

A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo

A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo

By

Esther Gitman

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo

By Esther Gitman

This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2024 by Esther Gitman

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-0364-0499-4

ISBN (13): 978-1-0364-0499-4

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	viii
Abbreviations	x
Preface	xiii
Guide to Croatian and Bosnian Pronunciation	xv
Foreword	xvi
Observation	xxiii
The Format and the Approach Taken in Writing This Book	xxvi
Where, When, and How it Ended for the Jews of Spain.....	1
Amatus Lusitanus' Life and Work as a Jew of Spain.....	16
Jews of Portugal Under a Trauma	21
Resurgence of Contemporary Historiographic Research.....	24
Sephardic Jews Arrived in Sarai (Sarajevo) in 1565	28
Jews in the Ottoman Empire which included Bosnia and Herzegovina	31
The Expelled Spanish Jews were Welcomed by the Ottomans	34
The Jews of Sarajevo.....	38
The Kingdom of Yugoslavia	49
The Jewish Synagogues and their Haggadah Projected their Past and their Future Sarajevo Haggadah.....	69

How it Started: Jews Among the Muslims, Catholics and Serb Orthodox.....	79
The Rise and Fall of the Yugoslav Jews, 1918 to 1941	93
A History of Jews in Sarajevo	103
The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 1918-1929	128
The Merger of the South Slavs Impacted the Jewish Population	135
The Interwar Period 1918-1941 and The Unification of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.....	138
Paris Peace Conference and Its Consequences	140
Jewry Under the Dictatorship of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1929 to 1941	153
Jewish Intellectuals and Communists in the Inter-war Period.....	159
Deep Discontent Leading to Anti-Semitic Propaganda	212
Testimonies of WWII Survivors.....	234
Who Was Likely to Survive?.....	236
Kaddish in the Forest (Kadiš u Šumi).....	250
The Italian Civilian and Military Authorities	260
In a Nutshell	279
Summary and Conclusions	282
The War Ended May 5, 1945, and Survivors Rushed to their Homes	292
Epilogue.....	296
Primary Sources and Hans Helm's Thirty-four Boxes of Primary Sources	298

Bibliography	304
Interviews with WWII Rescuers and Survivors	320
Index	323

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many individuals and organizations have generously supported my work. I cannot thank all, but I owe special gratitude to Professors Jane Gerber and Elisheva Carlebach who shared with me generously their knowledge and expertise in the field of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jewish history. I am grateful to the Fulbright Committee for granting me a one-year fellowship to Zagreb for the academic year 2002-2003. The Fulbright Fellowship opened for me many doors, including to the Croat Ministry of Science and Technology, and due to their intervention I was given an opportunity to review over thirty thousand documents and copied five thousand.

These documents were the core for receiving a six-month post-doctoral research fellowship from USHMM, granted by Barbara and Richard Rosenberg, in the academic year 2006-07. I am indebted to my friend Professor Dalia Ofer for her guidance and support by urging me to publish my so-called, or possibly even revolutionary, findings relative to the entities and individuals who had saved and rescued Jews in the independent State of Croatia during World War II (WWII).

I am also grateful to Professor Jure Krišto, from the Croatian Institute of History, for his invaluable assistance in areas pertaining to the Catholic Church. I owe a special thanks to Željko Tanjić, the Rector of the Catholic University in Zagreb, Croatia for introducing my research on Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac around the world and his assistance to Jews during WWII, including two presentations at the European Parliament.

Over the years, I have received assistance and support from my female friends: Ina Vukić, Dr. Claudia Sthal, Dr. Luna Kahana and Marijana Petir. Among those assisting me with primary sources were Marijan Gubić, Josip Stjepandić and Professor Zdenko Kovać, whose sources of information are endless and of great importance for the enrichment of this book.

My eternal appreciation is extended to the survivors and the rescuers whom I had the privilege to meet and interview. In their narrations they shared with me their painful moments which they faced with immense

courage and their unyielding determination to survive despite danger lurking in every corner and from every direction. They also related their joyous memories when they reunited with a family member or an old friend, or even a stranger who had rescued them and given them an opportunity to live another day! Their stories are described in this book, even though many of them are no longer with us.

