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or

THE VOCATION OF A MINORITY

by Richard Marienstras

jewish socialist critique pamphlet-1

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1983

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The article has been translated by Harri Webb, Welsh poet and minorities editor of *Planets* magazine.

The article originally appeared in *European Judaism*, V.9 N.2, Summer 1975. It is reprinted with permission.

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If you were to ask me today, must we help the Gipsies (or the Catalans, the Basques, the Bretons, the Red Indians, the Slovenes, the Jews or the Armenians etc.) to survive by perpetuating and deepening their differences, I would say, Yes we must. It does not matter whether any such aggregation is a people, a nation, a tribe, an ethnic group, a class, a caste, a sect, a fossil or a survival, nor whether their obstinate will to live is in accordance with modish progressive thought. If a group exists, if it exerts itself to maintain, to renew and recreate its identity, and if it does so without being parasitic, that is enough for me. The will to live does not have to justify itself. It is the death wish and the will to destroy of which justification must now be demanded. We no longer know where history is going, if indeed it is going anywhere at all. Who can now affirm that it is progressive to level out ways of life, to abolish the habits and customs which express mankind's varied past and his present diversity? Who will be the mouthpiece for those cold-blooded monsters, the state bureaucracies who dream of organising the human race on the lines of a conveyor belt?

Any minority, ethnic, cultural or religious, should have the power to organise itself as it wishes, within the limits of what is politically possible. This is not an escape clause, a minority soon discovers for itself the limits of its possibilities. Sometimes they are wider than it thinks, sometimes they are narrower than it would wish. In any case, if it does not know just how far it can go, it puts in hazard what remains of its existence. One step of affirmation too far and it is lost, destroyed. But if it remains inside the limit of what is possible, if it does not assert itself, it is even more completely lost, it forgets itself. Hence the many strategems needed for survival, the masks, religious, nationalist, traditionalist or progressive, the vast expenditure of energy it devotes to these activities. It is surrounded and opposed by the majority, the State, its culture and technology, its wealth and its institutionalised violence, its bureaucracy and its police. The majority does not have to justify its existence, nor seek to define itself in order to exist. Nor does it have to make much of an effort in order to deprive a minority of meaningful existence. Ethnocide can to all appearances be committed absent-mindedly. It is implicit in the structures of majoritarian society, part of its secret or proclaimed intention, as painless as loss of memory, as inevitable and as indifferent as the passage of time. Everything is its licensed weapon; ideology, whether of the left or right, the prestige of its language, the educational system, getting on in the world, the mass media, toys, cars, official documents.

In this day and age, the majoritarian state does not very often have to resort to killing. Because it is mortal it has had to civilise itself. But knowing itself to be mortal it must therefore more than ever will the death of others, in order to root itself in the illusion of its own immortality. It plays the waiting game, and can afford to. The disappearance of the minority is as *natural* as the invasion of fallow land by grass or trees. The dominant culture is the simple truth, the weed that grows, the wind that erodes, one has to be strangely perverse to resist it, such stubbornness is suspect, moribund. No wonder that the Jews, who have resisted for so long, are called a stiffnecked people.

The minority, on the other hand is *artificial*. Worse, it is unnatural. It is always being summoned to produce reasons for its survival. What is in it for others? What is its defence against the sentence of death pronounced by history and progress? Against the host of liberators who wish it to live at the price of its death? Why withstand the natural course of events, the spontaneous consensus of all, and all the evidence? Against health, wealth and happiness, against history, against the necessary, benevolent violence of redemptive universalism? It is separatist, selfish and retrograde, it is the enemy of reconciliation between nations, it is a pawn of imperialism, the tool of reaction and the colonialist forces that artificially preserve ethnic distinctions which if left to themselves would spontaneously dissolve into universal harmony. Biafra was the creation of the oil companies, Bangladesh is a puppet of India, and if the animists of the Sudan have had to be slightly liquidated, it is because it was known in advance that one day Israel would be helping them to hire mercenaries. Anyway, whether it survives or disappears, the minority bears witness on behalf of the dominant ideology. What perpetuates it is obscurantism, worship of the past, poverty. What destroys it is necessity, progress, the cultural superiority (what would once have been called the natural superiority) of the majority, the irresistible movement of capitalism or socialism, the march of the proletariat or the advancement of learning. Science yet! As for the regionalist claims in France and elsewhere, their motive force is *economic*. Only decolonise the regions, and then we will see how long these broken-down languages, these cultures fossilised by poverty will last! It is only underdevelopment that perpetuates them. That's common ground between right and left. They have not been Frenchified by compulsory elementary education, but prosperity will finish the job. We have only got to wait. Economics and organisation spell death to these cultures. Breton is on its last legs, and Basque, and Yiddish. Good. You have only got to look around you to see how

things are going, and to resign yourself to it. We will fight to preserve the countryside from speculators. But we will send a culture to the scrap-heap without giving it a thought. Everyone is instinctively in favour of the levelling policy of the French state. Soon the last Breton fisherman will have the privilege of working in a factory, and the last Basque farmer, now a forestry worker, will sell Breton jam to caravanners from Paris. The beautiful grand design will have become consummated, and the French language will at last have imposed its universality on the hexagon.

Of course it has recently been discovered on the left that it is good politics to support certain regionalist movements, those that can be seen to derive their motive force from the class struggle. But it does not appear that we are going very far in that support, nor that it is offered for more than merely tactical reasons. The majoritarian left, like the Trotskyist left, lives by the cult of the centralist state, whose power structure it dreams of seizing. ⁽¹⁾

It knows from experience what absolute power it gives over a nation. It is a question of utilising against the bourgeoisie, so they say, the invisible but inexhaustible violence which is a monopoly of the State machines. Loyal heirs of the Jacobins, the majoritarian left is not unaware that provincial assemblies weaken the State and limit its power by opposing to it embryonic sovereignties which must be ignored if their deliberations do not coincide with those of the national parties. Now the State, having confiscated power from the people and the regions, sees itself as the unique repository of sovereignty. Discussion and even practical participation can only strengthen it, for dialogue with a State bureaucracy enables it to absorb ideas which it is essentially incapable of formulating for itself, and to put into practice only those which reinforce its own power and the myth of its own necessity. Now the left wishes the State to retain and strengthen this sovereignty which one day they hope to control. This is seen in the style of their attacks on "power". Nothing imperfect happens that is not turned against it, *that is to say, towards it* supposing it to have infinite competence, and proposing, each time they denounce it, some new field of activity. In this system left and right are united to confiscate the initiative of all citizens. What will the left do after it has won the elections? It will multiply the occasions for State intervention, all with the best intentions, of course. Then it will ask, do we really want or need regional autonomy and the fragmentation of powers. Who has not heard it proclaimed by the left that regional autonomy will deliver the regions into the hands of Big Business and

the anarchy of local interests, and then it is asserted in the same breath that the apparatus of the State is the docile instrument of the same Big Business, implying that capital already dominates France under the present system of departments. That is to say, the State is seen as an *instrument*, rather like a hammer, which only kills in the hands of a murderer, and this instrument is to be used *as it is*.

A great part of the left is itself centralist, taken up with statist culture, with or without the "proletarian" tag, infatuated, despite its democratic verbiage, with power. It confuses egalitarianism — where all the ethnocidal appetites lurk — and the political and economic democracy of which our land has only known a sad caricature. Having integrated all the authoritarian models of France from Philippe le Bel to De Gaulle, via Robespierre and Napoleon, and having been struck by their elegant resemblance to democratic centralism, it seems that the left cannot take seriously the needs which are expressed by "culturalist" claims. Its ideological tradition causes it to defend "culture" against "cultures". And how could it be expected to see that the "quality of life" which it has undertaken to defend is an utterly empty notion if it is not brought precisely into these symbolic universes by which men recount *how* to live, *how* to talk to one another, and where they inscribe cumulatively the history and the practice of their *qualities*.

