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Editorial:

Introduction: Setbacks and shocks to the system: adjustments and particularly painful losses

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INTRODUCTION

Setbacks and shocks to the system: adjustments and particularly painful losses

The previous issue of *Transactions*, volume 51, largely comprised articles originating in a London conference about the Kindertransport (January 2019) – the migration to Britain of nearly ten thousand (mostly) Jewish children, in the wake of “the Night of the Broken Glass” in Nazi Germany, November 1938, to the outbreak of the Second World War. In February 2019, the colleagues who initiated that conference, Lesley Urbach and Jennifer Craig-Norton of Southampton University, along with Susan Cohen, approached me with the idea of hosting a related meeting on the history of internment. Its intended focus was the policy introduced in the United Kingdom in May 1940, and the exceptional debate that was held in the House of Commons on 10 July 1940. Historians would be invited to scrutinise these events and the impact of the internment of “enemy aliens” during the Second World War, to examine contemporary policies and detention in the UK in the twenty-first century, and to look beyond these cases at other uses of internment, in historical and comparative contexts.

Due to the creativity and outreach of Jennifer, Lesley, and Susan, the organising committee for that conference also came to include Mia Hasenson-Gross of the René Cassin human rights charity, and Barbara Warnock and Christine Schmidt of The Wiener Holocaust Library. Scheduled to be held at the Institute for Advanced Studies (IAS) of University College London (UCL) in March (2020), at least a dozen revised papers from that conference would have graced this issue of *Transactions*. The agreed keynote speakers were Bernard Wasserstein, formerly Professor of History at Oxford, Glasgow, and Brandeis University, and Tine Destrooper, Professor of Transitional Justice in the Human Rights Centre and Faculty of Law and Criminology at Ghent University.

Given what has since transpired in the last several months, it is easy to forget the timeliness of the proposed conference. A vociferous protest was sparked on 17 June 2019 when Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat of New York (United States House of Representatives), posted an Instagram video concerning “detention camps” on the southern U.S. border and used the term “concentration camps”. The Republican

Representative Liz Cheney (Wyoming), who is currently famed as one of the few courageous members of her party for challenging Trump, immediately upbraided Ocasio-Cortez for maliciously appropriating a Holocaust term, and countless others followed suit, including the charge of antisemitism. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) issued a statement on 24 June 2019, condemning the use of Holocaust analogies outright, widely understood to demean Representative Ocasio-Cortez.¹

In the wake of that proclamation, more than a hundred world-leading historians of the Holocaust sent “An Open Letter to the Director of the USHMM”. While affirming their overall support for the museum, the signers articulated a harsh rebuke to its administration, imploring it to “reverse its position on careful historical analysis and comparison.”² Conflicts such as those reported by Ocasio-Cortez continued and festered, particularly as the United States and Britain increasingly demonized migrants under Trump and Prime Ministers Theresa May and Boris Johnson. Britain’s second female prime minister expressed discomfort at Trump holding her hand, yet tacitly condoned his racist, anti-Islamic turn on immigration.

The most heinous application of antisemitism and abuse of Holocaust history in the United States, however, was the brandishing of racist and antisemitic symbols, awash in a sea of “Stop the Steal”, Trump, Confederate, and QAnon flags, in the storming of the U.S. Capitol building on 6 January 2021.³ The explicit antisemitism of the (thoroughly reprehensible) Republican Representative Marjorie Taylor-Greene, while bizarre and easy to ridicule, did not prevent her from being supported by the vast majority of her party, and receiving unqualified, effusive praise from Trump.⁴ It is

1 See <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/statement-regarding-the-museums-position-on-holocaust-analogies> (accessed 18 February 2021).

2 Omer Bartov, Doris Bergen, Andrea Orzoff, Timothy Snyder, Anika Walke, “An Open Letter to the Director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum”: <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/07/01/an-open-letter-to-the-director-of-the-holocaust-memorial-museum/> (accessed 18 February 2021).