Finally, I extend my most appreciative gratitude to my husband Dr. Israel Gitman, who encouraged me to undertake tasks that I had only dreamed about, but thought were beyond my reach. Israel was, and still is, my anchor.

I dedicate this book with great love and gratitude to my mother Hana Kaveson Danon for her swift flight from Sarajevo, in mid-1941, at the start of WWII in Yugoslavia and for not leaving me behind as many parents did. I am also indebted to Gavro Danon, who had convinced my mother to leave Sarajevo and take me with her. Gavro followed in our footsteps and after the end of the war he became my beloved father, who raised me to be independent, adventurous and fearless at undertaking new challenges.



My mother held me, Korčula, 1941. Gavro, who helped my mom, is standing on the right side.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABH Arhiv Bosne i Hercegovine (Archive of Bosnia-Herzegovina)

AIFM Archives of the Italian Foreign Ministry)

AIHRPH Arhiv Instituta za Historiju Radnički Pokreta Hrvatske (Archive of the Croatian Institute of History)

AFŽ Antifašistički front žena (Antifascist Women's Front)

AJC (American Jewish Committee)

ARIZBiH Arhiv Rijaseta Islamske Zajednice Bosne i Hercegovine (Archives of the Islamic Religion of BiH ARBiH)

Armija Republike Bosne i Hercegovine (Army of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina)

AVNOJ Antifasističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Jugoslavije (Anti-fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia)

BiH Bosna i Hercegovina

DELASEM Delegazione Assistenza Emigranti e Profughi Ebrei (Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants)

GESTAPO (German Police)

GUZ (Main Registration File)

HDA Zagreb (Croatian State Archive)

HICEM (Hebrew Immigrant Colonization Emigration)

HIAS (Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant)

HM Historijski Muzej BiH (Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

HZ Historijski zbornik, Zagreb (Historical Anthology)

IAS Istorijski arhiv Sarajevo (Historical Archive, Sarajevo)

IHP Institut za hrvatsku povijest (Institute for Croatian History)

IRC (International Red Cross)

JA Jugoslavenska armija (Yugoslav Army)

JAL Jevrejski almanah, Beograd (Jewish Almanac)

JDC/ JOINT (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee)

JIM Jevrejski istorijski muzej, Beograd, (Jewish Historical Museum, Belgrade.)

JMO Jugoslavenska muslimanska organizacija (Yugoslav Muslim Organization)

JNA Jugoslavenska narodna armija (Yugoslav People's Army)

MUP Ministarstvo o unutarnjih (unutrasnjih) poslova (Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia)

NAZ Nadbiskupski arhiv Zagreb (Archive of the Archbishopric of Zagreb)

NDH Nezavisna Država Hrvatska (Independent State of Croatia)

NOB Narodno-oslobodilačka borba (Struggle for National Liberation)

OMRI (Open Media Research Institute)

ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation and Training)

OZNA Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda (Division for People's Protection)

RSHA Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office)

RUR Ravnateljstvo ustaskog redarstva (Headquarters of the Ustaše Police)

SD Sicherheitsdienst – Služba sigurnosti (German police)

SS Schutz-Staffel – Zaštitne snage (SS Protection Squad)

UNRRA (United National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration)

UNS Ustaška nadzorna služba (Ustaše Supervisory Police)

USHMM (Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

WRB (War Refugee Board)

ZAVNOH Zemaljsko antifasističko vijeće narodnog oslobođenja Hrvatske
(The State Anti-fascist Council for the National Liberation of Croatia)

ZKRZ Zemaljska komisija za utvrđivanje zlocina okupatora i njihovih
pomagača (Legal Commission for the Establishing of War Crimes of
the Occupying Forces)

ZBJEG – The masses of refugees that followed the Partisans, after the
capitulation of Italy.

ŽOZ Židovska općina Zagreb (Jewish Community, Zagreb).