The left has not shown itself niggardly of promises and encouragement to the regions of France. It is coming to a confused realisation, if not of the "primary nations" at least of the collectives which, if history had been otherwise, could have become States. For we still have the fatal delusion that only those human groups which have the possibility of becoming States have a real right to survival. The dominant ideology — whether on the right or the extreme left, furnishes us with criteria which permit us to distinguish those groups whose candidature for the right to survive may be acknowledged: a language, a history and a territory to which — oh bliss — concrete and discernible limits may be set, and which gives it a claim to the "regional autonomy" championed by Lenin, and which is the indispensable basis of the right to separatism. This right is not conceded to every group, nor is that on which the group's identity is founded necessarily adjudged precious. The progressive vision of the future is still that of a world where cultural entities are gradually reduced to each other, and where everybody can absorb in equality — that is to say, uniformity — the benefits of the one universal culture. This sort of vision reminds me of the picture by Breughel the Elder of an eviscerated Leviathan full

of fish all eating other fish, with men joining in — a frightening lobsowse of cultures. Some fish are better looked at than fried. It was not quite Lenin's idea, he desired the disappearance of dispersed minorities. Between autonomy and assimilation the left sees no third way. Its emphasis is entirely on "national-territorial" autonomy, not "national-cultural" autonomy. (3) This doubtless is a schematisation of Lenin's thought, which itself is schematic, but it is what has been retained in theory and practice on the left. What preoccupied Lenin was the incidence of national and nationalist conceptions on the organisation of the party, which he wished to centralise in the image of the Tsarist empire and in accord with the evolution of capitalist society. "Marxists do not under any circumstances recommend the federal principle, nor decentralisation. A great centralised State contributes an immense historical progress, leading from medieval fragmentation to the future socialist unity of the whole world." (4) The aim sought by Lenin was not however the subjugation of cultural enclaves. He foresaw that around the autonomous territories, even in their reduced state, there could gravitate the dispersed members of a given nationality, the link between them being less a matter of government than a free association of like interests. One cannot accuse him of being unaware of the complexity of the problem, even though, for the Jews, he saw the Western solution of long-term assimilation as the only viable one. As soon as he saw the ravages committed by a bureaucracy serving the interests of a dominant ethnic group, or using ethnic dominance to secure its own power, he was to make a belated attempt to change matters. (5)

From such shade of thought, we have inherited some formidable foundations. How often do we still hear the echo of the murderous logic of Engels, "the more I think about history, the more I realise that it is *all up with Poland*, a nation we can only make use of (*sic*) until Russia is itself engaged in an agrarian revolution. From that moment onwards, Poland will no longer have any *raison d'être*." (6)

Some marvellous ventriloquists are still making such statements and have written them into the political praxis of the left. It seems that some nations are progressive and some reactionary, still — just as bourgeois humanism only recognises "mankind" without qualification, so, in 1973, the P.S.U. stated "There are no Jews in France, nor Arabs, nor Christians, but only workers, the only fundamental reality that binds them is exploitation." (7) And as we have seen, in the case of Bangladesh, a martyred people and its millions of refugees that is moving in the same direction as the presumed course of history,

must wait for the Revolution to put an end to their sufferings. It did not matter that by the time the Revolution dawned they would no longer be there to be liberated.

The logic and the presuppositions behind such opinions are complicated, but in order to simplify, we may quote Stalin, who with his characteristic lack of subtlety, gives the game away:

"Backward nations and peoples must be drawn into the wide channel of a superior culture."⁽⁸⁾ Only such a solution can be a factor in progress and acceptable to social democracy. Regional autonomy for the Caucasus is acceptable precisely because it draws the backward nations into the development of general culture, it helps them to emerge from their little-nationality shell which isolates them; autonomy advances them and facilitates their access to the benefits of the superior culture. However, national-cultural autonomy operates in the diametrically opposite direction, for it shuts up the nations in their old shells, it keeps them at a lower stage of cultural development and prevents them from rising to the higher cultural level."⁽⁹⁾

If the fulfilment of history through capitalism and then through centralising socialism implies that all men should become uniform, and that all groupings should be abolished whose diversity is an obstacle to the class struggle,⁽¹⁰⁾ to socialist-communist centralisation and thus to history itself, it is *logical* to think that some cultures are "superior" because they control others, and that others are "inferior", obscurantist, superstitious, allies of the enemies of progress, marginal to or obstructive of the flood of freedom. These cultures are doomed to destruction, either sudden or gradual, and this is the best thing that could happen to them, because if they lived they would only stagnate. When they die, their members become transfigured, and participate in the best of worlds, free of alienation, and there will be no shortage of ethnologists to study their customs, nor of translators to put their literature at last into everybody's reach.

All this however is a matter of distant perspectives and theoretical extrapolations (but the massive deportation of the Tatars from the Crimea, collectively guilty of standing in the path of history, happened as recently as 1946) and the right to a culturally autonomous existence is not challenged in practice by progressive forces, despite the grave danger of "divisions" which the nationalities pose to the revolutionary struggle. But the Jews are an exception. The liberal and marxist left reserves no other fate for them than that of absorption, a total conversion to the existing nationalities, not unlike that formerly demanded of them by the Christians. In both contexts, the existence of a Jewish

minority is a *sign* that the end of History, the end of Time, is not yet. This is the role assigned to them by the young Marx in his obscene little book *The Jewish Question* recently republished by pious hands.⁽¹¹⁾ It is a frantic and justified attack on bourgeois society and its worship of money, but blames the Jews for the fact that money dominates the earth. The entire world has been reduced to what they signify because of them and through their means. The practical spirit that rules everything is the Jewish spirit, which has contaminated the universe. "Bourgeois society ceaselessly engenders the Jew out of its own entrails."⁽¹²⁾ so that "the social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of the society from Judaism."⁽¹³⁾ The proposition is perfectly reversible and always is reversed: the Jews will be liberated from themselves, society will be liberated from the Jews and from everything that is Judaic in it, when it succeeds in "suppressing the conflict between the individual and sensible essence of man, and his generic essence."⁽¹⁴⁾ In short, if the Jew is *possible*, it is because society is alienated. His existence is the *sign* of that alienation, his disappearance will be the *sign* of general liberation.

There has always been a formidable dispute between the Jews and the left, of which only a few fragmentary aspects can be mentioned here. To avoid confusion it must be said straight away that those Jews who assert or confess themselves as such constitute a collective in which an ethnic and national element has never ceased to exist. In this they are more like the Armenians or the Gipsies than shall we say, the Protestants. The left, among its many deceptions, has tried to make believe that Judaism is a religion merely (and, later, "an origin"), failing to take into account the simple fact that a religion which teaches its adherents that they constitute a people gives rise to special problems. Implicit in this long-standing judgment is that with the progress of enlightenment – capitalism first, then socialism – the Jews as such will disappear, bound as they are to superstitions which are destined for the dustbin of history. Just thirty years ago the Jewish *nationality* of Eastern Europe and the denationalised Jews of Western Europe alike suffered the fate that twenty centuries of Western cultural hatred had prepared for them. There was a brief pause for reflection. But Israel had only to behave like any other State, and the Great Ventriloquist resumed his murderous utterances. The most recent has appeared in the bulletin published by the Soviet Information Bureau, *URSS*.⁽¹⁵⁾ Here under the title "The School of Obscurantism", and under the pretext of belabouring Zionism and Israeli policy, the author reproduces the text of a pamphlet published in 1906 by the notorious po-

grom leaders, The Black Hundreds. The beauty of the situation is not so much that antisemitism has once again become the weapon of bureaucracy, but that, from one regime to another, it is expressed in *exactly* the same language! Obscurantists the Jews and their rabbis have always been: for the Catholics in the Middle Ages, for Voltaire, for the German Liberals and the Russian Marxists, for Lenin and Stalin alike. One can only marvel at the impudence of those who attribute their own obscurantism to the *only* community in the Western world where for centuries there has been practically no illiteracy.