3 The analysis of the historian Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University was widely reported, appearing originally in the academic blog “The Conversation”. See <https://theconversation.com/a-scholar-of-american-anti-semitism-explains-the-hate-symbols-present-during-the-us-capitol-riot-152883> (accessed 18 February 2021).

4 See Deborah Lipstadt, “Jews fear what follows after Republicans applauded Marjorie Taylor Greene. It is chilling that rather than condemn the conspiracy theorist’s espousal of antisemitic nonsense, her party supported her”, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/feb/15/jews-fear-republicans-applauded-marjorie-taylor-greene-conspiracy-theorist> (accessed 19 February 2021).

safe to assume that the ludicrous accusation of “Jewish space-lasers” has never before appeared in *Transactions*, and let us hope that this is the first and last such instance.

A week following the insurrection, Representative Cheney issued this unbiased assessment:

On January 6, 2021 a violent mob attacked the United States Capitol to obstruct the process of our democracy and stop the counting of presidential electoral votes. This insurrection caused injury, death, and destruction in the most sacred space in our Republic. Much more will become clear in coming days and weeks, but what we know now is enough. The President of the United States summoned this mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack. Everything that followed was his doing. None of this would have happened without the President. The President could have immediately and forcefully intervened to stop the violence. He did not. There has never been a greater betrayal by a President of the United States of his office and his oath to the Constitution.⁵

In this instance, however, Cheney did not include the affronts to the Holocaust, and specifically to Jews, that accompanied the most treasonous assault on the United States since the Civil War.

What had been the hot-button issue of immigration, by then, was relegated to the sideline. To be sure, the use of internment as a matter of state policy, especially as it relates to migratory movements, is nothing new. The phenomenon, however, has lent itself to a wide spectrum of behaviours, some of which have resulted in inhumane treatment and callousness towards those seeking safety through relocation across national boundaries. From the perspective of state authorities, especially during wartime, internment is often a reaction to apparently hostile incursions and purported internal threats. Two of the better-known cases of internment arise from the Second World War: the treatment of Japanese Americans by the United States and that of Jewish refugees in the United Kingdom. We also are aware of internment outside wartime contexts. In *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe before the Second World War* (2012), Bernard Wasserstein asserts that “all over the continent” by January 1939, “Jews who had been evicted from their homes and homelands . . . were forced into temporary accommodation in so-called ‘camps’. Sometimes, as in Germany, these were prisons where they were subjected to slave labour

5 “Read Liz Cheney’s full statement in support of Trump’s impeachment”, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/12/liz-cheney-trump-impeachment-statement-458394> (accessed 18 February 2021).

and torture. Elsewhere, as in France, Poland, or the Netherlands, they were places of internment designated for refugees, illegal immigrants, or political undesirables.”⁶

Alas, that conference did not materialize due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Speaking for myself, I did not yet have the experience or confidence to help transform it into a “virtual” event – as would become the norm to which we are now accustomed. Despite the planned meeting not coming to fruition, we are pleased to publish original reflections on internment, which were intended for presentation, by the aforementioned Bernard Wasserstein, Tine Derstrooper, Jennifer Craig-Norton, and Susan Cohen.

This volume also includes articles beyond the theme of internment. Various aspects of the social, cultural, and legal history of British Jewry are explored in Henry Summerson’s “Jews and felony in English communities and courts, 1190–1290” and Carla Vieira’s “The prisoner, the fugitive and the returnee: three portrayals of the eighteenth-century Sephardi diaspora to England”. Delving into questions of religious identity, Jewish practice, and struggles with intellectual maturity and integrity concerning the Victorian scholar Marcus Kalisch, the historian Edward Breuer reveals a formerly obscure but compelling figure from Anglo-Jewish history. In the realm of popular culture, Daniel Appleby introduces us to the life and career of the entertainer Julian Rose from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. In contrast to the graphic liveliness in these articles, Philip Sapiro offers a very different perspective – from the Jewish burial grounds in Liverpool. All these can richly enhance our field, and may inspire succeeding scholars to take up new topics and questions.

