past interlaces the diasporic memory of the immigrant generation with contemporary imaginaries of Indian

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culture as mediated through transnational flows of commercialized Indian popular culture.

From claims to descent from one of the lost tribes, or being shipwrecked off the Konkan coast in Maharashtra in the 2nd century BCE, to encounters with Jewish co-religionists, visiting Christian missionaries and travellers, British colonial officials, and finally Zionist emissaries and World Jewry in various places of settlement today, Bene Israel oral tradition, historiography and history evoke narratives of migration, diaspora, transnational and trans-local relations at various historical junctures (see, for example, Isenberg 1988; Katz 2000; Kehimkar 1937; Roland 1989; Weil 1977). Historically, these encounters have in significant ways impacted on the formation, as well as, more specifically, the self-portrayal and self-perception of a Bene Israel community identity, engendering continuity and change as well as concerted community action or intra-communal discord. Although, in recent years, there has been an upsurge of interest in the history of India's Jewish communities, which is reflected in various research and film projects, academic publications, novels, community publications, and exhibitions by individual members of the community, individual Bene Israel continue to encounter curiosity as to their origin and the Jewishness of their community identity as US- based Bene Israel stand-up comedian Samson Koletkar, among others, epitomizes during one of his shows (see Koletkar 2012).

How then does the Bene Israel community fare in today's world which is perceived to be essentially "en route"? What impact do modernity's motilities – the internet, various social media, media technologies, mobile phones and travel – have on the promotion and constitution of a Bene Israel community life? More particularly, how do members of the worldwide Bene Israel diaspora negotiate the multiplicity of social and cultural ties and identities they embrace both within the nation states where they have settled and the transnational spaces they have carved out for themselves to explore, celebrate and perform their community identity? The paper will address these questions from the perspective of Israel, where the majority of Bene Israel are settled today. I suggest that a transnational perspective enables us to conceive of the Bene Israel not merely as the descendants of an obscure Indian Jewish community whose dwindling numbers and community centres in India have become an object of research, of tourist attraction or Jewish roots projects, but as modern global players, citizens and nationals as well as Jewish religionists who reflect upon and negotiate mundane everyday life assumptions about what the nation, "home-land", identity, and more generally "home" mean and are. Significantly, "while much of post-identity literature presents an image of free-floating individuals who move between social, geographical and cultural spheres of a newly founded and liberating cosmopolitanism ... a significant trend in diaspora research struggles to understand and conceptualize continuity, change, and the growing

complexity of identity and community in transnational times” (Georgiou 2006: 49). The present paper concurs with the latter view and highlights the Bene Israel’s multiple and multi-local sense of belonging, the creation of alternative diasporic public spheres, as well as the complex and hybrid interplay of an emerging contemporary Bene Israel identity that negotiates categories of “Indianness” and “Jewishness” in the transnational space they inhabit between Israel and India, as well as other diasporic places such as the USA, the UK, Canada or Australia. It is argued here that the public and private performance of an Indian Jewish and / or Bene Israel social, cultural and religious identity and milieu is one way to counterbalance the community’s relative marginality, both within World Jewry and its various places of settlement. Moreover, increased mobility, that is travel between India, Israel and other places of Bene Israel settlement, advanced media technologies and also in particular different forms of web- and mobile-based social media, increasingly facilitate transnational flows of information on community activities and concerns, while also enhancing the endeavour of local and trans-local community activists to promote a transnational or at least trans-local platform for the Bene Israel community.

Despite the fact that the majority of the Bene Israel have been settled in Israel since the late 1940s, and despite the fact that they have struggled to achieve Jewishness and Israeliness, they persist in sustaining a rich, evocative, distinctive aesthetic culture which is performed, celebrated and sometimes defended vis-à-vis co-religionists in Indian synagogues and prayer halls, during pilgrimage and acts of ceremonial giving, as well as during wedding celebrations. Moreover, the consumption and performance of commercialized Indian popular culture, in particular in the form of Bollywood and its *filmi* song and dance, by Israelis of Indian origin, is increasingly noticed by other Israelis and has in a sense become a marker of Indian identity in Israel (Shenar 2013). In the present context I define the Bene Israel in Israel as a “multiple” or “counter” diaspora, highlighting the fact that they are both part of the returning Jewish diaspora, as well as part of the worldwide Indian and more specifically, Bene Israel diaspora. Although Israel has no politically sanctioned concept of herself as a multicultural society, the celebration of cultural diversity as part of the Israeli cultural sphere is now acknowledged and officially promoted. Since the 1970s, Israeli society has undergone significant structural and ideological transformations which resulted in a profound critique of the so-called melting pot ideology, paving the way for a multicultural and, some would argue, increasingly privatized Israeli identity (Gutwein 2004). This shift gave rise to the public assertion of diverse ethnic milieus and interest groups within Israeli society that interlace with other identifiable social, political, ideological and cultural cleavages, a fact that an exploration of community and identity within Israeli society needs to be cognizant of. Focusing in particular on the Bene Israel *malida* rite, as well as on

the performance of the pre-wedding henna party, the *mehndi*, I will explore these questions in the context of Bene Israel popular and popular religious performance.

2. The Bene Israel Indian Jews of Maharashtra in India

In India, the Bene Israel, the largest of India's Jewish communities, lived mainly in Maharashtra, in Bombay (Mumbai) and surrounding areas and towns and spoke several North Indian languages, particularly Marathi, a language members of the community continue to speak in Israel, although the Israeli-born generation often has only a basic or no grasp of it. According to their preferred oral tradition, and as retold by members of the community, the ancestors of the Bene Israel were shipwrecked off the Konkan coast in West India in the year 175 BCE. For many centuries the Bene Israel were known as Shanwar Telis (Saturday oil pressers) and lived, scattered over numerous Konkan villages, apart from and mainly in ignorance of mainstream Jewish law and tradition. Over many centuries, they developed, like other Jewish communities around the world too, their own unique community traditions through encounters with the cultural, social and religious context of their place of settlement (see, for example, Isenberg 1988; Katz 2000; Kehimkar 1937; Roland 1989; Weil 1977). In the second half of the 18th century, in their search for economic opportunities, many Bene Israel began gradually to move to nearby cities and towns, in particular Bombay (Mumbai) and nearby towns, but also farther away, for example to Delhi or Karachi (now Pakistan), where they established an urban community infrastructure. The socio-economic development under British rule, growing Indian nationalism, as well as the launching of various Zionist activities in Bombay, had a decisive influence on the formation of a Bene Israel ethnic identity in India (see Isenberg 1988; Roland 1989). Members of the community were attracted by the chance presented by military service under the British, as well as by a demand for skilled artisanship such as carpentry and masonry (Strizower 1966: 128). In the late 19th century, educated Bene Israel found employment as clerks or administrators for the government railways, customs or post and telegraph departments, while others followed a career as engineers, contractors, architects and a significant number of women took up the teaching profession (Isenberg 1988: 199). Members of the Bene Israel community also contributed to Bombay's emerging Hindi film industry both as actors and behind the screen (Shenar 2013).

While the Bene Israel initially did not embrace Zionism, and did not, for example, participate in the first Zionist Congress in 1897, eventually they initiated Zionist activities, and a religiously defined Zionism in the sense of be-

longing to the wider Jewish collective brought about large-scale emigration (Weil 1982: 173 – 75). Today, approximately 5,500 Bene Israel identify as Jews in India, while the majority have moved to Israel, and some to English speaking countries like Australia, Canada, Britain, and the USA (Weil 2002: 14). Bene Israel who have remained in or returned to India live mainly in Mumbai, in particular in Thane, Pune, Panvel and Alibag, as well as other towns and villages in Maharashtra, and there is a small congregation in Delhi, centred around Judah Hyam Synagogue. The Bene Israel community in India has in recent years attracted considerable attention by the media, not least because of the 2008 Mumbai attack on a Jewish community centre. Clearly, visiting Jewish and non-Jewish tourists, Israeli diplomats, businessmen and representatives of various organizations, as well as backpackers and students who participate in Jewish heritage tours to India, form an integral part of the Bene Israel's transnational encounters with the wider Jewish collectivity. Yet it remains to be seen whether the community in India will be able to reassert itself and what kind of relations they will foster with the various Jewish organizations that are active in India, and in particular the numerous Chabad-Lubavitch Centres that have sprung up in India.

3. The Bene Israel Community in Israel

Within Israeli society, the Bene Israel are a comparatively little known *edah* (ethnic community) or *kehilla* (community), numbering, according to estimates by members of the community, approximately 50,000 to 70,000. The Bene Israel's status as Jews was initially contested by orthodox religious authorities in Israel, a dispute that traces its roots back to encounters with Jewish co-religionists in India, in particular the Baghdadi Jews, but was finally resolved in 1964 (Weil 1986: 20). In spite of some socio-economic and educational mobility among them, Israel's Bene Israel are disproportionately found in the lower socio-economic strata and in Israel's peripheral towns, often classified as problematic. The political and socio-economic marginality of the Bene Israel community is a concern for Bene Israel activists, who have undertaken numerous attempts to establish Indian political movements, such as, for example, the Tnuah Hodit Israelit (Indian-Israeli Political Movement), also named Hodaya, in the mid-1990s or the more recent Shivtei Israel in Beersheva in 2008. Bene Israel activists have lobbied various established political parties in order to enter the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) on an Indian ethnic ticket (see Shenar 2003). So far, these plans have not materialized and there are plenty of rumours circulating as to why the community does not succeed in uniting behind a single Bene Israel candidate. Some members of the community, however, are successfully involved in

local and municipal politics, especially in areas with a larger concentration of Indian families. What seems to drive individual Bene Israel activists, from both the fringe as well as the centre of Bene Israel community politics, is the wish to participate in the power structure of Israeli society in order to further Bene Israel social, economic, political and cultural interests. Bene Israel life in Israel is largely grounded in intergenerational social relationships within the family, which interlace at varying degrees also with existing community networks. Local and trans-local community activists and event organizers operate through numerous Indian-Israeli organizations such as the Central Organization for Indian Jews in Israel, the Indian Women's Organization, the approximately 50 Indian synagogues and prayer halls that have emerged all over Israel, local interest groups, cricket and other sports clubs, as well as neighbourhood and local and trans-local friendship networks.

A significant impact on the community's self-perception relates to the relations between India and Israel. Since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between India and Israel in 1992, bilateral trade and economic relations between the two countries have continuously grown. Today, Israel and India are partners in counter-terrorism and security operations, humanitarian efforts, the environment, renewable energy, and medicine (see Embassy of India 2012). India and Israel have also expanded tourism and cultural exchanges in recent years. Israeli youth in particular are attracted to India with tens of thousands of Israeli backpackers travelling to India every year, often, though not exclusively, after completion of their mandatory army service (Maoz 2005). Not least because Israeli backpackers have acquired a somewhat notorious reputation in India, young Israelis of Indian origin prefer, it seems, visiting relatives in India or participating in especially organized return visits, rather than joining the Israeli backpacker community. An increasing number of young Israelis of Indian origin also take advantage of one of the schemes promoted by the Indian embassy in Israel, such as the "Know India Program"-Internship Program for Diaspora Youth (IPDY), a programme conducted by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA). The programmes are officially promoted during Indian community events, that members of the Indian embassy attend regularly, as well as through the various Indian community institutions. Interestingly, while various organizations and entrepreneurs in Israel promote an officially sanctioned international cultural exchange between Israel and India, a parallel or alternative transnational flow of cultural-cum-aesthetic genres, repertoires and material goods between Israel and India is initiated by and targeted primarily at Israelis of Indian origin. Indian popular cinema, in particular Bollywood's *filmi* music and dance, visiting artists and TV celebrities from India, wedding supplies, as well as other items in demand by Israel's Indian community, feature significantly in these parallel and alternative transnational flows (see Shenar 2013). These al-

ternative transnational flows of goods and people impact in significant ways on the community's imagining process of home and diaspora.

4. Bene Israel Jewish Folklore and Religious Popular Culture: the *malida* Ritual

The Bene Israeli *malida* or *Eliyahu Ha'navi* rite forms an integral part of Bene Israel Jewish popular religious belief and practice and is performed in the transnational diasporic spaces members of the community have carved out for themselves between India and Israel, as well as other places of settlement. The contemporary form of this ritual food offering to the Prophet Elijah takes it essentially a liturgy-based ritual, although there is some room for more elaborate ritual enactment, depending on the occasion at which the *malida* is performed. For example, when the *malida* is performed as part of the pre-wedding henna ceremony, a portion of the *malida* offering is wrapped into a white cloth which is then handed to the bride who holds open a green cloth, symbolizing fertility, into which the *malida* portion is placed. The term *malida* is derived from the Persian word for a confection Muslim offering and is also commonly used by other Marathi speaking people. It means anything crushed or a cake made up with milk sugar and butter (Isenberg 1988: 115). In Israel both terms *malida* and *Eliyahu Ha'navi* are used to refer to the rite, as well as, more particularly, to the actual picturesque offering that is presented on a platter. Hence my own preference of the term *malida* in the present context.

Malida offerings are usually sponsored by individual households or local Bene Israel congregations. The gift, containing a sweet rice mixture, five kinds of fruit, as well as scented twigs and sometimes flowers, mostly roses, is offered to Elijah on a white cloth, usually on a table. Before the liturgical readings commence, candles or a lamp are lit and if a *minyan* (quorum of ten men required for public prayer) is present, prayers are said. This is followed by various liturgical readings from Genesis and Exodus, as well as the Sephardi prayer book, during which all participants are seated around a table or tables, to invoke Elijah's presence. The readings may vary but always contain a *pizmon* (hymn with a refrain) commencing with the words *Eliyahu Ha'navi, Eliyahu Ha'tisbi*, which is sung in an Indian tune, as well as *va'yeten lecha*, a blessing said after *havdala* (termination of the Sabbath). The readings may be conducted by a *hazan* (prayer leader), or any other male sufficiently qualified for the reading or chanting of the liturgy and the senior male of the household that sponsors the *malida* takes a seat of honour next to the person conducting the rite, unless he performs it himself. After the readings, the *malida* platter is brought to the table and the man

leading the liturgical readings raises a cup of wine. He pours a libation to the ground and drinks the rest. A handful of the sweet rice mixture (*malida*), the twigs and flowers and one of each kind of fruit, are blessed and put back on the platter. Once all foods and the scented twigs and petals are blessed they are distributed among the participants. Sometimes, they are packaged in small bags to be distributed among family and friends. With the partaking of the blessed food offering, the rite comes to its end and all participants are invited to a festive meal or light refreshments. The meal is not part of the *malida* ceremony, but forms an integral part of the larger event, as well as of a wider system of beliefs. The feeding of guests is an important *mitzvah* (religiously meritorious act), a way of communicating friendship, mutual respect, thanking and looking after those who have come to join in the collective effort to perform a religiously defined ritual.

Anthropologists take the view that the *malida* rite has become one of the core symbols of Bene Israel ethnic identity (Weil 1977: 316). Community activists sometimes point out that the *malida* has been performed for many centuries and hence may be seen as proof of their existence as an Indian Jewish community. While the origins of this food offering cannot be established in certainty, several Bene Israel as well as non-Bene Israel writers have attempted to provide possible explanations as to its emergence among the Bene Israel (Gussin 1972; Guy 1984; Isenberg 1988; Israel 1984; Kehimkar 1937; Moses 2012; Weil 1977). While some Bene Israel may object to the performance of the *malida*, many Bene Israel continue to perform the rite as a religiously defined act of blessing, thanksgiving, or taking a vow. The *malida* is performed at various occasions at home, in synagogues, for example at the end of Sukkot, in community centres to mark a special occasion, such as the anniversary of an Indian synagogue, as well as during pilgrimage to Khandalla in India, where according to Bene Israel folklore the Prophet Elijah appeared to the Bene Israel, or during Lag B'Omer at the cave of Elijah, near Haifa, in Israel.

In the anthropological literature on the Bene Israel community, the *malida* has been referred to as a syncretic ritual, and has been associated with the Hindu *puja* (ritual worship) and *prasad* (ritual offerings) or the offering at the tomb of a Muslim *pir* (saintly figure) (see Gussin 1972; Guy 1984; Isenberg 1988; Israel 1984; Weil 1977), a view some Bene Israel historiographers agree with, object to, or have attempted to rectify (Kehimkar 1937; Moses 2012). The Bene Israel writer Benjamin Israel, for example, tells us that the term *malida* originates from the Persian word for offerings made at the tomb of a Muslim *pir*, and may be seen as the single instance in which the Bene Israel community transgressed Jewish Law (Israel 1984: 6). I encountered very few members of the community in Israel who share this view and my own observations, too, confirm that the *malida* has become an integral part of Bene Israel popular religious practice within Israel

society. Indeed, within contemporary Israeli society, most Bene Israel, often together with non-Bene Israel in-laws and friends, embrace the rite as part of a wider complex of popular religious practice that is expressed among others by Israel's flourishing industry of saintly figures, as well as the various tombs of revered Jewish *tzaddikim* (righteous persons) that are frequented, even by Israeli politicians, to ask for blessings and divine intervention in particular in times of crisis. Moreover, as Weil has shown, the *malida* forms part of a wider set of beliefs and practices focusing on the biblical hero, pointing thus to Elijah's significance in Jewish folklore (Weil 1977: 316 – 334).

The 19th century Bene Israel historian Kehimkar argued that the Bene Israel offerings, as they appear during the *malida* food offering, conform largely to the ancient Hebrew customs as described in Leviticus. According to him, the Bene Israel continued to make eight of the eleven offerings which did not require the use of the Temple altar or the presence of priests. Six of these offerings were performed in the *malida* offering: the Thanks Offering (Leviticus 7); the Peace Offering (Leviticus 7); the Voluntary or Free-Will Offering (Leviticus 7); the Vow Offering (Leviticus 7); the Offering of Nazerite; the Offering of purification of a woman after childbirth (Kehimkar 1937: 25 – 29; Isenberg 1988: 116). Many of these offerings form part of the *malida* as it is performed nowadays, for example after recovery from an illness, during the pre-wedding henna ritual, before a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah, to appease feuding parties, when sons or daughters are called up for their national service in the Israeli Defence Forces, when moving into a new apartment, as well as many other occasions. The material form of the gift offered, however, resembles more or less one particular food offering mentioned by Kehimkar, one that includes various kinds of fruit and which was performed in India on Tu B'Shevat (the New Year for Trees). It seems that the *malida* offering is now predominantly presented in this material form and shape. Some Bene Israel follow certain rules in choosing the kind of fruits used for the *malida*, others simply find seasonal fruits acceptable – apples, bananas, oranges, dates and so on. Several of my Bene Israel interlocutors provided the information that one piece of fruit should be a *pri ha-adamah* (fruit of the earth) blessing, one for the *pri ha-aitz* (fruit of the tree) blessing and one to bless seasonal fruits. The symbolic meaning of the number of fruit arranged on the platter is usually explained in terms of the *hamsa* (an amulet shaped like a hand), a symbol which is meant to protect against the “evil eye”. In Israel the wafers or cakes mentioned by Kehimkar (1937) are only sometimes included and I have never participated in a *malida* that featured the use of meat.

As mentioned, the *malida* rite has mainly been studied as a syncretic ritual (see Gussin 1972; Weil 1977; Guy 1984; Isenberg 1988), as a marker of ethnic boundaries (see Gussin 1972; Weil 1977; Guy 1984) or, more particularly, as the sharing of bodily substance that make the Bene Israel family a homogenous

biomoral unit relative to non-family members (Guy 1984: 146 – 147). While these are possible approaches to the *malida* rite, I explore here, more particularly, the experiential and the aesthetic dimension of this unique Bene Israel tradition, also considering the relationship of emotions and ritual. Guy's (1984) approach to the *malida* as a sharing of bodily substance can be seen as augmenting the point I am wishing to make. She pays a great deal of attention to the consumption of food as an important feature of South Asian beliefs and practice, highlighting the importance of food and substance in constituting identity and community. This is also, in my view albeit seen from a different angle, significant for a consideration of the synaesthetic side to emotion. In consuming substances, that is, the blessed *malida* offering, by inhaling the fragrance of the scented twigs and petals used during the performance of the rite, and in aestheticizing the actual performance of the offering as well as the immediate environment in which it is performed, the Bene Israel are collectively imagining and performing a particularly designed way of communication with Elijah and through him God. More importantly, during the *malida* rite religiously defined emotions are not only publicly performed, but certain ritual enactments are provided to achieve the aim of actually experiencing emotions. Indeed, the cultural capital drawn on, that is, the ritual acts available to be carried out during the *malida*, the diverse ways in which the senses are implicated and impacted upon, enable the Bene Israel to do so and have an affecting presence.

In the anthropological literature on South Asia, writers highlight the significance of food in the emotional economy, expressed through indigenous metaphors and metonymic relations (Lynch 1990: 23). The performance of food rituals, these writers suggest, establishes a concrete means of experiencing and re-experiencing a gift given to a deity or superior. This seems to also be significant for an understanding of the *malida* ritual and is by no means unique to this group as exemplified by a number of food offerings performed elsewhere, for instance the *khatam* Koran among British Pakistanis (Werbner 1988), the Turkish *mevluds* (Tapper 1987) or the Hasidic *tish*, during which followers of a *rebbe* partake of the *shirayim* (leftovers) of a *tzadik's* (righteous person) meal (Hilton 1994). More specifically, anthropologists have noted that “in India the understanding of emotions as food is elaborated in terms of nourishment, cooking, ingestion, digesting, and the life. Food, moreover, is fragrant and the sense of smell is also involved” (Lynch 1990: 23). Food ritual in a sense, establishes a “metonymy between love and a gift given to devotees” (Toomey quoted in Lynch 1990: 22). More importantly, food rituals are a concrete means of experiencing and re-experiencing the gift to a deity. In other words, food is considered to be most accessible. What these writers refer to is a “synaesthetic sense of emotion, whose experiences and nuances and elaboration make those of the West seem impoverished” (Lynch 1990: 23).

Emotions, rather than being devalued as opposed to reason, as is the case with dominant discourses in the West, are in India, like food, necessary for a reasonable life, and may be cultivated to the fullest understanding of life's meaning and purpose (Lynch 1990: 23). Similarly, the knowledge or deep understanding of this sensuous-aesthetic domain of religiosity is, in my view, conducive to an understanding of what it means to be a Bene Israel Indian Jew. In a sense, the performance of the *malida* seems not so much motivated by the need to rejuvenate the Bene Israel community, but by the desire to conserve what Boyer refers to as the "surface properties" of ritual (1990). For the Bene Israel, the *malida* is a ceremonial occasion that has an affecting presence and is designed to evoke desirable moods and feelings. Moreover, the continuity of the *malida* points to an emotional continuity, compelling because of the sensual and emotive mood that the ritual performance inspires. Even if this practice does not seem to fit preconceived conception of what constitutes pure, scripture-based or orthodox practice, it is a meaningful Bene Israel Jewish popular religious practice. Furthermore, the *malida* is not just an act of thanking, honouring and blessing; it is sharing in God's grace through the food offering. The emotion is thus one of empowerment, of contact with the divine – some transcendent invisible being / element which has the power to bless. In other words, the emotion is also one of awe and of inner transformation. Seen from this perspective, the *malida* rite may be conceived of as the collective effort of an ethnic group to imagine, through performance, their sense of Indianness and Jewishness combined. The performance of the *malida*, I argue here, is essentially an aestheticization or cultivation of religiously defined emotions during a set of uniquely Indian and Jewish ritualized and aestheticized actions. Furthermore, the performance of the ritual in its new place of settlement, Israel, constructs that place as sacralized "home" from a particular aesthetic perspective.

5. Jewish-Israeli Weddings, Bene Israel Customs and Bollywood Imageries

As the public aspect of a central institution of Jewish-Israeli society – marriage, weddings – reflect on and mirror the commonly held view of Israel as a family oriented society. Weddings feature significantly in mainstream Israeli culture and a whole industry, based on an economy of mutual obligation and exchange, but equally a desire for conspicuous consumption, for indulgence and sensuous display, has evolved around the Jewish-Israeli wedding, scripting a mainstream popular mass cultural text that is taken as a yardstick against which to measure one's own good taste and thus to position oneself in Israeli society. Israeli

weddings are, however, not only sites of conspicuous consumption, but also sites at which issues of identity and community are explored and reflected upon through embodied aesthetic performance. Indeed the events surrounding the institution of marriage are a means for exploring an imaginary past as a sensuous display of performed knowledge and aesthetics, tradition and popular culture. And clearly this is a key moment in which cultural and diasporic memory are mobilized and embodied. Particular wedding rites, often a variation of or resembling local practice in the diaspora, are also included in the Israeli wedding pantheon. These cluster, in particular, around the pre-wedding henna ceremony. Ceremonial rites of this kind are performed throughout the Middle East and South Asia and the Bene Israel also have their own particular version of the henna – the *mehndi* – which is practiced widely in contemporary Israel.

The enthusiastic involvement of the Israeli-born Bene Israel generation in what may be referred to as “ethnic” ritual raises, in my view, a number of interesting questions. Weil noted in the 1970s that the *mehndi*, which she described as highly Indian in flavour, was persisting in spite of its apparent “anomaly” in the context of Israeli society. In particular, she thought it surprising that the *mehndi* persisted in view of the fact that it was not based on Jewish religion (Weil 1977: 226). It seems mistaken, in my view, to conceive of the *mehndi* as an anomaly within contemporary Israeli society, unless one wishes to make a political statement that only purely “Jewish” (based on *Halacha*) traditions are acceptable. It seems rather that the *mehndi* may be regarded as a henna party of a distinctive kind, with henna ceremonies being performed by many Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern, North African and Asian descent). Moreover, most immigrant groups in Israel have customs and traditions which are not necessarily rooted in *Halachic* traditions. And as expounded in a book on the Christian effect on Jewish life, there has been plenty of cultural borrowing over the centuries among European Jews as well, a fact which is often either ignored or suppressed (Hilton 1994).

Marriage is a significant event for Bene Israel families and it may well be regarded as the most popular joyful ritual occasion celebrating “happiness” and “joyfulness”. To elicit these desirable emotional states, a whole array of ritualized acts and sequences, both traditional-diasporic-, and contemporary-modern-Israeli, are drawn on. The ritualized activities and scenarios are taken from domains that are beyond the experience of everyday life as lived in Israel, though some genres may be consumed or performed as part of an everyday life. The cultural memory that is mobilized during wedding celebrations derives its magic from an imaginary diasporic past, while the magic derived from more modern themes is based on romance, modern fairy tales and western pop star culture, as well as from Indian TV shows, soaps and in particular commercialized Indian popular cinema, often in the form of Bollywood and its various

cultural products. In my view it is precisely because these domains need imagining, that they are in a sense beyond the reach of everyday life, means that they are imbued with the “magical force”, that is, they need to be staged in a performance that has an affecting presence.

Bene Israel families usually opt for a mainstream Israeli wedding reception party, which is modelled after the western style “white wedding”, in one of Israel’s popular *olam shmahot* (entertainment halls). The actual marriage ceremony may be performed either in an Indian synagogue or at the venue of the wedding reception party. In some cases, this may be related to the limited number of seats available in a small synagogue building, but when a Bene Israel marries out of the community, this also offers an agreeable solution to both families, since they will not need to decide in which of the ethnic synagogues the marriage ceremony should take place. While many of the wedding celebrations resemble mainstream Israeli practice, and are based on the script provided by the venue, an Indian wedding reception party is nevertheless often interlaced with the performance of Indian music or dance. An especially appealing feature of Bene Israel weddings is the performance of the wedding song *Yonati* (my dove) which depicts the bride as a dove whose splendour is praised. The song is a love poem written by Israel ben Moses Najara (1555 – 1625), which is sung to an Indian tune (Isenberg 1988: 135). A Bene Israel groom is expected to sing the song solo standing on the *bimah* (central podium in a synagogue) with the bride walking slowly towards him, but wedding guests often join in the song, mainly because of its huge popularity. The song may also form an integral part of Bene Israel wedding anniversary celebrations in Israel. While some wedding reception parties feature classical Indian dance, it is, however, more often the Bollywood genre, performed by local Indian-Israeli performers as well as wedding guests, that predominates.

By contrast to the wedding reception party, the Bene Israel *mehndi*, like other henna parties in Israel, too, is a more private event for family and close friends. Many Bene Israel families in contemporary Israel opt now for only one *mehndi* party, although some will insist on separate venues for bride and groom and in some cases two ethnically different henna parties, for example one Moroccan and one Indian, are performed at the same venue. The Bene Israel *mehndi* may vary in length and intensity, but follows a basic script which includes the *malida*, the wedding procession, the dressing up of bride and groom as king and queen, which includes the blessing of silver chains as well as the *sherra* (wedding crown), the actual henna ceremony, various acts of gift giving as well as the blessing of the bride and groom with money and the throwing of rice grains over the shoulders of the couple to keep evil spirits away. These ritual procedures are followed by a festive meal as well as plenty of merry making, often according to Bollywood tunes. At a Bene Israel *mehndi*, the bride always wears a green sari,

including brides who marry into a Bene Israel family, and the henna is applied on the index finger, rather than on the palm.

During the Bene Israel *mehndi*, the couple is ritually elevated to the status of queen and king for one night before they enter the reality of marriage. The custom of dressing up the bride and groom in the manner described above is obviously reminiscent of Hindu (and Indian Muslim) weddings. However, while the theme of queen and bride is obviously derived from Hindu or, more generally, South Asian customs, it ties in with the position allocated to children in Israeli society, too. Kehimkar reported that at the end of the 18th century the custom was dying out among the Bene Israel, mainly because the Cochini and Baghdadi Jews in India had condemned the practice as pagan in origin. In defence of this traditional practice and quoting Psalm 45, verse 13 – 14, Kehimkar suggested the possibility that the Bene Israel wedding adornments may have been inspired by biblical readings.

13 *The royal daughter is all glorious within
the palace*

Her clothing is woven with gold

14 *She shall be brought to the king in robes
of many colours.*

Still, he conceded that the flowers hanging over the bride and groom's faces are not directly mentioned in Psalms (Kehimkar 1937: 141 – 142). It seems a significant reflection to the power of aesthetics that even though the practice was reported to be on the decline in India at the end of the 18th century, it is still widely practiced, and indeed forms an integral part of the Bene Israel henna ceremony as it is celebrated in contemporary Israel.

Indian-wedding suppliers cater for the special requirements of an Indian henna party, providing decorations, palanquins, tents as well as *sherras* (wedding crowns). Business cards of local Israeli suppliers often feature Bollywood stars such as Aishwarya Rai rather than a traditional Bene Israel bride in her green sari. Members of the immigrant generation often note that some of the ritual sequences, as well as some of the ritual objects, such as, for example, the palanquin in which the pride and the groom are carried during the procession, were not actually part of the Bene Israel *mehndi* in India, but were only used in Hindu weddings. Moreover, guests and performers at the *mehndi* wear different styles of South Asian garments: sari, *shalvar*, *kameez* as well as other, often Bollywood-inspired, garments. Indeed far from being a mere traditional diasporic complex, the Bene Israel *mehndi* has undergone several changes within Israeli society, not least because its aesthetics and ambiance is increasingly inspired by transnational and globalized flows of commercialized Indian popular culture, in particular as derived from popular Hindi cinema. It seems not

farfetched, in my view, to claim that the Bene Israel *mehndi* in Israel has to some extent undergone a process of “Bollywoodization”. This also reflects, to some degree, contemporary changes in the aesthetics of weddings among India’s middle class, as well as current trends among Indian diasporic communities around the globe. Moreover, the Bene Israel *mehndi* has become an integral part of Israel’s wedding industry alongside other Mizrahi-style henna parties, and this is reflected in the fact that the *mehndi* is now often referred to as “Indian henna”.

6. Indian ‘Easternness’ and the Indian Way of being Israeli

Israeli intellectuals and commentators on Israeli society have, over the last decades, repeatedly probed the question of “Israeli identity”, only to realize that the term persistently eludes definition. Israeli nation-building has used powerful socializing agents of the state, in particular the education system and the army. These are probably the major influences on the majority of young people growing up in Israel, alongside the media and the globalizing spread of western consumption. Israel’s educational programme instils values such as the love of the land, Zionist history, and the continued memory of the Holocaust. The medium of teaching is Hebrew, and children are expected to celebrate public rituals and Israeli pioneer songs, and to go on extended hikes, along with visits to museums and study centres. The expectation in the past was that such powerful influences would bring about a new type of Israeli, in a version of the American melting pot ideology, a vision that only partially materialized. There is no doubt that young Bene Israel who were brought up in Israel and who serve their country in the army along with people from a large variety of ethnic origins, regard themselves as full Israelis. Indeed, while the immigrant generation often portrays itself as a group positioned between the two main categories Ashkenazim (Jews of European origin) and Mizrahim (Jews of Middle Eastern, African and Asian origin), the Israeli-born Bene Israel generations have integrated well into Israeli society and to varying degrees embrace their own brand of “Easternness” as an integral part of their Israeliness, irrespective of the degree of religiosity they adhere to. During the consumption, performance and celebration of South Asian popular culture they may emphasize a pan-Indian Israeli or, more generally, transnational Indian identity while in other contexts, such as the *malida* and the *mehndi*, they may foreground their Bene Israel identity. It seems that despite their sense of Israeliness, many Bene Israel in Israel refuse to abandon the aesthetic traditions of their group. Instead, they have tried to blend them, sometimes, in surprising ways, with their sense of Israeliness. Moreover, like other Mizrahim, too, the Israeli-born second and third generation embraces and

experiences the category Mizrahi not as a homogeneous identity, but rather as a heterogeneous one, one that includes Indian-Israeli identities alongside others.

Clearly, contemporary Bene Israel identity in Israel raises interesting questions about the very meaning of such terms as “acculturation” and “assimilation”. In Israel, the Bene Israel have redefined for themselves what it is they want to embrace when celebrating their so-called diaspora tradition, and there is compelling evidence that they do not wish to restrict their cultural-cum-aesthetic activities to the confines of history books, exhibitions and museum collections. Nor do they suffice themselves with performing their Bene Israel identity solely in one of the various Indian synagogues. While such projects and practices are of great importance for the transmission of memory and diasporic tradition, other media, such as, for example, commercialized Indian popular culture, may play an equally significant part in the perpetuation and, indeed, constitution of an Indian-Israeli identity. In these spaces of fun, aesthetic pleasure, dressing up in South Asian garments, dancing, singing, or performing religiously inspired emotions during the *malida*, the Bene Israel in Israel collectively perform, imagine and celebrate their own version of “Indianness” and “Bene Israelness”. Just like the writer in Ghosh’s sense invokes a diasporic past, providing its readership community with a powerful symbolic imaginary for the present, so does this collectively embraced milieu mediate an emotional continuity that may be conceived of as an epic link too – that of sound, vision, fragrance, taste and the embodiment of specific, often selective, values embraced by the Bene Israel as their “Indian” Israeliness.

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Searching for Traces of Judaism in Indonesia

1. Introduction

The transformations and dynamics of religions in different local and historical contexts are one of the main interests of the comparative study of religions. Particularly the position of minority religions in a religiously different region, such as Judaism in Indonesia, provides an interesting field to investigate processes of religious interaction, identification, and distinction. While I was searching for traces of Judaism as a micro-minority religion in Indonesia, a country highly shaped by Islam, a few striking discrepancies appeared: on the one hand, the Jewish population is quite small and Jewish religion is practically invisible in daily life; on the other hand, an impressive sixty-two foot-high menorah was erected in North Sulawesi. At the same time one is often confronted with widespread anti-Jewish attitudes and propaganda in the public sphere.

My former studies on religious diversity in contemporary Indonesia dealt with the formation and transformation of religious minorities. The population of Indonesia is nearly ninety percent Muslim and the country has a constitution which declares belief in one god or lordship as part of citizenship. In my work, I focused mainly on the sizable Christian minority and its structural similarities with Islam, as well as the small but historically and currently relevant minority religions, Buddhism and Hinduism (Franke 2012). I investigated how these religions dealt with the imposition of monotheistic belief required by the constitution and what impact it had on daily religious life and practice. Since the formulation of the principles of *Pancasila* (five principles included in the preamble of the Indonesian constitution) and the founding of the Indonesian Republic, first Islam was accepted by the state, followed by Christianity, then

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Buddhism and Hinduism, and, since 2006, Confucianism. I therefore wondered about the position of the small Jewish community, with its clear monotheism and structural similarity to Islam. Surely, I thought, there should be no formal hindrance to the acceptance of Judaism by the Indonesian state.

In this article, I will investigate the disparate factors that have contributed to the invisibility of the Jewish religion in much of Indonesia, and the striking visibility of Judaism in Sulawesi. After a short overview of some aspects of and data on the historical background of Jewish life in the Indonesian Archipelago, I will report some observations of traces of Judaism in Indonesia as short vignettes of current Jewish life, including the disappearance of the Jewish community in Surabaya and Java, the formation of new synagogues in North Sulawesi and the present state of Jewish life in Jakarta. After that, I will consider the function and meaning of the widespread anti-Judaism in public Indonesian discourse. Finally, I will bring these various observations together, in order to offer some insights into the ambivalent situation of Judaism and the Jewish minority in Indonesia. At first glance, the anti-Jewish public discourse seems misplaced, considering the relative invisibility of Jewish life and religion in Indonesia. However, the apparent contradiction between these two aspects of Indonesian society is based on factors that mutually reinforce each other, as will be demonstrated in the following discussion.

2. Historical Background of Jewish Life in the Indonesian Archipelago

Jews may have already arrived in Sumatra and Java as individual traders and mariners from the Indian subcontinent or Arabia before the arrival of European colonialism as part of a cosmopolitan Jewish traders' network (Kamsma 2010a: 90 – 98; Kowner 2011: 1 f.). The first confirmed traces of a Jewish presence in the Indonesian Archipelago are found in a text from the thirteenth century (see Kowner 2011: 2). Other Jews probably arrived with Portuguese traders in the sixteenth century, and yet others with the ships of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the seventeenth century. A section of the cemetery of Banda Aceh, reserved for Jews and tombstones with Jewish inscriptions, provides traces of the presence of Jews in Aceh in the seventeenth century.

Jacob Halevy Saphir (1822 – 1886), a Jewish traveller of Romanian descent, who visited the Archipelago in 1861, provided one of the first written reports that indicated Jews could be found in Batavia, Surabaya and Semarang. Apparently, they had not settled in communities, since they had no synagogue, cemetery, teacher or circumciser, and they appeared to be ashamed of their Jewish origins

(Saphir's letter documented in Hadler 2004: 295 – 299). This state of invisibility continued into the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. Indonesian Jews seem to have been identified as Europeans or as being of Arabic descent and they practised their religion privately. Kamsma explains that the “Jewish Diaspora in the Straits harbours distinct Jewish groups of which the difference between Ashkenazim and Sephardim is the most important”, a distinction that correlates with the points of origin between Jews from Christian and from Islamic contexts (Kamsma 2010a: 95 f.). The so-called Baghdadi Jews, with an Arabic or Persian-speaking background from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan were probably the most visible Jewish communities in South East Asia. With the flourishing of Singapore's economy at the beginning of the twentieth century, a larger number of Ashkenazi Jews from different parts of Europe came to South East Asia (Kamsma 2010a: 101 f.).

The activities of Zionists in the early twentieth century caught the public's attention more than had previous Jewish activities. For example, in 1921 the Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen arrived in Java. He published a Zionist newspaper, issued in Padang (1926 – 1939). Then, in 1926, the Dutch Indies Zionist Association was founded. Cohen estimated that about 2,000 Jews were living in Java and reported that the Ashkenazim Jews were often successful in business and had close ties to the ruling British elite, while the Sephardim seemed to be outsiders (Hadler 2004: 299; Kamsma 2010a: 101; Kowner 2011).

An official census conducted by the colonial government in the Dutch East Indies in 1930 reported the presence of 1,095 Jews. By the late 1930s, the population is estimated to have grown to about 2,500, with most Jews living in Java, some in Sumatra and far fewer in other parts of the archipelago (Kowner 2011: 4).

Before the outbreak of World War II, the number of Jews continued to grow; around the end of the Pacific War (1941 – 1945), there were about 3,000 Jews in Indonesia. After the Japanese occupied Indonesia in 1942, Jews were sent to internment camps, along with Europeans.² Most Jews left Indonesia after the war and went to various European countries, the USA, Australia and Israel.

Already in 1943 a Christian from Sulawesi introduced the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” (Hagemeister 2008), a forged document created in the late nineteenth century, into Indonesian society. That shows that the current Indonesian anti-Semitism, easily to find in the quite extensive variety of publications with negative views of Judaism, “is neither new nor Islamic in origin” (Hadler 2004: 305; Siegel 2000; Ricci 2010b; 2011).

The post-war Jewish population in Indonesia, as Kowner shows, may be divided into three groups (Kowner 2011: 5 f.):

² Kowner 2010 gives a detailed overview of the Japanese internment of Jews in this period, see also Hadler 2004: 302 – 305.

- (1) Dutch Jews, often employed by the colonial administration, and a large number of merchants with different origins, who were highly assimilated to the Dutch colonial culture.
- (2) Jews of the Sephardic tradition with a Baghdadi origin, mainly from Iraq and other parts of the Middle East, most of whom lived in Surabaya.
- (3) Descendants of Jews from Europe of the Ashkenazim tradition and numerous refugees from Nazi persecution in Germany, Austria and Eastern Europe, who reached the Archipelago via family ties and were supported by Dutch consuls.

The World Jewish Congress estimates that, after the war, 750 Jews lived in Batavia (today Jakarta), 500 in Surabaya, and 250 in Bandung. Another few hundred Jews lived spread across Indonesia (Hadler 2004: 306).

After 1957 and President Sukarno's nationalization policies, only around 450 Jews were left in Indonesia (Hadler 2004: 306; Kowner 2011: 2). That number dwindled to fifty during the economic crisis of Sukarno's regime and following the prosecution of communists after the *coup d'état* against Sukarno in the mid-1960s; indeed, Kowner estimates that, since 1969, there are fewer than twenty Indonesian-born Jews left in the country (Kowner 2011). However, considering the fact that many Jewish individuals have been well-assimilated to the Indonesian culture, this estimate may be low.

This brief overview shows that the Jewish population in Indonesia has been shaped by very different regional backgrounds and traditions. Jews can hardly be viewed either as one community, or as a network of actively practicing believers. They are closely interwoven into the dynamics of the global and specific regional history and contexts, which are in turn reflected in the diverse positions of Jews in current Indonesia.

Despite the first principle of the *Pancasila*, which states explicitly that Indonesian citizenship requires the belief in one god or lordship (*ketuhanan yang maha esa*), a later presidential decree from the early 1960s formulated several criteria for an acceptance of a religion as *agama pancasila*. In addition to the existence of a prophet, a holy book and a formulation of norms and ethics for all believers, these regulations also required that the religion be recognized as relevant, both within Indonesia and internationally (Franke 2012: 129). Judaism is without doubt internationally relevant, and should fulfil the requirements of the *Pancasila*, but the historically very small numbers of Jewish communities on the Indonesian Archipelago might have been the main reason that Judaism never reached the status of a *Pancasila* religion. Even the first President of Indonesia, Sukarno, mentioned Judaism along with Shintoism, Daoism and Zoroastrianism as religions of the Indonesian people, meaning that they are not forbidden and the religious practices of their believers should be accepted, as long as they do

not break any law (cf. Franke 2012: 128 – 129) But national politics did not encourage the establishment or visibility of the Jewish religion and communities related to it. Rather, the politics of the Suharto regime (1967 – 1998) supported the publishing of anti-Semitic literature and an atmosphere of anti-Semitic attitudes and conspiracy theories against Jews, Israel and the USA (Hadler 2004: 306 f.).

Thus, I was curious to learn about the presence and daily religious life of Jews in present-day Indonesia and started what I called “searching for traces” of the scattered, heterogeneous, and often invisible Judaism.

3. First Observations of Traces of Judaism in Indonesia Today

3.1. The Synagogue in Surabaya, Java: Some Impressions

While looking for traces of Jewish life in Indonesia, I quickly found a reference to the old and quite well-known synagogue in Surabaya, Java, declared to be the only synagogue in Indonesia in my travel guide from 2003. When I prepared my visit to Surabaya in March 2012, colleagues and friends in Yogyakarta called my attention to the fact that the synagogue is hard to find because all signs outside of the building have been removed. After protests of Muslim extremists against Israel’s actions during the Gaza War in winter 2008 – 2009 in front of the synagogue, the government felt forced to close the Surabaya synagogue. There seems to be only one Jew, Rivka Sayers, still living in Surabaya.

Despite having been given helpful advice, I was unable to contact anyone during my short stay. I came to realize that I should have prepared this visit much more carefully. Whereas one may spontaneously visit Buddhist temples or Christian churches and communities in Indonesia, contacting Jewish people these days in places like Surabaya obviously requires a well-prepared introduction by someone well-known or a previous introduction via foreign Jewish communities or acquaintances.

A Muslim colleague in Yogyakarta told me about a Jewish family of Batik traders in Yogyakarta with whom she is good friends. But she also told me that it is of great importance for them not to be recognized as Jews in public. Thus, they are very cautious with new contacts and do not want to meet Muslims, foreigners or people with whom they are not well-acquainted.

My impression was that it would have been impossible to meet a member of the former Jewish community in Surabaya, because an introduction would have needed much more time and multiple references to document that the visitor was a trustworthy person. Making the best of the situation, I travelled to Surabaya by myself and had a look at the synagogue at Jalan Kajoon, which is close

to the main station. If I had not already known what this building was, I would never have been able to guess from its outward appearance that it had formerly been a synagogue. A colonial-style building from the 1950s, nestled between several shops and located in front of several malls, banks and other large buildings, there is no sign or symbol which qualifies this building as a synagogue. The building had never been particularly imposing or eye-catching, but previously it bore a sign with the inscription “synagogue” and another one with “Beth Hashem” on it. Hadler (2004: 309) also reports on a prominent Star of David on the building. The building is currently surrounded by a stable fence. Pictures of the interior of the synagogue showing how it once was (and might still be) reveal that it was a place of Jewish religious practice – these pictures are still available on the internet. The Jewish Times Asia reported in November 2008 that in Surabaya about ten Jewish families gathered, most of them of Sephardic origin, to celebrate Jewish festivities and conduct services. The small community had no Torah, but five *siddars* / *machzors* (Jewish prayer books), which they shared and copied. Most of their communication took place via the Internet in order to arrange their meetings.

In an article on Jews belonging to the Sephardic Synagogue of Surabaya, some interesting aspects of Jewish daily life of the time around 2006 are reported, especially concerning Leah Zahavi and Isaac Solomon (Champagne / Aziz 2003). Zahavi and Solomon kept their community alive and held various official positions, including caretaker and guide in the synagogue. They tell about their Iraqi origin and point out that most of the Jews in Surabaya had come to Java as traders, bringing a Sephardic tradition with them. Zahavi’s daughter, who married an Indonesian Muslim, speaks of Indonesia as her home; she describes her heart as an “Indonesian heart”. Her two children attend a Catholic school; the boy follows his father to the mosque for Friday prayers and her older child has chosen a Jewish identity. According to their Indonesian identity cards, all members of this family are registered as Muslims, while many elder members of the community still hold Dutch passports. Zahavi and her daughter try to live as both Jewish and Indonesian: they speak Indonesian, sometimes employing Muslim Indonesian vocabulary, such as *ummat* for the religious community and *gereja* (church) for the synagogue. Zahavi says, she sells Jewish food at the market, but she would not be recognized as a Jew in public, and that she passes herself off as Arab at moments of tension. Both Zahavi and Solomon tell stories of friendship with their Christian and Muslim neighbours, but both also fear the rise of Muslim extremism.

Before the protests in 2008 – 2009 mentioned previously, the building and the inhabitants of the Surabaya synagogue had never been attacked directly. In the reports, however, several members of the small Jewish community and the family living at the synagogue expressed their fear that they were no longer safe.

After the violent demonstrations of anti-Semitic groups like Front Pembela Islam in front of the synagogue in 2009, all symbols and signs referring to Judaism were removed and all but one person, Rivka Sayers, left Java and re-located to Singapore and other destinations.

These first observations demonstrate that Jews in present-day Java currently maintain a very low profile. During my visit in 2012, I was told that Jews in Muslim-dominated Java usually do not wear a *kippa* or other identifying symbols in public. Usually their neighbours and friends are aware that they are Jewish and accept them on an individual level. According to their identity cards, many of them are registered officially as Christians or Muslims.

Jews living in Jakarta are similarly invisible, as the Jewish Virtual Library reports;³ many of them seem to lead secular lives, whereas others had at times visited the festivities at the Surabaya synagogue. At present there is no official address for a Jewish community in Jakarta. However, it is interesting to read the responses to Eyal Weizman, a twenty-three year-old Jew who wanted to visit Indonesia for the first time and was looking for a synagogue in the Internet-forum “Indahonesia.com – Discover Indonesia online” in a report from January 2006. Most of the respondents did not know anything about a synagogue or a Jewish community in Jakarta, but some warned him not to mention that he is Jewish; rather, someone wrote, he should “just be a Dutch”. Another member of the forum offered to give Weizman the address of a Jewish community in Jakarta and to tell him about this community – but not in public.

In further news, “The Times of Israel”⁴ reported on February 7, 2012 that a *bat mizwah* was celebrated in Jakarta. Mei Lin Kallman, a deaf twelve-year-old Indonesian girl from a business family with a Chinese background, received a Hebrew education in Singapore at the local Chabad Centre. Chabad is a messianic Hasidic-Jewish movement, founded by Rebe Schnoer Salman von Ljadi (1745 – 1812) in Lubavitch (Ehrlich 2000). In Singapore the Chabad movement has become quite visible since the 1990s (Kamsma 2010a: 106). The *bat mizwah* ceremony for Mei Lin Kallman in Jakarta was conducted by a rabbi from Israel.

These bits of information create the impression that there might be more than only twenty Jews living in Indonesia, as is often asserted. However, they are almost invisible.

3 [Http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/indonesia.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/indonesia.html).

4 [Http://www.timesofisrael.com/a-typical-bat-mitzva-in-an-a-typical-setting/](http://www.timesofisrael.com/a-typical-bat-mitzva-in-an-a-typical-setting/).

3.2. New Synagogues in Manado, North Sulawesi, and the Story of Yaacov Baruch

After the closing of the synagogue in Surabaya, possibly only two synagogues are left in Indonesia: one in Manado and one in Tondano, a village close to Manado City (a one-hour drive from Manado), both in the predominantly Christian Minahasa region of North Sulawesi (Kamsma 2010b: 387).

As previously mentioned, the Surabaya synagogue was shut down in 2009. Yet only two years later, in November 2011, an extremely eye-catching symbol of Judaism was installed in North Sulawesi. Though a very small number of Jews live in this region, a huge menorah, sixty-two feet tall, was erected on a mountain overlooking the city. The menorah is located across from an equally monumental ninety-eight foot statue of Jesus bestowing blessings, which had been raised two years earlier. The monument of the menorah was paid for by the local government and cost about US \$150,000. The local head of the district's tourism department and a local legislator, who is a Pentecostal Christian, hoped to attract tourists and business investors from abroad with the monument of the menorah (Onishi 2010).

Here one finds an impressive example of positive visibility of Judaism in Indonesia. The Jewish Virtual Library and the New York Times report⁵ that, in Manado, Israeli flags can be spotted on taxi-motorcycles and that the "six-year-old synagogue ... has received a face-lift, including a ceiling with a large star of David, paid for by local officials".

The primarily Christian area of North Sulawesi has obviously become a space in which Jewishness may be openly displayed and some people have revealed their family's Jewish background. Thus, "Jews and Israel seem to have become part of the expression of Minahasa identity as well" (Kamsma 2010b: 387).

Members of the Fontein family, who have Dutch-Jewish roots, together with Yaacov Baruch, who sometimes goes by the alias "Eli" or "Toar" (Kamsma 2010b: 396 – 398; 2010a: 114 – 116), a young lecturer of law at a local university, opened the first synagogue in Manado. This synagogue was established on the site of a former enterprise of the Fontein family (Kamsma 2010b: 391 – 393).

Yaacov Baruch was raised as a Catholic, has a Muslim mother and learned about his Jewish descent from his grandmother as late as 1999. The family had hidden its Jewish roots over the course of several generations and had lost its knowledge of Judaism and Jewish religious practice. Baruch reported in the New York Times that he learnt about being Jewish from "Rabbi Google" on the Internet. He also received a *kippa* (cap) from an uncle living abroad and then made his own *tefillin* (boxes containing scrolls with extracts of the Torah) and

⁵ [Http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/indonesia.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/indonesia.html); Onishi 2010.

tallit (prayer shawl). Baruch considers himself an orthodox Jew and belongs to the Chabad Lubavitch movement, an orthodox *chassidic* (mystical) tradition of Judaism. He and his friends do research on Judaism at an Internet café and have compiled a Torah by printing pages from the Internet, making a “parchment” by gluing flipcharts together. The story of the new synagogues in North Sulawesi is closely connected with Baruch’s story, in that he fought fiercely to develop a lively Jewish community in this area.

The Fontein family combines their Jewishness with Evangelical Christian beliefs and, as Kamsma reports, practices a “peculiar mix of Evangelical Christian and Judaist ideas” (Kamsma 2010b: 396). Baruch, however, is developing a local Jewish tradition and at the same time reconnects himself and his community with Jewish believers around the world. The unconventional Jewish practice of the Fontein family and the orthodox orientation of Baruch have therefore opened up insurmountable divergences in their religious practices as well as in lifestyle and behaviour. With the support of a Dutch sponsor, Baruch founded another synagogue in 2005 in the former house of his grandfather in Tondano. As Kamsma further reports, Baruch proudly presented his new synagogue in Singapore, but was criticized by the local Chabad rabbi, who said Baruch could not identify himself as Jewish. It is therefore unclear if Baruch is still a Christian or in an official process of conversion to Judaism; but he has obviously taken on the role of spokesman and representative of the Indonesian Jewish Community (IJC) and declares his synagogue as the only “Orthodox Jewish synagogue in the Manado area” (Kamsma 2010b: 398). Furthermore, Baruch is very active and present in national Indonesian and international media.

These aspects of Jewish life and visibility in North Sulawesi demonstrate certain influential background factors. First, the Jewish community in Sulawesi is located within a strong Christian environment, with a sizable number of different denominations, many of which have an explicit messianic orientation, showing many structural similarities to Chabad. Furthermore, North Sulawesi has historical and existing business contacts and future plans of cooperation between the Christians in this region and Israel as Kamsma (2010a) discusses in his study on the Jewish Diasporascape in the Straits. Highly compatible with the resurgence of a Jewish community are local interests that encourage tourism as one resource of a growing economy and seek to develop business with local foreign enterprises and countries, including Israel. Moreover, some families in this area have been living as Christians but are aware of their Jewish descendants; many of them show a lively interest in Jewish religion and tradition. Finally, members of these Jewish communities proudly portray their buildings and symbols as a form of Indonesian identity, accepted in the local context and reconnected to global Jewish networks.

These first observations reveal two divergent realities of Jewish life in Indonesia. In Java, Jewish life is largely invisible, because it is embedded in and assimilated to Indonesian Christian or Muslim identities and often almost forgotten. In North Sulawesi, however, a Jewish Chabad community is developing within a predominantly messianic Christian environment, which offers “a safe haven in an area hostile to Jews” (Kamsma 2010b: 389). This open and supportive environment allows Jews to express their religious beliefs and invites exchanges with business people and tourists from Israel.

In the context of widespread anti-Judaism, North Sulawesi is a very exceptional place for Judaism in Indonesia and for economic connections with Israel. The impact of anti-Judaism probably prohibits an open Jewishness in the rest of Indonesia.

4. Anti-Semitism in Indonesia: Some Brief Remarks

Practically speaking, there are no Jews in Indonesia. Nor do Indonesians usually claim that there are. But it is now said that there is strong Jewish influence corrupting Islam, sometimes disguised as orthodox Islamic truth and producing political unrest (Siegel 2000: 9).

It is obvious that the Jews in Indonesia, roughly estimated as being between twenty and a few hundred members in total, are a very small minority in a population of 237 million. Thus, the Jewish religion hardly counts in the multi-ethnic and Muslim-dominated culture of Indonesia. Despite the incredibly small presence of Jews, however, I found extensive anti-Semitism in Indonesia, as well as in other parts of the straits.

Although non-Jewish Indonesians almost never communicate and interact with their Jewish compatriots in their daily lives, they often hold deeply negative stereotypes of and perceptions about Jewishness. Furthermore, anti-Semitic literature and expressions are on the rise in Indonesian society (Schulze 2006; Suci 2008). Some observers of Indonesian society have described this phenomenon as anti-Semitism without Jews (for example Burdah 2010; Ricci 2010b). As Burdah explains, the absence of Jews and Judaism in the public sphere allows anti-Jewish stereotypes to flourish, with Indonesians claiming to “know” all about the negative intentions and behaviour they ascribe to Jews. Indeed, Indonesians often equate Jews and Judaism with Israel, Zionism, and conspiracy theories such as an international Jewish cabal (Siegel 2000; Burdah 2010). As Anthony Reid has shown “Jews seem to function for many neo-conservative Indonesian Muslims as a negative symbol of cosmopolitanism, secularism, globalization and modernity in general” (2010: 383) and therefore represent many qualities considered contrary to a pure Islam.

The growing anti-Semitism in Indonesia is the main source for the general perception of Jews in Indonesia. There is a wide range of Indonesian booklets and literature demonstrating the topicality and providing evidence of the Jewish-Zionist conspiracy theories. This anti-Semitism is founded not on real people and believers, but on an imagined Jewishness, equated not only with Israel and Zionism, but also with the US and with the alliance between the US and Israel against Islamic cultures around the world. Because most Indonesians have never met a Jew, negative images and stereotypes about Jews are flourishing. Without the experience of real encounters, Jews are seen as the “other”, accused of having Zionist sympathies and conspiring against Muslim Indonesia.

These short reflections on anti-Semitism highlight an essential aspect of this complex topic, which is that, in Indonesia, Jewishness and Judaism are mainly objects of projection. They are stereotypes of the dangerous “other”, filled with a mixture of negative images and emotions. These stereotypes have hardly anything to do with concrete experiences or with real persons. The example of North Sulawesi with its Christian messianic traditions, however, demonstrates that when non-Jewish Indonesians have a chance to encounter Jewish Indonesians on a daily basis, they may discover a basis of religious similarities and shared interests. The regular interaction between groups fosters a sphere of mutual understanding and acceptance.

5. Conclusion: Some Theses and Perspectives

Pulling these observations together, Jews in Indonesia are, generally speaking, practically invisible, with the exception of the proudly visible Jewishness in the Minahasa region. One might suppose that the very small Jewish communities in Indonesia could practise their belief under the protection of the *Pancasila* constitution, which commits the state to supporting religion. Judaism as a monotheistic religion and one of the so-called world religions fits perfectly into the category of a *Pancasila* religion. As previously discussed, however, the reality in present-day Indonesia is quite the opposite, shaped as it is by stark contradictions.