To return to our own day, it must be remembered that it is not the "pluralist" tradition of Montesquieu, Herder, Senger and Pastoret⁽¹⁶⁾ which has been retained by the "enlightened" but that of Voltaire, the Abbe Gregoire, Lamourette and later Naquet, those who, while passionately defending the emancipation of the Jews, said to the Assembly, "Your mission is not to make use of men as they are, but to make of them what you wish them to be". They concluded that nothing should be given to the Jews as a nation, but everything to them as individuals, for as Clermont Tonnerre said, there can be no nations in the bosom of the one nation.⁽¹⁷⁾ The same liberating, assimilating, ethnocidal impulse that destroyed the French provinces, reduced their culture to mere folklore and made their languages a sinful reproach, offered the French Jews a bargain which in their vulnerable position they felt they had to accept: emancipation but at the expense of the national dimension and collective existence. At least the terms of the bargain were clearly formulated and nobody was left in any doubt, that, although they were referred to as a "sect" the Jews were also a "nationality". In Rousseau's words, "Moses conceived and executed the astonishing plan of making a nation out of a horde of wretched fugitives." Rousseau analyses correctly the role of the Jewish religion which he interprets as a symbolic system whose constricting rules are essential to ensure communication between its members, and their resistance and endurance.

"To make sure that his people did not become mingled with foreign peoples, he (Moses) gave them customs and usages which kept them apart from other nations, he burdened them with special rites and ceremonies, he constricted them in a thousand ways, to keep them in good fettle, and forever foreigners among other men. All the bonds of brotherhood he established between members of the Republic were also barriers which kept them separate from their neighbours, preventing them from inter-mixing. Thus it is that this singular nation, so often subjugated,

so often dispersed and to all appearances destroyed, but always idolatrously faithful to its own rules, has survived to our day, scattered among others without conforming to them, and that its customs and laws and ceremonies have survived and will continue to survive to the end of the world, despite the hatred and persecution on the part of the rest of the human race." (18)

This choice, put before an infinitesimal proportion of Jewry in 1790 and 1791, is of capital importance, for it has served as the model for liberal and marxist thinking on the subject. The prestige of the French Revolution was so great that it was impossible to conceive, for the millions of Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern Europe, any other desirable fate but assimilation. Very soon the French Jews were offering themselves as an example to the rest of the world, and the value of that example was in no way diminished for them by the Dreyfus affair. The "solution" to "the Jewish question" must be integration or assimilation. So they vehemently rejected any national dimension or recognition of a Jewish nationality. On the international level they fought against the idea that Jewish communities could constitute autonomous political entities. The only form of organisation acceptable to them was that of a religious sect. No Jewish national minority in Eastern Europe, no Jewish State in Palestine. The fact is that French Jewry, almost to a man, rejected Zionism until after the creation of the State of Israel. It is only more recently that they have embraced the *ideology* of political Zionism with the zeal of converts and have transferred to it their chauvinistic French patriotism. (Remember that under the Occupation they considered themselves "different" from the more recently arrived Jewish immigrants) and to this day they revere the Nation-State, whether French or Israeli, with a remarkable continuity of devotion.

But the choice made during the Revolutionary epoch was significant not only for the fate of the Jews, but for all minorities within the framework of Nation-States. In 1791 there was a vital relationship between the Nation-State and the ideologies of emancipation. The ideologies had need of the state to become a concrete force, the state made use of the ideologies to camouflage its fundamental imperialism. The model of the state established by the French Revolution and fulfilled after Thermidor, together with a choice of all previous forms, has been reproduced on a world scale, acting on peoples with the inevitability of a law of science. It has given humanity a body of law more deadly than the oft-denounced "bourgeois legality", for its rules are established and respected by bourgeois states and self-styled

revolutionary states alike. What this other legality boils down to is that license is given to the majority in the state to deal with national minorities as it thinks fit and the majority in many cases is not inhibited from using coercion and ethnocide and murder. Cultural domination is thus superimposed onto class domination. This permits the *displacement* of the will of the conquered peoples, who are directed according to the will of the victors. And sometimes it is class domination which follows cultural domination and ethnocide, as when a demoralised ethnic group, deprived of the guidance of its traditions, becomes the ideal lumpen proletariat of the plantations and the shanty towns, on whom the prestige of the majority culture acts more effectively than any police force.

It is significant in this respect that the first organised proletarian force in Russia, the Bund, had both social and ethnic foundations, and the Bolsheviks could not rest until they had disorganised it and incorporated it. Lenin envisaged the creation, through his centralised party organisation, of a counter-state capable of seizing the tsarist machine. The extraordinary polemic between him and the Bund clearly demonstrated, in light of what has happened in the Soviet Union, that the destruction of a culture is the trade mark of tyranny.

“In the name of national culture, Great-Russian, Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian etc., the Black Hundreds, the clericals, also the bourgeois of *all* nations fulfil a sordid reactionary need . . . Our slogan is the international culture of democracy and the workers’ movement throughout the world.” (19)

To put on the same level the “national culture” of the majority, of territorial minorities and of a non-territorial minority, and to affirm the necessity for *combating* all such national cultures irrespective of their different characters, this means combating the *reactionary content* of the majority and territorial cultures, but it means fighting *the very existence* of the non-territorial culture. The “separatism” of the Bund arose from the concern felt by its leaders and members to obtain from the proletarian parties a built-in guarantee that the Jews should survive as a nation. The Bund understood perfectly well that to accept Bolshevik centralisation would be to strengthen the assimilationist and ethnocidal will of the majority, a will that asserted itself tragically in 1952, with the massacre of Yiddish writers. The Bund and Lenin both understood the “model” of the Jewish future proposed by the bourgeois nations. But it was rightly convinced that emancipation should not be achieved at the expense of their identity. What is pathetic about the adventure – and the failure – of the Bund is that it thought that

the liberation of the Jews by the victorious proletariat would not take the same form as the “emancipation” offered by the bourgeoisie.

The leaders of the Bund were not arrogant intellectuals fascinated by the “new culture”, whether bourgeois or Marxist. The nationalist emphasis did not become apparent until the Bund’s Third Congress (December 1899) and was imposed by the special character of the Jewish working-class struggle, a response to the demands of that struggle and the taking over by the proletariat of the whole Jewish destiny. And this was at a time when the Jewish proletariat was the first and only one in all Russia to possess, thanks to the Bund, a serious political organisation and a host of militants. If the Bund leaders did not have the intellectual genius of Lenin, they were closer to the people (their own people) than he was, and they actually expressed the aspiration of the Jewish masses to liberate themselves in a flowering of their national character, not to be liberated by the renunciation of their national identity.

For the fate that Lenin had in store for Jewish nationality was made clear in his analysis of Jewish culture, where he only retains the “universalist” characteristics, those which remain to individuals “of Jewish origin” after the loss through assimilation of national characteristics.

“Jewish national culture is the slogan of rabbis and bourgeois, the slogan of our enemies. But there are other elements in Jewish culture, and in all Jewish history. Of the ten and a half million Jews in the world today, more than half live in Galicia and Russia, wild, backward countries, which by force maintain the Jews in the position of a caste. The other half live in the civilised world, where there is no caste distinction for Jews, and where the noble, universalist, progressive character of Jewish culture are plainly manifest, its internationalism, its support of the progressive movements of our time (the proportion of Jews in the democratic and proletarian movements is everywhere higher than the proportion of Jews in the population at large).