Also in the months since the publication of the last *Transactions*, the Jewish Historical Society of England and the larger communities to which it belongs have lost a number of dear friends and colleagues.

Among the early victims of the Covid-19 pandemic was Michael Goldmeier (ל"ו). Michael was a recently retired solicitor and judge who had started a part-time MA in Jewish history at University College London. He was making splendid progress towards his degree, and had located a superb and important topic for his dissertation – on British fascism after the Second World War – about which he was already conducting careful research and articulating keen insights. Friendly, good-natured, and curious, Michael was beloved by undergraduates, postgraduate students,

6 Bernard Wasserstein, *On the Eve: The Jews of Europe Before the Second World War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), 385 (emphasis added).

and staff. A wise, sweet, generous, and modest soul, he was not with us for very long in the department of Hebrew & Jewish Studies but we miss him terribly. It was only after his death that we became aware that he was a pillar of several London (and national) Jewish communal institutions, and a powerhouse in the legal profession.⁷ There is no doubt that had he not been robbed by Covid-19 Michael would have gone on to become a distinguished historian and stellar contributor to the work of the Society.

Professor Ada Rapoport-Albert (א"ר), a two-term past president of the Jewish Historical Society of England (JHSE), died in June 2020. Ada, as she was known, succeeded John Klier at the helm of the JHSE after John's untimely death in 2007. A substantial portion of this journal is, therefore, dedicated to Ada. The contribution of Professor Rachel Elijor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was initially delivered at a symposium honouring Ada at Jerusalem's Zalman Shazar Center (July 2020), and a more substantial version of the talk appears here in Hebrew. We also include a translated, abbreviated adaptation. I wish to extend warm gratitude to Rachel Elijor, as well as for the combined efforts of Lily Kahn, Chani Smith, Wojciech Tworek, and Daphne Freedman for the translation, and to Jeremy Schonfield for helping prepare the Hebrew. The thoughts of Rachel Elijor remind us of the extent to which Jewish history, as a field, has been overwhelmingly male-centred and dominated, with little thought given until quite recently to what this has meant for half the Jewish people – and to the entirety of its well-being. It is no exaggeration to say that Ada Rapoport-Albert, more than anyone, roused Jewish Studies from its slumber on the question of gender. She not only called for but practised the scrupulous integration of Jewish women's history into Jewish history as had no scholar before her. The pieces that appear here by Jehuda Reinharz, Emma Harris, Belinda Samari, Chani Smith, David Biale, Magdalena Luszczynska, and Naomi Seidman are personal reflections on what she meant to the respective writers. In addition, particularly in the tribute by the Littman Library's Connie Webber, they help to render a story that has never been told: about how scholarship in Jewish women's history, and by women scholars, grew around the work and collective enterprises in which Ada was engaged.

Since I joined UCL's Department of Hebrew & Jewish Studies in 1997,

7 “Michael Goldmeier obituary: Lawyer who led the supermarkets' charge on changing the Sunday trading law and became chairman of the charity Jewish Care”, *The Times*, 4 June 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/michael-goldmeier-obituary-nmqtojsqb> (accessed 18 February 2021).

Ada has been, apart from immediate family, the most continuous and supportive presence in my life. I regard myself as extraordinarily fortunate to have had John Klier and Ada as colleagues and as the head of the department in which I worked. It is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine better colleagues and defenders of a small but somewhat unwieldy academic unit that doesn't quite fit any mould. In 2011 Ada was the main confidante I turned to when I was offered the editorship of *Transactions*. She encouraged me to accept, but she added that as editor I would have to be "merciless". I've tried my best.