PREFACE

This book in your hands is a mirror to the life of Dr. Esther Gitman. Born in Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina, she lived, thanks to the courage of individuals, through the whirlwind of a war that turned the lives of millions of Jewish people, including her family's, into the tragedy of the Holocaust. A strong consciousness of that tragedy, as well as the inner strength that she inherited from the spirit of her own people in a love of life, and searching for ways toward truth and justice, characterized her novel-like life. Her return to Sarajevo after the war, in 1948, then relocating to Israel, where she spent her youth and, finally, going to Canada and the United States, she fulfilled her dreams, being determined, dedicated and hard-working and with great success in business, and turning to the study of history at an age where many have considered their journey complete. Studying history became the way in which she told the history of her own life and her own people; it actually became the expression of what she held inside, and that was the pursuit of the truth of how she survived and what the fate of the Jews in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was. Researching the archives, and reading the documents, she has largely contributed to putting together pieces of the mosaic of terror inflicted on the Jews by the Nazis and the Ustaše, and also reveals untold stories of individuals and groups who were not afraid and who risked everything to save their fellow Jewish citizens, and at the same time, correcting the injustices that were inflicted on individuals by the communist distortion of history. In this book, Esther Gitman returns to her distant and closer roots and wants to tell a story of the Sephardic Jews who were expelled from the Spanish kingdom and found their new home in what was then the Ottoman Empire, in Bosnia, mainly in Sarajevo. It is a story of centuries-long suffering, but also of the joy of life; always searching for new ways of not only surviving, but of also creating culture, art, co-existence, as well as entrepreneurship, and a better life. It is a story of a part of European history and art which was violently disrupted by the evil of the Second World War, but which is still alive, not only in the traces that it left, but through people who still live that story and carry it in their bodies and souls, no matter where life has taken them. One of those people is Esther Gitman, whose personal story is reflected in this great story.

Thank you, dear Esther, for telling this story to all of us, your friends, and the many anonymous readers, no matter their religion, nationality, gender or race, who will get to know you and the history of European Jews better through this book.

Željko Tanjić,
Rector of the Catholic University, Zagreb, Croatia.

GUIDE TO CROATIAN AND BOSNIAN PRONUNCIATION

C	ts, as in “tsar”
Ć	ch, (soft) as the “t” in “future”
Dj	j, (soft) as in “g” in “organization”
Dž,	j, (hard) as in “jug”
y,	as in “Yugoslavia”
Ly	li, as in “Medallion”
Nj	ny, as in “Canyon”
Š	sh, as in “Shoulder”
Ž	zh as in “Zhivago”

FOREWORD

In this book, *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo*, I aimed to highlight the history of the Sephardic¹ Jews: those who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497, after their sojourn of fifteen hundred years in that part of the world. The single most important reason for their expulsion was their refusal to abolish their own Jewish religion, customs and their way of life and convert to Catholicism.

Once out of the Iberian Peninsula and after eight decades of roaming throughout the *Ottoman Empire* and through several European countries, some of these *Wandering Jews* had settled in 1565 in the Balkan Peninsula in a small settlement known as *Sarai*, a place that in time became known as Sarajevo. What was unique, and even puzzling, about this group of Jews is that while they changed their abode, by moving from one geographic location to another, for centuries they refused even to consider a change in their way of life, culture, customs and language.

The Sephardim were determined to preserve their Spanish and Portuguese languages, commonly known as *Ladino*, or *Judeo-Spanish*, even though they felt comfortable in their new city of Sarajevo. Historians and sociologists, for several decades, maintained that because of their dispersal throughout the world the former *Spanish Jews* would be in no position to survive as an identifiable entity, even if they stopped speaking their common language among themselves, and with all others who identified themselves as *Sephardim*.

In contrast with all those who predicted that Jews without a country of their own would perish, Abba Eban, in his book *My People* had criticized a few sociologists who held such a theory. Among them was Arnold Toynbee, a sociologist, who claimed that the Jews, in general, are facing the same dilemma at present, as did their forefathers, because Judaism

¹ The Hebrew Sepharad means Spain in English; hence, the Jews who originated from Spain were referred to, and still are, as Sephardim.

continues to profess contradictory ideas, those of *particularism* and of *universalism*, two ideologies that do not coincide... Arnold Toynbee's declaration was that:

Judaism cannot discharge its destiny of becoming a universal religion unless and until they renounce the national form of their distinctive communal identity for the sake of fulfilling their "universal mission."

