

A printable best-of-the-week curated by Forward editors. Sign up at [forward.com/shabbat](https://forward.com/shabbat).



### Life

## What do you do when you're harassed for being Jewish on the street?

By Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt

It was just a scream. And yet.

My husband, a rabbi at an Orthodox synagogue on the Upper East Side, was walking home from synagogue on Friday night with our three-year old son. He stopped to say Shabbat Shalom to a young community member, and a man accosted them.

The man – tall, in his 40s, African-American, carrying a tablet – was within arm's length of our child, screaming profane accusations about “you Jews.” When they kept walking, the man started following them. Eventually, he turned into a local pharmacy.

When they got home, my husband's face was drained of color as he recounted what happened. I could barely sing “Shalom Aleichem;” I just stood there, holding my son, who is not quite four and was quiet that night, large-eyed. As my husband recited the blessing over the wine – “He who sanctified us” – I thought about what it means to be sanctified. That is, separate. Other.

After dinner, as I was putting my son to bed, he told me: “I don't want to go to shul tomorrow. I'm scared of the bad man.”

I had, of course, expected this, in some deep, maternal gut. Amid the uptick in anti-Semitic incidents across the New York area last year, I found myself putting a hat or a hood over our son's yarmulke when outdoors. I know people think we should all take pride in our Jewish identity, but I'm a daughter of Soviet immigrants, I've inherited a lot of paranoia as it is, and now I'm a mother, and I'm not interested in risking my child's safety for the sake of a statement.

He wasn't wearing a hat to shul on Friday night.

So what does one do about an uncomfortable moment in which one is singled out and harassed for one's identity on the street, on the subway, in the supermarket?

It was just a scream, right? There was, thankfully, no physical altercation.

But it was in our neighborhood, a few blocks from our shul and our home, so we figured it would be good to report the incident, in case the man made a habit of this kind of harassment. On Sunday morning, my husband went to the local precinct – which has been generously

protecting our synagogue – and the officers on duty informed him that this was not a bias incident, it was street harassment.

I decided to share what happened on social media. I figured that these moments of anxiety, of what it means to be a visible Jew in New York in 2020, must be in the public record – if not in official police records, then on Twitter. When I shared the tweet, which had gotten some traction, with the local precinct's Twitter account, an officer immediately reached out to us for more information, to hear the full story. The officer subsequently encouraged reporting of these incidents, even if there was no physical assault or threats at hand.

I also reported the incident to the Anti-Defamation League, which collects incident reports from news reports and social media in a searchable database on its website. The head of the ADL, Jonathan Greenblatt, said that this tracker is an important supplement to official police logs of anti-Semitic hate crimes because, "it provides a much more accurate barometric reading of the mood toward Jews – and, not unsurprisingly, the mood of Jews because we are aware of the rise in uncomfortable moments like the one that you described on Twitter."

Greenblatt has an important point: These incidents ought to be recorded in order to assess, somehow, the fears of a community. When I posted about the incident on Instagram, where most of my followers are Orthodox like me, I received about a dozen messages from women who described similar situations – ones that they have not reported, and that will never get reported, because they are merely "uncomfortable," not criminal.

I called Deborah Lauter, who heads New York City's Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, to ask what one should do after being harassed on the street. I was gratified to learn that the New York Police Department plans to soon – she said "within the next few months" – start including such non-criminal bias incidents in their CompStat system.

"The fortunate and unfortunate thing is that you have a right to be a bigot," she told me. "But you don't have the right to harass people. The fact that he was pursuing your husband and child – that needed to be reported." Like Greenblatt, Lauter encouraged reporting incidents both to law enforcement and to the ADL.

So, if you find yourself in such a situation: Tell the local police. Tell community organizations devoted to keeping independent records. And – as a journalist, I believe in this strongly – tell the world, in your own voice, on social media. That is, don't let that incident live in some bureaucratic spreadsheet alone: Post about it. Share your story. Let it be known that hate is alive on American streets.

But while the city sorts out how exactly to catalog the intimidation many visibly religious Jews may feel while going about our daily lives – I am a mother trying to figure out how to support my not-yet-4-year-old son, who has evidently already figured out that there is a connection between his Judaism and the behavior of the "bad man."

He's had trouble going to school the last few days, the principal told me. This afternoon, I got on the phone with the school psychologist about how to handle this; she taught me to validate his emotions, and to emphasize that he is safe.

We've talked about this incident in the larger context of Jewish history, drawing on his knowledge of the Purim and Hanukkah stories, where sometimes people aren't nice to us because of who we are – but we must always remember who protects us, who keeps us safe.

