

# Remembrance and Research

The Journal of the Israel Oral History Association

Number 1 | December 2015

---

**Canada, the United States and German Re-Unification:  
Some Results from an Oral History Project.**

Alexander von Plato

---

**Transnationalism and Ethnic Identity:  
Cuban and Latino Sephardim in Miami**

Margalit Bejarano

---

**1,500 Early Holocaust Interviews Published Online  
for the First Time**

Sharon Kangisser-Cohen

---

**Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship at the Polish  
Section of the Kestenberg Archive**

Ganit Eiron

---

**Oral History of Jews from Islamic Countries  
who Made Aliyah to Israel Since 1948**

Judith Reifen-Ronen

---

Editorial	[3]
Canada, the United States and German Re-Unification: Some Results from an Oral History Project Alexander von Plato	[11]
Transnationalism and Ethnic Identity: Cuban and Latino Sephardim in Miami Margalit Bejarano	[37]
1.500 Early Holocaust Interviews Published Online for the First Time Sharon Kangisser-Cohen	[51]
Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship at the Polish Section of the Kestenberg Archive Ganit Eiron	[55]
Oral History of Jews from Islamic Countries who Made Aliyah to Israel Since 1948 Judith Reifen-Ronen	[65]

**The Journal of the Israel Oral History Association,**  
is dedicated to the promotion of knowledge, research and  
discussion on issues of oral history.

## **Editors**

Margalit Bejarano

Judith Reifen-Ronen

### **ILOHA Board of Directors**

Dr. Margalit Bejarano, Chair, Moshe Frankfurter, Adv.,  
Sara Benvenisti, Neri Erel, Dr. Miriam Gez-Abigal, Dr. Sharon  
Kangisser-Cohen, Dr. Rose Lerer-Cohen, Judy Lev, Dr. Moshe  
Mossek, Dr. Judith Reifen-Ronen, Ilan Shtayer

English Editor: Joel Bray

Graphic Design: Neta Lipshitz

Layout Design: Ephraim Ronen

Printing: Academon Print, Jerusalem

© All rights reserved by The Israel Oral History Association

ISSN 2414-7559

---

Articles of scholars and experts in the field are welcome to be submitted,  
both in Hebrew and English. Articles should not exceed 4,000 words,  
including references in standard format / footnotes.

Articles should be sent in WORD format to the editors:

margalit.bejarano@mail.huji.ac.il | j-ronen@zahav.net.il | iloha@gmail.com

Submissions are reviewed by the Remembrance and  
Research editors, as well as by external lecturers.



## Introductory Note

[3]

---

We are pleased to present the first issue of **Remembrance and Research** – The Journal of the Israel Oral History Association (ILOHA) – a bi-lingual journal whose objective is to serve as an academic forum for articles dealing with oral history, and to publish reviews and information on the field. **Remembrance and Research** substitutes the bulletin of ILOHA that started to appear in 2003 as a booklet of eight pages in Hebrew, which gradually grew to 32 pages. The two last issues (8 & 9) were bilingual, and gained audiences and participants from abroad. In view of the higher quality of articles we received, and of the growing interest in the field of oral history, it was decided to publish this journal as a forum of debate and clarification on theoretical and practical aspects of oral history. This journal is designed to serve scholars, laypersons and professionals in the field.

The first issue presents to the reader different problems related to oral history in the fields of the Holocaust, politics, military history, ethnic identity and old age.

### **Abstracts: The Hebrew Section**

#### **The Historian Versus the Testimony: Debates and Reflections**

Dalia Ofer

Prof. Dalia Ofer analyzes the significance of the testimony for the historian, stressing the centrality of oral history in the study of the Shoah, and points out important landmarks in the development of the field. She describes the doubts that accompanied her research on the validity of personal testimonies with respect to other historical sources. She reaches the conclusion that testimonies have to be treated with

[4] respect and criticism, exactly as any other document. From her rich experience she presents a few methodological issues relating to the personality of the interviewee, his/her views and purposes, and suggests ways to cope with them.

**The Yom Kippur War – Issues in Dispute:  
Can They be Solved by Means of Oral History Testimonies?**

Dani (Daniel) Asher

Brigadier General (Res.) Dr. Dani (Daniel) Asher analyzes some of the persistent controversial issues related to the Yom Kippur War (1973) and examines whether they can be resolved through research of oral testimonies in conjunction with written documents. With respect to issues that have been debated since the 1973 war, particularly the analysis of enemy troop movements prior to the war, known as “Misinterpretation”—Asher confirms the version of the Northern Command Intelligence Officer, in contrast with that of the Military Intelligence Headquarters (AMAN). He also criticizes the Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations (Mossad) for not having recognized the situation in real time and not having understood the significance of the changes in the Egyptian war plans. He calls into question the reliability of retrospective testimonies, noting they are often biased and used as a means to improve the interviewee’s standing on the historical record.

Two of the articles are based on lectures, given in the symposium, on the contribution of Oral testimonies to the writing of the biographies of Prime Ministers in Israel. The symposium was organized by The Oral History Division of the A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry and ILOHA in April 2013 (other articles from the same symposium will be published in the next issue):

**Golda Meir and The Media**

Meron Medzini

Prof. Meron Medzini analyzes the causes for Golda Meir's reservations toward the media in Israel. He presents her perception that the daily *Davar* was a model for correct journalism, whose objective was not only to supply information, but also to serve as an instrument for ideological education. Having worked closely with Golda Meir, Medzini points out her understanding of the importance of mass media and free expression, but he also emphasizes her fear of the leaking of information that could endanger the security and status of Israel. He presents the ties that she developed with the Editors' Committee of the Israeli Press, whom she recruited to defend the national interests through auto-censorship. The importance Golda Meir attributed to confidentiality provoked tensions between her and the non-partisan press and the television, which later retaliated against her at the most severe challenge of the state of Israel and herself.

**Oral History as a Historical Source:  
Menachem Begin's Crucial Decisions  
and His Withdrawal from Public Life**

Arie Naor

The article of Prof. Arie Naor, who served as the government's secretary under Menachem Begin, deals with oral history as a valuable historical source from three perspectives: (1) testimony on events that were not recorded by other accessible documents; (2) shedding light on the intentions and motivations of history-makers; (3) deciphering the hidden links and messages in the written documents. The first perspective is informative, while the other two are interpretative. Naor presents the example of Begin's visit to Ceausescu in order to promote the peace process with Egypt. Begin wanted a complete peace agreement that would end the state of war

[6]

between the two states. In a personal testimony, Naor speaks of how the Prime Minister considered bombing the nuclear reactor in Iraq, as well as his sense of responsibility toward the tragic war in Lebanon, which led to his decision to withdraw from public life.

### **Lifta - Memory and Oblivion Among the Jewish Inhabitants: the Role of the "Other"**

Ilan Stayer

The article of Ilan Shtayer deals with an unknown aspect of Lifta and its Jewish inhabitants: the settlement of Jews from Jewish neighborhoods after the flight of Lifta's Arabs in 1948. This was followed by the settlement of hundreds of Yemenite Jews and dozens of families from Kurdistan. Shtayer, one of the founders and activists of the project "Coalition for the Rescue of Lifta", analyzes interviews with the different groups of inhabitants of Lifta and their attitude towards the "other". The interviews with past and present inhabitants demonstrate the customs and the way of life of Jews emigrated from Lifta. He concludes that the personal narrative ignores both the existence of the "other" and the historical facts. Rather, they are expressions of political opinion.

### **"A Story Meets a Story":**

#### **An Oral History Project with Dementia Patients**

Nava Kling

Nava Kling, coordinator of the project "A Story Meets a Story", presents oral history as an alternative approach towards elderly persons diagnosed with dementia. She analyzes the findings of a joint project of the JDC-Eshel-Israel and the Oral History Division of the Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She points out the importance of the collection of life stories in the early period of the disease, and its contribution to treatment in its advanced stages. Kling



describes the training of interviewers. She emphasizes that the recorded personal narrative facilitates interaction with other persons and is meaningful for the patient, his family and the therapists. The preservation of memory through oral history grants therapists a deeper understanding of the personality and past of the patient.

### **The Ongoing Debate About Oral History's Reliability**

Moshe Mossek

Dr. Moshe Mossek refers to the debate between historians regarding the reliability of oral history. He argues that there are cases in which the personal testimony is more reliable than the written document. He presents the example of Victor Shem-Tov, who disclosed that he was actually a year younger than recorded on his birth certificate.

### **Book Review**

#### **From Hampi to Hansel to Jossel Ehrlich**

##### **Joske Erel's Biography**

Nir Mann

Dr. Nir Mann reviews the autobiography of Joske Erel, who emigrated from Germany in the Youth Aliyah, fought for the *Palmach* and the *Hagana*, and was crucial in the development of tourism from Germany to Kibbutz Ein Gedi. The review cites the autobiography as an example of integration of a personal narrative based on oral history with a thorough historical research.

#### **The St. Louis Passengers and The Holocaust**

Margalit Bejarano

Dr. Margalit Bejarano presents research by Sarah Ogilvie and Scott Miller. These two researchers from the Washington Holocaust Museum traced survivors from amongst the passengers of the SS St Louis.

[8] **Abstracts: The English Section**

---

**Canada, the United States and German Re-Unification:  
Some Results from an Oral History Project**

Alexander von Plato

Prof. Alexander von Plato, one of the most prominent scholars of oral history, opens the English section by presenting the conclusions of his study on the attitudes of Canada and the United States toward the Unification of Germany in 1999. In addition to archival documents, this research was based on over a hundred interviews with politicians and diplomats. He reaches the conclusions that interviews with politicians and senior diplomats add to our understanding of the attitudes and debates behind the scenes. They uncover contrasts between representatives of the same country or between states that officially shared the same attitude, and contribute to the understanding of the different alternatives that were examined before decision making.

**Transnationalism and Ethnic Identity:  
Cuban and Latino Sephardim in Miami**

Margalit Bejarano

Dr. Margalit Bejarano analyzes ethnic identities and transnational links of Spanish speaking Sephardim living in predominantly Hispanic Miami. The article is based on the analysis of interviews with Jews who immigrated to Dade County from Cuba, Venezuela, Colombia and Argentina, and presents some of the methodological problems posed by oral history to the historian. The article focuses on the hybrid identity of Spanglish speaking Cuban Jews; on the growth of a Jewish-Latino transnational diaspora; and on the transition from sub-ethnic Sephardic identities to a global Sephardic identity.

### **1,500 Early Holocaust Interviews Published Online for the First Time**

Sharon Kangisser-Cohen

Dr. Sharon Kangisser-Cohen is the Academic Director of the Oral History Division in the Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She reports on the online publication of 1500 interviews with Shoah survivors, published thanks to the generous support of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the Fondation pour Mémoire de la Shoah. The interviews (recorded and transcribed) can be accessed through the website: <http://bit.ly/ohd-shoah>. The article presents the archive of the Oral History Division, its founding in 1959, and its importance to both researchers and survivors' families.

### **Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship at the Polish Section of the Kestenberg Archive**

Ganit Eiron

The article of Ganit Eiron analyzes the relations between interviewer and interviewee as they are reflected in the interviews in Polish language in the Kestenberg Archive. Dr. Judith Kestenberg was a psychiatrist who studied the use of personal testimony as a tool in helping child survivors of the Holocaust overcome their trauma. This methodology was unique in that interviewers themselves were survivors who could identify with the interviewees, and that not all the interviewees were Jewish. The article highlights the central role of the interviewers in the production of their own oral history.

[10]

---

**Oral History of Jews from Islamic Countries  
who Made Aliyah to Israel Since 1948**

Judith Reifen-Ronen

Dr. Judith Reifen-Ronen shares her research-in-progress on the Israeli oral history collections regarding the Jews who made Aliyah from North Africa and the Middle East after 1948. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, 750,000 Jews escaped persecution and were forced to leave their homeland abruptly and find refuge in Israel. Another 300,000 immigrated to other countries especially North America and Europe. As a result Israel is unique in having the widest variety of Jewish communities from Islamic countries in the world. Until the 1990s oral history documentation focused on the leadership and political figures in the various parties and institutions. Since then, both personal and communal legacies are being told by the ordinary person.

We are proud to present *Remembrance and Research* as the first and only journal in Israel to engage exclusively with oral history as a forum for all scholars and the public at large.

Dr. Margalit Bejarano and Dr. Judith Reifen-Ronen

# **Canada, the United States and German Re-Unification**

## **Some Results from an Oral History Project**

[11]

---

**Alexander von Plato**

### **Preliminary Remark**

When I started to interview politicians and diplomats I was very skeptical. I assumed that these persons were adept at handling journalists and using them for their public profiling. Or – at least diplomats – were committed to being careful with information or with judgements of politicians on specific policies. In addition, most politicians and diplomats would agree to a short expert interview about political questions only, rather than to a longer life story interviews in which contradictions, conflicts, self-legitimations and attempts to conceal something are more obvious. These assumptions, it turns out, were proven wrong. But there is more to the story...

This article is based on research projects on the re-unification of Germany. Since 1999 I interviewed more than a hundred high ranked politicians and diplomats from different countries, including from the US. In parallel, I reviewed the appropriate files in Bonn, East-Berlin, Paris and especially in

Dr. habil. Alexander von Plato, Historian, founder and director of the "Institute for History and Biography of the Distance University of Hagen", co-founder of the Journal for Biographical Research - BIOS", former Secretary and Vice-director of the International Oral History Association. Studies among others in National Socialism, Forced Labour during WW2, GDR, Re-unification and methodology of Oral History.