In conclusion, I will present some insights regarding the visibility and invisibility of Judaism in Indonesia and present some new perspectives on this issue. Visibility and invisibility are expressions of diverse and ambivalent contexts, and based on several factors. To begin with visibility: first, Judaism is an accepted religion in a Christian neighbourhood, primarily due to the shared messianic orientation of these two religions. Second, Judaism supports a growing economy in trade and tourism, which invites investors and business people from abroad, especially from Israel and the USA. Third, better com-

munication via the Internet allows Diaspora Jews to reveal and share their hidden and forgotten background and to strengthen their networking, both locally and globally.

Invisibility of Jews in Indonesia is caused by fears of the unknown “other”, followed by negative stereotypes and conspiracy theories based on the absence of real Jews on the one hand, and the equation of Judaism with Israel, Zionism and the anti-Islamic politics of the US on the other hand. Furthermore, the few Jews who do live in Indonesia have been highly assimilated into the surrounding dominant Islamic culture. Finally, the dearth of Jews in Indonesia has led inevitably to the separation and hence the isolation of members.

In my estimation references to the *Pancasila* constitution do not play a decisive role for the position of Judaism in Indonesia. Of much more importance are the particular local contexts and the influence of global tensions and lines of conflict. In other words, non-Jewish Indonesians consider Jews in Indonesia first and foremost as representatives of Israel, Zionism, etc., until concrete encounters and communication with real Jews change their perception.

Jews in Indonesia as a micro-minority are in a peculiar situation. The lack of real contact opens up a sphere of projection and “othering”; the unknown “other” functions as a space for speculations that gains significant relevance. And one cannot ignore that this pattern is supported and intensified by global aspects, i. e., by the tensions between Israel and its Arabic neighbours. Therefore I think that, rather than relying on the constitution, actual interaction and communication are important steps for diminishing the fear of Jews as the dangerous “other” and for creating a sphere of shared daily life. Despite the fact that Jews in Indonesia constitute a micro-minority the example of North Sulawesi demonstrates that an atmosphere that allows visibility helps to overcome stereotypes fed by invisibility and creates positive interactions between Jewish and Non-Jewish compatriots.⁶

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⁶ I would like to thank Leonard Chrysostomos Epafra and Alef Theria Wasim, Yogyakarta, for their helpful advice.

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Vera Leininger¹

Jews in Singapore: Tradition and Transformation

Singapore is a small country at the southern tip of the Malaysian Peninsula at the crossroad of several international trade routes and in the last century it has become South-East Asia's most economically successful country. With a unique political and safety system, an extraordinary infrastructure, and a strict jurisdiction, but almost without any natural resources and maintaining only a very scarce water supply, this "little red dot" on the world map became an excellent centre for establishment and development of international commerce and financial business. The term "little red dot" gained currency after the former Indonesian President Habibie criticized Singapore in an interview 1998. Since then this epithet for the nation of Singapore was used by its leaders in speeches proudly quoting the achievements and fearing the vulnerability of this small country. Coupled with Singapore's thriving economic growth, this island-city-state has a unique history and claims a reputation of transforming cultural and religious traditions on their way to modernity and integrating the varieties of different societies in one nation. Modern on the surface and traditional underneath – this is the first impact to a foreign observer of the society in Singapore. But how does this statement correlate with the history of the Jews in Singapore?

It is rather an accepted, but not often discussed fact in the Singaporean public that in company with the majority of ethnic Chinese and the main minorities of Malays, Indians, Eurasians, and a great variety of immigrants from all over the world – and among them many secular Jews – Singapore has had a small but culturally and economically flourishing Jewish community since the 19th century. Despite the setbacks during the Japanese occupation in World War II, the Jewish community in Singapore can look at a long and successful history and

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today presents – maybe with exception of the Philippines and partly Thailand – the only active Jewish community in Southeast Asia.

The presented contribution will introduce certain facts about the history of the Jews in Singapore and point out few desiderata and question available resources of research about Jews in Singapore. The final focus will be on the varieties of the denominations within the small but respectful Jewish community and the presence of Jewish personalities in the cultural-religious and political life of Singapore.

1. History and Origins of the Settlements

Jews in Singapore – already the topic seems highly contradictive: the history of Jews with its wide spectrum of religious and cultural resources and precisely documented traditions passed on over thousands of years – in comparison to the rather sparsely recorded history of the settlements in South Malaya or Singapore.

About the early history of the Jews in South Malaya nothing is known. There are too little resources about the general history of this area. A settlement here named Pulau Ujong is mentioned in a Chinese inscription about the “end of the Island” in the third century. According to the legend from the 13th century, it was the Prince Srivijaya who called the place *Singa Pura* in Sanskrit or the “City of the lion”, when he spotted a lion in the jungle there. *Temasek* or the “Sea town” in Javanese dialect – a small port of South Malaya – was mentioned in medieval travelogues and letters. There is not much concrete research on the people who travelled and lived there. Arab traders were arriving in South Malaya as early as in the 10th century, among them probably also Jewish traders. Few hints suggest that Jews were travelling along the trading routes from Persia and India and maybe already settled down along the Straits of Malacca due to their occupation during the late Middle Ages.

The cultural similarity of the Jewish and the Arab traders seems to make the exact distinction additionally difficult. While the research on the Early Modern times extensively discusses the thriving and struggling but multiple and vivid Jewish communities in Europe and North Africa and the Middle East, and at least mentions the struggle of Jewish settlers in the colonies all around the world, we know nothing concrete about Jews in South Malaya or along the Straits of Malacca of that time. This disadvantage in information continues for later periods and may be caused partly by the lack of the available resources, partly by missing intensive research on Baghdadi Jews within the historical disciplines and Jewish Studies. In 2007 Jonathan Goldstein elaborated a possibility to extend the definition of “port Jews” in a colonial context to groups of Baghdadi

Jews in Southeast Asia in a connection to their home-communities and respective ties with their origins, which was the case for other so-called port Jews, as networkers in the maritime trade. He reflects the definition of “port Jews” initiated by David Sorkin and Lois C. Dubin in the 1990s, who placed Sephardi merchants in ports and colonies as harbingers of modernity, while remaining detached from the European *Haskalah* (cf. Goldstein 2007a: 1 – 19; Cesarani 2002). Baghdadi Jews, also called Jews of the Levante, are not to be confused with Sephardi Jews per definition, as there are not only differences in religious rites and cultural background, but also in the historical origins. Next to that, the cultural function of the “port Jews”, especially as a pendant to “court Jews”, has been argued since then by C. S. Monaco (Monaco 2009: 137 – 166) – most of the aspects of the “port Jews”, as used by David Sorkin, could be applied to the Jews of Singapore.

The fact is that except for the short monograph of Eze Nathan, which is a rich resource of valuable memoirs and a collection of missed documents and records and a historical reflection (Nathan 1986), and quite a recent journalistic work of Joan Bieder (Bieder 2007), we are still missing an extended and historically critical analysis about Jews in Singapore, not only for the period of the growing importance of the ports in the Straits of Malacca in the 18th and 19th centuries, but also for the entire time of their existence there.

However, according to the mentioned actual research – except few traders visiting the Straits in the 18th century – the first concrete mentioning of Jews settling down in Singapore is found during the enterprise of Stamford Raffles at the beginning of the 19th century. Most sources mention Jews of Baghdadi origin: mainly traders from India, especially from Calcutta, who came to Singapore after 1819, when the Sultan of Johor permitted the British businessman Sir Stamford Raffles and the East Indian Company to establish a trading post there. The position in the Straits of Malacca as the main water route between the Indian Ocean and the Chinese Sea brought an extensive trade business to Singapore. Around 1840, the Jewish community was able to collect enough funds to build a 40-person-synagogue in Synagogue Street, today a small isle in the busy financial district. The official census of 1830 recorded the presence of only nine traders of the Jewish faith in Singapore. The later records give different and partly unreliable numbers and the research imposes the economic and commercial importance of the few Jewish families as an opposition to their numbers. The evaluation of the statistics must indeed consider that the entire population of Singapore was very low – for the year 1846, Nathan mentions among “46 merchant houses recorded, [there are] twenty British, six Jewish, five Chinese, five Arab and two Armenian” (cf. Nathan 1986: 1, 187).

In its beginnings, the settlement of Singapore only took place around the southern seaside of the island near the port and shipping yard and the Singapore

River. The Jewish settlers also had houses in the Boat Quay Area (near the Singapore River and off South Canal Road) and later in the 19th century, an entire Jewish quarter developed – as a loose social and cultural living area amongst other immigrants from Asia. The *Mahallah* or “the Place” was located off today’s Orchard Road, around Dhoby Ghaut, Waterloo Street, Prinsep Street, and Selegie Road. Despite the enormous architectural changes in Singapore, there are houses with *Magen David* as a sign of their Jewish inheritance on the facade left till today. Because of no existing dwelling restriction, and despite of only few financial restrictions by the governing Sultan and later the British authorities, Jews could settle down almost everywhere, unlike in most parts of Europe at that time. At present, few houses of the wealthier Jewish merchants can still be found, sometimes converted or integrated into bigger estates – like the National University of Singapore at the Bukit Timah Road. With few exceptions, the origins of these dwellings are almost unknown in the Singaporean public.²

In 1873, the Jewish community bought a piece of land from the government in Waterloo Street and built their main synagogue – the *Maghain Aboth* (Shield of our Fathers). The census of 1871 stated that the Jewish community had 172 members, in the year 1930 it stated 877 (Nathan 1986: 187). Nathan also presents a collection of names from the both no longer existing Jewish cemeteries at the lower Orchard Road and Thomson Road (Novena) which gives information about the community. Already for that time, most of the publications mention Ashkenasi Jews settling in Singapore before the Suez Canal was built in 1869 (and increasingly afterwards), but impose their separation from the Baghdadi Jews while continuing their family bonds in Europe and joining mostly European communities. In fact – and despite of extensive hints in Nathan’s memoirs – there has been no comprehensive study about the Baghdadi and Ashkenasi Jews relationship in Singapore in the past. It seems that there had been almost no intermarriages between these two groups, which (on the other hand) may not have strictly religious, but also social and, eventually, economic reasons – maybe similar to the Jewish community in Amsterdam. The impact of the Ashkenasi Jewish entrepreneurship in Singapore especially before World War II is recorded by Nathan (Nathan 1986: 57) and finally in the wider aspect of the “Jewish” companies and entrepreneurship in the Straits in the detailed ethnographic study by Kamsma (Kamsma 2010). The reasons for a lack of wider records about the presence of the Ashkenasi Jews in Singapore may vary – the often assumed assimilation and their integration in the general society and the society of the countries of their origins respectively may be only one of them.

2 Cf. an interactive map comparing 1872, 1963 and present maps with historical pictures in <http://www.sgmmaps.blogspot.de/p/historical-maps.html>, and the awarded blog of Jerome Lim 2010.

Nevertheless, the buildings and street names in Singapore reveal the high participation of the Baghdadi Jews in the business and economy of the country. Following the successful merchant from Baghdad Salomon or Seliman Abraham (1798 – 1884), the probably most famous was Sir Menasseh Meyer (1846 – 1927), who arrived at the age of 15 and – as often imposed, very poor – from Calcutta and became one of the biggest owners of accessible property in Singapore and represented the Jewish community in Singapore. Already in 1900 he understood the political and economic changes and after the international opium trade was declared illegal, he invested in the property and land in Singapore, among other wealthy merchants, like the Arab family Alkaff. Meyer was the founder of the only other synagogue, Chesed El, at Oxley Rise (also near Orchard Road) which was built in 1905 after an argument with members of the Jewish community. Since then, Chesed El served as a private synagogue for Meyer's family and is nowadays the community synagogue serving the mostly orthodox Jewish public. Meyer was also the one who was approached by Albert Einstein on his Zionist-missionary travel through Asia in 1922 and collecting funds for the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Meyer and later his daughter Mozelle Nissim were active supporters and benefactors of the first Zionist settlements in Palestine (Bieder 2000 – 2001; Goldstein 2007b: 3). With Meyer's wide influence on the British authorities a guess about his influence on the Balfour Declaration comes up, despite his inclination to religious and not political Zionism. Although till now, there is no historical evidence on that. It is an open question if we can expect more information in the Zionist Archive in Jerusalem than revealed in the comprehensive book about Jews in Singapore by Joan Bieder (Bieder 2007).

Despite the records in the censuses, the numbers of Jewish inhabitants in Singapore often vary depending on the sources published. There may be multiple reasons: the international identity, the lack of interest for permanent settlement while having family living abroad, and several others like animosities or religious inclinations. There were supposed to be about 1,000 – 1,200 Jews in Singapore in 1939 before World War II. After the British authorities surrendered to the Japanese in 1942, many of the Jews were interned and treated as British; few could flee and many tried to send at least parts of their families abroad, some successfully; some of the Singaporean Ashkenasi Jews were considered citizens of the Axis depending on the country of their origin. After the war, a large number subsequently emigrated to Australia, England, the United States, and later to Israel and there were only about 200 members of the Jewish community left (Nathan 1986: 99 – 100).

2. Jews and the Republic of Singapore: Past Creating Present

With the transition of the politics in Singapore in the 1950s, trade opportunities increased again. Apart from the commercial status of several families, few Jews were part of politics in Singapore, and in 1955 David Marshall, a Jew of Iraqi origins, became the first chief minister of Singapore, and later ambassador of the country abroad. After the independence from Great Britain and a short intermezzo with Malaysia, Singapore became an independent republic in 1965, led by Singapore's icon, the first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. His political tactics and tough discipline, with which he established the order of the state and treated the internal riots, the doubts about the existence and progress of the new republic subsided.

Connected with the establishment of the Republic of Singapore, one of the international topics affecting Jewish and Singaporean history altogether is the cooperation with Israel on the military field. The Israel Defense Forces established the Singaporean army. This fact was commonly guessed since the beginning of the actions and some information leaked into the public, but it was finally confirmed in 2000 by Lee Kuan Yew in his memoirs, and few years later in details described in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz by Amnon Barzilai (Yew 2000; Barzilai 2004a; 2004b). Soon after the Establishment of Singapore in 1965, an Israeli military delegation with Major General Ya'akov Elazari (who later worked as the consultant for the Singaporean Army) arrived secretly in Singapore. The Israeli military officers, mentioned as "Mexicans" – so as not to upset the Malay-Muslim population in Malaysia and Singapore – started to help Singaporean authorities to build the various branches of the armed forces there. Since then, not only the security ties between the two countries have strengthened, but the foundations for further cooperation and extensive relations between Israel and Singapore were laid. An official trade agreement between Israel and Singapore was signed in 1968 and half a year later the Embassy of Israel was established in Singapore. The trade agreement from 1970 is existent till today. And, until today, the Singapore army follows the military model of Israel with some exceptions of national service for women.

Despite of the two mentioned monographs about the history of the Jews in Singapore (Nathan 1986; Bieder 2007), an entire political context and social spectrum, as well as religious and cultural developments of the Jews in Singapore, remain still undiscovered. From the point of the history of the religious congregations, many questions would include their religious and cultural life in the past and present. Do Jews in Singapore remain strictly traditional (as mentioned by Bieder 2007) or rather traditional but at the same time culturally and socially assimilated as the Baghdadi Jews in the function of the "port Jews" (Goldstein 2007a), or even reformed, according to the social and cultural model

of the Ashkenasi Jewish immigrants? Apart from the families who grew their economic wealth in Singapore since the last century, there were few newcomers breaking into the established society since the founding of the Republic of Singapore, not only of Baghdadi but also of Ashkenasi origin. A comprehensive approach would need a detailed research on both kinds of personalities, like the “made in Singapore” stock broker and philanthropist Jacob Ballas (1921 – 2000), the hotel proprietor and businessman Nissim Nissim Adis (1857-after 1920), the well-known lawyer and leader of many law institutions in Singapore Harry Elias (*1937), or the successful international fashion entrepreneur Frank Benjamin (*1934), and many others. Along with their traditional background, which is mentioned in the secondary literature, the combination of being an active Jewish community member on one hand and their secular education at St. Joseph and St. Andrew’s School and participating as “Jewish British” and later “Jewish Singaporeans” on the other hand, needs to be included. This aspect carries new possibilities for interdisciplinary research, especially as they were and are active also within secular public committees and professional organizations as public and charity founders and contribute to a great part to the political, economic, and last but not least cultural development of Singapore.

Within this context, it is a necessity to consider the Jewish traditional values and the large involvement of the personalities mentioned above in the public secular life. It may involve a necessary comparison with similar situations of the other ethnic immigrant groups who followed their traditions and were active in the general society at the same time – like Chinese or Indian trader families or even the less known, but not less influential, Arab and Armenian families in Singapore. Nevertheless, the effects of these comparisons would need to approach the general history of Singapore’s societies in the prospect of their various traditions and cultures – as often seen till today: modern on the surface and traditional underneath.

Connected with the above-mentioned, many topics need an extensive research of the available resources about the multicultural and multi-religious Asian societies with a great impact of immigrants like in Singapore. Recently, despite the so-called philo-Semitic tendencies, due to the misperception of the “economically only successful” Jews in the society not only in Singapore but also in many Asian countries, there are anti-Semitic tendencies showing up. A research of their roots would clarify if they are based on the growing influence of Christian denominations in the previously heterogeneous and multi-religious backgrounds, or due to social changes by the economic growth / crises and migration with the influence of the new media and the perspective of so-called “cultural globalization”.

3. Jewish Life in Singapore Today

Today, Singapore has almost 3.8 million residents (strictly including only Singaporean citizens and Permanent Residents) but in fact over 5 million inhabitants that consist of approximately 70 % ethnic Chinese, 15 % ethnic Malay, and 5 % ethnic Indians with an increasing and officially non-disclosed number of immigrants and expatriates of different ethnic and religious backgrounds from all over the world (cf. <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/keyind.html>). Despite a great amount of data about the size of the population, age, produce and occupation, marital status and income and any kind of commercial habits, migration and immigration numbers collected by the authorities, an exact statistical data cannot be retrieved, the reliability of the available data is limited by purpose of the topic approached.

Also, the numbers concerning the Jewish congregations in Singapore vary depending on the source and the religious-cultural or community-political purpose of the publisher. This inconsequence may mirror the real-life situation in the Jewish community and its inner politics and the possibility of each group to present or represent their agenda in the online media. There are supposed to be around 450 officially registered members of Jewish community in Singapore – a number given by the higher organization of the Jewish Welfare Board, which is nowadays under the influence of the Chabad-Lubavitch – and is slightly higher than the number given in the Singapore statistics. There is no reliable actual number of the progressive, liberal or reformed Jews living in Singapore. Yet, the number of those who consider themselves Jewish but are not registered with any Jewish denomination is totally unknown, and the question stays open how far it is based on the religious differences with or within the Jewish community.

Apart from the quantitative matter that has never reflected the real situation of the everyday life and not the one of the Jews in Singapore, we can raise a question: How is the Jewish religious and cultural life within this multi-ethnic, multi-religious society in Singapore today? As of 2012, both of the mentioned synagogues are active: the Maghain Aboth and Chesed El synagogues, with daily services, partly weekly services, adults' and children's education, and other community activities and holiday celebrations. A Jewish community centre offers Sunday school for youngsters. The annually elected Jewish Welfare Board, created after World War II, managing and regulating internal community affairs, as well as representing the Jewish community in Singapore in the public nowadays is influenced by a large number of Chabad-Lubavitch members.

Since 1994 a Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Mordechai Abergel took the place of a local orthodox rabbi, despite some first protests from the local, mostly Baghdadi orthodox community members. The situation opened step by step, but there are

signs that the Baghdadi orthodox members do not necessarily acknowledge authority of the appointed rabbi and turn regularly to the Beit Din (court of Jewish religious Law) and rabbis in Australia for help regarding *halachic* (biblical law) decisions, e. g. marital issues. Still, with the support of the local Jewish personalities the Chabad presence in Singapore is more than religious; with his appointment at the Jewish Welfare Board it also represents the community in the Singaporean public.

In 2007, a new Jewish community centre opened close to the Maghain Aboth Synagogue, the Jacob Ballas Centre, named after the mentioned local Jewish stock broker and a chairman of the Singapore Stock Exchange, who passed away in 2000 and bequeathed his entire wealth of several billion dollars to the charities: one half to the Jewish religious and Israeli projects and one half to the Singaporean organizations (also the renewed part of the Botanic Gardens near Bukit Timah – Jacob Ballas Children’s Garden was built in the name of its benefactor). He was the last non-Chabad chairman of the Jewish Welfare Board and his testament provided the community with support of the entire infrastructure for following the *halachic* laws: the Torah studies, a *mikvah* (ritual washing facility), a slaughter room, a full service restaurant, a kosher shop and a social hall for *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and other functions. There is a Jewish nursery “Ganenu” today claiming over 70 children from the local community and expatriates. Also the older Manasse Meyer School and the Talmud Torah School are under supervision of the Jewish Welfare Board. The community also runs several charity organizations like Abdullah Shooker Home for the Aged (which was also established from the donation of the Shooker family), provides for the operations of the *mikvah* and runs the Menorah Club (existing since the 1950s). Finally, under the organization of the Jewish Welfare Board also belongs the care of nowadays the only Jewish cemetery in Choa-Chu-Kang.

Within the viable spectrum of the different Jewish denominations in Singapore the United Hebrew Congregation must be mentioned. It was established 1991 for/by those more liberal Jewish expatriates and provides for Jews from a Progressive (Reform / Liberal / Conservative / Reconstructionist denominations and often of American origins) background, with the opportunity to be religiously and culturally involved with similar individuals and families in Singapore. The United Hebrew Congregation is organized and run by volunteers from the community and its involvement in the religious life of the Jewish community is less visible. There is no regular rabbi for its members though, and they mostly visit the Maghain Aboth synagogue or organize private services and meetings. Most of the Jewish liberal expatriates do not follow the strict *halachic* laws like the orthodox and Chabad parts of the community; their stage of assimilation allows them to interact culturally among the international expatriate communities. Just worth mentioning is not only the strong Jewish expatriate group

active at the American club, but also a large group of Russian-Jewish entrepreneurs, some integrated, but most of them living apart from the community activities. The immigrants from the USA and Israel often attend the services in Maghain Aboth, but for secular cultural events often organize their own functions.

This extremely complex and steadily changing and, from the outer point of view, non-transparent mixture of several often contradictive denominations within a Jewish community is nothing typical for Jews in Singapore only, but for Jews in other parts of the world in the past or present. Already before *Haskalah* – the Jewish Enlightenment – and the Emancipation in the 19th century, the religious pluralism has been a motive wheel of Judaism over the centuries and contributed greatly to the development not only of the variety of religious, but also cultural and secular Jewish identity and identities, with a certain unity among them.

How to retrieve accurate information while approaching the sensitive religious issues in the past and present? Clearly, the resources vary: biographies, travelogues, memoirs, letters, recorded oral statements, official statistics, contributions in newspapers and magazines, public and private records, but also resources that require more extensive research like rabbinic legal texts, responsa and correspondence. The availability of the archive resources may be restricted by political and religious motifs, but with help of the new media there is a chance that new opportunities of practical resourcing reveal. Through usage of various methods and interdisciplinary comparison, there might be more opportunities for other related disciplines of the humanities. While including the research of other disciplines certain paradigm shifts from the Euro-American-centric point of view ruling in Jewish and Judaic Studies in Europe, particularly in Germany, would be necessary. A global approach also towards the history of Jews in Singapore, which would include Asian and religious studies offers a development of new areas of research, geographically as well as qualitative, comparative, and rather multipolar, more international and more interdisciplinary.

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The Tiny Jewish Communities in Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia

1. Introduction

Focusing on religious pluralism or minority religions in Southeast Asia does not seem to put much interest in Judaism. Maybe this mis-representation is due to the historical situation that Jewish communities in Southeast Asia have never been very important in the history of Judaism in Asia. Southeast Asia was mostly seen only as connecting area between the communities in India and in China (Katz 2006: 231). This situation as a “minority area” for Jewish people changed and even worsened after World War II when more than 1,000 Jewish persons left Southeast Asian countries to settle in Israel. As for the contemporary situation, we can say that only in half of the countries in Southeast Asia, Jewish communities are active today; but the number of Jews – related to the general population – is very small. Estimated numbers for 2007 can be given as follows (Goldstein 2009a: 1232): Singapore 300, Thailand 300, the Philippines 100, Malaysia 3, Indonesia 100, and Myanmar 10.

Only in Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines there is a community life, even if it is only seen at a second glance. Next to the “regular” situation of Jewish inhabitants in these countries, one must not forget that some of these countries also attract tourists with Jewish roots from Israel and the USA, but also from other countries. These visitors form a part of Judaism in Southeast Asia. From the point of view of Comparative Religion this situation is quite interesting in a comparative perspective. Here, we are dealing with diaspora communities which are much smaller than the other diasporas, which have been well researched in Comparative Religion in the last decades, mainly focusing on Muslim, Hindu or Asian Buddhist diasporas in North America and Europe. To bring attention to

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Jewish diaspora countries maybe provides new aspects for general diaspora studies.

I think there is one special factor among Jewish diasporas compared to others: they are internationally linked at a very high degree and they provide well organized networks of cooperation and exchange; they also have – to my impression – a higher degree of mobility than other diasporas. The small diasporas in Southeast Asia are furthermore made up of better educated and economically more established people than some communities in Europe or the USA, which were established by refugees or low skilled workers. So despite the extremely small number, studying Jews in Southeast Asia should not be neglected in the Study of Religions from a comparative point of view. Maybe the following short overview of modern Jewry in Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia will give stimulus for further comparative studies.

2. Myanmar

Several scattered Jewish settlers have been known since the 18th century, and the incorporation of Rangoon (present-day Yangon) into British India after the second Anglo-Burman war (1852 – 1853). Then – besides Jews from India, mainly from Cochin, Calcutta and from the Bene Israel in Bombay – Baghdadi Jews from the Ottoman Empire came to Rangoon, seeking greater safety and ways to secure their lives here than in the Middle East (Katz 2006: 239; Goldstein 2009b: 1241). As early as in 1857, the first synagogue in Rangoon was built of wood between the 25th and 26th street and a Torah was brought into Burma (present-day Myanmar) from Baghdad, to allow suitable religious service in the synagogue (Cernea 2007: 8). When the community grew, the desire arose to acquire a larger synagogue as well as a ritual bath and a school. Thus, in 1893, the construction of a new building began, and the Mazmi'ah Yeshu'ah Synagogue (locally named Musmeah Yeshuah) was inaugurated in 1896. As a Baghdadi synagogue, it resembles several Baghdadi synagogues in India (Cernea 2007: 15). With this new synagogue the community also had the opportunity to attract rabbis to stay in Rangoon regularly and to serve their religious needs. Thus, the early 20th century turned to a very prosperous and happy period for the Jews of Burma. They enjoyed good fortune under British colonial rule and they became “almost Englishmen”, as Ruth Cernea (2007: 42 – 46) says. The community in Burma flourished and had an active religious life, focusing on the synagogue in Rangoon which was the centre point for all festivals and rites of passage, like weddings and burials in the cemetery two kilometres northeast of the synagogue (Cernea 2007: 131 – 132; Samuels, n.d.).

In the 1930s, the upcoming nationalist feelings of independence from England, which also led to anti-foreign sentiments, had effects upon the community. But even more furious was the Japanese military expansion to Burma (and other Southeast Asian countries), which brought suffering to the Jews (Cernea 2007: 80 – 84): after the surrender of Rangoon to the Japanese troops on March 9, 1942, most of the 2,200 Jews in the country's capital escaped to safety in India (Katz 2006: 239; Goldstein 2009a: 1234; Goldstein 2009b: 1241). The way for most of the refugees was from Rangoon over the Taungup pass to Akyab (present-day Sittway) and then via the Bay of Bengal by boat to India (Katz 2005: 5010; Cernea 2007: 83). About 1,000 to 1,500 of them reached Calcutta (present-day Kolkata). As many refugees were impoverished, this also created big problems for the Calcutta community which had to handle refugees from Europe who managed to escape the Nazi terror next to these new arrivals. After the war, only about 400 returned to Burma and the synagogue in Rangoon was re-opened for Shavuot in 1945, celebrating the festival with American and British soldiers (Cernea 2007: 99).

During the time immediately after reaching independence, Burma was shaken by civil war and separatist movements led by Karen, Shan and other ethnical groups, but also by Communists. Thus, many Jews had to live in chaotic conditions in the new state. Therefore, many of them tried to acquire immigration visas for Israel, and in 1953, when Prime Minister U Nu established full diplomatic relations with Israel, only a handful of Jewish people were still living in Burma. In November 1956, after Muslim riots as a result of the Israeli-Arab war, many of the remaining Jews left the country (Goldstein 2009a: 1235; Goldstein 2009b: 1242). As a result of this, in 1959, only 152 Jews still lived in Burma, most of them in Rangoon, a few in Bassein (present-day Patheingyi), Mawmyethazan (present-day Pyin Oo Lwin) and Mandalay (Cernea 2007: 114).

Migration to Israel was not only motivated by pull-factors coming from the new state of Israel. From 1948 to 1962 the political and diplomatic relations between the two countries were very good, also thanks to the personal friendship between the then leading politicians U Nu and Ben Gurion (Katz 2006: 239). When U Nu lost power in 1962, Burma's compartmentalization and the Burmese way of socialism by General Ne Win – combined with nationalization – led to a decrease of living standards for many Jews. Therefore, after 1964 a new exodus occurred. So the 1960s, for the first time, revealed anti-Jewish sentiments and in 1967 a direct attack against a synagogue occurred – revealing the country's situation in which the foreign “almost Englishmen” were not really welcome in the Burmese way of socialism. Thanks to the assistance of the Israeli Embassy, more than 100 people could migrate to Israel from then on till 1969.

The consequence was that in 1969 the last rabbi left, and since 1967 it often proved hard to make up *minyan* (quorum of participants for religious obliga-

tions) even at festivals for the religious service in the synagogue. Thus, the late 1960s marked a deep cut into a blooming history of the Jews in Burma after more than half a century (Cernea 2007: 127 – 128). Due to these political changes in the 1960s, the number of Jews living in Myanmar today is less than 25 from a total of eight families, most of them residing in Yangon. Regular service in the synagogue is still problematic and at a low level. But for Chanukah (December 27, 2011) about 100 people gathered in the Royal Park Hotel in Yangon for this Jewish holiday: all members of the community, staff from the Israeli embassy, several former ambassadors and Myanmar politicians as guests. So, one can observe that the community hopes to see a brighter future, also due to the political changes in Myanmar (Frank 2012).

Although there might be some more people of Jewish-Burmese origin living in Myanmar they do not practise Judaism, but live as Burmese Buddhists, like part of their Buddhist forefathers, but not like the Jewish part of their ancestor families.

Another minor Jewish group in Myanmar are the so-called Bene Menashe, living in the northwest of the country at the border to the Indian federal states Mizoram and Manipur. From the 1950s and early 1960s onwards, shamans began to spread the idea that their peoples were offspring of the (“lost”) Jewish tribe of Menashe, who in ancient times – after the fall of the Kingdom of Israel – had started migrating to the east, along the Silk Road to southwest China and to the area of the border lands of present-day India and Myanmar. Thus, the Mizu and the Kuki, ethnic groups on both sides of the border, began to observe Jewish religious practices, living their lives as Jews. The number and reception of such “Jews” in Myanmar is very limited, and to my knowledge there is no contact between the Bene Menashe of Myanmar and the tiny community in Yangon. The phenomenon is more widespread in India, where Bene Menashe are more prominent, also seeking to make *aliyah* (immigration) to Israel (Katz 2005: 5007; Mayer 2011).

In March 2010, I visited the synagogue and I was warmly welcome by Moses Samuels (Burmese name: Than Lwin), who cares for the synagogue together with his son Sammy (Burmese name: Aung Soe Lwin). Sammy Samuels is well educated in Jewish studies which he did at Yeshiva University in New York. He is still living in the USA, trying to help the Jewish community and his family from abroad. Moses Samuels spent more than an hour with me, telling me about the glorious history of the community, but also of the problems today. The greatest problem is the tiny number of Jews which makes it nearly impossible to make up a *minyan* for the festivals and for Shabbat. Also the small staff of the Embassy of Israel does not improve this minority situation, because there are only four male Israelis in the Embassy, and – according to Moses Samuels – they are very secularized, so they do not come to the synagogue regularly for Shabbat. An-

other problem for observant Jews in Myanmar is the lack of kosher food, so the Jewish diet cannot be kept, at least not according to the law. So the few Jews in Myanmar handle their religious life as good as they can as an absolute minority religion.

As the political situation is changing since the election in November 2010, maybe one can look to a brighter future for the Jews in Myanmar than during the last four decades. Maybe Moses Samuels' optimism will prove right that in the future Jews can once again come to Myanmar for business, thus bringing new community members and maybe even a rabbi back to Myanmar. To make it easier for Jews to come to Myanmar and attain tourist visas quite easily, Moses Samuels – together with his New York based son Sammy – has also established “Myanmar Shalom Travels and Tours” in 2005, to guide tourists to places of Jewish history in Myanmar (Samuels n.d.). So maybe, Israeli tourists who go to Bangkok like others soon will add Yangon and the synagogue to their itinerary, thus reviving Jewish life in Myanmar. I do not know if the Chabad movement, which is very active for Thailand's Jews and Israeli tourists, will open a centre in Yangon in the future. In 2010 however, Moses Samuels told me that the Jewish community did not have plans for inviting Chabad to their country.

3. Thailand

As Thailand – called Siam until the 1930s – was outside direct European colonialism, only singular cases of Jewish (and other “western”) people are known to have been active in Thailand in the 18th and 19th centuries. An early history of diplomats, medical professionals, and merchants in the 19th century is given by Gerson and Mallinger (2011: 22 – 29). The limited number of Jews is also evident from the Protestant Cemetery in Charoen Krung Road in Bangkok, where only several graves of Jews from the second half of 19th century exist (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 23). Thus, in 1904, less than 1,500 Western foreigners lived in Thailand, which also “influenced” the number of Jews (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 23). What is also interesting for the history of Jews in Thailand – in contrast to other Southeast Asian countries – is the fact that their roots are Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe and that there are no early links to wealthy Baghdadi merchant families as in India, Singapore, Myanmar or Hong Kong (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 30).

As a starting point for the Jews in Thailand one can take Max Rosenberg, who settled in Bangkok with his family between 1885 and 1890. After 1917, refugees from the originating Soviet Union also came to Siam, where they found a new life in Bangkok. But in these years, their number hardly exceeded 30; until the 1950s, a Jewish “community” in the proper sense existed only in Bangkok (Gerson /

Mallinger 2011: 38). The refugees in the 1920s partly came via Harbin in China; some of them went to Bangkok, others to Shanghai (Jahn 1998: 18). One of them was Chaim Gerson (born 1898), who in 1923 started a furniture company in Bangkok and established a “real Jewish home” with his second wife Clara (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 39) there. Until his death in 1970, he was involved in all aspects of Jewish life in Thailand. Interestingly, these years also mark the time in which the Siamese prince Devawongse Varoprakar openly raised his voice to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine in 1918. In this way, Siam became the first Asian – and non-Christian – nation to speak in favour of the Zionist movement to find a place for the settlement of Jewish people. The prince’s address was motivated by a request from the Shanghai Zionist Association (Goldstein 2009a: 1233; Goldstein 2009c: 1253).

Despite the limited number of Jews in Siam in the middle of the 1930s, they – like their compatriots in Shanghai and Manila – saw the necessity to help the ousted Jews from Germany to acquire immigration visas. Approximately 120 – 150 Jews from Austria and Germany could therefore find shelter in Bangkok after 1937; most of them without any money, because they were only allowed to leave Germany by surrendering all their belongings (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 45 – 52). This is noteworthy, because Thai nationalists sometimes looked to the nationalistic and totalitarian German government as a model to practise their own political agenda against the Chinese minority in Thailand, who sometimes were labelled as the “Jews of the East” (Goldstein 2009c: 1251; Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 43 – 44). This comparison meant that nationalists conceived Chinese as foreign (and dangerous) for Thailand as the Nazi regime saw the Jews as a destructive force for Germany. Of course such analogies drawn by Thai nationalists brought great sorrow to the Jews in Thailand. At the outbreak of the war, about 400 Jews lived in Thailand; and after the disturbance of the war, most of the German refugees who survived thanks to the help of the Jewish community in Bangkok, left Thailand. As a result, in 1948, only 130 Jews were left in the country and in 1954 the number had decreased to 40, most of them not very much committed to religious practices (Goldstein 2009c: 1252). One interesting point in the early post-war years was the high impact of Zionism on the Jews in Thailand. Though their religious commitment was rather low, celebrating only the high holidays, they whole-heartedly supported the foundation of the State of Israel (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 76). Dr. Franz Jacobsohn was Thailand’s first honorary consul for Israel, and in 1954 formal diplomatic relations between Israel and Thailand were established. This also provides some advantages for Jews, who are in a privileged position in regard to name-giving (Katz 2005: 5010; Katz 2006: 240). Normally, Thai citizens must take a Thai name, but this law is not effective for Jews who are not obliged to substitute their Jewish name with a Thai one.

During the war, Sephardic Jews from Iraq and Syria also came to Thailand, being in most cases more observant than the “local” Ashkenazis. From their prayer meetings and services the Even Chen Synagogue sprang forth (Gershon / Mallinger 2011: 66 – 67). The community was at that time only loosely organized, and religious practices and Shabbat services mainly happened in private homes: one leading person was the ophthalmologist Dr. Jacobsohn, who collected addresses of those who were “willing to be known as Jews” (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 55). In his large home religious festivals took place, because Dr. Jacobsohn was the only person in Bangkok who had a *shofar* (ritual blowing horn) in his possession, necessary for the conducting of any festival. When in 1964 the Jewish Association of Thailand became formally registered as a legal organization, “Jewish life” started on an officially recognized and organized level (Goldstein 2009a: 1235; Goldstein 2009c: 1252).

An indirect starting point for a synagogue was the year 1960, when a Sefer Torah (in Sephardi style) was brought to Thailand (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 40, 88 – 89), to secure authentic reading in the religious service, which was earlier only done from printed texts, and thus not entirely religiously suitable. Soon after receiving the Torah scroll from Singapore, the first *bar mitzvah* was conducted in Bangkok for a thirteen-year-old American boy. As there was no synagogue yet, the Torah was stored in the Embassy of Israel and it was used until the 1980s, when it got damaged (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 89).

It was only in 1966 that the first synagogue in Bangkok, the Bet Elisheva, could be established, favouring Ashkenazi style. For this synagogue, a new Ashkenazi Torah was acquired. The building is located in Sukhumvit Soi 22 on the grounds which Elisabeth Rosenberg Zerner (Max Rosenberg’s daughter) dedicated to the community (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 103 – 109). Now there is a residing rabbi at the synagogue (R. Yosef Kantor). Besides the synagogue, there is also a *mikvah* (ritual washing facility), a Sunday school and classes in Hebrew for the community. Also, kosher food can be acquired in the surroundings of the Bet Elisheva Synagogue. In 1984, the second synagogue – Even Chen – came into being, first with a Sephardi Torah originating from Afghanistan that was there as a loan from the Abraham family (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 92 – 93). Two years later, the community of Even Chen started donating money to buy a Torah scroll of their own for the community. It was the first one to be bought by the Thailand community which was neither donated nor lent (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 93). The origins of this synagogue lie in religious meetings of the Sephardis, who since the 1970s regularly met in rooms belonging to the business estates of the Abraham family, which was engaged in trading with gems and jewels. As gem businesses were also run by other Sephardic families in Bangkok, the connection between trade and religion was not always without tension because of business competition. Therefore, plans came up to establish a synagogue for the com-

munity independent from the Abraham estate. In 1984, the new synagogue was inaugurated, named “Even Chen” (precious stones), indicating the business of its founding fathers. Since then the location of the rented rooms for the synagogue has changed a few times, now it is located next to the Shangri-la hotel.

Until 1993 there was no permanent rabbi in Bangkok (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 113 ff.), the religious services were conducted by lay persons, and since the 1960s – against the background of the US-Vietnamese war – American rabbis serving for the military were stationed in Bangkok from time to time between 1966 and 1974. After several ups and downs, Rabbi Nachman Shem Tov came for the High Holidays in 1990 and 1992 and later the community invited Rabbi Joseph Kantor for Chanukah in 1992 and arranged his fixed position as rabbi for 1993 with the help of the Chabad organization (Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 126 – 127, 159 – 160). Rabbi Kantor is also a qualified *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), thus being able to provide kosher meat for Thailand. In the following year, Rabbi Kantor also started serving the Israeli backpackers in the Khao San Area, where he established a Chabad House with the Ohr Menachem Synagogue inside; a new building for this purpose was opened in the Ramputri Road in 2001.

All three synagogues are run and serviced by Chabad rabbis, mainly Yosef Kanton and Rabbi Nechamyah Wilhelm at the Ohr Menachem. Today, Chabad has centres in others places in Thailand, like Chiang Mai, Phuket and Ko Samui, and even a dependent centre in Luang Prabang (PR Laos) to serve Israeli tourists, whose number is as high as 100,000 per year (Goldstein 2009c: 1253; Gerson / Mallinger 2011: 162 – 163).

4. Cambodia

Cambodia does not have a “Jewish history” and expatriates of Jewish faith did not have the opportunity to practise religion as a community, not even at a low level, since the 1990s. Later, Cambodia began to attract foreigners again as a result of political change. Besides these expatriates living in the country today, there is also one native Cambodian, who refers to himself as a Jew because of a vision he had in the late 1980s, when god told him to follow the Jewish religion. But, as he relies mainly on himself, his chosen way to follow Judaism did not have any effect on the creation of a Jewish community in Cambodia. So, one has to take the year 2007 as starting point, when three Chabad rabbis paid a visit to Phnom Penh to celebrate Yom Kippur there, for the first time in Cambodian history (Lodish 2007). About 25 expatriate people took part in this historical ceremony which was held in Hebrew with interspersed explanations in English. Following this event, in 2009, a young rabbi, Bentzion Butman, took residence in Phnom Penh with his family, opening a Chabad house in November 2009 (no. 32,

street 228). Just as in Bangkok, Chabad tries both to re-vitalize Jewish communities and also to serve Jewish tourists who – even in a place where Jewish traditions have not been established in history – can thus find a place to meet for religious service and have a chance to be at least partly observant to *kashrut* (dietary) laws in a “foreign” surrounding (Ehrlich 2010: 65; Ehrlich 2008: 7 – 8.).

In March 2011, I could meet R. Butman and get some first-hand impressions of his plans and work there. He is well aware that Judaism has no ancient roots in Cambodia, but he wants to offer his service to Jews who for various reasons (business, diplomacy, and tourism) come or stay in Cambodia for a short while. According to his estimate, in 2011, about 150 Jews – from Israel, the USA, Australia, Belgium, and the UK – lived in Cambodia, mainly in Phnom Penh, but also in other places like Siem Reap, Battambang, or Sihanoukville. They gather in the Chabad house for the high festivals, where Rabbi Butman also offers religious services every Shabbat. His hope is that in the future, more Israeli tourists will come to Cambodia, and the Chabad centre can develop to greater extent like the one in Bangkok.

The Chabad centre can openly arrange religious meetings and services in Cambodia, and Jewish religion is legal according to Cambodian law. One recent highlight in the short history of the Jews in Cambodia occurred in February 2012, when the community could welcome its own Torah scroll, written in Israel for the community. This became possible by several donations of money on behalf of the community in Cambodia. Now the synagogue in the Chabad house has its own Torah, which replaces the one which was on loan from a Jew in New York. This was an important step to strengthen the community here. But it is the aim for the future to acquire an acknowledged status as one of the “official” religions – like Buddhism, Islam or Christianity. At the moment, this status is not given to Jews in Cambodia for historical reasons: on the one hand Judaism is not conceived as a historically established religion in the country and on the other hand there is the very small number of resident Jews. But in practical life, this does not hinder the work of the community, as there is neither a problem with inviting foreign rabbis nor with importing kosher food to Cambodia. As Rabbi Butman’s work is not intended to be missionary, to win over non-Jewish Cambodians or non-Jewish spouses to Judaism, his activities do not disturb religious “harmony” in the country. Therefore, the Jewish religion in Cambodia is focusing only on Jews who are in the country, to invite them to practise their religion in a community, run by the young rabbi who is assisted in his work by his wife.

5. Conclusion

Recently David Buxbaum (2008: 45) has described the development of Jews in Asia between Mumbai and Manila as follows: “Today in Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Philippines, and elsewhere in mainland China, Jewish life is again thriving, as it had in the past. Old synagogues are now active in use, Jewish schools are being established in many locations. New communities are growing up in old locations. In contrast to my arrival in East Asia in 1963, when Singapore was virtually the only centre of active Jewish life in East, Southeast and South Asia, today there are dozens of communities establishing centres for Jewish life in Asia. ... While Chabad has played the key role in these developments in Asia, many others have contributed to this reformation.”

Even if the minorities are still small in numbers, Jewish presence in Southeast Asia (and elsewhere) should no longer be neglected in studying religious pluralism, religious change and religious developments in Asia. As we can see Chabad has started to be an important agent in revitalizing Jewish ways of living throughout Southeast Asia, not only on the religious level, but also on an economical level by providing, for example, restaurants serving kosher meals. Such restaurants are not only helpful for Jewish people, but they also attract “western” tourists, who like the taste of this cooking which is closer to “western” cuisine and less spicy than dishes from local establishments in some Asian countries. In this way, Jewish “catering” fills a segment of business, which can cross religious borders and which also contributes to financial stability or progress of the small religious group (Ehrlich 2008: 7 – 8; Ehrlich 2010: 65). But despite these positive aspects, some latent tensions between local and “old” communities and the strict orthodoxy of Chabad rabbis may also arise, whose intention to care for Jews only is not totally free from the danger of keeping the Jewish community apart from the local society. So there are tasks for the future which the Jewish communities will have to solve in order to implant Judaism in the societies of Southeast Asian countries which are culturally deeply involved with Buddhism. In this way, it might be a task for the future for both Buddhists and Jews in Southeast Asia to look at each other’s religious traditions in dialogue, because Southeast Asia until the present is not among the score of “Buddhist-Jewish-Relations”, which only marginally take either Tibetan or Zen Buddhism into account, in academic discussions and interreligious dialogues as well (Teshima 1995; Todd 2004; Katz 2008).

For the historian of religion it is also obvious that these changes are closely connected with the political, social, economic and also general religious situation in the given countries since the de-colonization and the post-war developments. Focusing, as I have done, on Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia can also bring out the differences: Myanmar had a prosperous history during col-

onial times, but nationalistic political change nearly lead to extinction; Thailand has its own history with Jewish immigrants and businessmen, while Cambodia has only few years of Jewish history up until now. On the one hand, all three countries have their own history, and at least Thailand and Cambodia have common links through the efforts of the Chabad movement, bringing these two countries into global networks; while at the moment, the tiny Baghdadi-built community of Myanmar still has – also due to the political situation in that country until recently – lesser opportunities to share these global networks. When we study religions in Southeast Asia, Jews are still often missing both in “textbooks” and in statistics about religious adherents, but I think the Jewish minorities in these countries are a field of research that deserves the interest of Comparative Religion, as it is a small, but vivid part of a world religion. Therefore, focusing on the history of Judaism in Asia is also part of a “world history” of religions, and as we have seen for refugees in Thailand, it is also part of the study of the Jewish history of Austria and Germany.

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Alina Pătru¹

Judaism in the PR China and in Hong Kong Today: Its Presence and Perception

During the last 30 years, China has gone through the so-called process of opening up, rising as an economic world power as well. Since then, Jews have started to settle in China again after a break of several decades, and in the big cities organized forms of Jewish social and religious life appeared. In 1997 Hong Kong, the host city of a Jewish community which looks back on a history of 160 years, became part of China, playing an important role in the trade relations between China and the Western world. In Hong Kong there are seven synagogues now (figure for November 2011) which serve the special needs of the growing number of Jews.

The present-day Jewish communities on Chinese territory have to some extent been subject of interest for Chinese historians (Pan / Wang / Wang 2011) and for Jewish journalists (Anna 2008; Klayman 2008; Levin 2008; Wade 2008; Weisz 2011), sometimes even for Jewish scholars (Ehrlich 2008; Ehrlich 2010). I myself have undertaken field work on them, looking at them through the eyes of a researcher in the field of religious studies. My paper seeks to give a short presentation of some of my results, embedded in the theoretical frame which I will use for their analysis. Before doing that, I will offer some information about the specific research interest which I carry as a scholar of religious studies, about my working methods and about my particular aims.

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1. Research Interest in the Religious Studies

My perspective is that of a scholar of religious studies, which understands religion as a social and cultural system. The focus on the specific manifestations of a certain religion in a specific cultural context always bears the footprint of the general history of religions and always aims to draw conclusions which are generalizable for the comparative study of religions per se. A scholar in the field of religious studies aims to draw a *thick description* on religion in its interdependence with social, political, economical, cultural aspects, and with issues of everyday life. He / she analyses how religious beliefs develop, become influenced by or influence the surrounding cultural settings; he / she is interested in the resulting behaviours and in the structures of the religious community founded on them (Hutter 2012: 177).

A scholar of religious studies focuses on one certain religion in one defined context, and usually he / she wants to find out something specific about the potential of that religion under certain conditions, or about the transformations suffered by it. The findings may shed new light on religiously motivated social transformation processes and thus contribute to a better understanding of social dynamics in the global space. For the researcher himself, it is also exciting to learn more about the possibilities of religion in general in social interaction by studying the particular case, and thereby to challenge his / her own subject-specific concepts and expand if necessary.

2. Particular Aims

My special interest lies in the field of diaspora studies and intercultural exchange. The purpose is to see how religion interferes with the diaspora experience, shapes it and is itself transformed by it. The scientific approach to religion and diaspora is a new field of research inside the religious studies (Vertovec 2008: 275 – 276), and until now, most scholars have mainly dealt with the experience of migrants in Western, developed countries.

The static homeland-diaspora paradigm usually stays at the basis of such research. It is considered that people are torn between two worlds, the homeland which they have left, which they miss and which they often idealize, and their hostland, where they have to confront unexpected problems. Attitudes towards religion change under these circumstances, and people develop new forms of religious attachment and practice. This paradigm, too rigid to express all kinds of diaspora experience, has been challenged, and some interesting forms of criticism emerge from within the field of Jewish social sciences. Weingrod and Levy argue, that “the static homeland-diaspora model may be much too sim-

plistic, and that under certain political and historical circumstances these relationships are much more challenging and ambiguous” (Weingrod / Levy 2006: 694). This would certainly be the case in my analysis, as both the context (China, a new emerging world power) and the religion I deal with (Judaism) are non-typical elements for the recent diaspora research.

Judaism is the classical diaspora, and exactly by that it differs from the other diasporas we meet today. This group of people, as well as this religion, have lived for almost 2000 years exclusively under diaspora conditions and their present-day homeland has never been, for many of its members, a real geographic homeland as well. For many Jews, Israel has the value of an ideal, spiritual homeland, to which they feel connected, but at the same time they feel a strong connection to the place where they have been born and have lived; to their real, geographic homeland. Jews living outside Israel do not simply have one homeland, they have two places which share the title of “homeland” – embodying different aspects of it. These multiple connections relativize the concept of “homeland” and have an impact on the diasporic transformation processes, too.

At first sight, the problem might be more simple in the case of the Israelis. At a deeper look, it is not: even for them, the place from which they or their parents have emigrated from Israel may still be loaded with emotions and memories. More than that, similarly to the diaspora Jews, Israelis also carry with them the shaping of that world, a so-called specific “flavour” of Judaism. The situation is even more complex for Israelis living temporarily or permanently outside the borders of Israel. As Weingrod and Levy point out, a new Israeli diaspora emerges in places such as New York, Los Angeles, London or Paris (Weingrod / Levy 2006: 707). The Israeli diaspora has recently become a topic of research itself, and it is considered to be “still only an incipient diaspora” (Sheffer 1998: 29). Israelis who decide to leave the country for another place to live find themselves as forming a new, differently featured diaspora inside or besides the big Jewish community of that place. The Jewishness which they find there is not the same as the Jewishness they know from Israel, and thus Israelis develop a sense of difference and tend to connect to their own fellow Israelis and form a new kind of diaspora inside or besides the dominant Jewish cultural form.

Although it is impossible to speak about an outlined Chinese or Hong Kong Jewish diaspora, some diaspora related issues (such as transnationalism, or the relation to the state of Israel) may be explored in relation with Jews living on Chinese territory. When it comes to transnational issues related to Judaism, one can hardly ignore the Chabad-Lubavitch movement and its *shluchim* and *shluchos* sent all over the world to found communities or take care of Jewish travellers and merchants. They are present in China, too. They are not alone in the big Chinese cities. The Jews in Hong Kong, Beijing and today Shanghai, too, have

alternatives: in all the three cities there is an organized progressive group, which appeals to various types of non-orthodox Jews. Progressive communities are usually also linked transnationally, gain support and influence from international movements. Hong Kong offers the greatest variety, so that a Jew living there can choose between Modern Orthodox with a strong Zionist commitment, Sephardic Judaism, Chabad or the Progressive form.

3. Working Methods

During my second China trip (October to November 2011), I visited most of the Jewish congregations located in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. In each one of these congregations I had the chance to record interviews with the leaders and some of the members of the congregations, gaining some interesting insights about the internal dynamics of the communities, about aims and motivations of their members and about their self- and outside-perception in the Chinese world.

I have conducted a series of semi-structured, guided interviews, asking specific questions, but also allowing my interlocutors to give free, elaborated answers, which sometimes brought us very far from my initial concern. At the moment, I am in the midst of the process of analyzing and evaluating my interviews, using methods from the field of qualitative social research. The final results shall soon be available in form of a book. Due to space limitations imposed by our frame, I will now restrict my analysis to one city and one topic. I will work with one single interview, in which two persons with different Jewish backgrounds try to reflect on issues related to dynamics of intercultural exchange in the large Jewish community in Hong Kong.

4. A Hong Kong Example

For this analysis I have chosen an interview with two Jewish women living in Hong Kong, both active members of the Jewish Women's Association, Deborah and Elisa (the names have been changed). I had been introduced to Deborah during the common meal after one of the services in the synagogue and we decided to meet again at her home. There she was working with Elisa, and they both showed great interest to answer my questions. Both consider themselves expatriates in Hong Kong, and they both had lived there for less than five years. Deborah is an Israeli and Elisa comes from Brasil. Deborah was very eager to tell me about the special character of the Jewish community in Hong Kong. Let's give her the floor:

Deborah: “It is very different culturally and ... in most places in the World, Jews and Israelis do not mix in the communities. There are communities of Israelis and communities of Jews. What is unique in Hong Kong is that there is a school, one school, that a lot of Israelis like to send the children to, and that creates a connection. But if you look at the congregations, although there isn’t that the Israelis are not invited here or non-Israelis are not invited there ..., but actually you have Ohel Leah typically non-Israelis ...”

Alina: “Ohel Leah?”

D: “and Chabad typically Israelis, typically.”

A: “Chabad?”

D: Yes, in Hong Kong. They don’t mix, is like water and oil. ... This is a very unique community; it isn’t a typical community like anywhere else in the world.”

A: “And it is unique because of the school, or because of the ...”

D: “Because of the structure of the community. The Centre [Jewish Community Centre] is very strong. Because of the school, because of the fact that the most people live in the same area, it is a very strong area ...”

As we can see, a very strong accent is put on the difference between one of the subgroups of the Jewish people and the rest. Deborah, the Israeli, starts by emphasizing the usual separation of the two groups. Plastic comparisons (“it’s like water and oil”) are used to express this in a very strong manner. An uninformed reader may even think that Israelis are not Jews themselves. Hong Kong is seen as a “unique” place, because there are some links between the two groups, here an institution like the school “creates a connection”. It is not that the two groups act together in every aspect, but there are elements which are important for both, and therefore they come together in relation with these.

The difference is manifest on the level of religious practice, too. Different ways of practice, different attitudes towards religion, drive these groups away from each other. This difference persists in Hong Kong too, and this becomes visible in the different synagogues they would attend. The plurality of the religious offer is a factor that maintains the separation of the groups.

The question arises: what brings them together? An interest in making sure that Jewish identity will be passed on to the next generations seems to be a common element, since the Jewish school in the city is attended by the youngsters of both groups. A general interest for the broader Jewish culture reunites them under the umbrella of the single Jewish Community Centre, and of the adjacent institutions: both ladies are working together in the Jewish Women’s Association, performing charity projects. These interests create connections, apparently much more than religion does. And the connections take shape in the form of institutions, which are not religious institutions, at least not primarily religious ones.

Due to these links, Deborah turns to speak about one single community, “a very unique community” which reunites both groups. She seems to be con-

vinced that the existence of these connections is something unique to Hong Kong, and that it has to do with the institutions mentioned above. Are the institutions the real link between the groups, the real plus which makes Hong Kong unique?

If we are to explain Hong Kong's uniqueness, we should first think about the fact that here all the groups live under diaspora conditions. In Hong Kong, as well as in Mainland China, there is not anything that can be seen as a well established previous form of Judaism. A short insight into the historical background of the community is necessary for a correct understanding:

In Hong Kong, the community looks back to an uninterrupted history of about 160 years, centered upon Ohel Leah as a synagogue and upon a club which later became the Jewish Community Centre (Leventhal 1988; Smith 1996: 398 – 399). Ohel Leah, the impressive, more than 100 year old synagogue, certainly is one of the most stable factors of the community, but not in the content of its religious practice, which has suffered many changes during the history. Let us just recall that it started as a Sephardic synagogue and is Ashkenazi Modern Orthodox now. Modern Orthodox Judaism is a religious form which tries to embrace both openness to the modern society and faithfulness to the orthodox tradition, thus appealing to a large number of Jews. And still, as the Ohel Leah Rabbi himself puts it, “it may be a successful style, but it may not be a style that is for everyone” (Interview with the Ohel Leah Rabbi, November 15, 2011). So it is not the religious style of Ohel Leah which gives the identity of Hong Kong Judaism. Neither is it the Jewish Community Centre as the secular counterpart, since it is mainly a frame for different activities, an umbrella, large enough to shelter old and new initiatives. It is none of the established institutions who can convincingly affirm that it represents the Hong Kong Judaism.

It is also not one group. The Jewish community in the city is extremely diverse (Jewish Community Centre 1995: 15). The Khadoories are a Jewish family of long tradition in Hong Kong, and they still represent the old group of Baghdadi Jews, which had first arrived in the city in the 1840s (Leventhal 1988: 1; Jewish Community Centre 1995: 17). There are also some remnants of the Harbin Jews, the Russian immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century (Leventhal 1988: 3 – 4). But there is no Jewish group strong enough to become a dominant host in front of which newcomers would develop diasporic feelings inside the broader Jewish community. In other words, the newcomers are, at least numerically, much stronger than the hosts, so strong that they set the tone and particularize Hong Kong Judaism. And the newcomers are very diverse and relatively balanced in numbers. Another section from my interview will not only support this idea, but also bring some new aspects of the Jewish intercultural exchange:

Alina: "... is there any special flavour that Judaism could get here or no? ..."