Eban, however, understood that this so called "*impossibility*" was exactly what the Jewish people achieved, stating:

A vigorous sense of identity has not prevented this people from sending the repercussions of its influence far and wide into the oceans of universal history. It is when historic Israel is most persistently distinctive in living and writing a universal history. The lesson of history is plain. There is no salvation or significance for the Jews except when they aim high and stand straight within their own authentic frame of values.²

Eban, quoting Ernest Renan, goes even further to explain the validity of his conception that Jews can survive and accomplish a lot when they are united as a nation, stating:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle.; to have a common glory in the past, a common ill in the present and to have done great things together, to want to do them again, these are the conditions for the existence of a nation. And it appears that Jews, all through their history, held tight to this philosophy of life.³

From various sources of information utilized in this book, I learned that history is not plain, as suggested by some historians, because for the Jews and possibly for others, the salvation comes only when they aim high and stand straight and united within. But it is not always possible, as we learn from Isak Samakovlija, a physician, partisan and poet, who, upon his return to Sarajevo at the end of World War Two, stated:

² Abba Eban, *My People*, p. 521-22, Quoting: Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", text of a conference delivered in Paris.

³ Isak Samakovlija, *Tales of Old Sarajevo*, Memories of his return to Sarajevo after the end of WWII to find the devastation, and that his people were no more.

Once upon a time I knew everyone here in Sarajevo,⁴ every man, every child, even chicken, as people say...Look, most houses still exist, and all the streets from my childhood, my youth, but none of the same people are here anymore. Everyone is new, strange to me. Where are they? Killed, murdered, destroyed, and dispersed. These who are moving around, they neither know me nor I them. (Tales of Old Sarajevo.)⁵

This short and picturesque observation made by Dr Samakovlija, touched the hearts of all those who were old enough to remember the pre-war Sarajevo or who read enough to know exactly what he saw and felt after his visit to the city of his birth and youth.

Like Dr. Samakovlija, I was born in Sarajevo but, unlike him, on April 10, 1941, when World War II started in Yugoslavia, I was a toddler and, thus, I cannot say that I knew the Jews Samakovlija mentions in his books and stories; those who had lived in Sarajevo and who are no more. But I know of their existence from stories, photographs, testimonies, and documents. Each of these individuals had unique physical attributes, inimitable mental capabilities; each had a mother, a father, and most likely siblings and possibly even a wife and a few children. Each had a name and a home in which (after the end of World War Two) others lived; those who do not wish to be reminded to whom the houses or the apartments in which they currently live belong! Tito was also aware that the survivors who had returned to Sarajevo were not welcomed by the majority of the local population! First, the survivors were in a position to identify those who had joined the Ustaše (the local Croatian fascists) and who, alongside Adolf Hitler's forces, had committed crimes against the Jews and against former Partisans... Second, the returning Jews demanded from the locals a return of all their embezzled assets, such as homes and businesses.

Also, the Jews refused, or were unable, to emotionally set aside their losses and, numerically, the Jews were an insignificant minority, but one that could cause a lot of damage to Tito's objective of creating a Communist Republic of Yugoslavia under the slogan: "*Bratsvo Jedinstvo*" (Brotherhood and Unity). For Tito's purposes, the Jewish minority was a hindrance; they had to be eliminated. When the opportunity presented

⁴ Sarajevo, capital and cultural center of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It lies in the narrow valley of the Miljacka River at the foot of Mount Trebevic.

⁵ Isak Samakovlija, *Tales of Old Sarajevo*, *Memories of return to Sarajevo after the end of WWII to find the devastation, and that his people were no more*, p.11.

itself he “suggested” that they relocate to their new homeland in the newly established Jewish state, the state of Israel.

Tito also decided to rid the country of the Četniks, the remnants of the Serbian Royal Army, and most specifically, their leader Draža Mihajlović. He rushed to murder the criminal of Belgrade, Milan Nedić, but the latter committed suicide before he was captured by the officials of the new government. Among the most loyal supporters of Hitler were the so-called Volksdeutsche, Yugoslav citizens of German ancestry, who either fled the country or were murdered by the Partisans without a trial.

Among the undesirable entities was the Catholic Church in Yugoslavia, headed by the Vatican and the Pope in Rome. The Catholic Church in Zagreb was headed by the Archbishop of Zagreb, Alojzije Stepinac, whose first loyalty was to the Universal Catholic Church, then to the Pope in Rome, to his Croatian People and then to the secular leadership.

