

governments in response” to labor unrest, Reiter observes.

Canadian antisemitism mirrored the rise of fascism in Europe, and upwardly mobile Jews turned rightwards to escape the conflation of Jews with radicalism. After the Soviet Union entered World War II on the Allied side, however, the balance tilted leftward once again, and when the Soviet Yiddish poet Itsik Feffer and Solomon Mikhoels, founder and director of the Moscow Yiddish Art Theatre, came to New York and then Montreal and Toronto in 1943 to raise support for the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, thousands of people came to hear them and to contribute money. But Stalin’s murderous campaigns against Jewish writers had already begun, and Feffer and Mikhoels were killed just a few years later. After the war, the Soviet Union became an enemy again, and the Canadian Jewish Congress “joined the North American bandwagon of

isolating the left, in the process disregarding civil liberties.”

Reiter devotes separate chapters to women, to “Democracy and Dissent,” and to “Language and the Education of a New Generation.” In each chapter, she traces her theme from the beginning of Jewish immigration in Canada to the end of that demographic wave. This allows her to cite a vast number of important people and to follow most of the twists and turns of generational change — but it also means a lot of repetition. By the time she reaches the chapter titled “Cultural Life,” the reader knows the broad outlines of what she will tell us.

But her chapter, “Summer Camps,” at the end of her narrative, is a fresh and charming account of how this impoverished community managed to provide access to the splendid landscapes of Ontario and Quebec for children and then for adults: “The summer camps of the socialist Jew-

ish left were affordable places where working people could go for fun, rest and relaxation among like-minded people, a place where they did not have to explain themselves.”

Kinderland [“Children’s Country”], Naivelt [“New World”] and Nitgedaiget [“Not to Worry”] may have started as children’s camps, but they all morphed into summer colonies similar to the ones U.S. Jews established in the Catskill Mountains of New York State. The work of the camps was shared by everybody. But the founders’ children — teachers, dentists, doctors, and other professionals — have mostly moved on to suburbia and second homes.

How I wish that these traditions persisted — most especially the vision of a future without hate or need! **JC**

Martha Roth, a contributing writer, moved to Canada after George W. Bush was reelected in her native U.S. She is a founding member of Independent Jewish Voices Canada.

Turkish Delight

THE SEPHARDIC IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN FICTION

by Sarah Aroeste

It is with both pride and curiosity that I spent my childhood years staring daily at a photograph of my grandfather as a boy, his uncle Max beside him dressed up in a fez and Balkan uniform. The photo was prominently displayed in the hallway of my family’s house in Princeton, New Jersey — not exactly a hotbed of Sephardic culture — where I grew up hearing the stories

of my Sephardic family’s entry into the United States.

That grandfather, Julian Aresty, was born in 1907 in Monastir, what is known today as Bitola, Macedonia. Even after more than eighty years living in America, he always called himself a Turk. The Monastir of his childhood was part of the Ottoman Empire, which up until that point had been a welcoming haven for so many

Sephardic Jews escaping the Spanish Inquisition four hundred years earlier.

In 1908, however, Turkish reforms meant that all citizens were subject to conscription in the Turkish army. That, and the economic deterioration of the region with the impending collapse of the empire, left many Jews seeking refuge elsewhere. When American Jews think of the impetus for Jewish immigration at the turn of

the 20th century, Russian pogroms and poverty likely come to mind. The Balkan Wars and Turkish conscription are less familiar.

My grandfather arrived at Ellis Island on the *SS Italia* in 1913, right between the 1912 and 1913 Balkan Wars. Waves of Sephardic Jews entered the United States around that time, and while their immigrant story is akin to that of many other ethnic groups — including the prejudice, poverty, and eventual assimilation — the Sephardic experience is also unique in the fabric of American Jewry. We brought our own distinctive flavors, tastes, and traditions to American shores.

This Sephardic mosaic is beautifully represented in Shalach Manot's fine novel, *His Hundred Years, A Tale*. Shalach Manot is the pen name of Jane Mushabac, a writer and professor with a Turkish background of her own. The phrase *shalach manot* refers to the gifts friends and family send one another during Purim. For Mushabac, the phrase also represents the gifts that were passed down to her through family stories and songs.

These stories and songs are at the heart of her book. Not only is the book told through short linked tales, each titled with a year and place, but the characters inveterately tell stories and share expressions and songs across family dining tables, in cheap diners, on a plane with strangers, on the telephone, and more.

Reading the book, I continually felt my grandfather's love of telling stories. Sephardic Jewry, uprooted by the Spanish Inquisition and then decimated by the Holocaust, has survived the last five hundred years precisely because of storytelling and song. Judeo-Spanish, also known to many as Ladino, the language spoken by Sephardic Jews in the Ottoman Empire after their expulsion from Spain, lived

as a mother tongue that served an oral tradition until the 20th century. This determined habit of communication is central to all things Sephardic, and is the guiding force in Manot's novel.

