


deep concern. The privatization process seems to undermine the bonds of social solidarity and cultural identity, hence strengthening the centrifugal forces of the globalization. Nationhood is still powerful, but the meaning, the content of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, is a cause for self-questioning.

One of the features of globalization is a devaluation of knowledge, a delegitimization of knowledge, both religious and secular. Among Jews, this process is particularly evident: a respect for knowledge, whether religious or secular, was always part and parcel of Jewish tradition. To the culture of malls and McDonalds, it is important to pose an alternative of ideals that would offer values and morals: an understanding of a common past that empowers and justifies the present; a common

heritage and identification with *am olam*. The first step would be to cultivate the Hebrew language not only in Israel, but in the Diaspora. If we wish to preserve Jewish identity, we must create a common cultural tradition. In the Second Temple Period, it was customary to announce the start of a new month by lighting beacons on mountaintops. This was how our forefathers ensured adherence to a common calendar. We must start lighting beacons, symbolizing the deep bonds that connect all segments of the Jewish people. We have no control over globalization as a worldwide economic process. But the counter-reaction to it must come from us, out of the recognition of our cultural uniqueness, our pride in it, and our desire to sustain it, even in the face of sweeping sameness. 

Globalization and the Rebirth of European Jewry

Diana Pinto

AN ANECDOTE RECOUNTS that a rabbi in Vilna, upon hearing about Napoleon's victorious advance into Poland, replied wryly, "Good for the Jews, bad for Judaism." He was of course referring to the revolutionary consequences of emancipation. Many official rabbis in historically established communities across Europe feel the same way today with respect to globalization. A world Jewish community spanning all time zones and all Internet addresses has brought new life, new networking, and new initiatives to European Jewry. The result has been the emergence of a kaleidoscope of Jewish identities with little concern for national borders and a new generation of Jews who happily crisscross Europe to enjoy the continent's reinvigorated Jewish spaces. And, in the process, they are throwing the old national Jewish community hierarchies into disarray.

As a result of globalization, there are no longer "forgotten" or "abandoned" Jews on the European continent: not only through the work of the most globalized of all Judaisms, Chabad, or through the active intervention of American Jewish and Israeli institutions that played a seminal role in bringing Judaism back to life in the former communist lands of Europe. There now is a new grassroots renewal of Judaism that owes its existence to informal networking and the Internet. Jews who want to feel "Jewish" in the most remote Ukrainian village or in the smallest Italian provincial

town, both bereft of a rabbi, can now belong to the Jewish family. For example, a young Jewish homosexual in a Northern Italian town announced on an Italian Jewish website, *Kolot* (which sends its articles by email), that he and his partner (born to a Jewish father) were forming a local Jewish group open to Jews, half-Jews, or people with some Jewish ancestry who were serious about renewing Judaism. Such an initiative would have been unthinkable in the past, for there was no Jewish communal "authority" that would have allowed him to do so and no independent public to learn about it. The Internet and increased European networking have allowed many Jews who felt alienated from traditional communities to discover that there is a Judaism that is open and welcoming while respecting some traditional beliefs. Rather than proving alienating, this Internet Judaism has been transformed into a living Jewish reality across Europe. The young Italian Jew, for instance, can now gravitate toward the newly established Reform community in Milan — a community that grew out of a mixture of lay Jews and old-Italian Humanistic Jews who could no longer bear the ever "blacker" Israeli and Middle Eastern immigrant-induced official Italian Judaism of today, as well as Conservative and Reform American expatriate Jews who could not fit into the official Orthodox communities governed by state-sanctioned "Chief Rabbis."

America's pluralist Judaism, imported and

reinterpreted by European Jews has thus, in a new globalized context, wrought havoc with the old European Jewish model. It could do so because the historical underpinnings were no longer relevant in the post-1989 pluralist democratic European setting. Postwar European Jews, used to centuries of anti-semitism and traumatized by the Holocaust, still instinctively huddled around the central synagogue and its official rabbi as a shelter against a potentially hostile world. Unity was more important than the nature of the Jewish content for Jews who were “Jewish” often in a traditional family manner.

This is no longer the case today. Across Europe, Jews of all ages, and especially young Jews, are taking their Judaism seriously; they are no longer interested in labelling themselves “Jewish” out of traditional respect for their forefathers or because six million died in the Shoah. Their search for significant Jewish content has been considerably strengthened by a simple fact: Europe’s pluralist societies

are now actively interested in Judaism as an integral part of their own national patrimony. Non-Jewish interest in “things Jewish” has thus made Judaism even more attractive for many young Jews, who are proud of being the inheritors of such a rich pluralist tradition.

Young Jews want Judaism to be compatible with their more general worldviews, and as a result, there has been a profound two-sided transformation. Some Jews have changed their lifestyles to meet the criteria of a renewed ultra-Orthodoxy. Others, instead, want their Judaism to be compatible with their pluralist civil society lives. Either way, there has been a distancing from the old official European Jewish communities that, in a desperate attempt to restrengthen their legitimacy, began to take their cues from Israel’s official state Orthodox establishment. But even this tie was not Orthodox enough for the new globalized Orthodox and too “Orthodox” for those who were committed to equally globalized Conservative and Liberal movements.

This double shift has had major consequences in Europe’s Jewish world. Chabad, ultra-Orthodox Judaism, and Liberal and Conservative Judaisms have become strange allies in breaking the monopoly of the official communities with respect to legal rights, partial state subsidies, and above all, official and public recognition. Most countries must now accept that there is more than one type of Judaism and that they can no longer have a unique “top Jew” as interlocutor. As with all globalization, state sanctioned Jewish monopolies have been broken to the benefit of multiple Jewish voices.

The battle was not and is still not easy, but it is slowly coming to an end. Globalization has ensured that no group can destroy the other or turn it into a Jewish outlaw. Pragmatic coexistence, if not always religiously or culturally friendly, is becoming the norm. More important, different Jews do come spontaneously together in the crucial realms of community welfare, charity, the fight against antisemitism, and the defence of Israel’s right to exist. Slowly a new type of Jewish house is being built that will hold under its virtual roof all Jewish identities as Jews across Europe come to understand that different ways of being Jewish are a sign of renewed Jewish life and vigor, not divisiveness and weakness. Globalization has enriched, not impoverished, European Jewry.

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January 2006
Shevat 5766

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
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ISSN: 0049-0385 December 2005

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