Whoever proclaims, directly or indirectly, the slogan of Jewish national culture, is (however excellent his intentions) an enemy of the proletariat, a partisan of retrograde elements, branded with the *caste* character of Jewish society, an accomplice of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie. The Marxist Jews on the other hand, who dissolve themselves (*sic*) into the international Marxist organisations with the Russian, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and other workers, bring their contribution (as Russians and Jews) to the creation of the international culture of the working-class move-

ment; those Jews who oppose the separatism of the Bund, perpetuate the best Jewish traditions, combating the slogan of national culture.” (20)

The main currents of contemporary political thought have converged in the denial of any national vocation to the Jews of the Diaspora. This is merely to state the obvious. Catholicism, liberalism, whether deist or atheist, bourgeois nationalism and proletarian internationalism have literally joined hands in the denial, infecting, as usual, many Jewish intellectuals. Many assimilated and militantly assimilationist Jewish celebrities, like Bergson and Marc Bloch will continue to “declare themselves as Jews” until the Jews are no longer persecuted. Others take upon themselves, on principle, the burden of the Jewish past, enter into its collective memory and, one way or another, do not let it become extinct within them. There is a fundamental difference between the fight against anti-semitism, which the left has generally championed, and the defence of the national character of Jewish existence. The convergence I have emphasised becomes clear in Lenin, quoting Alfred Naquet to prove that there is no such thing as Jewish “nationality” (a statement contradicted by the statement of nationality carried on the passports of Soviet Jews), or more recently in an archaeo-Marxist study of Zionism published by the World Conference of Christians for Palestine (and previously by *Cahiers de l’Institut Maurice Thorez*) where the definition of the nation is Stalin’s definition. (21) Similarly the declaration of Yasser Arafat at the United Nations in 1974 denies to the Jews of Israel the right to maintain the State they have created, for such a right cannot be conceded to a religious community. There is a double contradiction here, for Arafat not only denied, in the face of all the evidence, the national character of the Jewish collective, but he chose to forget, for the moment, the opposite example of Pakistan, whose creation shocked no Muslim or Arab State, and pretended to believe that no religious community could of itself constitute a state.

This convergence of ideologies is longstanding, and it has had considerable historic and social consequences. We have seen that in Western Europe the price of emancipation was the abandonment by the Jews of their national rights. This price was demanded by “enlightened” opinion and paid with alacrity by the tiny Jewish communities of the “developed” countries, who became active propagandists on behalf of the option they had taken up. Robert Lafont talks of the elementary schoolteachers of the French Midi who, having adopted the ideology of cultural conformity, return home to manufacture in their

turn yet more national-majority mentalities. “The teacher who destroys the national culture of his region lives at the same level as the country people from whom he has sprung. He inflicts the traumas of his own infancy on the children . . . As this trauma has become for him a liberation, he liberates them by uprooting them.” (22) The same attitude is invoked in the remark of Kalinin in 1926, “In Moscow Jews mingle their blood with the Russians, and from the second or third generation they are lost henceforth to the Jewish nation and become great-Russifiers.” (23)

The assimilationism of the tiny fraction of Jews constituting the Western European communities appeared similarly at the Peace Conference in 1919, one of whose tasks was to define the juridical status of the minorities included in the new nations created at this time. The Jews of Eastern Europe, then numbering nine millions, sent a delegation whose programme was national, if not nationalistic. They came up against fierce opposition from the delegates of French and British Judaism, who succeeded in suppressing every mention of Jewish “national rights” and finally refused to be associated with a watered-down memorandum presented, in association with the American Jews, by the Easterners. The situation was the height of absurdity, when one considers that the French delegation (in which the spokesman of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* distinguished himself) and the British delegation between them represented at the most three hundred and fifty thousand Jews. But they had the prestige of the emancipated Jews, they belonged to the victorious nations, and their influence was great. (24)

The international treaties concerning minority rights were signed between June and July 1920. And here again the fate of the Jews cannot be separated from that of the territorial minorities. They provided that these rights were to be placed under the safeguard of the League of Nations. (25) It needs hardly to be said that these rights were never fully respected, and that they succumbed to the wave of nationalism unleashed by Hitler’s advent to power.

The minorities were flattened in capitalist Europe and the Soviet Union alike. Their rights never became facts. The idea that “there can be no nations within the bosom of the one nation”, which is explicitly or implicitly the basic charter of the Nation-State, was generally accepted as reality. For the Jews, assimilationist pressures were intensified throughout Europe. There is no point in describing what happened in Germany. In the Soviet Union a multiplicity of Jewish cultural and community organisations were created and encouraged between 1920

and 1935. There was even an attempt to “complete” the definition of the Jews as a nation by offering them a territory, Birobidjan. The theory underwent some strange fluctuations, and any truly nationally-minded activity on the part of these scattered communities was resisted, feebly during the “Golden Age” of Soviet Yiddish culture, but with the utmost brutality during the great Purges. During the Second World War, the creation of the Jewish Antifascist Committee gave some hope that the Jewish national community would be restored to its constitutional rights. In 1948, Gromyko’s intervention at the United Nations suggested a change of direction. But with the start of the Cold War, the axe fell. The Jewish minority in the Soviet Union was literally decapitated, and the measures taken show that it was ethnocide in the strict sense of the word. Salamon Mikhaels, Director of the Jewish Theatre in Moscow, was murdered and the theatre closed down in 1949. The Jewish theatres of Kiev, Minsk, Kharkov, Czernovitz, Odessa and Birobidjan were liquidated. Twenty-five prominent Jewish leaders and writers were arrested, twenty-four of them were executed in 1952. Over four hundred members of the Jewish intellectual elite were arrested and liquidated. Nearly all Yiddish publications were closed down. The last Jewish schools in Vilna and Kaunas were closed. It is estimated that during the great crises before and after the war, Stalin eliminated, among the Jews, 238 writers, 106 actors, 19 musicians, 87 painters and sculptors.⁽²⁶⁾ The idea spread abroad by the Soviets and by certain Western Communist parties, that Jewish culture is dying out in the Soviet Union because the Jews are assimilating “of their own free will” is thus shown up for what it is.

Independent of ideology or regime, forced assimilation is one of the fundamental facts of Jewish life over the last few decades, whether it be through institutional and social “soft” violence, physical liquidation, ideological blackmail or police pressure. The phenomenon is constant, the means used to provoke it, even in the most unlikely circumstances, are varied, and it is justified by the most apparently irreconcilable ideologies. The murderous character of state nationalism is thus revealed. The Jewish communities themselves are reluctant to admit the truth, being influenced today by Zionist propaganda, which itself defends state nationalism and argues that only the Zionists foresaw the catastrophe that lay ahead for the European communities, that they alone had essayed realistic *political* action to avoid it, and that if they had been heeded, European Jewry would have been saved. The argument is not serious. *Before* the Holocaust, the Zionist idea was only faintly credible, either to the European powers or to the

Jewish communities themselves. It was necessary for it *to have happened*, and for a special conjuncture in international affairs, before the United Nations could accept the partition of Palestine – with, incidentally, only a narrow majority, in 1948.

As Gromyko then clearly stated:—

“The Jewish people have undergone unheardof suffering and misery during the last war, sufferings and misery which were, without exaggeration, indescribable. The great majority of the surviving Jewish population of Europe have lost their country, their homes, their means of existence. Most of them are in Displaced Persons’ camps. The fact that no country of Western Europe has been in a position to ensure the protection of the elementary rights of the Jewish people, to defend them against the violence of Fascist torturers, explains the aspirations of the Jews for their own state. The denial of this right to the Jewish people cannot be justified.”⁽²⁷⁾

When one considers that in these very decades Soviet power had itself denied that right to the Jewish people – denying even that they existed as a people! – one has some idea of the trauma experienced by the *non-Jewish world* after the war, and of the trauma of the Jewish survivors, which cannot be measured or understood in any Western community, for none of them has had any comparable historic experience.

One can see why, for twenty years, the space of a generation, the Jewish communities have been incapable of re-defining themselves, and why Zionism to this day, although its militant force is weakened, retains a certain influence over Jews of the older generations.

And one can understand also why most Jews cannot attribute the catastrophe to the fundamentally imperialist and ethnocidal character of Nation-states. Belief in the Nation-state as the exclusive form of normality is literally all that is left to them if they are not to despair for the future of their identity. For Zionism, in the immediate present, is the only Jewish *political* option which has even partly succeeded. Zionist propaganda exploits this situation, it seeks to discredit all the other Jewish options which have appeared over the last hundred years. It denies the Diaspora any possibility of survival, it affirms, *taking its place in the ranks of the Nation-states*, that one must have one’s own State or perish.

