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Underground Publishing and the Public Sphere



Transnational Perspectives

Wiener Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 6

LIT

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**Written Contraband: The Jewish Resistance Press
during the Military Dictatorship in Argentina
(1976-1983)**

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Beschnüffelten alles, kramten herum
In Hemden, Hosen, Schnupftüchern.
Sie suchten nach Spitzen, nach Bijouterien,
Auch nach verbotenen Büchern.

Ihr Toren, die Ihr im Koffer sucht!
Hier werdet Ihr nichts entdecken!
Die Contrebande, die mit mir reist,
die habe ich im Kopfe stecken.

Heinrich Heine¹

Not only the concept of the text as woven cloth, derived from Talmudic hermeneutics, but also a history of persecution brought Jewish culture a legacy of verbal mechanisms intended to transmit texts, information, and knowledge in deliberately hidden ways. The Jews created a “culture of marranism”² that allowed them to resist repression and clandestinely preserve their traditions

¹ They poked among handkerchiefs, shirts, and hose/ They rummaged in likely places/ They were nosing about for prohibited books/ And jewelry and laces/ Ye fools, who turn my boxes out/ There’s nothing there forbidden/ The contraband I travel with/ In my head is safely hidden. (Heinrich Heine, *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*, translation by James Wald).

² The Spanish and Portuguese Jews who, seeking to avoid the Expulsion (1492 in Spain, 1497 in Portugal) and the Inquisition, officially “converted” to Catholicism, but secretly kept some of their traditions, were called “marranos.” On the history of the marranos, see Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1932); Leon Poliakov, *Histoire de l’antisémitisme*, t. II: *De Mahome aux Marranes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1961); Nathan Wachtel, *La Foi du souvenir: Labyrinthes marranes* (Paris:

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through the centuries. From Emperor Justinian's decree in 553 C.E. forbidding Jews to work as translators of sacred texts,³ to the concealment of banned texts during the Inquisition, to the circulation of clandestine texts and writings in the concentration camps,⁴ they managed to communicate in other ways. Taking into account that Western government is based on Christian theology and Roman law, from the Jewish perspective interaction between censorship and secret texts has existed for almost two thousand years.

In his article "Der neue Midrasch," Ernst Simon recalls the utilization of these rhetorical resources in 1930s Germany:

A persecuted minority still believed, as in the era of the editing of the *midrash*, in a private language to use in their confrontation with the outside world. Their enemies would only rarely understand this language, while their compatriots and coreligionists almost always would. . . . So, a certain daring style was developed that flew from the speaker to the listener and back, a certain way of intimate and conspiratorial understanding that brought them together.⁵

The coincidence that the name of the evil Haman, who wanted to annihilate the Jewish community of Persia, and the name of Hitler began with the

Le Seuil, 2001). On parallels to other processes of persecution, Cecil Roth, "Marranos and Racial Antisemitism. A Study in Parallels," *Jewish Social Studies* II (1940): 239-248; and Yosef Chayim Yerushalmi, *Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: The Iberian and the German Models* (London: Leo Baeck Institute, 1982).

³ Pierre Legendre, "Les juifs se livrent à des interprétations insensées. Expertise d'un text," in *La psychanalyse est-elle une histoire juive*, ed. A. Rassial, J.J. Rassial (Paris: Le Seuil, 1981), 93-113; Liliana Ruth Feierstein, "N. de la T.: los pies del texto," in *Traducción y poder: Sobre marginados, infieles, hermeneutas y exilados*, ed. Liliana Ruth Feierstein, Vera Elizabeth Gerling (Frankfurt/Main: Vervuert, 2008), 17-33.

⁴ David Shavit, *Hunger for the Printed Words: Books and Libraries in the Jewish Ghettos of Nazi-Occupied Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997); Alberto Manguel, "La pequeña biblioteca de Auschwitz," *Clarín*, 7 January 2003.

⁵ Ernst Simon, "Der neue Midrasch," in *Aufbau im Untergang: Jüdische Erwachsenenbildung im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland als geistiger Widerstand*, Chapter 4 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1959), p. 77, our translation. *Midrash* refers to traditional rabbinical intertextual readings of canonical texts. On the methods and history of midrash, see Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Günter Stemberger, *Midrasch: Vom Umgang der Rabbinen mit der Bibel* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1989).

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same letter made the parallels, in this case, even more evident to those whose ears were trained by tradition. As Leo Strauss wrote in his well-known essay *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), focusing on the authors of classical antiquity, “Persecution cannot prevent even public expressions of the heterodox truth, for a man of independent thought can utter his views in public and remain unharmed, provided he moves with circumspection. He can even utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines.”⁶ This culture of writing between the lines, which we call here the legacy of the *marrano* tradition, is also found in the Jewish resistance press during the last military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983) – though not always “without incurring any danger.”⁷ The regime of repression and terror was responsible for the killing of almost one hundred independent or opposition journalists among a total of thousands of “disappeared people.”⁸ In this violent context, little journalistic writing could fool the censors and relate information about the situation in the country. One successful example, however, was the clandestine press agency ANCLA, created by the writer Rodolfo Walsh for a guerrilla organization known as the Montoneros.⁹ Another was *Humor Registrado*, which, under the pretense of being a satirical

⁶ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 24.

⁷ It is interesting that one well-known Jewish-Argentine philosopher, Santiago Kovadloff, even under the dictatorship applied the “Christian” metaphor of a “culture of catacombs” to groups of intellectuals seeking to avoid the censorship of the Junta. See Santiago Kovadloff, *Una cultura de catacumbas y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Botella al mar, 1982), 13-17.

⁸ “Los periodistas desaparecidos,” published by the Unión de Trabajadores de Prensa de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires, 2004). “Desaparecidos”: the victims who were kidnapped, tortured, and executed by the military in Argentina “disappeared” without leaving traces of their existence – an uncanny psychological strategy that inflicted a collective trauma on Argentine society. The number of victims is not clear: about 10,000 cases have been documented by human rights organizations (*Nunca más*, the first report prepared in the aftermath of the dictatorship, in 1984, counts 8,956; after that time, more cases were documented). Since a number of cases have not been made public because of fear, some human rights organizations estimate the number of victims at about 30,000.

⁹ Walsh was wounded and apparently killed by a paramilitary group in an ambush in Buenos Aires in 1977, the day after he wrote “An Open Letter to the Military Junta,” denouncing its crimes. On ANCLA, see Horacio Verbitsky, *Rodolfo Walsh y la prensa clandestina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de la Urraca, 1985).

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magazine, became practically the only mass-circulation resistance publication. The other two examples were periodicals published for Argentina's ethnic communities: the *Buenos Aires Herald*,¹⁰ written in English and therefore limited in its readership, and the newspaper on which this paper will focus, *Nueva Presencia*.¹¹

Writing between the lines

Nueva Presencia had its origins in the Jewish community and gradually came to be the voice of several human rights organizations. It represented a key phenomenon in the history of independent journalism in Argentina, as it was the first time a Jewish publication was in the political vanguard and recognized by different sectors of society, despite the precariousness of its aesthetics and the way in which it had to carry out its work. Above all, its stature owed much to its combative posture during the dictatorship.

We will focus on the short history of the publication and on the different literary tactics used to fool the censors.¹² Among these devices were an indirect response to certain issues, a kind of literary *displacement* (for example, the fabrication of intra-community polemics or the use of existing controversies with an exact counterpart in the national situation – the same trick Heine used in his play *Almansor*, where the Moor is a camouflaged Jew); a two-level discourse using different messages in texts and illustrations; and the gradual inclusion in the weekly's pages of authors and subjects unrelated to its original

¹⁰ On the *Buenos Aires Herald* and the civil courage of its editor in these times, Robert Cox, see Luis Bruchstein, "Las notas del Herald salvaron vidas humanas," *Página 12*, 1 May 2001.