I've gotten some good advice from friends, congregants and Twitter followers. Some suggested picture books that deal with identity and difference, like 'Most People' by Michael Leannah and 'Chick Chak Shabbat' by Mara Rockliff. Others suggested focusing on the helpers, in the words of Mr. Rogers, making lists of the people in our lives who protect us and help our community.

This morning, my son told me he was afraid to go outside. "My favorite place is home," he said, hugging me. I understood his fear – and I was troubled that, at so young an age, he might feel stress associated with being Jewish in public. In that moment, I just held him, silently.

And then, I put a winter hat on him and sent him off to school.

---

*Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt is the life editor at the Forward. Find her on Twitter @avitalrachel.*

## News

# East Ramapo trial begins: ‘The white community will always win’ vs. ‘literally whitewashing’ Hasidic Jews

By Ari Feldman

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. – Lawyers on Monday presented starkly different perspectives on identity politics in a suburban New York school district, as a federal trial opened in a voting-rights case that caps more than a dozen years of battle over funding between Orthodox Jews and their mostly black and Latino neighbors.

The case concerns the East Ramapo Central School District, where a majority-Orthodox board has in recent years cut teachers, aides, and after-school programs rather than raise taxes as growing private-school enrollment swelled the state-mandated transportation budget. The district, which includes the Orthodox enclaves of Monsey and New Square as well as racially diverse Spring Valley and Hillcrest, now has about 9,000 students in public schools and 30,000 in yeshivas.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs, which include the NAACP, accused the district of being run by the tyranny of the majority – what Corey Calabrese of the firm Latham & Watkins called the white “private-school community.” The district board, she said, has been defined by indifference to the public schools and their black and Latino students, and accused it of using a secret slating process to elect candidates – including some who are black or Latino – who support private-school interests.

Arguing that the district’s at-large voting system violates the landmark 1965 Voting Rights Act, Calabrese said that unless the district institutes geographically based ward system, “the white community will always win.”

But David Butler, a lawyer representing the school district, said the issue was not racial representation but

policy differences, such as whether to raise taxes to make up for state budget cuts. He also accused his opponents of “literally whitewashing” the Hasidic community, saying bluntly: “This case is about Orthodox Jews.”

As for Calabrese’s accusation of a secret slating process, Butler said it was a “grand conspiracy theory of a shadowy Orthodox cabal that controls elections,” raising the specter of anti-Semitism.

The trial, in U.S. District Court in White Plains, N.Y., did not get underway in earnest until 4:30 p.m., delayed first by the Judge Cathy Seibel’s attendance at a colleague’s funeral, then by her efforts to get the parties to negotiate a settlement. As journalists, spectators, lawyers and clients waited, the bailiff had to admonish the crowd to lower the volume multiple times. There were many jokes about cell-phone withdrawal, since no electronic devices are allowed in court.

With no settlement reached, the lawyers outlined the cases they plan to present over the next two weeks, calling as witnesses current and former members of the school board; failed candidates for the board; former teachers and students in the district’s public schools; statisticians and demographers; and local activists.

In the courtroom were about a dozen supporters of the public-school parents and failed candidates for the board who are suing the district alongside the NAACP – and about 20 lawyers and support staff from Latham & Watkins, which is handling the plaintiffs’ case pro bono. Two lawyers from the New York Civil Liberties Union are also serving as counsel.

The district is being represented by Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. According to a bond filing from April 2019, the district expects to spend at least \$1 million on legal fees for the case.

Adjourning for the evening, Seibel told the parties that she expects them to continue settlement discussions, even though, following the opening arguments, “each side has heard the other say terrible things about them.”

---

*Ari Feldman is a staff writer at the Forward. Contact him at [feldman@forward.com](mailto:feldman@forward.com) or follow him on Twitter @aefeldman*

## Culture

# A righteous man in hell

By Yoel Matveyev

In October, the German academic publishing house WBG Theiss published the book, “Letters from Hell” (*Briefe aus der Hölle*), about Jews who served in the Sonderkommando at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. The volume also includes a new translation from the Yiddish memoirs of Rabbi Leib Langfus, prepared by the author of this article.

The book includes all available memoirs of Jews who served in the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz-Birkenau – the camp detail forced by the Nazis to help prepare inmates for the gas chambers and dispose of their corpses. In total, eight such documents have been preserved, the majority of them in Yiddish.