In the summer of 2007, which no one knew would be the last of John Klier's life, John graciously offered to lead a study-tour to St. Petersburg and Moscow before the meeting of the European Association of Jewish Studies (EAJS) to be held in Moscow, with a small group of colleagues. Ada, Susanne Marten-Finnis (of the University of Portsmouth), and I took John up on this opportunity. It was indeed the trip of a lifetime. Some of the photographs of Ada published here are from that excursion, courtesy of Susanne Marten-Finnis.

During that trip, while in Moscow, Ada accompanied me on a visit to a long-lost branch of my family, who were staying in their dacha outside Moscow. I had learned of their existence through a previously unknown relative, living in Haifa, who had tracked me down the year before – Lily Titova (née Jasvojn.) Before Lily contacted me, my family and I believed that all our relatives who were in Lithuania at the time of the Nazi rampage had been murdered. The extensive correspondence which my grandmother, Edith Berkowitz, had conducted in Yiddish and Russian, ceased totally. Despite repeated appeals to the Red Cross and Jewish organizations, we never received any news about the fate of our Lithuanian family.

Lily identified herself as from my father's mother's side, and said that one other family member had survived – her cousin Regina, with whom she was still in touch, and considered her best friend. Regina had been "evacuated" during the period of Soviet occupation (the so-called Non-Aggression Pact) to Central Asia, and Lily somehow joined her. The family I was visiting, then, was the son of Regina and his wife and son – and the elderly Regina was with them. Ada said she was happy to join me, in part to round out the site visits related to my research (about my family who had been photographers), and also to see what a dacha was like. She had been to the Soviet Union and Russia on several occasions, but had never before been invited to a dacha, and was curious.

We were met at our Moscow hotel by my younger cousin, Ilya, and

his girlfriend, to guide us to the dacha. They were gracious, spoke fine English, and happened to be a tall, stunning couple. Ilya's parents, not quite statuesque, turned out to be warm and fascinating people. Concurrent with my work, they also had been doing research about the family's career in photography, and they shared photographs I had never seen. They were able to confirm that the most famous photographer in the family, Wulf Jasvojn – who served in the court of the Tsar – was the grandfather of my grandmother, after whom my own father was named. Even more interesting was what we learned from Ilya's father, Mikhail Bronstein, an anthropologist-ethnographer whose specialty was the indigenous peoples of the area around Alaska's Bering Strait, including Siberia.⁸ He was particularly interested in the implements created by these people for hunting, which also revealed religious and sacrificial motifs. Ada found the examples he shared from his research to be astoundingly beautiful. She told him a bit about her own work that dealt with similar questions of blood and ritual and sacrifice, and how these were combined with tactile sensations and visual motifs. She said, though, that her work never uncovered exquisite objects such as those Mikhail had found.

Ada also said she enjoyed seeing the different generations of the family together, including Regina – who was a trim and petite, radiant woman. The round-trip journey itself from central Moscow to its outskirts was remarkable, involving a segment in a negotiated car-ride (a netherworld we had never before known, between hitchhiking and a private cab), and a train trip, with wooden benches, not seats, with chickens among the passengers. Ada thanked me several times for taking her, but the pleasure was truly all ours. My family loved meeting her, and Ada helped make it into one of my most memorable experiences.

Among the other excursions that Ada found especially poignant (related to me) were those when she accompanied Dovid Katz as he conducted his ethnographic-linguistic research in the Lithuanian hinterland, and when Seth Wolitz treated her to a visit with Lady Bird Johnson, on her sprawling ranch, when Ada was a visiting lecturer at the University of Texas.

Besides being an impromptu research partner for my photography project, Ada also helped me with my ongoing investigations into Jews and

8 See M. M. Bronstein, "Ekven: einsizartige archäologische Fundstelle in Nordost-asien", and S. A. Arutjunov and M. M. Bronstein, "Vorwort zum Katalog", in *Arktische Waljäger vor 3000 Jahren: Unbekannte siberische Kunst*, exh. cat. (Mainz and Munich: V. Hase and Kehler Verlag, 1993, 1995), 73–8, 85–92; touring exhibition, Tübingen, Munich, Moscow, Zurich, and Hamm, April 1993–May 1995.