¹¹ Another well-known newspaper was *La Opinión*, edited and published by Jacobo Timerman. Timerman (born in Ukraine in 1923 and raised in Argentina) was engaged in a long, brilliant journalist career when he was kidnapped in 1977 in the province of Buenos Aires (see *infra*). Up to this point, he had been receiving the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) and somehow trying to help them. The "Madres" is a group of mothers whose children had "disappeared."

¹² Our study is based on the testimony of its editor, Herman Schiller, and on the experience of Ricardo Feierstein, who worked as a journalist for *Nueva Presencia* during its ten years of existence (1978-1987).

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purpose. In general, these tactics took advantage of openings that permitted confrontation with a government hesitant to close down the publication or kill its journalists – as occurred with other newspapers. The military leaders feared repercussions in Jewish communities around the world and their supposed influence on the government of the United States, a notion that also informed the theoretical considerations of the local Nazis who supported the military leaders.

The experience of *Nueva Presencia* became an invitation to a very important sector of Argentine society to familiarize itself with the world of *midrashic* practices, to read between the lines and understand how the Biblical message “Justice, justice shalt thou follow” (Deuteronomy 16:20) could be applied to the contemporary situation.

The beginning

The decline of the Yiddish-language press around 1977 caused serious economic problems for the cooperative that published the daily newspaper *Di Presse*, the successors of those who had founded it in the early twentieth century (many of whom were members of the Jewish labor movement known as the Bund). Then the idea of publishing a paper in Spanish took root, with the aim of obtaining new readers while retaining the old ones. At that point the group called in Herman Schiller, who had just acquired journalistic experience at *Mundo Israelita*, a Spanish-language Jewish weekly established in the 1920s. He remembers it this way:

I wanted to sum up my previous attempts. Since the 1960s – therefore since my youth in a pioneer Zionist educational movement – one of the contradictions that bothered me most was the rare incorporation of Jews into the Argentine environment. And one of my fantasies was to create a journalistic bridge to connect to the progressive setting that seemingly was going to be introduced all over the world. Today the vision is different, but with the passing of time the point of view always changes: many things that we did in opposition to the dictatorship were heroic in those days, but seen from today they seem trifles; someone may ask: And that was all? I had a column in the newspaper *Mundo Israelita* that was titled “Hechos y resonancias” (Events and Echoes), where I not only related antisemitic events but also talked about the country, the

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things that were going on, the armed struggle. The editor, Gregorio Fainguersch, was an older, traditional man who didn't understand much of what I was doing ("What do the Jewish people and Israel and Zionism have to do with these stories about guerilla fighters?"), but he gave me that space, he had enough imagination to understand that he could approach young people through me and that the newspaper was being updated.¹³

Schiller's column continued to be controversial. At that time, the opportunity to work for *Di Presse* arose. Schiller suggested that translating the newspaper into Spanish made no sense and would end in failure; it was necessary to do something totally new to approach the new generations of potential Jewish readers.

That was the origin of *Nueva Presencia*, first published under his editorship on 9 July 1977 as a weekly supplement to the Yiddish newspaper. When that periodical ceased publication, *Nueva Presencia* continued as an independent weekly for a decade until June 1987. Its existence was the result of the almost single-handed efforts of its editor-in-chief, with the collaboration of a small group of journalists and writers. The editorial work was carried out in very precarious physical and security conditions.

This insecure situation included searching for sources of information and coping with material shortages of all sorts: over the course of many months, for example, it had available only a desk and an armchair located in the reception area of the old building at 330 Castelli Street, in the Balvanera neighborhood, where *Di Presse* operated. People who brought in articles or information had

¹³ All quotations of Herman Schiller in this article derive from interviews conducted by the authors in Buenos Aires in January 2006 and July 2011 (unpublished recording). At that time, Schiller stated that it was necessary to point out some differences when speaking about the resistance press: "Not everything started the same or in the same time period. If you take the magazine *Humor Registrado* for 1977/78, the harshest years of the dictatorship, it was extremely accommodating to the authorities. Up until the time of the Falklands War, in 1982, it maintained quite an aseptic position. Recently afterwards, when the end of the dictatorship could be glimpsed, the magazine clearly bet against it and became the mouthpiece of a great intellectual resistance. It is hard to talk about these things today, but that is the historical truth. . . . As for the *Buenos Aires Herald*, it is certain that it was opposed from the very beginning to the kidnappings and disappearances, with great bravery. But the difference is that the *Herald* at the same time gave support to the neoliberal economic policy of the dictatorship" (our translation from the Spanish interview transcript).

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to remain standing, or take seats in the bar on the corner, where the editorial team often did its work.

As the months went by (and parallel to the gradual decline of the Yiddish newspaper that was losing its readers for biological reasons, with no possibility of replacing them), *Nueva Presencia* grew – slowly at first and then extremely rapidly after the third or fourth year. As a result of the dearth of publications of this kind – in the Jewish community and, above all, in the Argentine information market, owing to the strict censorship imposed by the dictatorship – the weekly attracted more and more readers, Jews and non-Jews, and was able to engage many contributors from the nation's journalistic and intellectual community, many of them not Jewish. Not only that it was published in Spanish, as was already becoming the case for a great many of the Judeo-Argentine publications, but also its criticism of the regime and the act of giving words (explicit or between the lines) to what was happening in the country made *Nueva Presencia* a rarity in a country silenced by fear. Repeated threats on the telephone, several bombings at the printing works, and intimidations of all kinds were part of the daily lives of those who worked on the newspaper.

Schiller, along with this team, built a new kind of relationship with parts of the Jewish community and with local political channels and currents of national opinion. This was possible because of the weekly's resonance with vast segments of the country's population, including intellectuals and trade unions. In 1982 this led to the creation of the Jewish Movement for Human Rights (MJDH), in conjunction with Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, an American working in Argentina and one of the founders of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary in Buenos Aires.¹⁴

Nueva Presencia generated strong opposition, as much from the inner circles of the Jewish community as from the national media. Moreover, antagonism came not only from the agents of the military dictatorship, but also from those who were supposedly part of the resistance, whose ancestral prejudices were roused. The latter was often based on a traditional Catholic anti-Judaism – unconscious at times – that was prevalent among considerable num-

¹⁴ On Marshall T. Meyer and his engagement for human rights in Argentina, see Diego Rosenberg, *Marshall Meyer: El rabino que le vio la cara al Diablo* (Buenos Aires: Capital Intelectual, 2011).

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bers of people in Argentina whose primary socialization was influenced by a Church that was conservative and in some cases openly antisemitic.¹⁵ Moreover, during certain periods, the almost systematic confrontation with the distinct “establishments” – the military government, the leadership of the Jewish community, Israeli spokesmen’s official version of the conflict in the Middle East – led to the isolation of the periodical’s editors both personally and publicly.