It was also uncovered by Milovan Djilas, a prolific political writer and former Yugoslav communist official, who reportedly admitted that:

War criminals, such as the quisling leader of Croatia, Ante Pavelić, were helped to pass through the Western countries unmolested in order to avoid renewed recriminations and conflict. Support was also given to ex-King Peter. Although it was clear that the overwhelming majority of the people no longer wanted him as ruler of Yugoslavia.⁶

In order to understand the Jewish predicament and tragedy during and after the end of WWII, it is of essence to understand the meaning of the concept *Holocaust*, so frequently used and yet so poorly defined: The reason being that during World War II, one of the biggest and most incomprehensible tragedies had landed upon the Jews, when within days of the entrance of Nazi Germany and their local collaborators into their cities and neighborhoods, and then within a period of four years, from 1941 to 1945, approximately seventy percent of the Sarajevo Jewish population was annihilated, and a similar fate was experienced across all the nation states of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

⁶ Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito Speaks, His Self-Portrait and Struggle with Stalin* (London: Weidenfeld ... a Nicolson, London, W.I, 1953), p. 258.

The Nazi regime's deep hatred of the Jews, and for everything they stood for, led them to convince the population of Europe to wage a universal war against the Jews. And for his objective to materialize, Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Germany regime had to declare war against all the *European Nation States*, and a universal war against the Jews. By the end of the war, the Nazi regime, headed by Hitler and with the help of most of the European countries, had annihilated approximately seventy percent of Yugoslavia's Jewish population and in total, six million of the European Jews. In the annals of history, the Nazi's murderous acts and those of their collaborators was defined as the *Holocaust*.

The historian Jacob L. Talmon, in a symposium at Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem, had explained how he defined the concept of *Holocaust*, stating:

The Holocaust visited on the Jews is different from all the earlier massacres in its conscious and explicit planning, in its systematic execution in the absence of any emotional element in the remorselessly applied decision to exterminate everyone, but everyone; in the exclusion of any possibility that someone, when his turn came to be liquidated, might escape his fate by surrendering, by joining the victors and collaborating with them, by converting to the victors' faith, or by selling himself into slavery in order to save his life!⁷

Another Jewish historian, Yitzhak Arad, among many writing on the Holocaust, stated that this concept is so frequently used and yet it is so poorly defined:

The term "*Holocaust*" refers to the extermination of six million Jews worldwide by the Nazis during the years 1933-1945, and to the destruction of the social and spiritual centers of world Jewry during the last generations which existed in Central and Eastern Europe. The objective of Nazi Germany from 1933 onwards was to destroy the religious, social and spiritual centers of world Jewry so as to destroy their self-identity. The concept "*Holocaust*" refers to a defined historic period, but we would be amiss if we did not focus on the ideological currents and the political

⁷ Jacob L. Talmon, *European History as the Seedbed of the Holocaust*. A symposium, *Holocaust and Rebirth*, Lectures delivered at a symposium organized by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, April 1973. The publication of this book was made possible by a grant from the Vladimir Schreiber Endowment Fund, p.13.

forces which spawned the horrors of WWII; if we do not retrace our steps to the very processes which gave birth to traditional anti-Semitism in the course of the generations, we would be amiss. "If we ignore the roots of Nazi ideas in Germany and the ideological currents which swept Europe, and in the phenomenon of the development of racial anti-Semitism since the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Yitzhak Arad, continues his narrative by emphasizing that:

So destructive have been the storms which have overwhelmed the Jews and so stupendous are the clashing forces about us today that a modern historian, making a similar effort, would need both the narrative abilities of Abba Eben and the energetic powers of the contemporary historian Haim Yoseph Yerushalmi, to mention just these two, among many others.⁸

Thus, the *Holocaust* cannot be compared to any other tragic episodes in the past, such as: the destruction of the Jewish state by Rome and the past expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal. Thus, this book, *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo, 1556-1948*, focuses on several critical periods in the chronicles of this people, who had fallen many times at the hands of those who had despised them for their way of life and for holding on to their Jewish religion.