Elisa: "The flavours that we get here are more the flavours of the Jewish community exchanging flavours with each other, wherever you come from, so we find, from Brazil, we are Latin Jews, I will bring a flavour ..."

Deborah: "of energy..." [*both laughing*]

E: "she will bring a flavour as an Israeli Jew, the French would bring their flavour, the British would bring their flavour, and then you will have a mix of flavours within the community that to me is absolutely magical! ... I think more than the Chinese flavour, more than the Hong Kong flavour, Hong Kong flavour is this, this is Hong Kong flavour, Hong Kong flavour is this mix of people coming together, that's Hong Kong. ... China is another story. In China you get a strong Chinese flavour. The flavour that you get here is the flavour of Hong Kong, which is the openness of every flavour coming together."

D: "I like this explanation, I agree. ..."

E: "That's the Hong Kong flavour, you see, much more than any Chinese flavour, because by nature, Hong Kong is a mix ..."

The answers offer an insight into the diversity of the Jewish community in Hong Kong. South-American, Israeli, French and British Jews, and of course Jews of other origins, too, form a mix of great diversity, a world in itself. None of the groups is perceived as being dominant, none takes a hegemonic position inside the community. They all are involved in a process of cultural giving and receiving without restraints, which is an indication that they are all on the same level in terms of numbers and influence.

This fragment also leads us to further observations. My question aimed to find out something about the intercultural exchange between Jews and the local culture. The answer is interesting because it widens the horizon, pointing to the fact that dynamics of intercultural exchange do not happen only between the host country and the recently arrived group. Such dynamics happen inside the group itself. They lead to the outline of a unitary identity, melting together the different regional influences. In a completely new environment, as Hong Kong is for most of its Jewish inhabitants, a new Jewish identity can emerge, enriched by flavours of the different regions of the world where Jews came from.

A few more details about Hong Kong might be helpful in order to understand this process. As mentioned before, Hong Kong, meaning literally "fragrant harbour", is a place where Jews have lived for more than 160 years, and there are families which can look back to such a long local history. Nevertheless, during the last 20 years, the community has experienced a boom in terms of numbers: Jews from all over the world have moved here, mainly out of professional reasons (Green / Diestal 2009: 1190 – 1191). Various estimations see the number of Jews living in Hong Kong today somewhere between 3,000 and 5,000 (Green / Diestal 2009: 1186).

These people are not the classical immigrants who seek to integrate into the host society. They call themselves "expatriates", and almost all of them are sure

they will go back one day, back to their home country, which in this case means the country they have come from. Or, they will leave for some other place in the world. In spite of this, many of them live here for a very long time, much longer than they had originally imagined, and would continue to live here for an indefinite period. Some have started their own businesses and do not know how long they will remain. Connections inside the broader Jewish community are very important in this case. They or their family members become active and involved in different activities inside the Jewish community. For these long-term inhabitants, a change in their Jewish identity in the way described above may be the interesting result at the end of their stay.

A few questions could arise. One of them is concerned with the relation between these intercultural processes and the host country itself. In this particular case, the question is whether *Hong Kong is present or not* in this process of intercultural exchange among the Jews. In other words, would this evolution be the same everywhere in this world where Jews would meet, but none of the Jewish groups would be dominant, or *does Hong Kong play a certain role, catalyzing the reactions which occur among foreigners of the same group?* Another question queries the *value of generality* of the observations taken inside the Jewish community. It is to be asked whether such dynamics are to be found only inside the Jewish world, or whether the remarks have a more general value, whether they can be useful for the studies of other diasporas as well.

Elisa is convinced that these processes inside the Jewish community have something to do with Hong Kong itself. “By nature, Hong Kong is a mix”, she says. Jews who live in Hong Kong benefit from this mix. Being open to different influences makes you a real Hong Konger, being a cosmopolitan makes you a real Hong Konger, she suggests. Hong Kong means openness, which is to be rewarded by various enrichments. So yes, Hong Kong provides the tolerant soil which nourishes such processes, and to be engaged in such processes of sharing and receiving shows you to be integrated in the host society.

Elisa’s argument is interesting, but it overlooks the fact that all these forms of intercultural exchange she is talking about just happen inside the Jewish community, inside one of the diasporic groups. Despite the fact that they have different geographical origins, Jews form one single ethnical group. When they go abroad, they seek contact to members of this group, and not so much to other Brazilians, French, Britains or other representatives of their origin country. So yes, Jews living in Hong Kong are, according to Elisa’s description, open to influences, but only to influences internal to their own diasporic group. The question is: is this enough in order to affirm that they get a real Hong Kong flavour?

I will try to answer the question by looking at it from a different angle. Depending on the way one perceives Hong Kong, he or she will draw conclusions

about what it means to get a local flavour in Hong Kong, and about the relation between the inner-Jewish processes and Hong Kong itself. Thus, I will reformulate the question and therefore ask: *how is one supposed to understand Hong Kong in order to affirm that exposure to intercultural dynamics among the expats in Hong Kong makes you get a Hong Kong flavour?*

More than other host places in the world, Hong Kong can be perceived in different ways. One can look at it as *the Chinese metropolis*, today part of China and with an indisputable Chinese majority of population. This perspective emphasizes the Chinese dimension of Hong Kong, and therefore to become Hong Kong flavoured means to be influenced by the local Chinese / Cantonese form. Or one can see Hong Kong as *the international city*, deeply influenced by the former status of a British colony, a place where today a significant number of foreigners from all over the world live, where English is an official language, too, besides Mandarin and Cantonese, and where Chinese are just one of the ethnic groups. In this way, the international dimension of Hong Kong is in the foreground, and the Hong Kong flavour could mean to reach a higher level of internationality. Both interpretations are legitimate: quantitatively, Hong Kong is strongly Chinese, but qualitatively it can be regarded either as Chinese, or still as an international city.

I am grateful to Noam Urbach for his suggestions after my presentation and let them flow into my considerations. Urbach does not agree with the sentence that Jews get influenced by Hong Kong. For him, to be Hong Kong flavoured implies to be in contact with the Chinese and to become influenced by them:

“In fact, expat communities in Hong Kong tend to be surprisingly separate and detached from the Chinese communities there. Their knowledge of either Cantonese or Mandarin tends to be very limited even after many years. Jews are no exception. Jewish kids who go to the Carmel school grow up in a cultural enclave, disconnected from local culture. In fact, the Jewish community / communities is their surroundings, not Chinese Hong Kong. So I think their enthusiastic description of all sorts of Jews coming naturally together in Hong Kong, which one of them said ‘that is Hong Kong’, in fact means that for her, Hong Kong means not being in Hong Kong, having nothing to do with Hong Kong in general, but rather simply being in the Jewish expatriate enclave which is her actual surrounding. I.e. if she was in, let’s say, New York, she would have been actually living in New York, spending time and making a variety of connections with a variety of people etc., just part of this being ‘the Jewish community’, but in Hong Kong, she is wholly in the Jewish community” (Urbach, personal email, June 20, 2012).

Besides the fact that he adopts the first interpretation of Hong Kong, which is justified by the strong quantitative and even cultural dominance of the Chinese in the city, Urbach raises an important problem. He says, Hong Kong itself is missing in Elisa’s everyday life, since the Jewish community is all that matters. The too weak outside connections have as counterpart the strengthening of her

ties inside the Jewish community, and the intensity of the inner-Jewish dynamics is to be explained by the fact that the group ignores the host.

What happens, if we turn to look at Hong Kong as an international city? This is for sure Elisa's interpretation, since she defines Hong Kong as "a mix", and its flavour as "more than any Chinese flavour". Is Elisa focused on the international side of Hong Kong? Does she go beyond the borders of the Jewish community there? Does she have contacts with others, with non-Jews living in Hong Kong and does she become influenced by them? We need to look at the continuation of the interview in order to understand this:

Elisa: "You have eight million people, and from these eight million people roughly 150,000 are expats, roughly, if I'm not mistaken ..."

Deborah: "... and 5,000 of these are Jews."

Alina: "And the others? ..."

E: "There are eight million people, say, out of these 200,000 people are expatriates; the rest is Hong Kong Chinese. So there is already a big separation here. I mean, I ... most of ... a lot of my friends are Hong Kong Chinese. Because I've been coming here for many years, doing my work etc ..."

D: "... and she is very outgoing, very friendly. Not many people have Chinese friends like Elisa. I also have some Chinese friends, because I teach Hebrew and some Chinese, they want to learn Hebrew ..."

E: "... but the nature of these people, sorry, just to finish my thought, the nature of the expatriates here is that they would come together and share. So, within this large umbrella there's the Jewish community who behave the same way, we come in and we share our flavour."

In this part of the interview, Elisa moves on the quantitative line, giving exact numbers and explaining the proportion between Chinese and non-Chinese in Hong Kong. All this in order to emphasize the "big separation" which exists between the small group of expatriates and the large group of Chinese. Then she presents herself as different: she manages to overlap the gap which separates the two groups. The sentence is formulated with hesitation: "I mean, I ... most of ... a lot of my friends are Hong Kong Chinese", which shows that she is wrestling to find the right words. Her friend Deborah confirms her and stresses the fact that such people like Elisa are a minority, but a minority of which she is also part. Then Elisa interrupts her and affirms that it belongs to the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong to come together and to share, and exactly this is what Jews do inside their community.

The four key-concepts of this text are: separation between Chinese and expatriates, a minority of the expatriates bridging the gap, dynamics of intercultural exchange as part of the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong, dynamics of intercultural exchange inside the Jewish community. The first together with the third and the fourth are three steps which can be seen as the premises and the

conclusion of an argumentation process: since there is such a separation between Chinese and expats in Hong Kong, it is the nature of the expats here to share, and therefore the Jews also do this inside the Jewish community.

Does Hong Kong play a certain role in this process? For Elisa, the answer is yes. It is the nature of the expatriates *here* to come together and to share. The host provides not only the space, but also the conditions which foster the dynamics among expats. The Jewish community is only actualizing a pattern for itself which is common for Hong Kong – if Hong Kong is to be understood as the international city. Not the contacts with the Chinese, which may indeed exist, are decisive for the evaluation of the presence of Hong Kong inside these dynamics. Elisa feels to be Hong Kong flavoured due the fact that she is involved in such exchange processes among Jews, and not due to the fact that “a lot of her friends are Hong Kong Chinese”.

If we follow Urbach’s interpretation, Jews living in Hong Kong simply ignore Hong Kong. Anyway, even for him it is Hong Kong which determines Jews to only stay inside the Jewish community. Because of the separation between Chinese and expatriates, Jews come closer to each other. The fact that there are a few expatriates who pretend to be linked to the Chinese is insignificant in relation to the general model which is that of the separation. Fact is that Hong Kong requires that Jews grow together, because it is not an environment where they could easily mix or where they would be interested to have a greater variety of connections. In this case, dynamics inside a diaspora community are influenced by the host country, but in an indirect way.

In conclusion, intercultural exchange processes bear the mark of the place where they happen. This mark can be either positive or negative. It is positive, if we follow Elisa’s thought and understand Hong Kong as a pattern for mixture. It is negative, but still existing, if we understand Hong Kong as Chinese and as scarcely open to foreigners. The negative form of influence is in this case simply the separation between the newcomers and the host. It does not imply any form of hostility on the part of the host towards the expatriates. If migrants or expatriates found themselves in a hostile society, they would also stick to each other, but they would do this out of an exterior constraint. Even in that case, the impact of the host on the intercultural communication inside a diasporic community would be identifiable. Anyway, this is not the case for Hong Kong. This is what Deborah suggests.

Deborah: “Judaism is a very pure religion; it seeks pureness of man within himself, within his family, within his society. ... And we try to live, I think, peacefully with our neighbours, to contribute wherever we can, to be open ... That’s it, I think. Yes, and I think that Hong Kong in a way, now that you’re asking I’m thinking, you are stimulating my mind, that in many times in the history, many regimes considered Jews as a problem. Like, if we go to the Nazi regime, they wanted to solve the Jewish problem. And

I actually find it, as I speak with you, that where there is no anti-Semitism like in Hong Kong, then there is no Jewish problem. And this I find very interesting. That's it, I think."

It sounds as if the lack of a "Jewish problem" automatically enables natural developments, which may not be remarkable at first sight, but which can be perceived as a totally new experience. Deborah herself finds this setting "very interesting" and being in direct relation to all kinds of social interferences which Jews are part of.

Religion enters the scene again, since for Deborah Jewish attitude towards society is based on a religious ethos. Religion seemed to be missing in the reflections above, but in Deborah's view, religion has an impact on man "within himself, within his family, within his society" – the circle is extended from the individual towards the society. Religion underlies the peaceful attitude towards the neighbours, any form of social involvement and contribution, and a general unspecified openness, which implies, it can be only assumed, the openness towards the culture of the place of living. Religion is manifest in its products, in forms of behaviour which mark the transformation processes in the diaspora. The religious ideal is a desired state (*Sollzustand*), expressed by phrases such as "it seeks", "we try to live". At the institutional level, as we have seen in the first fragment of the text, religion appears to segregate the different subgroups of the Jewish diaspora, used to different types of worship and different ways of practice. At the level of ethics and social interference, it seems, according to Deborah, to influence the attitudes and shape the social dynamics in a positive way.

The four fragments of the interview which were chosen for the analysis offer different perspectives on inner-Jewish relations. In the first fragment, the separation between different Jewish subgroups is strongly affirmed to be the general pattern, to be found "in most places in the world". Here in Hong Kong, the separation persists at the level of congregations, and only some secular institutions seem to provide a link between them. The second and the third fragment point to a Jewish community which is growing in cohesion and even develops a united, combined style. This is due to the fact that Jews of different flavours meet in Hong Kong, the "fragrance harbour", a place which catalyses such reactions. The fourth text speaks more about an ideal, the religious ideal of "purity", peacefulness towards the neighbours and general openness. Shortly said, we have a general separation between Jewish groups, maintained on the level of congregations in Hong Kong. Secondly, we have a particular situation of coming together and mixing inside the Jewish community of Hong Kong, which simply has to do with the way expatriates come to behave in this host place. And thirdly, we have a nominal state which mainly has the value of a term of reference.

The second question is concerned with the value of generality of the ob-

servations related to the Jews. More precisely, it is to be asked whether similar forms of internal intercultural exchange can also be found within other diasporic groups, in Hong Kong and in other places of the world. One answer comes from Elisa: in the third quoted fragment, she says it was the nature of the expatriates in Hong Kong to come together and to share, the Jews being just a particular case. She herself indicates that from this point of view, Jewish diaspora is a typical diaspora; it is not a special form of diasporic existence which lives according to different rules, at least not here, in Hong Kong.

Another important aspect is pointed to by Deborah in the fourth fragment. Here she emphasizes the lack of anti-Semitism, as a precondition for the good particular situation in this host place. She does not move on a more general level, speaking about the lack of hostility towards a diasporic group. It would be a matter of study; it is only to be assumed that other ethnical groups in Hong Kong also feel they can share and grow together due to the fact that they don't feel threatened in Hong Kong.

The topic would be worth to be analyzed in other contexts, too. It is presumable that what these two ladies express here applies to every diaspora and its relations to the surrounding new home. Even if they do not gather together from different parts of the world, members of an ethnic or religious diaspora group will still bring with themselves regional differences, and will have the chance to grow together on the new soil. In order for this to happen, a few conditions must be fulfilled. First, they would need to meet in a neutral, peaceful environment, where tensions between the majority of the population and the group of newcomers were not felt as a serious danger for the individual or for the group. Secondly, no internal group should be strong enough to impose its style to the others, and to give them the feeling of being a diaspora inside the diaspora.

Concluding, I would say that although it is impossible to speak about an outlined Chinese or Hong Kong Jewish diaspora, the research done on the Jewish communities there shows many interesting aspects which may even have a more general value and which can put many diaspora related issues in a new light. Central concepts of the diaspora studies are challenged and enriched: not only the homeland must be relativized, but we can see that the concept of diaspora itself can be understood in a stratified way. The intercultural exchange itself comes to be seen as multidirectional, and the influence of the host context comes to be identified at more subtle levels. Religion plays a role in the various processes inside the community and towards the outside. All these aspects are to be deepened in my further research; my paper could only bring a few examples and indicate some directions in which the research should go on.

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Suzanne D. Rutland¹

The Asia-Pacific Region and Australian Jewry

1. Introduction

In December 1979, Melbourne Jewish leader, Joe Gersh, undertook a trip throughout the Asia-Pacific region. At a Chanukah function in Manila he stated (Gersh 1979: 23):

“In many ways the South East Asian Jewish Community defies traditional sociological learning which requires that for the maintenance of Jewish communal life, a certain numerical ‘critical mass’ was needed. By all sociological orthodoxy, the Jewish community of Manila (as well as that of Taipei) is well below the critical mass of numbers which is required to support Jewish life. Yet, nevertheless, a Jewish life persists, in defiance, as it were, of sociological norms.”

To date, there has been little research done on the connections of Australian Jewry with its northern neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region. This article will investigate Australian Jewry’s efforts to assist in the maintenance of the Jewish communities located there from 1969 to the mid-1990s, communities whose very presence was in defiance of sociological norms. It will examine the following aspects: organizational structure, educational contributions, religious life and political activities. I shall conclude with an analysis of the reasons for the demise in the 1990s of the regional body created to assist these communities, the Asia-Pacific Jewish Association, and a discussion of the overall significance of these activities for the region over a quarter of a century.

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2. Background

2.1. Australian Jewry

In 1933, Australian Jewry was a tiny, isolated, assimilated community of 23,000, mainly concentrated in the cities of Sydney and Melbourne, on “the edge of the diaspora”. The period before and after the Shoah was a watershed period for the community, because of the rapid growth in its size and change of ethnic composition. Between 1933 and 1945, around 9,000 Jewish refugees arrived in Australia, radically changing all aspects of Australian Jewish life and laying the foundation for the post-war survivor migration. As part of these changes, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) was formed as the roof body of the community, acting as its representative, both within Australian government forums and international Jewry. From 1945 to 1954, the community was responsible for the reception and absorption of 17,000 survivors, with a further 10,000 arriving by 1961, so that by that time the size of the community had almost trebled to 61,000 Jews (Rutland 2005: 51 – 65).

Owing to its proximity to Asia, Australia also received Jewish migrants in a number of different waves from China. Initially some Jews escaping from Tsarist Russia via China chose to migrate on to Australia, with the first port of call being Brisbane on Australia’s eastern coast. During the inter-war period, Jewish White Russians arrived, at times sponsored by family members who had arrived before 1914 (Encel / Rutland 2008). A number of Jewish refugees managed to escape from Singapore and other areas in the Asia-Pacific region before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, or immediately afterwards, mainly fleeing to Perth on Australia’s west coast, due to its proximity. In the immediate post-war period, stateless European Jews from Shanghai sought refuge in Australia, with a total of around 2,000 arriving in the period between 1946 and 1950 (Rutland 1987). Later some Jews from Harbin and Tientsin were also able to acquire landing permits for Australia, boosting the numbers of Jews from Asia. Some of these refugees, such as Isador Magid and Harry Triguboff, have enjoyed significant economic success in Australia and have played leading roles within both the Jewish and general communities (Encel / Rutland 2008).

In the immediate post-war period, Australian Jewry was largely concerned with the reception and resettlement of these immigrants, largely survivors, who sought to build new lives in the free environment of Australia (Rutland 2001). However, by the late 1960s, the reception and integration of pre-war refugees and Jewish Holocaust survivors had been achieved and many of the newcomers had managed to create successful business enterprises. As many of their children reached maturity, they began to look beyond Australian horizons.

2.2. Australian Government Foreign Policy

In the post-war period, the Asia-Pacific area had also become more significant for Australian foreign and trade policies. From the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor until the 1970s Australia moved from seeing Britain as her key protector to placing her reliance on the United States. This change was formalized with the signing of two treaties: the Security Treaty of Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Involvement with the Vietnam War created a greater awareness of the importance of the region for Australia.

The incremental changes in government policy towards its northern neighbours began under the Liberal government, in power for 23 years from December 1949. When the Labour government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam was elected to power in December 1972, he introduced a major sea change in the government's regional focus in foreign policy and significantly upgraded the importance of the Asian region (Pemberton 1997: 141 – 145). He formally recognized Communist China, ended all Australian involvement with the Vietnam War, rejected the concept of “forward defence”, and took a strong stand against Apartheid South Africa (Reynolds 1997: 111). In addition, he officially ended Australia's White Australia policy, allowing Asian immigrants into Australia, and began to foster multiculturalism. In his autobiography, Whitlam argued that he initiated a new approach to Australian foreign policy from the anti-Communist approach of his predecessors (Whitlam 1985: 25 – 181). These changes in foreign policy led to an expansion in the size of the Foreign Ministry's departmental desks dealing with Northeast and Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s (Viviani 1992: 48 – 49).

2.3. The Jewish World and Asia

In the immediate post-war era, the Jewish world tended to neglect the Asia-Pacific region. The challenges of resettling Jewish Holocaust survivors, refugees from Arab countries and building the newly founded State of Israel absorbed all the energies of the diaspora Jewish leadership. By the 1970s, the Asia-Pacific region was beginning to play an increasingly important role in global politics, due to the growing significance of the region for world trade and economic development in the post-Vietnam war era. By that time, Japan had emerged as one of the economic superpowers of the world, while China with its population of over one billion was on the brink of an economic explosion. India, with 750,000 million people, was the world's most populous democracy (Cohen 1988b). In addition, Indonesia had the largest Muslim population in the world.

These changing economic and political realities impacted on the way organized Australian Jewry viewed the Asia-Pacific region. Australian Jewry, though geographically isolated from the large, mainstream Jewish communities in the Americas and Europe, was better placed than those communities to play a leading role in the Asia-Pacific region. Key Australian Jewish leader, Isi Leibler, stressed that “geographically, Australia is part of Asia” (Leibler 1991).

3. Organizational structure

3.1. Federation of Jewish Communities of Southeast Asia and the Far East

By the late 1960s, Australian Jewry began to become more involved in global issues and to look north to the Asia-Pacific region. In 1969 the ECAJ organized the first regional conference in Sydney, attended by Dr. Nahum Goldmann, World Jewish Congress (WJC) president, and Dr. Gerhard Riegner, WJC executive director (ECAJ Press Release 1969). An outcome of this conference was the formation of the Federation of Jewish Communities of South East Asia and the Far East. However, it soon became moribund, due to conflicting agendas between Sydney and Melbourne and the impact of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

3.2. Southeast Asia Bureau

In November 1974, WJC executive director Riegner visited Australia for a second time and was present for the ECAJ annual conference held in Canberra. He discussed the problems facing the Federation and suggested that it should be reactivated. He stated that there would be a strong delegation of representatives from Southeast Asia at the WJC Plenary Assembly, which was to be held in February 1975, and that the matter should be discussed then. At the WJC plenary of February 1975, it was decided to reactivate the Federation and on his return from that meeting, Australian Jewish leader Gerald Falk visited the communities in Delhi, Hong Kong, Manila and Taipei. After the ECAJ leadership moved to Melbourne in May 1975, the Federation was reconstituted as the South-East Asia Bureau under Arnold Bloch's leadership (Bloch 1975), with the WJC largely funding its activities until 1980.

3.3. Asia-Pacific Jewish Association

In 1978 Isi Joseph Leibler was elected as ECAJ president. He was to dedicate significant time and personal resources to the region. He was the founder and CEO of Jetset Travel, which emerged as the largest travel company in the South East Asia-Pacific region in the 1970s. He worked with Joe Gersh, who was ECAJ Community Relations Chairman and became involved with the Asia-Pacific region. Under Leibler's leadership, the Asia-Pacific Jewish Association (APJA) was formed in May 1980 to replace the earlier Federation and the Bureau of Southeast Asia, although its structure and operations were similar. In the same year, Leibler was elected Chair of the WJC Asia-Pacific Branch of its International Advisory Committees. In addition to Leibler as President and Gersh as Honorary Secretary, Gus Diestel from Hong Kong became Honorary Treasurer and three vice-presidents were elected: David Citrin from Hong Kong, Ya'acov S. Lieberman from Taipei and Frank Benjamin from Singapore, representing the most active Jewish communities in the region. Kurt Rathner was appointed the executive director of the APJA, on a part-time basis.

In 1984 Leibler created The Australian Institute of Jewish Affairs (AIJA) (Rutland 2001). He established a joint secretariat between the AIJA and APJA, which he largely funded with the support of Richard Pratt and a few other Melbourne Jewish businessmen. Most of the APJA affiliates experienced problems paying their fees, so this Australian financial support was crucial. Michael Cohen assumed the role as executive director of the APJA as a full time employee, followed by Eileen Franklin in 1993. Initially, the APJA was created under the auspices of the ECAJ, and in the early 1980s there were tensions between the Melbourne and Sydney Jewish leadership as to who should lead the APJA. This organizational structure operated from 1980 until the demise of the APJA in 1995.

4. Regional Conferences

4.1. Hong Kong Conference, 1972

In order to create a sense of regional identity, Australian Jewry organized a number of conferences, following the 1969 inaugural conference in Sydney. A second conference was held in Hong Kong in 1972, organized by Melbourne community leader, Nathan Jacobson, at the time ECAJ president. Representatives were present from Australia, Hong Kong, India, Japan, New Zealand, with four additional observers from Australia. The emerging Jewish community in Taipei, Taiwan, was admitted as a new member of the Federation. The conference

discussed a range of issues facing world Jewry including the position of Israel, Soviet Jewry and Jews in Arab countries. Situation reports were presented by each of the communities present, and local problems relating to religious life, education and public relations were discussed. Rabbi Mervin Tokayer of Japan was appointed chairman of education and requested to investigate drawing up a syllabus and preparing materials for the other communities.

While the conference did bring together representatives from these dispersed communities, nothing tangible was achieved. From 1972 to 1975, the Federation existed in name only, and even after the restructure of the Southeast Asia Bureau, no further conferences were organized in the 1970s. Without any professional support, it was difficult for the Federation to operate in a meaningful way.

4.2. Hong Kong Conference, 1980

As discussed below, a third conference was organized in Hong Kong in 1980 when the APJA was formed. There were representatives from the following communities: India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Philippines, Japan, Korea, as well as delegations from New Zealand and the ECAJ. In addition, Moshe Raviv, Israeli ambassador for the Philippines, Lavy Becker from the WJC, and Raphael Kotlowitz, Chairman of the Department of *Aliya* and Absorption of the Jewish Agency, participated, with members of the Hong Kong Jewish community. In a press release following this conference, Leibler stressed that the ECAJ “through its affiliation with the World Jewish Congress had a responsibility to assist Jewish communities in the region” (Leibler 1980b).

During the 1980s, three more regional conferences were organized by the APJA, but they were connected with three major Asian-Jewish Symposiums, which were organized by Leibler with a political agenda. This caused problems for some of the association members, which will be discussed later.

5. Educational Activities

5.1. Appointment of Kurt Rathner

A key element of the Australian activities in the region was providing educational resources through professional leadership. In 1976, Kurt Rathner was appointed as the first educational director under the auspices of the Southeast Asia Bureau. He worked in a part-time capacity, while continuing in his role as director of the United Jewish Education Board (UJEB). He was to serve for eight years in this capacity. In 1976 he undertook his first visit to the key centres in the area – Hong

Kong, Singapore, Taipei, Bangkok and Manila, and later India – and subsequently visited the affiliates in the region on a biennial basis. The first thing he learnt was that he had to establish trust in what he was doing, as “Australian Jewry had made promises in the past but these had not been fulfilled” (Rathner 1998). On his return Rathner wrote a comprehensive report, in which he stressed that while Australia could not help with the supply of rabbis and teachers – the communities’ greatest need – Australian Jewry could help to develop a curriculum and provide ongoing assistance with suitable educational materials and pedagogy. The SEA (Southeast Asia) Bureau approved this recommendation and Bloch wrote to UJEB requesting that the Board act as a pedagogic clearing house for the communities involved, corresponding with them, preparing curricula and materials and providing advice. The WJC provided a small budget for these activities. Subsequently, in 1977, he developed a curriculum with Melbourne Jewish educational figure Manny Kingsley, and continued to supply educational materials to supplement this curriculum, mailing materials regularly to all the members.

After the formation of the APJA, Rathner visited more frequently on an annual basis. Over the years he retained close, personal contact with the key educational directors of each of these centres. He felt that he had made a substantial contribution to educational developments in the region, summing up his contribution as follows (Rathner 1982):

“My two weeks in South East Asia has once again encouraged me in my work as Executive Director of the A.P.J.A. The way things have developed it is now very much a personal thing. Mutual trust and confidence are crucial ingredients in our relationship. My warm – weather and personal – reception everywhere is most obvious and much appreciated ... As at May 1982 then, I see some progress having been achieved in some communities, less in others. All know and understand my commitment to them. I look forward to seeing the day when all obvious problems are eliminated and that today’s youngsters will mature into communities that have a vibrant Jewish life to offer them ...”

5.2. A New Educational Director: Michael Cohen

In 1983, Rathner accepted a position as full-time director of the Jewish National Fund in Melbourne and decided not to continue with his role in the APJA. Michael Cohen succeeded him in 1984, continuing and expanding the role. He brought a rich educational background and expertise to the position. He had completed degrees in Arts and Education, as well as a Graduate Diploma of Education before migrating from South Africa, and had taught for eight years at Mount Scopus College, Melbourne’s largest Jewish day school. He had a very

good command of Hebrew and his dedication to and passion for Jewish education was clear. He served as APJA director for eight years, until 1991, but continued in an honorary capacity in 1992, until a suitable successor could be found. Initially he worked on a voluntary part-time basis, continuing his full-time responsibilities at Mount Scopus Memorial College. However, when he was appointed to the APJA / AIJA on December 13, 1985 he resigned from his teaching position. During his period with the APJA he was extremely active and made a significant contribution to the small Jewish centres throughout the region. He visited each community every 18 months or so and maintained correspondence with them between visits, providing specific and practical advice.

The original syllabus material developed by Rathner and Kingsley in 1977 was replaced by a new, updated syllabus in 1987. This provided a bilingual format, responding to the fact that most centres had a large percentage of Israeli children who were native speakers. The new syllabus could be used by all the centres in the region and covered both Hebrew and Jewish Studies. However, there was a problem in the implementation of the syllabus, largely owing to the rapid changeover of teachers. Most of the teachers were Israeli women whose husbands were in the area on short-term contracts. When they left, their replacements tended to start all over again and the syllabus was either lost or set aside during the process. Alternatively, the new teachers who arrived had their own pedagogical approaches. Most of the students were also the children of “revolving” expatriates who returned home after a short stint, creating additional problems for the Asian Jewish education centres. Michael Cohen recalled helping to conduct a Bar Mitzvah in Taipei for a boy who had been born in Taipei – a first (Cohen, email from August 11, 2012).

In addition, Cohen regularly sent educational materials produced by Mount Scopus Memorial College for all the Jewish festivals and other key aspects of the Jewish calendar. He also prepared 16 hours of video-cassettes which could be used with other audio-visual aids to enrich teaching. In 1987 he introduced the idea of a Jewish Studies’ essay competition, but this was not successful as it only attracted a dozen responses from India and New Zealand. A more successful initiative was the introduction of the Montreal-based International Jewish Correspondence scheme in 1988, a “pen-pal scheme”, with an increasing number of young Jews, especially from India, corresponding with their peers in other parts of the Jewish world. Eileen Franklin was the last director, serving for just one year, 1993, and continuing in an honorary capacity in 1994. By then, the APJA had outlived its role and it ceased to function in 1995.

5.3. Youth Camps and other Endeavours

Concern was continually expressed about Jewish teenagers in the region and from the start the idea of organizing a regional Jewish camp was canvassed. However, the problems of distance, isolation and small numbers mitigated against the implementation of such suggestions. The only successful endeavour was in 1982, owing to an initiative of Rathner's, when ten Singapore youths, aged between 14 and 21, spent three weeks in Australia. They visited both Melbourne and Sydney and attended an interstate Habonim Dror camp near Sydney where a special leadership program was organized for them. Several of the group also spent a Shabbat in the Bnei Akiva camp and one participant, Reuben Khafi, aged 19, son of the vice-president of the Singapore Jewish Welfare Board, joined a group of 20 Australian Bnei Akiva *madrachim* (leaders) who were spending a year in Israel. Following the camp a social program was organized in Sydney. Commenting on the program, ECAJ president, Dr. Schneeweiss, stated that "this first attempt to bring to Australia groups of Jewish youngsters from the Pacific has been an unqualified success" (Schneeweiss 1982).

On their return to Singapore, social activities were organized for two different age groups – for the under-fifteen-year-olds with a fortnightly programme held after the morning Sabbath service and for those from 15 years to their early 20s with social functions. While the former group functioned successfully, the latter experienced problems. Despite the positive reports of this initiative it was not repeated and the issue of providing for Jewish teenagers remained problematic. This was partly because (apart from New Zealand) Singapore was the only community that shared common school holidays with Australia, making such collaborative efforts for teenagers difficult, while the concept of a regional camp proved to be too expensive. In order to meet the needs of youth in the Far East, in 1988, Michael Cohen worked to provide two *areivim*, young emissaries sent from Israel to small Jewish communities around the world through Project Areivim which was run by the World Union of Jewish Students (WUJS).

The APJA also produced some publications for the region. In September 1980 Rathner started to produce the APJA Bulletin and a number of issues were published in 1980 to 1981. In 1984, an APJA Regional Round-up was produced but this initiative was not maintained. In 1988, Michael Cohen produced an information booklet for Jewish travellers in the region entitled "The Asia-Pacific Survival Guide for the Jewish Traveller". It covered 17 Jewish communities across the Asia-Pacific region, from places with no Jewish communities such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia, giving a historical pen-sketch of each community and, where relevant, listing synagogue facilities, hotels, kosher and vegetarian outlets, and individual contacts. In the pre-internet days, this publication filled a real need. In 1993, Eileen Franklin together with the Australian Jewish News or-

ganized for its “Guide to Jewish Life in Australia” to include a major section on the Asia-Pacific region.

In 1989, an extensive survey was carried out of tertiary Jewish Studies in the area at the request of the International Centre for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization in Jerusalem. The findings were published in a report entitled “Studies in Jewish Civilization at Tertiary Level in the Asia Pacific Region: A Pilot Study”. Michael Cohen was appointed as a member of the Advisory Committee of this study of tertiary Jewish Civilization courses and wrote the report. The APJA also ensured that all the keynote speakers and academics who were brought to Australia by the AIJA, were offered to the Asia-Pacific region and a number of these key figures broke up their trip to Australia with speaking engagements in the region. In this way the association also fostered adult Jewish education.

6. Religious Assistance

The APJA also attempted to provide for the religious needs of the area – kosher food, services of *shochtim* (ritual slaughterers) and *mohelim* (ritual circumcisers) when required, and people to lead services for high holidays (Rathner 1981). The 1980 Hong Kong conference highlighted the problems of the lack of a qualified *mohel* for ritual circumcision in the area (Near-east, Asia Miss Mohel 1980). During his educational visit in 1981, Rathner was able to pass on information he had learnt from Ezra Toeg of Manila’s Jewish community about importing kosher food from the United States to Singapore. Rathner noted afterwards in his report, that such regional sharing of information was one of the major reasons for the formation of the APJA (Rathner 1981). Preparing kosher food for communities remote from Australia could be challenging, and there were a number of mishaps. For example, one year after sending Pesach food to Hong Kong for Pesach, the oil spilt, spoiling the shipment. A second shipment was sent, but it was affected by a typhoon (Cohen 2012). In 1990 Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky, Rabbi Emeritus of Melbourne’s St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, served as a *locum rabbi* for Hong Kong over Pesach because their rabbi left just prior to Pesach to take up a position in the United States. Michael Cohen sent the Rev. Mr Krinsky to Manila at least seven times to perform *shechitah* (ritual slaughters) or *britot milah* (circumcisions). Assisting with such initiatives was an ongoing responsibility for the APJA. There was also an attempt to form a Rabbinical Association for the Asia-Pacific area in 1987, but this only lasted a year due to the differing and conflicting needs of the various communities.

Despite these activities in both the educational and religious fields, Cohen was

not optimistic about the future of the communities he worked with. In a formal letter to Isi Leibler in February 1985, he wrote (Cohen 1985):

“The said communities find themselves in an almost all-engulfing foreign culture. These far flung centres of Jewish life are probably more isolated from world Jewry – religiously, socially and culturally – than any other established Jewish community anywhere. And there is a real danger, even in Singapore, where Jewish life is grounded on firm historical foundations, that rampant assimilation and loss of Jewish identification will become the order of the day as the ‘old guard’ – the stalwarts of communal leadership – dies and the Jewish religio-cultural and organizational nexus is left without direction.”

7. Political Activities

7.1. Regional Resistance to Political Activities

Initially, the communities made it clear that they did not want any political involvement. The collapse of colonialism and the emergence of different national identities in the various countries left the small, isolated Jewish communities in the region feeling vulnerable. Some, like the communities in Burma and Malaysia, had disintegrated. Community leaders in the region believed that, as “an alien minority”, they should not imply that they were part of an international community, which might offend their host countries and even lead to their expulsion (Leibler 1980c). These feelings were particularly strong in Singapore where Frank Benjamin, the president of the Jewish Welfare Board, initially expressed strong reservations about attending the 1980 conference in Hong Kong because of WJC involvement. He noted that the authorities in Singapore were trying to forge a new nation from a mixed population of Chinese and Malay, and that the Jewish leadership could not jeopardize the Jewish community here in any way by going against the wishes of the government. In addition, there was a great sensitivity in regard to the state of Israel. When Leibler founded the AJPA in 1980, he wished to change this culture, but his initial effort to introduce a resolution on Soviet Jewry in 1980 met with strong resistance (Leibler 1980a) and he was forced to accept the local position.

Some of these difficulties were exacerbated due to local conditions. For example, a confidential report noted the growing Saudi influence in Taiwan, due to their reliance on Saudi oil, trade and tourism. Thus, the Jewish community there felt that it “should not be seen as an organized entity” (Australian Jewish Times, September 24, 1981). This report also commented on the problems faced by the Singapore Jewish community, due to the government’s opposition to international affiliations. As the report commented, if such affiliations were permitted:

“Would not the majority then not seek closer ethnic ties with China?” (Leibler 1981b). The Philippine Jewish community also expressed concerns about the deteriorating position there in relation to Israel.

In order to break down the barriers, Leibler decided to create forums of Asian and Jewish scholars and he organized three major Asian-Jewish Colloquia. In 1991, Leibler explained the need for such a dialogue in the following terms (Leibler 1991):

“Since Jews do not form part of what has been termed Asia’s ‘cultural metabolism’ and do not have a defined place in the Asian mind, we have a unique opportunity to foster a process of dialogue devoid, in large measure, of the past prejudices and preconceptions which characterize so much of our interaction with the West. And while the barriers, such as ignorance and the absence of a Jewish presence in Asia, are formidable, the challenge must be met.”

The rationale behind these colloquia was developed in a number of key documents written by Leibler and Cohen. They were to meet three key aims of the APJA, namely:

- to develop a basic understanding in the region of World Jewry and Jewish concerns, especially the links, often misunderstood, between World Jewry and Israel.
- to heighten the awareness of the Jewish contribution to civilization; and
- to sensitize public opinion elites towards a balanced view of Israel and the Middle East and, in particular, the manner in which the needs of their developing societies can benefit from better relations with Israel.

These aims, which all had a political agenda, added to the original aim of the Federation to foster Jewish life in the communities of the region. Writing to Ya’acov Liberman in Taipei in June 1983 in relation to the planned colloquium in Singapore, Gersh confidentially stressed this agenda, asserting: “the centrality of Israel is uppermost in my mind in every aspect of the proposed conference. The purpose of meeting with the Asian leadership is to further Israel’s cause.”

7.2. The Singapore Colloquium

The first colloquium was held in Singapore in 1984, with Professor Yoram Dinstein as co-chair. Initially, the Jewish community was reluctant to host this colloquium due to their political concerns, but later they acquiesced. Sessions centred on the theme “Cultural Interaction: Old and New Societies – New States” and were divided into four sections dealing with identity and change; political theory; religion and law; and science and technology. Joe Gersh again played a

central role in the Symposium's planning, meeting twice with WJC personnel in New York. Eleven Jewish communities from the region participated, including India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Nepal, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, Israel, Europe, and the United States. Whilst it proved an important initial gathering, it faced problems of lack of press coverage and difficulties in attracting first-rate scholars (Leibler 1987).

7.3. Leibler as de facto Roving Ambassador: China and India

During this period, Leibler was also involved in private diplomatic negotiations, in both China and India, meeting with key leaders during the decade of the 1980s. He undertook his first visit to China in 1981 (Leibler 1981a) and in 1985 began to work closely with Israeli diplomat Reuven Merhav, who was posted to Hong Kong in May 1985. In October 1985 Leibler undertook his second visit to China officially representing the WJC, ECAJ and APJA, seeking support for the holding of a colloquium in Beijing (Leibler 1985). In the subsequent years he continued his diplomatic activities and in October 1991, was a member of the first WJC delegation to Beijing. Whilst Leibler had planned that the Beijing colloquium would help to facilitate diplomatic recognition of Israel, in fact this occurred in February 1992 before the opening of the colloquium in April, so that his ultimate political goal was achieved. A stellar Israeli contingent participated in the colloquium. They were accommodated in the official Chinese government guesthouse where a kosher kitchen was set up and even a *mashgiach* (supervisor) was imported.

In the same period, Leibler also worked to build connections with India. His predecessor as ECAJ President, Dr Joachim Schneeweiss, visited India in May 1978, when he met with the Indian Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, as well as assisting in the restructuring of Indian Jewish leadership with the formation of the Executive Council of Indian Jewry, based on the Australian model, with the two Jewish centres of Bombay (Mumbai) and New Delhi. During Leibler's first term as ECAJ President he met with Indira Gandhi, as well as a number of key Indian ministers, and again visited India in 1983. In 1991, he undertook a further visit to New Delhi, which contributed to India providing full diplomatic status to Israel in 1992.

Leibler also met with Imelda Marcos in the Philippines, and with other key political figures in Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand, writing extensive reports after most of these meetings. These activities were facilitated by his close personal friendship with Australian Prime Ministers Malcolm Fraser and Robert J. (Bob) Hawke, and the assistance provided by key officers in the Department of Foreign Affairs. In this way, he acted as a roving ambassador, an individualistic

diplomat, promoting the cause of Israel in the area throughout the 1980s. Schneeweiss also played a role with other leaders in the region, when he attended a meeting of the International Red Cross in Manila in 1981 and was able to speak in person with President Marcos about Jewish issues at a reception (Schneeweiss 1981).

7.4. The Hong Kong Colloquium

There was again considerable controversy over the location of the second colloquium. Leibler and the Israelis initially wanted to hold it in Tokyo, but the Japanese professors who participated in Singapore opposed this proposal. Walter Citrin, leader of the Japanese Jewish community, wrote strong letters expressing concerns about what he saw as the “political nature” of APJA activities. In the end, it was decided that Hong Kong would be the location, but Citrin refused to participate, supported by the other Japanese Jewish leaders. Ya’acov Liberman from Taiwan agreed to represent Japan officially, in addition to his own community in Taipei. The colloquium took place in March 1987 and overcame all the initial problems of 1984 so that it was seen as an outstanding success. Convened again by Professor Dinstein and Leibler, the theme this time was “The Jews and Asia: Old Identities and New Images”. This second colloquium attracted a much higher calibre of academic presentations and participants included Sir Zelman Cowen, former Australian Governor-General, who opened the proceedings, and former Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. Of particular importance was the participation of Professor Sidney Shapiro, who had become a Chinese citizen and was known by his Chinese name, Sha Boli.

7.5. The Beijing Colloquium

The final symposium was held in Beijing in 1992, with Professor Dinstein and Leibler as co-organizers. This was the culmination of a decade of effort and perseverance on the part of Leibler to establish contacts with Communist China. He had hoped that the colloquium would assist in the formal recognition of Israel by China, but it happened that recognition came before the colloquium. Nine eminent Jewish scholars and 15 Chinese scholars participated and they met with the Chinese Vice-Premier, Wu Xueqian. Subsequently, Leibler felt that this symposium had fulfilled all his expectations, both academic and political.

8. Reasons for the Demise of the APJA

By 1995 the APJA had outlived its usefulness for a variety of reasons. With the development of the “global village”, Australian assistance was less needed. As Michael Cohen described it: “once faxes and later the internet began, it was no longer required” (Cohen 2012). During the 1980s, Chabad expanded its activities in the region, filling the religious needs of the communities previously met by the APJA (Fishkoff 2003). In 1985, a Hong Kong educator wrote that they had two temporary Lubavitch rabbis who “seem to be paving their way for a more permanent arrangement. They may be our only chance – dedicated enough to handle the diverse!” (Diessel 1985). This prediction proved correct. Rabbi Mordechai Aytzon has served the Hong Kong Jewish community since 1984, and has pioneered the opening of Chabad Houses across Asia (Fridman 2009). Leibler’s stepping down as ECAJ president after his fourth term in 1995, his sale of Jetset Travel and *Aliyah* to Israel, ended the major funding source of the 1980s and early 1990s. Finally, the amalgamation of AIJA with Australia-Israel Publications, forming the Australia-Israel of Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), moved the community’s focus to Australia-Israel relations. AIJAC currently co-sponsors visits of key Muslim leaders, experts and journalists from Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, India and Indonesia for a week’s visit to Israel with the American Jewish Committee (Rubenstein 2011).

Another factor in the demise of the APJA was the lack of local support for the concept. Only a few local leaders, such as Ya’acov Liberman from Taipei, really provided the Association with their full backing. The leaders of the Jewish communities in Japan and Hong Kong, who could have provided a greater level of funding, were lukewarm to the concept from the start. With the withdrawal of Leibler from the area, they were not interested in maintaining the concept.

9. Significance of Australian Jewry’s Role in the Asia-Pacific Area

As can be seen, Australian Jewry helped to service the religious and educational needs of the region for a quarter of a century. In so doing, it contributed to the survival of these small communities before the internet age and Chabad expansion. As Leibler wrote (1989):

“I sincerely believe that our greatly increased efforts on behalf of these small and remote communities remain amongst the most important and worthy activities in which Australian Jewry has embarked in this decade.”

Australian activities also created greater awareness of the region’s importance for the activities of the WJC and other international Jewish organizations. Lei-

bler played a central role in this development and he also assisted in the building of political ties and particularly the recognition of Israel by both India and China in 1992.

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Part 2: Religion and Politics

Meron Medzini¹

Zionist Federations and Zionist Diplomacy in Asia to Ensure United Nations Support for the 1947 Partition Plan

In early February 1947 the British government addressed a letter to the United Nations Secretary General, asking him to convene a special session of the General Assembly in order to discuss the future governance of Palestine. That not unexpected move spurred the Political Department of the Jewish Agency to start preparing for the possibility that one of the proposals that would be discussed by the newly created international organization, would be the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. The Zionist leadership had already endorsed this idea in August 1946. President Truman supported partition in October 1946 and now the task was to ensure that this plan would obtain a majority of the membership of the United Nations General Assembly.

That body, at the time, consisted of 55 members. Two new ones, India and Pakistan, were to be added in August 1947, following the partition of the Indian subcontinent. The Zionist diplomats in Jerusalem now had to seek the support of virtually every UN member, and that entailed taking a close look at the post World War II situation.

One of the first documents dealing with the new reality was prepared on February 25, 1947 by Walter Eytan, a senior official of the Jewish Agency Political Department. He devoted much space to Eastern and Western Europe, the British Commonwealth of Nations, and to the largest bloc at the time, that of the Latin American states, and naturally to the lynchpin of the entire operation – the United States. The Asian nations that were members of the UN at the time were Afghanistan, Thailand, China and the Philippines. It was obvious that India and Pakistan would join in August. The rest were either still colonies fighting for their independence, such as Indonesia and Burma, or occupied areas like Japan and Korea. Eytan did not recommend the use of local Zionist Federations, saying they lacked the necessary experience and could do more harm than good. He

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thought the Philippines would vote the way the United States would, and that India, Afghanistan and China were likely to have a general bias against us. He could not think of any ideas regarding a campaign in those countries.

Whereas the Zionist diplomats expected to work closely with Zionist movements in the various countries, apart from India and China, there were virtually no such organizations in Asia that could be relied upon. Furthermore, there were no Jews in these countries that played any key role or had influence on the politics, foreign policy, media, academia and business unlike some of their counterparts in Europe, South and North America and the British Commonwealth of Nations.

As early as the 1930s, Moshe Sharett, the head of the Political Department, was convinced that India's Congress Party leaders viewed the Zionists as invaders and that the conflict between them and the Palestinian Arabs was a colonial one. But he thought that attitude could be changed once the Indian Congress Party leaders would understand the reality of Palestine. He was less concerned with China or even Japan that was by then closely aligned with Nazi Germany. In early 1947 it was obvious to Sharett that the key nuts to crack would be India and China, but for different reasons. The attitude of the leaders of India's struggle for independence towards Zionism, Gandhi and Nehru was well known to the Zionist leadership as they made no effort to conceal it. They opposed Zionism, seeing in it an offshoot of British imperialism and colonialism, and the Arab opposition to Zionism as part of the anti-colonial struggle against Britain. Nehru felt that the Jews must not be allowed to proclaim an independent state under British sponsorship. He also took into account the millions of Moslems residing in the Indian subcontinent. Sharett also realized that Moslems had a growing influence on the Indian government about to be formed. He knew that Nehru and Gandhi rejected any Jewish claim to Palestine and felt that the local Palestinian Arabs deserved to have their own state in which the majority would rule. Chaim Weizmann, the President of the World Zionist Organization, heard this from Nehru during a meeting they had in London on July 20, 1938. Gandhi's views were expressed in writing throughout the 1930s. The Zionist movement in India was not very strong, neither in membership nor organization, and its headquarters were in Mumbai and not in Delhi. Most of the 25,000 Jews who resided in India were members of the B'nai Israel tribe who lived in Kerala, in South India far from the political centre.

China was an unknown entity. To complicate matters, the major Zionist organization in that country, based mainly in Shanghai and Harbin, was the Revisionists Zionists who were at the time in opposition to the Labour led majority of the Zionist movement. China, with a Jewish population of some 30,000 people, many of whom were trying to leave that country after years of Japanese occupation, was in the midst of a civil war and the Middle East was a fairly low priority

for its diplomats in Nanjing, Washington and New York. There was a tiny Zionist structure in the Philippines, where the entire Jewish community consisted of less than five hundred souls, many of them trying to emigrate elsewhere after enduring three terrible years of Japanese occupation. In Thailand there were several hundred Jews who survived the war, but had no clout on the government and politics of that country. Their leader was an eye doctor from Germany, Dr. Max Yacobson. It became clear that when it came to the Asian nations, the Jewish side would have to rely on American pressure to help obtain either a favourable vote, or at best an abstention. The goal was to achieve at least 33 votes of the 57 member states, or two thirds required for a General Assembly resolution to be adopted.

The first contact with the future leadership of India and China was made in April 1945 during the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco. The Jewish Agency delegation was led by Eliyahu Eilat, a veteran official of the department who had been appointed recently as the Jewish Agency representative in Washington. He had extensive talks with the Chinese and Indian delegates but realized that their support for an independent Jewish state in Palestine was highly doubtful, although worth a try. Eilat also met General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines who expressed support for the Arab demands.

Contacts with some Indian leaders continued in 1946 and mainly in 1947 when a delegation of the Jewish community of Palestine, under the heading of a Hebrew University delegation, participated in a conference in New Delhi. That gave it an opportunity to meet with Nehru, but it was too close to the partition of India and his mind was preoccupied with other matters. By that time, it was clear that leaders of the Moslem League, the future rulers of Pakistan, among them Firoz Khan, were hostile to the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. While demanding communal national parity between the Hindu majority and the Moslem minority on the Indian subcontinent, they rejected such a solution for Palestine. They were unable to accept the idea that the “protected” or “tolerated” Jewish minority in Palestine would become masters of a holy Moslem territory. While partition was the solution for India, it was rejected by them as a solution to Palestine.

The opportunity for the Asian delegations to the General Assembly to express their views on the future of Palestine came during the special session that was held from April 28 to May 14, 1947. During the special session Ben Gurion, the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive, then in New York, met with Assaf Ali, India’s ambassador to the UN and United States; although a Moslem, he was a close ally of Nehru. Assaf Ali suggested to Ben Gurion that the Jews suspend immigration to Palestine for five years. Ben Gurion said it was unacceptable even for five seconds. Addressing the Assembly, Assaf Ali called on the Jews and Arabs of Palestine to settle their differences in a practical manner as two long lost

cousins who met again after long separation and let them live in peace and happiness ever after. Ben Gurion realized India was a lost cause.

At this stage it was clear that the Assembly would appoint a commission of inquiry that would suggest proposals for discussion in the second regular session of the General Assembly due to meet in New York in September 1947. The commission would be comprised of eleven members, chosen according to geographical regions and none would come from the major powers. Asia would be represented by India that won this place over Thailand. The Indian delegate was Abdur Rachman, a Moslem, a Supreme Court judge from Lahore, but a close ally of Nehru. Another member of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), Jorge Garcia Granados, described Rachman as the champion of the Arab cause and obtained from the Arabs, who boycotted UNSCOP, most of the questions he asked of Ben Gurion and Weizmann. Rachman also opposed a visit to a Displaced Persons Camp in Germany as a waste of time and was supported by Yugoslavia and Iran. In the final discussions in Lausanne, Rachman said that the Arabs were given international promises for independence whereas the Jews were given vague promises and their inclusion in the mandate was immoral and illegal.

When the United Nations General Assembly met in New York for its second regular session, the Palestine question was the most important issue it had to determine. The Jewish Agency delegation felt that it was now or never. The delegation was led by Moshe Sharett and consisted of some of the veteran Zionist diplomats, among them Eliyahu Eilat, David Horowitz, Abba Eban, Moshe Tov; and they were enforced by the leaders of the American Zionist movement led by rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, Emmanuel Newman, Dr. Israel Goldstein and Nahum Goldmann. Sharett, Eilat and Horowitz maintained the ties with the Indian delegation, deemed the most important Asian delegation. Although most Zionist diplomats agreed that India would vote against partition, especially now after the partition of India led to a massive refugee problem and much bloodshed, some felt it was worth a try. The same applied to China. But before turning to India and China, a few words on the attitude and policies of the smaller Asian states: Thailand and the Philippines.

Thailand was an unknown entity to the Zionist diplomats. None of them had been there, no one knew the military leaders of that country, there was no Jewish let alone Zionist presence in Bangkok and initially Thailand was listed as doubtful when it would come to the final voting. Michael Comay was put in charge of Thailand and the Philippines. On September 9, 1947 someone recalled that Thailand owed much to Denmark that sponsored its UN membership and proposed asking for the intervention of the Danish UN Ambassador Henrik de Kauffman. That did not help. Contacts with the Thai delegation were virtually impossible, as they were absent during most of the meetings. Sharett did manage

to meet the head of the Thai delegation Prince Subhosvasti Svastivat and tried to persuade him to vote in favour or at least to abstain. It was clear that pressure on the Thais would have to be exerted by Washington. Weizmann cabled President Truman on November 25, 1947 asking for his help to persuade Thailand (as well as China, India and the Philippines) to support partition. Congressman Emanuel Celler spoke to Under Secretary of State Lovett, to Truman's secretary and to Howard McGrath, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, to pressure Thailand not to vote against. Two days before the crucial and final vote, the leader of the Thai delegation suddenly sailed home. Apparently, there was a revolution in Thailand and the credentials of the Thai UN delegation were revoked. While at sea on the Queen Mary, Sharett cabled Prince Svastivat on November 27, pleading they vote in favour. On November 29, 1947 Thailand was the only country that did not take part in the voting and was listed as absent. After the vote, Britain addressed a note to the UN Secretary General asking him to request all member states to refrain from helping the illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine. Thailand did not even bother to reply.

The Philippino delegate, General Carlos Romulo, was very active in the special Assembly in April and May. He was impressed with the quiet dignity and moderation of both the Jewish Agency and Higher Arab Committee representatives. He stated that although the Philippines were far away from Palestine it would not be neutral on this issue if neutrality meant indifference. He also mentioned the possibility of an eventual ultimate independence for Palestine. While being quite active in the discussion on the terms of reference for UNSCOP, he made no commitments on core issues. As the time drew near to the crucial vote, it was clear that Romulo was going to oppose partition. In early November Eban reported that the Arabs promised the Philippines their support for a seat on the Trusteeship Committee if they opposed partition. On November 24, the Zionist delegates noted there was a problem with the Philippines and pressure would have to be exerted by Washington. Two American Supreme Court Justices, Frankfurter and Murphy, wrote to the Philippine Ambassador in Washington Joaquin Elizalde to press President Rojas to support partition. They also cabled Rojas, whom they knew personally, saying that his country will lose millions of American friends if they continued their policy of opposing partition. However, on November 26, Romulo announced that it would oppose partition; by then there were fifteen states who opposed partition.

The legal adviser of the Philippine Embassy in Washington, Oscar Cokes, told Eilat that Elizalde was furious with Romulo who failed to coordinate his Palestine policy with the Embassy fearing adverse reaction by American public opinion. Elizalde cabled Rojas warning that if Manila did not support partition it would arouse much criticism in America; he asked how a country that was occupied by Japan during the war could not support Holocaust survivors, at the time when

the Philippines were in dire need of American economic aid. The American pressure worked. A day before the final vote, Clark Clifford, Truman's closest adviser, met with Elizalde. He advised that contact be made with McNutt, the last American High Commissioner in the Philippines. McNutt suggested that contact be made with Julius Edelstein, a close friend of Rojas. He was contacted in London and probably spoke to Rojas. Chaim Weizmann also cabled Rojas, seeking his support. At the last moment Romulo was instructed by Rojas to vote for partition.

The first contacts between Zionist diplomats and Chinese diplomats occurred during the San Francisco Founding Conference of the United Nations in April-June 1945. Their main aim was to ensure that China would support the continuation of the British mandate over Palestine. No one was talking of a Jewish state. Their efforts focused on Ambassador V. K. Wellington Koo and General Wu of the Chinese delegation. To help them enlist the support of China they brought "Two Gun" Morris Cohen to San Francisco, a former aide to Sun Yat-sen. Koo had served as China's delegate to the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s, had met Chaim Weizmann and knew of the Holocaust. Koo later became China's ambassador to London and was fully aware of the Palestine problem. Later, he was transferred to Washington. As early as 1945 the ROC (Republic of China) ambassador in Cairo was instructed to get details on the Palestine question and strengthen ties with the Arab governments. It was becoming clear that ROC wanted Arab support in its evolving civil war against the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) and that millions of Moslems in China were important.