From the beginning, *Nueva Presencia* presented itself as the interpreter of a progressive position that intended to engage in ideological battles from its own trenches (the Jewish community) and by extending its reach to the national situation. In the first edition, Schiller wrote, “It is not de-ghettoization that we seek, but the rapid recreation of the great Jewish values of all times, principally the fight for justice (for ourselves and for others).”¹⁶

A consonantal mode of writing

How do you say something without saying it? The consonantal structure of the Hebrew language trains writers and readers to be *interpreters*: part of the message must be reconstructed by each person. If today one tries to look at the situation with some distance, *Nueva Presencia* had a short *first stage* in which the focus laid on saying what no one else was saying. Later, during the *second* was *stage*, an indirect, *oblique* style was used in dealing with what was happening in the country by referring to current topics in the Jewish community. Conveniently, these issues formed a mimetic replica of what was happening in the wider world. It was expected that the censors would have their suspicions, but lacked the legal excuses necessary to intervene.

¹⁵ On the history of the Catholic Church in Argentina, see Horacio Verbitsky, *Historia política de la Iglesia en Argentina* (5 vols.) (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2007-2010); on the responsibility of the Catholic hierarchy for the crimes of the dictatorship, see Emilio Mignone, *Iglesia y Dictadura* (Buenos Aires: Colihue, 1986). Without doubt, a small part of the Church in Argentina was progressive, supporting the human rights movements, and a number of priests were murdered by the *militars*. Nevertheless, they were always a minority and had practically no access to the internal hierarchies of the institution.

¹⁶ “Ser argentinos, ser judíos” in *Nueva Presencia*, 9 July 1977.

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The transfer of meaning was (almost) evident in some cases. The tense atmosphere and the regime's violence did not allow the use of complex semiotic methods. "It was about tactics created in the moment, in a spontaneous manner and according to the present need," Schiller remembers, "It didn't suit us at that time to discuss every step, because the dizziness of the situation did not permit these intellectual luxuries."¹⁷ The members of the staff went around with portable typewriters on their backs and wrote wherever there was a table to put them on.

Schiller recalls, for example, a very "direct" example where it was not even necessary to read between the lines: "... a very harsh editorial at the time Argentina won the World Cup in 1978 in Buenos Aires. At that time, I published an editorial, pointing out that although the euphoria over the triumph was legitimate, it was also necessary to deal with important problems such as the 'disappeared' and poverty. This was the first bit of explicit resistance: it was developing with care, taking on topics that other periodicals didn't want to touch or couldn't touch."¹⁸

The most common type of *oblique message* was the above-mentioned *discursive displacement*. For example, the paper published "A Documented Chronicle of the Jewish Problem in Argentina," in which the author reviewed antisemitic tendencies – most of which enjoyed police and military support – that had cropped up during the past decades. Starting with a recount of the Nuremberg trials, Schiller expanded his discussion to include the problem of "fascism that continues alive and active in various corners of the planet." In 1978, on the anniversary of the death of General José de San Martín, the greatest hero in the historical iconography of Argentina (a figure with whom the military identified), he titled his article "San Martín, General of *Clean Wars*." Even though the entire text praised the leader, it took little imagination to tie it to the "dirty war" in which the Argentinean military was currently engaged.¹⁹

Studies of the history of Jewish workers and union members in Argentina appeared in the guise of anniversary reminders as well as biographies of fight-

¹⁷ Interview with Herman Schiller, our translation (see note 13).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "San Martín, General de guerras limpias," *Nueva Presencia*, 17 August 1978.

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ers for social justice during the first decades of the twentieth century. Schiller also reviewed commemorations of allusive dates from Jewish history and tradition, at the same time referring to present-day national and social issues. The anniversaries of the deaths of Moses Hess and Nachman Sirkin – two theoreticians of left-wing Zionism – led to a commentary on Jewish thought in relation to universalist views, headed “Neither Exploiters nor Exploited.”²⁰

In a similar way, an oblique message was conveyed on the occasion of Jewish holidays: Passover and the exodus from Egypt were presented as “the festival of liberty.” The recounting of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising against the Nazis was “for our and your liberation,” one of the slogans of its commander, Mordechaj Anielewicz.²¹ The Hanukkah story was described as a *guerrilla epic*,²² Purim was interpreted as the fight of the ancient Jews against *prejudice and oppressors*.²³ Each date of remembrance was converted into a reflection on present-day reality, a lesson with a practical application in the daily struggle. Although many metaphors recalled situations in which Jewish people had resisted with arms, *Nueva Presencia* was a civil movement and did not support the guerrilla activities in the country, which had begun in the 1960s. The historical allusions to armed struggle were more about recalling the right to resist and defend freedom.

This displacement can also be observed in the *publication of translations* or the re-publication of pieces that had been printed abroad on other topics. This was the case, for example, with an article by Raquel Hodara titled “Censorship in Judaism,” which had been published some weeks previously in *Tiempo de Tel Aviv*, a Spanish-language Israeli weekly.²⁴ The editor’s explanatory comment at the head of this article reads, “The violence done to the mind of a person because of his honest convictions is as reprehensible as the violence done to his body.” The entire text is “translatable” to the censorship practiced

²⁰ “Ni explotadores ni explotados,” *Nueva Presencia*, 4 May 1979.

²¹ This slogan repeated the nineteenth-century Polish battle cry “za naszą i waszą wolność” in the uprisings against the Russian Empire (1831). We thank Jan C. Behrends for this reference. It also appears in the first editorial of *Nueva Presencia* quoted above. The figure of Anielewicz has great resonance among this generation of left-wing Jews in Argentina.

²² “El status de los ricos y la rebellion,” *Nueva Presencia*, 3 December 1977.

²³ “Purim y el triunfo judío sobre la opresión,” *Nueva Presencia*, 9 March 1979.

²⁴ “La censura y el judaísmo,” *Nueva Presencia*, 11 January 1980.

El status de los ricos y la rebelión

Cuando a un pueblo lo tiraniza un invasor o una dictadura, succionando sus riquezas, matando a los disidentes, sometiendo a torturas a la oposición y generalizando un régimen de total esclavitud, ¿qué otro camino le resta que rebelarse para obtener la libertad?

En el siglo II A. C. la situación en Judea se había puesto muy difícil. La invasión en Medio Oriente por parte de Grecia ya había hecho estragos en la especificidad cultural de los judíos, por lo menos cien años antes.

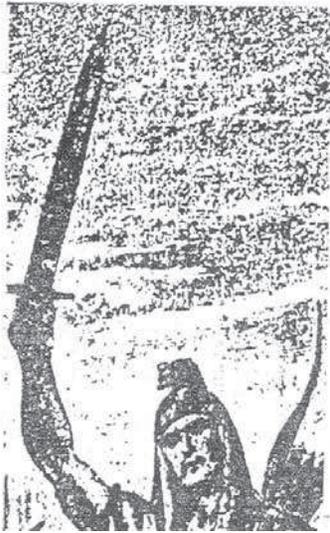
El modo de vida extremadamente ascético de los judíos de esa época —modo que trataba de conciliar al Estado con el credo—, era, quizás, "inevitable e insostenible" como lo señala un gran historiador judío, pero, al mismo tiempo, había desarrollado orgánicamente y en formas claras y precisas una internalización del sentimiento colectivo.

Este modo de vivir tan austero, a partir de una estructura económica agrícola-pastoral muy sencilla, tenía pública o privadamente a servir al cometido divino, chocó violentamente con la filosofía del Olimpo, cuya esencia —vitalmente pagana, incluso bajo el militarismo espartano—, se trasladó hacia Judea a través de un particular y sensual sentido de la religiosidad: adoración de muchas diosas, liviandad, insensibilidad, banquetes, honores...

del cargo que ejercía e implantar en Judea nuevos usos hebreos para lo cual viajó a Antioquia para ofrecerle al monarca una cuantiosa suma de dinero con tal de que lo designara. Como Sacerote en Jerusalén en lugar de Onías. Así lo hizo el rey que despojó a su titular del pontificado para remplazarlo por Jasón, que se convirtió en la mano derecha de Antioco IV Epifanes, haciéndolo respetar con mano dura el orden existente.