[12]

Moscow. (von Plato 2015 and 2009) In addition, I interviewed dissidents in the GDR and had access to interviews with dissidents from USSR and Poland (von Plato, Vilimek et al. 2013). In 2012 and 2013 students from the University of Winnipeg and I interviewed Canadian politicians and diplomats (Brglez, von Plato et al. 2015) regarding the Canadian politics on German re-unification. This research is based on files of the Federal Archive in Ottawa, and on eleven interviews with Canadian politicians and diplomats.

### **North American Politics during Cold War**

Both the files and the interviews show that the period between the seventies and the mid-eighties of the twentieth century were not the best in terms of relations between Canada and the United States. There were vast political differences between the governments and their leaders. Prime Minister Trudeau did not support the Cold War policy of the United States, especially under President Ronald Reagan; he rather supported the Cold War policy of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. For other reasons, the relations with France were also tense.<sup>1</sup> Though Canada was a member of NATO, Trudeau's government criticized the armament policy of the United States, in particular the nuclear mobilization, and they tried to achieve better relations with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Trudeau called this policy his "peace initiative". He normalized diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China before the United States. Trudeau's government tried to reduce the tensions between East and West in general. His government pursued a

---

<sup>1</sup> France supported the movements for an independent Quebec; de Gaulle had to shorten his visit to Canada in 1967 after he had shouted his famous sentence: "Vive le Québec libre!". See the essay of Amanda Kotowicz in: Berglez/von Plato, 89 ff.

<sup>2</sup> See the essays of Christopher Kshyk, Stephen Spence, Suzanne Zalewski in: Berglez/von Plato.

détente policy which was similar to the policy of the Swedish Premier Olof Palme and of the West German chancellor Willy Brandt.

[13]

---

The government under Trudeau wanted to forge better relationships not only with the Soviet Union and with China but also with independent states of the third world, including Cuba under Fidel Castro. The Canadian Prime Minister visited Cuba in 1976.<sup>3</sup> It is said that Castro and Trudeau became close friends (Castro attended Trudeau's funeral in 2000). While the policy of the United States tried to isolate Cuba and to lead it into an economic disaster with the embargo of 1961. Trudeau vehemently opposed this policy.

However, there was a fundamental difference between the West German "Entspannungspolitik" and the "détente policy" of Palme and Trudeau: The West German Government had the aim to not only reduce tensions between East and West – but to resolve the division of Germany. They hoped to attain better conditions for unifying Germany by reducing the conflicts with the Soviet Union (the slogan was: "Wandel durch Annäherung", perhaps to translate as "change by approximation"). Whereas, the main aim of US diplomacy was to contain the influence of the Soviet Union in the world, especially in Europe.

The government of the United States was skeptical of the politics of the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt and his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, as well as of the politics of Trudeau. The Americans were particularly provoked by their northern neighbour and tried to limit the Canada's international influence. Ronald Reagan, who was

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Wright (2007), *Three Nights in Havana*. Pierre Trudeau, Fidel Castro and the Cold War World: Harper Collins, Toronto.

[14]

elected president in 1981, and Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990, believed the détente policy was a form of appeasement. They supported the position that only a strong armament policy would bring the Soviet Union to their knees. Trudeau, Palme, Brandt, Genscher, and others were seen similarly by the US as being too soft in their politics against the Soviet Union. They were sometimes viewed as political “appeasers”. Genscher continued to feel these judgments from some of the American leaders – although never publicised them - later as Foreign Minister under Chancellor Helmut Kohl.<sup>4</sup>

Most of our Canadian interviewees complained that the attitude of the United States was to treat the Canadian government as the younger brother who should blindly support American policies against the Soviet Union. Sometimes, however, this younger brother stepped out of line and disturbed US politics. The interviewed diplomats reported a continuous struggle over recognition of Canadian influence in global affairs between Canadian and US diplomacies. One such is Robert Fowler- a senior diplomat who served under several different Prime Ministers from Trudeau to Jean Chrétien. He believed that Canada was considered a “bystander” in world politics. According to him, the Canadian government did not promote itself enough as a world player. For instance, Canada was excluded from the negotiations after World War II in Yalta and Potsdam, although Canada was an important ally and had lost thousands of soldiers. In 1945 when the United Nations (UN) charter was being written, the Canadians promoted the French to have a permanent seat, but not themselves. Additionally, in early negotiations, Canada was not to be invited to join the G7

---

<sup>4</sup> That was a special question in my interview with Condoleezza Rice on September 17, 1999 at Stanford University.



and was deeply concerned by the spectre of such exclusion. Only after Canada asked President Ford directly, did Canada become a member of the G7 group. Other cases of exclusion include: the preparation for the Reykjavik summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in 1986 and the “2+4” negotiations between the two Germanies and the Soviet Union, USA, UK, and France in 1990 (see below). Fowler compared the Canadian lack of involvement in the 2+4 meetings to these anecdotes.<sup>5</sup>

In May 1979 the Liberals under Trudeau lost the general election and Joe Clark, the leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, became Prime Minister of Canada. However, only seven months later he lost a non-confidence motion and as a result of the federal elections in February 1980, Trudeau came back as Prime Minister until 1984 when his Liberals were beaten by the Progressive Conservatives again, this time under the leadership of Brian Mulroney.

Nearly at the same time – in 1981 – Ronald Reagan won the elections and became President of the United States. The governments under Reagan, and his successor George Bush (Sr.) and Mulroney had considerably better relations than under Trudeau. The main result of these new relations was the creation of the “Free Trade Agreement” (NAFTA) and the “Goods and Services Tax”. It is said that it was Canadian diplomacy which pushed the US establishment to include Mexico in the Free Trade Agreement.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert (Bob) Fowler in our interview on March 18, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Canada was initially closed to include Mexico in the deal, but overcame this reluctance and decided to seek trilateral negotiations to create the Free Trade Agreement. (Cameron/Tomlin, 2000).

[16]

Despite improved relations, significant policy differences continued to exist between the two countries. Mulroney and his minister for foreign affairs (and former Prime Minister) Joe Clark, were active in ending the Apartheid regime in South Africa, sometimes in strong opposition to Reagan and Thatcher. Our Canadian interviewees from different political wings stressed these contradictions – Heinbecker, who served under Trudeau as well as under Mulroney and Fowler, and others who were more critical of Reagan and Mulroney. Mulroney’s policy in South Africa was a continuation of established liberal Canadian policies.<sup>7</sup> Canada also disagreed with the Americans over Ethiopia. Joe Clark was the first Western foreign minister to visit Addis Ababa, although there was a “Marxist” and isolated government in office. In addition, Clark and Mulroney did not support the intervention of the United States in Nicaragua. Another frustration for the Reagan administration was Mulroney’s promise to increase Canadian troops in Europe, but his government refused for budgetary reasons.

When Mikhail Gorbachev came into office as General Secretary in 1985 he was not unknown to Canadian politicians and diplomats. Gorbachev had visited Canada in 1983 as Soviet Minister of Agriculture. As our Canadian interviewees reported, Gorbachev impressed the Canadian politicians and diplomats with his open mind, his discursive style, and his frank questions about Canadian agricultural production and the market system. Aleksandr Jakovlev, the ambassador of the Soviet Union in Ottawa until 1985, was also a close political

---

<sup>7</sup> However, Paul Heinbecker saw Mulroney stricter in his politics against Apartheid than Trudeau. Heinbecker describes Trudeau as being more committed to social questions than to human rights. (Interview Heinbecker from January 21, 2013).

advisor of Gorbachev (and a friend of the Trudeau family<sup>8</sup>). Gorbachev asked him to come back to Moscow and to support him in his fight for Perestroika.

[17]

---

As our interviewees stressed, Canadian diplomats tried to encourage the Americans to oblige Gorbachev and his delegation in Reykjavik in 1986. Yet, Ronald Reagan pursued his strong armament policy even shortly before Reykjavik in opposition to the Canadian diplomats.

Robert Fowler emphasized that the US President dismissed Trudeau's Peace Initiative as inconsequential, yet only *18 months later [in Reykjavik], Reagan was saying very similar things to the Peace Initiative. He felt that the Americans wanted to be in charge and only **they** would change world politics and not the Canadians* (said with a sarcastic tone). It seemed that the Americans felt assured of their superiority to the Canadians in all areas of international politics. Fowler viewed Helmut Kohl as being similarly dismissive of Trudeau's Peace Initiative calling them the *silly little Canadians*. (Fowler Interview 2013).

In Fowler's opinion the Cold War ended in Reykjavik, a position not held by the other interviewed Canadian diplomats, most of whom believed the Cold War ended with the signing of the "2+4" agreement. Lloyd Axworthy and Gaetan Lavertue, as late as 2012 and 2013 and before the crises in Ukraine and the

---

<sup>8</sup> The later Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lloyd Axworthy, confirmed the "very close" connections between Jakovlev and the Trudeau Family (in his interview between him and Karen Brglez and me on October 23, 2012 in Winnipeg.). He added: *In fact, I think that parliamentary trip (in 1990) I talked about, we were briefed quite actively by him (Jakovlev) and his associates of the institute.* The director of the State Archive of the Russian Federation, Sergej Mironenko, told me a short time before Jakovlev died in 2005, that Jakovlev was the Godfather of Sascha Trudeau.

[18]

Crimea, expressed doubt that the Cold War ever really ended. Paul Heinbecker when asked if and when, in his opinion, the Cold War ended replied: *It's a cool war now*. The US Secretary of State, James Baker, described his feeling that the Cold War ended not with the "2+4"-process, but with the common Soviet and American involvement against Saddam Hussein in the UN vote in 1990. That was a unique position among my American interviewees.<sup>9</sup>

We asked the diplomat Gaetan Lavertu and other Canadian diplomats if the armament politics of President Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher caused the collapse of the Soviet Union. Lavertu answered similar to some other interviewees:

Alexander von Plato (AVP): *I asked Charles Powell, the advisor of Thatcher, in an interview if the politics concerning Germany by the British was a failure. And he said: 'Not at all. He has only two persons in mind who were successful in helping end the cold war – Reagan and Thatcher because they tried to increase the expenses for the military budget.'*

Gaetan Lavertu (GL): (cuts him off) *I don't believe in that. ... I do not accept that view.*

AVP: *Ah, interesting*

GL: *I have the view that in the end nobody won that war. It was not a victory of the United States, assisted by Britain over the Soviet Union. What ended the Cold War in my view was the failure of the economic system in the Soviet Union and a willingness of Mr. Gorbachev to see a different system emerge in central Europe. His consent to the re-unification of Germany*

---

<sup>9</sup> See my interviews with George Bush, James Baker, Brent Scowcroft and Condoleezza Rice.

*eventually, prior to that, his decision, not to maintain the ration of doctrine of the convention of central and eastern Europe. He basically said to those countries, you're on your own. If it had not been for that – who knows?*

[19]

---

There were other Canadian interviewees who saw the armament policy of the Reagan administration (“Star Wars”) as only one, but perhaps an important reason for the implosion of the Soviet system because the economy could not keep up with the demands of the Soviet military any longer (i.e. Heinbecker in interview Heinbecker 20013).

The “2+4” negotiations concerning the external conditions of German re-unification was initiated in Canada. During the “Open Skies Conference” hosted in Ottawa in February 1990 Foreign Ministers from East and West gathered to discuss the rules of flying over borders. However, Canada was not a part of the 2+4-process. It was developed around the same in Washington during meetings between members of the office of State Secretary James Baker and senior diplomats of the Federal German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, On the one side and during the meeting of advisors, ministers, and diplomats with Gorbachev about the German Question on the Soviet side on January 25 (or 26), 1990.<sup>10</sup>

The Soviets wanted to stress the role of the victors over Germany. Therefore, Anatolij Cernjaev, the “founder” of this expression (4+2), in the Soviet Union, spoke of “4+2” negotiations while the Germans and the Americans called it “2+4”. The Germans and the Americans did not want the negotiations to appear to be between the victors and losers of WW II and they wanted to avoid a repeat of the WW I Versailles Treaty.

---

<sup>10</sup> Following the diary and my discussions with Anatolij S. Cernjaev, it must have been the 25<sup>th</sup>.

## Re-Unification Politics of the United States under George Bush (Sr)

The first Bush administration had a clear and continuous strategy towards re-unification of Germany, steered by the President's National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft<sup>11</sup>. The policy's starting point was following his security boss Brent Scowcroft (the National Security Advisor) – the growing influence of Mikhail S. Gorbachev and his popular ideology of a *common European house*. This influence should be pushed back. Scowcroft: Gorbachev and his idea of a European house should be taken at their word, but expended by clear words about the possibility *to walk freely from room to room*. (Interview Scowcroft, September 14, 1999 in Washington). It should be a Europe without the borders of the Cold War in Germany, Berlin and Europe, without the dictatorships in Eastern and Middle-East Europe. The Federal Republic of Germany should become the *partner in leadership*, a role which was kept by Great Britain. George Bush presented this new strategy to the Brussels conference celebrating the 40th jubilee of NATO in May 1989 and some days later in Mainz (FRG). There he said:

The aim of the West was to achieve *an undivided and free Europe*. *For the founding fathers of the alliance this hope was a distant dream. Now this hope is the new task of NATO. [...] The Cold War began with the division of Europe. It can only be ended when the division of Europe is abolished. [...] There cannot be a European house (à la Gorbachev) when not all of*

---

<sup>11</sup> Brent Scowcroft in Interview with author, on September 14th, 1999 in Washington. General Scowcroft und sein Mitarbeiter Bob Zoellick waren wesentlich an der Ausarbeitung und Durchsetzung der Strategie zur Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands beteiligt. Siehe dazu auch: von Plato 2015, 21. ( translated into English - *.General Scowcroft and Bob Zoellick were substantially planning the enforcement of the participation of united Germany*).