Zionists and religious Jews alike diagnose the *fact* of the diaspora as a pathologically abnormal situation, a *galuth*. They are in unison with majoritarian thinking about the Jews, which condemns dual allegiance

or double fidelity. They specify a univocal existence in the bosom of the Nation-state as "natural" and the existence of a minority as "unhealthy, unnatural, artificial". The Zionists, the religious Jews and the non-Jewish majoritarians of the right or left consider that to be exiled is to be cut off or separated from the circumstances of one's origin. They want the Jews to "come out of exile" or "come out of the ghetto", and to become one with their surroundings. They present them with mandatory alternatives: to go to Israel in order to remain Jews, or to become assimilated. The difficulty is that in the present historic situation, the original circumstances of the majority of diaspora Jews are precisely those in which they are now living. Nearly all the Western Jews could emigrate to Israel *if they wanted to*. By not emigrating they give daily proof, by an abstention which like all abstentions is a positive act, that they do not consider themselves to be in exile. Their real position is that of dispersion accepted, or better still, dispersion justified. As long as the State of Israel did not exist, they could imagine or claim that they were "in exile". Since the creation of the State, to assert that the situation of the Jews in the outside world is a *galuth* is only one ideological interpretation among many. Curiously enough it is the Zionists and the religious Jews who argue *as if* the State of Israel did not exist, and that we live in a situation anterior to its creation. The existence of the State of Israel, together with the attitude of the Jews to migration, reveal what the Zionist ideology tries to hide, that the Diaspora has become a durable and satisfactory situation, not an ephemeral and accidental one. One may of course comment on the *relatively* precarious position of various diasporas taken separately, this or that one will disappear because its numbers are few, or because anti-semitism is virulent, or because it lacks the will to maintain its existence. But the Diaspora cannot be understood by the analysis of such and such of its components, but by examining it as a whole, and this totality gives proof of a permanence, a resistance to assimilation, and of a remarkable cultural and organisational activity. Nothing *if not the open or hidden desire for the disappearance of the Jews as such*, permits us to affirm that this obstinate survival results only from the imperfections of the majority societies, or that hostility or their benevolence, or their division into antagonistic classes, or their economic systems. Besides, contradictory assertions are heard: the Jews survive *because of* anti-semitism or *despite* anti-semitism, and, contrary-wise, that they are doomed to disappear because the majority society is too tolerant or not tolerant enough. The will to survive in the Diaspora must be accepted as a fact,

despite the absence of a common language, customs or institutions. It must also be accepted that the modern definition of the Jews, to which the majority of the Diaspora are tending despite their leaders, is essentially a national and political definition. Certainly the collective will of the Jews in the Diaspora is guaranteed neither success nor eternity. It is so situated in history as to be susceptible, both individually and collectively, to erosion and constraint, it is conditioned by the past and by all the majoritarian forces that tend to impose uniformity on ways of life, to enforce simplistic fidelities, to turn men into cogwheels obedient to the control of state bureaucracies and industrial empires. This precariousness is obvious. It is the fate in store for all stateless minorities. But it is also the fate in store for the Nation-states. The fate of any human group is not guaranteed by history or by the gods. Of course, this goes for the Jewish state, too, whose duration, like that of the Diaspora, must be measured in the long term of history, not in the short space of a few generations. The Jewish State is precarious, its character has been revealed by ancient history. All Zionist and communitarian propaganda seeks to rally Jews around Israel, arguing basically from the dangers that surround her, and thus from this very precariousness. In any case, in the age of tactical and other atomic weaponry, states far larger and more populous than Israel are no more assured of their survival. To claim that Israel alone, by some divine or historic grace, can escape from the common situation of all is the profession of a mystic faith. Finally, to imagine that Israel can be maintained without the constant support of the Diaspora, moral, political and material, is a vision in defiance of fact. Thus, a massive immigration would, by causing an outflow from the Diaspora, deprive the State of the support of the very people who help it and would weaken its capacity to survive.

Certain minorities see very well what most Jews, branded by provincialism and with a providential or catastrophic vision of their destiny, do not see clearly: that the Jews have survived for so long in history, not *despite* dispersion but *because of* dispersion. However strong the destructive will of a nation, it has never been entirely successful because a part of the Jewish totality has always been outside its grasp. And the temptations to conversion or assimilation have been presented to the Jews in too many different forms for all the diasporas to succumb to them simultaneously. Globally, over twenty centuries, the Jewish communities have developed a prodigious defensive armoury, which has enabled them to avoid the ultimate catastrophe of complete disappearance. One cannot say so much for many "terror-

ial" nations, assimilated or destroyed by colonisers or better organised peoples. In a catastrophic situation – and only the very greatest nations (greatest that is, in terms of numbers) can allow themselves to ignore the possibility of such a situation – the concentration of an entire people in a contiguous territory makes of it a hostage to fortune. It is no accident that the fall of Troy is at the heart of one of the foundational myths of our civilisation. Now, the Jewish Diaspora is the example which proves, by history and actuality, that non-state communities can survive and perpetuate their symbolic universe and their own means of communication despite violence which may destroy them and seductions which may weaken them. No Western community has a historic memory as long as that of the Jews, and that memory in its entirety springs from the Diaspora, independent of the language used, territory occupied, institutions adopted, or modes of production, although it makes use of all of these. It adapts itself to constraint, benefits by accidents, hazards and chances. What must be emphasised is not the boring "natural" fact that the Diasporas have adopted the ways of life, languages and customs of the lands in which they have taken root, but that, despite this diversity, they "recognise one another" among themselves. We know today that the existence of a human group outside of particular frontiers is not an historical anomaly. For centuries many such groups have lived in a minority situation, some legally, some retaining under the appearance of assimilation the characteristics on which much present-day work of "regionalist" reconstruction is based. And it may be pointed out in passing that the Jews have had long experience of this work; since the enlightenment reflexion on their identity has been their identification mark. Conversely, it is considered scandalous today that an ethnic majority having achieved its own Nation-state, should impose its political, administrative and cultural standards on all the groups it dominates. Of course this does not mean that the Nation-state is going to disappear as *such*, but it does mean that it is gradually disappearing as a *model*.

It is understandable that some Jews, dazzled by the attainment of a national existence, tend to see the Nation-state as the norm of collective existence, and that the existence of groups which do not constitute a state is, to them, pathological. But this attitude is no longer the norm. It expresses only one ideology and one option. I do not despise that option, for I affirm with Albert Memmi that "Israel is the *only* Jewish country, that is to say the only country where a Jew may go, if he wishes to, as of right, and without the permission of a power

suspected of anti-semitism."⁽²⁸⁾ But I challenge the ideology, because it makes incomprehensible the contrary evidence that five Jews out of six live outside of Israel, rooted in their respective Diasporas, with their own specific questions that political Zionism cannot answer and cannot even ask. A few of them choose or have chosen Israel, but this only throws in to greater relief the fact that the majority have chosen the Diaspora. For some of them, Israel seems today to be the best refuge should danger arise. But history is uncertain. And no one can say that one day the Diaspora in its turn may not once more play the role that fell to it after the destruction of the Temple.

In short then, a Jew *may* go to Israel, but that does not mean that he *should* go, or that he should want to go. The facts speak for themselves. What political Zionism does is to convert the optative into the imperative, and that is why it has become obsolete since the creation of the State.

Undoubtedly Israel is not a Jewish community like any other. Its territorial base and its state organisation has upset the equilibrium of Jewish existence by giving it a sense of security which may be real or illusory, and a simplified identity. Since the emancipation there has been a Jewish identity crisis, in phase with the general crisis of Western civilisation, and primary nationalism as expressed in Zionist propaganda has therefore been able to exercise great influence over recent years and is still doing so. But it has done so too because majoritarian doctrine denies that the Jews, wherever they live, have the right to "a political existence among the nations". The identification of Diaspora Jews with Zionism (and which some who specifically deny this right attribute to the malevolent and misleading power of Zionism)⁽²⁹⁾ results essentially from this negation. What pushes Jews into Zionism (a purely verbal Zionism for most of them) is not its magical or demoniacal character, it is the ensemble of ideological, political and institutional pressures which prevent them from asserting themselves as a national minority. The Zionist ideal states that Israel alone is invested with historic normality, and is a model and an example to other communities, that the history of the Jews cannot henceforth be understood except in the light of Israeli history. But when one considers the national character of Jewish existence and the totality of the Jewish condition, that idea is at once revealed as false. This ridiculous vision eclipses the existence of ten million people, it speaks the same language as those majoritarian states which want them to disappear. Once again they become *luftmenschen*, once more they are obliged to emigrate in order to affirm that they are real people.