The format and the approach taken in authoring this book was: *Let the documents and the eyewitnesses talk!* This book contains footnotes, the testimonies of survivors, rescuers and the testimonies of eyewitnesses, and often quotes entire paragraphs, which seem to be important as far as clarifying some of the contentious issues are concerned, that up to the present did not receive a resolution, especially those that pertain to the rescue and survival of Jews during WWII.

Fifty-six survivors and rescuers agreed to reveal to me their personal stories and many others I have obtained in the *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (USHMM) in Washington D.C. and at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. The approach, or methodology, utilized in this book gives readers an objective perspective of the period and on the events that took place before, during and after the end of WWII. Some added clarification is needed when, and if, some may argue that it is not a fully scholarly

⁸ Yitzhak Arad, Introduction, Holocaust and Rebirth, A Symposium, the publication of this book was made possible by a grant from the Vladimir Schreiber Endowment Fund. Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1974, p, 7-8.

book, because some of the events described are my personal testimonies and those of my family members. My reply would be: it is well known that I have related the story of the survival of my mother and me to many historians and archivists, which they included with other reliable information so, if this is the case, then why should this resource not be available in this book? In essence, I aim to present a balanced point of view, of the life and struggles of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a focus on the Sephardic Jews, from the time of their expulsion from Spain and Portugal and all through the years, prior and post-WWII.

Of great interest to me, and to other historians with whom I exchanged information, relative to the years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal, was their fate, all through the various wars, while in a constant search for a new abode. Some of these memorable stories I aim to share with you! And, in fact, one of my main reasons for authoring this book has been my desire to strengthen the spirit, the courage and the determination of every one of us, those who survived the *Holocaust* and are still around, to summarize their own thoughts and memories that they had gathered from their grandparents and parents, regardless of the length or the importance of their story or stories. Every bit of new information enriches the individuals who are recording the events that took place for the sake of the future generations who will be reading them. What is true, and of essence to know, is that all of us have a moral obligation to continue to promote justice, while fighting tyranny, injustice and oppression.

OBSERVATION

“On January 4, 1933, a meeting of the top forty German industrialists took place in Cologne, a major city of the Ruhr belt with Von Papen, the then foreign minister and with Hitler, Himmler and Hess. It took place at the home of *Kurt von Schrader*, of Bank house Schrader, who represented the top banks. At the end of the meeting, Papen emerged, beaming, with a happy face toward the forty waiting industrialists and bankers and declared jubilantly: ‘*Meine Herren we have just concluded an agreement with Mr. Hitler. Here at this moment were laid the foundations for the ensuing war in Europe.*’¹

Another theory, among many others, is that it was not the industrialists who held the key to the war and the Holocaust but, rather, that up until the destruction of the Communist Party of Germany, the key was in the hands of the Russian leader Joseph Stalin, not of the financiers, who merely took advantage of the utter political paralysis induced by Stalin and his German flunkies, and by the militant section of the German working class and, without them, all this tragedy was in the realm of the probable but not possible; they held the key and they handed it to Hitler.

The reasons given for such brutalities was the concept coined and promulgated by one-man, Nazi Germany’s Fuhrer, Adolf Hitler—*The Final Solution of the Jewish Question*. This concept was broadcast throughout the world and promoted initially throughout Europe, including the countries of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.²

Throughout the ages, the Jews had experienced an indefatigable determination to preserve their ancestors’ religion, and their way of life. One of my reasons for authoring this book: *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo*, has been my desire to remind people to remember the spirit and courage of the Jews whose sojourn of

¹ George Spiro, The Chief Forces Responsible for the Nazi Murder of Jews. Published, end of summer, 1979 by a non-profit organization, pp.6-8.

² Raul Hilberg, *The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, (Harper Perennial, 1993), 16.

fifteen hundred years ended in their being expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs, and that the reasons for their survival as an identifiable entity of the Jewish people was their determination to preserve their Jewish religion and way of life. Despite the Jews being hunted by the Spanish Inquisition, by Nazi Germany and, subsequently, by the Croatian Ustaše Muslims and Catholics, the Jews through many generations continued to follow in the pathway of their Jewish ancestors.