Sharett undertook to maintain ties with the ROC UN delegation during the special session of the General Assembly in the spring of 1947. ROC foreign minister Quo Tai Chi spoke of the tragedy that befell the Jewish people who deserved a shelter they could call their own in which they would live a life of happiness, free of social and political segregation, protected from the eternal fear of persecution. But he also understood the national aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs. In another meeting the Chinese representative Shushi Hsu told the Arabs that they must cease thinking that the end of the mandate and the declaration of Palestinian independence would resolve all the problems. A former Vice Foreign Minister of the ROC and now Under Secretary General of the UN, Victor Hoo, became the Secretary of UNSCOP and travelled with it to Palestine.

On the eve of the second session of the General Assembly, where the Palestine Problem would be the main item, the Zionists intensified their efforts to ensure the support of the ROC or at least get it to abstain on the crucial partition resolution. To that end Eilat met with Wellington Koo, now the ROC ambassador to Washington, in late July 1947. Koo explained to him that the ROC wanted to play a greater role in the Middle East – otherwise it would lose standing and

status to India. Already then there was a basic question – who will lead the people of Asia – China or India.

A parallel effort was undertaken by the Zionist-Revisionists in Paris. They instructed the head of the Beitar Political Section in Shanghai, Judith Hasser, to develop contacts with the Chinese government. She met a number of times with Foreign Minister Yeh Kung Chao and on July 4, 1947 obtained a letter of support from Sut Yat-sen's son, Sun Fo, who repeated his late father's support for the Zionist movement which he called a worthy cause. This was not exactly an endorsement of partition and Sun Fo had no influence on China's foreign policy, but the Revisionists saw it as a valuable document and they sent it to the ROC UN delegation in New York. Mrs. Hasser also met with the Chief ROC UN delegate, Tingfu Tsiang, a Columbia University graduate who later claimed that before and during the war he did all he could to help persecuted Jews. In 1935 he travelled to Germany, contacted several Jewish intellectuals and found a job for a Jewish professor at his university. He was fully aware of what the United States and the Jews had done for China. In retrospect the Revisionist effort was insignificant and had no impact on the decision of China initially to oppose partition and later to abstain. The decision to abstain was taken after massive American pressure was exerted on China.

At the beginning of the General Assembly, Sharett reported to Ben Gurion that China would most likely oppose partition as part of its rivalry with India. Sharett also reported that Wellington Koo stated, that imposed partition would create a serious conflict and that China could not accept responsibility for partition. It was also clear that in the fall of 1947, the fortunes of the ROC were turning and that the CCP was gaining territory. Nationalist China needed international support and also Moslem support for its stand and realized that Arabs had six votes in the General Assembly – some ten percent of the total membership of the UN at the time. In addition, there were four other Moslem nations – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey. In late October, Eitan realized that China, Thailand and the Philippines deserved special treatment.

The scene shifted to Washington where Senator Robert Taft, a leading Republican politician, was asked to approach the Chinese embassy and he told the Ambassador that if China should oppose partition, a policy the US supported, many of his constituents in Ohio would not be able to understand why the US should provide China with an additional 50 million dollar loan then pending in the Congress. From sources inside the Chinese delegation the Zionists learned that the two key people in the Chinese UN delegation were Tingfu Tsiang and Ambassador Koo. Koo was far more attuned to American public opinion and was able to change the Chinese vote from opposition to partition to abstention. China may have feared that at some point there would be a partition of China, like the one in India, and was averse to such a possibility. In early November, Tingfu

Tsiang explained his position in a letter to a wealthy New York businessman, H. H. Fisher, saying that China was not opposed to the partition of Palestine but was opposed to imposing it by force. China cannot be generous to the Jews over something she does not own. China's decision to abstain was explained in a lengthy speech by Ambassador Koo who feared a bloody conflict if partition were enforced. The decision was most likely taken in New York and approved by the Nanjing government. It was obvious that American pressure brought about China's abstention. Once again local Zionist organizations in China had no impact on the policy of that government.

The same applies to India as well. We have noted that the Indian member of UNSCOP, Abdur Rachman, openly became the champion of the Arab cause. He voted for a federal solution, claiming that the Arabs were given an international promise for independence and it was their natural right as owners of the country to claim Palestine as an Arab state. The Indian position in the General Assembly was shaped largely by the bloody civil war that erupted on that subcontinent after partition, the creation of a massive refugee problem, the struggle over Kashmir, and the need to mobilize Arab support in the UN for future discussions of the situation in the Indian sub-continent. Another consequence of the British decision to abandon India was its final decision taken in early September 1947 to abandon the Palestine Mandate. On September 17, 1947 Attlee noted that "we are all under the impression of what is happening in India, therefore we have to withdraw from Palestine within six months even if there is no Arab-Jewish agreement or another mandatory will be appointed".

A key figure in the Indian delegation was Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister. In a speech to the Ad-Hoc Palestine Committee on October 17, 1947 she called on all nations to propose a number of refugees they were willing to absorb, in order to separate the Palestine problem from the issue of displaced persons. Zionist documentation from 1945 on indicates that India was seen as hostile to the Zionist aspirations and it was in fact futile to even try and change that attitude. Sharett, Ben Gurion and Eilat called for intensifying ties with Indian leaders and intellectuals, but it was obvious that the final decision would be made by Nehru and his opposition to Zionism was well known since the mid 1930s. At one point an idea arose to send Golda Meir to India to explain the Jewish position; she refused to go, claiming it was hopeless. On October 23, 1947 Sharett reported to Ben Gurion that "we have had extensive meetings with Indian delegates and there is no doubt we have reached a high level of understanding of our stand by them, and that there is an inner debate within the delegation of abandoning their efforts to appease the Moslems, but it has not yet been translated into a new policy". He added that Nehru's dominant and doctrinaire position made it impossible for anyone to oppose him. At one point his sister

asked for permission to abstain on a certain vote and he ordered her to vote against.

The Zionists enlisted President Truman, Albert Einstein and Congressman Emanuel Celler to appeal to Nehru. There was also a last minute appeal by Weizmann. But on November 11, 1947 India announced it would vote against partition and support a federal solution. Clearly, their struggle with Pakistan, a huge Moslem minority in India, the need for Arab support over Kashmir, and the historic rejection of Zionism and a Jewish state in Palestine determined their position. Once again, the Zionist organization in India was powerless to intervene, let alone influence. They had no contact with the Indian leadership or even with the major newspapers.

Some words on Pakistan: it was obvious from the start that this country would vote against partition, but few expected that their representative, Sir Zafrulla Khan, would become the spokesman for the Palestinian Arabs. A brilliant jurist, Khan was a member of the Indian delegation to the League of Nations in 1939, the President of the Pan Moslem League in India in 1932, and was already appointed to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. His arguments were legal. The Balfour Declaration he claimed had no legal basis, partition was impractical, although his sympathy was with the persecuted Jewish people, but the problem of the displaced persons was an international problem and that the Arabs should not be asked to pay the price. He rejected any comparison with the partition of India, saying that Moslems and Hindus lived there for generations and did not come recently and that India's partition was an independence and ensuring the Jews' autonomy in religious, linguistic and cultural matters but only to the Jews residing there, meaning no further immigration.

He met on with Zionist diplomats on a number of occasions and complained to them that the Arabs rejected any solution, were not prepared for any compromise, thus making it impossible for them to have their case taken seriously. Zafrulla Khan also suggested to the Arabs that they seek a ruling from the International Court of Justice regarding the legality of partition as it was opposed to international law and the principle of majority rights. A proposal to this effect failed to achieve a majority and was lost. Two days before the final vote he met with Arab delegations and berated them for rejecting even a federal solution that would have left the bulk of the country under their rule forcing the Jews eventually to assimilate among the majority. He later said that the rejectionist Arab position did more than anything else to help the Jews. His final speech, a day before going to The Hague, argued that the UN had no legal right to rule on partition. Needless to say, there was no Zionist organization in Karachi or any other major city that was included in Pakistan.

To sum it all up, the Asian vote on the partition of Palestine was influenced mainly by the United States; hence the Zionist effort was focused on Washington

and not on New Delhi, Nanjing, Bangkok and Manila. The local Zionist bodies played a very minor role in this effort. Walter Eytan's advice not to rely on local Zionist Federations, certainly when applied to the Asian nations, proved to be correct. He was wrong when it came to Western countries, chiefly the United States and France.

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The Jews of Manila: Manuel Quezon, Paul McNutt, and the Politics and Consequences of Holocaust Rescue

When one thinks about Holocaust rescue, the names of Oskar Schindler, Raoul Wallenberg and other righteous diplomats and valiant rescuers come readily to mind. Much, but not all of this behaviour, occurred “in the belly of the monster”, in Europe proper. In Manila, one of the world’s largest seaports and cities, one can also observe such efforts. In the 19th and early 20th centuries this seaport had a Jewish community of approximately 2,000 individuals. What were the political, diplomatic, and economic conditions in which Holocaust rescue took place? What was the residual impact of this rescue episode on the islands’ Jewish community and on the Philippines as a whole, especially in terms of post-war relations with the reborn State of Israel?

1. Manila Jews’ Communal Origins and Commercial Activity

The first Jews recorded to have arrived in the Spanish Philippines were the Marrano brothers Jorge and Domingo Rodriguez. These secret Spanish Jews reached Manila in the 1590s. To the local population they were indistinguishable from other Spanish colonials. But by 1593 the Spanish colonial government discovered their religious identity. The brothers were tried at an *auto-da-fe*

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(judgment by the inquisition) in Mexico City because the Spanish Inquisition did not have an independent tribunal in the Philippines. They were imprisoned and at least eight other Marranos from the Philippines were subsequently tried by the Inquisition (Kohut 1904: 149 – 156; Lea 1908: 304).

A second group of Jews arrived after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 – 71. The Levy brothers of Alsace fled with a stash of diamonds and found refuge in Manila. They established a jewellery store and then a general merchandising business. By 1898, when the United States took the Philippines from Spain, the Levys had been joined by more Alsatian Ashkenazim plus Egyptian, Syrian, and Turkish Jews whom the Spaniards lumped together with other ‘Ottomanos’. Manila Jewry thus became a multi-ethnic community of approximately fifty individuals (Ephraim 2003: 11 – 12; Gleeck n.d.: 34; Smith 2012; Tuval 1971).

By 1918, after twenty years under United States sovereignty, Manila Jewry consisted of about 150 people. Most of the newcomers were American servicemen discharged there after the Spanish-American War and the First World War plus Russian Jews fleeing the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. These new immigrants, according to communal historian Annette Eberly, considered Manila “a second frontier ... a place for the young and ambitious to flee to. It was especially attractive to those who chafed at limitations on social and economic mobility in their native lands” (Eberly 1975: 162 – 63). These arrivals engaged in import and export trade and portside real estate development. By 1920, Manila Jewry included the founder of the stock exchange, the conductor of the symphony orchestra, physicians, and architects (Griese 1954: 21 – 22).

2. The Absence of Jewish Institutional Development in Manila

Apart from these purely secular achievements, twenty-two years after the commencement of the American occupation, there was almost no Jewish institutional development. Spanish repression may explain this phenomenon before 1898. It does not account for the absence of institutional development under the Americans. In 1920, the British Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen, who was greatly impressed by Jewish institutional development in Singapore, visited Manila. He lamented that, although “there were several hundred Jews, they had not formed a synagogue. They were there twenty years, there was no Jewish organization or institution of any kind. If a Jew wished to get married, he took a day trip to Hong Kong” (Cohen 1925: 108 – 114; Cohen 1956: 193; Horn 1941: 132).

A synagogue was finally built by a wealthy Ashkenazi benefactor in 1924 but was rarely serviced by full time clergy. Rabbis and cantors were imported from

Shanghai and elsewhere for short stints. In 1930 an American journalist reported that

“the eighty Jewish families and fifty single Jews in the Philippines are all well-established yet indifferent to their Judaism. They have no interest in a Jewish community. There is a handsome synagogue, but it is used only on [the Jewish high holidays of] Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur. There was a religious school, but it was closed on account of the scarcity of teachers. ... Most of the children receive absolutely no Jewish education. ... The religious indifference of their parents plus the lack of knowledge of Jewish affairs of the children counts these families as *a total loss to Judaism*” (emphasis by Goldstein / Kotlowski; *Jews in the Philippines Not Religious* (1930); Netzorg n.d.: 29, 66; *World Jewish Congress 1963*: 49; Cowen 1971: 129 – 138; Gleeck n.d.: 16 – 17; Griese 1954: 21 – 22).

It is clear then that, prior to the Holocaust, Manila’s Jews experienced precious little of the intensified Rabbinic Judaism of Eastern or Central Europe or even of other places in Southeast Asia such as Singapore. Some Manila Jews faded completely into the seductive woodwork of what historian Eberly calls “the good life out there” (Eberly 1975: *passim*). Others would assume secularized aspects of Jewish identity. The fullest expression of this secularized identity was the aid Philippine Jews gave first to refugees from Hitler and thereafter to Zionism and to the State of Israel. For many Philippine Jews these two forms of philanthropy became inseparable. How did they evolve?

3. Philippine Jews’ Assistance to Holocaust Refugees

It was the rise of Hitler that mobilized some of Manila’s most secular Jews into communal service. The niece of the founder of the infrequently-used Manila synagogue summarized this episode in the words “we only became Jewish conscious in a deep way when the terrible threat came out of Europe and suddenly there were Jews in desperate need of help” (Minna Gaberman, Manila, quoted in Eberly 1975: 60).

Some diplomatic context is needed here. The Philippines, as already noted, became an American territorial possession in 1898. The colony gained self-governing status in the 1930s. Until the Philippines passed its own comprehensive immigration legislation on January 1, 1941, the immigration restrictions imposed by the United States Congress *theoretically* applied in both the continental United States and the Philippines. But, as this chapter will suggest, *in practice* the Philippines had some flexibility when it came to the implementation of immigration policy.

The first German Jewish refugees from Hitler may have been Karl Nathan and Heinz Eulau from Offenbach. They arrived in Manila in June 1934 on affidavits of

support from Eulau's cousin Dr. Kurt Eulau, who had lived in the islands since 1924. The first opportunity to shelter a significant number of Jewish refugees came as a result of the 1937 Japanese attack on Shanghai. In August of that year the German government offered all Germans in Shanghai free passage to the Philippines if they wished to escape the Sino-Japanese hostilities that had engulfed that city. At the request of the German Consul General in Manila, U.S. High Commissioner to the Philippines Paul V. McNutt and Philippine President Manuel L. Quezon independently authorized the admission of these refugees on the condition that they would not become a public burden. The immigrants were to be supported by their fellow nationals in the Philippines. In Shanghai about three dozen ethnic Germans plus twenty-eight German Jews took the Nazi government up on its offer. The ethnic Germans and the German Jews arrived together in Manila on September 8, 1937 aboard the Norddeutscher Lloyd steamship *Gneisenau*. Manila's ethnic German community took care of its brethren. A hastily-organized Jewish Refugee Committee assumed the formidable task of providing for what was easily the largest Jewish refugee group ever to have landed in the Philippines. To further ease the plight of specifically Jewish refugees, on February 15, 1939, Quezon sent a message to the Philippine congress, which technically oversaw immigration matters, urging the admission of an additional 10,000 German Jewish professionals. What do we know about the background to these gestures by President Quezon and Commissioner McNutt, which occurred at a time when nearly the entire world had slammed its doors shut to German Jewish immigration (Wyman 1968; Srebrnik 2008: 4; Quezon 1941: 427; Ephraim 2003: 15 – 77; 134; Horn 1941: 146; Griese 1954: 18; 21 – 23; 28; 134; Smith 2012)?

4. The Roles of McNutt and Quezon in Jewish Holocaust Rescue

The absorption of Jewish refugees in the Philippines and the growth thereby of Manila's Jewish community owe much to the activities of McNutt, who was United States High Commissioner to the Philippines from 1937 to 1939. McNutt, a savvy and opportunistic politician, helped resettle 1,200 German and Austrian Jews in the Philippine capital. This chapter of the international refugee crisis was almost unknown until the first decade of the 21st century, partly because its chief protagonist had descended into obscurity following the collapse of his 1940 presidential and vice-presidential ambitions. "Paul McNutt towers over the 1930s", observed James H. Madison (1982: 415), a historian of McNutt's native state of Indiana, "yet there exists no satisfactory biography [of him]". His actions to save Jewish lives warrant closer scrutiny.

According to historian Lewis Gould (1977: 460), McNutt was a “substantial political figure of the Roosevelt era”, that is, he was someone acquainted with the exercise of power. As governor of Indiana (1933 – 37), he supported United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt [FDR]’s New Deal and revamped his state’s government, emerging as one of the nation’s strongest governors. After serving as FDR’s High Commissioner to the Philippines (1937 – 1939), he became administrator of the Federal Security Agency (1939 – 45) and chair of the War Manpower Commission (1942 – 45). McNutt hoped to succeed Roosevelt, but was thwarted when the president decided to seek a third term in 1940. He next sought the Democratic nomination for vice president in 1940, until FDR voiced his preference for Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace. After heading the War Manpower Commission, McNutt returned to the Philippines as high commissioner (1945 – 46) and ambassador (1946 – 1947), where he helped to prepare the islands for independence.

Three trends are apparent in McNutt’s career: ambition, public service, and an association with liberal principles, particularly “security” – an idea that lay at the heart of Roosevelt’s New Deal, American intervention in World War II, and the U.S. policy to contain the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Kennedy 1999: 365). During the 1930s and 1940s, McNutt sought to use American state power to protect ordinary people from the threats posed by economic hardship, internal subversion, and international aggression (Kotlowski 2011: 540 – 544, 570).

As anti-Semitism raged in the United States in the 1930s, McNutt saw Jews as a vital part of his America. He was tolerant of people of different races and religions, particularly Jewish Americans. McNutt was born in 1891 and grew up in Martinsville, Indiana, a community that was homogeneous, overwhelmingly white, and inward-looking. But Paul and his parents were recent migrants to, rather than long-time natives of, Martinsville. As outsiders, the McNutts exuded an air of superiority toward their neighbours who, in turn, became antagonistic toward them. Paul experienced much hostility at the hands of schoolyard bullies. This abuse left its mark, imbuing him with a sense of toughness and sympathy for the persecuted. Reinforcing such empathy was his family’s close connection with the Masons, a fraternal order that had experienced discrimination over the course of American and European history. McNutt’s life-long affiliations with the American Legion and the Democratic Party further enhanced his respect for religious and racial diversity. Although neither organization was free of prejudice, the Legion welcomed into its ranks all Americans who had served in the Great War, while the Democratic Party in the northern United States proved more inclusive of Catholics and immigrants than its Republican counterpart, running New York’s Roman Catholic governor Alfred E. Smith for President in 1928. Because of the strength of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana during the 1920s, Jews and African-Americans voted Democratic in the Hoosier State a decade

before the New Deal. McNutt, a budding politician, knew that his party was ethnically and religiously diverse and becoming ever more so (Kotlowski 2009: 867 – 872).

As governor, McNutt felt concern for the plight of German Jews. He took his official oath on January 9, 1933, three weeks before Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany and nearly two months before Roosevelt's inauguration. McNutt and FDR sought common solutions to pressing problems, such as the Great Depression, and they adopted some of the same tactics, such as forming partnerships with anyone who might advance their agenda – including Jews. A close political ally of the Indiana governor was Jacob Weiss, an Indianapolis Jew who served as president pro tempore of the state senate and later played a role in the refugee project (Ephraim 2003: 28). McNutt, a soldier in the First World War and onetime national commander of the American Legion, closely followed developments overseas, especially in Germany. He took time to read, and to become outraged by reports of Nazi atrocities – hardly the traditional duties of a state executive. McNutt condemned Nazi mistreatment of Jews at a public rally in Chicago in 1933. In Indiana he made similar statements, extended official greetings to Jewish groups, and won praise from Zionists by becoming the first Indiana governor to mark “Palestine Day”. McNutt understood the Jewish contributions to American liberalism. He acknowledged that his administration's efforts to provide economic security for Hoosiers via work relief, old-age pensions, and regulation of banks – policies that also resembled those of FDR – paralleled activities by numerous American-Jewish relief agencies, hospitals, clinics, and “settlement houses” for recent immigrants. American-Jewish philanthropic activity was backed by a wide spectrum of the American-Jewish population, ranging from established Wall Street bankers to recently-arrived, impoverished members of cooperative burial societies (Kotlowski 2009: 872 – 875).

McNutt's attitudes and actions toward Jews also derived from political opportunism. Here he had to tread carefully, for he knew how easily Americans could succumb to feelings of intolerance. His messages to Jewish groups reflected the sort of ethnic-specific appeals indulged in by other constituency-conscious politicians. As the presidential election of 1940 neared, McNutt sensed that his efforts on behalf of Jewish refugees could be used to win Jewish votes. In 1939, Jewish periodicals carried pictures of McNutt with Weiss. The Hoosier's incipient presidential bid enjoyed “a run in the Jewish press” (Judd to McNutt, July 26, 1939). It should be noted, however, that McNutt's courtship of Jewish voters occurred *after* he returned to the United States in 1939; during his time in Manila, there is little evidence that electoral considerations swayed his decision to help refugees (Kotlowski 2009: 877). Of far greater weight were McNutt's philo-Semitism, his respect for Jewish accomplishments, and his conception of

Jews as allies in the global struggle against Nazism. By the end of World War II, he was publicly praising Jewish Palestine as “an arsenal of Democracy in the Middle East” and heralding the “heroism” of Jewish soldiers in Allied campaigns to liberate Libya, Syria, and Greece (McNutt 1945: 5). McNutt also expressed public admiration for the “thrift, chastity, and vision” of the Jewish people, which had enabled them to withstand a centuries-long reign of terror”, albeit not of the Holocaust (Kotlowski 2009: 873).

McNutt knew that there was comparatively little he could do to alleviate the Nazis’ reign of terror. There were obstacles to admitting Central and Eastern European Jews into the United States, including restrictive immigration quotas based on national origin, bureaucratic inertia, anti-Semitism at the State Department level, and a president who showed only intermittent interest in the problem. Most significantly, the United States Immigration Act of 1924, which established the system of annual quotas, “took no official cognizance of ‘refugees’ and thus made no provision for offering asylum to the victims of religious or political persecution” (Kennedy 1999: 413). And the “Likely to Become a Public Charge” provision of the United States Immigration Act of 1917 prohibited the issuance of visas to anyone who lacked the wherewithal to support themselves (Breitman / Kraut 1987: 7 – 8). These impediments collectively formed a restrictive edifice which the historian David Wyman characterized as “paper walls”. In Wyman’s view, officials at the State Department enforced U.S. immigration law so stringently as to thwart the arrival of many newcomers. Despite such barriers, a few Jewish and non-Jewish individuals were willing to help refugees. These humanitarians pursued what Wyman has called “the illusionary search for havens”, that is, unoccupied areas of the earth that might permit Jewish settlement (Wyman 1985: ix).

The Philippines emerged as one potential haven. As already suggested, the Philippines’ laws, politics, and status in the world were fluid and open to creative policymaking with respect to refugees. During the 1930s, the archipelago was in a state of transition, having attained semi-independent status as a “commonwealth”. Beginning in 1935, Filipinos received internal autonomy and the right to elect their own president while the United States remained the sovereign power. Washington was represented in Manila by a “high commissioner” appointed by the U.S. president. The responsibilities of the high commissioner were somewhat nebulous as was the commonwealth set-up itself (Kotlowski 2010: 507 – 509).

Immigration policy was a case in point, for the Immigration Act of 1917, which included the “most likely to become a public charge” proviso, applied to entrants to the Philippines, while the Immigration Act of 1924, with its annual quotas, did not. Immigration to the Philippines was riddled with loopholes because immigration policies were not clearly defined. The Philippines had no immigration laws of its own and there was a history of U.S. officials in the

Philippines bypassing immigration laws that applied in the continental United States. Chinese and Japanese immigrants were routinely permitted to settle in the islands, despite local Philippine opposition and at a time when these same immigrants were excluded from the American mainland. Enforcement of all types of law in the Philippines had historically been lax at best and corrupt at worst.

The complex and unresolved issue of immigration was among the problems confronting Manuel Quezon when he became president of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935. The issue also faced McNutt when he became high commissioner in 1937. Fortunately, Quezon and McNutt formed a close partnership. One photograph showed both men seated on a sofa, with the high commissioner laughing. McNutt scrawled on the picture: "Ours has been a most happy association based on confidence and understanding. May our sense of humour grow and last as has our friendship" (Retrato Photo Archive, Photo# FP00653).

Close personal cooperation between the two leaders facilitated the refugee venture. As already noted, the Philippines emerged as a Jewish haven in an *ad hoc* fashion. In 1937 twenty-eight German Jews fled Shanghai unexpectedly and arrived in Manila, where a committee of Philippine Jews furnished them with food, clothing, and housing. McNutt proved responsive as well; he asked Leo Gardner, his legal adviser, to find a way to help these refugees. Gardner studied executive orders defining the office of high commissioner and found that McNutt had the power to "waive visa requirements in admitting persons to the Islands" (Untitled Narrative of McNutt's First Stint as High Commissioner, Undated: 7 - 8). The high commissioner did so with the encouragement and support of Quezon and Jewish leaders in Manila, notably Philip Frieder and his brothers - Alex, Morris, and Herbert - who were cigar manufacturers from Cincinnati.

Fortuitous timing, pragmatic leadership, and enlightened self-interest facilitated the refugee venture. Early in 1938 McNutt briefly returned to Washington, in part to launch his presidential campaign. While there, he discussed the possibility of a more systematic refugee venture with Jacob Weiss, his old ally from Indiana. Weiss' brother Julius was active in the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (The Joint) and the Refugee Economic Corporation (The REC), which "specialized in creating Jewish settlements" in countries that "agreed to absorb Jewish refugees" (Ephraim 2003: 27). McNutt decided to back the effort, provided that Manila's Jews assumed responsibility for administering it. Understanding the requirements of the law, the danger of interference by the State Department, and the volatility of public opinion, McNutt insisted that the newcomers had to be able to support themselves in accordance with the "likely to become a public charge" stipulation. The Jewish Refugee Committee in

Manila agreed. Philip Frieder and his associates then compiled a list of fourteen categories of occupations and the number of Jews to be admitted in each category. To enhance the wherewithal and cohesion of Manila's Jewish community, they sought to attract medical specialists, automobile mechanics, accountants, barbers, chemical engineers, and a rabbi. Applicants sent dossiers to the chief Jewish relief agency in Germany which forwarded them to the REC and Manila's Refugee Committee. Frieder and his team then studied the applications and sent names to the Philippine government for approval. Refugees were required to deposit, in a Manila bank, \$1,200 – a sum sufficient to support them for two years. After the applicant had proven himself unlikely to become a public charge, the State Department issued a visa from an appropriate consular office (Kotlowski 2009: 884 – 887).

Quezon backed this project for principled and practical reasons. As a “non-Aryan”, he had no affinity for Nazi-style racism. During a visit to Europe in 1937, Quezon, his wife, and their son were troubled by the sight of a Nazi parade in Berlin. And, back in Manila, the Philippine president had made good friends with its Jewish-American community in part because Jews, who were familiar with discrimination, made an effort to be friends with Filipinos at a time when other Americans would not. Quezon, like the Frieders, was interested in bolstering the island nation economically by admitting skilled Jewish workers. Quezon was especially keen to resettle Jews on the southernmost island of Mindanao, which was populated by large numbers of Muslims. While Quezon considered the Muslim Moros part of his predominantly Christian nation, he probably wanted to “drown” them with settlers, mainly Christian Filipinos, to neutralize them. Moreover, Mindanao was an island where many Japanese immigrants had settled and whose influence Quezon sought to check. For all these reasons, he became attracted to a proposal to settle 10,000 Jewish refugees, over ten years, on Mindanao (Kotlowski 2009: 886 – 888; Smith 2012).

The so-called Mindanao Plan never became a reality. The idea to resettle Jews on the island emerged at the end of 1938 following *Kristallnacht*, or the “Night of Broken Glass”, when Nazi storm troopers attacked Jews and Jewish-owned property. That pogrom aroused sympathy for Jews in the United States and the Philippines and encouraged officials at the State Department to consider placing European Jews in underdeveloped parts of the globe. In this context, McNutt and Quezon discussed resettlement on Mindanao in December 1938. McNutt probably broached the idea, for the Philippine president was somewhat passive on the refugee issue (Kotlowski 2009: 889 – 890). In January 1939, Quezon declared that his government would welcome refugees “under certain conditions” (Quezon 1939: 2).

Quezon had cause for concern. Manila's Philippines Free Press, in a pair of editorials on November 26, 1938, tempered its condemnation of *Kristallnacht*

with a sober notation of the dangers of liberalized immigration to the Philippines. The newspaper also conceded the universality of mankind's capacity for hatred, violence, and murder. With memories still fresh of Chinese immigrants who had been materially successful in the Philippines and of the Japanese who had designs of their own on the islands, the prospect of further immigration troubled many ethnic Filipinos. Quezon began to vacillate, especially after McNutt departed the Philippines in 1939. The new high commissioner, Francis B. Sayre, thought the Mindanao Plan impractical. Then, in May 1940, Quezon signed an immigration bill mandating that no more than 500 people from each nation be admitted to the Philippines per year. Although the measure still allowed the president to admit non-quota immigrants, the Mindanao Plan faced an uncertain fate. A number of problems, including the selection of appropriate land, the training of settlers, and the requisitioning of a sufficient number of ships, inhibited what remained of the project. The outbreak of war in Europe, the subsequent German conquest of the continent, and the termination of all civilian shipping in the Pacific after December 1941 effectively killed the scheme.

Although there was no proof that McNutt could have salvaged the Mindanao Plan, his departure from Manila left the plan without its major promoter. In 1940, a Jewish reporter raised some faint hope that McNutt might be able to do something stateside. Pat Frank, in his "Speaking Frankly" column, predicted that, "if Paul V. McNutt becomes the Democratic nominee for president ... and ultimately wins the Presidency, Jewry will find in the White House a man with an acute feel for their problems, and a personal knowledge of refugee colonization" (Frank 1940). This never happened, for McNutt's presidential campaign was cut short by President Roosevelt's decision to seek a third term.

Nevertheless, if Mindanao between 1939 and 1941 was an illusionary haven, then Manila between 1938 and 1939 was a real one. By June 1939, 750 Jews had arrived in the Philippine capital and the Jewish Refugee Committee had sent the State Department a list of 313 people approved for visas. The exact number who came to Manila remained uncertain but most accounts place it at over 1,000. The figure exceeded that of the 933 German Jews on board the Havana-bound passenger liner S.S. *St. Louis*, which, despite promises to the contrary, was denied the right to dock by the Cuban government and had to return to Europe (Breitman / Kraut 1987: 70 – 73). The number of "Manilaners" also eclipsed the population of the largest and best known refugee colony of Sosua, in the Dominican Republic (Feingold 1970: 121). Frank Ephraim, a historian of and one of the refugees in Manila, stressed the significance of what went on in the Philippines: "Between the leadership of the Frieder brothers and McNutt, Jewish lives were being saved" (Ephraim 2003: 58).

Quezon's contribution must not be overlooked. Even though the Mindanao Plan never materialized, Jacob "Jake" Rosenthal, Alex and Philip Frieder, and

other Manila Jews – along with McNutt – had been able to persuade Quezon to authorize the admission of approximately one thousand Nazi-persecuted Jews. To be sure, these admissions were problematic, as the Philippines had no independent consular service and relied on United States diplomatic personnel for the worldwide implementation of its immigration policy. In the blunt words of the son of Manila Jewish community president Morton Netzorg, “wherever the American consular staff was friendly to the Jewish people Jews got out, and where they shrugged their shoulders Jews did not get out” (Berger 2005: 15 – 16; Netzorg n.d.: 4; Ephraim 2003: 68). Quezon himself donated seven and a half acres of his country estate at Marikina as a working farm for Jewish refugees. Marikina Hall was dedicated on April 23, 1940 and housed approximately forty Jewish residents (Berger 2005: 15 – 16; Ephraim 2003: *passim*).

5. Survival in Wartime

Thus, by a variety of means and assistance from both Jews and ethnic Filipinos, about 1,000 Jewish refugees reached Manila before the December 1941 Japanese attack on both Pearl Harbor and the Philippines. The Japanese invasion of the Philippines was followed by an occupation of the entire archipelago. Those Jewish refugees who had arrived either with limited resources or on two-year temporary visas received assistance from the Joint and the REC at least until the Japanese attack. Some aid before that date and all assistance for the duration of the war came from the Manila Jewish community. Of particular help were those community members who held Iraqi, Filipino, and – ironically – German passports and who thereby escaped Japanese internment. The Japanese, it must be stressed, imprisoned approximately 250 Jews with American, Belgian, British, British Commonwealth, Dutch, and Polish citizenship, along with 5,000 non-Jewish “enemy aliens”, in the Santo Tomas and Los Banos detention camps.

The rescue effort becomes all the more impressive when one considers that after December 1941 the Philippines were a war zone. During the Battle of Manila in February and March 1945, 79 individuals, or approximately ten percent of the Jewish community, were wartime casualties, a rate similar to that of Manila’s overall population. The Japanese arrested, tortured and murdered several Jews at Fort Santiago, alleging that they collaborated with anti-Japanese resistance. Some, such as ritual slaughterer Israel Konigsberg, were indeed active participants in the anti-Japanese resistance. Several Jewish refugees were butchered in cold blood by Japanese marines during a rampage in the Manila Red Cross Hospital on February 10, 1945. (Netzorg n.d.: 3; Yegar 1984: 10; Cowen 1971: 131; Seruya 1979: 8; Freedman 1979: 74 – 75; Eberly 1975: 62 – 63; Gleeck n.d.: 34; Ephraim 2003: 39 – 92 and *passim*; Griese 1954: 31 – 33; “From Zbaszyn to

Manila” and other files in the Joint Archives). Despite all these difficulties and setbacks the Jewish Community of Manila was able to spare perhaps as many as 1,000 Jews from almost certain obliteration at the hands of the Nazis (Eberly 1975: 61).

6. Legacies of Holocaust Rescue: The Philippine Jewish Community’s Embrace of Zionism and Assistance to the State of Israel

What was the post-war, residual impact of the rescue effort on Philippine Jewry and on the Philippines itself? It should be recalled that when the British Zionist fundraiser Israel Cohen visited Manila in 1920 he was greatly disappointed because the Manila Jewish community did not support his movement. He lamented, that “I spoke to quite a number of Jews, but they simply would not hear of it, and not a single god damn cent did I get” (Cohen 1925: 110). Within twenty-five years many members of the community had made a complete turnaround on the subject of Zionism. For them Zionism was a natural outgrowth of their wartime experiences. They had incurred heavy losses at the hands of Hitler and his allies, made significant sacrifices to aid European refugees, and now wanted a secure Jewish homeland for the “surviving remnant”, the *sherut plita*. Members of the community who were close to post-war Philippine President Manuel Roxas proved instrumental, along with key advisors to U.S. President Harry Truman, in convincing the Philippine delegation to the United Nations to vote in 1947 in favour of the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state. American pressure counteracted that of a Druze “Syrian” pressure group in Manila, led by Sa’id Taqi al-Din and Wadi’a Jamayyil-Hamady, who were trying to get Roxas to vote against partition. The Philippines thus became the only Asian nation to vote for Israeli independence. It was also among the first to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. Those diplomatic relations blossomed into extensive economic ties, including in 2013 the presence in Israel of some 40,000 Filipino domestic workers, who form the backbone of the country’s private eldercare system (Smith 2012; Eberly 1975: 64; Tuval 1971; Simke 1951; Simke 1955; Gadol 1955 and 1956; Simke 1956; Preiss 1954; Sharett 1964: pas-sim).

Emigration from the Philippines to Israel and elsewhere reduced the Manila community from an immediate post-war peak of perhaps 2,500, which included the refugees, to 1,000 in 1946, 400 in 1949, 250 in 1968, and to approximately 100 families in 2013. Some families, such as the Simkes, secured Philippine citizenship. For a brief period after 1945 a group of Syrian Jews, prominent in

Manila's rag trade, took over the city's synagogue, restoring the community – in terms of ritual – to its original, Mizrahi roots. As of 2013, in terms of ethnicity, the community remains a mix of Filipino spouses and/or converts, Ashkenazim, Sephardim, Baghdadis, Syrians, Americans, Israelis, and others. Although small in numbers and weak in formal aspects of religiosity, this Jewish community in one of the world's largest cities and seaports today remains secular, Jewish, Filipino, and overwhelmingly Zionist. Although Manila never had been a *Yiddische Gemeinde*, or Jewish community in the classic European, or even the Singaporean / Baghdadi sense, its “religiosity” was displayed in secular ways, most notably in its efforts to rescue Jewish refugees and to aid the Zionist movement. In places like Singapore, there was a long history of Jewish communal consciousness and self-help, the outgrowth of an orthodox Baghdadi religious commitment. The commitment of the highly assimilated, multiethnic Jews of Manila and their Christian allies to Holocaust rescue and to the State of Israel was unexpected and distinct (Smith 2012; Thischby 1958; Manila Chronicle, September 29, 1956; Manila Times, September 29, 1956; The Evening News [Manila], October 3, 1956; “Tiny Jewish Groups”, in: Forward 1987; Bures 1984: 4; World Jewish Congress 1963: 48 – 49; Asia-Pacific Jewish Association n. d.: 85 – 88; Seruya 1979: 8; Griese 1954: 21 – 22; Tuval 1971).

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² Note: CZA = Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

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Malte Gaier¹

Jews in Pakistan in the Context of Estranged Pakistani-Israeli Relations

This paper is an attempt to highlight the neglected history of Jewish community life in Pakistan. A brief historical review provides a setting against which both immigration to Israel and processes of restructuring and, to a certain extent, assimilation, as the case of the formerly well-established Jewish business class in Karachi illustrates, can be analyzed. Secondly, the paper will take a look into the ambiguous nature of the bilateral relations and regional security issues such as the nuclearizing of the State of Israel and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and sidelining hidden efforts to establish a strategic partnership.

1. Jewish-Muslim Perceptions

President General Pervez Musharraf (1999 – 2008) became the first Pakistani leader to officially recognize the Jews of Pakistan during an official visit to Jewish communities in New York (Jackson 2011: 171 – 172). Generally, his doctrine of “enlightened moderation” had been welcomed enthusiastically by many in the West, Jewish and Christian circles in the United States and the Bush administration in particular with the latter being able to style one of its most important post-9/11 military allies as a moderate Muslim force that might play an exemplary role in the Muslim world, in which the United States were more and more perceived in terms of negative stereotypes and hostile attitudes. Thus, his invitation by the American Jewish Congress (AJC) and the Council of World Jewry, accordingly reciprocated by an invitation of two-high ranking Jewish representatives to Islamabad (Haider 2005), marked a significant turn in that important Jewish agencies invited a Muslim leader. The promising rapprochement

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between the two uneven countries experienced a harsh blow with the Mumbai attacks of 2008. Supporters of Jewish/Israeli-Muslim/Pakistani dialogue such as the chair of the AJC, Jack Rosen, expressed disapproval facing the refusal by the Pakistani government and foreign ministry to offer condolence to the victims of the attacks (Guttman 2008). Former Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, who had returned to Pakistan from self-imposed exile in 2007, had displayed willingness to follow General Musharraf's gestures of good will towards the Jewish world and Israel but was assassinated on December 27, 2007.

Jews living in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have always been the subject of wild speculations in society. Stories like that of foreign diplomats who were keen enough to smuggle Jews out of Pakistan contributed to their mystification. Following the events of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 the wife of an Australian consul general who had come to know about the situation of the Karachi Jews through a high-ranking Karachi police officer used her husband's Mercedes-Benz with diplomatic licence plates to transport Jews and two Indian children of High Commission staff members (hidden in the rear trunk of the car) to the border, which as a result of the ongoing hostilities between India and Pakistan was opened for diplomats only (Point of No Return 2010). Using her diplomatic immunity, the Australian lady called "June" also provided the Jewish community of Karachi with rare goods like kosher wine and rescued Torah scrolls from synagogues in Karachi and bazaars in Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province, by bringing them to Australia.

In November 2010, the Jewish Agency press release announced a recent *aliyah* (immigration) made by Jews from Pakistan to Israel. According to the agency's wording, the airlifting operation was undercover and complicated, based on a confidential agreement between the two governments. Out of the 2,500 members of the Jewish communities in Pakistan that were recorded in 1947, probably around a dozen Jews remain in Pakistan, mainly in Karachi, where the Bene Israel have lived over the past century. It remains unknown how many Jews still live in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, since it is believed that several well-known business players are Jewish despite their claiming to be Muslims or Parsis. Discriminatory politics and everyday life in the Muslim majority society and a promising future in Israel made more and more Jews leave the country, most of them without compensation for their property.

2. Pakistani-Israeli Relations

On a political level, before 1997, when both foreign ministers met publicly in Istanbul, there were hardly any Pakistani-Israeli relations on the official level. Proposals to establish diplomatic ties with Israel provoked harsh opposition

from all political and religious camps. However, a historical review illustrates continuing efforts by subsequent governments to establish unofficial strategic links between Jerusalem and Islamabad. Similarly, Israel's governments, which were clearly oriented towards India based on economic and strategic interests, aimed to include Pakistan in their regional security paradigm. Beyond the political level, in Pakistan resentments against Israel remain embedded within a nationalized narrative where Israel, together with the United States and India, is seen as an omnipresent hostile force harming the strategic and political interests of Pakistan. This powerful anti-Israeli element, deeply intertwined with the narrative of anti-Semitism in Pakistan's society and public consciousness, forms a substantial part within the national conspiracy mindset.

Discussed only in few articles (Kumaraswamy 1997; 2000; Yegar 2007; Siddiq 2010), Pakistan-Israel relations lack a tradition of normality in terms of existing political-diplomatic or economic ties. The demand for closer ties is, understandably, rare (Rockower 2008: 3):

“Given the isolation of Israel vis-à-vis the Islamic world, and given Pakistan's increasing isolation through the perception of its increasing radicalism, the opportunity to show a nascent dialogue between the second largest Muslim nation and the Jewish state would be a public diplomacy boon for two countries with flagging public diplomacy images. Dialogue with Israel gives Pakistan more credibility to burnish a moderate image while dialogue with Pakistan allows Israel to reach beyond seclusion. All of this being carried out through non-diplomatic, nongovernmental channels helps mitigate the dynamic of the absence of formal diplomatic relations.”

Contacts between the two countries, in Pakistan often referred to as “ideological twins”, officially do not exist while such comparison is – for good reasons – generally neglected by Israelis. Rather, bilateral relations are framed by Pakistan's non-acceptance of Israel on the official level and by intelligence reports, mainstream political statements, and psychological mindsets claiming Israel's frequent intervention in Pakistani affairs. Still alive in the mainstream public are Israeli plans to militarily destroy Pakistan's primary nuclear facilities in Kahuta during the 1980s in a strategic alliance with India. In contrast, only little public attention has been paid to the existing backdoor diplomacy reaching its positive climax in September 2005, when the foreign ministers met in Istanbul, followed by a meeting between President Pervez Musharraf and prime minister Ariel Sharon. Before, during the 1990s, bilateral relations suffered when Israeli authorities refused to provide a visiting visa for Benazir Bhutto's trip to the Palestinian territories.

Pakistan primarily sees Israel through the military and economic prism. The debate to copy the Israel Defence Forces' reserve system, admiration for Israel becoming the rising Nasdaq star behind the United States and China and the

world's leading start-up nation, or the country's visionary plans to utilize the vast Negev desert region for agricultural developments, have since been focused on. But the dominating ideological discourse concentrates on Israel's role as an illegitimate occupying force, enemy to large parts of the Arab-Muslim world, and the powerful symbolism inherent to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In Pakistan, like in most other Muslim countries, the Middle East conflict evokes expressions of solidarity and fraternity towards the Palestinians, combined with anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic mindsets throughout all strata of society. Politically, Pakistan is subjected to the Arab bloc's doctrine of non-acceptance of Israel – like those Arab states that until today follow this imperative, Pakistani citizens hold passports with the note “valid to any country except Israel”. Resentments against Israel remain embedded within a popularized narrative highlighting the “Mossad-CIA-Blackwater-RAW” connection, in which Israel, together with the US and India, is seen as harming the strategic interests of Pakistan with its spy operatives being active on Pakistani soil. Hence, a strong political-ideological anti-Israeli element and latent anti-Semitism in Pakistani society and public consciousness forms a substantial part of national political discourse which, according to Ayesha Siddiq, resulted in an abstract and highly ambiguous relationship (Siddiq 2010):

“Pakistan has a love-hate relationship with Israel. While we abhor Tel Aviv, secretly powerful Pakistanis happily claim similarities between the two states starting with the fact that both Israel and Pakistan were created on the basis of a religious identity. For those who compare a sense of similarity probably makes them feel important and elevated. After all, Islamabad would like to feel as important as America's best buddy. Some might argue that such comparison itself is a sign of neo-colonial mentality of Pakistani rulers.”

Israel in turn sees Pakistan primarily – if not exclusively – not as a direct adversary, but as a key nuclear and terrorist security threat to the Western world (Bar'el 2009). While geographically bound to the Middle East, there is a strong orientation within Israeli self-perception, according to which the State of Israel is seen, historically and culturally, as belonging to the West. Following the 9/11 attacks, Israel's political leadership declared Israel's solidarity with the US, the “free world”, and the West. In reaction to the attacks Israel mobilized its troops along the Israeli-Syrian demarcation line despite ongoing peace talks with Damascus via mediators. Subsequently, Israel – although not directly involved – has provided support and legitimization for the international and US-led missions in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Single events, such as the kidnapping and murder of Wall Street journalist and American-Israeli citizen Daniel Pearl in 2002 and the 2008 Mumbai attacks, reinforced traditional Israeli and international perception of Pakistan. Between 2004 and 2007/08 the pros-

pect of a composite dialogue between Pakistan and India and a peace initiative was opened but remained volatile and peace dividends diminished over night when the bilateral reconciliation came to a halt following the Mumbai attacks, which took place between November 26 and 29, 2008. The attacks, in which 170 people died, were carried out by Lashkar-e-Taiba operatives, believed to have been trained and equipped on Pakistani soil, on ten targets in the Mumbai city area. In one attack against the Nariman Jewish Community Centre, coordinated by Chabad emissaries, the rabbi and four other fellow Jews were killed. The attack was extensively covered by Israeli and Jewish media and security measures at hundreds of Israeli and Jewish institutions worldwide were advanced (Susser 2008).

Facing a new proxy war with Iran, Israel has suspected Pakistan's ISI to have silently provided intelligence for Iranian operations against Israeli diplomats in India, Thailand and Georgia in 2011/2012, which are believed to reciprocate assassinations of Iranian nuclear scientists by Mossad-trained Iranian dissidents. In turn, similarly to the Arab bloc at the OIC and the UN, Iran has supported Pakistan's cause with regard to Kashmir (Pakistan Today, May 21, 2012).

Especially the Pearl case and subsequent abductions of Jews in Pakistan have blurred bilateral stereotypes. In September 2012, a video message by the American-Israeli citizen and hostage Prof. Dr. Warren Weinstein was made public. The Country Director for Pakistan of J. E. Austin Associates – a US-based development organization – had been kidnapped by members of a militant jihadist outfit in Lahore in August 2011 (Chicago Tribune News, September 12, 2012). Together with three guards and his driver, the 71-year-old former professor is believed to be held captive by militants in North Waziristan in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas close to the Afghan border. It is not clear whether Weinstein is a hostage of Al-Qa'ida, as the group's Egyptian leader Ayman al-Zawahiri had claimed in December 2011, or by Lashkar-e-Jangvi. The latter, a militant Sunni Deobandi organization, has been increasingly active in Pakistan and Afghanistan in recent years despite having been banned by the Pakistani authorities in 2001 (Tucker 2012).

3. The Nuclear Factor and Strategic Security Interests

Despite their historic intensive involvement in pro-tracked regional conflicts that followed their "birth at war", Pakistan and Israel had never declared war with each other. However, during the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and its Arab neighbours, during which Pakistan declared its solidarity with its Muslim brother states, Israelis and Pakistanis were involved in direct firefights: at the

outbreak of the war, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) sent supportive ground personnel and pilots to Syria, Egypt and Jordan. According to the PAF, volunteering pilots were able to shoot down ten Israeli jets. During the Yom Kippur War of 1973, PAF servicemen supported the Syrian army as air base instructors on the ground (Scramble Magazine, September 1, 2009).

Regarding Israel's security needs, it has been stated that Israel still perceives a nuclear armed Muslim state to be a threat to its very existence. In 1981 and 2007, two operations against nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria were successfully carried out which can be framed within the wider context of Menachem Begin's first strike doctrine, according to which Israel, irrespectively of diplomatic costs, would never allow an enemy state or organization to hold the means to carry out a nuclear option against Israel.

With the support of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's nuclear ambitions started in 1965, the year in which the Pakistani public perceived itself as having been humiliated and stigmatized by the military defeat against India. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, foreign minister at that time, stated, "if India builds the bomb, we will eat grass or leaves for a thousand years, even go hungry, but we will get one of our own" (Siddiqi 2010). In the light of post-Hiroshima's "nuclear taboo", the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has been ratified by 189 states, whereas Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korea refuse to accept the NPT and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty unconditionally, as demanded by the UN Resolution 1172 after both sides conducted tests in May 1998. Although in the past Israel and Pakistan have been significantly dependent on US funds to produce conventional armaments, their nuclear arsenals and major weapon systems are being produced indigenously – at times against the opposition of the US and the international community and with the help of illegal nuclear proliferation and secret deals with internationally outlawed regimes such as North Korea and former Apartheid South Africa. In recent years, international media such as The Guardian referred to official South African files when claiming to have the "first official evidence of Israeli nuclear weapons". Reportedly, senior defence officials from South Africa and Israel met in late March-early April 1975, with the Israeli envoys offering to sell nuclear warheads to the Apartheid regime, thus turning Israel's passive nuclear role into that of an active international exporter (Polakow-Suransky 2010: 39 – 52). Sasha Polakow-Suransky, whose book created a heated debate in Israel when officials declared the Guardian report a plot to brand Israel as an Apartheid state, goes beyond military and nuclear cooperation between the two countries and points out that within the political mythology and self-imagery of Afrikaans nationalism, the State of Israel provided a role model narrative in terms of the state's founding ethos which laid ground for South African nationalist biblical connotations as a "new Israel" (Polakow-Suransky 2010: 13 – 21).

From 1965 onwards, Israeli military and political leaders had adopted the official formula that Israel does not have nuclear weapons and will not be the first state in the region to introduce them, for decades. This position has been superseded by a policy of maintaining “deliberate ambiguity” in which officials neither confirm nor deny possessing nuclear weapons (bomb-in-the-basement). By avoiding a policy of disclosure and declaring itself a nuclear power (bomb-on-the-table) – a step which would place enormous pressure on its Arab neighbour states and Iran including the risk of a nuclear and unconventional arms race in the region – Israel can maintain its nuclear deterrence (Beres 1990: 3 – 10). Furthermore, by keeping its nuclear arsenal ambiguous, military rivals are forced to assume the size of nuclear weapons and have to overestimate it, allowing Israel to keep a much smaller arsenal than otherwise necessary (Bowman 2010). In 1986, Mordechai Vanunu, a nuclear technician at the Negev Nuclear Research Center near Dimona (Israel), revealed details of Israel’s nuclear program to the British Sunday Times. Before Vanunu’s dates had been verified by experts, Vanunu was lured to Rome where he was kidnapped by Israeli intelligence. In Israel he was imprisoned for 18 years on charges of treason and espionage. At that time, the Sunday Times, on the basis of Vanunu’s account, calculated Israel possessing plutonium for about 100 – 200 nuclear weapons which was “10 times the previously estimated strength” (London Sunday Times 1986).

In light of the country’s nuclear role and the recent years, Israeli governments always refused terms like the “Jewish bomb”, in contrast to India’s “Hindu bomb” and Pakistan’s “Muslim bomb”. The same is true for connotations of its Samson Option, which embodies Israel’s ability and willingness to use its atom weapons in a second strike operation from the sea in case of invasion of its territory, according to Shimon Peres, “an option for a rainy day” (Cohen 1998: 236). In contrast, subsequent Pakistani governments played the religious card and declared the “Islamic bomb” the most dramatic event in the country’s history after the great partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 and cause of national pride, for it not only provided a security asset vis-à-vis nuclear India, but also for the Muslim *umma* vis-à-vis Jewish-Zionist Israel. The nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan, the father of Pakistan’s bomb and a mystified national hero, who in 2012 had announced to run for elections, provided a popularized feeling of “renewal” related to the invention of the “Muslim” or “Islamic Bomb” (The Friday Times, June 21, 1998).

In May 1998, after the successful nuclear test, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, when confirming the tests in Pakistani television, referred to Bhutto’s call for national sacrifice (BBC News, May 28, 1998):

“By the grace of god, our troops are imbued with the spirit of faith in God and are ready to face the enemy at every front with full determination. Our nuclear scientists and technicians too, by the grace of God, are endowed with divine capabilities and the strength of faith in God. Our nuclear explosions have eradicated the uncertain situation that had been created by the enemy’s explosions. The Pakistani nation pays tribute to these great sons of the nation. No enemy, God willing, can carry out cowardly nuclear attack on our country. ... We had deprived ourselves of our self-reliance by seeking loans from others. The indebted life had dissuaded us from labour and toil and habituated us to an artificial life. The enemy has awakened us by challenging our self-respect. Now we will not look at any outsider. We will depend on our own strength and will seek help only from God. Pakistan zindabad!”

Pakistan’s nuclear deterrence is couched in a doctrine of first use, hence an irrational doctrine which is solely directed against India. Quite a number of authors have pointed out its strong ideological impact and its supportive role in Pakistan’s nation-building process (Rais 2007: 54):

“A national consensus has emerged on nuclear deterrence that is close to historical consensus on Muslim nationalism on the subcontinent. The bomb is seen as the absolute weapon with which to defend the territoriality of the sub-continental Muslim nationalism that Pakistan as a nation-state embodies.”

Pakistan is believed to hold an arsenal of around 90 to 110 nuclear weapons with an annual spending of about 2.5 billion US dollars in development. This arsenal would outnumber India’s capacities, which are believed to hold an arsenal with 80 to 100 nuclear weapons. These numbers were estimated in a report published in *The Hindu* in April, 2012 (Dawn 2012). Despite an agreement signed in 1991, which determined India’s and Pakistan’s position to not pre-emptively attack the nuclear facilities of the other, nuclear mobilization still is one of the main obstacles of bilateral rapprochement and regional cooperation.

Recent statements by Israeli leaders, that an attack on Iran’s nuclear capabilities is only a matter of time, combined with Jerusalem’s campaigning for new sanctions on Iran to enforce new IAEA sanctions against Teheran by the international community, refer back to Prime Minister Menachem Begin’s decision to attack Iraq’s nuclear plant Usirag near Baghdad in 1981. After Saddam Hussain had asserted Iraq’s right of using nuclear material for peaceful and scientific purposes, on June 7, 1981, Begin gave the order for the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor Usirag, declaring that Israel would never accept the fact that a hostile force calling for its destruction holds the means to deliver such an operation. This decision was given priority over a pre-emptive response to Syria’s deployment of surface-to-air missiles in southern Lebanon, due to US pressure on the Israeli government and bad weather conditions on the ground. Oren writes: “Since Israel might pay a heavy political price for each of the two operations, the reactor should take precedence ...” (Oren 2011). Responding to enormous in-

ternational protest against Israel's disrespect of international law and the UN Security Council's condemnation of the operation in Resolution 487, Begin justified the operation as a "supreme moral act to save the Jewish State from another Holocaust" (Beres 1990: 22). Those arguments which evidence that during the early 1980s the Begin cabinet viewed an attack on the Kahuta reactor on Pakistani soil as justifiable on the basis of this doctrine, refers to Israeli intelligence gathered during that time. According to the Mossad, Muslim countries such as Libya had provided funds and uranium to Pakistan and in turn expected Islamabad to share its know-how, thus constituting the scenario of a nuclearized Arab belt around Israel. The Kahuta plan finally failed through India's refusal to grant landing permission to Israeli airplanes for fear of Pakistani retaliatory strikes against its own nuclear arsenal. Begin's first strike doctrine however, and eventually the Israeli conclusion that it had been strategically wrong and against Israel's strategic long-term interests not to interfere in Pakistan's nuclear armament, experienced a new Middle Eastern variant in 2007: on September 6, Israeli airplanes crossed into Syrian airspace and destroyed a complex of buildings in the desert near Deir az-Zur (Der Spiegel 2009). Contrary to Syria's statement, that the natural uranium found at the site came from Israeli missiles, this version of Operation Orchard had been challenged by the IDF command and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA 2008).

In sum, given the two countries' artificiality in terms of their founding history, and their self-claimed exceptionalism in light of their inner conflict dynamics, and externally, their key role in regional conflicts, that has attracted the focus of world politics for decades, the cultural and political-ideological rift between the two states can hardly be ignored. However, their exceptional non-relationship and issues of bilateral interest such as the status of Pakistan's Jews helped in fostering concrete yet unusual modes of interaction on the state level.

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The Bilateral Relations between Israel and Modern China (1948 – 2010)

1. Overview

As early as January 9, 1950, less than 100 days after the PRC (Peoples Republic of China) was founded, Israel recognized Communist China and then the two countries initiated steps for diplomatic approaches. Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and the foreign minister received a congratulation cable recognizing China signed by Moshe Sharett, the Israeli foreign minister then, and responded positively. Meanwhile, Israel dispatched its envoys to build close contacts with the Chinese embassies in Sweden, Hungary, Switzerland, Denmark and other countries, expressing the idea to establish diplomacy with China.

But unfortunately, the Korean War breaking out in June 1950 made the Israeli government decide to slow down the process. The Israeli foreign ministry ordered its envoy in Moscow as follows: “the government decides to build diplomacy with China in principle, but not act unless the situation is clear in the Far East region”. Actually, the war happening at this moment did not profit any of the two “lonely” countries and none of the Israeli leaders realized that this short order “jugulated” a “God-given” chance and for which they had to pay so much in the forthcoming decades: postponed normalization of the two would-be friendly countries’ relations for almost half a century. During the Korean War, though there had been no records proving the two new-born countries’ troops stood facing each other, Ben Gurion’s government did respond to the UN-American initiatives to fight against the communist troops, send medical sup-

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plies and even intend to send two IDF (Israel Defense Forces) battalions to support the UN army (Lindenstrauss 1994).

Moreover, no sooner had the Panmonjom Truce been signed than Israel reviewed its approach to China; Premier Zhou Enlai agreed to respond to the Israeli good wishes. He read in his official report to the congress, that “China is in a progress to build diplomacy with Afghanistan and Israel” (People’s Daily, September 26, 1954).

But, history begrudged offering any more easy chances for Israel to come closer to China. 27 former western colonies, newly independent African and Asian countries, held the Bandung Conference in 1955, in which Zhou Enlai headed the Chinese delegation and got to know Gamal Abdel Nasser and some other leaders of Arab countries; the diplomatic benthamism of both sides parked their mutual relation in a frozen area of 30 years. The Fez Conference in 1982 implicitly acknowledged the existence of Israel, the two countries restarted the approach; the Gulf war and the Madrid Peace conference made China realize its absence and little voice in international affairs; only on January 24, 1992, China and Israel established normal diplomatic ties (Du Xianju 2009).