A quite expansive introduction and detailed commentary accompanies the book, prepared by Pavel Polian, a Moscow-based geographer, author and literature scholar who has been preoccupied for quite some time with this theme. In 2011 he published a Russian-language edition of Zalman Gradovsky’s memoirs, translated from Yiddish in 2007–2008 by Alexandra Polian, a well-known Yiddish instructor and researcher from Moscow.

Gradovsky relates that in the camp, he slept in the same bunks as the *dayan*, or rabbinic judge, Leib Langfus of Makow Mazowiecki, Poland. Because of his extraordinary piety—a rarity in such a terrible place, particularly among the Sonderkommando—the Kapo had pity on the rabbi and gave him the “easy” task, if one may use such a word in this context: to wash and dry the shorn hair of the women. About a year ago, Pavel Polian asked me to prepare a fresh translation of Langfus’s memoirs.

Unfortunately, we still know relatively little about this person. The basic research on his life, which historians have pursued since the 1950s, seems like a captivating yet tragic detective novel. Until recently, researchers believed that his original Yiddish-language memoir was unreadable because

of the dangerous fragility of the severely damaged state of the ruined pages on which it was written.

Langfus was sent to Birkenau in December 1942. Together with Gradovsky he participated in the Sonderkommando uprising, in which 451 of the resisters were killed on October 7, 1944; they nevertheless succeeded in destroying one of the crematoria and in this way delayed by a little the killing process. The rabbi himself was murdered later, on the 26th or 27th of November.

In the camp he felt compelled to write two works, a memoir and a diary. Both works were discovered after the war, buried in glass jars near the crematoria. The diary was sufficiently preserved. Dina Terletsкая translated it from Yiddish into Russian; Roman Richter’s German version of her translation appears in the new collection. Thanks to Richter, my Russian translation of Langfus’s memoirs appears in the volume, which in Yiddish was titled “*Geyrush*” [“Expulsion”].

Already in April 1945, a Pole named Gustaw Borowczyk found the memoir in the ruins of Auschwitz crematorium number 3, and hid the manuscript in the attic of his house; his brother discovered them there in 1970. In 1972, historian Dr. Roman Pytel translated it into Polish; in the same year it was also published in German.

Although Pytel’s translation helped me greatly, it is nonetheless littered with errors and fantastic interpolations. When the translator couldn’t understand the Yiddish text, he continuously filled in the blanks, often with extraordinarily awkward turns of phrase. For example, in one place he changes the word “Jewish,” for who knows what reason, to “Aryan” – that is, German, according to the racist terminology of the Nazis. The word “shul” which in context clearly means “synagogue” he translated as “school” and so forth.

Nonetheless, the manuscript during the 1970s was in much better condition than today. The Polish translator therefore could make out parts of it that were now obscured with age. Without the help of

contemporary technology, the manuscript would remain indecipherable.

Russian computer expert Alexander Nikitayev examined the pages, separating out the color of the faded blue ink. This, however, proved insufficient; I had to analyze every fragment from various perspectives with the help of a computer. Langfus had scratched some of the pages with some sort of sharp instrument, instead of a pen.

In short, Langfus tells of the ghetto in Makow, its liquidation, the Nazi selection process, the path to the death camp, the poison gas, the crematoria.... The memoir is full of psychological, and, it seems to me,

Freudian elements. It gives the tragic impression that the author is losing his sanity, and even the physical ability to write further.

Little by little, I was able to make sense of the words, sentences, then whole paragraphs that the previous researchers were unable to decipher. Unfortunately, just a portion of the original notes remain, and even these preserved pages were torn, soiled, moldy, erased. But precisely this fragile character gives the text its own dark character: “bodies...remaining graves...death...”

Only these words remain legible on page 114. What Langfus may have written further—and if he wrote further at all—remains a mystery. In any event, the fact encourages us, that even in long familiar documents, new and significant details may be found, thanks to the development of computer technology. An additional important step and an honor for the murdered authors would be, of course, to publish these “megillahs of Auschwitz” in the original Yiddish.

## News

# Canadians, like New Yorkers, sue their government to force change in yeshivas

By Jordan Kutzik

For the first time, the Canadian government is getting a taste of what New York City and state have been dealing with for years – a trial over a lawsuit accusing it of failing to provide adequate secular education to Hasidic children.

Yohanan Lowen, and his wife Shifra, claim in the lawsuit against the province of Quebec that when Yohanan graduated at age 18, he was unable to read or write in French or English or perform basic arithmetic.

(Shifra Lowen has written for the Forverts).

“The plaintiffs finished their high school education without knowing about the St. Lawrence River or the theory of evolution,” a summary of the claim reads.