However, with the end of WWII, Marshal Josip Broz, known as Tito, had recognized that the Jews were neither emotionally strong nor in a rational frame of mind to forgive and forget those who had committed heinous crimes against the Jewish people. Furthermore, numerically, the Jews constituted less than one quarter of one percent of the total Yugoslavian population, and as such, they were in no position to assist Tito to build a strong Communist Republic of Yugoslavia, based on the slogan “Bratsvo Jedinstvo” (Brotherhood and Unity). And, for these reasons, the remnant of the Jewish population became a hindrance to Tito’s vision and, thus, the Jews had to be sent off elsewhere!

The Jews left their footprints in the Balkan Peninsula and in the cities of *Split* and *Dubrovnik*, as early as the seventh century of the common era (CE) and in the city of *Gebalim*, which refers to Zagreb in the tenth century. It is due to their perseverance and determination to survive as an identifiable entity that Jews were thankful to God, demonstrated by their frequent chanting in Hebrew: “*Baruch Ata Adonai Shehyanu ve Kiymanu ve higianu Lzman Haze*.”³ The Jews, from the time of their dispersal in 70 CE⁴ and all through the centuries held on to their religion, with some adaptations to their ever-present, new living locations, yet, never deviating from the basic tenets of their Jewish religion and their way of life.

Tito was also aware that the survivors who had returned to Sarajevo were not welcomed by the majority of the local population! Thus, under a different set of circumstances, he would have probably empathized with them and with the losses they had incurred; after all, many Jews had fought the Nazi occupiers and their local collaborators alongside Tito’s Partisans. The Jews refused or were unable, emotionally, to set aside their

³ Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this moment.

⁴ CE, Common Era

losses and also numerically the Jewish survivors constituted an insignificant minority, and as such, they were in no position to advance Tito's objectives for the future of Yugoslavia. When the opportunity presented itself he "suggested" that they relocate to their new homeland in Israel.

First, the surviving Jews were in a position to identify the criminals who had joined the Ustaše, the local Croatian fascists, who alongside Adolf Hitler's forces had committed crimes against Jews and many others who had opposed fascism. Second, the returning Jews demanded from the locals a return of all their embezzled assets, such as their homes and businesses.

It is possible that Marshall Tito empathized with the Jewish losses, but he had no intention of alienating all others who were instrumental to the fulfillment of his primary objective in uniting all the citizens of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia with an objective to recreate a new Communist Republic of Yugoslavia. For his purposes, the Jewish minority was a hindrance on his way to achieving a, once again, united Yugoslavia. He wished to rid the country of its Jews, excluding a few that were essential for the proper functioning of his new Republic.

In order to begin to understand the Jewish predicament and tragedy during and after the end of WWII, it is of essence to understand the meaning of the concept *Holocaust*, so frequently used and yet so poorly defined: The reason being that during World War II, one of the biggest and most incomprehensible tragedies had landed upon the Jews, within days from the entrance of Nazi Germany and their local collaborators into their cities and neighborhoods and within a period of four years, from 1941 to 1945, 70 percent of the Sarajevo Jewish population was annihilated, and similar fate was experienced across all the nation states of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

THE FORMAT AND THE APPROACH TAKEN IN WRITING THIS BOOK

Since it is a scholarly book, with footnotes and documented, I would like to point out and let the readers know that the most characteristic feature in my writing of this book is that I, often quote paragraphs, which seem to be of importance and may also clarify some contentious issues, that up to date did not received a resolution, especially when the content pertains to WWII. Also, in this book, the approach taken was to let the surviving individuals, whom I had the privilege to interview, to tell their stories of death, rescue and survival during the WWII years. This methodology, hopefully, will give the readers an objective perspective of the period and the events under discussion.

I aim to present what I believe to be a balanced point of view, not only of the WWII years, but also of the years prior and post war experiences. Some survivors and rescuers volunteered to tell me their own stories of pre and post WWII. Similarly, the archives are filled with stories describing horrific events that took place in the Iberian Peninsula and their fate once the Inquisition took control over religious life in both Spain and Portugal.

Of great interest to me was to read and study the biographies of individuals who had experienced a most fruitful life in Spain and Portugal and their fate once the Spanish Inquisition took control over the territories of the Iberian Peninsula. Similarly, it was surprising to learn the control Nazi Germany had over Europe and beyond. Some of these painful and memorable stories I aim to share with you! But before we start it is imperative to emphasize that all the stories and the events that took place, are composed of a mixture of joy as well as of great sorrow.