*its inhabitants can move freely from room to room. [...] We are striving for the self-determination of the whole of Germany and all the countries of Eastern Europe [...] Berlin must be the next stage.* (Zelikow/Rice 1997, 67; von Plato 2009, 22.).

[21]

---

This meant that the essential US-American policy concerning Germany was: re-unification yes, but peaceful, democratic, in self-determination and under the roof of, or even under the leadership of NATO. *NATO was the only political anchor of the United States in Europe*, Condoleezza Rice said in an interview in 2000.

Bush reiterated these points in Washington in November 1989, one day after Chancellor Kohl outlined his "Ten Points" and some days later in Brussels. His "Four Points" were:

- Peaceful and step by step
- Recognition of the existing borders in Europe
- Self-determination and
- under the roof of NATO

Thus, Bush supported and complemented Kohl's "Ten Points", not to speak of a correction, because Kohl had not mentioned the border question, especially to Poland, nor NATO. The first matter should cause harsh criticism from different sides, especially from the Polish government and from the German Social Democrats, and the second one (NATO) was probably not mentioned by Kohl to help Gorbachev in his internal conflicts. Nevertheless Kohl was criticized by all of his neighbors, among them Gorbachev and his Foreign Minister, Eduard Shevardnadze (*Not even Hitler would have dared that!*). German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had to hear this not very diplomatic revilement in Moscow on

[22]

December 5, 1989, though he himself was not informed of the “Ten Points” by Kohl before. (von Plato 2009, 125, von Plato 2015, 120; A. von Plato /my interview with Hans-Dietrich Genscher 2001). The European governments involved including Gorbachev’s complained that they were not informed before. Only President George Bush and his staff were briefed one day before Kohl’s speech in the German Parliament. These rejections of Kohl’s “Ten Points” show the “generation fear” of a new strong Germany after the experiences of the World Wars and the Nazi crimes, especially the Holocaust.

Therefore I asked Bush:

*AvP: There were some politicians who saw the German division as a consequence of National Socialism in World War II. Or even as a punishment for the crimes of German politics. You do not? (i.e. Beker/Kedmi, 1991)*

*Bush: Not me. I didn’t. But I think you’re right. I think some people felt that Germany, having brutally invaded the Netherlands and gone to war with most of the free world, was properly punished. But I ... my view is: Germany earned, the Federal Republic of Germany earned its place by its adherence to democratic principles, free elections, democracy, freedom. And I saw that bringing that to the GDR would be a good positive thing for peace. This was an unnatural division. And unnatural divisions are not catalysts for peace. (Interview Bush, by A. von Plato, September 14, 1999 in Washington)*

Re-unification of Germany in connection with its Western partners – not in neutrality – was the main aim of Kohl’s policy during 1989/1990 and the decades before while the American politics under Bush concerning Germany was embedded in the strategy to push back the Soviet influence in Europe and to strengthen NATO. In 1989 and 1990 both of these strategies



came together and led to success for both of them: Germany was united and NATO expanded.

[23]

---

What was the response of Gorbachev and his administration to these clear aims? He had very different strategies and changed them quickly trying to follow the speed of the political development – mostly too late and dragging behind the real process.

In December 1989 he stressed the role of the GDR remaining independent as a guarantor of peace in Europe; re-unification not being on the agenda. By January 25, 1990 developments had forced him and his advisors to discuss the possibility of German re-unification on condition of the simultaneous withdrawal of American and Soviet troops from Middle Europe. On January 30, 1990 he followed the proposal of the East German prime minister to join a new European Security System to replace the former NATO and Warsaw Treaty. (A. von Plato 2015, 423; A. von Plato/my interviews with Cernjaev, Scowcroft, Baker, Bush and Modrow.) However, it was too late: the Warsaw Treaty was a trump card no longer, and it broke down. Gorbachev signed an agreement in Washington during the first days of June 1990 to allow the Germans to choose their alliance themselves – and the German government, not the Germans, chose NATO.

### **Canada's Role(s) 1989–1995: Support of Bush and Kohl by the Canadian Government<sup>12</sup>**

What was the role of the Mulroney government in Canada in bringing an end to the Cold War and building a united Germany? At first glance, looking at the highest level, Prime Minister Mulroney always supported Kohl and the American position. The German Chancellor Kohl called Mulroney *one of*

---

<sup>12</sup> See the chapter on Canada in von Plato 2015, 406

[24]

*the most reliable friends* as reported by the Canadian diplomat and political scientist Paul Heinbecker in an interview with Canadian students and me/A. von Plato in Ottawa on January 21, 2013. He said that the Canadian Foreign Minister of that time, Joe Clark, acted in the same way.

On closer examination, however, of the documents at the Federal Archive in Ottawa and the transcripts of our interviews with Canadian politicians from the time, it becomes clear that the reality was more complex. Indeed, our Canadian interviewees reported that Canadian diplomats and politicians discussed alternative, and often divergent, proposals.

### **Diplomatic Views**

John Noble was one of the main organizers of the Open Skies Conference in Ottawa on February 11 (1990) where the “2+4” negotiations were concluded. He gave the first welcome speech because Mulroney was delayed with a previous engagement. We asked him and our other Canadian interviewees if Canada should and could have played a bigger role during the “2+4-process”, perhaps with a special status as had been granted to the Polish government. The Italian and Dutch foreign ministers had complained of the “exclusive club” of the “2+4” participants and demanded a role for other European nations. However, the German Foreign Minister Genscher harshly responded: *You are out of the game*.<sup>13</sup> Canada saw itself as a leader of the “middle powers” countries, had troops in Germany, was a victor of WW II, a member of NATO, and was connected to all Arctic questions surrounding

---

<sup>13</sup> Or: *You are not part of the game*. In the German form it was: *You are out of the game*.

the strategic and military problems of NATO.<sup>14</sup> Noble told us that there were different positions on this matter, but:

[25]

---

*Well, well, I don't think we tried very hard. Joe Clark was not that interested in Europe. Up until the time I took over as Director General of International Security he had a tendency to avoid NATO meetings (Interview Noble 2013).*

Bob Fowler said it was really a shame that Canada played only the role of a “housekeeper” because Canada had *enough reasons to take on a bigger role within the forum*. (Interview Fowler 2013).

The Canadian government did not take over the role of the “middle power” speaker nor did Italy or the Netherlands.

Some of our interviewees were members of a delegation of the (Parliamentary) Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade, which visited the Soviet Union and the two Germanies from April 20 to May 5, 1990. Their report discloses very different political opinions and strategies from those of the government. The former Member of Parliament and Minister, Billi Blaikie from the New Democratic Party, directed our attention to the “Report of the Committee’s Visit”. He was a member of the delegation and gave us a copy of the report which we could not get from the Federal Archive. Until now he has the same opinion as the report from 1990. Concerning the Polish-German border, Bill Blaikie (together with colleague Jesse Flis) presented very early in 1990 petitions to the House

---

<sup>14</sup> *To take only one example, the information we received during our visit that the Soviet nuclear test site may be transferred from the Far East to the (west) shocked us into a recognition of our geographic and environmental interdependences. (Report of the Committee’s Visit to the Soviet Union and the Germanies, April 20 – May 5, 1990, edited by the “Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade” in June 1990, pp 2 and 3 (up from now quoted as “Report”).*

[26]

of Commons. The Polish government, at the time, was opposed to Kohl's policy of postponing recognition of the "Oder-Neiße-Border" until the first session of the parliament in the newly united Germany. Blaikie's petition called on the Canadian government to support the Polish position.

### **The Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade of the House of Commons**

From April 20 to May 5 1990, shortly after the democratic election of the GDR Parliament ("Volkskammer") on March 18, 1990, members of the *House of Commons* and its *Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade* visited the Soviet Union and the two Germanies. They were leading members of the Parliament from different parties, amongst them Bill Blaikie. The report issued by the committee was entirely opposed to the position of the Canadian government of the time.

At the beginning they formulated carefully:

*There was a fairly general agreement among the Germans we met that a united Germany should be a member of NATO, at least for a transitional period. The basic arguments are, first, that given its twentieth century history, a neutral Germany is in no one's interest; and, second, that in this period of rapid change it is essential not to upset the stabilizing influence of NATO. (Report, S. 2)*

But then they wrote:

*At the same time, many Germans, in both the GDR and the FRG and at various points on the political spectrum, insisted that unification must occur as part of a process of creating a pan-European security system.*

And:

[27]

---

*The transition years should have as an underlying objective, the uniting of Europe, with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe occupying one end of the European home and Canada and the United States the other. We see a special opportunity for Canada to participate in the design and building of new pan-European institutions. (Report, 4)*

The authors of the "Report" quoted Hans-Jürgen Misselwitz from the Foreign Ministry of the GDR, (Under Secretary of State under Foreign Minister Markus Meckel resp. Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière):

*Misselwitz: In general, they [the Soviets – AvP] are very supportive of the wider European approach to security, but they have no idea how to do it. The West should give them constructive ideas, to help the Soviets feel at home. They know that the old system does not work. They are on the losing side, but the West should give them the chance not to feel like losers. (Ibid.)*

Misselwitz confirmed this statement in an interview with me on June 6, 2014 in Berlin and added that the West did not give the Soviets this chance. He mentioned that the politics of Meckel (and him) were criticized especially by the representatives of the United States.

The authors of the report mentioned that the two concessions to Soviet security interests should be allowed: No NATO troops should be stationed on what is now East German soil and the 350,000 Soviet troops should be allowed to stay for a transitional time. The memory of the war has – describes the Committee report – a powerful influence in colouring Soviet thinking about German unification, but is perhaps not the determining factor.

[28]

---

*The real Soviet fear, we suspect, is that the settlement of the German question could have the effect, or be interpreted as having the effect, of excluding the Soviet Union from Europe. Mr. Gorbachev's central foreign objective, declared in his book Perestroika and repeated endlessly since, is to bring the Soviet Union into Europe and the wider world community as quickly and completely as possible. (Ibid.)*

Misselwitz from the now democratic East German Foreign Ministry is quoted: *We need unconventional solutions or else the divisions of Europe will only be repeated further east. (Ibid., confirmed by Misselwitz in Interview Misselwitz 2014)*

The authors of the report repeated that a *neutral Germany is in no one's interest* and asked for alternatives: *A special status like France is really only a variant of neutral Germany and leaves the question of the country's security regime up in the air. Also Gorbachev's consideration for Germany's membership in both alliances (including all members of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty) is not seen as a realistic alternative.*

But:

*[...] the question of Germany in NATO is more than the last great item of repair work of the cold war. Instead it is the first great item in building a new cooperative security system for Europe.*

And:

*We think the impasse over the relationship between a united Germany and NATO will only be resolved by the West wholeheartedly embracing the Soviet Unions' long term goal of participation leading to full membership in the European Community. (Report, 28)*

The consequence of the report:

[29]

---

*Even if the alliances continue to demonstrate their recent capacity for new thinking, we should start building alternative structures of cooperative security that will, in all likelihood, eventually replace the alliances. This is where the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) comes into play. (Report, S. 30)*

The Standing Committee quotes a reference at the end of the report to reiterate support for this position, by Under Secretary of State (in German: "Staatssekretär", not the minister) Hans-Jürgen Misselwitz: *It is important that North America continues to play a role or we will wind up with a Europe from Poland to Portugal that will also exclude the USSR. We want the USSR in Europe, but this also requires the balance of North America. The United States and Canada belong to the balance of the European landscape.*<sup>15</sup> That means a new security system in Europe which includes the USSR as well as the North Americas. (Report, 33, confirmed by Misselwitz in Interview Misselwitz 2014)

As we know now, these conclusions were refused by the Bush administration and by most of the governments of the other NATO members, including Canada's Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Foreign Minister Joe Clark, as well as Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher.<sup>16</sup> United Germany under the roof of NATO was the outcome of

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> However, the Report mentioned that Clark has sometimes similar considerations, for instance when he said: *... the Alliance should turn outwards to embrace its old adversaries and new friends.* (ibidem, p. 29) In my opinion Genscher had also the hope to integrate the Soviet Union in European Affairs; he was skeptical to exclude Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation from Europe. (A.v.Plato: Die Vereinigung, p. 207 and p. 410.)

[30]

the “2+4” negotiations, especially the negotiations between Bush and Gorbachev that took place during the summit in Washington during the first days of June 1990 in Washington.

However, the members of the Standing Committee for Foreign Affairs and International Trade were not insignificant political players; they played a large role in the Canadian politics and diplomacy making at the time. Bill Blaikie declared in his interview, that it was not unusual for the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade to take different positions from Canadian policy makers, and that he still agreed with the main positions of the 1990 Report in 2013.