Sin embargo —por aquello, quizás, de que hasta los nuestros más seguros terminan por caer—, una nueva intriga dio por tierra con Jasón, quien, después de llegar al orden de arriba, tuvo que dejar paso al ambicioso Menelao. Este, que alcanzó el cargo porque prometió al soberano entregarle furores más elevados que sus acciones, despojó al Templo de sus tesoros y se los llevó a Antioquia, ciudad de residencia del rey. Allí, inesperadamente, se encontró con el primer Gran Sacerote depuesto —el antiguo Onías— quien comprobó con estupor el vaciamiento que había producido en el Templo de Jerusalén, con el consiguiente perjuicio moral y material que esa evasión de oro significaba para su país.

Menelao solucionó esa penitencia, dificultad asumiendo a Onías, pero el hecho llegó a conocimiento del pueblo que se rebeló contra el Gran



Eliezer y Jonatán) estaban inflamados de ardor y deseaban de terminar con las estructuras caducas.

Mattathías da la señal para el alzamiento al matar primero a sus hijos a un funcionario del rey en Modin llamado Apelca y a un judío traidor que pretendía congraciarse con el poder. Al mismo tiempo subyuga al pueblo a seguirlo en la lucha, estableciendo parcialmente contactos con todos los que vivían dispersos por el país y practicaban su religión a escondidas.

Al llamado responden miles de "hasidim", pero todos ellos —plenamente conscientes de que no podían desencadenar una contienda regular contra el poderoso ejército imperial—, huyen a las montañas e inician una de las primeras y más eficientes guerras de partisanos de la historia. En las escondidas, junto al Mar Muerto, en el desierto y en las cuevas de las montañas, preparan los hombres la gran resistencia y, cuando se presentan ocasiones propicias, atacan de improviso a los soldados, irrumpen en los ciudades y aldeas, matan a los judíos renegados y destruyen sus altares y templos paganos.

En los lugares ya liberados —circunscriptos al principio a puntos lejanos del país— los jefes entusiastas a sus combatientes leyendoles capítulos de los Salmos y de los Profetas. Los luchado-

in Argentina, although Hodara refers literally to a strictly religious problem centered on Moses and the Prophets.

The same topic of censorship and self-censorship is doubly addressed in a series of debates about "the cultural fascism in our community," which, although it took concrete elements from community political discussions, refers clearly to the fascist nature of the Argentine state. This allusion is reinforced by the inclusion of illustrations, translations of cartoons published in other countries. Some of the depicted scenes also invite reading between the lines, like someone writing illegible words on a wall and explaining, "Actually it says 'Long live freedom,' but I'm putting it in code to avoid running any risks."²⁵

Other caricatures, such as a huge pencil labeled "censorship," or a duel

²⁵ "Guía de los distraídos, pasión por el detalle," *Nueva Presencia*, 27 April 1979.

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RELIGION/POLEMICA

11/01/80

La violencia perpetrada contra la mente de un hombre a causa de sus convicciones honestas es tan condenable como la violencia perpetrada contra su cuerpo

La censura y el judaísmo

En un debate acerca del "Arte y Censura" transmitido recientemente por la televisión israelí, participó como defensor de la censura un hombre ortodoxo y aparentemente dotado de amplios conocimientos. Una de sus declaraciones (acompañada por un ejemplo que más tenía que ver con la política que con el arte) me produjo honda preocupación. Su afirmación respecto a la necesidad de prohibir que se exprese en un comentario u n a opinión que "contradice una norma de conducta de la absoluta mayoría" (¿y quién podría medir en cada caso si esa mayoría supera el 90 por ciento, como él sugiere?) me hizo pensar que: a) la preservación de la democracia en Israel n o p u e d e darse por descontada, sino que sus defensores deben permanecer en constante estado de alerta y b) que cuando entramos al campo de la política no son pocos los judíos ortodoxos que tienden a olvidar los principios de nuestra religión cuando éstos no sirven a sus intereses.

Uno de estos principios es el expresado en el famoso versículo bíblico que reza: "No seguirás a la multitud para hacer el mal" (Éxodo XXIII, vers. 2). Este versículo, que defiende el derecho del individuo a seguir los dictados de su conciencia, se puso en práctica no pocas veces a través de nuestra historia.

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Desde sus orígenes el pueblo judío representó un reto a las normas de lo establecido, pues creó una forma totalmente nueva de vivir y pensar

Desde sus orígenes, el judaísmo representó un reto a las normas de lo establecido: ¿cómo crear una forma totalmente nueva de vivir y pensar. Abraham, el primer súbdito, comenzó su "carretera" rompiendo los ídolos de la casa de su padre. En tanto que buen hijo, no duda acerca del amor a su padre y a su madre pero siente que la devoción a la verdad y la justicia le impiden reverenciar los mismos dioses que su antecesor adora. No pudo respetar el modo de vida que enseñó en su casa y así devino errante y refugiado. Fue llamado "el hebreo" (Ishvri) — según lo explica negativamente el Talmud — porque él estaba de un lado del río y el mundo entero estaba del otro.

¿No desafió también Moisés al pueblo entero al destruir el becerro de oro en cuya construcción participara incluso su hermano Aarón, quien, a pesar de oponerse a la idolatría, no halló las fuerzas necesarias para imponer su opinión?

¿Que hicieron los profetas sino oponerse a las normas de conducta de la mayoría?

Y a las acciones de los gobernantes? ¿No son las mismas leyes bíblicas (recuérdese, por ejemplo aquellas que se refieren a la esclavitud o los sacrificios humanos) una rebelión en contra de todo lo considerado "sagrado" por la sociedad de aquellos días? Y si nos apartamos por un momento de nuestros propios moldes, podríamos preguntarnos, por ejemplo, ¿cuál habría sido el destino de Dreyfus si sus defensores se hubieran rendido a n i t e la abrumadora mayoría?

Pero regresemos al seno del judaísmo. Conocemos de sobra el respeto de nuestra religión por la vida humana, por la vida de cada hombre. Pero ¿qué tendamos a olvidar que ese respeto va mucho más allá de la vida física, pues reconoce que la violencia perpetrada contra la mente de un hombre a causa de sus convicciones honestas es tan condenable como la violencia perpetrada contra su cuerpo. El judaísmo sostiene que tanto las diferencias físicas como las divergencias de opinión existentes entre los hombres son revelaciones del poder y la gloria infinitos del Creador "ya que el hombre al acuñar monedas hace un molde y cada moneda acuñada en ese molde es una réplica exacta de todas las

obstante, ninguno de ellos es exactamente igual al otro"

Esta frase talmúdica no se refiere únicamente al aspecto exterior de los hombres; los rabíes han formulado una bendición que debe ser recitada cuando se ve una gran multitud para expresar la sensación de asombro y maravilla ante el hecho de que "así como los rostros de los hombres se diferencian entre sí, así se diferencian también sus opiniones". De aquí se infiere que cualquier intento de eliminar o suprimir estas diferencias espirituales es a la vez pecaminosa y fútil ya que se opone a la voluntad de Dios.