I wish to be clearly understood: Shortly after the Six Day War I had occasion to say that "for the first time since their dispersion, the Jews had been identified with violence unjustified by any of the universalist slogans, revolution, class struggle, rights of man, etc., but with violence exercised in their own name, for the defence of their own community, their historic destiny, their past and their culture."⁽³⁰⁾ What I meant was that in today's world a group with its own culture, even if that culture is in rags, without any means of exercising violence, could find itself so gravely exposed that its members could lose confidence in their collective survival. This means that the "will to live" of the Diaspora largely depends on the existence of the State of Israel just as the "ability to live" of the State largely depends on the existence of the Diaspora. But this does not transform the dispersion into "exile", it does not make emigration obligatory, it does not make life in the Diaspora shameful or unhealthy. It does not authorise the Israeli government's policy of annexation, ignoring the Palestinian people, it does not do away with the political and moral difficulties that arise from the use of violence. It does not restore to the Nation-state her symbolic virginity. Neither does it absolve the Diaspora from analysing its own problems, recreating its own culture, modifying its institutions, or from asserting itself as a minority. Finally, it does not hide the conflicts which arise from the position of the Jews in societies themselves characterised by a serious crisis of civilisation, where class struggle, bureaucratic oppression, social injustice and tolerance impose the necessity of constant and difficult choice.

The joint existence of the Diaspora and the State of Israel shows that henceforth there are many ways of assuming and creating the Jewish destiny. National affirmation does not put an end to any problem, on the contrary it adds to those political and social problems that already exist. All that is conservative in the Jewish communities prevents them from allying themselves with other minorities, or for declaring that they themselves are a minority. The Zionists and many religious Jews have nothing but contempt for the Diaspora, in which, nevertheless, they live. So it is stated that the Jews have for nineteen centuries been content to submit to their fate and it took the Six Day War before they dared to assert themselves.⁽³¹⁾ If they had been merely content to submit to their fate, Albert Memmi would not be here today to perpetrate such a scandalous misjudgment on them. Scandalous because he attempts to replace them once again within the purview of those who have tried in vain to destroy them. Similarly it is a false claim that among the Soviet Jews it is only those who wish

to emigrate to Israel who have "rediscovered" their Jewish identity. Some of them have never lost it, and it is premature, to say the least, that the migratory behaviour of the Soviet Jews, if they were able to move freely, would be significantly different from that of Jews living in other developed countries. The Jewish establishment itself takes the side of the centralised state and defends its activities, maintaining by so doing the old alliance between the rich Jews and the State machine.

The Jewish establishment refuses to see that national aspirations of diverse peoples, who are today becoming aware of the irreplaceable character of their history and culture, tend to be realised, according to local conditions, on the model of the state or by territorial consolidation or by a linked dispersal. That the Nation-state shall be the exclusive model, that outside of it extant ethnic minorities are doomed, is what the Zionists want, and the Jewish establishment, and all the majority-minded thinkers whether of the right or left. They are adopting the theory and practice of the very institutions and powers who wagered for two thousand years on the disappearance of the Jews, and who have lost their bet. They have adopted the viewpoint of the conqueror and the coloniser. They have given their backing and their active support to what Robert Jaulin has called the cultural crimes of Islam and Western Christianity. Finally, from the Jewish point of view, it is to resign oneself to the State of Israel, becoming an ethnic closed shop, and all the Jews of the Diaspora lining up behind her in the drab normality of member-states of the United Nations, joining in the fundamentally iniquitous conspiracy which binds these states together whenever one of them should rediscover genocide as an elegant solution to socio-ethnic problems which cannot be resolved politically.

But the dangers that Zionism brings to the community of the Diaspora are also political, institutional and cultural. First of all, the scattered communities are financed by fund-raising among their members, funds which are vital to the existence of the Diaspora. Now in many countries, including France, these funds are raised on behalf of the local community and of Israel, without any distinction being drawn, the moneys being divided half and half. This practice has led to disputes which are becoming increasingly bitter. The French community has failed to carry out a coherent programme of cultural reconstruction, it has failed to take a stand on its own identity, so donations have dwindled. Such cultural work as it has undertaken since the last war has been influenced by the dominant ideologies,

Zionist and religious, and has been largely a failure. The younger generation is not interested in involving itself with such a conservative and hidebound community. Instead of being drawn into their own identity, they reject it, thanks to the political and cultural attitudes of the leaders. Thus, organised Jewry as such dwindles in numbers, and finances diminish, and this despite a manifest strong desire on the part of the young to rebuild an identity, to rediscover the past of their people and to assert themselves as Jews with a culture of their own.

These disputes over the allocation of the funds have prompted internal manoeuvring by the Zionists and the Jewish Agency to take over the community organisations of the Diaspora. So the former director of one of the most important Jewish organisations in the U.S.A. has been replaced by a personality more acceptable to the Zionists. The power struggle in France is still going on. A Zionist seizure of the community organisations would have serious consequences. An organisation controlled by any State whatsoever acts automatically according to the instructions it has been given, manifesting on all occasions the sacred egoism appropriate to state bureaucracies, and operates according to the day to day political decisions of the government in power. Now there is a fundamental difference between the aid and sympathy which exists and which must exist between Israel and the Diaspora, and a relationship which would turn these dispersed communities into the docile and passive instruments of Israeli politics. So much discredit would accrue to the organisations of Jewry in dispersal that for a long time to come they would lose their influence among young Jews and any possibility of being able to intervene effectively in matters concerning Jews throughout the world.

Finally such a takeover would mean that any attempt at cultural reconstruction would have to have an ideological orientation and would thus become sterile. Zionist militants deride Jewish life in the Diaspora. What matters above all to them is political activity which will increase the amount of the money that goes to Israel and the volume of emigration. For them, Jewish culture is only a means to these political ends. As most of the Jews in dispersal are well established in their countries the Zionisation of Jewish culture repels them. They are tempted to reject their historic tradition in its entirety. Today the Zionisation of Jewish culture in the Diaspora is itself a factor in assimilation.

Taken in the sense I mean, "culture" does not merely include the literary, philosophical, or any other sort of luggage the "cultured"

individual carries around with him, but the sum total of all those distinctive characteristics that enables any human group to identify its members, and itself to be identified as a group. It can include separately or together, means of production, institutions, a body of law, religion, language, literature, folklore, daily habits and ideology. It is not generally possible to discover a group culture in the characteristics manifested by one individual or several. This explains why certain Jews — and certain Bretons — having carried out a careful self-analysis and having discovered nothing that resembles a "culture", have decided that they are simply "French". Such individuals often become assimilated and there is nothing against them doing so. But the destiny of a community can only be truly revealed by the ideal reconstruction of the entire culture. What has prevented a generally-agreed understanding of the Jewish phenomenon has been the attempt to deduce it from such and such an individual or community, whereas the links between the communities go so deep, are so little apparent and at the same time so powerful that this method cannot but conceal the overall characteristics.

It is impossible to summarise these characteristics. One would have to describe all the different ways there are in the world of being a Jew, the various organisational frameworks of Jewish life, the historic experience of all Jews, living and dead. To simplify matters, let us say that in the Diaspora, Jewish identity is seen either in a minimal activity, such as taking a Jewish periodical or reading a Jewish book, or in a deeper involvement, religious, political, "communal" or cultural. The minimal symptom of belonging may be no more than an uneasiness about one's own identity, which enables one to take a detached view of the majority culture and which, above all, enables one to see it as a *cultural* and not a *natural* creation. For what characterises Jewish existence in the Diaspora is its faithful attachment to multiple cultural entities, from which, up to a point, it is possible to become detached or liberated. For centuries, many Jews have known that to belong to their people is an act of individual will under the pressures to convert or assimilate, that their cultural entity is consciously maintained, that it is a human creation and that one can *choose* or *will* to belong to it. Whereas in the olden days one was born into one's original culture and that remained the absolute determinant, today it is only a relative determinant. And even if this consciousness is not widely shared by the greater number, we must, because of it, try to understand cultural "belonging" in new terms.