In contradiction to him and others, Paul Heinbecker, who served under Trudeau and Mulroney and later under Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, was from the opposite end of the political spectrum from our other interviewees, mentioned that the recommendations of the Standing Committee were “pipe dreams”. His main arguments against a European Security System inclusive of the Soviet Union were:

*What do the Poles think? What do the Czech's think? And they were much less concerned, in my judgement at least, what it meant for Russia, than what it meant for themselves. They wanted to be on the inside, looking out. And they had plenty of good reasons for that. [...] You couldn't, you couldn't afford them the protection they wanted, in an organization that included Russia with a decision making veto. That would be, that would have been my judgement, that would be my judgement now. I don't think that these two things were reconcilable. ... Including Russia and giving protection to the Poland, the Baltic States and the others, because Russia, the Soviet Union have an imperialistic history. (Interview with Heinbecker 2013).*



However, at that time the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation were weak, 20 years later the Russian Federation was much stronger. Indeed, the Canadian Government and most of the Conservatives would have agreed to this qualification, especially after the summit in Washington during the first days of June 1990. Most of the conservatives among the Standing Committee do not mention their role in this committee during its visit to the Soviet Union and to the Germanies. Immediately after their visit and the publishing of the report their thoughts became obsolete in Canadian Politics. Perhaps they were now uncomfortable with the political aims of the report.

I do not agree with the argument<sup>17</sup> that the concept of a new strategic alliance in Europe should exclude the North Americas and has failed because of this reason. The concept of a pan-European Military Alliance was based on the idea that it should replace NATO and the Warsaw Treaty and that would have meant including every country in both alliances: the USA and the Soviet Union and all the various allies. Nevertheless, in this concept (under this proposal) the USA would have lost much of its influence. For this reason both Bush and Kohl rejected it. For the latter it was clear that reunification could not be managed against the United States. One of the reasons was that Kohl needed American support against nearly all the other European governments who were afraid of a united Germany or even a "Fourth Reich". Thatcher, for instance, could only be won over to the idea for a united Germany under an extended NATO. The idea of an all-European security architecture came up very late in the Soviet Union (only in March 1990) after the

---

<sup>17</sup> Sarotte wrote that the "Gorbachev's vague vision of pan-European structures" would have "largely excluded the United States." Sarotte 1989, 198.

[32]

“Allianz für Deutschland” won the elections and the Warsaw Treaty had collapsed. Gorbachev’s “trumps” had disappeared.

Nevertheless the strategic problems of excluding the Soviet Union from Europe and extending NATO to the East remain significant until today; for North America as much as for Europe.

### **The Extension of NATO to the East**

Naturally, the history of NATO and Russia did not end in 1990. Since the end of the 1990s NATO extended to the East; the Central and East Central European countries joined NATO, and the alliance reached the borders of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. For the Russians, this development was (and remains) a threat. Lloyd Axworthy was a member of the Standing Committee and a member of the parliamentary delegation to the Soviet Union and the Germanies in 1990, and Foreign Minister of Canada from 1996 to 2000. He shared the opinions of Jeremy Kinsman, Robert Fowler, Bill Blaikie, and other Canadian diplomats and politicians, that there is now a “new, smaller Cold War” that developed when NATO extended far past the territory of the former GDR. However, his Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, as well as the Eastern European lobby groups in Canada (and the United States) appreciated the extension against Russia—and believed that there was no viable alternative. (Interview Axworthy 2012)<sup>18</sup>

Today, we have to ask if the exclusion of Russia from Europe and the extension of NATO gambled the chance away to integrate the Russian Federation into Europe and to hinder it from the unilateralist politics later demonstrated in the Caucasus and Ukraine. The hostile mood among the Russian

---

<sup>18</sup> Axworthy was some years later nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize because of his engagement against land mines. (See his book “Navigating a New World: Canada’s Global Future”, Toronto 2003.)

population against the West has one of its causes in the fall of the Soviet Union and the extension of NATO, and was one of the reasons for Putin's anti-democratic Russian great-power politics and for his popularity.

[33]

---

### **Final Remark**

Back to the questions presented in the beginning: Did the interviews with high ranking politicians and diplomats bring more information and insight than it seemed before? The answer is clear: Yes. These interviews contributed a great deal although most of the interviewees did not hide their light under a bushel. We have heard a lot about the contradictions between representatives from different countries and between politicians from one countries; we got to know a lot about the relations between politicians, their judgements of a specific character or their politics; we sourced new documents, and most important: we heard of alternatives which were discussed at that time, sometime before the final decisions. Some of them turned out (decades later) to be disputable and even problematic – like the refusing of a new security architecture replacing NATO and Warsaw treaty or the extension of NATO to the East without binding Russia to Europe. It is not clear yet if these decisions evoked new conflicts which were feared by some far-sighted politicians. To elaborate these lost alternatives is the only way to describe a historical process as a product of various interests and factors which have long lasting effects and therefore are not really lost. Otherwise we would understand and describe history in a teleological manner: history could only develop in this way as it went. And we could not understand why politicians, parties or movements acted in the way they did as if they knew the future. Sometime we see the consequences of former decisions only decades later.

[34]

## List of Interviews

---

Lloyd Axworthy, November 2012 in Winnipeg (Interviewer: Karen Brglez, Alexander von Plato).

Bill Blaikie, March 25, 2013 in Winnipeg (Interviewer: Lauren Finkel, Christopher Kshyk, Suzanne Zaleski and Alexander von Plato).

George Bush (Sr.), September 14, 1999 in Washington (Interviewer: Alexander von Plato)

Bob Fowler, March 18, 2013 in Ottawa (Interviewer: Natalie Bartmes, Holly McElrea, Amanda Kotowicz and Alexander von Plato).

Hans-Dietrich Genscher, April 4, 2001 in Lüdenscheid (Interviewer: Alexander von Plato).

Paul Heinbecker, January 21, 2013 in Ottawa. (Interviewer: Karen Brglez, Chris Clements and Alexander von Plato).

Hans-Jürgen Misselwitz, June 6, 2014 in Berlin (Interviewer: Alexander von Plato)

John Noble, January 25, 2013 in Ottawa (Interviewer Chris Clements, Hayley Caldwell and Alexander von Plato).

Condoleezza Rice, am 17.9.1999 in Stanford (Interviewer: Alexander von Plato).

Brent Scowcroft, September 14, 1999 in Washington (Interviewer: Alexander von Plato).

## Bibliography

Axworthy, Lloyd: *Navigating A New World: Canada's Global Future*. Knopf Canada, Toronto 2003

Beker, Avi and Simona Kedmi: *German Unification. A Jewish-Israeli Perspective*, Jerusalem 1991.

Brglez, Karen, von Plato, Alexander et al.: *Canada and German Re-Unification* in: Oral History Forum (Canada), 2015.

Cameron, Maxwell A./Tomlin, Brian W.: *The Making of NAFTA: How the Deal Was Done*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2000.

Canada. *House of Commons*. (Hansard) 34<sup>th</sup> Parliament, session, June 27, 1990, S. 2.

Heinbecker, Paul: *Getting back in the Game. A Foreign Policy Playbook for Canada*, Toronto (Key Porter Books) 2010.

Plato, Alexander von: *Die Vereinigung Deutschlands – ein weltpolitisches Machtspiel. Bush, Kohl, Gorbatschow und die internen Moskauer Protokolle*, 3. Auflage. Christoph Links, Berlin 2009, S. 21; actualized in English: *Ending the Cold War? Bush, Kohl, Gorbachev and German Re-unification*, New York (Palgrave/MacMillan) 2015.

*Report of the Committee's Visit to the Soviet Union and the Germanies*, April 20 – May 5, 1990, edited by the Standing Committee on External Affairs and International Trade in June 1990.

Sarotte, Mary Elise: 1989. *The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*, Princeton 2009.

Zelikow, Philip und Rice, Condoleezza: *Sternstunde der Diplomatie. Die deutsche Einheit und das Ende der Staltung Europas*, Berlin 1997.



# Transnationalism and Ethnic identity: Cuban and Latino Sephardim in Miami

[37]

---

## Margalit Bejarano

During the last fifty years, the demographic profile of Dade County – the metropolitan area of Miami – has changed completely, transforming the city into a mosaic of ethnic groups. The white, English speakers, who in 1960 constituted 80% of the population, declined to 15%, while the rate of the Hispanics grew from 5% to 65%.<sup>1</sup> Due to the constant immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean, many of the "Anglos" (white English speakers) - including the Jews - moved northward to adjacent cities in south Florida such as Broward County and Palm Beach.<sup>2</sup>

The old Jewish population was characterized by large numbers of "snowbirds", who lived in Miami only in the winter months, or old age persons who preferred to retire in a tropical

Dr. Margalit Bejarano was a teaching fellow in the Dept. of Romance and Latin American Studies, a research fellow of the Liwerant Center and the director of the Oral History Division of the Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She published extensively on Cuban Jewry, Sephardim in Latin America, Latin American Jews in Miami and oral history.

---

<sup>1</sup> Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City on the Edge, the Transformation of Miami*, University of California Press 1993, 211.

<sup>2</sup> Ira Sheskin, "Ten Percent of American Jews", Andrea Greenbaum (ed.), *Jews of South Florida*, Brandeis University Press: Waltham, Mass. 2005, 5-6.

[38]

climate. Their place was taken by new groups of Spanish, Russian, French and Hebrew speakers. Many of them were Sephardim from the Middle East and North Africa who came to Miami in a secondary or third migration. The history of these Sephardim and their impact on Jewish Miami was studied by Henry Green;<sup>3</sup> this article will focus on the story of the Sephardim from Latin America.

Jewish Immigration from Latin America to Miami started in the early 1960s, as a result of the Castro revolution. Other waves followed during periods of economic and political crises in various countries, the most recent being that of the Venezuelans under the Chavez regime. English speaking Jews were reluctant to recognize Hispanics as Jews, or to distinguish between Spanish speaking Ashkenazim and Ladino or Arabic speaking Sephardim.<sup>4</sup>

The Jewish immigrants from Latin America had to adapt themselves to new circumstances and to redefine their relations with their homeland, their ethnic group, with their coreligionists in America, with Israel and with their adoptive homeland. In this process they shaped multiple identities that can be studied primarily by oral histories that reflect self-perception. The objective of this paper is to analyze national, ethnic and religious identities of Cuban and other Latino Sephardim in Miami, as revealed through their interviews with oral historians.

---

<sup>3</sup> Green, Henry A. (2012) "Transnational Identity and Miami Sephardim" in: Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (eds.), *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 124-140.

<sup>4</sup> Margalit Bejarano, "From Turkey to the United States: The Trajectory of Cuban Sephardim in Miami, in: Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (eds.), *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 151.



## Methodological problems

The field of oral history is subject to debates between an instrumental conservative approach, still predominant among historians in Israel, that consider oral history – or rather oral documentation – as a tool for the collection of historical evidence,<sup>5</sup> and interdisciplinary and post-modern approaches that regard oral histories as the subject matter. Scholars like Paul Thompson, Michael Friesch, Ronald Grele, Alessandro Portelli and others have developed new theories, which include analysis of the significance of personal and collective narratives, or consider interviewees as participants in the writing and in the making of history.<sup>6</sup> They point out the social and political agenda of both interviewers and interviewees; the different layers of interpretation; and they suggest new readings of oral histories.

In my historical research on Cuban Jews and Jews from other Latin American countries living in Miami, I've conducted interviews using conservative methods – such as a thorough study of the subject before interviewing and a detailed personal questionnaire directed to fill gaps of knowledge. At the same time I found in the new theories on oral history useful tools for

---

<sup>5</sup> Yoav Gelber, *Historia, Zikaron Vetaamula*, Am Oved: Tel Aviv 2008, 251-296.

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Oxford University Press, New York 2000; Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: On the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1990; Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, *The Myths We Live By*, Routledge, London 1990; Ronald Grele (Columbia University, New York): "Memory Myth Ideology Consciousness", *Proceedings of the XIII International Oral History Conference "Memory and Globalization"*, Rome 2004 (CD); Alessandro Portelli, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*, Palgrave Press: New York 2003.

[40]

---

the interpretation of memories, particularly for the analysis of the structuring of identities in a changing context.

I conducted interviews in Miami in three different stages. The first was in the 1980s, while I was working on my doctoral dissertation. At that time I was able to interview first generation immigrants who had arrived in Cuba immediately after World War I. Interviews included memories from hometowns in Turkey, causes and patterns of migration and detailed descriptions of life in Cuba until the Castro revolution, ending in the traumatic experience of a second migration in one's lifetime.

In 1991 I conducted a series of interviews with Cuban Jews on their experiences in Miami. Most of the interviewees were born in Cuba and immigrated to the US as young adults. They spoke about their life in Cuba with nostalgia, were extremely critical of the Communist regime, and were very bitter about the unfriendly welcome they had received from the local Jews upon their arrival to Miami.

My most recent study deals with Latino Jews in Miami, and is part of a larger project undertaken by the Liwerant Center for the Study of Latin America, Spain and Portugal and their Jewish Communities at Hebrew University that compares the different experiences of Latin American Jews across four continents. One of my conclusions is that Cuban Jews and Jews coming from other countries in Latin America form two separate transnational diasporas. The former, defining themselves as *Jewbans*, have been living in the United States for fifty years, becoming Americanized in the process. The latter – the Latinos – came from different countries, in different periods and driven by different motives. Most of them are permanent residents, while others continue to move between their homeland and their host-land.