Esta posición se expresa también en la interpretación de las palabras "Dios de los

espíritus de toda carne" que emplea Moisés al dirigirse a Dios para solicitar que se le nombre un sucesor (Números, cap. XXVII, vers. 16): "Sabes que no hay entre tus hijos dos que piensen igual; por lo tanto, te ruego que nombres un líder que sea indulgente con cada uno de ellos".

Ningún tipo de sociedad puede caracterizarse como democrática si no lucha incesantemente por incorporar este principio de la manera más amplia posible a su sistema de vida. Aquellos que estamos sinceramente preocupados por el sistema de vida de nuestra sociedad, deberíamos tener siempre presentes tanto la herencia judaica como la breve pero elocuente frase de Abraham Lincoln: "Pecar por guardar silencio cuando deberían protestar convierte a los hombres en cobardes".

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between Woody Allen and Joseph McCarthy,²⁶ are more than obvious (we can see a copy of *Nueva Presencia* in Woody Allen's pocket).

Another variation of the message between the lines was the *strategy of interviews*. In addition to the fact that the publisher could not be held legally responsible for opinions stated by third parties, the articles made it possible to leak content in dialogue. Thus, an interview with the famous Argentine actress Inda Ledesma that was literally devoted to the world of the theater has a quote from her as its headline: "We live in eclipse, but the sun will shine

²⁶ "Composición tema: el fascismo cultural me avergüenza," *Nueva Presencia*, 1 October 1982.

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OPPOSICION TEMA: EL FASCISMO CULTURAL ME AVERGÜENZA

Escribe RICARDO FEIERSTEIN

«... tiene ser leído es que a las injusticias sin sentir popular pero Diógenes, el de la página de historietas y gorrón. Asimismo, la palabra que tiene desperdada por la de en algunos estudios de rias judías a raíz de la soligrías de "Nueva Presencia: vergüenza. «Caza de brujas» des- el cual, quizás por los entra- oría es tan afecta, el mar- nienza un trabajo pro- o controla represivos, pro- uita y participación que se útima y dolorosa años, la la convivencia humana. Se tantos judíos con voos- dirigentes ananos en sus oicia en el cerebro. Var- lo de intelectuales, profe- madrum» a quienes se les na "discusión" pública para n. Vergüenza ante el silen-

pacifistas" tuvieron una trágica confirmación, más allá de la responsabilidad por acción u omisión, más no determinada, de efectivos israelíes en esa acción. Otra vez la confusión entre Estado permanente y gobierno accidental, tan cara a la propaganda anti- israelí, volvió a hacer presa entre algunos sectores comunitarios.

LA TEORIA DEL VOLQUETE

Distengamos aquí la reseña y tratamos de extraer de esta historia algunas enseñanzas, más allá de los acontecimientos accidentales. Existen tres niveles posibles de análisis: el primero, relacionado con el tema en discusión, no voy a tratarlo aquí. Estoy casi convencido de que las cuestiones airerivas a la política israelí deben ventilarse en su ámbito geogr- fico natural, lo cual no excluye en casos extremos —como la matanza de civiles de ambos bandos, los llamados querrelistas o el entroncamiento de un malsano "fascismo israelí" en círculos cercanos al gobierno— la necesidad de pronunciarse en forma pública, por inexcusables cuestiones de conciencia. El segundo, vinculado al momento político que vive la Argentina, sería motivo de otro análisis y ya ha sido mencionado por diferentes articulistas. El tercero, en



Woody Allen y Joseph Mc Carthy

su contribución a los trastornos ecológicos; el que, por lo tanto, las obras en construcción no tengan manera de evitar sus escombros y sobrantes; ni que, en ese caso, lo mejor sería eliminar directa- mente la erección de edificios, que perturbaban con sus ruidos y molestias la vida cotidiana; el que, ahora sí, no existan más cerros ni zanjas ni contenedo- res ni obras en construcción y todo es un gran y denso silencio y tranquilidad, como corresponde a los cementerios.

Porque, en definitiva, lo que esta gente ama, lo

o inapetencia, los debían hacer. Rec- ete de las formas de accionar allí en lo menos en su enunciación, y su aplic- al caso que nos viene ocupando. De tal una suerte de composición escolar, a trar cierto tipo de métodos que, de otra! pasar por meras discusiones teóric- Alrededor, entonces, de la famas pueden detectarse los siguientes in- ación.

11 Los guardianas del Templo; algu- rras veces, a las posturas, nombr-

again.”²⁷ More direct is the article on Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer, who explains the differences between various religious currents within Judaism. The piece’s headline reads: “Judaism cannot survive in a society where human rights are not in force,” and the subhead: “I, as a rabbi, could not forgive myself if I were to repeat the silence of the rabbis during the 1930s in Europe,”²⁸ drawing a clear parallel between the military government and National Socialism. Meyer, shielded by his American passport and displaying great civil courage, felt that he could run the risk of naming the murderers directly.²⁹

²⁷ “Vivimos en un eclipse, pero el sol volverá a alumbrar,” *Nueva Presencia*, 14 September 1979.

²⁸ “El judaísmo no puede sobrevivir en una sociedad donde no rijan derechos humanos,” *Nueva Presencia*, 22 December 1978. Of course, not all the rabbis were kipping silence in Germany in the 1930s—Meyer forced here the argumentation for political purposes.

²⁹ Foreign passports were not always enough to protect people – as shown, among others, by the cases of the disappeared French nuns Léonie Duquet and Alice Domon as well as the German student Elisabeth Käsemann.

SIGNIFICATIVA ENTREVISTA AL RABINO CONSERVADOR MARSHALL T. MEYER

"El judaísmo no puede sobrevivir en una sociedad donde no rijan derechos humanos"

"Yo, como rabino, no podría perdonarme si repitiera el silencio de los rabinos de la década del treinta en Europa".

La trayectoria del rabino Marshall Teodoro Meyer suscita fervores y polémicas, pero no pasa indiferente. Artífice de la "Comunidad Bet El" y forjador de otros tantos hitos en su esfera de desenvolvimiento (véase una aproximación a su "currículum vitae" en la página 12), ha accedido gentilmente a responder a nuestro cuestionario.

—Los no-judios no tienen demasiado claro que en el caso de la religión judía existen varias corrientes y ritos. Hasta podría decirse que buena parte de los judíos también lo ignoran. ¿Podría usted definir sintéticamente cuales son las diferencias que separan a reformistas, conservadores y ortodoxos?

—En el judaísmo religioso de hoy existen las siguientes corrientes:

- a) Ortodoxia;
- b) Neo-ortodoxia;
- c) Judaísmo Conservador;
- d) Reconstruccionismo;
- e) Reformas.

En síntesis se puede definirlos de la manera siguiente: a) La Ortodoxia. Tiene como plataforma la revelación literal de Dios en el Monte Sinaí, o sea que cada palabra de la Torá fue directamente revelada por Dios a Moisés. Simultáneamente, la Torá escrita ("Torá shebnal-pe") fue dada a Moisés, o por lo menos los principios hermenéuticos, según los cuales la Torá habría de seguir desarrollándose. En el mundo auténticamente ortodoxo, no es posible utilizar la metodología científica en el estudio de la Biblia o del Talmud. Asimismo está permitido



crítica de la Biblia y de todos los textos de la tradición judía, sometiéndolos a un riguroso estudio científico para conocer el desarrollo histórico y evolutivo del judaísmo. Afirma que tanto la "Agadá" como la "Halajá" (pensamiento poético y filosófico y la ley judía) son experimentado una evolución y que el judaísmo auténtico ha de adecuarse a un mundo en constante transformación, sin perder la esencia del judaísmo. El conservadorismo siempre observó el Shabat, la "kashrut" y tomó al Talmud como base de todo futuro desarrollo de la "Halajá" (la ley judía). Se origina en la escuela académica y tiene un enfoque "histórico positivo" que trata de comprender los orígenes del monoteísmo ético y la revelación, intentando al mismo tiempo seguir el desarrollo de las costumbres, leyes y prácticas jurídicas. El conservadorismo, después de haber "rastreado" dicho origen y desarrollo, se permite el derecho de decirle al ser humano

integrado por más de dos millones de judíos. Es más difícil de calcular a los ortodoxos y los neo-ortodoxos, porque no están tan organizados, pero se los considera algo menores en número que el conservadorismo. La reforma temida por encima del millón de adeptos y el reconstruccionismo sería mucho menor, con un máximo de 100.000 integrantes.