2. Respective Incentives to Promote the Bilateral Relations (1949 – 1955)

The situations China and Israel were facing in the Far East and Middle East regions made the two countries eager to build up diplomatic ties. On the second day after Israel declared its independence, five neighbouring Arab countries tried to snuff out this calamitous and new country, while communist China had been suffering from sanctions and embargo by western powers headed by the United States from the start. Besides that, there were other reasons for Israel being eager to build diplomacy with China:

- (a) There had never been any kind of anti-Semitism in China deeply influenced by Confucianism and Buddhism and the two new-born countries had no interest in conflict but plentiful heritages of friendship and tolerance in history. The materialist initiative of Israel was that communists taking over power in mainland China had been de facto and China, the biggest country in Asia, would be a potential power in the world.
- (b) Israel needed to discuss the *Aliyah* (immigration) of the remaining Holocaust Jewish refugees and the return of the Sephardic properties in China, as owned by the Sassoons and Kadoories (famous wealthy Jewish families) in Shanghai. There was also a lot of wealth left by the Ashkenazi families in Harbin.

- (c) Many scholars believe that though Israel has never been a socialist country, many of its founders had been from the Soviet Union (hereafter USSR), with a natural preference or tendency to a socialist government. Israel never tried to recognize Taiwan which was being ruled by the former Chinese nationalists that declared to be the only legal representative of the Republic of China, but voted for Communist China's return to the UN as early as 1950.
- (d) Approved by the two governments, Golda Meir, Israeli ambassador to the USSR, and Wang Jiaxiang, Chinese ambassador, met in Moscow on June 20, 1950. On June 28, the Israeli cabinet discussed and decided to build diplomacy with China, but also to postpone the diplomacy because of the Korean War breaking out three days before. The Israeli government was in hesitation under US pressure to oppose its relations with China. "Only a free talk for technical matters, but not for formal negotiation, because Israel is not ready for diplomacy". And there were also two views inside the Israeli government on diplomacy with China: Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Abba Eban, Ruben Shiloa, and those key figures argued that "no real interests with China and diplomacy only harms Israeli relations with the States". It was the Israeli Pro-US policy, the negligence of a new but emerging power or "ge-strategic short-sight" that missed the critical moment of developing the bilateral relations with China. Fortunately, Israel realized its shortcoming on time, and kept making new attempts. In December 1953, Chinese ambassador Yao Zhongming met with Israeli ambassador David Ha-Cohen in Burma and soon a message was delivered to the Chinese foreign ministry: the Israeli government ordered Ha-Cohen to "keep the sincerest and friendliest relation with China and check the possibility to develop business and trade with our country". And soon after that the Israeli embassy in Finland also asked about the possibility of an Israeli business delegation to visit China, which was approved by Premier Zhou Enlai in August 1954. On January 27, 1955, the Israeli delegation headed by Ha-Cohen and Daniel Levine (Asian Department Head of Israeli Foreign Ministry) arrived in Beijing, they were authorized to "deal with all those issues except business and trade, including diplomacy" (Chronology of Chinese Foreign Ministry 2004).
- (e) Sometimes we have to admit that history is never bountiful enough to offer more than one chance. The Bandung Conference was a landmark for communist China to break the international blockade and valued greatly even today, but quite a negative event in the Israel-China diplomatic process, which happened on April 18, 1955. At this conference, Premier Zhou Enlai met with Gamal Abdel Nasser and got to know the strong hostility against Israel by many Arab countries. Based on the same colonial historic background, national experience and anti-imperialistic emotions,

China decided to side with the multiple Arab countries rather than a single and lonely Israel that it knew little up to then. Unfortunately, quite a few of the Islamic countries were not interested in building close ties with China then. China only built up the formal diplomatic relations respectively with Syria in 1956, Iraq in 1958, Iran in 1971, Lebanon in 1971, Jordan in 1977, and Saudi Arabia as late as 1990 (see Chronology of Chinese Foreign Ministry). China could not refuse a significant Arab “betrothal” gift when most western countries were still hostile against it. Gamal Abdel Nasser defended China at the cost of offending the USA and lost the American fund to build the Aswan Dam in late June 1956. That was why Daniel Levine, Israeli ambassador to the USSR suffered a cold reception when making a private tour to China on July 3, 1956. He could not understand how China changed its attitude so sharply on mutual diplomacy. Meeting with Zhang Hanfu, the deputy foreign minister in Near Eastern affairs, he was told that “Establishing diplomacy has not been mature under the present situation”.

Israel sensed China’s change, Daniel Levine cabled China twice for diplomacy, but was sorry to see there was no way to reverse China’s position on Middle Eastern policy. Premier Zhou Enlai, the highest decision maker on foreign affairs, expressed the Chinese final solution as: “Delay diplomacy with Israel but maintain trade relations”. Thus, the Bandung Conference resulted in a long period of stagnation in Sino-Israeli relations and the complete halt of all Sino-Israeli ties except some limited and sporadic contacts between scientists from both countries (Pan Guang 2010).

3. The Gap, Isolation and Hostility between the Two Countries (1956 – 1978)

After the Bandung Conference and in the following years from 1956 – 1965, China built diplomacy with Egypt, Syria, Yemen and ten other Arab countries. Israel was criticized and cursed a lot by China based on its diplomatic doctrine: “Five Principles of Peace and Coexistence on State to State Relations” initiated at the Bandung Conference. As a return to Nasser’s support to China, China supported Egypt for its war against Great Britain, France and Israel during the Suez Canal Crisis in October 1956, even quitted the last limited trade with Israel. On June 5, 1967, China condemned Israel for its aggression toward Syria and other Arab countries. “This is a crime against Arab people by American Imperialism and Israel as a tool, meanwhile a challenge to all the people in the world”, “Side with the Arab people and support their just war against the American and Israeli

aggression” (Goldstein 1999: 215). From the 1950s to the middle of the 1970s, all the Chinese media mentioned Israel as “Zionist Regime or Entity”, meanwhile the Chinese authorities and civilian societies avoided any contact or touch with Israel. An incredible incident or misplay conducted by a senior Chinese diplomat shocked Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and all the top Chinese leaders. On May 7, 1973, Zhou Boping, Chinese ambassador to Greece, went to participate in the local Israeli independent anniversary since he mistook it as Kuwait’s. His short presence surprised so many journalists and there had been a front page story both in the media locally and internationally, which was taken as a black model of very serious mistakes in the Chinese foreign affairs ministry (Regional Gazetteer 1978). There was no post delivery or communication between the two sides. The communist or socialist parties from both sides even lost contacts after some disputes caused by the different ideology (Shichor 1979).

All during the 1960s, China was on the brink of war with the USSR and had a decade-long tacit fighting with the US in Vietnam, but maintained its support of the radical Arab countries, including accepting the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) office in Beijing in 1965. And in the early 1970s, China looked for a wide international favour for its achievement of UN membership and the relevant seat on the Permanent Security Council, during which the majority of the Middle East Arab countries and even Israel voted beyond China’s expectation. Israel was tolerant to see that China still insisted on an anti-Israel stand and criticized Israel for “aggression, expansion and illegal occupation of the Arab’s territory”, but never mentioned anything against Jews and the Israeli people, just its regime.

It appears that Israel had already calculated that it simply could not open up direct diplomatic relations and business deals with China until the United States had already opened the door. As early as 1969, Yigal Allon, then Israel’s deputy prime minister, had forecast: “Perhaps, when a positive change occurs in the relations between the USA and China, some sort of change will occur in the Chinese attitude toward us.” Thus, after Richard Nixon, as US President, did open the door to China, Israel’s manoeuvring began and Shaul Eisenberg launched on the secret “official” deals that ultimately bridged up the gap between the two countries.

The early years of the 1970s saw China’s greatest diplomatic achievements. A new Grand Triangle structure came into being as the USA, USSR and China began to replace the Two Superpowers Monopoly paradigm. Except for the probing re-entry of the international community, China normalized its relations with the USA, Japan and many western countries. Chairman Mao Zedong’s “Three Worlds Theory” was approbated and accepted by many developing countries. With China’s importance continuing to grow, Israel tried once more to come near this biggest developing country. Something interesting is that the

Chinese foreign ministry never tried to locate Israel according to the “Three Worlds Theory”. To promote Sino-Israeli relations in the new era, the Israeli consulate was established in Hong Kong in 1973 and Emanuel Gelber was appointed as the General Consul. Unfortunately, the efforts made to establish diplomatic relations with China failed because the latter was preoccupied with his own domestic chaos and the Consulate General was closed, and has not been opened again until August 1985.

4. The Defrosting Era (1982 – 1991)

The disaster and calamity caused by the Cultural Revolution made the Chinese top leaders review and readjust their radical domestic and international policies. To retreat from Vietnam “gloriously and gracefully”, Richard Nixon’s visit to China in February 1972 broke the Ice Age between this oriental giant and the western countries. Well-known for their meticulous connotation, the Chinese leaders had no reason to ignore the historical matchmaker role by a globally famous Jew, Henry Kissinger. To strengthen ties with the western powers had been the major concern, and the Middle East was still beyond the Chinese sight because of the distance. China was not ready or would not be interested in that area. There was no Chinese presence at the Geneva Peace Conference with Egypt, Jordan and Israel, matched by USA in December 1973, and the “Fez Declaration” in 1982. Meanwhile China put an end to its radical policies and started reforms both in domestic and international affairs in 1978, all of which paved the way for another close contact between China and Israel.

During this period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, diverse scientific and technological relations between the two countries were accelerated. Cooperation in technological fields as well as social sciences and humanities significantly improved. Israeli scientists were invited to take part in international conferences held in China, although initially only Israeli nationals who were holding additional non-Israeli passports were invited; beginning in 1986 all Israeli passport holders were able to participate (Friedman 1985).

Restricted by COCOM (Coordinating Committee on Export Control) and the Wassenaar Arrangement, China had to seek to import advanced military technology from any possible channels. The Paris Air Show in 1975 and the 1978 Switzerland Military Show created a chance for China to find the value of Israel, especially the Israeli defence technologies that could help modernize its military forces. Israel is not a signature country of COCOM. In 1979, Shaul Eisenberg, an Israeli businessman and a Holocaust refugee in Shanghai during World War II, who had diverse commercial relations in East Asia, came up to perform this mission. Despite the official hostility between the two countries, he used his

private jet plane, known as Israel's secret alternative foreign ministry, and flew high-level Israelis directly to China for defence-related cooperation, which had been approved by then-Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and connived with US president Jimmy Carter for the purpose of "strengthening the counterbalance to Soviet military might" (Berton 2010). There had been some events among China and the US that could not be ignored: the two countries built diplomacy in January 1979 and were just at the beginning of the honeymoon. China's former patriarch, Deng Xiaoping, visited Washington for negotiating a punishment war in the Indo-China region against Vietnam, the closest ally and agent of the USSR, who was also planning an invasion of Afghanistan as an alleyway to the Indian Ocean. Unprecedentedly, Israel and China started a kind of cooperation in the Grand Triangle structure (USA-USSR-China) at the flood tide of the Cold War, forwardly or passively.

It seemed that the international situation would allow Israel to practise its good will on China, but China itself would not respond so actively, lessened by the precedent that Anwar Sadat and his country were sanctioned by the Arab League because of his compromise with Israel in 1978. In addition, a vast population of Muslims located mostly in north-western China has been another unavoidable consideration in the expressions of China's position concerning Middle Eastern events. According to the 2009 census, the Muslim population in China amounted to 21,667,000 people, fourth only after Han, Zhuang and Manchu nationalities.

In April 1986, after the vice president of Israel's national Academy of Science, Prof. Yehoshua Yurtner, participated in a scientific conference in Beijing, the Chinese authorities decided to allow Israeli scientists to freely participate in Chinese conferences in the future. Later that year the University of Beijing opened a class for Hebrew studies, which admitted few BA candidates every four years.

Chinese premier Zhao Ziyang stressed the "universal rights for independence and existence" when visiting Egypt in December 1982, which implicitly showed China's minor changes in attitude toward Israel, and consequently Shimon Perez responded that "we should knock on the door of China, a giant, the distance should not be a diplomatic block between the two peoples". From then on, China started a secret deal with Israel while still criticizing it on international levels. In December 1985, Chinese foreign minister Wu Xueqian mentioned the differences between the Israeli government and its people, approved some Israeli experts and scholars visiting China in individual ways.

Most importantly, another international event released the exterior misgiving of Chinese authorities to build diplomacy with Israel. In November and December 1988, Palestine authorities and Yasser Arafat declared a state, accepting the UN 224 and 338 Resolutions, implicitly recognizing the existence of Israel,

which was also approved by the Arab Summit. There was no reason for China, a world power, to hesitate on this issue anymore.

5. The Establishment of Diplomacy (1992)

Two foreign ministers met regularly since 1987, Qian Qichen met with Shimon Perez during the 43rd UN assembly in September 1988, which brought the diplomacy into the agenda of the two countries. To promote acts in this progress, China preferred to start in a field not so sensitive. In February 1990, the Israeli Academy of Science opened an office headed by Prof. Yoel Guilatt in Beijing, whose official role was to supervise and oversee scientists and promote the exchange of knowledge. The unofficial role was to function as a liaison office for both governments. An office of the China International Travel Service (CITS) was also opened in Tel Aviv for a similar purpose headed by the foreign ministry officials that brought the two countries to the eve of diplomatic establishment, but China was still not resolved to pass over the last threshold scrupled by the Arabs' reactions.

In December 1991, the Peace and Development Institute (the precursor of the Centre of Jewish and Israeli Studies) of the Shanghai Social Sciences Academy hosted the first "Memorial Forever – Holocaust 1939 – 1945" in China, sponsored by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. To dilute influence, the Chinese foreign ministry planned the event in the economic and financial Shanghai rather than in Beijing, the political capital city; simultaneously, a foreign coin collection exhibition was opened. Yang Fuchang, the deputy Chinese foreign minister in Middle Eastern affairs was present at the opening ceremony and handed over the menorah to his assistant too quickly to leave the journalists an instant for a photo.

What stimulated China to quit its "small steps but fast running" on approaching Israel was the Madrid Peace conference. Israel rejected China's role in the process definitely, doubting the fairness of "a judge that only keeps tie with one side of the conflict". Since many Arab countries were sitting at the same table with Israel, why could not China change its bigotry on Israel? In November 1991, a senior Israeli delegation visited China, and as a return, Yang Fuchang visited Israel, both happened before the formal diplomacy. Few of the Arab countries reacted strongly against this trend, and some even expressed their understanding on China's choice, and wished Sino-Israel relations to help them in the Middle East process.

In November 1991, the Defence Minister of Israel, Moshe Arens, paid a secret visit to China and is believed to have negotiated the establishment of ties and expansion of military cooperation. On January 24, 1992, the Foreign Minister of

Israel, David Levy, paid a four-day visit to Beijing, preceding the formal establishment of ties. On January 24, China and Israel signed the communiqué for diplomacy. And on January 28, China was invited to attend the Middle East Peace Conference in Moscow, where the Chinese mission chief Yang Fuchang said, “all the Arab territories should be returned, the sovereignty and security of all the states in the region should be respected and guaranteed”. This neutral and constructive stand has been in great accordance with the traditional Chinese foreign policies.

Since then, China has become Israel’s largest trading partner in Asia, the annual growth in trade has averaged 40 %, bilateral trade rose to USD 3 billion in 2005 and rose to USD 5 billion by 2008 and USD 10 billion by 2010 (Ackerman 2011). China has sought Israel’s expertise in solar energy, manufacturing robotics, irrigation, construction, agricultural and water management and desalination technologies to combat drought and water shortages.

On July 3, 2011, Israel and the Peoples Republic of China entered into an economic cooperation agreement that aimed to boost trade between the two countries. According to Eliran Elimelech, Israel’s commercial attaché in Beijing, the agreement was expected to deepen ties between Israeli and Chinese businessmen in the short term, and in the medium to long term, to improve trade conditions between the countries. To promote that, Israel built consulates general accordingly but unreciprocally in Shanghai and Guangzhou, the most developed delta regions in China. In January 2011, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics stated that Israeli exports to China grew an annual 95 percent in 2010 to USD 2 billion.

Israel and China began extensive military cooperation as early as in the 1980s, even though no formal diplomatic relations existed. Some estimate that Israel sold arms worth USD 4 billion to China in this period (Friedman 1985). China has looked to Israel for the advanced arms and technology it wants but cannot acquire from both the United States and Russia. Israel has now become China’s second-largest supplier of arms (following Russia). China has purchased a wide array of military equipment and technology, including communications satellites. The building of military cooperation and trade has softened China’s historic anti-Israeli policy over Palestine and Middle Eastern issues. China has become a vital market for Israel’s extensive military industries and arms manufacturers (BBC News, July 12, 2000.)

On May 25, 2011, Admiral Wu Shengli, the navy commander of the People’s Liberation Army of China, met with Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak and his Israeli counterpart, Rear Admiral Eliezer Marom, during an official visit to Israel (Opall-Rome 2011). On August 14, 2011, General Chen Bingde, Chief of the People’s Liberation Army General Staff Department, arrived for an official visit to Israel. This was the first visit by a Chinese military chief to the country. He

came as a guest of the Israeli Chief of Staff Benny Gantz, who received him with an honour guard in Tel Aviv (Williams 2011). The visit came after Defence Minister Ehud Barak's visit to China in June, the first visit of a defence minister to the country in a decade.

6. Present Situation

Since 1992, both China and Israel have been trying to redeem what was lost unnecessarily in the Isolation Era and push comprehensive ties in all the fields. But the year 2000 became the lowest point in the Sino-Israeli relations to date, as the Phalcon crisis, as it came to be known, caused political relations to cool down significantly. Israel's increasing defence cooperation with China has caused concern in the United States, which is the largest foreign supplier of military equipment and financial sponsor to Israel. Owing to concerns over the vital threat to the US Pacific fleet and the security of Taiwan, the US has pressured Israel against selling sophisticated equipment and technology to China (Asia Times 2004). Israel cancelled the sale to China of the Israeli-built Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) in 2000 in the wake of pressure from the US, which threatened to cut off USD 2.8 billion in yearly aid if the deal went through, which put Israel in a dilemma. Israel's hard but alternativeless decision drew condemnation from China, which stated that the cancellation would hurt bilateral ties. Maybe Israel never realized what a harm it did to China and its leaders without understanding the connotation of diplomatic symbolism by China. Pressed by domestic military leaders, former president Jiang Zemin even made a four-day visit to tiny Israel to promote the AWACS deal, but only had a short and courtesy visit with Yasser Arafat, China's traditional friend, in April 2000. Jiang thought he was cheated by Prime Minister Barak and refused to meet him again in the coming UN Millennium Summit. US intelligence also suspects that exported American Patriot missiles and Israel's indigenous Lavi jet and Harpy drones aircraft technology have been shared with China (Power and Interest News Report 2005).

What a historical irony! The USA goaded Israel to export weaponry to China during the Cold War era for the purpose of strategic balance, but punished Israel for the deal with the same country for its own tactical interests.

Meanwhile, Israel has been worrying about China's attitude toward the international stand against Iran's nuclear programme. In 2010, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1929, imposing a fourth round of sanctions against Iran for its nuclear enrichment programme. China ultimately supported this resolution, although initially, due to the strong Chinese-Iranian relationship, China meant to oppose the sanctions. According to the New York Times

(June 8, 2010) Israel lobbied for the sanctions by explaining to China the impact that any pre-emptive strike on Iran would have on the world oil supply, and hence on the Chinese economy (Jacobs 2010).

7. Conclusion

The gap, isolation and even the hostility between China and Israel were caused by the general atmosphere of the Cold War. The mutual diplomatic policies of the two countries were all in the interests of their own strategy frameworks: Israel-West-China and China-Arabs-Israel. China needs oil for its booming economy, but meanwhile does not want to ignore its demands of advanced technology and science to strengthen the manoeuvres of military means.

Over the years, the military export has become a major means for Israel to maintain its relations with the outside world. For example, military sales play a pivotal role in the close ties that Israel maintains with Turkey, India and other undeveloped countries. Hence, the harpy drones aircraft upgrading for China, to avoid US suspicion, was initially described as a “repair” rather than an “upgrade”. There should be no doubt that Israel would review its military deals with China whenever there is a possibility, based on the fact that the Jews all over the world thank China for the rare favour and shelter of their four diasporas in this country, where there has been not “one drop of anti-Semitism” originally. Israeli media admitted that US Undersecretary of Defence for Policy, Douglas Feith, the third most senior official in the Pentagon, demanded the resignation of Amos Yaron, the top bureaucrat in Israel’s Defence Ministry, over the Harpy drones aircraft controversy. However, having learned from the Phalcon controversy, China and Israel decided to resolve the dilemma quietly (A talk by an anonymous Israeli diplomat vacationing in Shanghai, China, 6 July 2005).

Both the national interests and the traditional values and philosophy of Confucius make China put great concern in the Middle East, which needs it to act as a Fair Player to keep a strategic balance. A universal justice and permanent friendship should be a more important choice by the two sides to fix the mutual relation.

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The Artful Deletion of Israeli / Jewish Presence in the Straits

1. Veiled, Silenced and Deleted Presence

The general public in the Straits has been made to believe that Israelis are not allowed to set foot on Indonesian soil, that in the late 1970s the US and not Israel had sold Skyhawk fighter planes to Indonesia, that the Mexicans who in the mid-1960s came to Singapore to assist as agricultural specialists, were indeed Mexicans and not Israelis. It has been made to believe that at the tsunami relief operations in Aceh, the entire world, except Israel, showed its humanitarian face and sent rescue and aid operations to the area. And, finally, that it is foremost Singapore's own effort that it has successfully positioned itself as a water hub, with its own waste water technology and as a centre for venture capital in telecommunications. Israel is absent in all these narratives and operations.

In the Straits, Singapore is viewed as an important node that Israel connects to. In 1968, an Israeli trade office was already opened there (Abadi 2004: 179). The strategic location of Singapore, and its non-Muslim population, make it an excellent hub from where new connections can be made into the wider Straits. So, what is going on here? Have since then all of Israel's efforts been without result? It seems that if there was any Israeli or Jewish corporeal presence, that presence was veiled, ignored, and deemed as historically irrelevant or insignificant. Israeli or Jewish presence in the Straits seems, so to speak, "artfully deleted" (Law 2004: 88).

This art of deletion, however, is never innocent. When irrelevance or insignificance is used as an appreciation or label, one might wonder whether or not there are hidden interests involved. This asks for an extension of the range of visibility and therefore in the methods of detection. What will be done in this

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article is to make visible and present what in the Straits is kept in the dark. Dealing with this complexity of Jewish and Israeli mobilities, the focus – inevitably – is on interconnections and networks. Deletion of Israel and the Jews in one part of the Straits and their emergence in another part is interrelated.

The Straits as the regional spatial topology offers possibilities to go beyond the strict demarcation of Indonesian, Malaysian and Singaporean national borders when acknowledging Israeli or Jewish presence. The attention is re-directed to the processes that in time and space have made them disappear and / or reappear again. By making manifest Israel's oscillations in the Straits between presence and absence a new networked reality is crafted. A reality in which authority of presence depends on that which cannot be made present – that which is absent. Doing so, it becomes a resource to question the presumed Straits non-Israeli or Straits non-Jewish reality which is potentially dangerous. This unquestioned absence lacks the protection that an acknowledged corporeal presence – if only as a stranger would have.

Globalization has produced new mobility regimes in which it is becoming harder to determine who is a stranger and who is not. Simmel's stranger here is not the wanderer any longer, "who comes today but will leave tomorrow", but rather the person "who comes today and stays tomorrow" (Simmel 1950). Strangers in these new regimes do not operate any longer through visible presence at borders and through the policing of bounded spaces. The "stranger", in this sense, is facing an expansive set of both physical, psychological, and sociological limitations and opportunities. His operational space is, though multilayered, hard to detect, vague and has ephemeral gestures of openness and closure. If detectable, it will only be at the most minute aspects of social interaction (Shamir 2005: 215). This asks for a method that in its scope goes beyond the way it has traditionally been helpful to understand the world as.

In its aim to find clarity by proclaiming precision traditional method is said to deny the fluidity, ambiguity, elusiveness, and multiplicity of today's interconnected and mobile world (Alvesson / Sköldbberg 2009; Büscher / Urry 2009; Kamsma 2010; Law 2004; Law / Urry 2004; Urry 2000; Urry 2005). An alternative policy is suggested that aims at a re-direction of the idea what methods should be capable of. Methods need an open eye allowing incompleteness, accepting their incompetence, to offer the tools to understand the world. The aim in that re-direction then would be to detect limits and to acknowledge that methods help to re-shape the world by allowing new realities to appear. In Actor-Network Theory (ANT) this has been put forward as "method assemblage" (Law 2004: 83 – 84; Kamsma 2010: 68). Method assemblage must be seen as a combination of a reality detector and a reality amplifier. This alternative policy, as one of the founding fathers of ANT, Law (2004: 84) has put it, points to "out-there realities reflected in in-here statements allowing an endless ramification of processes and

contexts ‘out there’ that are both necessary to what is ‘in here’ but what remains invisible, or veiled to it”.

What is made manifest involves a relevant absence and an “othered” absence. Allowing those absences that do not seem to fit to manifest themselves softens and plays with the boundaries between presence and absence. The Skyhawk fighter planes, the Mexicans, and the tsunami relief operations are “scandals” that surround a hidden Israeli presence in the Straits. Vertex and NEWater are business ventures in which Israelis are involved, but whose involvement is kept away from visibility. Deletions are made manifest and are put in a wider context and amplify what has been labelled as the Straits Jewish Diasporascape. Doing so, this paper intends to bring forward a new Israeli / Jewish-inhabited reality in which the presence of both Israel and the Jews will be made manifest.

This is, next to an epistemological, also an ontological choice. What has been left unnoticed, or what has been kept in the dark, will be made present because the author thinks it is important to make it present, thereby enacting an alternative truth and allowing ontological politics². To do so, the paper focuses on the networks and interconnections that keep Israeli / Jewish presence latently, if not overtly, present only to re-emerge periodically. In this sense, the discontinuity of Israeli / Jewish presence in the Straits can be read as a myth, and both the deleting, and the making present again of Israel / the Jews as a creative and imaginative act.

With the design and depiction of a Straits Jewish Diasporascape, this paper, following ANT and complexity theory principles (Cilliers 2005; Law 2004; Law / Urry 2004; Urry 2000; Urry 2007), delivers and opens up a potential for alternative understanding. This complexity perspective is inextricably linked with network research in which mobilities, as a global phenomenon, are said to restructure the social (Urry 2000; van Loon 2006). This “mobilities turn” (Büscher / Urry 2009: 100) brings new, more nomadic societies into scientific focus, as through their networks they are thought to be better equipped to deal with the demands of globalization. This globally dispersed and (in the Straits) glocally enacted Israeli / Jewish diaspora community is such a society. Following complexity principles, this study of Israeli / Jewish diasporic mobilities focuses on networks that are embedded in an intricate design of spatial topologies and in different temporalities that leave room, important for this paper, for assessing new configurations of presence. Thus, both in the context of popular imagining

2 I was puzzled by the seemingly casual way in which anti-Semitism was gaining ground in the Muslim countries in Southeast Asia. I thought it dangerous to let the popular imaging of Jews and the anti-Semitic writings in the Straits go uncontested. I thought that the way in which the scientific community had been dealing with this matter was inadequate. It concerned me that the corporeal Jews had been “allegorized away” in the Straits. The link with the Jews’ othering capacity had been too easily made, and it seemed free of obligations.

of Israelis / Jews in the Straits and Israel's overtures towards a wider engagement with Asia, this paper traces the meanders along the course of Israeli / Jewish presence in the Straits, as it has flowed through dramatic changes in the Straits' socio-political landscape.

2. Skyhawk Fighter Planes

Suharto's Indonesian New Order regime was more sympathetic to Israel than the outside world was allowed to know. When Arafat and Rabin, in September 1993, signed a peace agreement the situation seemed less strenuous. For a moment, it was less of a taboo to discuss ties between the two nation states. But still demonstrations followed when in October 1993, unofficially and unannounced, Israel's president Rabin visited Suharto at his residency in Jakarta. To appease the Islamist hard-liners Suharto had to stress that there were no beginnings of bilateral talks to establish diplomatic ties. Suharto did meet with Rabin as the chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and not as the president of Indonesia. When commotions flared up, Suharto repeatedly had to give reassurance that Indonesia officially supported the Arab "struggle" against "Israeli aggression". And that Israel must withdraw "from conquered Arab territories" and reinstate the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people" (Yegar 2006: 143 – 144; Leifer 1989: 64).³

Between Suharto's Indonesia and Israel there were more connections than the regime was willing to bring out in the open. There was an extensive military cooperation between Israel and Indonesia (Abadi 2004: 373).⁴ Singapore was involved as the partner that had to disguise this tricky Israeli involvement in Indonesia's arms supply. For instance, in 1979 Israel had secretly sold 28

3 On the other hand, because of restrictions Suharto placed on Islamic political activity, Suharto first did not allow the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) to open an office in Jakarta. It is argued that the PLO was not allowed to open an office in Jakarta because Suharto did not want his activities to be monitored by the Palestinians. Malaysia already earlier in 1981 – coinciding with Mahathir becoming Prime Minister – granted the PLO full diplomatic status. Earlier, already in 1969, Al-Fatah was given permission to open an office in Kuala Lumpur. In 1974 it became the office of the PLO. When in the late 1980s Suharto's attitude towards Muslim groups changed, Suharto officially recognized the State of Palestine (November 16, 1988) and allowed the opening of a Palestinian Embassy in Jakarta (inauguration of the Embassy of the State of Palestine on October 19, 1989).

4 By the early 1980s Israel and Indonesia had expanded their contacts to the military field. A CIA report disclosed that the Mossad maintained a station in Jakarta under a commercial cover. In spring 1980, it was disclosed that Israel had numerous military contacts with Indonesia (Abadi 2004: 373).

Skyhawks and 11 Bell-205 planes to Indonesia.⁵ That operation was called Operation Alpha. Indonesia had turned to the US to buy fighter aircrafts. The fighters should be operational within a short period of time. At that time, only the US could deliver some F-5 Tiger's. Indonesian intelligence information revealed that Israel was changing their fleet, and that their A-4E Skyhawks were for sale. Israel and Indonesia agreed on the sale. The transactions were made in the most secretive way possible. Technicians and pilots were told they were going to the US. But in reality they were travelling to Israel. Singapore was their first stop. In Singapore they were taken to the – at that time – most luxurious hotel in town, the Shangri-la hotel. They were invited for dinner by General Benny Murdani⁶ of the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia). Murdani told them that they were on a secret mission. The ones who had doubts and would like to step back still could do that. But the message was: once in, there was no way out anymore. Their passports were taken and they received a SPLP.⁷ Should the mission fail, Indonesia would never admit that they were Indonesian citizens. From Singapore they went to Frankfurt, where they changed planes to Tel Aviv. In Israel, they received the necessary training and in 1980, they received their brevet. The brevet however was immediately burned by their accompanying BAIS-ABRI (Armed Forces Strategic Intelligence Agency) officer.⁸ After their training in Israel they went to the US on a two-week tour in the country. Tourist pictures were taken in New York and were sent to their families in Indonesia to provide evidence that they had been in the US and to make sure that every Israeli connection was covered up.⁹ Indonesia's links with Israel were totally deleted.

5 These are the numbers given in Yegar (2006: 144). In Abadi (2004: 374) other numbers are given. Abadi speaks of 16 Skyhawk aircrafts and 16 A4 fighters.

6 The Christian defence chief Benny (L.B.) Murdani became commander of Indonesia's armed forces in 1983. Later, in 1988 until 1993, he became the minister of defence. L.B. Murdani was responsible for the covert operations with Israel (Leifer 1994: 6). His role in these operations turned against him when he fell out of grace with Suharto and when Islamists fabricated an alleged Israeli Mossad-Christian conspiracy to topple Suharto's government from power (Paris 1996).

7 SPLP (Surat Perintah Laksana Paspor) is a travel document that replaces a passport given at Indonesian embassies when one's passport has been lost or damaged.

8 BAIS (Badan Inteligen Strategis) Strategic Intelligence Agency. ABRI (Angkatan Bersenjata Republic Indonesia) The Indonesian army.

9 The Skyhawk sale was revealed in two articles in the Indonesian newspaper Suara Karya (June 12, 2001; June 13, 2001). A report from Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) cites from the magazine "The Middle East Military Balance" that in 1996 Indonesia bought unmanned aerial vehicles from Israel. <http://www.caat.org.uk/publications/countries/israel-1002.php> (March 6, 2008).

3. Mexicans

On their military relationship both Singapore and Israel had imposed a total blackout. It is only in 2004 that the blackout on the story about Israeli military presence in Singapore was lifted from the Israeli side. That was via an article in the Haaretz (July 16, 2004) newspaper. It was kept a secret for thirty-five years that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had built up the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).¹⁰ The SAF utilized Israeli doctrine, training methods, and equipment (Lee Kin Lan 2001). The focus, in the early years of the cooperation, was on military tactical training and military strategic issues. The cooperation between the two countries has nowadays been expanded in many other new fields as well.¹¹

When Singapore declared its independence Israel was the most pro-active in answering to Singapore's call for assistance. On Christmas Eve 1965, the first of many Israeli military delegations that have visited Singapore paid their call.¹² The mission was led by Colonel Yaakov Elazari. Singapore and Israel agreed on stationing six Israeli experts to design their Total Defense Doctrine. To disguise their presence, these first advisors that came to Singapore were called "Mexican agricultural advisers". Traces of Israeli presence were deleted. Israel supplied Singapore with used military hardware and helped in setting up producing arms. In addition, Singapore became Israel's main Mossad Station (Abadi 2004: 179).

In Singapore in 2000, Lee Kuan Yew already disclosed the secret that the Israel Defense Force had helped to establish the Singaporean Army and that the Mexicans in reality were Israeli military working on this secretive project. This project, the delegations, and the stationing of advisors, laid the foundations of a continuing presence of Israelis in the region.

New security issues became relevant for a prolonged Singaporean-Israeli cooperation – for instance, in the civil defence industries. The suicide bombings created new worries. How to create national resilience with respect to suicide attacks? And how to monitor the developments of Islam in the Far East in comparison with those in the Middle East? For Singapore, Israel again is the example. In Israel, life goes on as usual within two hours after a bombing.¹³ That

10 In his memoirs Lee Kuan Yew (2000: 31) for the first time officially admitted the arrival of the Mexicans who – in Lee's words – "looked swarthy enough" to make plausible that they indeed were Mexicans.

11 Interview with Kwa Chong Guan, Institute for Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (February 8, 2005). Kwa Chong Guan is former head of SAF and nephew of Lee Kuan Yew. He hinted that he travelled to Israel several times when Israel was building up Singapore's defence system.

12 This Israeli mission was headed by then colonel Yaakov Elazari. Later he was promoted to brigadier general. When he left the army he became a consultant to the Singaporean Army.

13 Kwa Chong Guan indicated that in circles of Singaporean policy makers basically three theoretical approaches are used in formulating strategies for civil defence resilience. First, a

resilience makes Israel an interesting partner for developing modern (civil) defence strategies. Not least because links have been developed that made cooperation a matter of course. "There is definitely a new generation coming, paved by old generation generals, young staff bringing new ideas, technological knowledge about the issues that matter in the modern days, like civil defence and terrorism counter measures".¹⁴

4. Singapore's New Economy

The Singaporean government is actively involved in its market economy; approximately two thirds of its economic activity is related to the government.¹⁵ Singapore policy encourages investment in high-tech and technological research and development. Cooperation in the area of research and development is in joint ventures with Singaporean government linked companies (GLCs).¹⁶ In Israel it is revealed that the transferring of military technological know-how from defence to the civilian sector is substantial. Young Israelis who leave the army's intelligence service put their expertise to use and go to work in research centres of multinational defence industries. Even more Israelis set up their own companies in fields that relate to the intelligence projects that they were working on while under arms (The Straits Times Interactive, December 18, 2006). Not surprisingly, almost 35 % of the Israeli entrepreneurs in defence industrialization were trained in R&D (research and development) during their military services and 57 % of them were officers in the Israel Defense Forces. In Singapore, there is little evidence that SAF (Singapore Armed Forces) military-to-civilian cross-overs have resulted in commercial start-ups. Despite the new-economy rhetoric in Singapore, cross-overs are mostly in managerial or technocratic fields, and not really in the sectors that relate to the development of a knowledge based and new technology driven "new economy" (Kuah /

more religious Weberian approach, second a historical approach, and third a sociological approach that looks at tensions within Muslim society. Interview with Kwa Chong Guan, Singapore (February 8, 2005).

14 Interview with Kwa Chong Guan, Singapore (February 8, 2005).

15 A wide range of influential officials and family members of the Lee Kuan Yew dynasty are closely involved in these GLC (Government Related Companies) businesses. They include relatives of senior government leaders, former senior government leaders, former senior military commanders, current senior government officials and current and former ruling party politicians. These links are regularly criticized as collusive domestic networks that hinder emerging competitive markets. But now Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has declared that GLCs would continue to be "one of the thrusts forward" for the Singapore economy. See for an extensive list: http://www.sfdonline.org/LinkPages/Linkfolders/02Pf/glc_100202.html#former_senior_mil (November 15, 2006).

16 That, however, is classified material.

Loo 2004: 4; Kai Wen Wong / Bunnell 2006; Menkhoff et al. 2005). Singapore's new economy is "imported" from countries like Israel or from other "new economy" embracing countries and implemented via these joint ventures; for instance via an organization like SIIRD (Singapore-Israel Industrial R&D Foundation) that yearly subsidizes joint industrial R&D projects between Israeli and Singaporean companies.¹⁷

4.1. Jeremy Lint Lintechnologies

Jeremy Lint¹⁸, a long-termer in Singapore, is such an Israeli Mexican entrepreneur who is putting his former military knowledge to use in his new ventures in the Straits region. He left the service in 1983 where he had a military education in R&D. Jeremy Lint has been in Singapore on and off since 1986. During service there usually is much lobbying for a job after service.¹⁹ He started working for a company called Tadiran, an international company specialized in defence systems. Later he moved to another company, Efrat, specialized in telecommunication technology.²⁰ He became vice-president and was responsible for the international marketing in the Pacific Rim-Asia region. In 1999, he stopped at Efrat and started his own company, Lintechnologies. Jeremy Lint estimates the number of Israelis living in Singapore at 500 to 600 of which 20 % stay (semi-)permanently.²¹ Social life amongst Israelis is very transient. Once you get to know a person, he or she already moves. But since 1995 – 1996, Jeremy observed a change. The number of Israelis who choose to stay for longer periods of time grows. He estimates that 50 % of the Israeli companies in Singapore are in high-tech, in security or in biotechnology. They operate internationally with

17 SIIRD was founded in 1997 and in 2004 its budget was increased to US\$ 3 million a year (News from Israel, July 2004), <http://www.israelbiz.org.sg/new.html> (February 1, 2013).

18 Interview with Jeremy Lint (pseudonym) at Great World City Mall (April 18, 2004; June 5, 2005). Lint was born in Poland (1948) and left together with his parents – both Holocaust survivors – in 1950 for Israel. He studied Electronics and Engineering at Technion in Haifa and continued his education in the military service. In the 1970s he was stationed in Dallas. His highest rank was colonel in the R&D department.

19 Generally in Israel the military retire from service at the age of 40 – 45. That is too young to do nothing. Besides that the pension is not high enough to lead a life of leisure.

20 Comverse Technology Inc. develops and markets telecommunication software.

21 These 20 % are mostly married to a local Singaporean. The others usually don't stay long. Generally they don't have a contract that extends a period of more than two years. At the time Lint came to Singapore the group of Israelis was not that big yet. He estimates the number at 150 persons. Now already there are subgroups and it is well possible that you run into someone who has been in Singapore for more than two years without meeting him or her before.

branches in Europe and the US.²² The general attitude in Singapore towards the Israelis is positive and respectful. In Singapore, officials deal directly with foreigners. There is no need for middlemen to deal with officials. Singapore scores high on the corruption index. That is positive for the trust factor, “the fifth T” which must attract investments.²³ Singapore has become an attractive city to organize and operate one’s business.

Singapore’s infrastructure is well suited for applying emerging communications technologies. In a networked global market, Singapore is considered an early adopter of new communication technologies coming from innovators like Israel. Jeremy Lint’s company Lintechnologies is such an innovator. Lintechnologies sells software that helps to collect, store and sift through voice, video, fax, e-mail, internet and data transmissions for security purposes. Data is sifted from a steadily increasing stream of information and communication contact moments and checked for whether or not there is possible insubordinate – terrorist – material. Differently said, raw data is turned into actionable intelligence. With this technology, Singapore wants to monitor possible terrorist activities. Jeremy claimed that Singapore was already working five years without result on the development of this type of technology. He has done the job in half a year to a year. “They don’t dare to use their creativity, they just repeat what has been done and do not dare to take risks and try something new”.²⁴ The Singaporean government is a customer of Jeremy Lint. He therefore has to follow supply conditions to Indonesia and Malaysia. But as he stated, these are less strict than, for instance, in Israel. In Israel it is hard, for security reasons, to sell this type of technology. Jeremy does business in Indonesia as well. There were no problems with his Israeli citizenship as he still holds a (“Mexican”) Polish passport.

22 Because of their action radius they would never project their companies as Israel-based. Next to these multinational operating companies there is a group of Israelis in Singapore engaged in the older trades, such as the diamond trade and companies that are in education.

23 Singapore’s strategic paradigm to remake Singapore into “a land of opportunity” has embraced Richard Florida’s ideas about how to make a city attractive for investors. Florida deemed the three T’s – Talent, Technology and Tolerance – as necessary for attracting what he calls “the creative class”. Singapore has added two extra T’s – Trade and Trust (Tan Tay Keong 2005). Hong Kong has always been a competitor, but because of the Chinese take-over there initially has been some holding back. Of course with booming Shanghai and supposedly plenty of business opportunities this attitude towards China might have changed since the interviews were held (2004 – 2005). Two other Asia-Pacific Rim regional Jewish hubs are Sydney and Melbourne.

24 Interview with Oliver Stern at Great World City Mall (April 18, 2004; June 5, 2005).

4.2. Oliver Stern's NEWater

Another Mexican Israeli company is Aguatic, the company Oliver Stern is working for. Aguatic (established in 1986) is in filtration. Singapore is an interesting market for filtration companies like Aguatic. Singapore still has to rely on its neighbour Malaysia for its water supply. That dependency on Malay fresh water is a thorn in the flesh of Singapore's government officials. Already in 1927 there was a water supply agreement with Johor. Malaysia and Singapore still have a number of contracts that allow Singapore to receive water from Malaysia. One contract expired in 2011. In that agreement Singapore is allowed to draw up to around 400 million litres a day. Another contract, set up in 1962, gave Singapore the right to draw up to around 1,100 million litres a day from the Johor River.²⁵ Singapore's aim is to be completely self-sufficient by the year 2061 when another water supply agreement with Malaysia expires.

Singapore and Malaysia have been disputing over price agreements that were made over water even before the two countries separated in 1965. Malaysia has taken full advantage of water as a strategic weapon. When bilateral relations between the two countries deteriorated, for instance in the Herzog crisis, there were calls to stop the water supply. That makes it not surprising that Singapore has proven to be an early adopter of new water technology and that Singapore aspires to become a regional water hub. They have actively stimulated the development and appliance of new and sustainable technology to solve their water dependency. Again, Israel is one of the providers of the needed technology. Oliver's company Aguatic has been working in a diverse range of water projects in the private sector, but also for the Singaporean government. "Everybody in Singapore who is in the water business knows us".²⁶ One of these projects Oliver claims to have been involved in is NEWater. Aguatic was supplier of filters and sub-contractor of the total plant that Hyflux had developed in Bedok. NEWater is the reclaimed water brand of Singapore's national water agency, the Public Utilities Board (PUB), an ambitious programme to develop water plants in public private partnership.

The NEWater factory recovers water for industrial applications and for drinking from secondary treated sewage effluent. Different modern techniques are applied to filter the water. Not without pride Singapore's Prime Minister Goh Chok in 2002 showed a bottle of NEWater. "We now have our own water". With these words he launched a publicity campaign to create awareness about Singapore's need to become self-sufficient in water supply. At the same time across

25 The exact number is 86 million gallons and 250 million gallons (one gallon equals 4.55 liter) (Tan 1997:16).

26 Interview with Oliver Stern (May 3, 2005).

the border in Johor, the launch of NEWater was looked at with Argus' eyes. Chief Minister Abdul Ghani Othman warned the Malay to watch out for Singapore's water. "We from Malaysia should know that when we go to Singapore one day and drink coffee, the water comes from behind their kitchens or washrooms".²⁷

The water that was used for NEWater is reclaimed water. The technology that is put to use in NEWater basically consists of a membrane technology whereby the water is treated by micro filtration, reversed osmosis and ultra violet light (Weerstra-De Boer 2005). The Singaporean government aims at different technologies to keep pace with the ever-increasing demand for water. Desalination is another technology that is promising and that is applied, but still is costly. Of course with desalination there potentially is an inexhaustible source of water. The other already applied technology is to collect the (rain) water in Singapore at a wider scale. There is the Marina barrage that collects all the water from Singaporean rivers. In combination with the efforts to raise the public awareness in Singapore to use water more diligently, the application of these technologies has to minimize the dependency of the import of water from across the border. "I think they are going to be ready in 2061, when the contract with Malaysia finishes, they are working hard on it".²⁸

Most of the glory has gone to Hyflux, a Singaporean based company, and to the Public Utilities Board (PUB), the commissioner of the NEWater project. For Aguatic the high media coverage of NEWater was also positive. They now can tell that they were involved as supplier and subcontractor. Because Hyflux seemed a promising enterprise Temasek Holdings, the investment arm of the Singaporean Government, had invested Singapore \$ 3.3 billion in their enterprise. They raised their stake in Hyflux to 5 % in 2003.²⁹ Hyflux has leaned heavily on technology that was developed in Israel. Hyflux had in 1992 obtained the distribution rights from membrane products that were developed at Kiryat Weizman, the high-tech incubator of the Weizman Institute of Science at Rekovot in Israel. Through these distribution rights, they acquired the knowledge to install the membranes and membrane filtration technology for other processes as well.³⁰ Singapore Stock Exchange (SGX)-listed, Hyflux now is the showpiece of Singapore's aim to be-

27 LA Times (August 18, 2002), originally posted at <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-fg-water18aug18.story?coll=la%2Dhome%2Dtoday%2Dtimes>. See also Reuters (February 24, 2003), originally posted at: <http://www.planetark.org/dailynewsstory.cfm/newsid/19911/story.htm>, and *Associated Press* (September 26, 2002), originally posted at http://www.enn.com/news/wire-stories/2002/09/09262002/ap_48538.asp.

28 Interview with Oliver Stern (May 3, 2005).

29 [Http://www.hyflux.com](http://www.hyflux.com).

30 It is not clear what price they paid to buy the technology from Kiryat Weizman. The way it is mentioned on the Hyflux website leaves it open for speculation whether or not a (fair) price has been paid. Kiryat Weizman stopped delivering their membrane filtration technology in 1998.

come a water hub. After plants in Bedok, Seletar, the desalinization SingSpring plant and the plant at Chestnut Avenue, the fifth major PUB plant is going to be built at Changi.³¹ Hyflux won two bids. USFilter and Keppel (another GLC; government linked company), got the other two.³²

Aguatic has five subsidiaries and is active in the Americas, Singapore, France, Germany, and in China. At first, the Asian regional subsidiary was in Australia. When the possibilities in the Far East became more important the subsidiary was relocated.³³ Singapore was chosen as the company's hub in the Asia-Pacific Rim with Oliver Stern as its manager.³⁴ Aguatic is for the greatest part owned by a *kibbutz* (67 %). *Kibbutzim* in Israel have expertise in finding solutions for the shortage of water for their agricultural activities. In the older days these agricultural activities were sufficient to provide *kibbutz* members with a means of living. Nowadays *kibbutzim* in Israel have to find extra sources of income. They cannot live from agriculture alone. They have set up companies and started to export knowledge. Aguatic, from the *Aguat kibbutz*, has been in Singapore since 1993. Aguatic is involved in waste water projects, but Aguatic is also taking care of the irrigation of golf courses; it provides filtration of sea water on off-shore platforms, and supplies water for semi-conductor companies. Their main markets are Korea, Japan and Singapore.

When Singapore is mentioned as a main market, it should be taken into account that this main market also includes Indonesia and Malaysia. However, officially Aguatic is an Israeli company and cannot do business in Malaysia and Indonesia. As an Israeli citizen the problem for Oliver is that he only holds an Israeli passport which makes his action radius in the Straits rather limited.³⁵ For business, Oliver regularly travels to other Southeast Asian destinations, but Indonesia and Malaysia are no-go areas.³⁶ So how to do business there? Again, the links with Israel are deleted. Aguatic works with a Singaporean subsidiary company FCS (Filtration Control Systems) that officially takes care of the

31 Because of Temasek's stake in Hyflux there is a conflict of interest when awarding calls for the production of these plants. Singaporean government is competing with private organizations here.

32 Interview with Oliver Stern (May 3, 2005). When the research took place, there was no bid yet for the Changi plant.

33 What helped to choose Singapore to relocate, was that the Australian subsidiary at that time was married to a Singaporean woman.

34 Oliver is an engineer graduated at Technion and specialized in water works. Before, he had worked in Jamaica for the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the water business. Oliver started working in Singapore in 1999. He is the representative in the Southeast Asian region and has been involved in a diverse range of water works.

35 Not to get too claustrophobic, the family at least two times a year goes to other places like Thailand and Myanmar for leisure.

36 During the interviews however, he indicated that he was not unfamiliar with the situation in these two Muslim countries and he hinted that he has been in Jakarta and Malaysia.

business in Indonesia and Malaysia. “People know, with internet now it is bull-shit, in the past it worked, but you know they keep one eye closed, we have a Singaporean guy taking care of it, not an Israeli guy, we have our guys from Malaysia, coming for a meeting here, not in Malaysia, instead meeting here instead of me going there, and we take all the ‘made in Israel’ from all our products or catalogues before we send it, all the marks. That’s it, very easy. We send it from Israel to Singapore and then from Singapore to Malaysia or Indonesia, not direct”³⁷.

These regulations are of course hampering the business, but according to Oliver it has not been critical. Indonesia and Malaysia are important growing markets for Aguatic. His stay in Singapore was successful. Since Oliver became manager the turnover went up considerably. In 1997, because of the crisis, there was stagnation and they were even losing money, but the parent company took its losses and decided to stay. Since 2000, Aguatic is growing again. In each market there is progress, especially Korea. A good agent and good support of customers are important. They have different projects in Indonesia. Power plants, desalination, irrigation. The future in Indonesia seems bright. Indonesia’s last President Yudhoyono has the support of the farmers. He had promised that when he would come to power the agricultural sector would receive extra attention.

4.3. Vertex Venture Capital³⁸

To finance all these high-tech new economy like initiatives venture capital is an important resource. Again Israel is important here. Temasek Holdings plays a dominant role in Singaporean investment policies. As said there are investments in the high-tech market via joint ventures between Israel and Singapore. Vertex

37 Interview with Oliver Stern (May 3, 2005).

38 Venture capitalists (and private equity) purchase an equity stake in a venture they want to fund. Venture capital is not the same as loans. Venture capitalists succeed when the increased value of their equities in a firm grows. Venture capitalists actively monitor, assist, and even intervene, for instance by demanding seats on the board of directors in order to increase the chances for company survival and rapid growth. Their experience and connections are put to use to make the most out of their investments. The aim is either bankruptcy, merger, or an initial public stock offering. Venture capitalists are only temporary investors until the investment is liquidated. A firm is just a product that needs to be sold as profitably as possible. These venture capitalists are criticized because of their ruthlessness when it comes to sanitize a company or when nationalisms in national industries are eradicated. Governmental action to save industries from being denationalized is an extra risk for venture capitalists. They thrive best in situations of *laissez faire* or of course, in situations where governments explicitly stimulate venture capital as an efficient method for commercializing innovations (Kenney / Han / Tanaka 2004: 52 – 83).

Venture Capital is an important player in international venture capital. Vertex is headquartered in Tel Aviv and has offices in the UK, USA, Singapore and Japan. Vertex invests in Israeli and Israel-related companies at all stages of development. That is, mainly in the fields of information networking, communications, enterprise software and other emerging technologies.³⁹ Vertex Venture Capital is the 51 % Singapore-owned venture capital arm of Vertex Venture Holdings Ltd., set up in 1996. Vertex Venture Holdings is set up by the multi-billion dollar Singapore government related Temasek Holdings, which is part of the Singapore Technologies (ST) conglomerate. ST's core business is to invest in both early-stage and expansion-stage technology companies in the United States, Europe, Israel and Asia.

In Singapore, Vertex has established a strategically tight and close network with government related organizations in Singapore. In these links Israel has played and still plays a substantial role. Israel's enduring presence in Singapore – that started when the Israeli Defense Forces were building up Singapore's Armed Forces – has proved to be lucrative. As Singaporean Ambassador Yitzak Shoham put it “these personal relations, most of them were in the army or defence forces, they retired and moved in to the private sector or the public sector, in time they developed a good quality of trade, and investments, research, industrial and technological, for civilian application”.⁴⁰ Although Israeli companies traditionally have looked westwards in the direction of the US and have tended to neglect the market potential in Asia, nowadays the awareness has grown that today Asia and the Pacific Rim represent a market that is considerably larger than that of the US.⁴¹ Besides that it took time to create the links for an enduring and more widespread presence in the region.

Teo Ming Kian, Chairman of the National Science and Technology Board (NSTB), a statutory board under the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Singapore, claims that, “Israel is a hotbed of new technologies”,⁴² and that Israel has

39 [Http://www.vertexisrael.co.il](http://www.vertexisrael.co.il).

40 Interview with Israeli Ambassador to Singapore, Itzhak Shoham (June 28, 2005).

41 See Abadi 2004. The intention in the beginning was to become part of the Asian family. Moshe Sharett, a Minister of Foreign Affairs had an extensive visit (1956) to the East from Turkey to Iran and all the way to China and met with leaders like Tunku and Lee Kuan Yew. The opposition of Arab countries made it less appealing to proceed with this policy and Israel turned to the West (interview with Itzhak Shoham, June 28, 2005).

42 The Straits Times Interactive (December 18, 2006); <http://www.vertexisrael.co.il>. Vertex Management Israel manages three venture funds with a total capital of US\$ 250 million and is part of the international Vertex Venture Capital Group. The Group manages over US\$ 1 billion through offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. Vertex Management Israel investments focus primarily on seed and early stage Israeli and North American start-up companies that specialize in the areas of communications, internet enabling technologies, web-based enterprise and e-commerce solutions. Strategic Vertex Management Israel investors include Singapore Technologies, Israel

one of the highest rates of start-up businesses per capita in the world. Israel's high-tech sector is attractive to investors.⁴³ For Singapore that has meant that there are opportunities to find synergies in joint ventures. Israeli companies that seek to expand in the Far East use Singapore as hub. Singapore on its turn takes advantage of the Israeli presence to develop commercialized science and technology capabilities and knowledge via venture capital.

Venture capital already had found its way to Israel in an earlier phase. After Silicon Valley, Israel was the second most popular destination for venture capital funds. The establishment of new nodes and hubs in venture capital is traceable via Silicon Valley. These new hubs have emerged out of bilateral relationships between Silicon Valley and India, Taiwan and Israel.⁴⁴ These nodes have been established by workers in Silicon Valley that seek opportunities at home, also in Israel. Israel has transformed into a Silicon Valley from where new nodes are established from which new hubs emerge.⁴⁵ Singapore intends to become such a new hub. Israel is the strong innovative hub and, linking with Singapore, Singapore is what is called an early adopter. Singapore is eager to become a venture capital hub itself. By establishing their own new innovative industries the prerequisite links to become synergetic have been working for both Israel and Singapore. Israel and Singapore have similar populations. The populations are relatively highly educated, and there is abundant entrepreneurial spirit. Both their internal markets are relatively small. Both economies depend on outside markets and have a lack of natural resources. "There is no gas, no oil, no water, no coal, the only resource we have is the brain, the human resources, that is the similarity".⁴⁶ To follow in Israel's footsteps and develop into a venture capital hub Singapore needed a friendly commune of business links that incite venture capitalists to invest. That was what Israel was providing once again.

Venture capitalist links to Israel in the Straits region are risky, for instance when Singapore Technologies Telemedia (STT), as a subsidiary of Singapore Technologies (ST), was buying a stake of 41,94 % in the Indonesian Indosat.

Discount Capital Markets & Investments, Creative Technologies, Investec, Nomura International, Mellon Ventures, Safeguard Scientific and Jafco.

43 See for instance, the Israel High-Tech & Investment Reports. A Monthly Report Covering News and Investment Opportunities. Publisher: Joseph Morgenstern at <http://ishitech.co.il>.

44 See The Straits Times Interactive (December 18, 2006).

45 On November 6, 2000, Vertex Management in Israel announced that Singapore alone was investing a total of US\$ 76 million in its third fund – Vertex Israel II. Strategic Singapore investors include Government linked NSTB (Singapore's National Science and Technology Board), Singapore Technologies, Infocomm Investments (investment subsidiary of Infocomm Development Authority (IDA)), Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC), and private investors like Vickers Ballas Holdings, Vickers Capital, Jafco Investment (Asia Pacific), and Creative Technology.

46 Interview with Itzhak Shoham (June 28, 2005).

Immediately a rumour started that STT is an Israeli agent and that STT and Vertex Management Israel are linked (Weerstra-De Boer 2005). A watchful Indonesian citizen discovered that the logos of STT and that of Vertex Management Israel are exactly the same and put it on the internet. The accusation was that STT is a technological *anak perusahaan* (Subsidiary Company) of ST. The truth, he added, would be easily checkable at www.st.com.sg⁴⁷ in which STT was mentioned as a daughter of ST. Clearly, avoiding discovery is not that easy anymore. At least not like it was in the time when Benny Murdani instructed the Skyhawk fighters' pilots to keep their mission secret. The internet takes care of an instant dissemination and accessibility of possibly incriminating information. That information might be the fuel to light up the fire that is smouldering under the surface in the Straits. When other seemingly distant nodes, for instance for religious-political reasons, want to connect to certain corporate practices, that fire might easily lead to a scandal of which the effects are difficult to determine and predict.

5. Tsunami Relief Operations

All prerequisites are there for Singapore and Israel for a successful cooperation. A lot of fieldwork to link Singapore and Israel had been done. The spin-offs are promising. The problem remains that in the Straits a direct link to Israel is a taboo. Much effort has been put into avoiding backlashes and keeping these links manageable. As long as the links are not too much in the open, business can go on as usual. Is this situation satisfying for all parties involved? Apparently not. Frustration came to the fore when a terrible natural disaster, the tsunami, hit the region. The world was shocked witnessing the tsunami's destructive force and the extensive human and material losses. It wanted to send aid and offer relief to the victims. Manpower and material were put to use to offer that relief. The humanitarian, technological, organizational and military capabilities in the Straits were appealed to on a scale that had no precedent.