Some on the left have thought that a normal future for the Jews

could only be one of assimilation, because in the age of emancipation and enlightenment, adherence to Judaism (or indeed any other religion) was seen as an individual or group act of choice, whereas adherence to the majority culture was seen as destiny. It was one's destiny to be French, it was *natural*. To be Jewish was volitional, *artificial*. But the vulnerability of national and cultural entities all over the world has radically changed that. All cultures are voluntary today, like parenthood or a planned economy. The young deculturalised Occitans, the Black Americans whose "black" culture is a lot more mythical than that of the Jews, the third-generation Bretons in Paris, all these can, if they *wish* fundamentally modify their cultural position, re-establish their links with their history, with a special group and its customs. In short they can build up their solidarity on something different from political slogans. Once again they will be able to say "we" despite the majoritarian system in which every individual is a monad before the state.

And it is no use saying that all this depends on a particular language or territory or customs handed down. Loss of memory is never total. The most dramatic recoveries are possible. Today, one may add, they are desirable. In non-state communities they occur among individuals who to all appearances have been entirely assimilated by the majority. In this the Jews are no different from the other deculturalised minorities. It is impossible to state the exact number of Jews or Basques in France. In the U.S.A. it is impossible to give an exact count of the Indians, the urbanised, detribalised ones have become assimilated and disappeared, although among these a sort of intertribal Indianity has appeared, which is a sign of belonging rather than of specificity. And it is belonging that matters, the possibility of being able to say "we". Besides, among many individuals, this feeling of belonging is not necessarily connected with any elaborate or complex cultural content, nor with a language or territory. The various regionalist movements, like the Jews, dream of this feeling of belonging before passing on to the stage of cultural reconstruction. In the phrase of Leroy Ladurie, they have only to hear the echo of a "matrix-event": Montsegur for the Occitans, Treblinka for the Jews. These events linger in the collective memory for a very long time. After that it is a matter of choice, perseverance, will.

Can it be said that the assertion of their national status by the Jews has a progressive or liberating role to play in these days? Is it not true that one of the most remarkable characteristics of Jewish communities throughout the world is their relative prosperity, wealth even? That in

the Diaspora they tend to move more and more into the middle class? And that it is vain to expect any human group so privileged in fortune and knowledge to oppose the powers and the regimes which guarantee their prosperity? This analysis, which is often elaborated, gravely neglects the part that could be played by non-proletarian groups in the development of socialism. It underestimates the importance of cultural definitions in the life of men. It makes implicit use of the old stereotype according to which the Jews have allied themselves with active, aggressive capitalism, whereas such Jews are only a tiny minority. If it is true that most Jews do not belong to the proletariat — even in the enlarged definition recently propounded by Edmond Maire — they nevertheless remain a focus of controversy and indiscipline. This is true of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. alike. It is less apparent in France, where progressive or revolutionary Jews act outside of Jewish organisations, and where the Jewish organisations of the left (socialist or communist) are ousted from community decision-making when any "serious" matters have to be considered. The financial conservatism of prominent French Jews results from the history of the community itself, whose representatives display, in their relationship with the State, a prudence verging on complicity. The State treats them well, and this to some extent reinforces their own authority. Of the 600,000 Jews who make up the French community, only a quarter are "old stock", a third European Jews and their descendants, immigrated just before or after the Second World War, the remainder are very recent immigrants from North Africa. It is therefore a very diverse community, whose collective dynamic is still weak, and which has traditionally presented itself to public opinion as a *religious group* or *cult*. It is divided into a myriad differing groups, which reproduce the regional or political divisions of distant or extinct communities, a mosaic formed from the Jewish villages of Eastern Europe, themselves divided into political sub-groups, a mosaic of Zionist groups who bring into the Diaspora the internal conflicts of Israeli society, which only make sense in Israel. In contrast with this mixture of groupings, institutions such as the Fonds Social Juif Unifié (a fund-raising and distribution organisation), the Consistoire (a religious organisation, the only one officially supposed to "represent" French Jewry) appear so solid and well-organised as to make the others seem negligible. But it is among these "others" that the real Jewish life is found. The official organs are circumspect and (except when Israel is involved) they abstain from intervention in anything that could arouse passions. Official Judaism therefore has no place in politics, urban revolt, confrontation, social

thought, the defence of the oppressed and underprivileged, while as individuals many Jews are militants in progressive and revolutionary organisations and are active out of all proportion to their relative numbers. This gulf between official Judaism and French Jewry is widening as the younger generation put forward fresh demands, and the Jewish community seems incapable of offering them anything but religion or Zionism.

What is surprising is that these younger Jews are not provoked by the reactionary or conservative attitude of the leaders into *denying* their origins. On the contrary, the younger generation is profoundly influenced by the centrifugal movements which are to be found everywhere today, to the extent that they themselves have set out on a quest for their identity and their traditions, they aim to rebuild a culture which their elders cannot supply. They feel strongly that one way of opposing modern society lies precisely in those activities where the individual and the collective can work together. They have thus spontaneously rediscovered the role played by the Jewish *minorities* in history, and especially in the Diaspora. It is essentially a role of confrontation.

It must be said here that in the course of their history, the Jews have practised various forms of confrontation with varied success, but which the outside world has as a rule belittled. These examples may be cited. There has been armed struggle, as in the Warsaw Ghetto Insurrection. Contrary to what is generally stated, this was one of the first risings in the occupied countries. There has been the stubborn assertion of particularism and otherness against the various forms of political and cultural totalitarianism. The many ruses and metamorphoses of the Diaspora are only the means of expression of this stubbornness, which in extremely difficult circumstances can be accomplished in secret as in the case of the Marranos. Then there has been participation in universalist or revolutionary movements, sometimes as communities as at the time of the German enlightenment or of the Bund. At other times certain Jews have broken with their communities or with Judaism, as was the case with many Bolsheviks or with certain leftists today. Among these forms of confrontation, some professed to be "passive" means of survival, and others active means of changing the world. But even the passive methods actively perpetuated a Jewish presence that majority groups resented as scandalous. As indeed it was, *because it signified at the very heart of the totalitarian endeavour, that the dominant system was powerless to monopolise discourse on its world.* The Jew therefore has been and in some countries still is, a

counter-type, formidable by the very fact of his existence. For in every exclusive system he is The Other, who has to be absorbed or excluded. This provocative otherness can be interpreted, according to circumstances, as a fact of civilisation, religion, culture, cosmopolitanism or obstinate nationalism, political deviation, economic or moral perversion. And this otherness has manifested itself independently of the avowed purposes of the Diaspora. Under these circumstances what is subversive is the simple determination to survive in a manner deemed unacceptable by the majority.

Historical circumstances have, today, brought the diverse Jewish communities of the Diaspora willy-nilly into close contact with other minorities fighting for emancipation. This is obvious in the U.S.A., where the Jewish community, despite its prosperity, plays its part in the confrontation struggles of the minorities. Of course, this is not so in the case of prominent Jews, who are thus in a dilemma. They can turn their back on the situation, enter into alliance with the powers that be, with some help from Zionists and Jewish capitalists, and turn away from the struggle of the minorities. This is a dangerous choice, whatever the particular issue may be. If they win, the dominant groups will apply to the Jews the means used against the other minorities. If they lose, they will drag the Jews down with them. On the other hand, if the leaders take the minority claims into account, as certain of the religious Jews now do — ethnic pluralism, economic equality, social justice, the struggle against imperialism — they will help to entrench the uniqueness of the Jews in the American mosaic, and strengthen their right to be different.