Es demasiado obvio que este resumen deja mucha que decir, porque la temática es vasta y sería necesario un espacio mucho mayor para explazar sobre el particular. En la revista "Majshavot", publicada por el Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano en Buenos Aires, que es la sede en América del Sur, del movimiento conservador, es posible hallar gran cantidad de material en castellano sobre estos asuntos.

—Se suele atribuir a la comunidad "Bet El" una gran capacidad para atraer a los jóvenes judíos al quehacer religioso. ¿Es real este éxito?

—No creo que la palabra "éxito" sea adecuada para referirse a una empresa espiritual. Para empezar, quisiera decir que la trascendencia de lo espiritual, no puede medirse con términos que son más bien útiles para el mundo

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From the heart of the community, *Nueva Presencia* proposed other ways of reading reality. It brought back the Prophets' teachings to foster the yearning for humanism and social justice, which would allow integration with other parts of society that fought for liberty and democracy.

The community umbrella

Another aspect – the cultural and communal angle – of the connection between the contents on the surface and the hidden meanings was less strong, but also evident to those who wanted to see it. “The Marginalization of the Intellectual in the Jewish Community”³⁰ appeared in close proximity to the notices (and rumors) of the imposition of “blacklists” of creative people and intellectuals in the country who, once denounced as “subversives,” could no longer work or publish in the media.

Within the Jewish community, there were staunch supporters such as Rabbi Meyer, but there were shameful attacks as well. One emblematic case was the magazine *La Luz* (The Light), representing a segment of the Sephardic community (primarily Jews who were natives of Turkey, Greece, and Spain). Within a few days after the military coup on 24 March 1976 – which would culminate in the bloodiest slaughter in Argentina's history – the editor of that publication wrote an editorial denouncing board members of the DAIA (Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, the political representatives of Argentine Jews) and other members of the Jewish community as accomplices of the “corruptive phase” that the country had just been through, a phase to which the “fortunate” military intervention had put an end.³¹ The reaction to this piece appeared in the weekly *Mundo Israelita*, in an editor's note that was unsigned, but written almost entirely by Schiller, who was already contemplating his idea for a periodical like *Nueva Presencia* to preserve Jewish dignity. In his note he pointed out that the denunciation took place at a time when the Jewish representatives who were being criticized “had risked their necks to openly condemn all the government-linked forces that spread anti-Jewish

³⁰ “La marginalización del intelectual en la comunidad judía,” *Nueva Presencia*, 15 April 1978.

³¹ “Erradicar las lacras peronistas de la conducción judeo-argentina,” *La Luz*, 10 April 1976.

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fictions,” a transparent reference to those community leaders’ efforts to rescue Jewish youths who had been kidnapped and tortured under Nazi slogans – efforts that were successful in some cases. And he adds convincingly:

Today, when that magazine pretends to be more papist than the Pope and lashes out hysterically at everything around it in a language of hatred that no one these days would dare to adopt, it is useful to recall a certain episode of Jewish history that occurred eighteen centuries ago. In the second century C.E., when the Jews in Eretz Israel were organizing their final act of rebellion against the Roman Empire, there appeared informers who denounced their fellows to the oppressor’s armies. It was necessary, then, to watch out not only for exploiters from outside but also for those who betrayed the rebels from within in order to gain favor with those in power. Similarly, the spiritual leaders of Judaism decided to include in the major prayer known as *Shmoneh Esrei* a plea that to this very day, in order to keep its ancient relevance in force, every good Jew ought to recite three times a day: *Velamalschinim al tehi tikva*, which means: “Frustrate the hope of those who malign us, (O Lord).”

Without doubt, the Almighty, in His infinite wisdom, does not love the slanderers, the “malshinim.” Much less yellow journalism.³²

The terrible anathema made no impression on the author, who continued to point unhesitatingly to the “subversives” and “infiltrators” who “were infecting the community.” One and a half years later, in an editorial dedicated to the “ideological penetration of subversion in the community,” Nissim Elnecavé launched an attack on the publishers of *Nueva Presencia* in *La Luz*. This came at a time when journalists and intellectuals were disappearing every day in the streets of Argentina and, after being tortured and interrogated, were thrown alive into the ocean. He wrote:

In our midst, there exists another publication that . . . has a peculiar way of expressing itself and a different content [from the rest of the Jewish press]. It calls itself Jewish, it takes advantage of appearing to be Jewish, it tangentially makes use of Jewish affairs; but it is no more, no less than a cosmetic mask applied with consummate mastery. If you wash your face to remove your mask, your natural face – with no trace of Jewishness – becomes visible, for the simple fact that it is in the service of a cause

³² “*Velamalschinim. . .*” (“Those who malign us”), *Mundo Israelita*, 17 April 1976, our translation.

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alien to the interests of our people and often contradictory and hostile to Jewish goals and ideals.³³

Some months later, the number of the “disappeared” approached more than ten thousand Argentiniens, including about 1,500 of Jewish heritage.³⁴

Growing

What we could call the *third stage* – clearly guided by human rights demands and *openly* opposing the dictatorship – was inaugurated with the publication of a map of La Perla, one of the largest concentration camps in the country. One of the few survivors who escaped from the camp, Graciela Geuna, a non-Jew, offered her testimony in 1979 before the Knesset, and then settled in Switzerland. At the height of the repressions, Schiller decided to reproduce Geuna’s map from memory – a very dangerous move at the time.

A few years later, in the early 1980s, the growth of *Nueva Presencia* seemed unstoppable. Representatives of groups with little opportunity for expression – ecologists, feminists, homosexuals – found room on the pages of the periodical for their particular passions and, above all, an opportunity to raise the “question of the Other.” The number of new readers and advertisers grew by the week. The original 8 pages became 16, 24, 32, and then 40 or more folios every week. There were people who wanted to sell their apartments through *Nueva Presencia*, and not through *Clarín* (the most important morning paper in Argentina with a daily circulation of hundreds of thousands of copies) because they believed ads in *Nueva Presencia* to be more effective.

³³ *La Luz*, 16 March 1979.

³⁴ There are no exact numbers for the “desaparecidos,” but Jews made up about 10 to 15% of all victims. For comparison, the proportion of Jews among the total population is about 0.7%. On the disappeared Jews, see DAIA, *Informe sobre la situación de los detenidos-desaparecidos judíos durante el genocidio perpetrado en Argentina (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 2006); COSOFAM, *La violación de los derechos humanos de argentinos judíos bajo el régimen militar (1976-1983)* (Buenos Aires: Milá, 2006); Gabriela Lotersztain, *Los judíos bajo el terror-Argentina 1976-1983* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Ejercitar la Memoria, 2008), Guillermo Lipis, *Zikarón-Memoria: Judíos y militares bajo el terror del Plan Cóndor* (Buenos Aires: Del Nuevo Extremo, 2010).