These capabilities were exerted under an extensive public exposure. Singapore launched the mission "Operation Flying Eagle". It was Singapore's largest-ever deployment of men, machines and technology to offer relief. In a special report *The Sunday Times* (February 13, February 20; February 27, 2005)⁴⁸ started a three-part series in which the Singapore Armed Forces were made the centre of attention. After six weeks of media coverage describing the horrors and

47 Source becomes material here.

48 Again the source itself becomes material here. *The Sunday Times* is part of the Straits Times which is owned by Mediacorp that is strongly related to Singapore's "meritocracy".

disasters of the tsunami it had become time to show what was behind the relief mission. More than 1,200 personnel appeared to have been involved. Special attention was given to the material that was used to offer help. Helicopter landing ships, Chinooks, Super Pumas, field hospitals, and desalinization machines that would be able to provide clean drinking water were provided. The difficult circumstances in which they had to operate were expiated upon. Efficiency, excellent planning, adaptability, the good spirit of the men; this all justified the confidence that the SAF had been well equipped to deal with the situation in Aceh. SAF's ability to communicate in Malay and their understanding of the Indonesian way of doing things, proved to be an important asset. The SAF men were of great assistance to the TNI (Indonesian Military) officers to help them communicate with the foreign aid workers that were arriving in Banda Aceh. TNI seemed comfortable with the Singaporean presence. They appreciated Singaporean sincere but low profile assistance.

Singapore kept up the appearance that it was satisfied with its low profile involvement in the relief operations. But there was uneasiness about western media coverage. It soon became too much of a western operation. Especially the CNN attention that was given to a buffalo that had hit a landing aircraft and caused the blockade of Banda Aceh's only runway went down the wrong way. The buffalo became the symbol of the problems western relief workers encountered in providing relief in "backward" Southeast Asia. This incident was extensively covered in the western media. No attention was for instance given to the specialized Singapore SAF rescue mission using a heavy-lift SAF Chinook helicopter that was flown in from Medan to Aceh to clear the runway. Western media stressed a presumed Southeast Asian inability to adequately deal with a major catastrophe like the tsunami.⁴⁹

This story had to be counter narrated. Singapore's reputation and forty years of major investments in a military system and training should not go down the drain because of a buffalo. Singapore's relief operation in Aceh was a good opportunity to show the world that it had developed into a first world country. In the meantime it was also an opportunity to show Indonesia and Malaysia, their direct neighbours, that from a military angle the Singapore Story still is successful. In a way, it resembled the military parades in the former East European countries showing the advancements in the build-up of a military system that would be able to resist the West. The tsunami was a sad occasion to hold that "parade". At any other occasion it would have been a provocation for the region, most notably for Malaysia and Indonesia. With the tsunami relief operations Singapore was able to show its strength. But of main importance of course, due to Singapore's swift and firm performance, thousands of victims were rescued.

49 Singapore The Sunday Times (February 13; February 20; February 27, 2005).

This gave Singapore a lot of credit in the region. Singapore has done what you might expect from a good neighbour. Military strength was complemented with soft power. The operations might have cost Singapore a lot, but on the long run the exertion of this kind of soft power may turn out to be more effective than displaying military strength.

But what about Israel? It must have been bitter for Israel that none of these credits went into their direction. But that was inherent to the nature of their presence in Singapore. When former Prime Minister Rabin instructed the first Israeli mission to Singapore that was led by colonel Elazari, he had said to Elazari “You are going to teach the people and hand them the command. We are not colonialists; we are not going to impose our presence anywhere. Second you are not weapon traders. ... You will advise them about what is best for their needs, but they will buy whatever they need even if it’s not Israeli – remember that. Overall, remember you are coming back”.⁵⁰

As a hub Singapore has grown up; Shoham (2005) said: “The small child we held in our hands in the 1960s grew to be a brother and now – I dare think – a partner”. Former Ambassador to Singapore Itzhak Shoham mentioned a few other fields in which Israel and Singapore had been cooperating, like in public housing and social and cultural work. Just like Israel, Singapore had to create a nation state and a national self consciousness and self esteem. So, the cooperation was not only military. ... The flow is constant and all options are open. ... Wherever you go in Singapore, you find traces of our presence, even though we always kept a very low profile and were very discreet”.

Israel was also present in Aceh to bring relief to the victims of the tsunami. But again Israel had to operate discreetly, and again their presence was deleted. The Indonesian government had issued flight permits to a number of countries for relief missions to Aceh. Reportedly a Boeing 747 – 200 that belongs to the Israel airlines El Al had landed at the airport of Batam in Riau. The plane carried 90 tons of relief supplies for the tsunami victims in Aceh. At first, the Indonesian government denied any Israeli assistance.⁵¹ On the plane there was an Israeli foreign ministry official who carried a letter of condolence to the Indonesian government from Israel’s foreign minister.⁵² The plane first unloaded equipment in Sri Lanka and then went on to Batam.⁵³ Details and logistics of the shipment

50 Rabin’s words according to Yaakov Jack Elazari who is cited in Shoham 2005.

51 [Http://www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com): Xinhua online China View, View China, January 14, 2005 (March 7, 2005).

52 [Http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/01/13/wtsun313.xml&sS](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/01/13/wtsun313.xml&sS), January 13, 2005 (March 7, 2005).

53 [Http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=-cid=1105](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=-cid=1105) (The Jerusalem Post). Three different news report sites reported the stop at Batam. Also the Ambassador Shoham was quoted in: RI akhirnya reima bantuan Israel; Pesawat

were said to have been worked out between Israeli and Indonesian officials. The crew of the plane reported that they were received warmly. “They were not embarrassed that we were here, or tried to hide us”.⁵⁴ Also Shoham confirmed that an El Al plane had landed in Batam. Later, hesitantly, also the Indonesian government confirmed the relief aid from Israel.⁵⁵ After consultation with different religious leaders there was an agreement that the Indonesian government should separate political from humanitarian problems and that the ones in Aceh clearly were humanitarian. Although the aid would “*bau-bau Israel*”⁵⁶ (“smell of Israel”), in the end an El Al plane was allowed to land on Indonesian soil.

6. The Art of Deleting

Singapore’s defence doctrine is inspired by external security threats that come from Singapore’s closest neighbours Malaysia and Indonesia. For Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia still are the main security concerns.⁵⁷ When relations deteriorate in the Straits, Singapore is treated by its Straits partners as a scapegoat. Singapore then becomes the Israel of Southeast Asia. When the British withdrew from their colonial backyard the situation that followed was tense for Singapore. Indonesia’s *Konfrontasi* politics⁵⁸ on one side of the Straits,

Israel Mendarat di Indonesia (January 13, 2005) at www.minahasa.go.id saying that the El Al plane had already landed the evening before he was contacted by the press agency. The same website, <http://www.minahasa.go.id>, showed in Indonesia Tolak Bantuan Israel that there were feverish attempts to make Israel’s relief aid possible. The possibility was investigated to let the relief aid go via international aid, like the International Red Cross. These websites were checked on July 3, 2005.

54 The pilot of the El Al flight, Captain Gorelik Dror, quoted in: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=cid=1105> (November 1, 2005).

55 It seems not coincidental that this was published on the local (at *kabupaten* level) government website of the Christian enclave of Minahasa. Earlier the links between Israel and Minahasa have been described as friendly.

56 The English translation of the Indonesian word *bau-bau* is “to smell” or “to stink”.

57 On a defence level Singapore and Malaysia, together with Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain, cooperate in the Five Power Defence Arrangements. They regularly have military exercises together. In that respect ties to Malaysia have been enhanced. The change of leadership also had its influence. Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir were no friends. The relationship between leaders Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Lee Kuan Yew’s son Lee Hsien Loong is said to be much better. However, long-standing disputes remain thorny. Water supply and territorial disputes are the most prominent. White Rock islet is one. The status of this small 2,000 square metre islet is disputed and now under arbitration of the International Court of Justice. Malaysia’s railway immigration checkpoint right in the middle of Singapore is another thorny issue.

58 Indonesia’s president at the time of the forming of the Federation of Malaysia, Soekarno, designed the politics of *Konfrontasi*, in which he disputed the Federation that in his view was a product of neo-colonialism. Although he never publicly supported the thought of an

the political hostilities because of the separation from Malaysia directly at their doorstep,⁵⁹ and a threat from within from the Communist *Barisan Sosialis*, made Singapore feel clamped like “a Chinese nut in a Malay nutcracker” (Singh 2003: 18). This tense period still reverberates in Singapore’s foreign policies and has resulted in what Singh calls a paranoid sense of insecurity (Singh 2003: 18).

Next to security Singapore’s main concern were economic proceeds (Leifer 2000). From the late 1980s well into the 1990s, Indonesian investment and trading links with Singapore played an important role in the facilitation of Indonesia’s export-led economic boom. Singapore is used as a port of transshipment to Indonesia and Malaysia.⁶⁰ In Indonesia’s New Order period, Singapore helped Suharto to sustain his grip of power. Singapore considered Suharto as practical and trustworthy (Lee Chek Liang 2001: 25). Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew politically and ideologically justified Asian authoritative styles of governance by designing the “Asian values” argument (Barr 2002: 3 – 4).⁶¹ Singapore was helpful in legitimizing the autocratic leadership of Suharto and Mahathir.

But also economically Singapore has helped to sustain this autocratic leadership. Suharto’s cronyism for instance was sustained by allowing the Suharto regime’s patronage network to profit from joint venture businesses like in the SIJORI (Singapore-Johor-Riau) growth triangle (Lee Chek Liang 2001). Again security is an important motivation. Rising tensions would increase risks to invest in the region. Suharto’s downfall was such a liability. Early in 1998 Lee Kuan Yew had been outspoken in his appraisal that Habibie, later Suharto’s successor as president, was unsuitable for the post of vice president. Lee Kuan Yew considered Habibie’s high tech vision to turn Indonesia into a technologi-

Indonesia Raja, a Greater Indonesia, that included all Malayan peoples including those on the peninsular of Malakka and in Sabah and Sarawak, he is thought to have been a supporter of this idea. (Giebels 2001: Chapter 7).

59 Singh 2003: 66 – 70. For instance, Tunku Abdul Rahman, at that time the first prime minister of the Federation of nine Sultanates of Malaysia, threatened to turn off the water supply to Singapore on the first day of Singapore’s independence. Singh 2003 in appendix 1 gives an overview of the major disputes between Singapore and Malaysia between 1965 and 2002. Almost every year there has been a dispute.

60 Suara Karya (November 12, 1999). DPR Harus Tegur Menlu Shihab.

61 This cultural relativist line of argumentation opposes Western “cultural imperialism”. The idea is that claims of hegemonic liberal democracy and their focus on human rights are western-based and not universal at all. Alternative “Asian” forms are no less legitimate than this “universal” form. Lee Kuan Yew claims that Singapore had become what it is now because it is an Asian-Oriental type of society. Asian values are hard work, thrift and discipline. That diligence is combined with the importance of family relationships and parent-children obligations, sacrifice for the future, respect for education, and an entrepreneurial spirit. Critics, however, say that the Asian values claim is an obvious way to justify cronyism and to support an authoritative style of government with repressive practices. For a discussion on Asian values see Barr 2002.

cally advanced industrial powerhouse unrealistic and damaging for Indonesia's economy (Schwarz 1994: 88; Huxley 2000: 54).⁶² When Habibie became president in May 1998, he was unforgiving. In an interview he immediately pointed to Singapore's vulnerability. He advised reporters to have a look at the regional map. They would see that all the green on the map is Indonesia, and that Singapore is no more than a red dot (Leifer 2000: 143)⁶³.

When Wahid succeeded Habibie in January 1999, Singapore again did not show much enthusiasm. Lee Kuan Yew frustrated Wahid in his attempt to act as a regional leader. Singapore was opposed to Wahid's plan to let Papua New Guinea and independent East Timor become members of the ASEAN.⁶⁴ Wahid attempted to appease Lee Kuan Yew by inviting him to become his government's international advisor, but Wahid was given the cold shoulder.⁶⁵ Wahid's weak physical condition was made a point of concern. Lee Kuan Yew expressed his disappointment with Indonesia's ruling elite and urged Wahid to restore order and fight corruption in the country. Otherwise Singaporean and international investors' confidence would not return. Wahid felt manipulated and disappointed. He accused Singapore of pursuing profit based policy only and a lack of care for its neighbours (The Jakarta Post, December 18, 2000).⁶⁶

For Singapore, the links with Israel are useful to express autonomy, force and independence. Israel stands guarantee for a first class military backup. In Southeast Asia Israel's military power is respected. Israel's reverberating victory in the 1967 Six-Day War is still remembered. This alliance between the Israeli and Singaporean defence establishments has intensified and expanded. Nowadays, there is an extensive cooperation between the two military industries and Singapore is believed to be one of Israel's major clients of Israeli combat means and military technology (Haaretz newspaper, July 16, 2004).

The first Israeli military delegation in 1965 laid the foundations for an extensive network of relations between Israel and Singapore. Singapore's geopolitical position was very much similar to that of Israel. Both countries are

62 Habibie believed that Singapore was frustrated by his plans to open an international airport at Batam and the construction of nuclear power plants.

63 Leifer noted that Habibie was craving for respect which Lee Kuan Yew and Singapore were not giving.

64 Wahid's presidency did not last long. He had to withdraw from office in July 2001 and was replaced by Megawati Sukarnoputri who was his deputy during his period of reign.

65 Singapore was Wahid's first stop on his inaugural overseas trip.

66 There were more of such sentiments. As a centre of monetary services, Singapore was considered not free from guilt for the sharp downfall in 1997 of the IDR (Indonesian Rupiah) because of speculation at the Singaporean Stock Exchange (allegedly with George Soros as the main speculator). Moreover, in the turbulent period before and after the resigning of President Suharto, Singapore was a free haven for securing capital and for Indonesians from Chinese descent who wished to wait out the worst of the storm.

surrounded by Muslim countries. Singapore's relation with Malaysia and Indonesia is precarious, but not overtly hostile. It might be too strong to state that Singapore is the Israel of Southeast Asia, but Singapore has left no doubt that if necessary, Singapore is willing to assume that status (Huxley 2000: 249). Israel's defence industry continues to provide military advice and seeks to maintain their share in Singapore's defence market by collaboration in participation programs that transfer technological know-how (Huxley 2000: 198).

When the pressure is mounting up in the Straits for Singapore, Singapore is regularly forced to take the sensitivities concerning Israel's presence in Singapore into consideration. Singapore has to be reassured that it is only grudgingly that its autonomy is not a point of discussion. Singapore is urged not to provoke by displaying Israel's presence too much. Singapore with Israel as catalyst "Other" has to show its good intentions by artfully deleting Israel's presence. The message is to "cover their tracks and lay the ghost to rest" (Urry 2003: 117). The ghost here is the scandal of Israeli / Jewish presence that might ignite as a small cause and that can have big effects producing unexpected unpredictable and irreversible consequences.

Israel is not deleted whenever Singapore wishes. The relationship between Singapore and Israel is too complex for that. As has been shown they are connected in many ways and therefore also depend on each other in many ways. Therefore, Israel's deletion is an artful deletion. The artful covering up of their links is never a total concealment. In terms of network relations, their links are semi-concealed, but operational. Both sides constantly negotiate about the degree of Israel's presence.⁶⁷ The discretion that Israel has to use in all these examples is hindering Israel.⁶⁸ It is felt that their presence sometimes is too easily deleted. Singapore, as Israel's partner, is not always that thoughtful when it comes to giving credits to Israel. That Israel raised Singapore is too easily forgotten. In network topological terms, in this scale-free network there is a discontinuity of the once hierarchical links between Singapore and Israel and a new bifurcated modular system has slowly evolved, in which Singapore and Israel have become hubs that are linked on a more equal base.

67 That reportedly can go as far as not allowing the embassy to use the Israeli flag on their cars or when celebrating Remembrance Day.

68 Personal contacts that are close to the Israeli Embassy in Singapore showed a "frustrated" letter written by Shoham in which he recounted all the aid Israel had provided in the relief operations in the tsunami hit area. That same list of relief aid from Israel was to be found at <http://www.icej.nl/nieuws/hulp/doodgezwegen.htm>, the homepage of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, in which the lack of honest reporting concerning Israel's part in the tsunami relief operations was criticized. Israel's efforts to give aid to Aceh were not mentioned in that letter.

For Israel, its presence in Singapore is supposed to be more than real. Singapore is its gateway, or stronghold in the Straits region. Israel's presence sinks in better when there is bio power, or corporeality involved. Its presence needs to be embodied. Sustained embodiment would mean authorisation of networks. Now, it is in these oscillations between presence and absence that Israel has to manoeuvre. The concealments hinder mobility. Israel does not want "to lay the ghost to rest" (Urry 2003: 117), Israel wants to exorcise the ghost; otherwise Israel remains an easy target for artful otherings, concealments, and deletions.

The art of deletion has, however, changed. In Indonesia's New Order period there was no problem concealing links. But because of the internet, Israel's "trespassing" is hard to cover up nowadays. Internet and global media possess the means to make transparent and public what is supposed to stay opaque and private. This power of exposure makes front stage what is supposed to stay back stage. Each move that "*bau-bau Israel*" (smells Israel) is instantly blown up. That makes Israel's wish to officiate links, and make the networks between the two countries palpable, more than understandable. But it still seems a long way before the ghost is laid to rest. For Malaysia, that seems even further away. Of course businesses find their ways, also in Malaysia,⁶⁹ in the words of Shoham because of "the very vertical autocratic system, every contact we try to establish with higher levels, the authorization was withdrawn. Mahathir had left a heritage that is very difficult to change".⁷⁰

7. Concluding: Counteracting the Art of Deletion

The way that Jews were visible in the Straits was mostly as "mediatic Jews" (Siegel 2000), as a tool or a multifunctional projection screen to understand the behaviour of others, or to divert attention from internal societal problems. The real Jew, the corporeal Jew, was "allegorized away" (Boyarin / Boyarin 2003: 92).⁷¹ In the Muslim part of the Straits, the word Jew therefore is said to indicate

69 Each Israeli company is officially on its own to find its way into Malaysia. I. Shoham does not want to elaborate upon the way they establish their business. But that would be via Singapore pretty much, the same strategy that Aguatic applies. Israeli company Intel, for example, exports microchips from Israel to Malaysia. According to Shoham, it is a vital import product for the industry in Malaysia. If it is that vital, apparently, there are mechanisms that make sure that the "ghost is kept in the bottle", and that shipments can go through even from Israel.

70 Interview with Itzhak Shoham (June 28, 2005).

71 "Remembering the other" Lyotard insists that this way we learn how to imagine ourselves as Blacks, Arabs, Indians, homeless etc. But using the "Jew" for the "other", Lyotard does not suggest how those who themselves are "real Jews" could respond to that. Boyarin / Boyarin insist that there is a loss and danger in "allegorizing away real Jews".

nothing more than a menace; “they inhabit nothing” (Siegel 2000: 38 – 39).⁷² In an interconnected world authority of presence – what is perceived as reality – depends on what is (made) absent. An unquestioned absence lacks the “protection” that an acknowledged corporeal presence – if only as a stranger – would have.

This paper argues that, contrary to popular understanding, Jews have never been away in Indonesia or Malaysia. It just takes more effort to trace them. The presence of Jews in one part of the wider (Straits) region, and absence in another part, is interrelated. Logics (and logistics) in Jewish diasporic mobilities prescribe an operation at nodes from where it is more convenient to act at a distance. Singapore has emerged as an important node for Israeli and Jewish mobilities in the wider region. It is shown that, rather than a focus on diasporic “returning to the homeland” configurations, Israel has become a node, too, from where – directly or via Singapore – new connections outside Israel in Southeast Asia are built.

By making Jewish and Israel’s oscillations between presence and absence in the Straits manifest a new networked reality is crafted. The attention in this paper is redirected to the processes that in time and space have made them disappear and / or reappear again. Doing so, it becomes a resource to question this presumed reality. To put this resource to use it was necessary to produce narratives to track the (re)configurations of presence and absence of Israelis / Jews in the Straits. The narratives about the Mexicans, the Skyhawk fighter planes, Singapore’s New Economy, and the tsunami relief operations show how – in a problematic hinterland, and Israel’s urge to connect in the wider Asian region – an artfully deleted Jewish presence re-emerges again. This detection and its amplifying is part of an alternative politics to re-imagine and redirect the way Simmel’s (Jewish) stranger is positioned rather as someone “who comes today and stays tomorrow” than someone “who comes today but will leave tomorrow” (Simmel 1950).

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⁷² Siegel, for instance, sees the imagining of the Jew in Indonesia as helpful in concealing the gap between well-to-do Muslim middle and under classes.

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Part 3: Judaism in Everyday Life and Society

Heinz Werner Wessler¹

“My Backward Place is Where I am”: Jewish Identity and Jewish Authorship in India

For Jawaharlal Nehru and the great majority of Indian politicians and intellectuals before and after independence, Indian Judaism is a kind of star witness of the essential tolerance of the Indian (or: Hindu) tradition. Judaism is a precious part in the mosaic of religious traditions in India, as the narrative even presented in the appropriate standard school text books up to the present goes. The central point here is that the three indigenous Jewish groups – Baghdadi / Irani Jews, Cochin Jews and the Bene Israel – were, as far as we know through history, never persecuted or discriminated. In the past and present, Jews could live in India without distress, and they still can – or, one should say, they could stay in India without harm, if they wanted to do so.

Emigration to Israel has affected Indian Judaism on a large scale since the 1950s, and all over the critical limit for the viability of each of the three groups is probably reached, as the documentary film “Next year in Bombay” (2010) somehow demonstrates, in which Sharon and Sharona Galsulkar are the last educators of a small Indian Jewish community, desperately trying to keep the community together. The total number of Indian Jews was once about 35,000, according to the Indian census of 1951. In 2011 – Judaism is no longer recorded in the Census data – a number of 5,000 Indian Jews on Indian soil is estimated, apart from two tribal population groups in Andhra Pradesh and the North-East, who have been trying to establish their Jewish identity for some time. The number of the Indian-born population in Israel is estimated at 50,000, however (Singh 2009: 65 ff.). During my last visit in the Kerieseth Elijahoo Synagogue in Mumbai 2009, the attendant gave me a copy of a full-page article in the German “Jüdische Allgemeine” dated April 15, 1993 with a rhetorical question as title: “Are they [= Indian Jews in India] soon be just a nostalgic reminder?” (“Werden

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sie [= indische Juden in Indien] bald nur noch eine nostalgische Erinnerung sein?“).

“I am an Indian first and a Jew second. India is one of the places where Jews have never suffered from anti-Semitism or persecution, therefore I consider India my motherland”, says Ezekiel Isaac Malekar, head of the small Judah Hyam Synagogue in central Delhi, a sacred building donated in 1956 by the Government of India. This bold statement in an interview with a journalist may, to some extent, be seen as a confirmation of the common Indian national narrative. However, the Indian Jewry as such certainly is a pillar of the state. Its representatives regularly participate in interreligious prayers, including official state celebrations. The Jewish contribution fulfils an important function in the state’s political model of the mosaic of religions in India, hardly affected by the rapid numerical disappearance of the Jewish community in India.

The existence of Judaism in India is politically constitutive as an enactment of the tolerance of the system as such. The representation has, however, little to do with the real power in numbers. Currently, there are about 30 synagogues in India, of which ten are in Mumbai, where supposedly 4,000 Jews live. Most synagogues can only occasionally perform services when foreign guests are visiting, as the quorum of ten male worshippers is hardly met with because of emigration and because of weak religious affiliation of parish members. Many of the remaining Jews are married to members of other religions and therefore contribute to the decline of Jewish identity in India.

Pride in the old tradition of Judaism in the Subcontinent, never endangered by violence or discrimination, is unfortunately juxtaposed by anti-Zionist positions, as can be detected in stray statements from freedom fighters as well as prominent neo-Hindu thinkers. George Jochnowitz holds that Mahatma Gandhi was an anti-Semite.² He is perhaps exaggerating the case, but it is a fact that Mahatma Gandhi maintained his reservations against monotheistic exclusivism in general and against Jewish monotheism in particular, with the ambivalent relationship of the Old Testament to violence and especially with the Zionist state idea. However, Shimon Lev has rightly pointed out that the relevant statements of Mahatma Gandhi have to be seen in their complexity. Gandhi hardly was a hard-boiled anti-Semite.

Jawaharlal Nehru and many other freedom fighters were however particularly critical of Zionism. On the one hand, they saw Zionism as a continuation of European colonialism. Beyond that they identified the Zionist state as a communalist project that was contrary to the idea of “unity in diversity” and therefore anti-secularist (in the South Asian interpretation of secularism). The idea that the religious culture of a single religion should be the basis for a modern

2 [Http://www.jochnowitz.net/Essays/AntiSemitism.html](http://www.jochnowitz.net/Essays/AntiSemitism.html).

state was mostly strongly rejected by those who participated in the project of a multi-religious state for post-colonial India.

Independent India was among the minority of states that voted against the partition of Palestine and the creation of the Israeli state in the historical vote in the UN General Assembly in November 1947. Nehru even accused the pro-Israel campaign to have tried to bribe India with millions of U.S. dollars. His sister, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, India's ambassador to the United Nations, had – according to Nehru – received daily warnings that her life was in danger unless she secured the Indian pro-Israel vote. India furthermore consistently refused the admission of Israel to the United Nations in 1949. For several decades, India diplomatically supported pan-Arabic positions concerning Israel. The Ice Age in the Indian-Israeli relationship continued and was only lifted after the demise of the Eastern Bloc and the Non-Aligned Movement. Full diplomatic relations between India and Israel were established as recent as 1991. Since then, the Indian-Israeli relations have developed rapidly – economically, militarily and culturally.

Interestingly, this development has hardly disturbed the good relations between Arab states and India. Furthermore, Iran maintains an excellent relationship with India, which even includes joint military exercises in international waters off the coast of Pakistan and of course, much to the chagrin of Pakistan. As early as 1947 Hindu nationalist leaders, especially Veer Savarkar (1883 – 1966), had criticized the rejection of the Jewish state by India. The Hindu nationalists saw the state of Israel as a model for a Hindu nation. "It must be emphasised therefore that historically speaking, the whole of Palestine has been, from at least two thousand years before the birth of the Muslim prophet, the National Home of the Jewish People."³

India turned pro-Israel in the 1990s, with the decidedly anti-Jehadi component playing a significant role. This is palpable, for example, in the following quote from an article from the politically non-suspicious "Asian Voice" (2007: 9) by Vishnu Pandya: "There are a lot of things common between the Hindus and the Jews. Both have a culture that is very old. Both the communities had and are even today facing aggressors that are Jihadis – religious fanatics. The Jews and the Hindus are highly courageous." Such statements have entered the high-level, government-sponsored Hindu-Jewish religious dialogue that produces official declarations, constructing a common Jewish-Hindu theological axis, which in-

3 Veer Savarkar 1947, quote from: <http://www.nhsf.org.uk/images/stories/HinduDharma/Interfaith/hinduzion.pdf>.

herently or explicitly identifies Hinduism and Judaism as victims of Muslim (and, to some extent, also Christian) violence.⁴

Numerically the most important group within the Indian Jewry, the Bene Israel, traditionally settled mainly in the Konkan, south of Goa. Since the 19th century and the rediscovery of their Jewish identity they increasingly moved to Mumbai and other cities in what forms the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat in post-colonial India. Their Jewish status was disputed, and only during the later 19th century, they were able to raise their reputation by consistently strengthening their Jewish identity, including the spread of education, the construction of synagogues and the education of rabbis with a more profound understanding of Hebrew. I refer primarily to the research by Shalva Weil and Nathan Katz. Shalva Weil also has been Chairperson of the Israel-India Cultural Association for many years, for example, after the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008, during which a Jewish centre had been brutally attacked. The Chabad House in Mumbai belonged to the worldwide orthodox Chabad Israel network with cultural centres, which primarily addresses Jewish Israeli tourists.

1. Nissim Ezekiel (1924 – 2004)

Nissim Ezekiel is the son of Moses Ezekiel, a professor of botany, Wilson College, Mumbai. After his BA in English literature at the Wilson College, he worked for a while teaching English literature and then spent three and a half years studying philosophy in England. His first collection of poems came out in 1952 (“The Bad Days”). After his return he worked as professor of English literature and editor (radio). His wife Daisy Jacob was a Marathi-speaking Bene Israel from Mumbai like himself. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for poetry for his “Latter-day Psalms” in 1983.

Some time ago when I asked the book exporter and publisher Manish Modi in Mumbai whether he knew other Jewish writers in Mumbai, he responded to me that he had no inkling that Nissim Ezekiel was of Jewish origin and that his religious identity was irrelevant for the reading of his work. Beyond that, he argued that Anglo-Indian literature was secular, and communal identities were overcome by literature, not encouraged.

This feedback from a Mumbai connoisseur of literature is not just a stray personal opinion, but quite typical in a country where the narrative of modernity is very much related to the idea of progress and anti-traditionalism. Progressivism, as manifested for example in the 1936 founded Progressive Writers’

4 Compare for example <http://www.hafsite.org/pdf/2nd%20Jewish-Hindu%20Summit%20Final%20Declaration%2002-27-08.pdf>.

Association, continues to be critical of the rhetoric of the search and the process of defining identity and understands modernity rather as a deliberate limitation of the political and social space of religion and religiosity. In this context, I would like to mention a list of ten questions referring to the current state of Hindi literature, which I had been asked to forward to several Hindi authors and which is published in the September issue of the literary magazine "Hans" in 2009. Question no. 7 goes like this: "Why is the number of contributions from authors of Christian and other religious identities rather low in Hindi literature, excepting authors with Muslim identity?" (Hans 9/2009, 36 ff.). I cannot present the responses in detail, but they illustrate how difficult it is for an enlightened mind in India to interpret religion other than as a resource of political reaction and social conservatism. For example, the respected senior author Archana Varma introduces her response to the question with the laconic statement: "And finally, once again, this damn identity."

Does Ezekiel share this progressivism, does he agree that identity resources are something to be overcome and that identity resources are a threat to the secularist? Does Ezekiel refuse the aesthetics of identity? Is he a post-religious Jew in a place very far removed from traditional attributions of identity?

How then is a book entitled "Latter-day Psalms" to be explained, for which he was granted the award of the Sahitya Academy? My own conclusion is that Manish Modi has probably simply not read his Nissim Ezekiel, because if he had read him he would have noticed that Ezekiel's psalms are modern and in a way post-religious and at the same time display a distinctive substratum of religious identity. In other words, Ezekiel does not fit into the common Indian stereotyping of traditionalism and progressivism, which corresponds to the political opposition between secularism and communalism. Ezekiel's topics include the uncertainty, the search for God, and the transformative rhetoric of religious metaphors for the expression of existential experience – in other words, among the authors of modern English literature, he is particularly influenced by T.S. Eliot. His poems are, as he himself describes it, prayers, in which the desire for a perfect world watches out for words, so says the poet – for example in "Morning Prayer":

God grant me certainty
 In kinship with the sky,
 Air, earth, fire, sea –
 And the fresh inward eye.
 Whatever the enigma,
 The passion of the blood,
 Grant me the metaphor
 To make it human good.

He speaks of “kinship with the sky”, of God himself, of mystery, passion, and the metaphor of the inherent connection of the metaphor with ethics. However, the specific Indian text and context are clearly marked: the Indian modernity, with its enlightened pathos, but also that of the tragically imperfect India, entangled in its shortcomings and sufferings, which are always present in Ezekiel’s writing as in “In India”:

Always, in the sun’s eye,
 Here among the beggars,
 Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
 Hutment dwellers, slums,
 Dead souls of men and gods,
 Burnt-out mothers, frightened
 Virgins, wasted child
 And tortured animal,
 All in noisy silence
 Suffering the place and time
 I ride my elephant of thought,
 A Cézanne slung around my neck. (p. 131)

The “Cézanne” stands not only for the visual arts of foreign origin, but for the arts and education in general: the poet on the Indian elephant, like a convicted felon, carrying a board like a burden – like a chained convict around his neck, on which his offence is noted – paraded before the people posing as a joker, with the elephant as mount and as an icon of a tourist attraction – rundown princely dignity of the grand animal, who passes ceremoniously in between watchful subjects, dead souls of Gods and men, in a parody of the solemn procession. Western modernity is an unfulfilled promise, it says in the same poem: the tedium of a party in which two people meet – unable to communicate substantially – “The wives of India sit apart”:

This, she said to herself
 As she sat at table
 With the English boss,
 Is IT. This is the promise:
 The long evenings
 In the large apartment
 With cold beer and Western music,
 Lucid talk of art and literature,
 And of all ‘the changes India needs’. (p. 133)

The women sitting apart separately are the living symbol of a failing existence, of mere commenting, of knowing better, the rhetoric of talking about something and avoiding embarrassment. Ezekiel realizes modern forms of informal communication and an analytical perspective on India as being hollow. Thus, mel-

ancholic Ezekiel falls back to reactions provided by tradition – the prayer as a return to existential seriousness in "Prayer":

Now again I must declare
 My faith in things unseen, unheard,
 The inner music, undertone,
 The silence of a daily friend,
 The dignity of trust, the fervour
 Of an erring choice, the hidden
 Sacrifice, the wordless song.
 'Guard my tongue from evil'
 Is a prayer within the reach
 Of evil tongues. Indifference
 Alone is unredeemable.
 The rest is faith, belief and truth
 Pursued, at any rate, in prayer. (p. 100 ff.)

"Guard my tongue from evil" is the prayer of the poet (after Talmud Berachot 17a), looking for metaphors that stand for the truth of human existence: a struggle with the indifference, the poet wants to be surpassed. This is perhaps best seen in his self-conscious "Psalm 151":

Light rebukes and sky abuses,
 Streets are empty, houses jaded,
 Girls are doubtful, one refuses,
 Colours of the earth are faded.
 Evening comes like Samson, blind,
 I who tasted power know him,
 Turning round and round like him,
 Double-crossed within the mind.
 In sorrow I am not enlarged,
 My corn and wine do not increase,
 Hours of joy with doubt are charged,
 Confessions bring me no release.
 Deliver me from evil, Lord,
 Rouse me to essential good,
 Change the drink for me, O Lord,
 Lead me from the wailing wood. (p. 73)

The poet sees himself as a "Poet, Lover, Birdwatcher" – a poem that typically ends again with a biblical quotation, in this case from the New Testament:

To watch the rarer birds, you have to go
 Along deserted lanes and where the rivers flow
 In silence near the source, or by a shore
 Remote and thorny like the heart's dark floor.
 And there the women slowly turn around,

Not only flesh and bone but myths of light
 With darkness at the core, and sense is found
 By poets lost in crooked, restless flight,
 The deaf can hear, the blind recover sight. (p. 135)

The model of the beloved William Blake is present here, with his famous sad hymn to the city of London: “I wander through each chartered street / near where the chartered Thames does flow ...” – certainly not an accidental allusion of the poet of Mumbai. One of the most quoted poems by Ezekiel is “Background, Casually”, called “verse autobiography” (King 2001: 100) by Bruce King in his book on Modern Indian Poetry in English. The following poem is a stray reflection on his childhood and teens – playful identities of the young poet:

I went to Roman Catholic school,
 A mugging Jew among the wolves.
 They told me I had killed the Christ,
 That year I won the scripture prize.
 A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears.
 I grew in terror of the strong
 But undernourished Hindu lads.
 ...
 I heard of Yoga and of Zen.
 Could I, perhaps, be rabbi-saint?
 The more I searched, the less I found. (p. 179)

Already in his first book of poetry, the poet laments the other hand about the passing of identity options in “The Double Horror”:

I am corrupted by the world, continually
 Reduced to something less than human by the crowd ...

Ezekiel sees himself as “The Unfinished Man” – as the title of one of his poetry collections goes. The “crowd” is the population of Mumbai, where the poet spends most of his life, and where he was born and died.

2. Sheila Rohekar (born 1942)

In February 2009, I was able to visit Sheila Rohekar in her flat in Lucknow after a longer period of occasional phone calls and some e-mails and we could talk in detail, mainly about her groundbreaking novel *Tāvīz* (“The Amulet”), as well as about her yet unpublished new novel, which was already in a phase of being revised then. The novel will, as the editor Ravinder Kaliya (Vani) has recently confirmed on the phone, soon be available in print.

Rohekar has been living in Delhi and Lucknow for decades and is presently

probably singular as a Jewish Hindi author. She has been teaching natural sciences at college level and is married to the Hindi author Ravindra Varma. Her early stories were written in Gujarati, and her first collection, with the title *Laiflain nī bahār*, is in Gujarati, and was written in the 1970s. After moving to North India, she began to write in Hindi. Her short stories were published in established Hindi magazines like *Sārikā* and *Dharmyug*, and later in *Hans*, *Kathā Deś* and *Kathā Kram*. In 1978, her first short novel in Hindi, *Dinānt*, was published (unfortunately unavailable for me until now) followed by *Tāvīz* in 2005. The manuscript of another novel with the preliminary title *Apne hone kī jagah* (“The space to be oneself”) is more or less finished and will hopefully be published soon. This forthcoming novel focuses on questions of Indian Jewish identity before and after the post-colonial emigration that brought the Jewish community in India to the verge of extinction, narrated from the perspective of Jewish inhabitants of a *vṛddhāśram* – a home for elderly people – and is a swan song for the dwindling Jewish community in India.

The other famous Jewish Hindi author is Mira Mahadevan (Mīrā Mahādevan), who is particularly known for one novel, *Apnā ghar*, originally published in Hindi in 1961 and in a free English translation under the title *Shulamith* in 1975. It describes the Bene Israel lifestyle and identity conflicts in early post-colonial India, when the emigration of the majority of Bene Israel to Israel had happened only recently, or was still ongoing. Mahadevan has also written about a dozen short stories on various issues, demonstrating a strong Gandhian influence on her perception of social and communal conflicts in modern India. Mira Mahadevan, born Miriam Jacob Mendrekar and married to a South Indian Hindu, has lived in an atmosphere inspired by Gandhian thought, partly in the famous Sabarmati Ashram in Maharashtra, where Hindi has been promoted as the spoken language of daily communication, which made her feel at home in Hindi.

The plot of Sheila Rohekar’s novel *Tāvīz* is based on a love marriage between a Hindu woman (Revā) and a Muslim man (Anvar) and the social, psychological, and political consequences of this conscious transgression of religious boundaries. Inter-communal marriage is not new as a theme in Hindi literature, and I would like to mention Krishna Sobti’s (Kṛṣṇā Sobtī) *Ār se bichuī* in particular in this context.

Tāvīz is a novel on communal identity and violence, and was published in 2005 at Vāṇī Prakāśan’s, with a second edition in 2008. It begins with the last announcement in a Lucknow newspaper seeking anyone who could identify the dead body of a middle-aged lady. At the end of the novel, which ties both ends of the narrated time together in a circle, the readers will know that it was Revā’s body. In the first chapter, Nainā talks to her husband Niraj jokingly as he reads aloud the newspaper announcement while she serves tea. His remark is that “if this poor thing is not even identified, who might cry about her?” (*“Jis becārī kī*

śinākhāt bhī nahīm ho pā rahī ho, us par bhalā kaun ronevālā hogā?”, p. 9). Nainā responds that the police will definitely be crying because they have to arrange the final rites and leave the case open in their files (p. 9). They remain unaware that both of them had known the dead lady, who appears to have committed suicide by throwing herself under a train. Later on, the truth is revealed by the all-knowing narrator to the reader: an innocent woman was brutally killed. On the next page, Nainā and Nīraj talk about Revā’s son, who disappeared some years ago – the reader will find out that he too was killed, and that the murder of both his parents was related to his own murder. All of them simply disappear – without leaving names and memories, even among close relatives and friends.

The frame narration concerns the fate of Revā, her husband Anvar, and their son Anant (often called “Annu”). All three end up being brutally killed on different occasions. After the flash-forward in the first chapter, the narration reverts to a conventionally narrated time, beginning sometime in the 1960s. Revā is forced to break with her family when she decides to marry not only a boy of her own choice, but a Muslim medical doctor, Anvar. Her father reluctantly supports her decision and does not make her go without his blessing, but he accepts the fact that the break with his daughter has to be complete and cannot be questioned. The couple decides on a civil marriage (p. 90) which, again, both their families cannot accept. Revā has a modern middle class background, while Anvar’s family fits into the stereotype of Muslim families in India; it is – according to general norms – more “backward”, Anvar being the first academic in the family. Nevertheless, Anvar’s family finds a way to cope with what they perceive as one of the whims of their son, while Revā’s marriage serves to break her off from her family altogether. The couple moves to the boy’s family, where she is accepted as the new daughter-in-law. The family members, however, initially take it for granted that she would convert to Islam, which she refuses (p. 88). However, they manage to cope even with this decision after some argument. Anvar, her husband, is liberal in outlook, and supports her personal choices, and even accepts that their son, though circumcised, is not brought up as a Muslim. This part of the story takes place in Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

The narration switches back and forth in narrative time, changing between auctorial narration, reportage, and forms of non-linear story-telling, including flashbacks, suspension and, particularly, a series of references back to the 19th and earlier 20th century events and observations reported in the diary of Revā’s grandfather, which bind Revā to her family’s past. This diary forms something similar to a narration within the narration, contrasting the present, with its exclusivist identity politics, with the colonial and early post-colonial golden past, with its less rigid opportunities to transcend religious boundaries. Revā’s paternal grandfather, a freedom fighter, not only narrates his own experiences in

the diary, but also reports stories that he has heard from earlier generations. Compared to Revā, her grandfather is much more outspoken. After 1947, he becomes more and more critical of the new state and its society. For Revā, the national enthusiasm and moral rigour of the liberation struggle is already part of a remote past; her visits to the Sabarmati Ashram close to Ahmedabad on her free Sundays have already become part of a middle-class weekend routine, a ritualized form of reassurance, living from the memorization of a kind of folklore version of the liberation movement, unrelated to the present and its civilizational decline. Mahatma Gandhi is somehow present as a kind of moral ideal (p. 127), but is contested and lacks any impact on one’s own life or social and intellectual reality. During a later Sunday visit to the Sabarmati Ashram with her son Annu, some five or six years after Anvar’s murder, Maheś Jhā, her future second husband, joins them and proposes marriage.

At crucial points in the book, critical reflections on the situation before and after independence are mixed in, particularly in the grandfather’s diary, which Revā keeps exploring and which constitutes the memorial link between not only the political past and present, but also between herself and her own relatives (a broken relationship because of her love marriage). Her grandfather writes in 1959: “What has been achieved by independence? The social setup is the same, the trench between poor and rich is the same” (“*Svatamtratā se kyā hāsil huā? Sāmājīk hāmcā vahī hai, vahī amīr-garīb kī khāī hai*”, *Tāvīz*, p. 279).

While Revā’s love relationship and marriage with Anvar is a symbolic act of transcending the borders of religious communities, the brutal murder of her husband, her son, and herself reveal the structure of a society which is threatened, when walls between communities are disrespected and borders transgressed. Annu and his identity crisis as a young lad is a living symbol of the failure of identity constructions that go beyond traditional social boundaries in modern India.

Jewish identity is neither constructed nor even visible in this contemporary novel. It can, however, be argued that the perception of an interreligious marriage and the threat to this social relationship by Hindu reactionary forces displays a minority perspective that is essential for the construction of the plot and its narrativity.

3. Esther David (born 1945)

Esther David was a professor of art, a visual artist and editor before the publication of her debut novel “*The Walled City*” in 1997, which all of a sudden brought her into the focus as a representative of Indo-Jewish literature. *The Walled City*, title of the novel, refers primarily to the city of Ahmedabad in

Gujarat, where Esther David grew up as the daughter of the zoo director Reuben David (1912 – 1989) and where she has decided to return after many years outside of India. “Walled in” are the people themselves also, stuck in the mental seclusion of their traditional identities, which hinder their ability to communicate and to envision substantial forms of human interaction. This applies in particular to the emigration of the shrunken Jewish community, which, despite the increased age of its members and ignorance of its own religion, tends to keep itself away from the others, insisting on the formless God in a city where Gods appear all over in countless shapes and forms.

The swan song of the city of Ahmedabad and its multicultural coexistence in *The Walled City* is followed by the “*Book of Esther*”, published in 2002, more an autobiography than a novel. It is constructed on Esther David’s own family history since the 19th century, the family narratives on ancestors and their offspring into the present. More than *The Walled City* this book is a mirror, almost a kind of literary testament of the Bene Israel in an epoch in which this community has left its inherited soil to quite some extent. The latest novel, “*The Man with Enormous Wings*”, published in 2010 by Penguin India, follows the consequences of the pogroms of 2002 in Gujarat, especially in Ahmedabad. The man with the mighty wings is an angel flying through the town, observing, but unable to intervene and proving more and more to be the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi.

As it says in the preface of the *Book of Esther*: “As I began to work on [the book], I found old family photographs were inspiring. I opened boxes containing notes, diaries, documents, paper clippings and every possible written material besides to help me along.” The book is a kind of literary recovery of the family history, related to a rescue action of memorabilia: securing one’s own identity through the documents saved in the family tradition.

What is the meaning of Jewish identity in India? First it must be noted that the Jewish population in India consisted of various groups that consider themselves mutually in a hierarchical relationship to each other. This is exemplified in an episode, in which a proposed inter-community marriage by Dr. Ezra and Jerusha David is refused by the parents of the elect in the grandparents’ generation in the *Book of Esther* (p. 134): Dr. Ezra is a Baghdadi Jew – he wants to marry Jerusha at the beginning of the 20th century, one of the first trained medical doctors of the Bene Israel community. Given the marriage advances, the discrete lines of separation between the communities become visible. After the surprising marriage proposal, Jerusha asks herself what to make of it: How should the gap be overcome in the name of a homogeneous Jewish identity? So she says to Dr. Ezra: “I am so sure you know about the Sefer Torah incident. The Bagdadis had issued a statement that we were not clean enough to touch them. My father would never accept our marriage” (p. 134). In fact, her father refused to accept the marriage. Jerusha then remains unmarried all her life. Decades later, Esther asks

herself, while washing the corpse of a deceased aunt, whether she has actually remained virgin until death or not. And also in her own youth in the late 1950s, Esther makes her grandmother aware of the scandalous marriage prohibitions between the two Jewish communities: “With a certain harshness in her voice she added that marriage was also taboo with Baghdadi and Cochini Jews” (p. 290).

The internal discrimination within the Jewish communities in India is related to the strong indigenization of the Bene Israel. They lived for many centuries in rural regions south of Goa; the beloved language Konkani – today one of India’s 22 national languages – continues to be alive for 1 – 2 generations even after moving to urban centres such as Mumbai, Pune and Ahmedabad, but gradually fades away. They wash and dress Indian style more and more, they use a Sanskrit terminology for God as “Parameshwar” and “Dev” and even the clothing is a solid proof of cultural indigenization: “There was already some dissent in the family as he refused to wear *dhotis*, *angarkhas* and *turbans*. He had taken to the dress usually worn by Muslims and Parsis – loose, flared pants, a long-sleeved shirt and a long, flowing coat. He wore a *fez*, and sometimes changed it for a tall conical hat. For a festival or celebration, however, he agreed to wear a turban but was stubborn about the choice of colours” (p. 86). In the early 20th century the typical colonial shifts become more and more visible: “In the family photograph of these days the men are dressed formally, like Englishmen, and some like Muslims and Parsis. The girls are in frocks and ribbons. The elder women are still in their nine-yard Maharashtrian *sari* or Parsi-style Gujarati *saris*. Only one woman is wearing a Gujarati-style Ghaghra *choli* with a half-sari ... I wonder how they managed to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity. In later ... photographs, the dress code changes. The women are in white chiffon saris, worn in the style of the modern Indian woman. ... The wedding photographs show a western influence. ... They look uncomfortable and stiff” (p. 120 ff.).

Over the history of the family from its rural origins in the Konkan in the second half of the 19th century to Ahmedabad, from a perceived backwardness towards colonial modernity – a development that can be followed up through the clothes as seen on the historical photos – the family loses some of its traditional Indian identity, but wins not only the English language and the colonial culture it stands for, but it also strengthens and regains its Jewish identity: for the first time in history, they learn Hebrew as the code of sacred texts, synagogues are constructed in the towns, into which the Bene Israel migrate. “Indian customs” as various rites with coconuts and coconut milk, i. e. “Hindu” or “Indian” customs from the perspective of Baghdadi Jews are abolished.

Together with independence, a new cultural and religious awareness is created: “The Bene Israel Jews of India had suddenly become aware that they were connected to a larger Jewish community in Europe” (p. 198). Finding this ac-

companies the massive emigration to Israel that consequently takes place. Joshua David (i. e. Reuben David), the father of Esther and founder of the famous zoo Ahmed Abbas, becomes aware of his Jewish identity as an Indian boar breed is to be named after him: “He may not have been a practicing Jew, but he had never eaten pork. It was an unspoken law of the house – only animals that possessed the dual characteristics of cloven hoofs and chewing cud were permitted. ... It was the Jewish dietary law.” (p. 147). “Joshua had not touched his prayer shawl since he had received it at his bar mitzvah at the age of thirteen. He knew he would need it at his death” (p. 252). “Though he was a non-believer and was not a practicing Jew, when he wrote articles on wildlife, he invariably quoted from the Old Testament” (p. 257). In dying and death, Jewish identity proves to be essential: since he has only one daughter, Esther, the question of who has to pour the first earth over his corpse in the grave is there – a duty that normally the son plays. “My son was too young, and I was a woman. I asked the elders’ permission that I be allowed to sprinkle the earth upon him – just like a son. The Bene Israel men collected in a corner, discussed the problem and agreed. I felt relieved and strangely victorious in the face of death and our Jewish rituals” (p. 264).

The *Book of Esther* is thus more than a fictionalization of the family history of Reuben David (Dandekar [the original Indian name is not much used in the family]). It is a genre picture of not only the family but the Bene Israel in general – the biblical character of “Esther” by the way refers to the emigration tradition of the Bene Israel community – and is also a sensitive indicator of colonial identity discourse. It becomes clear at the same time, that the Bene Israel protagonists in the family saga are deeply influenced by Indian religious discourses. Joshua is indeed a passionate lover of hunting, but suffers from the fact that playing game means killing animals (p. 188) – from a Hindu, Jain or Buddhist perspective a violation of the ethics of non-violence – and an encounter with a wounded gazelle, whose innards are caught in the thicket, is the final momentum for the initiation into another profession. Her father becomes the animal guardian and the person responsible for the zoo in Ahmedabad: “... the hands which killed thus had the power to heal” (p. 196). He is first and then the veterinary director of the new zoo in Ahmedabad (p. 210).

Contacts with regional protagonists of the Indian liberation struggle – Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Vallabhai Patel, etc. – are there, the contact with representatives of the British colonial power and the history of the liberation movement is always on the edge of the family narration, and later – in 1961 – Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (p. 242 ff.) becomes one of the many high-ranking visitors of the prominent zoo that Esther David’s father has established.

While on the one hand, the separate Jewish identity is strengthened over the generations, the secularization of life is an ongoing process. Does the develop-

ment of the family over the generations move towards a post-religious identity? Does the association with the inherited religion turn into a rather loose connection to a constructed tradition? “Father says he has never thought about God. He does not feel the need to do so. He feels Jewish and that is enough for him” (*The Walled City*, p. 100). In the parental generation of the author, one of the first civil marriages of the Bene Israel community is being held: Joshua and Naomi married in 1942 without the approval of the bride’s father, which leads to an exclusion from the Jewish community for decades. Only in 1975, Joshua and his wife are officially pardoned and probably only because Joshua has become a recognized public figure, and the recipient of the prestigious Padmashree Award by the Indian Union. Over the birth of granddaughter Esther, his grandmother Shebabeth forgets the Purim festival – the annual festival in honour of Esther in the Old Testament (p. 271), though the fact that the girl was born at the time of the festival, caused the child to be named after her.

Only the last part of the book entitled “Esther” is about the author herself, about her life, her rediscovery of identity after two failed marriages, after the leave for Israel and France. After six years of married life in France, she decides to return to Ahmedabad: “I abandon my jeans, shirts, coats, shoes. I dress in a sari. With the sari, I am transformed into the Indian woman I was. ... I am relieved she is alive and waiting for me” (p. 394). This is the result of a difficult self-discovery amidst a failing or, to be precise, an already failed marriage. Visual arts play an important role in this process: the drawing pen is like a scalpel, when the strokes of her pen are virtually self-cuts: “I started a series of drawings. They were like a secret diary. The drawings were about myself. A hardline harsh, dark and vicious cuts through my body” (p. 394). Her own body is the body of Saint Sebastian pierced with arrows (think of the self-portrait of Egon Schiele as Saint Sebastian). The feet of her husband, which peep out from under the blanket, recall the feet of a dead body, covered by the sheet.

The Book of Esther is less a family drama in the style of Thomas Mann, William Faulkner or Honoré de Balzac, and also not in the style of the large, commercially successful and soon translated novels of modern Indo-English literature, but more of a family saga in reportage style, a fixed literary memory of Jewish existence in India from the late 19th until the early 21st century.

The novels “*Shalom India Housing Society*” (2007) and, more recently, “*The Man with Enormous Wings*” (2010), with their more complex narratives than their predecessors, also deal with their home city of Ahmedabad. Their perspective is the post-pogrom of 2002 scenario. The man with enormous wings is Mahatma Gandhi, who can no longer influence the increasing collective hatred and the increasing isolation of the religions and turns into a ghostlike and passive observer of the terrible violence executed by religious hardliners. In *Shalom India Housing Society*, it is the idea of a purely Jewish residential block

that is to provide shelter and security to its residents in times of emergency. The society signals the failure of the peaceful coexistence of religions in Ahmedabad. Prophet Elijah, who is revered by the Bene Israel particularly, turns up as a guest during the Passover celebration in the homes of tenants and is an ironic and sad observer of this failure at the same time.

4. Conclusion

Cohen refers to 20 different categories of Jewish camps according to the American Foundation for Jewish Camping, from “Lubavitch Orthodox” to “secular-social justice”, in the context of the institutional fragmentation of Jewish identity in late modernity (Cohen 2010: 15). Identity research in this context speaks of the “compartmentalization” of Jewish identity. It is difficult to classify or relate the three authors presented here into any rigid identity scheme. It is clear that they are not much interested in Zionism and the Aliya. Nissim Ezekiel and Sheila Rohekar have always remained in India, Esther David is a returnee.

Religious issues and religious behaviour continues to exert an impact on the thoughts and writings of the three authors Nissim Ezekiel, Esther David and Sheila Rohekar, even though their individual motivations, their reflexivity and their genres of creative expression may be very divers. This can come about through sudden religious spurts, like when Esther David talks about her adolescence: “I suddenly became religious. I said I wanted to know the meaning of being a Bene Israel Jew” (p. 288). But when the young Raphael no longer shows up in the synagogue, Esther soon loses interest. “As I did not see Raphael again in the synagogue, I lost interest in religion” (p. 292). Rudiments of personal religiosity appear to be somehow opportunistic in the broader context of biographies, not vice versa, the biography doesn’t appear to display a deep religious impact, and none of the three is much interested in institutionalized forms of religion. However, elements of a lived Jewish religion appear all over again, despite the parents’ secular life and – in the case of Esther David – a confessed atheist as a father. A typical example is the Hebrew death prayer at the deathbed of her mother Naomi: the sound of the formulaic prayer in Hebrew as a way to express deep and existential sentiments.

The transfer to Israel, for her, is first of all an experience of pilgrimage, like in a prayer she reflects on it: “It would wipe out my past. Give me a new life. Help me forget India. ... I was running away from India” (p. 371). But the strangeness of experience proves to be stronger and they come to the conclusion: “If I wished to live like a Jew, I could anywhere. I did not have to live in Israel to feel more Jewish than I felt in India ... Israel unnerved me” (p. 377). After six years with her

second husband, which brings her from Israel to France, the next divorce is not to be avoided – which brings her to the decision to return to Ahmedabad. From her personal perspective, the return is the actual Aliya (immigration), to return to herself, to her complex identity as a Jewish woman in the midst of a non-Jewish Indian environment, in which she participates, and in which her personal identity is recreated again and again. This is not to be understood as a return to a primordial collective identity, but as a kind of playful discovery of the self as a piece in the overall picture of India’s “unity in diversity”. The identification with Judaism is more symbolic than real, and in this sense one can, in a slight variant to the “vanishing American Jew” according to Dershowitz (Dershowitz 1997), classify Esther David’s literary work as a testimony of the vanishing Indian Jews.

For Sheila Rohekar, finally, the enormous violence resulting from the mainstream of society is the focus of her attention as a writer: a primordial structural violence, which easily turns into direct violence if traditional identities and their relation to the primordial are questioned and disregarded. While Ezekiel and David are clearly visible as Jewish authors from the plots they employ, this is not so obvious with Rohekar. I would argue, however, that a special sensitivity to the author for overcoming limitations of traditional identities and the consequences of violent religious action within society displays a minority perspective on the important problems of Indian society and identity. I think, the novel is a work of lasting format to be – a contemporary historical testimony that I could present here in brief outline only. The lived religion of ordinary people has no independent positive value for any of the three authors. This is perhaps exemplified in poems such as “*Night of the Scorpion*” by Nissim Ezekiel – one of his most famous poems (which is included in the curriculum of the Delhi University English undergraduate course), which is concerned with the conflict between Hindu resentment and modern rationalism:

Thank God the scorpion picked on me
And spared my children.

For Nissim Ezekiel, visiting the synagogue, or some other form of the routine practice of religion in the traditional sense, do not matter. Religion, however, provides the language and the narrativity of deeper dimension of reality. Poetry is not talking about things, but is an expression of things – as he points out in an essay “*Poetry as Knowledge*” of 1975: the poet differs from the theorist in that he insists “on the integrity, the uniqueness, the primacy of his experience in poetry, which is his experience, so to speak, of being on fire and not the experience of studying the flame that has cooled down” (*Selected Prose*, p. 30 – 31). He sees himself first in this idealistic sense as poet, i. e. emanating from experience and subjectivity, which conveys to him the creative facility to write poetry. Poetic

identity is nourished by the metaphors that a pre-modern language provides – a language returning to the sources:

The song of my experience sung,
 I knew that all was yet to sing.
 My ancestors, among the castes,
 Were aliens crushing seed for bread
 (The hooded bullock made his rounds).