boxing. She told me that she had earlier lived near one of Daniel Mendoza's homes in the East End, where there was a blue plaque. She encouraged me to gain a sense of the remaining material culture tied to Jews and boxing, which I pursued. Ada also asked me to send my major publication on boxing, a catalogue for the Jewish Museum exhibition I co-edited with Ruti Ungar (2007), to Chimen Abramsky. Chimen, the former head of my department, happened to live near me in Dartmouth Park. Ada reminded me that Chimen liked to read the scholarship of those in the department, and she said that he was, while not exactly a sportsman, anxious to see the boxing book. I sent it to him, and later, when I visited Chimen, he told me an incredible story.

Chimen said he had never followed or been much interested in boxing. But he personally knew how it felt to be on the receiving end of fists that had been trained to fight. Chimen left London in 1939 to study at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Due to his notoriety as a young intellectual who had left the Orthodox fold, and embraced anarchism, he was quickly identified and reviled by right-wing students and local activists. He told me that none other than Yitzhak Shamir (later the Israeli Prime Minister) pummelled him, with the intention of inflicting serious harm, and he was hospitalized. Chimen recalled that as he was getting the hell beaten out of him, he was struck by a feeling that his assailant knew, precisely, the kind of internal damage he was inflicting. If not for Ada, I do not believe I would have been as forthcoming as I was in imposing myself on Chimen. Although I saw him only infrequently, my relationship with him was meaningful, and I realized how his open-mindedness had a profound impact on Ada.

Remembering what might be deemed Ada's lighter side, many will have known that she hosted annual Christmas gatherings, with fantastic arrays of food and drink served over a several-hour period, and she presented each of her guests with carefully selected gifts. Who gives a party and gives gifts to the guests? The menu always included a flaming fruitcake-like "pudding" that had further gifts baked in it, which we had to be careful not to swallow. Ada famously put silver trinkets in the cake. These resembled the markers in the classic Monopoly game, such as the racing car and the aeroplane. I still don't know where she managed to find these. For many of us, Ada's Christmas, strange as it may sound, was the highlight of our social calendar.

In addition to her own stamp on Christmas festivities, Ada was

singularly at the forefront of a revolution in metropolitan transport. She was one of the earliest Londoners to attempt commuting by means of an electric scooter. She was so far ahead of the curve that her use of the vehicle was deemed illegal. Ada was always a strong proponent of off-beat and environmentally friendly transport, and one of her last Christmas gifts to me was a London-area cycling manual which I have found extremely useful.

During her time as the JHSE President, Ada devoted a great deal of thought and attention to how the Society might persevere into the twenty-first century. Some of the grizzled veterans may have found her intimidating, but countless others believe that she was the best thing ever to have happened to the JHSE. Continuing Ada's spirit of expansiveness and constructive engagement with new fields and emerging scholars, the current president of the JHSE, Professor Miri Rubin, has initiated a "New Generation" group in the JHSE. This cohort has been lively and vibrant, despite the limits of the pandemic. We can especially credit the postgraduate students Sophie Wilson and Dean Irwin for assuming the creative reins of this latest incarnation of the Society. Ada would also be deeply satisfied to see that the administration of the JHSE has been taken up, with unparalleled energy and competence, by Caroline Maurice.

In closing, I wish to thank Katharine Ridler for her continued, excellent work as copy-editor of *Transactions*, and Jeremy Schonfield, for the many duties he continues to perform, so admirably, as contributing editor. We wish to thank Lars Fischer for having edited the book review section, a post which he has resigned. His service to the organization is recognized. I also wish to thank Naftali Loewenthal warmly for allowing our republication of his obituary for Ada, and to Ada's son, Saul, for sharing photographs of his mother. I also express gratitude to the confidential readers who provided reports for the many submissions to the journal. Our work here, and for a long time to come, is dedicated to Ada Rapoport-Albert, truly of blessed memory.

Michael Berkowitz