## Cuban Sephardim

The Sephardic immigration to Cuba started on the eve of World War I. The first immigrants were young single men who tried to avoid conscription to the Turkish army. Some of them had immigrated earlier to the United States, but were attracted to Cuba by the climate, the language and the economic prosperity of the sugar industry, that opened opportunities for itinerant vendors. They became spearheads for future chains of migration from their hometowns. Most of my early interviewees had arrived during the 1920s and joined their relatives who preceded them. They described the poverty and instability in their home communities, particularly during WWI, and the unofficial networks of migration that directed them to specific destinations in Cuba and supplied their basic needs, such as lodging and merchandise on credit.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the Sephardic immigrants to Cuba came from two regions in Turkey and they created a unified and homogenous community. Social contacts were limited to their own community, girls were strictly looked after and women were not allowed to work outside their home, maintaining a similar way of life to that of their home communities in Turkey.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand they absorbed the Spanish language because of its similarity to Ladino, preserving only residues of their Jewish mother tongue.

---

<sup>7</sup> Extracts from these interviews were published in *The Jewish Community of Cuba: Memory and History* (Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University: Jerusalem 2014). See for example interviews with Jack Barrocas (Carmiel 1983) Moises Bensignor (Miami 1984), Cali and Elías Maya (Miami 1984), Oral History Archive of the Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry (ICJ)

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with Sol and José Credi (Miami 1984), Alegra Fins (Miami 1987), Manzanillo Group (Miami 1993), Cali Maya, ICJ.

[42]

The Sephardim created a centralized community in Havana, with branches in the provincial towns. The communal organization supplied all the religious services, had a day school, and beneficiary organizations including a women's society. Interviewees spoke with great admiration about the assistance to poor and needy, to sick people and women at birth who were part of their closely knit community.<sup>9</sup> Sephardim were also very active in the Zionist movement: during the war of independence of Israel almost all the volunteers from Cuba were Sephardim.<sup>10</sup>

After the Cuban revolution, most of the Jewish population left the country. Among those who stayed behind, there was a higher proportion of Sephardim, since they were more dispersed in the provinces and their economic status was lower than that of the Ashkenazim. The Jewish exodus from Cuba was not an immigration of individuals, but rather a transplantation of the whole community to new soil. Many Sephardic Jews were assisted by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), that relocated them to other parts of the United States or Latin America, but after a few years they found their way to Miami, that became the substitute of Havana.<sup>11</sup>

In Miami, social differences between Ashkenazim and Sephardim lost much of their relevance, because of the common past. The Ashkenazi Jews founded in 1961 the Cuban Hebrew Circle, as a framework for all the Jews who came from Cuba. Its religious services, however, followed the Ashkenazi rite, and Sephardim had to look for another synagogue.

---

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with Rabbi Nissim Gambach (Miami 1984), Moises Bensignor, Isidoro Behar (Miami 1991), ICJ.

<sup>10</sup> Interviews with Jacobo and Dr. Alberto Forma (Miami 1984), Israel Bichachi (Miami 1984) Salomón Garazi (Miami 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Bejarano, *From Turkey*, 157-58.

In 1960 there was only one Sephardic synagogue in Miami Beach, whose members were mostly Jews of Turkish origin, who had formerly lived in New York. Interviewees remember that although they came as refugees and had no money, they were denied entry to the synagogue if they didn't pay their fees. The unfriendly welcome received by the local Sephardim was the main motive for their decision to create a Cuban Sephardic congregation. They started



Sephardic Congregation of Florida

in a dark basement in downtown Miami Beach, which they nicknamed "the cave", but gradually were able to raise funds and to build their own synagogue - the Sephardic congregation of Florida – Temple Moses. Interviews conducted in 1991 with community leaders show that they considered Temple Moses as the heir of their community in Havana, and they wanted to transmit to their children the same values they had received from their parents. They wanted to preserve the Cuban tradition, and continued to conduct their activities using Spanish. Women have a leading role in maintaining the Sephardic tradition, preparing and selling traditional Sephardic dishes.<sup>12</sup> According to an ex-president of the congregation: *I consider after having been so many years in exile, that the role of the woman in the institutional assistance is much respected, much respectable and very big.*<sup>13</sup>

The major problem encountered by the Cuban Sephardic community was the preservation and transmission of their

<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Rebeca and Juan Matalon (Miami 1991), Dr. Isaac Cohen (Miami 1991), ICJ.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Isidoro Behar, Miami 1991, ICJ.

[44]

identity to the future generations. Family relations continue to be respected by the children and grandchildren of the immigrants from Cuba, but apart from the High Holidays, they prefer to join English speaking congregations close to their residence, where their children may have a day school and where men and women sit together. Another ex-president of the congregation referred to his granddaughters membership in a Reform congregation: *Our customs are rooted in our personality in such a way that we cannot, we do not accept that a person will be smoking [In the synagogue] on Sabbath, we do not accept – although we see it – that a person will enter the synagogue without a kipa. These are things that are part of our tradition.*<sup>14</sup> The Cuban Sephardim were used to an Orthodox tradition, but also to a very tolerant attitude towards the observance of the *mitzvot*. Unable to find rabbis from Turkey, they hired rabbis of a different origin, mainly from Morocco, losing much of their original tradition.<sup>15</sup>

The Zionist devotion of the Cuban Sephardim in Miami is manifested in frameworks that they share with other Jews. The Jewish Federation of Greater Miami opened a Cuban and Latin division, where Ashkenazim and Sephardim work together on behalf of Israel. Through their generous donations, that reflect their economic success, the Cuban Jews in Miami were able to buy the respect of their English speaking coreligionists.

Another important factor in the Zionist activities of the Sephardim was the foundation of a chapter of FESELA – the Sephardic Federation of Latin America – in Miami in 1982. Through this institution the Cuban Jews in Miami were officially recognized as part of a Latin American Sephardic network,

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Rabbi Abraham Benzaquen (Miami 1993) and Rabbi Isaac Ben Shimol (Miami 2010), ICJ.

reflecting the changes in the demographic profile of Miami, which changed the relations between English and Spanish speakers, as well as between Ashkenazim and Sephardim.<sup>16</sup>

### **Latino Sephardim**

During the 1970s and 1980s, small groups of Jews from Colombia, Peru and other Latin American countries started to settle in Miami. They fled the drug wars, kidnappings and growing violence that threatened their personal security. Some affluent Jews, who had regularly come to Miami for vacation, bought a second home, using it as a temporary residence during periods of economic or political crisis. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century large segments of the middle classes in Latin America became impoverished, a phenomenon that had a profound impact on the Jews. A considerable number of Jews, particularly in Argentina, arrived in Miami in search of better opportunities. The largest wave of immigration, however, came from Venezuela, motivated by the personal insecurity under the Chavez regime.<sup>17</sup>

This later wave of Latino Jews received a very different welcome from that of the Cubans. Since the decline of the Anglo population, many of the old congregations and day schools have been losing their traditional members and are trying to attract the Latin American Jews. They hire Spanish speaking personnel and organize activities for the Spanish speakers, changing gradually the character of Jewish Miami.

---

<sup>16</sup> Interviews with Veronica Maya (Miami 2014), Sabeto Garazi (Miami 2014), Armando Franco (Miami 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Margalit Bejarano, "Changing Identities in a Transnational Diaspora: Latin American Jews in Miami", Eliezer Ben Raphael, Judit Bokser Liwerant and Yosef Gorny (eds.), *Reconsidering Israel-Diaspora Relations*, Brill: Leiden Boston 2014, 170-72.

[46]

Latino Jews have not felt compelled to establish separate organizations, instead they have opened an *Hebraica* section in the Jewish Community Center in Aventura, where most of them live. The *Hebraica* in Latin America is a country club that unites all the Jews, regardless of their ethnic origin, and is the most



Latinos and Anglos in JCC Aventura  
Photo: Margalit Bejarano

important Jewish social center. In Miami the *Hebraica* has become the central meeting place for Jewish immigrants from Latin America. Its main attractions are the Macabi games, where each group plays under the flag of its country of origin. Gradually it

became a space of interaction with English speaking Jews who play under the flag of the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The demographic changes in Miami are reflected also in the growing number of Sephardic synagogues. Latino Sephardim have no difficulty finding a local place of worship. The number of Sephardim interviewed for this project is too small to draw general conclusions, but when compared with other data, we see a sequence of processes that started in Latin America. Sephardim coming from Argentina, Brazil or Mexico, were divided into separate communities according to their sub-ethnic origin in Morocco, Aleppo, Damascus or Lebanon, or belonged to a community of Ladino speakers. In smaller communities, such as in Venezuela, Colombia and Peru, there was one central Sephardic community, but differences between religious patterns persisted. The Jews from Syria, particularly from Aleppo, have traditionally been the most

---

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with Dror Gershoni (Miami 2011), Ariel Betata (Miami 2011) Clarita Kassin (Miami 2011).



observant of religious precepts and the most oriented towards the preservation of ethnicity. The Ladino speakers are generally more liberal in religious matters, and have tended to marry outside their group, both with Ashkenazim and with non-Jews.<sup>19</sup>

Since the 1960s Sephardim in Latin America have been influenced by global religious movements. The Conservative movement has been very successful, and its rabbinical seminary continues to export rabbis to the Spanish speaking world. The conservative movement is not ethnic, and is especially attractive to Ladino speakers, who look for a more modern religious framework. Since all Orthodox Sephardic rabbis in Latin America refuse to perform conversions, the Conservative movement attracts Sephardim who wish to marry converts. During the last forty years Chabad has gained much influence in Latin America, and the *Tshuva* movement, under the leadership of Ashkenazi rabbis, was particularly successful among Aleppans and Damascenes. At the same time, Sephardim of Syrian origin started to send rabbinical students to *yeshivot* that accept the religious leadership of rabbi Ovadia Yosef in Jerusalem, and their communities are undergoing a process of growing religiosity.<sup>20</sup>

These movements are also reflected among Miami's Sephardim. Those coming from a more liberal background feel more comfortable in the Conservative synagogues. The

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Rabbi Yosef Galimidi (Miami 2010), Rabbi Ben Shimol, Rabbi Ben Zaquen.

<sup>20</sup> Margalit Bejarano, "Comunidad y religiosidad: cambios en la identidad colectiva de los sefardíes en América Latina", Haim Avni, Judit Bokser Liwerant, Sergio DellaPergola, Margalit Bejarano and Leonardo Senkman, *Pertenencia y alteridad. Judíos en/de América Latina: Cuarenta años de cambios*, Iberoamericana Vervuert: Madrid 2011, 603-620.

[48]

Venezuelans, many of whom came originally from Spanish Morocco, are more attracted by Chabad, while those of Aleppo



A kosher delicatessen in  
Miami Beach  
Photo: Margalit Bejarano

origin, particularly from Mexico and Panama prefer the Safra synagogue.

In an interview with the rabbi of this synagogue, who comes from Argentina, he explained that parents with a Sephardic orientation try to transmit to their children the tradition of their community of origin.<sup>21</sup> The

growth of Sephardic synagogues strengthened the rabbinical authority, and rabbis started to control religious life. Most of the interviewees, Sephardim and Ashkenazim, state

that they became more religiously observant since their immigration to Miami.

Not all the Sephardim look for a religious manifestation of their Jewish identity. In Latin America there is a growing movement of Sephardim, mainly Ladino speakers, who look for secular expressions of their traditional heritage, principally through cultural activities. A Jew from Brazil, who is very active in fomenting Sephardic culture, explained: *for me to be a Jew means to be a Sephardic Jew.*<sup>22</sup> A singer born in Cuba, who grew up in Venezuela and later moved to Miami says that she feels that she is above all else a Sephardic Jew – even though her father is not Jewish. She performs mainly Ladino songs, saying that within her Jewish identity the Sephardic part is the most important.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rabbi Yosef Galimidi (Miami 2010).

<sup>22</sup> Interview Nelson Menda (Miami 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Interview Susana Behar (Miami 2011)

## Conclusion

Most of the Sephardim interviewed for this study are children of immigrants who were born in Latin America. Their parents had arrived from the Middle East or North Africa in the interwar period or in the 1950s. Their national identity in Latin America depends on their country of origin. In the Cuban case, the transplantation of the whole community to Miami strengthened the Cuban-Jewish identity. This community is undergoing a process of Americanization, but it is an assimilation into a hybrid society of Spanglish speakers. The Latinos are not an homogenized group: Argentineans and Venezuelans have a strong national identity, while Colombians and Peruvians identify as Latinos rather than with their homeland.

Immigration to Miami seems to weaken the sub-ethnicity of the Sephardim. The community of origin of their parents, which formed the basis of their Sephardic identity when living in Latin America, gradually changes into a more general Sephardic identity. Internal divisions between Sephardim are more religious than ethnic. Global religious movements have a growing influence on the Sephardim in Miami, who tend to become more Orthodox. On the other hand, we find also signs of a secular movement that cultivates Sephardic culture as a new expression of identity.

Oral histories are the most important source for the study of these processes. National or ethnic identities are connected with the way people remember and interpret their past. It is not only **what** they remember, but **how** they remember.