India as one's own country and the original outlandish Jewish identity is the reference point of one's own experience. Thus Ezekiel goes beyond what Bruce King (2001: 92 ff.) calls the main feature of contemporary Indian poetry in English: namely, ironic scepticism. The urban and rural landscape – well, it sometimes is rural India outside the subjective world centre of Mumbai, which is found in Ezekiel's poetry – comes to its own expression through the poet, the expression of urban Mumbai – “the city like a passion burns” – a very personal experience that dries out the eyes due to pain and love:

The Indian landscape sears my eyes
 I have become a part of it
 To be observed by foreigners.
 They say that I am singular,
 Their letters overstate the case.
 I have made my commitments now.
 This is one: to stay where I am,
 As others choose to give themselves
 In some remote and backward place.
 My backward place is where I am. (p. 181)

India may be some kind of “backward place”, yet also the site of a successful realization of identity – and the incentive “to stay where I am.”

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Hindu-Jewish Dialogue: A New Tradition in the Making

1. Introduction

In this essay, I will review and assess the historic yet under-publicized encounters of Hindu and Jewish spiritual leaders during the 2007 and 2008 summits in Delhi and Jerusalem.² My objective is to provide a scholar's perspective of the significance and implications of these meetings in the context of interfaith dialogues in general, and Indo-Judaic conversations and relations in particular.³

In contrast to interreligious Jewish dialogues with Christians and Muslims, whose past and even current anti-Jewish or anti-Israel ideologies are an ever present component, the prospect of dialogues with Hindus and Buddhists promises freedom from such stigmas. Jews have lived in India for the past two millennia and their existence there has been marked by peaceful co-existence and the absence of anti-Semitism. Moreover, given the current bilateral economic and military cooperation between Israel and India, there is incentive to expand this cooperation to other spheres, including each other's spiritual traditions. Furthermore, the extensive Israeli tourism to India is another factor in the interest in seeking dialogue and harmony between Hindus and Jews.

Broadly speaking, eastern and western interfaith encounters have both their share of possibilities and challenges. Jews and Christians share a scriptural matrix, a factor that on the one hand contributes to a common language, while at

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2 This essay is an updated version of Greenberg 2009.

3 I thank Rabbi Naftali Rothenberg of the Van Leer Institute, Rabbi Daniel Sperber, Professor of Talmud at Bar Ilan University, Rabbi David Rosen, Director of the Department for Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, and Dr. Martha Doherty for their helpful perspectives and comments during my research. Special thanks and recognition goes to Mr. Bawa Jain for sharing his passion for religious diplomacy, and for providing supporting documents and materials for my 2009 article.

the same time it deepens their theological divide. Hindu-Jewish dialogue initially lacks common textual footings, yet as the summits suggest, can be fortified through, among other things, a shared avoidance of proselytization. Orientalism and false dyads such as monotheism versus polytheism have further distanced these traditions in the popular as well as the intellectual imagination. On the other hand, the absence of enmity between the two nations throughout history provided an immediate comfort zone for the interchanges that took place in Delhi and Jerusalem. As the resolutions that were articulated in these meetings suggest, the delegates recognized significant resemblances and shared beliefs, and enthusiastically committed to deepening this dialogue in ever more meaningful ways.

The 2007 and 2008 Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits represent the first time that officially appointed delegations of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders met and produced declarations affirming common religious views, histories, and practices. A precursor to the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits was the Millennium World Peace Summit held in New York in 2000, which brought together for the first time over 1,200 eminent religious leaders from over 120 countries at the United Nations.⁴ Importantly, this occasion served as a catalyst for the establishment of the first official group of Hindu leaders – the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha in 2002.⁵

It took the courage and determination of several contemporary leaders and visionaries to set the stage for these historic interreligious summits. Whereas Swami Dayananda had long desired to meet with Jewish religious leaders, the prospect that the Chief Rabbinate of Israel would consider engaging in interfaith relations in general and with Hindus in particular, would have been considered entirely unrealistic just a short few years earlier. The Rabbinate's readiness for such an event as the 2007 Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit can be understood in light of its recent history with interfaith activities. This new development can be traced to the inspiration of Pope John Paul II, who contributed to a process of maturation in Jewish-Christian relations by initiating a bilateral dialogue with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in 2000. Since then, other formal relations have been established, including those with the Anglican Communion, with the organization of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, and since 2007, with the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha.

Until the 2007 Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit, almost all formal meetings and dialogues between Hindus and Jews on the subject of religious identity have

4 The Jewish delegation included both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi Chief Rabbis of Israel, while the Hindu delegation included the leadership of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha.

5 For more information on the history and development of the Acharya Sabha, see <http://www.acharyasabha.org/>.

taken place within the confines of academia⁶. Some of these meetings can be defined more broadly using the rubric of Indo-Judaic studies, and include the 2002 Oxford University conference entitled “A Perspective from the Margins. The State of the Art of Indo-Judaic Studies”⁷. Another Indo-Judaic conference was the “International Seminar on the Jewish Heritage of Kerala”, which was held in Cochin (February 21 – 23, 2006); the Proceedings of that seminar were published in a special issue (vol. 1, issue 3) of “*Tapasam. Journal for Kerala Studies*” in 2006.

In addition, the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion’s Comparative Studies of Hinduisms and Judaisms Group engender significant scholarly exchanges in this field. This AAR Unit, co-founded in 1995 by Professors Barbara Holdrege and Paul Morris, and later chaired by Professor Kathryn McClymond and this writer, has maintained and fostered close relations and cooperation among scholars of the two traditions. The group provides a forum for engaging with epistemologies that interrogate euro-centric intellectual ideals and discourse. Over the years, scholarly presentations have included themes of sacrifice, purity, and the body, and topics such as the guru and the rabbi, and the erotic figuring of the divine in both traditions.

2. The 2007 Delhi Summit

The Hindu-Jewish leadership summit was held in New Delhi (February 5 – 7, 2007). During these days, besides inaugural addresses the discussions and statements focussed on philosophical issues, practices in both traditions and topics of common concern. The meeting resulted in a “Declaration of mutual understanding and cooperation”. The following analysis of the summit is based on the speeches and papers published in the Proceedings (2007).

6 Mr. Jain coordinated the planning process of the summit over a three year period with the support of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, and in particular with Swami Dayananda Saraswati, as well as with the Office of the Chief Rabbinate. On a much smaller scale, a meeting between the Chief Rabbi of London and the Secretary General of the Hindu Forum of Britain took place in 2005, and recognized common experiences of these sub-communities of Great Britain.

7 Cf. Katz 2007. In his own contribution Katz includes 2,000 years of interactions between Jews and Indians more generally; he also includes Gandhi’s interaction with Indian Jews, and the 1990 Tibetan-Jewish dialogue (Katz 2007a: 113 – 128).

2.1. Goals for the 2007 Hindu-Jewish Dialogue

The overarching goal for the first Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit as conceived by the World Council of Religious Leaders was to foster respect and amity between the two communities. Other objectives included addressing the relevance of their respective spiritual teachings for contemporary society, focusing on justice, compassion, and humility; recognizing commonalities in values and social and religious conduct; working together to preserve tradition in an increasingly global and secular society; implementing both strong secular as well as religious education; and carrying out their mutual responsibility to those who suffer, to the environment, and to world peace.

These spiritual and philosophical goals can be seen as long term in nature. Participation in the summit was also driven by more immediate and pragmatic considerations. The threat of terrorism as well as missionary activity is a common concern of both groups. In speaking with members of the Jewish delegation, the rationale for the Rabbinate's participation in the dialogue was articulated in part as *pikuach nefesh*, the imperative to save Jewish lives. This principle is contextualized in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits as the impetus to join forces with the religious leadership of Hinduism to condemn terrorism, to fight against missionary activities, and to support the State of Israel. Another mutually beneficial objective for the dialogues was the potential expansion of cultural and diplomatic ties between India and Israel.

2.2. Highlights of the Delhi Dialogue

In his inaugural address, Sri Swami Dayananda, Chairman of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, recognized common features of Judaism and Hinduism: belief in One Supreme Being; the principle of non-conversion; the oral tradition of recitation of the Veda and Torah and their hermeneutics; and the commitment to peace and nonviolence.

In supportive statements made by their Holinesses The Shankaracharyas, the uniqueness of being ancient non-proselytizing traditions was poignantly highlighted. His Holiness (HH) Sri Pramukh Swamiji Maharaj, Swami Narayan Sanstha, Akshardham, stated that "India has not only not persecuted the Jews, but we Indians have welcomed and embraced the Jews in the past." A statement by HH Acharya Sri Sri Ravi Shankarji, Art of Living, further elaborates the point of the shared values and historical experience of Hindus and Jews who "have been persecuted ... are both victims of proselytizing and mass conversion ... yet both our communities do not convert people from other faiths". HH Jagadguru Sri Swami Svarupananda Saraswatiiji Shankaracharya of Jyotir Math, affirmed,

“both the Hindu and Jewish communities have a lot in common, we need to discover and nurture these areas for the benefit of millions of people”. And HH Jagadguru Swami Jayendra Saraswatiji Sri Shankaracharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham offered a blessing for “reinforcing the feeling of pride for one’s religion and country, and for a deep bond between the followers of Hinduism and Judaism”.

The Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, emphasized the historic nature of being the first Chief Rabbi of Israel to visit India and thanked the Hindu leaders for the 2,000 years that Jews in India enjoyed the freedom to live and practise their laws and customs in an open and peaceful environment. Rabbi Sperber provided an overview of Judaism, including an explanation of the meaning of the Sabbath. In addressing the Jewish hermeneutical tradition, he distinguished between two philosophical views whereby according to the one, God fills every element of the world and according to the other, God surrounds the world. Together, these views can be seen as providing a framework for a theology of both immanence and transcendence.

Swami Gurusharanananda stated that “both traditions have given birth to many other religions: Hinduism has given birth to Buddhism and Jainism, and similarly, Judaism is the mother of Christianity and Islam”. He further pointed out that both traditions are revealed: the Vedas are not merely books; they are revealed facts by Rishis who are the seers of the mantras, not their authors, which he emphasized is similar to the prophet Moses who received the Torah from God. He also highlighted resonances in religious behaviour, especially in purity and dietary laws. He drew correspondences to the lunar calendar, and the fast holidays of Yom Kippur and Navaratri, as well as the spring holidays of Purim and Holi. Other delegates expressed sentiments for partnership and mutual education in the area of self-preservation such as reviving the Hebrew language, and comparative studies of Hebrew, Torah, Sanskrit, and Veda.

Addressing the theological hot button of the meeting, Swami Veditatmananda spoke about the topic of Hindu worship. Introducing the Vedic view that God pervades all existence, he explained that God thereby could be invoked in any name or form. Hindus worship God in many forms: “it is not that the people worship the idol, metal, or stone that is in front of them, but it becomes a stepping-stone for worshipping God”. He further elaborated that there are different kinds of devotees, those who do not need aids for worship, and others who need spiritual devices of names and forms. He urged the Jewish delegation to study Hinduism, and in a profoundly “dialogical” moment, beckoned: “We seek a sympathetic understanding on the part of other religious leaders to not dismiss us as idolaters.”

Rabbi David Rosen’s response to the issue of idolatry focused on the principle of moral conduct that informs the biblical notion of idolatry. He quotes 14th

century sage Rabbi Menachem who affirmed that a community that adheres to ethical conduct is by definition not idolatrous. This perspective enabled the Jewish delegation to move beyond the prevailing views of idolatry that had shaped the Abrahamic construct of monotheism, and allowed a new relationship with their Hindu dialogical partners to begin.

2.3. Hindu-Jewish Declarations

The Hindu-Jewish Summits produced declarations affirming common theological and ethical principles. The first declaration of 2007 represents a momentous and historic breakthrough insofar as it affirms the recognition by the Jewish religious leaders of the fundamental nature of the Hindu belief in One Supreme Being, and overturns the common Abrahamic theological view of Hinduism as idolatrous. The first affirmation states:

“Their respective Traditions teach that there is One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality, who has created this world in its blessed diversity and who has communicated Divine ways of action for humanity, for different peoples in different times and places.”

According to Rabbi Sperber, the great challenge for dialogue and cooperation between religious Jews and Hindus has been the issue of idolatry, *avodah zarah* in Hebrew. While Judaism affirms not only the transcendent God but also the immanence of the divine, it has held since the biblical period a deeply engrained stance of defining itself over and against the practices of idolatry. This repudiation of idolatry is reflected in the second commandment of the Decalogue as well as in the Talmud which has an entire tractate called *Avodah Zarah*, devoted to delineating rules of conduct pertaining to all aspects of contact with idol-worshippers. According to Jewish law, Jews are forbidden to enjoy any benefits of contact with idol-worshipping religious institutions and individuals whose practices are considered blasphemous. Even the Noachide Laws in the Hebrew Bible, a set of seven laws directed towards the nations of the world, include along with prohibition of murder and theft, the ban against idolatry.

In the course of the dialogue, members of the Hindu Dharma clarified what to them has been a fundamentally inaccurate and flawed view of their tradition. They explained on the basis of the Vedas that their traditions teach of One Supreme Being who created the world; along with this essential truth, they elaborated that the multiplicity of gods and goddesses are manifestations of the godhead.

The issue of idolatry took centre stage in the 2007 summit as indicated in its prominent location in the declaration. Contrary to the view that the topic of idolatry may represent an immediate obstacle in Hindu-Jewish dialogue, it

appears that not only was it addressed in Delhi, but in fact, members of the Jewish delegation initially displayed genuine openness and trust towards their Hindu dialogical partners with regards to this topic.⁸ Based on the report of the Delhi meeting and conversations with a number of the delegates, it appears that the Jewish delegation listened and accepted the self-definition of their Hindu partners without imposing their own definitions.⁹ The affirmation of the oneness of God created a common ground, which enabled the dialogue to thrive.

The declaration also affirmed the central roles of peoplehood, culture, land, and language, and underscored the non-proselytizing nature of both traditions. Other topics agreed upon in the first declaration include the sanctity of life and the condemnation of violence in the name of religion; the importance of educating future generations in the history and teachings of their traditions; the need to understand each other's religious symbols, culture, and philosophy and to be understood by other faith communities; the commitment to cooperate to address poverty, sickness, and economic inequities; and the establishment of a standing committee on Hindu-Jewish relations.¹⁰ The results of the first summit were impressive, as Rabbi David Rosen explains:

“Above all, this meeting provided the opportunity ... to shatter distorted stereotypes and misconceptions that all too often have contributed to keeping the Hindu and Jewish worlds apart ... we were part of the beginning of a new historic era of understanding and cooperation between our two faith communities.”

3. The 2008 Jerusalem Summit

During the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit in Jerusalem (cf. Transcribed Proceedings 2008), a deeper theological dialogue ensued. The Jewish delegation raised questions regarding the specific nature of the Hindu deity. Some of the questions posed to the Hindus include: What is the nature of one's relationship with the Hindu God? Is it a personal relationship? Is the Hindu deity a commanding deity? One delegate in the Hindu group questioned the meaning of commanding. He suggested that one way to respond to the question is perhaps to interpret a command as an imperative of what one experiences as right and

8 This initial response to Hindu ritual and belief by the Jewish leaders was later problematized upon further research of salient points of view in Advaita Vedanta.

9 Leonard Swidler, one of the foremost scholars of interreligious dialogue, posits rules of conduct for interfaith dialogue, including the 5th commandment, which warns against imposing one's self-definition upon the other. See Swidler 1990, also referred to in Katz 2007a.

10 As Chair of the Jewish side of the Hindu Jewish Scholars Group, Rabbi Sperber was charged with the agenda of collecting and discussing relevant classical and contemporary texts. In this capacity, he will help guide future meetings on this and other topics.

good. In this light, he asserted, it can be stated that the Hindu God is commanding.

Fundamentally, the second declaration does not present any new theological ideas. However, a more nuanced and elaborate formulation of the nature of Hindu belief in One Supreme Being is expressed in the first affirmation of the second declaration. Accordingly, the Rabbinat recognized that

“One Supreme Being, both in its formless and manifest aspects, has been worshipped by Hindus over the millennia. This does not mean that Hindus worship ‘gods’ and ‘idols’. The Hindu relates to only the One Supreme Being when he / she prays to a particular manifestation.”

The conversations in the second meeting also highlighted specific concerns of the Hindu delegation. For example, the first declaration affirmed the need to understand each other’s religious symbols, culture, and philosophy, and to be understood by other faith communities. The 7th affirmation of the second declaration addresses this concern in a specific way by focusing on the misunderstanding of the ancient Hindu symbol of the swastika:

“Swastika is an ancient and greatly auspicious symbol of the Hindu tradition. It is inscribed on Hindu temples, ritual altars, entrances, and even account books. A distorted version of the sacred symbol was misappropriated by the Third Reich in Germany, and abused as an emblem under which heinous crimes were perpetrated against humanity, particularly against the Jewish people. The participants recognize that this symbol is, and has been sacred to Hindus for millennia, long before its misappropriation.”

As stated above, it is clear that the swastika is a sensitive symbol for both communities and could generate a possible point of contention in Hindu-Jewish dialogue. In the case of the Hindus, a distortion and misunderstanding of this religious symbol is offensive; for Jews, the swastika (albeit in its distorted form) is a painful reminder of the cruellest crimes committed against them in recent history. The 7th affirmation informs and elaborates not only the original and true meaning of the swastika for Hindus but also recognizes its painful association for Jews. In this way, it assuages both communities’ sensitivities to this symbol.

Other affirmations in the second declaration include the mutual commitment to deepening the relationship on the basis of three principles:

- (a) belief in one supreme God, creator and guide of the cosmos;
- (b) shared values; and
- (c) common historical experiences.

The delegates expressed their commitment to resolving conflicts through non-violent means such as dialogue, negotiations, and compromise. They considered

an appeal to other religions to respect the sanctity and validity of all religions for their adherents, with the goal of non-interference.

As the declarations of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits indicate, both delegations recognized the affinity of being non-proselytizing religions and the symmetry of their historical experience as oppressed groups. Both shared concern over the persistence of missionizing efforts and its threat to the integrity of their traditions. The success of the second meeting can be appreciated on the basis of the high degree of trust and bonding reached among the delegates of both groups.

4. The Hindu-Jewish Summits in Light of Indo-Judaic and Comparative Religious Studies

The significance of the Summits can be further appreciated in light of existing scholarship in the areas of Indo-Judaic and Comparative Religious Studies. Despite their distinct enterprises, ethos, and rules of engagement, interfaith dialogue as seen in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits and the comparative study of Indo-Judaic civilizations begin with similar questions: What do these traditions share and what is gained from this comparison and dialogue?

A common perception of Judaism and Hinduism is the apparent contradiction between Hindu iconocentric polytheism, and Jewish iconoclastic monotheism. However, as indicated in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits and the burgeoning field of Indo-Judaic Studies, examples of cultural and religious resonances and affinities between the two traditions are compelling and worthy of further scholarship. The expertise and commitment of eminent scholars from disciplines such as History, Linguistics, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, and Comparative Religion promise growth of this innovative interdisciplinary field.

The volume “Between Jerusalem and Benares: Comparative Studies in Judaism and Hinduism” (Goodman 1994) is the first attempt by a group of scholars of Hinduism and Judaism to take seriously the cross-cultural affinities between these traditions. These essays explore the historical connections and influences between the two cultures; highlight resonances of concepts and practices; and feature comparative themes such as *dharma* and *Halachah*, Veda and Torah, and Tantric and Kabbalistic notions of union with the divine.

A more recent volume (Katz 2007), bearing the name of the 2002 Oxford conference “Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century. A View from the Margin”, contributes to this growing field in the areas of historical studies, Comparative Religious Studies (including an essay on Hindu-Jewish dialogue),

Jewish communities in India, and contemporary interactions in polity, political discourse and diplomacy. This latest volume features and provides a context for a discourse on topics such as the role of theology and the relationship between doctrine and practice in Hindu-Jewish dialogue. Katz and Holdrege's reflections on Hindu-Jewish dialogues, whether these are primarily scholarly or religious in nature, urge their participants to re-evaluate their assumptions and methodologies. They caution against the unconscious adoption of dominant Christian categories that might be alien to both Judaism and Hinduism, and challenge existing hegemonic paradigms, epistemologies, and rules of engagement, whether in the comparative study of religion or in the practices of interfaith dialogue. According to Holdrege and Katz, cultural and religious resonances between Judaism and Hinduism render an alternative conceptual model and discourse for interreligious dialogue not only possible but also necessary.

In the context of Hindu-Jewish dialogue, significant symmetries can be seen in the historical legacies of the two communities. Katz (2007a) points out the social symmetry that exists in Hindu-Jewish relations, especially outside of India, where neither dominates the other and in fact both have been subject to religious oppression. An interesting point he makes pertains to the process of diasporization and modernization that Jews were first to undergo, and thus communities that are just now becoming diasporized and / or modernized such as Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists look to Jews for guidance. As minorities in countries such as the USA, both communities can cooperate in shared challenges such as warding off missionaries.

In Holdrege's estimate, the Jewish and Hindu traditions share important affinities, especially the brahmanical and rabbinic traditions, as systems concerned with issues of family, ethnic, and cultural integrity, blood lineages, and the intergenerational transmission of traditions. She further underscores the common strands of the two traditions as orthopraxic religions with hereditary priesthood, sacrifices, strict dietary and purity laws. Other affinities include sacred language and land (Holdrege 2007: 88).

Considering Hindu-Jewish dialogue in light of the aforementioned themes brings to focus the meaningful contributions that the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits have begun to make and the future possibilities that are already palpable in cultivating intellectual, cultural, and religious bridges between the two traditions. Recognizing the challenges that any theological differences can pose to interfaith dialogue, it was agreed in the planning process that the difficult issue of idolatry must be addressed in the first Hindu-Jewish Summit. Once this topic was discussed, even if in a preliminary fashion, a preconceived hurdle was

overcome and it was then possible to speak about and further contemplate the affinities between these traditions.¹¹

Unlike other dialogues whose partners have had to overcome decades and even centuries of distrust, contempt and pain, the participants in the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits had the advantage of a clean slate in light of the history of peaceful coexistence of the two communities in India.¹² The Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits provide scholars with new conceptual frameworks for Hindu-Jewish Studies, Comparative Religions, and Interreligious Studies. Existing scholarly groups will need to process this fundamentally new interfaith engagement on the basis of its contributions to comparative theology and hermeneutics.

5. Future Topics and Challenges for Hindu-Jewish Dialogues

The delegates of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits have identified and agreed upon several topics for future discussions. These include contemporary scientific and social challenges to religion; the role of religion with regards to ecological welfare; respectful relationships among faiths; and the parameters of legitimizing opposing worldviews.

A key objective articulated by the delegates of the 2007 and 2008 summits was how to promulgate the newly formed views of the other in their respective communities. Stereotyping the other cannot be expected to disappear or be eradicated overnight. Furthermore, more conservative groups within their communities could contribute to a backlash against the declarations.

This challenge is not only integral to interfaith work but is part and parcel of intra-religious dialogue. A pivotal question in this regard is the distinction between relativism and pluralism. New notions of religious pluralism press orthodox Jews and Hindus alike to reconcile a traditional insular perspective with an expanded contemporary view of themselves in relation to other religions, as well as to the diverse constituencies within their own faith communities. Surely, if the Chief Rabbinate of Israel can bridge the religious divide between Jews and Hindus, they can begin to consider ways to ameliorate the relations among Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews.

In response to such objectives and challenges and in accordance with the

11 For future setbacks of the Hindu-Jewish dialogue, see the following footnote and Wilke's essay in this volume.

12 Of relevance is Irving Greenberg's account of his interfaith experiences and the critical and suspicious responses he endured during the early sixties, especially in light of Rabbi Soloveitchik's writings on the subject and the subsequent rabbinic prohibition against any theological dialogue with Catholics. See Greenberg 2004.

summits' resolutions, the Scholars Group was scheduled to convene in 2008 to disseminate textual sources to further their discussions and deliberations. These texts will not only provide the delegates with primary textual materials for their own understanding, but in the long term, it is anticipated that new and revised educational materials will be prepared under the guidance of the Scholars Group as part of the process of implementing these in a variety of educational settings.¹³

From the Jewish perspective, pertinent topics for discussions include the *Halachic* (Jewish legal) implications of the declarations. The rabbis would need to consider the extent to which social, cultural, and economic relations with Hindus are permissible in light of both the new theological insights generated during the summits and the confines of *Halachah*. The consequences of their deliberations on a range of interactions with Hindus could be profound.

Rabbinic deliberations could, for example, have implications for Israelis travelling in India. As is well known, the phenomenon of Israelis who travel to Asia in general and India in particular involves 50,000 to 60,000 Israelis at any given moment.¹⁴ While these represent a variety of age groups, the majority of these Israelis are in their early twenties, who, following their military service, flock to India for spiritual and recreational reasons alike. For those among them who are observant, India becomes an attractive destination for a number of reasons, including dietary ones, given the strictly vegetarian Hindu diet prevailing in India, which accommodates *kashrut* (Jewish dietary) laws. At the same time, there are other *Halachic* laws prohibiting visiting of sacred places that are non-Jewish, partaking in meals and other social interactions where there is a connection, whether direct or indirect, to foreign religious rituals. Another *Halachic* consideration of Jewish-Hindu cooperation is the 2005 controversy over whether wigs from India are kosher (given that they are the hair of Hindus whose hair was sacrificed in their temple for ritual purposes).¹⁵ While not all segments of the Orthodox Jewish community are concerned with this degree of observance, this issue is nevertheless indicative of some of the limitations placed upon observant Jews vis-à-vis their interactions with non-Jews, in this case specifically with Hindus. Any *Halachic* deliberations regarding these issues

13 Since 2008 the group met twice, in 2009 and in 2011 in New York and Delhi. As Chair of the Scholar's Group, Rabbi Sperber researched both the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, upheld by Swami Dayananda, as well as some of the *Halachic* issues posed by Jewish engagement with certain Hindu practices. His study resulted in a 91-page article entitled "The Halachic Status of Hinduism. Is Hinduism Idolatrous? A Jewish Legal Inquiry" (in private circulation). For a summary of his paper and reflections from the perspective of an Indologist as well as Swami Dayananda's response to Rabbi Sperber's article, see Wilke's essay in this volume.

14 For a collection of essays on this phenomenon, see Nir 2006.

15 Married Orthodox Jewish women are required to cover their hair while in public and often opt for fashionable wigs to fulfill this obligation.

could have an enormous impact on the activities and interactions of religious Israelis and Jews travelling and conducting business in India.

Finally, a complex and sensitive topic to be considered in future meetings is the question of representation. As is well known, religious leadership varies from one culture or nation to another and reflects existing dynamics of intra-religious reality. The exclusion of non-Orthodox voices from the Jewish delegation will need to be revisited. Additionally, whereas the Hindu delegation had three women scholars, there were no female participants on the Jewish delegation. The selection of the participants for these summits and which constituencies within their religious group they represent is an important topic in interfaith dialogues in general and Hindu-Jewish dialogues in particular.

In conclusion, the recent Hindu-Jewish dialogues represent a new beginning in Hindu-Jewish relations. These are unique encounters that produced historic breakthroughs. It is evident that the encounters had immense impact on the participants. The cooperation and trust displayed during the Summits can be attributed in large part to the absence of political or religious hostility, current or ancient. Despite such a clean slate, the delegations clearly had to wrestle with significant areas of religious differences. As the disagreements subsequent to the meetings profiled in this essay indicate, there have been and will be bumps in the road. The overcoming of long-held theological preconceptions regarding the nature of each faith's core beliefs, doctrines, symbols, and practices represents a major step forward in Hindu-Jewish relations in particular, and in interfaith dialogue in general. These interreligious encounters indicate a profound level of commitment to understanding each other and augur well for the ultimate goal of dialogue – recognizing our interdependence and bringing about *Shalom Bayit* or peace in our home.

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Annette Wilke¹

The Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summits: New “Ground-breaking Strides” of Global Interfaith Cooperation?

“Namaste and Shalom ... When we say, ‘Namaste’, we bring our two hands together. Our two hands are entirely different, and they can never match, but they never fight ... All there is is one, and we are all one ... We give others the freedom to be who they are and enjoy each other. This dialogue is a great event” (Inaugural Address by Swami Dayananda, Proceedings of the Hindu-Jewish Leadership Summit 2007: 17).

Interreligious dialogue was a typically Christian project for a long time. My paper is about an interfaith project of a different kind and I present material which is very new and part of it unpublished. I will discuss the recent history of the Hindu-Jewish dialogue, the 2007 and 2008 Hindu-Jewish leadership summits in Delhi and Jerusalem, which for the first time officially assembled appointed delegations of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders, and furthermore the succeeding closed meetings of Hindu and Jewish scholars, which took place in 2009 and 2011 in New York and Delhi respectively. The initiator of these memorable events was Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, a Hindu monk and leading Vedanta master of India, who had in 2002 founded the All India Dharma Acharya Sabha, a body of more than 130 Hindu religious leaders representing 12 ancient Hindu traditions. All meetings took place under the auspices of the Acharya Sabha and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, facilitated by the American Jewish Committee and the World Council of Religious Leaders, part of the United Nations. Besides Hindu and Jewish religious leaders of very high rank, the summits also attracted an amazing number of political leaders.

The two leadership summits and the resulting joint declarations about shared religious views, histories, practices, and values, were viewed by the participants and the media, e. g. the New Indian Express, the Jerusalem Post and News Today, as a “ground-breaking stride”, as they helped resolve misconceptions (in par-

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ticular about Hindu “idolatry” and the symbol of the swastika), and as a landmark of interreligious dialogue which revised 2000 years of misunderstandings and set new standards in interfaith cooperation. Repeatedly a new, great dialogue between “the two most ancient” religions of the world was mentioned, as they were seen as the cradles of the other world religions: Buddhism and Jainism on the one hand, and Christianity and Islam on the other, respectively. These “most ancient” religions would in their joint venture play a leading role in bringing about world peace and harmony, end conflict and religious violence and lead the world out of chaos with their moral authority (Proceedings 2007: 11). This was a major argument of Bawa Jain, the Secretary General of the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCORL) and the Millennium World Peace Summit, who played a decisive role in organizing and hosting the meetings. Furthermore Swami Dayananda started his open letter in the New Indian Express (March 9, 2008) with the words:

“An extraordinary inter-faith meeting between Hindu and Jewish religious leaders – an event with the potential to pioneer a paradigm shift from conflict to harmony among all religions – took place in Jerusalem a couple of weeks ago. The historic meet emphasized and illustrated the importance of honest dialogue between any two religious traditions to resolve seemingly irresolvable differences ... The Jerusalem meeting concluded with a landmark declaration that Hindus worship ‘one supreme being’ and are not really idolatrous. The implications of this are profound in content and far-reaching in effect. ... Leaders of both religions came out of the mutually enriching meeting, wiser. ... Now this needs to be globalized for promoting peace among religions”.

There was little change in this enthusiastic tone in the press release of the latest meeting in 2011, issued by Rabbi David Rosen, the head of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and Jewish International Director of Interreligious affairs. Rosen speaks of a “historic bilateral cooperation”, “impressive new strides in recent years”, and “a new world of global interfaith communication in which the AJC has been a trailblazer”. It is true that the AJC and particularly Rosen played an instrumental and constructive role in the new interfaith encounter. However, the meeting of 2011 had an “after-story” which must be judged as a backlash. Rabbi David Sperber, one of the chief delegates of the Jewish section, circulated a paper “The *halachic* status of Hinduism. Is Hinduism idolatrous? A Jewish legal inquiry” (2011a) which was received with great disappointment by the Hindu section. The dialogue got stuck thereafter, and possibly came to a sudden end.

I want to discuss and contextualize these events along the lines of the following questions: Who were the leading figures who participated and discursively shaped the interactions? What made the dialogue so successful and what were the salient points of the declarations? What topics were discussed in the closed scholar meetings, and what brought about the sudden break of the productive exchange? My focus will thus be on the agents, i. e. on the framework

and on the content: the interfaith program and the declarations. Furthermore the political dimensions of the summits and the latest developments will be considered: Rabbi Sperber's paper and Swami Dayananda's reaction.

Except for an article by Yudit Kornberg Greenberg on the two leadership summits (Greenberg 2009; Greenberg in this volume), no research has been undertaken on the subject. Part of my discussion will overlap with Greenberg's contribution. It is necessary to look at the summits and the declarations to set the scene. I will revise the same material, however, from a different angle, and also add new materials on later developments. My perspective is that of a scholar of Religious Studies, Indology, and Cultural Anthropology.

I owe great thanks to Swami Dayananda and his secretary PhD Martha Doherty for their confidential information and providing of data on the more recent developments (transcribed minutes of the second summit, audio-material of not yet transcribed minutes of the last meeting, unpublished papers, and personal e-mail correspondence). This would not have been possible without a long und trusting relationship with both. Martha Doherty and I studied Vedanta and Sanskrit with Swami Dayananda from 1979 to 1982 in his first three-year study course outside of India in Piercy (California), which was before Martha and I received our academic training in Religious Studies and Indology in our respective home countries and later pursued our different careers. During a stay in Rishikesh in March 2012, I had the opportunity to discuss the Hindu-Jewish summits with Swami Dayananda and Martha in person and I also had the opportunity to interview Swamini Svatmavidyananda Sarasvati who had been participant of the summits as well. Consequently, my presentation will be more informed from the Hindu side, but hopefully future studies will supplement the Jewish perspective with first-hand information regarding the present unhappy situation.

1. The Framework: the Actors and Discourses

The pictures on the front page of the Proceedings of the Hindu-Jewish leadership summit February 5 – 7, 2007 in Delhi show some of the major celebrities of the function and communicate the companionable spirit among them. You will find the President of India, Dr. Kalam, performing *pranam* (a respectful gesture) towards Swami Dayananda, the initiator of the Hindu-Jewish dialogue, at whose side stands Rabbi Yona Metzger, the chief rabbi of Israel for the Ashkenazi. You can see a laughing Bawa Jain sitting between Swami Dayananda and Rabbi Metzger who are just about to shake hands. You will acknowledge a smiling Shankaracarya of the Hampi Math (Karnataka) and other orange-clad Indian leaders, and the Mahamandaleswar Swami Gurusharananda giving a *tikka* (sa-

cred mark) to Rabbi Rosen. You will also find the former BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party) leader Lal Advani, and Mrs Balaji warmly shaking hands with a Jewish delegate's wife at the dinner table. The pictures illustrate an event where important people, from both religion and politics, met. Beside these pictures you will also find the logos of the WCORL and the All India Movement for Seva (AIM) on the front page of the Proceedings – the leadership summit is presented as an initiative of the WCORL in cooperation with the AIM. The AIM, dedicated to social service and education in rural India, is another big institution lately created by Swami Dayananda and connected to the Acharya Sabha.

The proceedings of the first summit are an impressive account of the great assembly of Hindu and Jewish religious leaders who were part of the function. The first pages contain messages and blessings from some very prominent members of the Acharya Sabha who were not able to come: the Shankaracaryas of the Jyotir Math, the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham, and the Pushpagiri as well as greetings from the leader of the Swami Narayan order and Ravi Shankar, the popular leader of the "Art of Living". The Jewish delegation comprised eminent rabbis and Jewish scholars, among them Daniel Sperber, professor of Talmud and Jewish Studies at Bar Ilan University, and a great number of official representatives. Besides Rabbi Metzger and Rabbi Rosen also Rabbi Dr. Israel Singer from the United States came, the chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation and of the World Jewish Congress, and Rabbi Moshe Garelik, the director of the Rabbinical Centre of Europe, as well as the Chief Rabbis of India, Belgium, Turkey, Spain, and the ambassador and consuls of Israel.

A dialogue project of this extent would not be possible without pre-established networks. Indeed, the preconditions have been vital for the event to take place at all – first of which was the public standing and prestige which the initiator Swami Dayananda enjoys in present-day India and beyond. He is considered a holy man and probably the most prominent teacher of Advaita Vedanta in contemporary India. He is highly reputed in both very orthodox-traditionalist and modern-reform circles for his lucid Vedanta teaching and profound knowledge of the Shastra (the original texts). He also has a large following of diaspora Hindus in the US and attracts Western devotees from around the world as well. He was invited to give a speech at the UN several times.

An important precursor to the Hindu-Jewish summits was the Millenium World Peace Summit held in New York in 2000, organized by Bawa Jain who had invited Swami Dayananda and Rabbi Rosen as keynote speakers. This summit brought 1,200 religious leaders from more than 120 countries together at the United Nations, and was one of the catalysts for the formation of the All Hindu Acharya Sabha in 2002, because it made painfully obvious that the Hindus were lacking a collective and representative voice which would grant them an equal

standing compared to the Rabbinate, the Vatican, or the World Council of Churches. Up until then, each guru was his own pope. With the Acharya Sabha, Swami Dayananda created an umbrella institution which brought a large group of orthodox Hindu leaders from different religious traditions together under one roof – all the Shankaracharyas, as well as abbots, Acharyas, Pitadhipatis and Mandaleshvaras from Shaiva, Vaishnava, Shakta, and other *sampradayas* (religious traditions) which must be at least 250 years old. He achieved something which Western scholars of Hinduism would have deemed impossible, and this illustrates his public standing. Of course the new Acharya Sabha was not just founded for interreligious dialogue. The major aim was to speak in “a single collective voice” to uphold common socio-political interests in present-day India (Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha 2004: 25, 66).

The formation of the Acharya Sabha was an important precondition to enter into the Hindu-Jewish dialogue in such an official way and grandiose style as during the summits of 2007 and 2008. However, the Acharya Sabha was not fully represented. The vast majority of Hindu delegates came from different Shankara *sampradayas*, and only a minor number from Natha, Vaishnava, Madhva, Ashtamata and Udasi *sampradayas*. Of the Jewish delegation, being from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, only the Ashkenazi chief rabbi attended the first summit, and not the Sephardic chief rabbi, who has an equal standing within the Rabbinate. However, both the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Acharya Sabha represent orthodoxy in their traditions.

1.1. Hindu-Jewish Resonances

“This is a historic meeting. Never before has there been such a meeting of Jews and Hindus. ... I would like to open with echoing the profound resonance that exists between the Hindu and the Jewish World ... Jewish life ... is a way in which language, culture, and religion are intertwined. This is not found anywhere, except in the Hindu culture. ... We hope that this first meeting will lead us to celebrate the preservation of our tradition” (Proceedings 2007: 8).

This opening statement by Rabbi Rosen of the summit as a “historic occasion” (as Rabbi Metzger put it also) expresses a shared area of self-understanding and expectations echoed by the Hindu side: “to celebrate the preservation of our tradition” was an important common denominator. It was one of the major reasons why Swami Dayananda wanted to start a dialogue. In a globalized world of rapid change Swami Dayananda strives to keep the “Vedic wisdom” and “Vedic way of life” alive, to revitalize Hindu ethics and customs, and to join global and local communities by reaching a wider audience.

Swami Dayananda’s interest in entering the dialogue with Jewish leaders was

most likely raised by more than one reason. One was his love for tradition and erudition of the sacred literature and language which he found in the Jewish rabbis he met. According to Martha Doherty, he was deeply impressed by the rabbis at the Peace Summit and other conferences, and felt there were similar customs and values and a lot to share. He sought exchange to learn more about Judaism and for mutual empowerment. Another interest, and not an insignificant one either, was his notion that both the Hindu and Jewish traditions have in common to be non-proselytizing – in contrast to Christianity and Islam. Some resentment regarding the latter two is certainly present. Since his memorable lecture “Conversion is violence” held in Chennai in the late 1990s (Dayananda 1999; Wilke 2005), Swami Dayananda keeps mentioning that proselytizing is an act of aggression and that Christian and Muslim missionary activities have been destroying whole cultures, families, and individual lives in the past and present.

The notion that missionary activity meant a threat to Indian culture has been an important concern of the Acharya Sabha since its foundation. As indicated above, the Acharya Sabha fought for a legal ban. But the issue also resonated in Jewish interests and concerns. The threat of terrorism as well as missionary activity was a common concern of both the Hindu and the Jewish group. The rationale of the Rabbinate to participate in the dialogue was in fact “articulated in part as *pikuach nefesh*, the imperative to save Jewish lives. This principle is contextualized in the Hindu-Jewish summits as the impetus to join forces with the Hindu religious leadership to condemn terrorism, to fight against missionary activities, and to support the State of Israel” (Greenberg 2009: 28).

It is not possible to go into the interesting details discussed during the first summit, but one recurring topic was that Jewish people never suffered persecution in India, and the equal respect toward all faiths in the country. Furthermore, a common memory of suffering persecution and being non-converting (non-proselytizing) religions was a vital topic, other shared concerns were the belief in the sanctity of life and the great value of human dignity, the adherence to moral principles of ethical conduct, the worth of religion and ethics for the integrity of the person and the loss of spirituality among the young in the modern times of secularism and consumerism.

There was great excitement discovering that many elements of faith and practice seemed to be quite similar, like the love for tradition, the orality of scripture and profound hermeneutics, the practice of fasts, the value of purity rules, the family life, and most of all the common faith in one Supreme Being who created and sustains the world “in its blessed diversity” (see Proceedings 2007: 41; Greenberg 2009: 31). It was obviously a great concern on the Hindu side to shatter all accusations of polytheistic idolatry, i. e. to be looked down upon for it, and to affirm that the worship of the many gods and goddesses was not the worship of idols of stone and wood, but of a supreme power behind all the diversity. As Swami

Viditatmananda remarked: “We seek a sympathetic understanding on the part of other religious leaders to not dismiss us as idolaters” (Proceedings 2007: 32). Swami Dayananda’s explanation that there is not only one god, but *only God*, and that therefore everything can become an altar of worship, was repeated in many different ways by the various Hindu leaders and they indeed formed a single collective voice in this and sustained their view by textual sources. The Jewish delegation, on the other hand, was greatly surprised and happy to hear this.

Both sides tried to establish a number of connecting links, or to even find secret hints in their languages that pointed to some common ground (like Om in Shalom), and did not tire of exchanging homage and courtesies, affirming each other of their sympathy and respect and their will to join forces to prepare better educational resources to further mutual understanding, promote social responsibility, peace, reconciliation and harmony among the people, and fight injustice and religious violence. Besides such general objectives which belong to the standard formulas of interreligious dialogue, a more interesting feature was that certain themes and claims became very concrete, such as the de-nazification of the Swastika and the de-mythologizing of the Aryan myth.

1.2. The Political Dimension and the Succeeding Meetings

1.2.1. Delhi 2007

Bawa Jain pointed out during the leadership summits in Delhi and Jerusalem that the entire programme was purely educational, and non-political (Proceedings 2007: 12; Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 8). Indeed, the major objective of both delegations was religious exchange, and to discuss common manners and customs, and share each other’s spiritual wisdom in a sincere effort to create more understanding and cooperation. But of course, there was also a political dimension by seeking cooperation. Starting with the presence of people of political leadership at the summits, one may conclude that not only the bonds between “two religions” were strengthened, but also the diplomatic ties between “two nations”. There was a close interface between religious and nationalist agendas for some of the participants at least. Consider the inaugural speech at the first summit held by the constitutional expert and jurist Dr. L.M. Singhvi, a former member of the parliament:

“In 1962, I asked Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, to not discriminate against Israel. I wrote him and said that these are the two oldest traditions in the world. It is about time we took cognizance of the political possibilities of nurturing this connection. ... I said that in recognizing Israel, we recognize the Jewish tradition. ... Dharma is that which sustains and keeps us together. Like us Hindus, the Jews unite with us in their adherence to righteous living. We celebrate this righteousness” (Proceedings 2007: 9).

In Singhvi's speech the "celebration of traditions" turns into a "celebration of righteousness" – and traditionalist and political forces upholding Hindu *dharma* indeed joined in the interfaith encounter. Besides the jurist Singhvi, the columnist and BJP leader Balbir Punj participated in the summit. It is noteworthy that the delegation of the first summit paid a visit to the President of India, and the event also included a dinner in the influential BJP leader Lal Advani's home. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteer Organization) leader Sah-sarkaryavah Suresh Suni was also present at the reception. A report of Chief Rabbi Metzger's "touching reference to the lasting contribution" in furthering friendship and cooperation between India and Israel by Advani appeared on the internet. It was a pleasant surprise, the report goes on to say, that the opposition's leader's residence became the meeting place of religious leaders of Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam. Indian Muslim scholars and theologians met the Israeli Jewish rabbis to further peace in West Asia at Advani's reception. The summits provided a forum for the political right who wished to strengthen religion in their nationalist agenda, and new opportunities to negotiate conflicting fields.

1.2.2. Jerusalem 2008

The second summit took place on a big scale in Jerusalem in 2008 (see also Greenberg 2009: 32 – 34), supported by the government of Israel. A delegation of Hindu swamis and religious leaders, all of them members of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, visited Israel at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the International Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Committee, and the World Council of Religious Leaders. Both the Chief Rabbis of Israel, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger and the Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shelomo Amar were present, as well as highly distinguished scholars and rabbis, like Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen (the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, elder of the council of the Chief Rabbinate, and chairman of the Interreligious Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel), and the Chief Rabbi Yosef Azran (the Rabbi of Rishon Le-Zion and also member of the commission). Swami Dayananda was not able to come, because of serious health problems. The chairman of the Hindu delegation was the Mandaleshvar Swami Avadeshananda Giri (the chief of the Juna Akhara in Haridwar, a conglomerate of various ascetics with thousands of participants, and esteemed as influential saint with one of the largest followings in India), supported by Swami Paramatmananda, the secretary of the Acharya Sabha, who is a learned monk and Vedanta master from Chennai, initiated by Swami Dayananda.

The inaugural speech by Shelomo Amar, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, attributed a possible bridging function to the Hindu delegation:

“I believe that there is very special blessing that can come from the religious leaders from India. Both because of your experience of religious diversity and tolerance, but also because by coming here, to where there have been conflicts between us, you can be a source of bridging and reconciliation between those that are in tension with one another” (Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 9).

Swami Avadeshnanda responded that he felt blessed to be in one of the holiest places of the world which has inspired many religions and great wise people, a land which is “spreading the right kind of vibrations throughout the world” and “gives us energy as well” (Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 10).

The summit was not only remarkable because of the high level of Jewish and Hindu leaders, but also because of the unparalleled extent of Israeli leadership that participated. The Government of Israel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the American Jewish Committee organized special meetings with the President Shimon Peres, the Deputy Foreign Minister M.K. Majali Whbee, and Minister Isaac Herzog, and while visiting the Knesset-Parliament a meeting with the Prime Minister Ehud Olmert also took place. A dinner with the Israeli Indian Community and a luncheon hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also part of the event. During the audiences, similarities between Jewish and Hindu beliefs, mutual hopes for lasting peace in the Middle East and the importance of a strong Israeli-Indian relationship were discussed. Moreover, there were meetings with the Druze, Baha’i and Ahmadiyya communities.

It is noteworthy that Bawa Jain in his introduction to the second summit – although sticking to the non-political nature of the encounter during the conference itself – makes an outspoken move from “two religions” to “two nations”. He suggests the interfaith encounter as a corollary with the “rapidly growing relations and strategic alliances of India, Israel, and USA”, and attributes a “potential to affect global politics by altering the power in Asia” (Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 2) to it.

Besides deepening the mutual education regarding observances and customs, the plan was to discuss contemporary social and scientific challenges to religion, and related themes – religious educational needs, positions on ecology, morality in a world of relativistic thought, and respectful relationships between differing faith groups. However, the concept of god remained a salient topic, and regained predominance in the second session. The discussion showed great mutual respect and interest, but also possible controversies, which however did not have an influence on the declaration.

1.2.3. New York 2009

The third Hindu-Jewish meeting took place in the USA (New York and Washington) in 2009 and included an invitation to the White House. It was purposely planned as a smaller-scale, closed meeting of scholars to discuss more in depth. I

have only second-hand information about this event. It included the presence of Indologists and scholars of religion who questioned the Hindu self-presentation as too simplistic. The friendly tone and atmosphere between the Hindu and Jewish leaders remained unchanged, as an article by Allan Brill, professor of Jewish-Christian Studies, reveals. The article mentions that representatives of Shaivism (sic!) emphasized that “they worship a single Supreme Being and are not polytheistic”. It also mentions the broad acceptance of Hindu theology by the Jewish participants which set a “universal tone, but is likely to become substantially more qualified or restricted when meetings include Hindu swamis from other denominations that have a more devotional and literal approach to worship of images of the divine”. Beside the conception of god, the Swastika remained a major topic. Moreover, it says: “Hindu representatives all shared the perception that Christians engage in aggressive proselytizing and have a hidden conversionary agenda in interfaith activity” and “they felt that Jews understand their concerns”. There was also tacit agreement about the threat of radical Islamist forces, which the Hindu delegation addressed. Two more points are worth mentioning: some religious leaders kept women from being in the same room due to religious restrictions, while others gladly shared the podium with female Hindu leaders. The second point concerns the more explicit political dimension of an Israel-India-USA cooperation, which was popularized by Hindu lay leaders from the US who wore lapel pins combining the Israeli, Indian and American flags. Rabbi Rosen furthermore mentioned the rapid growth of political, economic and military connections between Israel and India and the need to supplement and deepen the relations between two religions deeply steeped in scripture and ritual. Post 9/11 India and Israel had rapid rapprochement, fostering political and military links, including arms sales, and joint intelligence and trade agreements.

1.2.4. Delhi 2011

The fourth gathering, again a closed one among scholars, took place in Delhi in 2011. Israel’s Ambassador to India, Mark Sofer, addressed the meeting, and stressed the importance of the gathering of religious leaders for the State of Israel (Press communication to the AJC Global Jewish Advocacy, by Rabbi Rosen). The Jewish delegation was joined by representatives of the Indian Jewish community, and meetings with the Sikh, Jain and Muslim leaders were organized. Rabbi Rosen characterizes the content of the fourth gathering as a discussion of convergence and difference in the two great religions. The programme clarifies that once more the concept of god ranged high. An abstract of Rabbi Sperber on how Hinduism relates to the Jewish law and whether Hindu-Jewish religious, social, economic, and political cooperation can be sanctioned by the *halacha*, was discussed. The second topic concerned observances and calendar, i. e. holy time

and space, and how to relate to god and religious life. No press was allowed during the two-day meeting. Rabbi Rosen's press release echoed the utterly positive image of the previous summits. He speaks of a "historic bilateral cooperation" and "impressive new strides in recent years", and holds: "Deepening relations between the spiritual foundations of our respective civilizations are just as important as diplomatic relations and provide for deeper, stronger and more lasting bonds of friendship and collaboration". In fact, the diplomatic ties between India and Israel were as well strengthened, as Rabbi Metzger remarked: "The meetings of the two religions were also a meeting between the two nations".

There is no reason to doubt that the interfaith encounter and exchange ranked first among the participants. My informants of the Hindu section made a point of the spiritual quality throughout the events, even when meeting political leaders. But it cannot be denied that the conferences' framing included shifts and fluctuations from "interfaith encounter" to "bilateral national cooperation". An article published on the internet about Swami Avadheshananda Giri, the Hindu head of the second summit, calls him a "realistic saint" who is not only worried about Hindu traditions and rituals in times of religious fundamentalism and terrorism, but also wants to contribute to nation building ("A Hindu Saint whose Heart beats for Israel", www.weeklyblitz.net; www.sanghparivar.org). He is said to view Israel as a natural ally of India in cultural and strategic areas, and showed particular interest in Israel's technological advancement in irrigation and defence, which could bring about a revolution in the Indian agricultural sector. It is also noteworthy that Rabbi Sperber's examination of the compatibility of Hinduism with the Jewish law was not only made up of religious interests, but interests in economic and military cooperation as well.

2. The Declarations of the Two Leadership Summits

The Delhi summit of 2007 was a full success and so was the Jerusalem summit of 2008. The first summit resulted in a nine-point declaration, which was reaffirmed in the second summit, but changed in tone and wording. An interesting feature is the use of three calendars, which supplement the Christian era with traditional Jewish and Hindu dates. In both declarations, the shared belief in one Supreme Being both in its formless and manifest aspects, ranges first, and further points include the common world view of the sanctity of life and the recognition that all religions are sacred for their people and must not be denigrated. The overarching spiritual and philosophical long term goals included the relevance of Hindu and Jewish spiritual teaching for contemporary society, recognizing commonalities in values and social and religious conduct, working together for the collective good of humanity and in rejecting violence, and

preserving their traditions while constructively addressing the challenges of modernity. The official declarations also contained more immediate and pragmatic concerns, such as the preparation of educational material.

The 2008 declaration was not intended to supplant the first, but to supplement it. Though the declarations of the 2007 and 2008 summits more or less embrace the same ideas, there are some important differences. The confession of belief in One Supreme Being was in the first declaration worded closer to the Jewish tradition. Paragraph 1 affirmed “Faith in One Supreme Being who is the Ultimate Reality, who has created this world in its blessed diversity and who has communicated Divine ways of action for humanity for different peoples in different times and places”. Paragraph 1 in the second declaration is more akin to the Hindu tradition: it speaks of “the recognition of One Supreme Being, Creator and Guide of the Cosmos”. Note that “recognition” here replaces “faith” and that the “cosmos” takes the place of “different peoples in different times and places”. Moreover, the Hindus’ recognition of One Supreme Being got extended and further qualified: the new second paragraph is about Hindu worship and how it relates to the One Supreme Being in its formless and manifest aspects. This issue remained a contested field and came to the forefront again with Sperber’s paper three years later. The choice of the words “One Supreme Being” was actually quite clever. It was a good dialogical solution to bring the Jewish “one God” and the Hindu “only God” under one umbrella, but it also created misunderstandings. We will see that Rabbi Sperber reads the One Supreme Being as monotheism – a term which was intentionally avoided in the declarations.

A further point of interest is that in 2008 the anti-proselytizing and mutual respect topic of paragraph 4 of the 2007 declaration was affirmed. The sanctity of the human person is addressed and the categorical rejection of violent methods “to achieve particular goals” (paragraph 3). It is said that the Acharya Sabha and the Jewish religious leadership “may consider jointly appealing to various religious organizations in the world to recognize that all religions are sacred and valid for their respective peoples. We believe that there is no inherent right embedded in any religion to denigrate or interfere with any other religion or with its practitioners” (paragraph 4). Similarly, the paragraph in the older declaration mentioning that Jewish and Hindu communities “have both, in their own ways, gone through painful experiences of persecution, oppression and destruction” (paragraph 6) was affirmed by the more general wording that both communities have “similar historical experiences” (paragraph 1).

Two new points in the declaration of 2008 call for special attention, the Swastika (paragraph 7) and the Aryan theory (paragraph 8). The two topics had in fact already been discussed in 2007 and considered vitally important (Proceedings 2007: 34 – 36). The Swastika discussion had a concrete recent background. A new restaurant in Bombay was named “Hitler’s Cross” by its owner

and the rabbi of India (Abraham Benjamin) thanked Swami Dayananda at the summit to have rescued the Jewish people by starting a campaign to stop abuse of the Swastika. Swami Dayananda made clear in his response that the Swastika represents a highly auspicious symbol in India and that it was reversed in Nazi Germany, to Hitler's Cross, representing a blatant crime (Proceedings 2007: 34). A similar point was raised regarding the Aryan theory. This theory, according to Prof. Rajiv Malhotra, was not only a disaster for the Jews in Germany, but also for the Indian psyche (Proceedings 2007: 35). Indians were told by the Western academia that Hinduism is "an upper caste fabrication to oppress others" and this claim was based on Aryan as a racial term, whereas the real meaning of *arya* was a noble person with good qualities. Both Hindu and Jewish delegates found this subject highly important and that it should be discussed more widely and the declaration therefore calls for a serious reconsideration of the Aryan theory and a revision of the educational material. This latter point illustrates how hotly disputed issues amounting to political debates in India and diaspora countries (USA and Britain) found their way into the summits and declarations and served as postulates for Hindu dignity and self-respect.

3. Rabbi Daniel Sperber's Paper and Swami Dayananda's Reaction

Looking at Rabbi Rosen's press release after the fourth meeting in May 2011 in Delhi, the positive tone of Jewish-Hindu dialogue has not changed. But my interview partners see it differently: "The foundation was good and it was very broad and open-minded, but the dialogue got stuck because of Rabbi Sperber". There is great disappointment. Whereas the declarations seemed to have overcome an old problem of Jewish orthodoxy with Hindu worship and conceptions of the divine, Sperber's (so far unpublished) conference abstract and paper "The halachic status of Hinduism ..." (2011a) is seen as a relapse. While the rabbi's presence in all the meetings was always greatly appreciated and his sympathy, deep spiritual interest and friendship never doubted (not even now), the paper clearly showed: obviously, problems with idol-worship were not solved. Moreover, Sperber's presentation of Hindu monotheism was in many ways misconceived, full of orientalisms, and Swami Dayananda's words concerning the Advaita Vedantic understanding of *tat tvam asi* (That you are) were also misrepresented. Rabbi Sperber's paper, revised after the conference (2011b), did not bring the recompense hoped for, Rabbi Sperber actually tried to strengthen his arguments with additional sources and did not rework the passages where he reproduced Swami Dayananda's argumentation and the results of the declara-

tion in a problematic way. For the Hindu side it felt like he had neither listened properly nor really understood what was communicated. They concluded that the whole dialogue had been in vain. This is why Rabbi Sperber received an exceedingly sharp rejoinder by Swami Dayananda in November 2011. Rabbi Sperber did not respond directly to this, but subsequently welcomed editorial input from Swami Dayananda's team. His resistance to what was seen as basic amendments brought the collaboration to an impasse, but there was mutual agreement to keep the dialogue open.

This is in short what happened, and clearly it is shaped by the Hindu perspective. This perspective does not take into account that Rabbi Sperber obviously wrote his paper for an orthodox Jewish audience and had difficulty coming to terms with the great plurality of Hinduism which he apparently found underrepresented in Swami Dayananda as a person. Having been the Chief Rabbi of India (Calcutta) in the 1950s, Rabbi Sperber has personal knowledge of India. In the first summit he even spoke of "a long-standing love relationship" and praised the hospitality of India for the Jews living there (Proceedings 2007: 25). I have already hinted at the mundane objectives of his paper: the sanctioning of bilateral economic and military cooperation with India by the Jewish law. Rosen's pragmatic solution, that the Hindus lead an ethical life and follow *dharma*, and therefore the question of idolatry is not applicable for them at all, was obviously not enough from the normative orthodox point of view which Rabbi Sperber represented. His intention was to redeem Hinduism in the eyes of the orthodox and normative Jewish authorities. Unfortunately, however, he did this in a very problematic way indeed, using outdated sources and imagining Hinduism in a Jewish way, stripped of its cultural contexts. The following summary of the revised 91-page paper (2011b) shall offer a short overview on Rabbi Sperber's quest and his unfortunate solution, i. e. the problematic areas of his discussion.

Rabbi Sperber's paper "The halachic status of Hinduism. Is Hinduism idolatrous? A Jewish legal inquiry" discerned the following basic problems: to the Western visitor, Hinduism with its numerous gods and its plethora of images, would appear to be the classic example of polytheistic idolatry. Jewish law forbids any benefit from idolatry and any real relationship – be it social, economic or political – with idolaters. This problem needs to be tackled in the modern situation, according to Rabbi Sperber, not only because of the initiated Jewish-Hindu dialogue, but also because of big scale economic and political cooperation between Israel and India, for instance in the high-tech industry and in the military industry (Sperber 2011b: 89). Moreover, young Israeli backpackers like to go to India after their military service. They often seek spirituality in India, live in ashrams and even partake in temple services. For all these reasons, the compatibility of Hinduism with *halachic* law must be carefully studied. This is a

challenge as Rabbi Sperber explains: “Westerners, brought up in a totally different cultural milieu and philosophical way of thought, find great difficulty in understanding Eastern religions and Eastern thought, and consequently misunderstand the nature of Hinduism” (number 3 in the abstract circulated at the fourth meeting in 2011).