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From a first printing of 2,000 copies, *Nueva Presencia* grew to a circulation of 25,000 by the last years of the military dictatorship (1982-1983), a qualitative jump for this newcomer to the national scene that placed it in an exceptional position. However, it never was a commercial success, as no one could really live on the income. Also in those years, however, the gap separating the periodical from the official Jewish community leadership widened even more. There were not only political differences; the topics that *Nueva Presencia* addressed moreover began to diverge from traditional Jewish interests and issues.

A Jewish story?

In the first stage, the newspaper was gradually accepted by other parts of the Jewish community, though always through internal discussion. There were mixed signals, such as putting out a progressive publication in a very “ghetto” format, with notices about gastronomy, parties, or marriage brokers placed beside editorials. The response to the weekly, which was practically the only expression of Jewish resistance and one of the few assertions of opposition in the entire country, was outstanding.³⁵ At the gathering held to commemorate the second anniversary of *Nueva Presencia* in 1979, more than two thousand people crowded into the enormous theater of the Sociedad Hebraica Argentina.³⁶

Around 1981, this growth led to disputes about the paper and about questions of political competence, generating incidents that showed a community

³⁵ The large number of Jewish political activists was due in part to family history (most members of the Judeo-Argentine community were children and grandchildren of Russian and Polish Jews, many of whom were socialists and Bundists), and in part to Jewish tradition (predictive of participation in social struggles). On the history of the Bund, including its Argentine branch, see Israel Laubstein, *Bund: Historia del movimiento obrero judío* (Buenos Aires: Acervo Cultural Ediciones, 1997); on the Jewish ideals of social justice and Jewish participation in revolutions, see Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe, A Study in Elective Affinity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992). This high rate of political participation is also the subject of the documentary *Kadish* by filmmaker Bernardo Kononovich (Buenos Aires, 2010).

³⁶ See “Una compacta multitud adhirió a la celebración de Nueva Presencia,” *Nueva Presencia*, 26 July 1979.

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DOS AÑOS DESPUES

UNA COMPACTA MULTITUD ADHIRIO A LA CELEBRACION DE "NUEVA PRESENCIA"
CALOR POPULAR EN EL SEGUNDO ANIVERSARIO

Todavía era de día cuando comenzaron a formarse las "colas" frente a la entrada del Teatro SHA. El personal de la sala, bastante sorprendido, sólo atinó a ordenar un poco la fila, pero ya a las 19 se hacía bastante difícil contener a la multitud que, expectante, esperaba que se abrieran las puertas. Ello ocurrió poco después de las 19.30 y una verdadera marea humana se lanzó hacia adentro para conseguir algún asiento vacío. Todos los cordones de activistas de "Horim", colocados a fin de reservar alguna ubicación en las primeras filas para personalidades y visitantes, fueron inútiles. El público no quiso saber de nada y, virtualmente, se "apoderó" en pocos minutos de las 350 butacas con que cuenta el Teatro. Otros centenares se apilaron en los pasillos y un silencio atmósferico, al no tener siquiera acceso, decidió retirarse.

El clima ya estaba logrando. Sin duda no era el orden y la solemnidad de los actos habituales de la colectividad, pero el fervor de la gente que no quería perderse detalle del acto, hizo disminuir las deficiencias de organización. Este entusiasmo produjo, sin embargo, que numerosos amigos de "Nueva Presencia" —como el doctor Carlos Polak y el escritor Marcos Aguirre— no tuvieron más alternativa que acomodarse en las últimas filas de la multitud.



De izquierda a derecha: Itzhak Niborski, Herman Schiller, Ing. Carlos María Radhi, Ing. Saúl Roehwenger, Dr. Nehemias Kozitsky, Mario Diamant, Arq. Ricardo Felsenstein, Arq. Eliahu Tokow y Daniel Fink.

Comenzó la serie el doctor Miguel A. Keter (vicepresidente de "Horim"), nuestro semanario, porque considera que "Nueva Presencia" no critica suficientemente a la dictadura. Por último, habló el director de "Nueva Presencia", Herman Schiller, quien trató de tranquilizar a los presentes.

Por último, habló el director de "Nueva Presencia", Herman Schiller, quien trató de tranquilizar a los presentes.

on the brink of division. Diverging political positions, fear of military reprisal against the whole Jewish community, and differences about how to deal with the situation in the country were not easy to reconcile.

During the year 1982, Jewish issues became secondary – and almost anecdotal – in the publication. Complete numbers were published without a single reference to Jewish institutions or topics, that is, to the original orientation of the periodical. Censorship was no longer as strict as before, so it became possible to write more directly about the situation in the country, and the growing numbers of non-Jewish readers brought other questions to the newspaper. At the same time, the aforementioned Jewish Movement for Human Rights was created, and it subsequently put on a “performance” of the “Judgment of *Nueva Presencia*” in the headquarters of the Macabi Club.

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Many “Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo”³⁷ of Jewish origin had affiliated with *Nueva Presencia* because of its stance on human rights. This Jewish Movement formed a specific branch within the human rights scene which Schiller describes as “similar to the voluntary Jewish Brigade that fought in the Spanish Civil War.” They wanted to keep a specific Jewish signature in the fight. But some people in other human rights movements refused to accept them. A strong Catholic antisemitism, which some people had acquired in childhood, was still present – even in what was supposed to be a common social struggle.³⁸ Although the Mothers were one of the most acclaimed groups, and some of its well-known protagonists were also active in the Movimiento Judío por los Derechos Humanos, it was not included in joint statements, allegedly because “this organization had been created at the end of the dictatorship and not years earlier, like the others.” “This assertion was a pretext,” Schiller affirms, recalling with pain:

I remember a delegation from the Jewish Movement for Human Rights that went to a joint meeting after democracy had been restored, to call for the release of the political prisoners. One person from the rest of the movement stood in the doorway and said, “If these people from the Jewish movement come inside, then we won’t come in.” Finally we were able to enter, but everything was very unpleasant. Prejudices also exist among people who you think are on your side. . .³⁹

³⁷ This group of mothers banded together during the first years of the dictatorship to help each other in the search for their sons and daughters and to speak out against what was happening. Their symbol is a white scarf, worn in memory of their children’s white diapers. The group’s founder, Azucena Villaflor, along with two other founding members, was also kidnapped, tortured, and murdered (“disappeared”). This group has a strong Catholic tone, which was partly an answer to the Catholic Junta, but also an expression of the religious convictions of many of the involved individuals. On its Catholic iconography and discourses, see Roberto Amigo, *Letanias en la catedral. Iconografía cristiana y política en Argentina. Cristo obrero, cristó guerrillero, cristó desaparecido* (2007) <http://servidor.esteticas.unam.mx/edartedal/PDF/Bahia/complets/AmigoLETANIAS.pdf> (accessed 1 October 2010). On the differences and cooperation between Catholic and Jewish Madres de Plaza de Mayo, see Liliana Ruth Feierstein, *Huellas religiosas y culturales en la representación, elaboraciones y duelos de la violencia en Argentina* (in print).

³⁸ Herman Schiller is also the author of an excellent work on the history of antisemitism in Argentina (unpublished manuscript).