The situation is not radically dissimilar in France, where confrontation with political, administrative and cultural centralism is increasing. The Jews, *as a minority*, have an important part to play in this criticism, and this is bound up with their survival as a group. Therefore they must oppose their leaders, all of whom turn their back on this situation, and perpetuate modes of thought and organisation obedient to the dominant theology: exaltation of the Nation-state as the only form of normality (so making common cause with the Zionists, the Jacobins of the right and left, the so-called liberal bourgeoisie and the communists), perpetuation of authoritarian community organisation, monopolisation of community organisation by the Zionists and the religious, who cling to their bogus status as "representatives" which they only are by grace of the powers that be, refusal to play any part in the struggles which are of importance to the majority of French people.

For with the Jews even more than with any of the other minorities, the assertion of their nationality in France today appears as a progressive and creative act of indiscipline. If part of the struggle for a better society has got to be waged against capitalism, it has also got to be waged against the State as it exists today in fact and in people's minds, a State that transforms citizens into subjects, producers into cogwheels, public servants into agents of power, and the majority culture into an instrument of propaganda and domination. In the present situation, the assertion of culture and nationality is one of the forms of civil disobedience that the Americans do so well. Thoreau refusing to pay his taxes was an early example. It is a fundamental disobedience, ideologically and institutionally. Individuals have to come together again to practise it, and to these it offers an intellectual and subjective foundation which enables them to resist the blandishments of propaganda.

Here the historic experience of the Jews can help the other minorities as well as themselves. Dispersed and disunited, the minorities are nothing. Together they can organise and co-ordinate the struggle against the centralised Nation-state, claim a portion of sovereignty, decide what institutions they should set up, break-up the state bureaucracy, bring in new national and international legislation. It is a long-term programme. But that is why they must have the will to accomplish if mankind's true qualities are to survive.



- (1) Rosa Luxemburg writes: "*Capitalist centralisation* constitutes the foundation, if not one of the essential elements of the future socialist system" (R. Luxemburg, "Question nationale et autonomie" in *Partisans*, September-October 1971, p.15). Lenin writes: "*Unconditional surrender* to a single will is absolutely indispensable for the success of a task organised on the model of large-scale mechanical industry" (Lenin "Les Taches immediates du pouvoirs des soviets", *œuvres choisies*, Moscow 1968, Vol. II, p.689). (Italics by the authors.) "Marxists, of course, are hostile to federation and decentralisation for the simple reason that States should be as big and as centralised as possible." (Lenin, "Critical Notes on the National Question", *œuvres completes*, Moscow, 1959, Vol XX, p.39).
- (2) "The party of the proletariat aspires to create as vast a State as possible, for that is in the interest of the workers, it will aspire to the bringing together of nations, then their fusion . . ." (Lenin, "Les Taches du proletariat dans notre revolution", *œuvres choisies*, Vol. II, p.58).
- (3) On this question, see "Critical Notes on the National Question". A good summary of the question is by Maxime Rodinson, "Sur la theorie marxiste de la nation", *Voies Nouvelles*, May 1958, No. 2, p.25-30.
- (4) Lenin, "Notes critiques . . ." *œuvres completes*, Vol. XX, p.39.
- (5) ". . . what we call ours is an apparatus which in fact is still functionally strange to us, and which represents a mixture of bourgeois and tsarist survivals . . .
"In these conditions it is quite natural that the "Freedom to leave the Union", which serves us as a justification, should appear as a bureaucratic formula incapable of defending the other peoples of Russia from invasion by Russia proper, Great-Russia and the chauvinist and oppressive scoundrel which the typical Russian bureaucrat basically is". (Lenin, Notes of the 30th December 1922. *œuvres choisies*, Vol. III, p.761-762).
- (6) Letter of the 23rd May 1851 to Karl Marx, quoted by J.P. Nettle, *The Life and Work of Rosa Luxemburg*, Vol. 2. For similar pronouncements, see H.B. Bavis, "Marx et Engels sur la question nationale" *Partisans*, May-August 1971, No. 59-60.
- (7) "Replies to a questionnaire from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency", a letter from the National Office of the P.S.U., Paris, 1st March 1973.
- (8) Stalin's own underlining.
- (9) J. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question" in *Le Marxisme et la question nationale es coloniale*, Ed. sociales, Paris, 1949, p.61-62.
- (10) "Let us admit that there will be a State frontier one day between Great-Russia and the Ukraine: even in that case the historically progressive character of the "assimilation" of the Great-Russian and Ukrainian workers will not be in doubt". (Lenin, "Critical Notes . . ." op. cit., p.24).
- (11) Karl Marx, *la question juive*, introduction by Robert Mandron, 10-18, Paris, 1968. See the excellent but too charitable study by Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Les Figures juives de Marx*, edition Galilee, 1973.
- (12) Karl Marx, *op. cit.*, p.52.
- (13) *Ibid.*, p.56.
- (14) *Ibid.*
- (15) 22nd September 1972. The text of the article and an account of the trial which followed are to be found in *Rencontre* 2nd Volume 1973, no. 31.
- (16) M. Senger, *l' es prit des lois mosaïques*, Bordeaux, 1785; Emile Claude de

- Pastoret, *Moyse considere comme Legislator et comme moralist* Paris, 1788.
- (17) Abbe L. (Antoine Adren Lamourette), *Observations sur l'etat civil des juifs*, Paris 1790. These texts and those in the preceding note are quoted and discussed in Arthur Herzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, New York, 1968, and in J.L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, 1952.
- (18) J.-J. Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland and its proposed reformation*, 1771.
- (19) Lenin, "Critical Notes . . .", *œuvres completes*, Vol. XX, p.16. Lenin has many hostile references to the Bund. See for example, *œuvres completes*, Vol. 6, p.324, 542. Concerning the integration of the Bund into social-democracy Nettle writes: Although the SDKPiL admitted the right of the Bund to an autonomous organisation with limited powers, it became more and more convinced that a latent nationalism existed within the bosom of the Jewish party: "There is no doubt that the Bund slowed up the progress of social democracy . . . by incessantly invoking its own Jewish character". This concern was accompanied by a certain envy: "The Bund has been able to create an efficient organisation which has enabled it to educate the Jewish workers and to inspire them with revolutionary enthusiasm . . . but as its latent nationalism becomes ever more marked, it arouses separatist tendencies in the Jewish working masses. The Poles were quite aware of the intention of Iskra to isolate the Bund before the next Congress, unless it accepted integration into the Russian organisation on humiliating terms fatal to its existence". (J.P. Nettl, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1.)
- (20) Lenin, "Critical Notes . . .", *op. cit.*, p.18.
- (21) H. and P. Jacot, *Le Sionisme*, a pamphlet published by the World Conference of Christians on Palestine, Hebdo-TC press, Yvetot, n.d. in this pamphlet which included a "history" of the creation of the State of Israel, the support of the U.S.S.R. for its creation is passed over in silence.
- (22) Robert Lafont. *Sur la France*.
- (23) Quoted by Leon Poliakov, *de l'anti sionisme a l'anti semitisme*, Paris, 1969, p.43. Lenin also speaks of the destructive role played by "the non-Russian peoples", in connection with the excesses committed by Dzerjinski in the Caucasus. (Notes of 30th December 1922, *œuvres choisies*, Vol. 3, p.759).
- (24) See O.I. Janowsky, *The Jews and Minority Rights, 1898 to 1919*. New York, 1933, p.264-319. J. Robinson . . ., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure*, New York 1943. *Les Droits nationaux des Juifs en Europe orientale*, by the Committee of Jewish Delegations at the Peace Conference, Paris, 1919. Important bibliography in J. Robinson, *Das Minoritätenproblem, und seine Literatur*, Berlin-Leipzig, 1928.
- (25) Article 12 of the Treaty with Poland served as a model for the others.
- (26) Figures from Gerard Israel, *Les Juifs en URSS*, Paris 1971, p.226 (London 1975).
- (27) Quoted by Poliakov, *op. cit.*, p.65-66.
- (28) *L'Arche*, January 1971.
- (29) See, for example, certain numbers of *Temoignage chretien*.
- (30) *Esprit*, April 1968.
- (31) Albert Memmi, in *l'Arche*, January 1971.