To say the most important thing first: the rabbi does not conclude that economic and political cooperation etc. is not possible. In fact, he tries very hard to make Hinduism *halachic*, i. e. non-idolatrous, and to be empathic and find analogies in the Jewish culture to the different points he discusses. This endeavour itself is admirable and proves his friendly attitude. But unfortunately, neither is his representation of Hindu beliefs and practices quite correct, nor are the analogies really fitting. He tries, for instance, to interpret the Hindu deities as angels and intermediaries, and to explain their icons as mere symbols, to make them conform to the *Halacha* and be acceptable to orthodox Jewish ears. For Hindus, however, the gods and goddesses are neither just intermediaries like angels or mere “demigods”, nor are the deities’ icons mere symbols, but rather worshiped as live forms and real embodiments of the divine after the elaborate rites of consecration. In Rabbi Sperber’s representation of so-called Hindu polytheism, many inaccurate and disparaging secondary sources are cited. Another problematic area is Rabbi Sperber’s representation of eroticism in Hindu iconography and temple sculpture. Neither is it as widespread as conceived by Rabbi Sperber (his model is Konarak), nor does he take the theological interpretations into account or the fact that icons like the Shivalinga have no sexual connotations for practising Hindus today. Here again, he reproduces the misrepresentation of Hinduism by earlier generations of Western scholars, which were often, consciously or unconsciously, disparaging. Although Rabbi Sperber quoted from many secondary sources, he lacked the sound Indological training to judge his sources. The page-long footnotes using a lot of old, outdated secondary literature to prove his argumentation unfortunately give his paper an unprofessional touch. It is a shame that Sperber did not work with an Indologist. In many areas he was simply not well enough informed and apparently not acquainted with the intensive academic discussion concerning Orientalism in the past three decades. Rabbi Sperber’s intention was good, but the outcome was offensive to Hindu ears. Almost every cliché possible crept into his discourse, such as pagan idolatry, sensuous eroticism, and man-made self-deification.

Since Judaism differentiates clearly between man and god, Rabbi Sperber obviously had extreme difficulties to accommodate the Advaita Vedantic vision of the identity of divine and human. This was not only an area of serious conflict for Rabbi Sperber, but also a negotiated field in Indian religious history. It is understandable from Rabbi Sperber’s standpoint of Jewish orthodoxy that he preferred to resort to alternative Hindu interpretations like the Vedanta of

Madhva and Ramanuja. Such positions were also referred to by Swami Dayananda, but inclusively undermined by presenting the Advaita Vedanta as the final word which is the foundation of all other Vedantas and contains them all. Rabbi Sperber has a point in bringing these other views into focus. It is unfortunate, however, that he misrepresents Swami Dayananda's explanation of the *tat tvam asi* as an "alternative" to the teachings of Shankara. Swami Dayananda "translated" Shankara into a less scholastic and more comprehensible modern language, but semantically he was faithful to the eighth century philosopher and Advaita Vedantic teaching. In this teaching, identity is absolute in essence or nature (the consciousness-existence-bliss-continuum is the same in the Absolute Being and the individual person), while apparent differences are accepted (and overcome if the unity is properly understood through hermeneutic procedures and self-inquiry). One may not consent to this view, which Swami Dayananda called the "last word" and "final philosophy", but it is certainly neither a minority or "modern", non-traditional viewpoint as Sperber argued, nor does it see mere illusion in the traditional Advaita Vedanta of Shankara (often wrongly interpreted in secondary literature from which Rabbi Sperber gathered his information). In any case, seeing it as man-made self-deification as Sperber did (and as was often brought forth in the past by Christian theologians and Western writers) is far from applicable and disregards the transpersonal view of the divine and the scriptural base of Advaita Vedantic teaching (the soteriological force attributed to the great words of non-dual identity in the Upanishads).

The theological hot button of Hindu worship and the concept of god were solved in the declaration by the very open term One Supreme Being to whom all worship ultimately goes – an idea which is found, for instance, in the Bhagavad Gita, one of the sacred scriptures of the Advaita Vedanta as well as Vaishnava devotionalism. The metalinguistic terminology One Supreme Being was a clever device to bring different conceptions of an ultimate godhead and their different theologies together. The word "monotheistic" was intentionally avoided, as it cannot be applied to all Hindu traditions and carries wrong associations even for those sectarian lineages and devotional traditions to which it can be applied. Hinduism is very diverse and complex, and although monotheistic streams exist, there are others which would object strenuously to such a characterization. Despite the fact that the great traditions of Sanskrit-Hinduism will agree that there is one Supreme Being, they can differ widely on the nature of that being and its relationship to the world and the individual. "One Supreme Being" (in contrast to "One God") is semantically open to different interpretations within Hinduism and also able to cover the Jewish understanding of the divine. However, this openness turned out to be a source of misunderstanding. Sperber turns

it into the one god of monotheism, i. e. erroneously or purposely interprets it that way:

“Leading Hindu religious authorities insist categorically that Hinduism is monotheistic, proving their position by citing their sacred canonic texts” (number 4 in the abstract).

However, this is not exactly what the dialogue partners or the declarations were communicating. The dominant Hindu view that was propounded by the Hindu leaders and supported by their (mainly Vedic / Upanishadic) source material was not that there is one God, but that there is only God. This phrase (and related topics like god created creation out of himself) was accepted by Sperber at the summits (Proceedings 2007: 26; Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 21 – 22; 30 – 31) and he referred to Maimonides for a similar view. However, he added that this was a point of controversy (Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 31). Hence, the conception did not play a significant role in his paper on the *Halacha*.

Rabbi Sperber’s conclusion that leading Hindu authorities “insist categorically” that Hinduism is monotheistic and prove their position by citing their sacred canonical texts solved the theological hot button regarding normative Hinduism from his point of view. However, Rabbi Sperber discerns differences between establishment theology and popular religion and holds that only the theological position of the scholars and canonical texts must be accepted:

“It may be argued that the religious leadership correctly understands Hinduism to be monotheistic, but what about the general public, and the less educated strata ...? Surely they believe in many gods and sacrifice to idols? Our response is that we view a religion as it is represented in its sacred canonic texts and as interpreted by its religious authorities, and not as it may appear in its popular manifestations” (number 11 in the abstract).

Sperber’s suggested conclusion concerning the compatibility to the *Halacha* is this:

“Given all of the above it seems clear that we should accept Hinduism as monotheistic and non-idolatrous, thus permitting the broadest range of our relationship and cooperation with Hindus in all areas of joint interest” (number 12 in the abstract).

This positive result unfortunately rests on a number of misconceptions, including notions that are offensive to Hindu ears. Moreover, in the eyes of his Hindu recipients Sperber’s whole endeavour dismisses what had been worked out together and agreed upon in the declarations. The Hindu side may have presented Hinduism relying too much on a single viewpoint, and may have downplayed that the Advaita Vedantic interpretation is only one of many. But it remains an interesting and important fact that all leaders could agree with Swami Dayananda’s explanation, “there is only God”. Of course, this can be

explained partly with the fact that the majority of them came from Shankara lineages. However, it was also possible for other traditions to consent. Essentially, the clause “only God” even applies to most sectarian monotheist movements within Hinduism (devotional or Tantric), although they explain this clause in divergent ways. Hindu monotheism differs from the Jewish conception in some important aspects. There are at least three ultimate Lord Gods (Shiva, Vishnu, Great Goddess or Shakti, power) and rarely there is a die-hard boundary between the divine and the human. The idea that the divine is all-pervading and animates everything has a long history beginning in Vedic times and has informed nearly all traditions of Sanskrit-Hinduism. Moreover, despite that most of actual Hindu practices may be called a “subjective monotheism” or “cosmological monotheism”, as Angelika Malinar suggested (Malinar 2009: 130 – 131), this does not rule out the worship of other deities. *Saguna* and *nirguna* ways – i. e. the formed and formless ways – to conceive the divine are not at all viewed as dichotomies, but interact and blend in many ways. The single voice of the Hindu delegates was surely and even purposely essentializing the vastly manifold ways of religious perception and actual practice in Hindu India. But it was not all that wrong.

And what about popular Hinduism as it is lived in daily life? Of course, here Sperber has a good point: “great” and “little” tradition(s) sometimes differ heavily in their deities and practices, particularly if we look at village India and vernacular, so called “folk Hinduism” – but less so in the normal *puja* ritual (image worship). There has been much mutual borrowing and interaction between Sanskrit-Hinduism and popular religion. Even a wild folk goddess like the Tamil village-mother Ankalamman, who never found her way into the flow of the “great” stream of Sanskrit-Hinduism, is viewed by her devotees as Adiparasakti, “primordial, supreme power” (Meyer 1986). She is manifest not only in her icon, but also in termite hills and humans who are possessed by her. Though so-called “folk Hinduism” is in many aspects separated from the Vedic palette to which the Hindu leaders were referring, there is a certain continuum even here (and an even greater continuum in the puranic, epic, devotional and tantric lore which were Rabbi Sperber’s reference points). No great divide exists between nature, human, and divine like in the dominant discourse of the abrahamic traditions, and practically everything in nature – including humans – can become an embodiment of the sacred. This was Swami Dayananda’s major argument. Although this argument was forced and daring (Ankalamman and Brahman / Ishvara have little in common) and too spiritual and scholastic to apply to the daily interactions, it was still much closer to the lived reality than the rabbi’s symbols and angels. The sad conclusion regarding Rabbi Sperber’s paper is: if Hinduism is this, it will never be able to get a *halachic* sanction. Divine embodiment and identity are too unorthodox to be stretched that far. Or in other words: since

much of Rabbi Sperber's explanation is not applicable, the stigma of idolatry remains.

Swami Dayananda's reaction was sharp and direct – probably the first of its kind in interreligious dialogue settings. He broke the rules of interreligious discourse and rather followed the rules of Indian debating culture. He rejoined that Sperber's representation was a precise representation of the old problem of monotheism: not to be able to be objective and holding on to beliefs which do not stand to rationality:

“I feel that I did not communicate adequately the vision of Vedanta, if your response indicates anything. I think there is always difficulty in understanding this vision with a mind that is committed to certain beliefs, which are fundamental to a practising Muslim, Christian or Jew. I don't consider there is such a thing called Western thinking and Eastern thinking. These theologies condition the minds of the practising religious person, not letting him see, objectively, certain realities ... I don't subscribe to the idea of monotheism. ... Is there a number one without being subject to division or addition?” (Personal e-mail message, November 2011).

It is interesting that for Swami Dayananda rationality and intersubjectivity are major criteria – belief systems that cannot be proven cannot be subscribed to, whereas Sperber's argumentation in the second summit showed that for him spirituality was about something beyond the rational, something incomprehensible and super-rational (Transcribed Proceedings 2008: 33). He argued that this is why young Israelis seek new age mysticism and go to alien India, to fill the void left by an ultra rationalistic de-ethicized education, without knowing the depth of their own tradition, which contains all what they find lacking and even more (“we never reach the ultimate understanding”). However, New Age spirituality precisely seeks ultimate understanding and those going to Indian *ashrams* will likely have an image of Indian spirituality, in which non-dual wholeness and self-knowledge about one's godly nature is the kernel of Hinduism, similar to the image Swami Dayananda presents and which Swami Vivekananda propounded at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago as early as the 19th century.

In many ways Swami Vivekananda's so-called Neo-Vedanta was a precursor, starting with the inclusivist and (consciously) essentialist view of Hinduism with the Advaita Vedanta being the very basis and roof which can accommodate all religious traditions. An important difference, however, is that Swami Dayananda stays closer to the original sources (*shastra*) and the traditional teaching method of the Advaita Vedanta. In this tradition revelation, i. e. the Veda word (the Upanishads), is seen as a means of knowledge in itself (besides sense perception, analogy, and so on). It must stand to reason and rational inquiry, since it is about the true nature of oneself and the world. It is about the recognition of non-dual

identity as a *real fact*, and involves the insight that the belief of “that” (Supreme Being) and “this” (the individual person) being different is based on ignorance. This includes the clear vision that nothing is separated from divine reality (“everything is Brahman”). Swami Dayananda sees this pre-reflexive intuition – similar to Swami Vivekananda – present in all of Hindu culture far beyond the Advaita Vedantic palette (in which it was just thoroughly reflected upon). Accordingly, his rejoinder to Rabbi Sperber pins down two areas with which he disagrees the most:

“In India there are people who believe that the world, the individual and God are all different. ... But if you look at any Hindu in any village and examine his attitudes and modes of worship, it doesn’t take time to understand that for a Hindu, everything is god. Any other concept, even if it is from India, is open for discussion and dismissal. It is not supported by *sastra* and cannot stand inquiry. It is against all other means of knowledge. – Also, I would like to point out here that there is no alternative interpretation of *tat tvam asi* [i.e. that Dayananda’s interpretation was not an alternative one, A.W.] ... I am sending you a book called *Vakyavritti*, a discussion of *tat tvam asi*, attributed to Sankara. If you go through it, carefully, you will find there is nothing new about what I told in the meeting” (Personal e-mail message, November 2011).

Just as the initial passage quoted above, the final words of the e-mail are most likely not suitable to help the dialogue proceed: “Having said all this, I still value any set of beliefs, even though they are foolish. ... Since Jewish people do not have a program of proselytization, I value their friendship and love to be with them”.

I will ignore the ambivalent proselytization theme here since it was not part of the controversy, but a common conviction (see Sperber’s speech in the Proceedings 2007: 25). But I want to point to another issue of interest: Swami Dayananda’s words speak not only of personal hurt and disappointment that his tradition was not being respected as it is. They also reflect a different idea of dialogue culture. In Swami Dayananda’s perspective, interfaith encounter must not skirt around tough issues (Dayananda 2008). It must be lead with ruthless honesty and be able to accommodate harsh debate and conflict for the truth’s sake: “We should have the courage to probe, question, listen and even agonize if we have to, but never shirk”. The ruthlessness of Swami Dayananda’s response was quite in keep with the debating culture of the Indian commentary and hagiographic literature, according to which the better argument wins and the loser takes up the view of the winner. Some have suggested a similar model for modern interfaith encounter (Berger 1992: 171 – 181), but it is hardly to be expected that those engaged in dialogue would convert to the partner’s view, being steeped too much in their own tradition as the ultimate truth. If dialogue is to be fruitful, the partners have to take this into account. They must view each

other as equals and try to see with the partner's eyes. This was not the case in Sperber's paper, or in Swami Dayananda's rejoinder.

Is this a serious impasse in the Hindu-Jewish dialogue which started with so much enthusiasm? Time will tell. One should remember that the Hindu-Jewish dialogue is not restricted to two persons, Swami Dayananda and Rabbi Sperber, but concerns the whole of the Acharya Sabha and the Rabbinate. However, since Swami Dayananda is the primary dialogue partner of the Acharya Sabha, and Rabbi Sperber has been the principal interlocutor for the Rabbinate, the advancement of the dialogue has become linked to a resolution of the problems raised by them. It is important to consider, also, that although current discussions are contentious, they do not override the conclusions of the declarations. These remain the official stands of the Rabbinate and the Acharya Sabha and have inherent in them grounds for continued dialogue.

4. Concluding Remarks

My article was more similar to a report, than an analytic contribution. However, it was not without underlying theory, focusing on the multiple voices and interfaces, including oscillations between religion and politics (e. g. moves from "two religions" to "two nations" or the assertion of non-violence, while not questioning military cooperation and arms sales) and highlighting ambiguities in what was discerned as common theological ground. It would be worthwhile to analyze the discourse more consistently by means of Goffman's theory of interaction rituals and framing (Goffman 1967; 1974) than I did. There was a move in the Hindu-Jewish interfaith encounter from finding similarities and communalities (first summit) to acknowledging differences (second summit and scholars' meetings) to confrontation and open conflict (Sperber-Dayananda-debate). It is not surprising that differences exist and conflicting world-views meet. The question is how one deals with them. Dialogue is more about enjoying difference than anything else. Rabbi Rosen, the only one with a lot of experience in dialogue, knew this well. Swami Dayananda also started off this way, i. e. had this frame of orientation, as my initial quote indicates. However, the Hindu partners were forced to be apologetic or reacted that way. Instead of saying: Yes, we have polytheism besides monotheism and monism (all terms of course invented in Europe), and see no problem in it; the problem is only yours, they saw no other option than pretending that they were no polytheists and idolatrists to become acceptable. Rabbi Sperber did not understand this pre-condition of his partners, nor did Swami Dayananda understand Rabbi Sperber's problem to come to terms with the law of Jewish orthodoxy and take the paper for what it was: a legal inquiry and less a theological statement. One can understand Swami

Dayananda's reaction nonetheless. Rabbi Sperber did his best to make Hinduism *halachic*, but ended up with a distorted vision of Hindu culture. However, neither Rabbi Sperber's orientalism and lack of trust in Swami Dayananda's Vedanta presentation, nor Swami Dayananda's zeal to convince the other of his view of truth and call the other's faith untenable, were conducive to continuing the exchange. Or were they? Both were apologetic and dogmatic in their own way. Rabbi Sperber stubbornly called Hinduism monotheistic, in order to placate Jewish orthodoxy, while screening the Hindu leaders' claim that there is only god and not taking into account the fact that Advaita Vedanta is definitely not monotheism. Swami Dayananda discounted the fact of a lot of diversity within the Hindu field, defending his view as based on the source material (Upanishads). Both did not accept plurality of interpretations of reality and truth, and both broke rules of interreligious discourse and violated mutual respect and hurt the other's feelings.

At least this is the etic view-point of cultural anthropology and less the emic view of belonging and self-identification. From the perspective of cultural anthropology it is difficult to understand the problems of Rabbi Sperber and the striving of Swami Dayananda to prove the unity of Hinduism. From a constructivist point of view they just offered different interpretations of a larger realm which transcends daily life, which they both believe in, and of what they regard as absolute reality. The idolatry that one fears for the other is a description of sacred reality. Swami Dayananda's concern to fight against prejudices of idolatry – much like the concern of the whole Hindu delegation – is understandable. What he did not understand was that judgments of idolatry or non-idolatry may possibly have nothing to do with a lack of sympathy, respect and understanding, but with orthodox norms and legal systems and very down-to-earth pragmatic goals.

As a prelude, I started with the overwhelmingly positive reception of the leadership summits to give an impression of the exiting atmosphere and the hopes surrounding the new dialogue. The more recent developments make us understand the profound difficulties in this new form of dialogue in which each side does not just commit to celebrating commonalities, but to grappling with theological differences and working towards mutual understanding. In the 2011 meeting, Oded Wiener, the director general of the Rabbinate of Israel, remarked:

“I find it very interesting that in all the other dialogues with the Christians, Muslims, Anglicans, whatever, our basic condition was that we are not going to speak about any theological questions. And with you, we are starting from the very beginning to deal with the very basic questions” (Untranscribed audio material 2011).

The summits were truly a milestone in the post-modern interfaith encounter: one of the rare cases where dialogue was initiated and performed without any

Western mediation. The swamis and rabbis were excited to engage with another religion with no negative historic baggage. This was a very good precondition for a free and open exchange. However, the encounters also make clear that dialoguing is a tricky thing. It remains difficult and problematic as long as it is self-defensive and apologetic or if the partner is forced to react that way. The parties may also be too naïve in their enthusiasm to find common ground, particularly if not trained and skilled in the epistemological framework of the partner. They may come with different expectations, interests and agendas (including nationalist political ones), have different strategies to find horizons merging, be insufficiently prepared and lack background information to contextualize the partner's actions and reactions. The only person skilled in dialogue was Rabbi Rosen. His tendency to stress plurality and difference (within Judaism and cross-culturally) contrasts the tendency of the Hindu side, unskilled in dialogue and the partners' tradition, to seek common ground (within Hinduism and cross-culturally) and reduce and mask the differences, which burst open all the more forcibly in the recent developments. Rabbi Sperber, too, was unskilled in dialoguing and the partners' tradition, and should have worked out his thesis along with Indologists to escape the trap of Orientalism – with empathic Indologists who were not only versed in the diversity and complexity of Hindu culture, but also willing to understand, respect and defend Swami Dayananda's point of view. He was also under pressure to convince the Rabbinate that Hinduism is non-idolatrous, and to do this within hermeneutic constraints that he himself is free of. In the present situation a neutral mediator from religious studies may be required to make a new start possible, a mediator who is sympathetic to both traditions like Bawa Jain, but better informed in academic discourse and less romantic about the capacity, effect and reach of interfaith dialogue regarding big goals like world peace.

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Ping Zhang¹

When *Chokhmah* met *Zhi*: Perception and Misperception of Jewish Wisdom in China since the 1990s

1. *Chokhmah* vs. *Zhi*, Wisdoms of Way-seekers and Torah-seekers

In Judaism, there is hardly any concept that holds more value than wisdom, except probably for that of God himself. According to Cornelis Bennema (2001: 73), in the “spirit-centred wisdom tradition” of Judaism, “the quest for wisdom is depicted as a sapiential journey, which goes from earthly existence via the way of wisdom to knowledge of and union with God”. Although he described a “Torah-centred wisdom tradition” that started from the age of the Bible, Gabriele Boccaccini (2002: 148) convincingly showed us that “it would take a long time before in Rabbinic Judaism the law superseded wisdom”. And before that happened (Boccaccini 2008: 71 – 72), “Wisdom and Torah still maintain, as in Sirach, their separate identities, Torah being an inferior, earthly and quite late manifestation of the heavenly wisdom on earth”. Only later “the rabbis ... developed the idea that Torah was the earthly embodiment of the heavenly, pre-existent Wisdom, first making Torah stand side by side with the heavenly Wisdom and then replacing Wisdom with the heavenly, pre-existent Torah” (Boccaccini 2008: 75).

In contrast to the superior status of the Wisdom in Judaism, the concept of *Zhi*, the Chinese concept of wisdom, considered valuable in early Confucianism as one of the six key virtues, yet suffered substantial devaluation later due to the strong tendency of anti-intellectualism in Chinese tradition. According to Yu Yingshi (Yu 2004: 276 – 313), of the three main philosophic schools in the Pre-Qin period, namely, Confucianism, Taoism and Legalism, at least two of them, Taoism and Legalism, held extremely negative attitudes toward wisdom, especially in the arena of politics. From the Han Dynasty, Confucianism was largely

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re-constructed with ideas of Legalism and joined this anti-wisdom tendency. Yu Yingshi (2004: 339 – 340) further pointed out that anti-intellectualism had two sources in Chinese tradition: the political consideration, which turned the Confucian idea of “the wise rules” into a latent doctrine of “the one who rules is wise”; and the priority of *De*, the virtue, over the *Zhi*, the wisdom, which made the wisdom eventually become an inferior affiliation to the virtue.

I’d like to introduce here the framework of way-seeking / truth-seeking into my discussion, in the hope of deepening our understanding of the issue. The framework originated from Angus C. Graham’s insight that the concept of “truth”, which dominated western philosophy, was not a main concern in traditional Chinese philosophy (Graham 1989: 3). Later, this insight was developed by David Hall and Roger Ames into the framework of truth-seekers and way-seekers (Hall / Ames 1998: 104 – 122). In recent years, I have made an effort to add Rabbinic Judaism to the picture, and have concluded that the Jewish tradition can be named a “Torah-seeking” tradition (Zhang 2011: 15 – 25).

The different traditions in this framework were shaped by the prior questions that were asked when they faced the world. Truth-seeking traditions, which are represented by Greek philosophy, ask questions with what-priority, while way-seeking traditions, which are represented by Confucianism, ask questions with how-priority. The Torah-seeking tradition, which refers to Rabbinic Judaism, is somewhere between them and asks questions of “what is how”. The way-seeking tradition and the Torah-seeking tradition are similar not only because of the how-question that they both ask, but also because those how-questions are “into life” questions, which basically ask “how do we lead our life in this world”, while the truth-seeking tradition has its main concern on the nature or the “truth” of the world. However, the Torah-seeking tradition is different from a pure way-seeking tradition by its attempt to regulate every detail of human life by hermeneutic thinking, while the way-seeking tradition stresses the importance of self-cultivation and leaves the details of the daily life to a more heuristic solution (Zhang 2011: 34 – 43).

If we observe the concepts of wisdom in this framework of way-seeking, Torah-seeking and truth-seeking models, we may say that since both the way-seeking tradition and the Torah-seeking tradition ask “how” as their key question and follow the “into life” direction, the Chinese and Jewish wisdoms mainly contain concrete knowledge on human life. This is clearly different from a truth-seeking tradition, such as ancient Greek philosophy, in which, according to Platonic dialogues for example, *phronesis*, the practical wisdom, is only one of the three forms of wisdom (Sternberg 1990: 14). But other than that, the concepts of wisdom in Chinese and Jewish traditions are hardly similar at all. While wisdom in Rabbinic Judaism was basically equal to the Torah and embodied most parts of the tradition, in Confucianism it was only one of the main values

and had its specific content. Even in early Confucianism, while wisdom was relatively esteemed, it was only one of three or four virtues, and usually stayed at the end of the list. Mencius, for example, put *Zhi* (the wisdom) after *Ren* (the benevolence), *Yi* (the righteousness) and *Li* (the rites), and defined it as “knowing right from wrong” (Mencius, the 1st Gaozi chapter). While wisdom in Judaism was considered pre-existent, ancient Chinese tradition had an obscure border between the character *zhi* 智, which means wisdom and *zhi* 知, which means to know, and the constant confusion between these two characters showed that wisdom was only about human perception and was not a pre-existing entity. While in Judaism it was the wisdom that generated ethical conducts, in Chinese tradition, it was the opposite. *De*, the virtue, generated *Zhi*, the wisdom, which remains inferior to the virtue. While wisdom was among the highest values of the tradition in Judaism almost all the time, *Zhi*, the Chinese wisdom, fell victim to the strong and persistent anti-intellectualism and was downgraded from the understanding of the human being to practical strategies or plans.

Given these radical differences between the concepts of wisdom in the two traditions, it is almost ironic to see the huge amount of so-called “Jewish Wisdom” books that have flooded bookshelves in China, both in bookstores and in private homes. With the long standing anti-intellectualism tendency in Chinese tradition, how could Jewish wisdom possibly be admired so much in China? And since all of the above are mentioned here for the first time and people apparently have no idea that the two wisdoms hold more differences than similarities, how could the so-called “Jewish Wisdom” be perceived properly in China?

2. When *Chokhmah* met *Zhi*: A Brief History of “Jewish Wisdom” in Modern China since the 1990s

Although the Jewish community has been present in China for more than 1,000 years and Chinese people recognized the existence of the Jewish tradition for more than 100 years, Jewish wisdom was not brought to the knowledge of the Chinese people until the 1990s, and the faked Jewish wisdom did not flood into China until the beginning of the 21st century.

A key figure involved in bringing the wisdom to the Far East, including China, is Rabbi Marvin Tokayer. He served as a United States Air Force Chaplain in Japan and as the rabbi for the Jewish Community of Japan and spent some 10 years in Japan in the 1960s and 1970s and published more than 20 books on Jewish people, history, culture, and tradition in Japanese. Some of his books used the term “wisdom” in Japanese in the titles. For example, his book on the Talmud

was titled “Five Thousand Years of Jewish Wisdom” (Tokayer 1971). Aiming at ordinary readers, Tokayer adopted a very unique style which consisted of many very short chapters on various subjects and many traditional stories, legends, proverbs, etc. that explain the ideas. His deep understanding of Jewish tradition against the background of Japanese culture, combined with the style of the books which are almost like Japanese cartoon books without pictures, made his books extremely popular and some of them became bestsellers. Although the popularity is probably something that he expected, what happened next was for sure beyond his expectation and out of his control. The Jewish wisdom that he brought to the Far East was transferred in a typical Far Eastern way and each country or area contributed its own unique style.

Without Tokayer’s knowledge and, of course, without his permission, the books were translated into Korean and Chinese and were published illegally in South Korea and Taiwan. The influence, however, was as astounding as in Japan. In Korea, Jewish wisdom became a popular term and the books known as “Marvin Tokayer’s Talmud” are found in ordinary households (Ruda 2012). In Taiwan, the books were published by various publishers in various versions, and were very soon sold out.

Gu Jun, a Shanghai scholar, was among the first people who introduced Tokayer’s work to mainland China. He published his book titled “Jewish Wisdom. The Human Philosophy that Created Miracles in this World” in 1993. The book was apparently influenced by the Taiwanese translation of Tokayer’s books. The format of the book, which consists of relatively short chapters, reminds us of what Tokayer’s books look like. Many stories were taken from Tokayer’s books and sometimes even the titles of the chapters, such as “Rolling Wisdom”, were taken directly from the original books (Gu 1993: 102).

Gu Jun’s book, though no bibliography was given, still kept Tokayer’s narration of the Jewish tradition. The fake “Jewish Wisdom” books, that have started to flood the Chinese book market since the beginning of the 21st century, inherited only the format of the original books. They kept their chapters short, used a lot of stories and proverbs, whether Jewish or not. They even added many illustrations to the books and made them more like cartoon books. Yet they took the job of creating Jewish wisdom into their hands, felt free to distort and to fake the wisdom with whatever materials they got, sometimes completely irrelevant to Jewish tradition.

The Koreans and Taiwanese did not obtain the copyrights to translate and to publish the books, but at least the author was honored and his name was carried with the books. When the “Jewish Wisdom” finally arrived in mainland China in such a large quantity, no mention of the original author was made at all.

One thing, however, did survive through all these procedures of piracy, plagiarism, faking and distortion, and that is, the term “Jewish Wisdom”, or *You-*

taizhahui in Chinese. Since the books were originally translated from Japanese, and the words wisdom in Japanese 知恵 and Chinese 智慧 basically used similar characters, the term transferred naturally to Chinese even without translation. People simply took it for granted that the Jewish sages meant the same thing as the Chinese when they said wisdom and nobody ever asked if the Jewish wisdom could be something else.

Tokayer's books' unique style and content also somehow made the misperception easier. In order to make the Jewish tradition understandable to Japanese, Tokayer basically used the *Aggadah* (exegetical texts) of the tradition, without specifically discussing much of the *Halachah* (religious law) and no impressive examples were given. This approach made his books easily understood and popular in the Far East. But popularity comes with a price. This *Aggadah* oriented Jewish wisdom also gave Chinese, Koreans and Japanese a wrong impression that those life concerning proverbs and practical guidelines are what the Jewish wisdom means, and are basically not different from the wisdom of the Chinese. In the terms of the way-seeking vs. Torah-seeking framework, the misperception of Jewish wisdom in Chinese popular culture is that they believe that the Jewish tradition asks a similar how-question just like the Chinese tradition, and ignores the whole importance of the what-question in Judaism.

3. Misperception: A Case Study of the Faked *Derech Eretz Zuta* and of the "Parallel Logic"

In 2003, my translation of *Derech Eretz Zuta* was published by Beijing University Press. The book came with hundreds of footnotes in which the comparison between Jewish and Chinese traditions was an important part. It also came with a long introduction on the concept of *Derech Eretz* in Rabbinic Judaism and the comparison between it and the concept of *Ren Dao* in Confucianism. Given the nature of the book and the fact that faked Jewish wisdom books already flooded the Chinese book market, I expected a kind of plagiarism in some of these books, but never thought that a whole faked book would come out with the same title.

Faked books have been a known phenomenon in China since the beginning of the century. A faked book is a book with a faked author or faked expertise of the author, that is, a book on something that the author knows nothing about or nobody knows anything about. Most faked books are on various kinds of life wisdom and are supposed to teach people how to succeed. In 2005, the General Administration of Press and Publication of the Peoples' Republic of China published two lists of some 100 faked books, but then stopped doing so although

the problem continued. Faked books are usually considered an indication of the popularity of the subject, as the publisher's sole motivation is making a profit.

The faked *Derech Eretz* came out in 2006. The book is more faked than other faked books, as not only the author and the content are faked, since the writers of the book apparently understood nothing on Judaism or on *Derech Eretz* even after they read my original book, but even the publisher and the ISBN are faked.

The main method of faking Jewish wisdom in this book was, like in all other such books, to distort. In this book, the writer took 55 sentences from my original book and presented them to the readers as proverbs, and each was followed by a short chapter (4 – 5 pages) to explain the wisdom behind it. Those explanations are a chaotic mixture of plagiarism from my book, stories and sayings borrowed from other Jewish wisdom books, including Tokayer's books, stories and sayings that have nothing to do with Jewish tradition and were taken from wherever was convenient for the writers, including Christianity, western news stories and modern Chinese politics. Each chapter came with an illustration, including one that shows Jesus Christ in crucifixion (Jin 2006: 235). The distortion in the book was so immense that it became something compulsive, for example, even my name and affiliation were unnecessarily distorted into Prof. Wang Ping from Beijing University (Jin 2006: 272).

The distortions can basically be summarized into three kinds.

- (1) The Jewish sayings were taken out of their contexts and treated freely. In the case of *Derech Eretz Zuta*, my introduction on the concept of *Derech Eretz* as a sub-concept of the Torah and as the basic ethical requirement for being any kind of human being, not necessarily Jewish, was completely ignored. The 55 sayings were singled out and were blown up into “the great wisdom that made the Jewish achievements of being successful everywhere in the world”, as it was stated on the cover of the book.
- (2) The Jewish sayings were turned into a list of strategies, tricks or plots which can be adopted by people in real life. For example, “questions to the point, and answers according to the Law; he learns something new from every chapter taught to him” of chapter 3 was distorted into a strategy of “Listening to the others in order to enrich oneself”. In the explanation, seven tricks of “how to listen to others” were demonstrated, and it is stressed time and again that one should follow those tricks in order to gain the trust of the speaker and to squeeze more information out of him (Jin 2006: 212 – 215). This kind of “brocade sack of miracle plans” was a typical Chinese understanding of wisdom, when the great wisdom *Dazhi* in early Chinese philosophy was degraded later into *Zhimou*, or resourcefulness.
- (3) There is a neglect of moral responsibility in the distorted Jewish wisdom. In Chinese tradition, wisdom is inferior to virtue, which made the harmony and the unity of the community possible. Therefore wisdom, especially in

the sense of *Zhimou*, concerns only personal gains, and has a tendency to treat the others as hostile parties. Likewise, the distorted Jewish wisdom is all about personal success and survival in a dangerous world and has nothing to do with building a society for everyone. Thus, we see in the faked *Derech Eretz*, the seven steps into sin in chapter 6 were distorted into a strategy called “never trust anyone easily”. In the explanation, a story was told to say that “anyone” includes one’s father. That story was wrongly assigned as a Jewish story (Jin 2006: 190 – 195).

While the faked *Derech Eretz* showed the misperception of Jewish wisdom on the level of popular culture, the case of the so-called “parallel logic” showed more about the situation in the academic world. “Parallel logic” is a term that I first used in 2006 in an article introducing a typical Jewish way of thinking in Israel. In the article, which was originally titled “Trivial matters that never turn out right” when it was published in my blog, I used the term “parallel logic” instead of the generally accepted term of argumentation or controversy for Rabbinic Judaism in the western academic world, because the direct translation of argumentation in Chinese can mean that a conclusion should be reached. When the article was published in the “Open” magazine in Hong Kong in May 2006, the title was changed by the editor into “The Logic of Jewish Thinking”. Seeing that many people took the term literally after the publication, I wrote another piece, which was titled “I don’t agree either”, for my blog in 2007. In that article, I further discussed the meaning of the term and the difference between the Jewish thinking and the Greek philosophical thinking. I made it clear that “strictly speaking, parallel logic is not a real logic ... it is more about a method or an attitude of encouraging the spirit of argumentation”.

In 2011, Prof. Bangfan Liu published his paper “Jewish Logic Wisdom” in an academic journal in China. The paper was, apparently, influenced by the popular trends of Jewish wisdom, and was largely based on my two articles. My first article appeared at the end of his bibliography, and quite a long paragraph from my second, blogged-only article, was copied word for word without quotation marks and references.

Though Liu concentrated his efforts on building a “logical wisdom” for Jewish thinking, his misperception was quite obvious. He has practically no knowledge whatsoever of the Talmud which he talked about from the beginning to the end. The list of the so-called “Talmudic books” that he gave in his footnotes contains mostly faked Jewish wisdom books. His whole theory was based on several stories that he took from these books and my article, without any text analysis of the Jewish classics. He has no idea that the parallel logic has a deep connection to the Torah-seeking tradition and the hermeneutic way of thinking based on the Torah text. Instead, he thought that Jewish tradition was also about truth-

seeking, just like the Greek philosophical tradition, and he thought that the parallel logic could be described as “do not decide at the beginning what the truth is and what the truth is not, rather, one should continuously give oneself the space of imagination” (Liu 2011: 8). After discussing the logic together with Greek logic and mathematical concepts and theories, he concluded that parallel logic should be the basis of dialectic logic and its reconstruction (Liu 2011: 9).

The main problem with Liu’s paper is that the so-called parallel logic was completely taken out of the Talmudic and *halachic* context, and was discussed with Greek philosophical tradition, as if it were part of that tradition or equal to a part. This kind of misperception is not rare among Chinese academics. On the concise Chinese version of Encyclopedia Judaica, for example, both Ding Guangxun and Zhu Weizhi believed that Jewish tradition is an important part of western tradition, and thus stated that studying Jewish tradition can be used as a step towards the understanding of western culture, as Judaism was one of the cornerstones of that culture.

4. Conclusions: a Failure to Grasp the Betweenness

The rise of the distorted Jewish wisdom coincided with the collapse of social morality in China as a companion of the fast economic development. This collapse led to a reality in which *De*, the traditional virtue that once held the society together, lost its ground to the *Zhi* or *Zhimou*, a traditional concept of wisdom of personal survival and success. This is the general historical background that explains the popularity of Jewish wisdom in China since the 1990s.

There are also other historical facts that contributed to the Chinese misperception of the Jewish wisdom, as was shown above, such as the transfer of the term *Zhihui* from Japanese to Chinese. One of the negative influences of this direct transfer is that Jewish wisdom, once it was called wisdom in Chinese, got all the negative connotations as well. Wise people are admired, especially in today’s China; however, they can also be morally corrupt or evil. For example, when Song Hongbin’s Currency War repeated typical anti-Semitic sayings that blamed the Rothschild family for the financial crisis in the world, many Chinese people, even some who consider themselves friendly towards Jewish people, believed in this kind of nonsense. For them, it is believable that wise people do immoral things, as this is part of the concept of wisdom in China.

Nevertheless, at a deeper level, the misperception could be understood as an outcome of the difference between the way-seeking tradition and the Torah-seeking tradition. While the Torah-seeking tradition asks “what is how”, the way-seeking tradition asks only “how” and does not develop a *Halachah*-like system that tries to define every action in any specific occasion. Thus, it would be

extremely hard for Chinese popular culture to understand the *Halachah* part of the Jewish wisdom, as it is impossible to find its counterpart in Chinese tradition. Even if the Jewish wisdom were introduced to China in full, from the very beginning, there would still be a long way for Chinese people to go to grasp the *Halachah* part of the Jewish wisdom. On the other hand, Chinese elite or intellectuals tend to get the misperception from another side. They are confused by Jewish achievement in modern science and philosophy, tend to define the Jewish wisdom as a part of the truth-seeking western tradition, and thus fail to grasp the betweenness of Jewish tradition, just like Chinese popular culture did, only in another way.

In 1996, when my translation of “Pirke Avoth” was published in China, hardly anybody paid attention to the book. In 2003, when “Derech Eretz Zuta” was published, a faked book was produced and sold much better than my original book. In 2011, when “Seder Zeraim of the Mishnah” was published, people were excited about the appearance of the “true Jewish wisdom” that had eventually arrived in China. But very few people seem to understand what is written in that book. I do not expect Chinese popular culture to grasp *Halachah* that easily and therefore I do not think that they will fake this one. What has happened with my three books in the past 16 years outlines how Jewish wisdom has entered China and what the perception and misperception has been. The non-faking expectation of the Mishnah maybe gives us a hint to the solution of the problem. The introduction of Jewish *Aggadah*, that was started by rabbi Marvin Tokayer, has made its own history and reached its limit, maybe it is time that *Halachah* should be seriously introduced to China and hopefully the introduction will balance the Chinese misperception from both sides and eventually transfer the message of betweenness to the Chinese perception of Jewish tradition.

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Why the Chinese People are Interested in Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel

In a book chapter on the Chinese people's knowledge of Jews, Xiao Xian from Yunnan University in Kunming, China, concludes that "Although Jews lived in China for centuries, the Chinese people were long unaware that these people were part of a worldwide Diaspora. Not until the European powers forced open China's closed door in the second half of the nineteenth century did the Chinese begin to know about Jews in the outside world and to connect them with the small Jewish community inside China" (Xian 1999: 64; Pan 2001; Elazar n.d.). Although not aware of the global nature of Judaism, some Chinese people as far back as the Song Dynasty (960 – 1279 CE) had taken notice of the tiny minority population whom they called by several different names, among them Yi-ci-le-ye – the Chosen People (Xu et al. 1995: 32). Because the Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci had already discovered the Jews of China in the early 17th century (Xu et al. 1995: 80), Europe had been aware of a Jewish presence in China long before China realized that there were Jews anywhere else in the world. Until the mid-19th century, the awareness of Jews in China was mostly a one-way street.

Between the time of the Concessions (foreign enclaves) in the mid-19th century and 1992, at which time China established diplomatic relations with the modern State of Israel, much turmoil happened within China, so that today the Jews of China no longer officially exist, only their "descendents", who have no legal standing (Xu 2006: 98). Judaism is not one of the five recognized religions in China, which include Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism. And yet, in just twenty short years, at least five Centres of Jewish Studies have been established at Chinese universities – in Nanjing, Shanghai, Kaifeng, Beijing, and Shandong, all by Chinese nationals. Although none of them are Jewish, in fact cannot be, the academics who participate in these pro-

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grammes take the study of Judaism as seriously as any programme in Israel, the United States, or Europe. The directors raise the funds to send their PhD students to study Hebrew and Judaism at Israeli and other international universities, and Chinese scholars travel to Israel to study the Holocaust at Yad Vashem as well as at universities in other countries (Song 2008). In turn, Chinese universities bring Israeli scholars as well as scholars of Judaism from other parts of the world to their institutions to enhance their academic offerings and further academic exchange (Troen 2009: 29).

In 2006, a stroke of luck connected me with a Chinese delegation to my university, the University of Tennessee. At the time, a group known as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, based in London, had begun partnering with Chinese universities to educate a broad segment of academics and students from all over China on the Holocaust. The first such partnership was with Nanjing University; home to the Diane and Guilford Glazer Centre for Jewish Studies which was founded in 2006 (the Glazers are also major donors to the Judaic Studies Programme at the University of Tennessee which I direct). The programme is headed by Professor Xu Xin, a most enterprising and courageous Chinese national (Treiman 2003). In 1984 Professor Xu was teaching a course on American Jewish authors, without having ever met a Jew. That year he met Professor Jim Friend from Chicago, who visited China to teach. In 1986, Xu Xin lived with the Friends for a year in Chicago, learning all about Judaism (Friend 2006: front page). In May 1992, after China recognized Israel, Professor Xu Xin established the first Institute of Jewish Studies in China, in order to meet “a growing demand for Judaic Studies in China, promoting the study of Jewish subjects among Chinese college students and a better understanding between the two peoples following the establishment of full diplomatic relations between China and Israel in January 1992” (Xu fundraising pamphlet: front page). Professor Xu Xin is also the president of the China Judaic Studies Association, an organization for academics who teach Jewish studies.

It so happened that the second conference organized by the International Task Force was to take place at Shanghai University in 2007 in conjunction with the Centre of Jewish Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences which is led by Professor Pan Guang. Upon learning that I teach about Judaism, Israel, and the Holocaust, Professor Changgang Guo, my dinner partner from the Chinese delegation, who happened to be the organizer of the 2007 conference, invited me to join them, give some lectures, and lead a workshop. For me, this was an incredible opportunity to learn about a people I knew little about and to share my knowledge of Judaism. I could never have imagined what a rich experience this would be, an experience that has had ripple effects ever since (Schmidt 2008: 8 – 12).

Shanghai's Jewish presence dates back to the 19th century, the time of the Concessions, when Sephardi Jews from Iraq, Egypt, and India – among them the Sassoons (Baghdad and Bombay) and the Kadoories (Baghdad) – settled in Shanghai (Xu et al. 1995: 121; Pan 2005: 5 – 9; Pan 2001: 24 – 45; Owyang 2007: 164 – 65). They were wealthy businessmen and observant Jews, who generously supported their community. In 1920, Jacob Sassoon, who had lost his wife, Rachel, built the Ohel Rachel Synagogue in her memory; it was in use until 1952 (Pan 2005: 7; Owyang 2007: 196). Today, it is a government building housing the Shanghai Education Commission that can only be seen from a distance by most visitors. Xu Xin notes, and Cara Anna wrote a recent article about Jewish events, such as a wedding, taking place in the synagogue, after lengthy negotiations with the Chinese government (Anna 2008: 4). Another important landmark in Shanghai is the Ohel Moshe Synagogue, built in 1927 by the Ashkenazi Jewish community (Owyang 2007: 165). When I visited Shanghai in 2007, it was not possible to enter the site, as the buildings were under renovation. Renovations of the complex were completed in 2008, and I thoroughly enjoyed a visit to what has become the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum, a reminder of the approximately 25,000 European Jews who found refuge just a few blocks from the Museum, in the Hongkou District of Shanghai. The Ohel Moshe Synagogue is intact, and on the second floor one can peruse an exhibition about Israel and China-Israel relations. The museum also includes a building dedicated to the Chinese Consul to Vienna, Feng Shan Ho, who wrote visas for several thousand of the Jews who found refuge in Shanghai (Pan 2001: 90 – 131). Under Japanese occupation in 1942, these refugees were ghettoized in row houses along Huoshan Road, across the street from Huoshan Park, where a large memorial for the refugees has been erected.

While in Shanghai, I kept records of the contacts I had made, and in 2008, when Professor Guo invited me for a second conference on “Globalization, Values and Pluralism” at Shanghai University and Jerry Gotel from London simultaneously invited me to join them in Kunming, Yunnan Province, for another Holocaust conference, I took the plunge and wrote to my colleague, Professor Qianhong Zhang at Henan University in Kaifeng, whom I had also met in 2007, to see if this would be a good time for me to visit their university as a visiting scholar. Miraculously, everything fell in place, and I was able to reconnect with faculty and students I had met in 2007 in Shanghai, also from Kaifeng, and to meet new colleagues and more students who came to Kunming from as far away as Inner Mongolia, Xian, and Harbin (on Harbin see Pan 2001: 47 – 87; Xu 2004: 88 – 93). The south-western part of China and Yunnan Province in particular, is home to nearly half of the 56 recognized minorities in China. To qualify, the National Minorities Institute imposes strict criteria such as “a common language, an area of inhabitation, a unique set of customs, attitudes,

and beliefs, and traditional means of livelihood,” which the descendents of Chinese Jews cannot meet (Xu 2006: 93). Kunming is also the end station of the Burma-China road, built under Allied direction during World War II, to give support to the Flying Tigers who were based in Kunming. This was one of America’s major contributions in support of China’s efforts to rid their country of Japanese occupation during World War II. Today, the region is also home to the Uygurs, a radical group of Muslims who clamour for at least autonomy, similar to the way Tibet does. When I arrived at Kunming airport in 2008, the group had detonated a bomb on a bus in Kunming, killing two, and our hosts whisked me off to the compound where the Holocaust conference took place, where we remained for the duration of the conference.

Kaifeng, located along the ancient Silk Route, prides itself on being the home of the oldest Jewish community in China, dating back to the 11th century (Xu 2003). At the height of its existence, the community was about 5,000 strong. Welcomed graciously by the emperor of the Song Dynasty after a long and arduous journey from “the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea” (Xu et al. 1995: 4), these Jews were given Chinese names by the emperor, one for each of the seven representatives who were part of the delegation that visited him (Xu et al. 1995: 23). Today, Chinese families carry these names and proudly point to their descent from the original group who settled in Kaifeng. Alas, “the synagogue [Temple of Purity and Truth] no longer proudly stands on Teaching the Torah Lane. Hebrew is neither chanted nor understood. The Torah scrolls have been lost. Inter-marriage is rife. Nine hundred years have elapsed since Jews first settled in Kaifeng, and the passage of time, isolation, natural disasters, and war have all taken their toll on the Kaifeng Jewish community” (Xu et al. 1995: 137). So writes Professor Xu (also see Fishbane 2010: 9). And after the revolution of 1949, new ways of categorizing the Chinese population brought additional difficulties for the remainder of the original Chinese Jews, who did not readily fit into the new system developed by the National Minorities Institute. To qualify for national ethnic status, a person must fulfil three requirements: “1) distinctive religious customs and practices, 2) residence of the group in a specific locality, and 3) a distinctive language” (Xu et al. 1995: 139). Since the Jews of Kaifeng were not able to prove these elements any longer, they are classified today as Han Chinese. Once the new state of Israel was established, most of the Jews in Shanghai, Harbin, and Xianjing left China.

The mythical aura surrounding the Jewish community of Kaifeng has not lessened over time. On the contrary, the Institute of Jewish Studies at Henan University provides a basis for visiting scholars who are interested in the history of this once famous community and are willing to share some of their own knowledge on Jewish topics with the students in the Institute. The students take it upon themselves to be the guardians of the remnants of this Jewish com-

munity, be they people or buildings. Traces of Jewish life can still be found in the former “Teaching the Torah Lane”, a street once home to a vibrant Jewish community and its synagogue. Walking along Nanjiaojing Hutong, the still existing house numbers point to homes of Jewish descendents, such as No. 21, the home of Mrs. Zhao, the widow of a descendent of Kaifeng Jews. Kaifeng is well-known for its delicate and exquisite paper cuts. Mrs. Zhao’s daughter, who studied in Israel in 2008, is a skilful paper cut artist; her designs include the Kaifeng synagogue, a Magen David, doves, flowers, and the word *shalom* in Hebrew. Down the street and around the corner from Mrs. Zhao’s home is a shack inside of which is located the well from which the Jews of Kaifeng drew their water. In the old part of Kaifeng, the Ancient Guild Hall holds two pictures of the Jewish quarter as it once existed. One can also see two of the four stone bowls that used to be in the synagogue. I was told that the other two bowls were taken to Canada. The bowls are massive and about three feet in diameter, but I was not able to determine their use. Perhaps they held incense or fire. Beverly Friend writes that they were used “for ritual washing before worship” (Friend n. d.: 3). Only the three steles with the community’s history were inaccessible to us, as the museum that houses them was under repair.

My understanding of the Chinese people’s interest in Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel was formed primarily by my interactions with a significant number of students. “Why do you want to study Judaism if it isn’t even one of the five religions in China?” I asked. The answers were very interesting and I would like to share a few here.

- Chinese students see Judaism as being a very old civilization – like their own, whose traditions have survived – unlike theirs. Judaism is rich in religious holidays and festivals and in life cycle events. This survival of the tradition is a sore point with some of the young people, because during the Cultural Revolution Chinese traditions were ridiculed and expunged from Chinese life. Buddha images were destroyed, and religious practices abolished. Now young people feel that their parents’ generation is lacking values and rituals. They feel that the only goal is to make money, that there is no higher goal. They want to find a way to fill their own sense of emptiness and return to their cultural values from before the Cultural Revolution. They admire Jews for having retained their cultural and religious traditions throughout history and are keenly interested in how we did that. One recent example of Chinese character-building for the students is the “Green Long March” to save the environment of the Yellow River, a reversal of the deadly “Long March” led by Mao Zedong in 1934.
- China and Judaism both have an ancient language with a unique alphabet that has survived for thousands of years. Yet, in both cases the ancient language was in need of modernization. Hence, the Chinese simplified Mandarin, while

the Jews through Eliezer ben Yehuda developed Modern Hebrew. Both cultures are rich in literature. Professor Zhiqing Zhong from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences studied in Israel where she received her Ph.D. in Modern Hebrew Language and Literature from Ben Gurion University of the Negev in 2006. She is the translator of many of Amos Oz's works into Chinese, including his very complicated autobiography, "A Tale of Love and Darkness". It is my understanding that Amos Oz travelled to Beijing for the release of the Chinese edition.

- Confucius and the Hebrew prophets are contemporaries. The two value systems, though spatially worlds apart, developed parallel to each other, sharing many ideas. Although we have no evidence of merchants travelling between the Middle East and China as far back as Solomon, some people suggest that there indeed was interaction between the two peoples, to be reinforced or complemented when the First Temple was destroyed in 586 BCE. It is thought that some Jews settled in India at the time. From there it was indeed possible to explore the Far East as well.
- Jewish teachings, as well as Confucian teachings, emphasize deeds, not dogma. "Don't do unto others what you would not want them do unto you", can be found in the Talmud (Shabbat 31a) and in Confucius' Analects (15:23). Both systems stress ethics, personal integrity, and both take an optimistic approach to human nature. In Judaism, a major principle is *tikkun olam*, or the perfecting of the world, a concept that the Chinese people also appreciate. This idea includes discipline and consideration for all living things.
- Both peoples value family. The Chinese people admire the Jewish commitment to both the nuclear and the extended family – respect of children for parents, and respect for elders in the community. With China's one-child policy, many families look longingly to the larger Jewish families with many siblings.
- Both peoples value education. While we joke about Jewish mothers and how they quell over "my son the doctor", Chinese parents likewise take pride in the academic achievements of their children – especially in the areas of science and mathematics and in music and art. Chinese young people will make great sacrifices to earn an education, often travelling far from home, because, especially in rural areas, education and particularly higher education, is difficult to obtain. They often work while going to school and send money home to help their families. This is not unlike Jewish immigrant families to America, whose children were the first generation to graduate from high school and attend university, often working nights to help support the family, or vice versa, working during the day and going to school at night.
- Both peoples have a history of suffering and persecution. In discussing the Holocaust, one student wanted to discuss the Rape of Nanking by the Japanese in 1937. The expression of this concern was just the tip of the iceberg. The

students were extremely interested in finding out what the genocide experience meant to the Jewish people. How did Jews cope with the Holocaust? And especially, how did they manage to pick themselves up after the Holocaust and continue with life? Did they hate the Germans? If not, why not? They were keenly interested in why Jews did not lose their faith in God as a result of the Holocaust, and how they maintained their moral values. Of course, many Jews did lose their faith, but the students focused on the fact that the Jews as a people are optimistic, they have hope, no matter how bad things are.

- Both Judaism and China experienced a rebirth, Judaism with the birth of the modern state of Israel in 1948 and China in 1949 with the revolution and the creation of the People’s Republic of China. They point out that President Sun Yatsen in the 1920s was a strong supporter of the Zionist movement and pointed to Zionism as an inspiration for a modern Chinese nationalism.
- Both China and Israel have five official religions. In China it is Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Contrary to some perceptions, Israel does not have only one official religion, namely Judaism, but the state supports five religious groups – Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Baha’i and the Druze (Chinese people are very interested in the Baha’i faith). When I asked Chinese students whether Judaism could ever become one of the recognized religions in China, they just smile.

Since my two visits in 2007 and 2008 I have unfortunately not been able to return to China. However, I have maintained contact with about twenty of the students and with all of the major faculties. Several of the students asked me to send them specific books for their research, which I did, and several of the academic programmes were in need of books on Judaism – history, literature, art, social theory, not just religion. We conducted a book drive in the community and sent boxes to Nanjing and Kaifeng. Unfortunately the shipment to Lu Dong University in Shandong Province was inexplicably lost. The number of Chinese students and faculty who have come to the University of Tennessee has been amazing. In the fall of 2008, three of the graduate students whom I had met at one of the conferences came to Knoxville for three weeks to conduct research for their M. A. theses. Xiao Xiao Xie, Haiyang Yo, and Lin Ding lived with me and a Chinese professor who was kind enough to help out. They thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Xiao Xiao has recently gone on to Australia to study for his PhD and “Ocean” (Haiyang) finished his M.A. degree, got married, and is now a father. In fall of 2008, I met Professor Lihong Song, a colleague of Xu Xin’s at the Glazer Institute of Jewish Studies at Nanjing University, at the annual meeting of the Association for Jewish Studies, and we enjoyed a meal and good conversation together. This was not our first meeting; we had previously met at the Kunming Holocaust conference and before that in Shanghai. In 2010, Professor Guo from

Shanghai University visited my university and gave a very well attended public lecture on “Religion in the Context of the Social Development of Contemporary China”. We travelled together to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Atlanta, where he was one of our invited international guests and participated in a special topics forum on Asia, that the International Connections Committee, of which I was a member, had organized. Professor Xu Xin from Nanjing University stopped in Knoxville in January 2011, and gave an equally well-received lecture on the Jews of China. In April of this year, Professor Zhiqing Zhong from the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, who was a Visiting Professor at Harvard’s Yenching Institute, came to Knoxville for a unique programme on her translation work of Amos Oz’s books and our Italian Hebrew teacher’s translation work of modern Hebrew literature. We had hoped that one of my Kaifeng students, who has since spent a year in Israel and earned her PhD in Judaic Studies at Nanjing University, would be able to come to Knoxville as a Research Scholar in fall of 2012. Alas, these plans did not work out. So far, only one of our students has travelled to Shanghai at the invitation of Professor Guo. In the spring of 2011, Amy Canter, a double major in Judaic Studies and Religious Studies, spent six weeks at Shanghai University doing research on Chinese students’ knowledge of Judaism, the Holocaust, and Israel. She greatly enjoyed the experience, so much so that she bought a new ticket upon returning home and spent the summer in China as well. The University of Tennessee has extensive linkages with Chinese universities beyond Shanghai, but these involve mostly the sciences and engineering.

Chinese interest in Judaism and Israel is widespread and genuine. Although China’s diplomatic relations with Israel are young – a mere twenty years – cultural relations have developed amazingly quickly and are very strong (Wald 2008: 20 – 25). Especially in the area of education, Chinese scholars travel to Israel unabashedly, studying Hebrew, the Holocaust, and Jewish and Israeli literature, culture, and history, in an effort to better serve their own people. In many ways, the Chinese dragon and the lion of Judah are soulmates.

As I was revising this paper for publication, an article on the future importance of China to Israel appeared in my inbox – from Barry Rubin, of Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, “The Israel-Arab Reader” fame. I have used this text in my Zionism course for many years. Barry Rubin recently travelled to China and discovered “a remarkable amount of interest in China about Israel and Jews” (Rubin 2012). No surprise there. Two of his observations are worth including, “that Israel in particular and the Jewish people in general have been success stories”, as China hopes she has, and that both countries “have many parallel interests, among them the desire for stability in the Middle East” (Rubin 2012). Reading the fine print in this article won’t hurt either, it is enlightening along the political front.

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