**1,500 Early Holocaust Interviews  
Published Online for the First Time:  
Digitized Holocaust Interviews:  
A Resource for Researchers and Educators**

**Sharon Kangisser-Cohen**

The **Oral History Division** (OHD) of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem has made 1,500 Holocaust-related voice recordings and transcripts available to the public. The release of these materials marks 75 years since the *Kristallnacht* attacks against German and Austrian Jews on November 9 and 10, 1938. The on-line access of 1,000 interviews relating to the Shoah was supported by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and with additional funding from the *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah*, the OHD is uploading another 500 interviews from projects relating to the Shoah.

The public can now search and access the materials through a new website created with the assistance of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Multimedia Department. The collection is online <http://bit.ly/ohd-shoah>.

Dr Sharon Kangisser Cohen is the academic director of the oral history division of the Avraham Harman Institute of contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University. She teaches at the Rothberg School for International Students and at the Melton School for Jewish Education. Her main research is with survivors of the Holocaust.

[52]

This collection of archival materials will provide teachers and educators with an invaluable teaching tool and will benefit the study, research and production of materials relating to the Shoah. One of the earliest-recorded oral history collections on the Shoah, it has been made available through the generous support of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the *Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah*.

Even before the website was formally launched, several families unexpectedly discovered their relatives' Holocaust testimonies for the first time. For example:

- The Nordlicht family discovered the testimony of Tova Gusta Nordlicht and for the first time heard her account of the resistance in Poland. Her grandson Gal wrote the Oral History Division, *I never heard this story before and it was incredible to hear it after all these years*. (Link to her testimony is at <http://youtu.be/gsyap7JBvWk>.)
- The descendants of Laslo Samushi discovered his testimony concerning the rescue of Jewish children in Hungary from 1944 until the liberation. (Link to his testimony is at <http://youtu.be/pNQjsEsOgxg>.)
- The Even Dar family discovered an interview with their grandfather Simcha Even Dar; this is the only recorded documents the Even Dar family has of Simcha's involvement in the Bricha ( the underground organized effort that helped Jewish Holocaust survivors escape post-World War II Europe to pre-state Israel) and Aliyah Bet (immigration by Jews to pre-state Israel in violation of British restrictions). (Link to his testimony is at <http://youtu.be/xphn9-7nHNQ>).

This collection is just a small sample of the invaluable archive at the Oral History Division, which contains the memories of individuals from Israeli and Jewish society

throughout its modern history. The archive contains rare testimonies from Holocaust survivors, key individuals in the Zionist movement, organizations such as the United Jewish Appeal, men and women who grew up under the British mandate in Palestine, under Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, or in various Jewish communities throughout the world.

Prof. Dalia Ofer, the Max and Rita Haber Prof. of Holocaust and Contemporary Jewry, Emeritus at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, said: *These on-line testimonies are an outstanding contribution that will help spread knowledge and understanding of the Jews' daily lives and their struggle to survive during the dark period of the Holocaust. It represents the dedication of the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry to enable the public, who often sought out the university's collections, to use the testimonies as part of their regular study and interest in the life of the Jews during this period. Personally I feel gratitude for those who enabled the project, which will allow students to explore the great collection of this archive with ease and success. I recall extensively using the Oral History Division's general collection in my own research from my first steps as a master student and throughout my work as a teacher and researcher.*

Dr. Sharon Kangisser Cohen, Academic Director of the Oral History Division, said: *The success of the Oral History Division in initiating and completing this project is due to the close collaborative work of different departments in the university. This project is essentially the product of the professionalism and dedication of members of staff at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The accessibility of a small section of our archive will only enhance research and writing of the Holocaust period and its aftermath, but also as we have*

[54]

---

*already seen, it has been significant on the personal level as families are rediscovering their family's past as people have found interviews with their parents and grandparents, which they had never heard before. We also hope that our archive will be a helpful resource for teachers.*

### **About the Oral History Division:**

The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry [ICJ] began collecting oral histories for the purposes of historical research in 1959. These early interviews, covering a wide range of subjects and conducted according to highly professional standards, granted the ICJ the distinction of being the most important academic collection of oral documentation in Israel. The Oral History Division's collection of more than 12,000 interviews in 20 languages constitutes a unique treasure of Jewish memories that will provide future researchers with an invaluable social history of the Yishuv, the State of Israel and Jewish communities in the Diaspora. Researchers can visit the Division to read transcripts and listen to recordings. Digitized interviews are also being made available on the web. Online at <http://oralhistoryeng.huji.ac.il>



# Interviewer-Interviewee Relationship at the Polish Section of the Kestenbergs' Archive

[55]

---

**Ganit Eiron**

The Kestenbergs' Archive is a collection of more than 1500 of oral testimonies of child survivors of the Holocaust collected in numerous countries over the past thirty years. These documents were received by the Oral History Division of the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the year 2010.

Initiators of the project were Dr. Judith S. Kestenberg (1910-1999) a psychiatrist and her husband, Milton Kestenberg (1910-1991) who was a lawyer. Dr. Judith Kestenberg was the founder of Child Development Research in the US in 1961, working with children and parents for the prevention of mental disorder and developmental problems. In 1981, the Kestenbergs, working with many associates, began traveling all over the world within the framework of what was named the International Study of Organized Persecution of Children project, interviewing 1,531 child survivors of the Holocaust as well as children of Nazis and observers of child persecution.<sup>1</sup>

Ganit Eiron completed her MA at the Abraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and works as a volunteer in its Oral History Division. She is a retired history and Hebrew teacher in the Seligsberg High School and the David's Yellin College of Education in Jerusalem.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.cfhu.org/.../archive-interviews-child-survivors-holocaust](http://www.cfhu.org/.../archive-interviews-child-survivors-holocaust)

[56]

Among other countries they established a network of interviewers also in Poland. There they interviewed themselves as they were Jews of Polish origin. The Polish part of this archive includes 150 interviews. Most of them I prepared for research.

In this article I want to focus on the relations between five of the interviewers and their interviewees as I saw them in this part of the archive.<sup>2</sup> I will especially focus on the founders, the Kestenbergs, and on the interviews made by three of the Polish interviewers who disclosed some interesting data about their life and their involvement in this project

### **Background: The establishing of the project – The role of the Kestenbergs**

The Kestenbergs decided to establish this project following Milton Kestenberg's experience as a lawyer representing child survivors (of WW II) in German courts. During this time, he created a special method for interviewing these children- a crucial step in securing for them monetary compensation from the state. His wife, Dr. Judith Kestenberg, worked as a psychiatrist and was interested in how the traumatic past of survivors influences their subsequent life. Very soon they found that the interviews, which started as a research project, also had an integrative, therapeutic effect.<sup>3</sup> This discovery caused Judith Kestenberg to explore the therapeutic effects of the interviews and how they could be further enhanced.

---

<sup>2</sup> There were more interviewers, but I refer to those whose name or at least their fate is referred to in the interviews.

<sup>3</sup> Judith S. Kestenberg & Eva Fogelman (Eds), *Children During the Nazi Reign- Psychological Perspective on the Interview Process*, Praeger: Westport, Connecticut & London 1994, p. 32.

Dr Kestenberberg believed that recollecting early memories, or even only imagining them, can help the survivors integrate the trauma into their life narrative and, as a result, to feel better. She instructed the interviewers to explore childhood memories; to describe the parents, to recall everything they could, including tiny vague images or bodily movements. In addition, she would ask the interviewees about their dreams, believing in the dreams' power to access early memories and to facilitate healing<sup>4</sup>. She was interested in the colors that they saw in their dreams of the camps and hiding places. She believed that bright colors indicate hope and good experiences, and black or grey colors denote bad experiences. Usually the interviewees described their dreams as black and dreadful. All the interviewers were instructed to ask these kinds of questions, thought was rare for the interviewees to successfully recall their dreams.

### **Judith Kestenberberg and her interviewing method**

Possibly, in her psychiatric work **Judith Kestenberberg's** therapeutic approach successfully helped survivors. Yet in the interviews she conducted in Poland, I could not find this approach, perhaps because she stayed there only for a short while so she didn't begin a treatment that usually needed a longer time. We can see that in some of the interviews she didn't succeed in building empathy and trust between her and the interviewees. Moreover, some of the interviews reveal acute tension between J. Kestenberberg and the interviewees. For example, two nurse interviewees who worked for Dr. Mengele felt that J. Kestenberberg didn't believe their testimony as they told it. Another example for such a tension can be found in an interview with a female psychiatrist who disagreed with

---

<sup>4</sup> For example the interviews 29-37 p.20; 30-60. All the interviews are deposited in the Oral History Division, The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

[58]

Kestenberg's interpretation of her dreams.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, excluding the above-described cases, most interviews clearly recognize J. Kestenberg's interest in, and devotion to the project. She wrote summaries and even translated into English many of the interviews. She also annotated their content.

Also her husband made a big contribution to the project. **Milton Kestenberg** was the first to establish an interview method of children Holocaust survivors. His methodology was thus described by his wife: *with a lawyer's orientation, he wanted to be helpful to the interviewee as soon as possible in getting reparations or rents. He became a specialist in detecting hidden or overt feelings of guilt, to which he reacted like a benign father giving absolution to his children...* [In every country] *we interviewed, the researchers considered Milton a pioneer in the exploration of psychological consequences of persecution, especially in childhood.*<sup>6</sup>

Milton Kestenberg asked himself what the interview's significance for child survivors might be. He believed the interviews enabled survivors to grapple with the meaning of their survival. Most survivors, particularly child survivors, consented to be interviewed because they either wanted to unburden themselves or because they felt obligated to justify their survival. Many survivors sought to ascribe meaning to outliving their families and communities rather than to perceive their survival as a blind act of chance.<sup>7</sup>

Milton Kestenberg was deeply involved in the interviewees' testimonies. On one occasion, an interviewee

---

<sup>5</sup> The interview number 29-71 HD-JK

<sup>6</sup> Kestenberg & Fogelman, *Children during the Nazi Reign*, p. xiii

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 57.

remarked about Kestenbergs's emotional response.<sup>8</sup> During another interview, he addressed the female interviewee as *Kochanie* (darling), when she told him she doesn't have any family and feels very lonely. However, throughout most of the interview, he addressed her as *Pani* (Madam), because familiarity is not common in Polish language between strangers.

### **Who were the staff interviewers?**

Although the purpose of the project was psychological, the **Kestenbergs** didn't hire Polish psychologists or psychiatrists as interviewers. Rather, from the information they disclose during the interviews, the interviewers themselves were child survivors of the ghettos, the camps and hiding places. I believe that in making such a choice, the project founders hoped to engage empathetic interviewers, who would be able to gain their interviewees' trust.

In contrast, engaging psychologists or psychiatrists as interviewers would have been perceived as shamefully stigmatizing in Polish society.

**Katarzyna Meloch**, a well known journalist of Jewish origin, was a staff member of the Kestenbergs for only a short period but her interviews provide an important example of the interviewers' deep empathy to and even identification with the interviewees. Nine years old at the beginning of the war, Katarzyna Meloch was in Bialystok and Warsaw ghettos before being smuggled out and hidden in a monastery. Throughout the interviews, Meloch repeatedly compares herself to her three interviewees. She maintained close friendship with two of her interviewees - Maria and Jadzia - for years afterwards. Judith Kestenbergs thought that Katarzyna Meloch was too much involved in her mission so she critically remarked about this

---

<sup>8</sup> The interview number 29-69 GL-MK

[60]

mode of interviewing: *Interviewer compares herself incessantly.*<sup>9</sup> When I interviewed Mrs. Meloch<sup>10</sup> in winter 2014 she told me that the survivors haven't told all that happened to them during the times of the war. Obviously, they haven't mentioned events and deeds that were either too painful or shameful. Even when they told the interviewer some details that they thought them to be embarrassing they have made a joint decision with the interviewer to omit such information from the interviews.<sup>11</sup> During the 1980s and 1990s, Meloch considered it improper to mention sexual abuse. Since then, however, she has expressed a greater willingness to write about this problem.

### **The outcome of the interview:**

#### **Aa shared authorship**

The above clearly demonstrates that both parties, interviewer and interviewee, are partners in a dialogue which elicits information. Such a partnership creates what Michael Frisch and others call "the shared authorship in oral history".<sup>12</sup> This interview partnership yields (at least) two different data types: psychological and historical. Although Judith Kestenberg emphasized that her interest was strictly in the psychological, the wealth of historical material generated is undeniable. Kestenberg wrote in 1994 that there is some *overlapping between psychologists and historians*, yet while they have

---

<sup>9</sup> The interview number 30-2 b p.4

<sup>10</sup> I called her twice by phone. She lives in Warsaw.