³⁹ Interview with Herman Schiller, our translation (see note 13). Schiller later wrote an article

The Jewish Resistance Press during the Military Dictatorship in Argentina

At the end of the interview, Schiller asked himself one of the more complex and painful questions: Why did the military let us live, when for reasons that were much less important, huge numbers of people were made to “disappear” in the country day after day? Most certainly, there were telephone threats, attempts at intimidation, and threatening, antisemitic graffiti on the walls of the editorial offices. Two bombs were placed in the printing works where the paper was published. But the central element seems to have been the general ignorance – and prejudice – of those who commanded the forces of repression, supposing *Nueva Presencia* to be part of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy with strong influence in Israel and the United States. Schiller was aware of this paranoid story and sought to turn it into an advantage in various maneuvers: He published articles about the American Jewish Committee and tried to give the impression that the newspaper had a permanent alliance with this organization. It seems that the military preferred not to create enemies in the United States, especially in sectors they believed to be influenced by the vague but powerful Jewish lobby. Similar reasons helped to save the life of the journalist Jacobo Timerman, who was first kidnapped and tortured by the military and then, after strong international pressure, ultimately freed.⁴⁰ *Nueva Presencia* (along with the *Buenos Aires Herald*) played a central role in the campaign for

in the publication of the Argentine survivors (Asociación de ex-detenidos desaparecidos) affirming that the only group that never had a problem with Jewish statements was precisely this one: the survivors themselves.

⁴⁰ The gang under the command of General Ramón Camps that kidnapped Timerman was the most paranoid antisemitic group of the dictatorship, convinced that world Jewry was behind all the “subversive movements.” In his youth, Timerman had belonged to a Zionist socialist youth group and was one of the founders of the newspaper *Nueva Sión*, so his captors ascribed enormous power and influence to him. In his book *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number), Timerman writes about the sessions of torture and interrogation by the military hierarchs, who were sure that they had caught a key figure in the worldwide conspiracy denounced in the antisemitic pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, obligatory reading for local Nazis. Understanding that staying alive depended on this absurd belief on the part of his captors, Timerman replied, “in my house,” when asked where the future global Jewish government held its meetings. Without giving concrete facts or answering questions, he nourished in his torturers, over a period of months, the belief that he possessed invaluable secrets for these “crusaders of the West,” who were certain they were engaged in “World War III against the Jews.” The intervention of the US Embassy and Jewish organizations, international pressure, and the

Ricardo FEIERSTEIN, Liliana Ruth FEIERSTEIN

Timerman's release: in an almost tender cartoon, he is shown next to Dreyfus, who gives him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder. At a distance of more than eighty-five years and ten thousand kilometers, the injustice and absurdity was repeated. But the echoes of "J'accuse" were also heard.

Suplemento editado por "Di Presse" Editor responsable: Ing. Carlos M. Raffel Director: Herman Schiffric

Buenos Aires, 28 de Setiembre de 1979 \$ 1.100 el ejemplar Año II — Nº 117

La decisión de la Suprema Corte de Justicia precipitó los acontecimientos

Jacobo Timerman: trabajosa libertad

Desde su primer número, "Nueva Prensa" subrayó cuantas veces pudo — en forma escrita u oral y en las tonos más altos posibles — que no existe ninguna contradicción entre ser un buen argentino y un buen judío. Al mismo tiempo, sobre el hervor de esta lucha periodística semanal, trató de demostrar la legitimidad de ambas posturas. Antisemitas de todos los pólos acudieron, en cambio, que los judíos son malos argentinos y desleales con la nación en la que residen. Esto infundió prejuicios — que, "a priori", no necesitaría siquiera ser refutado, dada la poca disposición activa de los juicios en la estirpe judaica — se encuentra ampliamente difundida entre los estratos más heterogéneos de la sociedad argentina.

No vamos a retomar aquí discusiones filosóficas bien conocidas sobre la raíz de este prejuicio — generalmente atribuido a la vulnerabilidad de los judíos por su ubicación en los sectores intermedios de la escala social — ni vamos a indagar ahora por qué este segmento de la población argentina denominada comunidad judía se encuentra potencialmente apto para convertirse en el chivo expiatorio más a mano de las crisis, las frustraciones y los resentimientos. Pero lo que sí resulta inevitable subrayar en este momento es la dolorosa impresión que, en buena parte de la judería local, ha causado la decisión de quitarle la ciudadanía a Jacobo Timerman — después de más de medio siglo de residencia y



Jacobo Timerman y Alfred Dreyfus, según Amós

hermandad fraternalmente monolítica y no existen diferencias entre un judío y otro judío) poco y nada le interese seguir siendo argentino. ¿Cómo contrarrestar esta amenaza que se ha creado en torno a Timerman? ¿Cómo evitar que se hubiéramos perdido un final más reivindicativo y menos tumultuoso. Algunos diarios — "Clarín" y "La Razón", entre otros — han sido bastante explícitos al transmitir los difíciles momentos que

diario "El Mundo", habiendo hecho también periódicos estrictamente judíos en publicaciones como "Nueva Sión" y "Vida de Israel" — pasó a ocupar un lugar de primera línea en la prensa nacional cuando fundó, a principios de los años sesenta, las revistas "Primera Plana" (uno de los más importantes periódicos de opinión del país), según lo señalara esta semana un matutino porteño) y más tarde la revista "Confirmado". Sin embargo, la cúspide la alcanzó recién en 1971 al fundar un diario como "La Opinión", que hasta sus más acérrimos enemigos coincidieron en calificar como una verdadera revolución en el periodismo argentino. Esta revolución no fue sólo formal, sino que también señaló pautas de conducta no comunes en la prensa tradicional, como ocurrió en los días aciagos de la revolución peronista, cuando se convirtió en el único órgano de expresión que denunciara sus crímenes. En esos momentos de incertidumbre nacional, el pueblo agotado "La Opinión", porque sus columnas decían lo que todos los demás diarios temían siquiera intinar.

"La Opinión", donde se escuchaban los intelectuales jóvenes más idiosyncráticos, alcanzó entonces niveles de inflexión popularidad (los asesores que le proporcionaban una vida efímera, calificándola de "elitista", se equivocaron notablemente), demostrando que la Argentina, uno de los países con mayor actividad cultural en el mundo, estaba en

su Graiver y la subversión, fue absuelto por un tribunal militar (el 13-X-77) y el 29 de julio de 1978 la Corte Suprema de Justicia de la Nación ordenó su libertad. En los últimos días...

inaccurate intelligence exchanged among the military sectors allowed his life to be saved. Timerman was expelled from the country and stripped of his citizenship.

A secret door to the outside

An anecdotal detail, which has at the same time both a manifest and a latent meaning, might sum up this journalistic experience. During those years it was common to witness the kidnapping of journalists at their place of work by “task groups” (military or paramilitary), which arrived without warning at the editorial offices in cars – usually Ford Falcons bearing no license plate – and proceeded to forcibly seize the individuals they were looking for and convey them to the torture and extermination centers. The *Nueva Presencia* office at 330 Castelli Street occupied the ground floor and first floor until 1980, when it was moved to a site on the upper floor – far from the street and right next to the wall dividing it from the building next door. With the complicity of some of the owners of the building next door, a consortium with eight floors of departments, a door was built which was usually concealed (à la Anne Frank), allowing people to move to the general landing of the neighboring building in case of an emergency. Thus it was possible to gain access to a secret exit in the event of an attack on the editorial offices or the violent attempt of an armed group to storm the office.

In some ways, the (initially not deliberate) construction of this “marrano” journalistic experience, with its double readings, was also a secret emergency exit that allowed a good part of Argentina’s citizens a vent to the outside, an escape valve to survive the suffocation of the repressive regime.