The book revolves around a Turkish Jew who peddles his way through the collapsing Ottoman Empire before, during, and after World War I. He sells matches, buttons, and headscarves, and in 1920, when he arrives in New York, he becomes the balloon man on 110th Street and Fifth Avenue. Like most of the characters in the book, he is given no name, but is a kind of everyman in a Turkish world of pleasures and woes, sometimes a child man, sometimes a grown man, the episodes going back and forth in time. It is exactly his ability to tell his own story and find connections to other's stories that allows him to survive, first in Turkish villages threatened with wartime famine and even wolves, and later as a new immigrant in New York.

He quickly becomes the most successful salesman in an insurance agency in America because his pleasure is talking to strangers and nurturing relationships. Communication, in various languages, is his key to sales success, and it also makes for a prose rich with expressions in Judeo-Spanish, Turkish, Hebrew, and French, deftly woven in with English cues as needed. The character's pleasure in language is not just a key part of the novel, but representative of the Sephardic historical experience itself. As the scrappy salesman works his way up from selling buttons in Inecik, Turkey to the fanciest insurance policies his company in New York has to offer, an insurance magazine reporter writes about him to showcase his success:

The reporter mentioned [that] the agent spoke six

languages plus English and always answers his prospects in their own languages. The article said not every agent could be a linguist but many with "foreign" territories might be wise to pick up a "smattering of phrases" to feel at home as the company's representative in a city packed with immigrants. The reporter did not understand that the agent did not deal with a smattering of phrases, but the poetry of hope. The agent had been sifting languages all his life with the carnival of peoples, his neighbors. The Jews were a tiny minority compared to other groups — Greeks, Armenians, Turks — and brokered their way through the day like boys darting through crowds on a holiday.

That passage reminded me of my grandfather's arrival in America and, after settling in Rochester, New York, looking for ways to make some quick money. He and his cousins hitched a ride on the backs of wagons to sell currants, cucumbers, and melons to Bulgarian workers building a nearby canal. After all, Bulgarians were used to the same foods from the old country as Turks, and my grandfather started supplying them with what they loved from home. For Manot's Turkish peddler and my grandfather, being able to



Discussed in this essay:
His Hundred Years, A Tale by Shalach Manot.
Albion-Andalus Books, 2016, 208 pages.

relate to others — either in language or in affinity — was the formula for not only a successful sale but for survival and feeling at home in a foreign land.

Not quite matching the peddler's hundred-year lifespan, my grandfather lived to 92, and luckily my cousin had the foresight to video his memories of his immigration before he died. The stories he shares have had a long-lasting impact on how I view cultural transmission today. I imagine my grandfather would have related to a passage in Manot's book in which we hear of the protagonist's relief at his Sephardic bloodline being continued. When his four daughters are all married, he no longer had to carry Valium in his jacket pocket. He no longer had to worry "that having survived the Inquisition, and the Nazis, starvation and the wolves of Inecik, it would all

stop there, in his line, with unmarried daughters, with nothing to show for all his determination and passionate desire to survive."

I understand why so many Jews continue to reference surviving the Holocaust as further justification to be fruitful and multiply. But deep down for so many Sephardim, our historical trauma goes back further — to 1492. The fact that the insurance man includes the Inquisition in his list of remembrances is not surprising. Recent studies in Jewish epigenetics are exploring how expulsion from Spain actually has altered the DNA of Sephardic Jews. The historic and collective consciousness of Sephardic Jews, like that of all Jews, is profound, but with Sephardic Jews that consciousness draws dramatically from Iberian and Ottoman worlds little known to

Ashkenazim.

My grandfather's pride in his Sephardic identity is a lasting legacy that he shares with Manot's hero, who lives for twenty years in a port on the Dardanelles and in the Balkan countryside before he comes to New York and makes his way with almost no education, just seat-of-the-pants resilience.

The Sephardic experience is foreign to so many, and the immigrant one all the more so. For a sense of the Sephardic experience in Turkey and in America, Manot's book is a beautiful snapshot and a great read. **JG**

Sarah Aroeste is a singer/songwriter and author who has devoted her career to Ladino cultural preservation. Her upcoming English/Ladino holiday album, Together/Endjuntos, will be released this fall.

Nemirovsky's Flight from the *Juif*

ASSIMILATION AND DISSIMULATION

by Zelda Gamson

The life could have made a good novel, and she might even have written it — had she lived to do so. But Irene Nemirovsky died before she could live that life. She was hiding in plain sight, wearing the yellow star, in Issy-l'Éveque, a village in Vichy France. She was arrested in 1942, early in the Nazi occupation, and shipped to Auschwitz, where she died soon afterwards at 39. Her husband,

Michel Epstein, died the same way a bit later. They left two young daughters, Denise, 12, and Elisabeth, 5, with their French governess, who spent the war years with them running and hiding from the Germans.

A novel that Nemirovsky had started not long after the German invasion, *Suite Française*, was published in 2004 to worldwide acclaim. Before the war, she had been one of the few women in France to break into the publishing world dominated by men. This is re-

markable because she was not only a woman but a foreigner and a Jew.

Susan Rubin Suleiman, in *The Nemirovsky Question: The Life, Death, and Legacy of a Jewish Writer in 20th-Century France*, finds a way into Nemirovsky's life that is compelling for 21st-century readers, Jews as well as other border-crossers. From a wealthy Ukrainian family that fled Russia in January 1918, when she was 15, Nemirovsky spent the rest of her life in France. Having spoken French since childhood, she