<sup>11</sup> At the interview 30-54 p.1 J. Kestenberg wrote by handwriting a remark about physical and sexual abuse. There is a discussion about the importance of the interviewer's ability to facilitate a conversation about social taboos and the unspeakable in Helen Bulpitt & Peter J Martin, "Who am I and what am I doing ? Becoming a qualitative research interviewer", *Researcher* 2010, 17,3 9 ( web edition)

<sup>12</sup> Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*, State University of New York Press: Albany 1990 p.xx; Bulpitt & Martin, 2010.

some commonalities, ultimately, each profession pursues different goals, and approaches differently the interviewer's role. The historian perceives the interviewee as a witness who testifies; the psychologist expects the interviewee to disclose feelings and thoughts regarding key life events.<sup>13</sup>

An example of an interviewer who sought testimony-giving witnesses was the Polish lawyer **Jozef Witkowski**. Witkowski himself was a camp survivor. He was imprisoned in the Lodz camp for youth and children. Witkowski dedicated much of his life to documenting the unbelievable cruelty of this place towards children. He wrote a book about the Lodz camp<sup>14</sup>. Witkowski's interviewees emphasized the fact that it was his post-war legal advocacy that spurred them to share with him their painful past. Witkowski helped survivors obtain reparations and made immense efforts to bring to justice camp staff members, such as Sedonia Bayerowa and Pohl, both Lodz staffers.<sup>15</sup> In some interviews Witkowski addresses interviewees as "kolega" which means "colleague" – he thus indicates their shared past. That's clear why many of the interviewees express their admiration for him.

---

<sup>13</sup> Kestenberg & Fogelman p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> The details of the book are: Jozef Witkowski, *Hitlerowski oboz koncentracyjny dla mialoletnich w Lodzi*, Wroclaw , 1975.

When I looked for information about professor Czeslaw Kempisty who was often mentioned in these interviews, I found on the web information about his research about the health conditions in the concentration camps and in the Nazis' prisons which was conducted together with J. Witkowski.

<sup>15</sup> The interviews 30-46b;30-48; 30-65

[62]

## **The uniqueness of this archive: Most of the interviews with gentiles**

Witkowski's interviews demonstrate a unique aspect of the interviews conducted in Poland.<sup>16</sup> In Poland, the Kestenbergs and the others mostly interviewed non Jewish survivors. Because of his personal story, Witkowski wanted to spread the knowledge about the Poles' own suffering during the German occupation. The Poles are painfully conscious of the widespread misconception about Polish rather than German responsibility for the death camps. Various efforts have been made to dispel this misconception. The interviews could be perceived as a part of national efforts to present a Polish perspective on World War II events. In the preface of his book about the Lodz camp of youth and children Witkowski claimed that the German policy towards the Poles was one of extermination, which would happen after the extermination of Jews, because also Poles were seen by the Nazis as "untermensch" –sub-human creatures and they saw in Poland and Russia the space for "Lebensraum", the place of the German national expanding.<sup>17</sup>

It should be emphasized that during the 1980s and early 1990s, when the interviews were conducted, many Poles perceived themselves only as victims. In Poland then, the Holocaust and Jewish-Polish relations during the war were hardly discussed openly and freely.

By the period of the interviews only a few Jews remained in Poland. Therefore many of the Jewish interviewees were famous people: well-known actors, film directors, journalists and scientists who hadn't left Poland even in the dark times of the

---

<sup>16</sup> As we were told at the congress "Looking at Then Now" which took place at the Hebrew University in June 2014 also in Hungary gentiles were interviewed.

<sup>17</sup> Witkowski, *Hitlerowski Oboz*, p. 7-8.



anti-Semitic wave of 1968 because of their deep bonds with Polish culture.<sup>18</sup>

[63]

---

The interviewer of many of these prominent survivors of Jewish origin disclosed only the first letter of his name: **R**. R initially worked with the Kestenbergs, helping them create contacts with people who might be able to help find child survivors. During an interview he co-conducted with the Kestenbergs, R thanked the interviewee for the services rendered by the underground group, PPS (Polish Socialist Party), of which the interviewee was a member: the PPS faked *kenkarts* (identity cards) for R's parents during the war.<sup>19</sup>

During the earlier interviews he conducted, R disclosed interviewees' names; he ceased doing so in later interviews. Perhaps the Kestenbergs instructed him to maintain **anonymity**. Interviewers and interviewees agreed to avoid disclosing interviewees' names. In some cases, the confidentiality agreement was put in the form of a written and signed document. The purpose of non-disclosure was to enable the interviewee to talk freely. Nevertheless, often first and sometimes last names are clearly indicated in writing, mentioned by the interviewee during the meeting, or disclosed by interviewee relatives who were also interviewed. Breach of anonymity presents an ethical problem. An explanation could be that the interviewees chose to reveal their identity in order to assert their testimony's credibility. They hoped to preserve the historical memory of the atrocities in order to help prevent them from reoccurring.

---

<sup>18</sup> For example the interviews with Jerzy Hoffman ,30-56 , Danuta Dejmek 29-4, 30-18 Maria Einhorn Suslowska;30-41, 30-19, 29-82 , 29-20 etc.

<sup>19</sup> The interview 29-95 JK- MK

## Conclusion

I find the Polish part of interviews significant for what they reveal about interviewers and about the interviewer-interviewee relationship.

1. The Kestenbergs personally conducted interviews in the Polish language in Poland, during most summers in the years 1983-1990 establishing there the way of interviewing.
2. Most of the interviewees were Poles, in contrast to most of the other countries where mostly Jews were interviewed.
3. A problematic pattern of breaching interviewees' anonymity can be discerned throughout the interviews.
4. All interviewers empathized with the interviewees. The interviewer-interviewee partnership is characterized by:
  - a) The Kestenbergs' personal engagement with, and concern for the interviewees;
  - b) The tension during some of Judith Kestenberg's interviews;
  - c) The development of close friendship with interviewees following the interviews, as in Katarzyna Meloch's case;
  - d) A feeling of personal indebtedness towards the interviewee, as in R's case.
  - e) Often a mutual empathy between the interviewee and the interviewer is evidenced: on the one hand we see the interviewer's identification with the interviewee arising from shared past experiences of traumas, and on the other hand we see the interviewee's sense of admiration and indebtedness towards the interviewer as in Jozef Witkowski's case.

# Oral History of Jews from Islamic Countries who Made Aliyah to Israel Since 1948<sup>1</sup>

[65]

---

## Judith Reifen-Ronen

At the time of the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, there were approximately one million Jews living in Muslim countries. About half resided in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt and half in the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Yemen and Aden, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey).<sup>2</sup> With the rise of Arab nationalism after the Second World War, the Jews were ideologically grouped together with the former colonial rulers and labeled collaborators and traitors. Jews were isolated from society and were relegated to the place of second rate citizens. The Jewish-Arab conflict since the establishment of the State of Israel resulted in political and economic persecution. The Jews were forced to “sell” their properties at ridiculous prices prior to their expulsion, after which their assets

Dr. Judith Reifen-Ronen, ILOHA, former manager of The Golda Meir Memorial Association, free-lance editor and historian on German Jewry and rescue efforts from Nazi Germany.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of IOHA - International Oral History Association, Barcelona 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Esther Meir Glitzenstein, “Zionist or Refugees: The Historical Aspect of the Uprooting of the Jews from Arab Countries and their Immigration to Israel”, *Justice*, no. 50, 2012, pp. 21-28; Martin Gilbert, *In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands*, Yale University Press, 2010; translation to Hebrew by Levana Zamir, Keness Hafakot, Tel-Aviv, 2013.

[66] were confiscated by the authorities. The Jews were forced to leave their homeland.

This was an enormous trauma for people whose ancestors had lived for hundreds - even thousands - of years in a country which they considered home. Much has been written of the psychological effects on people who were suddenly torn away from their home and forced to escape.

Margalit Bejarano observed in her latest book: *The stories of the interviewees are of ordinary people who were trapped in extraordinary events*. As a historian Bejarano emphasizes how critical oral history testimonies are to our understanding of historical events: *The confrontation of history with memory is one of the major subjects treated by oral historians who analyze interviews not only as historical evidence but rather as interpretations of past experiences that reflect the period and the historical context in which the interviews were conducted*.<sup>3</sup>

Here are two examples which reflect the impact of the sudden exile forced upon two Jewish families. One was expelled from Syria in the 1940s, the other from Egypt in the 1950s:

Yaakov was one of the seven children of Shlomo Chooly, a hard working shoemaker from Damascus, and of his wife Badia (beauty). In his testimony he describes the sudden flight to Israel. *After the outbreak of WWII, restrictions against the Jews prevented my father from providing for his family. He joined other Jewish men that went to work in Tel Aviv and every weekend would return to Damascus, taking a taxi from Haifa. In 1942 there were riots in Damascus... my father wrote to my*

---

<sup>3</sup> Margalit Bejarano, *The Jewish Community of Cuba: Memory and History*, The Hebrew University, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 2014, pp. 20, 23.

*mother a letter via Europe, telling her to close the house, take the children and come to Israel... It was in 1942, I was a boy (eight) but I remember it clearly. We left Damascus by bus, escorted by two Arab smugglers. We drove by bus until Quneitra...from there we started to walk the mountains... towards evening we saw shimmering lights. We were lifted on to the rowing boat by Palmach soldiers. They brought us to a kibbutz, where we were given a tent to live in.<sup>4</sup>*

[67]

---

The exile of a wealthy Jewish family from Egypt, ten years later, was described by Levana Zamir (b. 1938) who made Aliyah from Cairo with her family in 1950.<sup>5</sup> Levana's family (including her six brothers) lived in the Jewish community found in the elite Cairo quarter of Helwan. This community had been established by her mother's grandfather- David Mosseri. She described:

*My mother was a Zionist. She wanted to leave Egypt although she was from the Mosseri family who lived in Egypt since 1750... a rich, well known family... one of them received the title Bey, Nissim Bey Mosseri. They were accepted in Royal Circles by the Kings of Egypt. An ancient family in Egypt although we came from Italy. Levana, who grew up as a teenager, in a well-established wealthy, respected family, describes the horror, the fear of being expelled from Egypt: after the establishment of Israel, Egyptian officers entered our house, in the middle of the night...I remember the small children terrified in their beds, and they (the Egyptian officers), were searching and turning everything upside down... they took my uncle to a detention camp in Egypt. He came out chained*

---

<sup>4</sup> Yaakov Chooly, June 7, 2014, Petah-Tikva, Israel, video interview by Judith and Ephraim Ronen.

<sup>5</sup> Levana Zamir, May 6, 1985, interviewer: Jehuda Tal, Oral History Division, The Hebrew University, 10(197).

[68]

*straight to a ship that took him to Italy, because we had Italian citizenship... then I understood. They said: he is a Zionist.*

Since 1948, entire communities were forced to flee - over 750,000 to Israel and another 300,000 to other countries, primarily to the USA, Canada, and Europe. During the last twenty years Oral History projects were initiated among these Jewish communities. University history departments and local organizations have shown eagerness to undertake oral history projects in the history of this phenomenon. The projects have cast light on the personal stories of those who were forced to flee.

Professor Henry Green, of Miami University, initiated such a project in the USA and England, an international oral history project by the name of *Sephardi Voices*. The testimonies he collected are housed at the British Library, London. The *Jimena* organization for Jews originating from the Middle East and North Africa has its center in the USA and has been interviewing members of the communities. Another example is the psychologist Dr. Helen Trigano, who, 15 years ago, established the oral history testimony archive in Paris - *Archives De La Memoire Sepharade*. Trigano personally interviewed many of the North Africans Jews who emigrated in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to France.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Hélène Trigano, "Fragments de la mémoire sépharade", A film presented by Dr. H. Trigano at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, on May 25, 2014.

Immigration from Islamic Countries to Israel 1948-2010

A total of 765,400



The majority of the immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa settled in Israel. Israel became unique as the country home to the largest variety of Jewish communities from the Islamic world. Since the 1950s, organizations were established to preserve the uniqueness of each diaspora, their identity and their legacy for generations to come.<sup>7</sup>

Oral history is one of the basic instruments to acknowledge, document and preserve the legacy of the family and the community at large. Therefore, it is of great importance to map the data on oral history collections and enable researchers and the general public to have access to authentic stories of the individual and the communities.<sup>8</sup> Mapping oral

<sup>7</sup> Yaron Tsur, *A Torn Community: The Jews of Morocco And Nationalism*, 2002, (Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> Margalit Bejarano, November 2012, Yad Ben Zvi, Jerusalem; Margalit Bejarano, "Oral Testimonies: History and Theory", *Arhion*, no. 13, 2005, The Association of Israeli Archivists. (Hebrew).

[70]

---

history archives facilitates the location of interviews on specific subjects, and will prevent interviews with persons who have already been interviewed, thus directing interviewers to new interviewees. For researchers the data which is in the process of being accumulating, defines the target and the diversity of the interviewees, defines criteria and opens possibilities for comparative study between generations and between communities.

### **Jews from the Middle East and North Africa: Oral History collections in Israel**

The methodologies of Oral History practice have developed and changed over the years in reflection of the changes in the broader discourse within both historical research and the society more broadly. Oral history, as a distinct practice, was first defined at Columbia University in 1948 and when it arrived in Israel in the 1950s was almost exclusively the preserve of universities and research institutions. Over time, however, a process of democratization has occurred. The telling and recording of oral histories, and the initiation and management of oral history projects, has been taken up directly by the communities themselves.

A major change occurred 25 years ago when technologically simple and affordable devices became available. Simultaneously, the importance and value of oral history testimonies was increasingly recognized. Oral history projects were conducted professionally and non-professionally by individuals, organizations, political parties, kibbutzim, villages and urban communities that came from the same diaspora. Some were financed while the others were done voluntarily. The first and second generations felt the urgency to record their narratives, as both personal histories and as a public record of their roles in the building of the state and the



making of its history. Oral history became a popular national phenomenon.