One of the main reasons for undertaking to write this book, *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia With a Lens on Sarajevo*, has been my desire to strengthen the spirit, the courage and the determination of every one of us, those who survived the Holocaust, and are still around to summarize their memories, whatever they have, regardless of the length, with an objective to introduce the following generations, to their family's pathway and with an objective, to continue to fight tyranny, injustice and oppression.

However, while observing what was happening to the Jews of Sarajevo, and especially to those known as Sephardim under *Fascism and Communism*, it became apparent that their likelihood of survival as independent entities were minimal. Jews, who failed to escape Sarajevo before or immediately upon the entrance of Nazi Germany's forces, accompanied by the Ustaše, comprised of local collaborators, comprised of Muslim and Catholic collaborators, the Serbian Chetniks, and the *Volksdeutsche*, Yugoslav citizens of German ancestry. The reasons given for such brutalities was the concept coined and promoted by one man, Adolf Hitler, "*The Final Solution of the Jewish Question.*" This concept was promulgated and promoted throughout Europe, including the countries of the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Thus Hitler has transformed the liquid ideas of 1940 into the hard reality of 1941 genocide.¹

In the past the Jews had experienced indefatigable determination to preserve their ancestors' religion, and their way of life. One of my reasons for writing this book *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Lense on Sarajevo*, has been my desire to remind and to remember the spirit and courage of the Jews whose sojourn of fifteen hundred years ended when they were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula by the *Spanish Inquisition*, supported by both the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs, whose objective was to convert as many of the Jews as they could, and those who refused, and were determined to preserve their own religion and way of life, were brutally murdered or expelled.

With the end of WWII, Tito had recognized that Jews were neither emotionally strong nor in a rational frame of mind to forgive and forget those who had committed heinous crimes against the Jewish people. Furthermore, numerically the Jews constituted less than one quarter of one percent of the total Yugoslavia's population, and as such, they were in no position to assist him in the building of a strong new Yugoslavia, and as such they would become a hindrance to his plans.

Yet, based on the above it should be clear that the Jews were unable emotionally, to set aside their sorrow as Tito urged them to do. The Jewish losses, at the hands of Nazi Germany and their local Yugoslav collaborators, the Ustaše and others, prevented them from accepting Tito's

¹ Hilberg, Raul, *The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, (Harper Perennial, 1993), 16.

request to *forget the past and forgive* all the evil doers for the wrong done to them during World War II (WWII).

Consequently, Tito's leadership acknowledged that, since the Jews had become an insignificant minority, justice and legal proceedings were out of consideration, and that the time was ripe to ask them to go to their new *State of Israel*:

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz-Israel; the General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the *United Nations* of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable. This right is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign State.²

Of great interest to me and to many historians who preceded me and with whom I exchanged information, relative to the years after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, followed by their expulsion from Portugal was their fate, all through WWII, while in a constant search for a new abode. Some of these memorable stories I aim to share in this book!

One of my objectives for authoring this book: *A Legacy of the Jews of Yugoslavia with a Focus on Sarajevo*, has been my objective to *remind and remember* the spirit and courage of the Jews who spent fifteen hundred years in Spain in 1492, and Portugal in 1497. Despite their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula by the Spanish and Portuguese monarchs, they showed an unstoppable determination to survive and to preserve their religion and way of life, despite being hunted for centuries by various enemies. Their final plight for life and survival began again when Nazi Germany, in 1933, began waging a *Universal War* against them.

In Europe, Nazi Germany managed to annihilate six million Jews, and seventy-five percent of the Jews of the *Independent State of Croatia*, known as *Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, (the NDH) perished from 1941 to

² Eban, Abba My People, The story of the Jews, New York and Random House, Inc., New York and simultaneously New York and Random House, Inc., New 1ore and simultaneous int Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 68.27328

1945. Yet, based on the above, it should be clear that the Jews were unable, not only emotionally, to set aside their sorrow as Tito urged them to do, but they also requested to bring to justice the perpetrator. The Jewish loses, at the hands of *Nazi Germany* and their local Yugoslav collaborators, prevented them from accepting Tito's request to *forget the past and forgive all the evil doers* for the crimes done to them during WWII.