[71]

---

The result is that we have a huge number of testimonies and, in order to make this information accessible, it is necessary to systematically map all the Oral History collections on Jews from Islamic countries to be found in Israeli archives. The goal is to uncover unknown material scattered throughout Israel.

### **Where can be found oral history testimonies in Israel?**

Oral histories on Jews from the Middle East and North Africa can be found in the following archives:

- The Israel State Archive
- Universities and Research Institutions
- Political movements' archives
- Organizations, Associations and Museums
- Municipalities, local councils, villages, kibbutzim
- Genealogical societies
- Private collections

The major collections include:

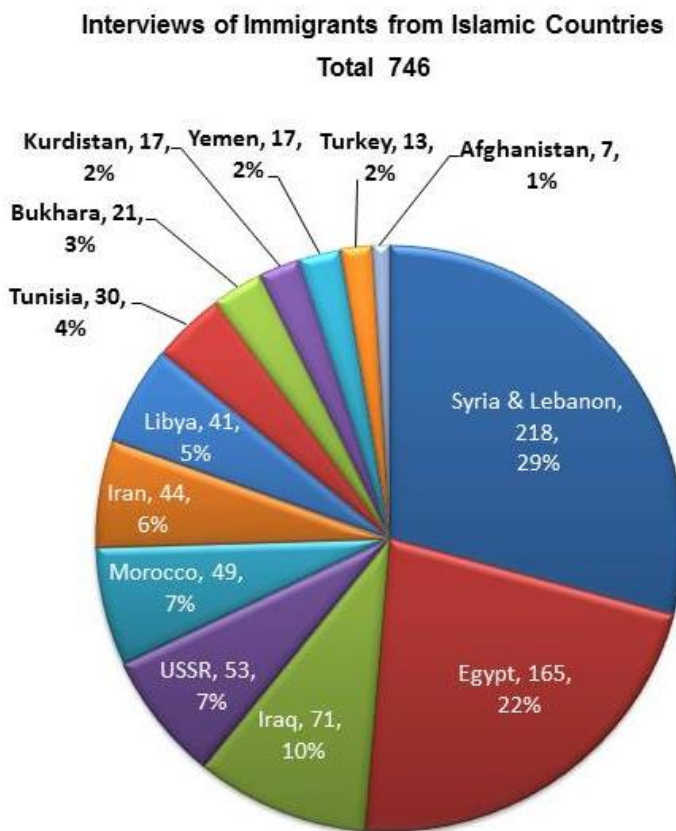
**The Hebrew University of Jerusalem**, The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Oral History Division (OHD): The Academic Director, Dr. Sharon Kangisser-Cohen. <http://www.hum.huji.ac.il>

The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry began collecting oral histories for the purpose of historical research in 1959. The Institute had a particular interest in collecting from sources that were difficult to access, such as the

[72]

history of the Holocaust or the Jewish communities in Arab countries. These early interviews covered a wide range of subjects. The collection contains 12,000 interviews (as of 2015), in 20 languages, and has been conducted according to highly professional standards.

The archive holds 746 interviews relating to the Jews from Islamic countries that made Aliyah to Israel from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen, Turkey and Kurdistan. Syria, Lebanon and Egypt hold 52% of the testimonies which focus on the history and narratives of individuals and communities.



These interviews relate to the Jewish communities during WWII, the Zionist movements in different Islamic countries and the absorption of Jews from Arab countries in Israel.<sup>9</sup> The interviews are transcribed; their abstracts and keywords appear on the Hebrew University's website.

In addition to the stories of those who immigrated to Israel, the Oral History Division houses copies of 80 interviews conducted by *Jimena* with emigrants who fled to North America.

**The Israel Folktale Archives (IFA)**, The Faculty of Humanities, University of Haifa: Academic director, Dr. Haya Milo. <http://ifa.haifa.ac.il>

The Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), named in honour of its founder Prof. Dov Noy, was established in 1955. Two principle motives led to their establishment. Firstly, Noy wanted to collect, save and document the oral folk narratives brought, from the numerous ethnic and cultural backgrounds represented in Israeli society by newly arriving immigrants, and remembered by veteran Israelis. A second aim was to facilitate the systematic research of these folk narratives using modern scientific methods.

The IFA has the world's largest collection of folktales. It houses over 24,000 recorded narratives including 8,487 interviews from immigrants from Islamic Countries. It initiates folktale research and publishes scientific research from its collection. It plays an important role in advancing the cultural heritage of Israel's many ethnic communities and encouraging open dialogue between cultures and ethnicities. Since 1983 the archive is housed at the Haifa University which enables the

---

<sup>9</sup> Information provided by Margalit Bejarano, former academic director of the Oral History Division at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Jerusalem.

[74]

continuation of interviews at the university as part of the academic social sciences curriculum.

**The Yad Tabenkin Archives (YTA):** The Research and Documentation Center of The Kibbutz Movement:  
Director: Dr. Aharon Azati. [www.yadtabenkin.org.il](http://www.yadtabenkin.org.il)

Yad Tabenkin Archives were established in 1975. The oral history collection was initiated and financed by the YTA and conducted by professional interviewers. It holds 9,325 interviews.

**The Institute for Research on Zionist and Pioneer Movements in Eastern and Sephardic Communities** in Yad Tabenkin was established in 1979 by Dr. Yitzhak Avrahami who made Aliyah from Tunisia and was one of the founders of kibbutz Regavim near Haifa. Dr. Isaac Guershon was the institute's director until its closure; The institute initiated oral testimonies of Jewish communities in Islamic countries including testimonies of leaders and *Shlichim* – emissaries of the youth movements in Eretz Israel who were sent in the 1940s to the Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> This important corpus holds 206 Interviews. It focuses on North Africa with three-quarters of the interviews coming from those who fled Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. A collection from this oral history archive was published in 2011.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Judith Reifen-Ronen, "The 'Solel Boneh' Unit 745 Royal Engineers: The first unit exclusively composed of Jews from the yishuv in the British Army during WWII", in: *Olive Leaves and Sword*, volume 14, editor: Nir Mann, Israel 2014, pp. 271-301. (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> Azriel Kamon, *New Frontiers: Jewish immigrants from Islamic Countries Settlement in Moshavim, in the 1950s*, Yad Tabenkin, Israel 2011. (Hebrew).

**The Pinhas Lavon Institute for Labor Movement Research**

Chair: Dr. Miriam Katchansky. [www.amalnet.k12.il](http://www.amalnet.k12.il)

[75]

---

In 1973, Prof. Yehuda Sluzki of the Tel Aviv University and a member of the Higher Education Department of the Histadrut, (The trade unions organization which became one of the most powerful institutions of Israel until 2000s), founded the Center for Oral History Testimonies. The project was a joint venture of the Histadrut and the archives of the Labor party, reflecting the historical affiliations of the two organizations. The aim of the project was, as Sluzki defined it: *to interview, first-hand, members of the Israel Labor party. Preserve the legacy and activities [of the party] towards the establishment of the state of Israel; leaders and politicians of the labor party forming the government of Israel in the years 1948-1977.* The Histadrut financed the project until it closed in the 1990s.

The collection holds 572 interviews out of which approximately 75 are of leaders and political figures who emigrated from Iraq, Yemen and Tunisia. They served in high positions in the labor government, the labor party and the Histadrut. All interviews were highly professional; most of the interviewees were historians and academic researchers. As in other research institutes of those times, finances were invested also in transcripts of the testimonies, in order to facilitate usage of the material by academic researchers. Sluzki emphasized the oral history's importance: *oral history testimonies are sometimes the only source and evidence to events where there are no other documents. In many incidences it explains and enlightens aspects unknown or forgotten, and sometimes it leads the way to unexpected documents and to unknown events.* Nearly two thirds of the interviews were done in the 1970s. Three years after the beginning of the project, the first out of the four annotated oral history indexes (which covers the whole collection) has been issued for the public.

[76]

**Babylonian Jewry Heritage Museum**  
**Or Yehudah, Israel** [www.babylonjewry.org.il](http://www.babylonjewry.org.il)

The Museum holds a library and reconstructed artifacts from the life of Jews in Iraq since the destruction of the first temple, 2,500 years ago.

Oral history interviews were conducted towards the end of the 1970s by scholars from the Iraqi Israeli community. The collection holds 1,200 interviews of which 400 are transcribed. 10% are interviews with *shlichim*, Jewish emissaries from Eretz Israel who were active in rescuing Iraqi Jews.<sup>12</sup> Many of the testimonies were given to the Museum by academic researchers.<sup>13</sup>

**The Jabotinsky Institute in Israel:**

Director General: Yossi Ahimeir. [www.jabotinsky.org](http://www.jabotinsky.org)

The Institute is composed of the Jabotinsky Museum and the Archives of the Jabotinsky Movement. (The Jabotinsky or Revisionist Movement was known as the *Irgun* or *Etzel* during the Mandatory years). Both the museum and the archives showcase the movement's history, factions, institutions and prominent personalities.

The archive comprises 850 oral history testimonies including 116 group interviews. Out of the 750 individual interviews - 100 feature immigrants from Islamic countries. Most interviews are transcribed. Dr. Yosef Pa'amoni, who initiated the oral history testimonies in the 1950s and 1960s, focused on interviews about *Etzel's* battles for Jerusalem. The institute initiated projects in the 1970s and 1990s on the Revisionist

---

<sup>12</sup> Among the *shlichim* who smuggled out Iraqi families, was Max Reifen (the author's uncle), who's testimony is housed at Or Yehuda.

<sup>13</sup> Yaacob Zamir, librarian, June 2014, interviewer J. Reifen-Ronen.

movement during the Mandate period. The oral history collection holds cassettes and transcripts whereas the filmed video interviews, individuals and groups are not transcribed.<sup>14</sup>

[77]

---

The majority of the interviewees who emigrated from Islamic countries, similar to their Ashkenazi brethren, focused on patriotic duty over personal fate and described in detail their heroic participation in *Etzel's* military operations. The Oral History collection's data is accessible on the website.

### **Private initiatives**

**Toldot Yisrael**, Documenting Israel's 1948 Generation, Founder and Executive Director: Aryeh Halivni. [www.toldotyisrael.org](http://www.toldotyisrael.org)

Toldot Yisrael is a Jerusalem based nonprofit organization dedicated to recording and sharing the firsthand testimonies of the men and women who helped found the State of Israel. Since the project began in 2008, there have been in excess of 2,500 interview sessions with over 1,000 individuals and approximately 5,000 hours of archival video footage. 100 of Toldot Yisrael's interviewees were from Islamic countries, amongst them agents from the Yishuv, active in the underground in Iraq and soldiers in the British army in North Africa during WWII. The archive is housed in The Israel National Library, Jerusalem.

### **Preserving the Iraqi language**

[www.facebook.com/groups/zahavb](https://www.facebook.com/groups/zahavb)

One finds numerous private initiatives which consider the video and audio oral history conversations, as means to

---

<sup>14</sup> Amira Stern, Archive's manager, The Jabotinsky Institute, May 2014, interviewer Judith Reifen-Ronen.

[78]

recapture their tradition, as it used to be in their past “homeland”. One example is the widely spread “Preserving the Iraqi language”, initiated by Zehava Bracha on Facebook.<sup>15</sup> It is an example of the possibilities of the media to communicate with large and rare groups of people. In this case, it involves people from Israel, their neighbors from by gone years and acquaintances from Iraq.

## Conclusions

This article brings a few examples of collections of oral history testimonies from Jews from Islamic countries. However this data project is at its first phase and it will be appreciated if readers will supply to the author additional information on other available sources.<sup>16</sup> This information will be published in subsequent issues of *Remembrance and Research*.

Since the establishment of the oral history collections in Israel there have been changes in many aspects. From the 1950s until the 1980s oral history interviews focused on leaders and politicians. During those years, the political parties, universities and a small number of institutes initiated oral history projects, investing funds in equipment and in transcripts. Much of the practical use of the testimony is a result of having the ability to read it. As a result one finds transcripts in most of the archives from those years.

Due to lack of funds many archives and institutes were not able to continue with their interviewing project although modern technical means have been facilitating the procedure of

---

<sup>15</sup> Anat Lev-Adler, An Outstanding Friendship: Iraqi people from Iraq and Israeli-Iraqi Jews. *Ynet*, 27.7.2015  
<http://xnet.ynet.co.il/win/articles/0,14717,L-3110028,00.html>

<sup>16</sup> Judith Reifen-Ronen, *The Importance of Oral Testimonies' Data*, a lecture, ILOHA, Jerusalem, 2003. [J-ronen@zahav.net.il](mailto:J-ronen@zahav.net.il)



interviewing. Therefore a major part of their oral history collections are only up to the 1990s. During the last years, initiatives have been taken by private people and organizations whose concern is to preserve the national and cultural legacies.

[79]

---

The ordinary person's testimony has become exceedingly important during the last twenty odd years. Researchers like Portelli, Lieblich, Bejarano, Ofer, Shelly-Newman and many others, emphasize the personal narratives of the ordinary person who participated or was a witness to dramatic, historical events.

Interviewing, however, is only a first phase of rescuing the memories of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. The preparation of data base on all the oral histories collection, including information on their accessibility to the public is instrumental for the development of further projects.