The Lowens filed the lawsuit, which alleges that education authorities did not provide proper oversight of the Hasidic schools he attended in a Montreal suburb, in 2015.

Yohanan was born into the “Tash” Hasidic community, which among Hasidic Jews has a reputation for extreme insularity, and left in 2010.

The trial began on Monday in Quebec Superior Court. The Lowens are not seeking financial damages. Rather, they are aiming to have the court impose a declaratory judgment, which would force the province to ensure that students of private religious schools receive an education that meets the standards of the provincial curriculum.

The Lowen’s lawsuit comes amid increasing scrutiny of Hasidic yeshivas in New York State, where some people who have left various Haredi communities have sued the state and the city citing similar reasons as the Lowens. Little has changed in New York, however, as pro-yeshiva groups, yeshiva critics

led by YAFFED and state education authorities have spent years arguing over the basic facts of what is taught in Hasidic schools.

On Monday, Marie-Josée Bernier, a youth protection employee, testified that many children in Hasidic schools suffer from “educational neglect,” lacking basic general knowledge and possessing only rudimentary English and no French at all. A 2014 investigation by Quebec’s youth protection services determined that 280 of 320 boys in the Hasidic education system who were examined were “developmentally compromised.” Some couldn’t read a menu or count change.

While the educational issues in New York are strikingly similar, the political situation in Quebec may be more conducive to those seeking to reform Hasidic schools there. Furthermore, the tension between French and English language partisans in Quebec will likely play a role.

Under the previous Liberal government, the province had entered an agreement with some Hasidic schools that saw secular studies taught at home under the supervision of local Anglophone school boards. Those school boards have, however, been dismantled by the new ruling coalition Coalition Avenir Québec as part of an education overhaul passed on Saturday in part to strengthen the role of French in the province’s education system. With the Anglophone school boards gone, the future of the deal between some yeshivas and Quebec that allowed the schools to not teach secular subjects appears to be in jeopardy.

Bruce Johnston, the Lowens’ lawyer, argued that Quebec has known for 30 years that some religious schools have been operating illegally but failed to enforce the laws.

“We’re not saying these people are ill-intentioned, but whatever strategy they had was a failure,” Johnston told the court, before asking the judge: “By tolerating illegal schools, did the government violate its own law?”

Lawyers for the Tash Hasidic community contend that educational standards have improved since the Lowens left the fold.

The trial is expected to last until February 20th.

---

*Jordan Kutzik is a staff writer at the Forverts..*

## News

# In a change of heart, Amazon has dropped white nationalist books

By Aiden Pink

Amazon has removed several white nationalist and anti-Semitic books from its website, a change from its past policy of defending the sale of objectionable publications, The New York Times reported Sunday.

While the online marketplace has frequently removed things like anti-Semitic action figures and Christmas ornaments listed for purchase by third-party sellers, it has traditionally not been as quick to remove books, the Times reported.

But that appears to be changing. Titles such as David Duke’s “My Awakening: A Path to Racial Understanding” and the Nation of Islam tract “The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews” are no longer listed for purchase.

Some users think the platform has gone too far. A book documenting the creation of the Amazon Prime show “The Man in the High Castle,” which imagines what would have happened if the Nazis won World War II, digitally erased swastikas from set photos. The book’s publisher, Titan, said Amazon approved those changes, while Amazon said they didn’t make any editorial edits to the photos.

“If you can’t even have swastikas shown in a book about Nazis taking over America, please do not make books ever again,” one reviewer wrote on Amazon.

To be sure, some anti-Semitic books are still available, such as Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf.” But booksellers told the Times that Amazon ordered them to remove certain books without specifying why, or provide guidelines for what should and shouldn’t be made available for purchase.

“I’m not going to argue for the wider distribution of Nazi material,” said Kansas bookstore owner Danny Caine. “But I still don’t trust Amazon to be the arbiters of free speech. What if Amazon decided to pull books representing a less despicable political viewpoint? Or books critical of Amazon’s practices?”

There are no First Amendment implications for these issues; as a private business, Amazon has the right to sell or not sell whatever books it wishes.

## Opinion

# How an anti-Semitic staple about Jewish power captured the left

By Sharon Goldman

In two weeks, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee will host its annual confab, the AIPAC Policy Conference. As one of the largest pro-Israel lobbying organizations in the United States, surpassed only by Christians United for Israel, AIPAC often works as a stand-in for perceptions of American Jewish power. In the decade that I worked for AIPAC, board members would routinely return from visits abroad and share stories with me about foreign leaders lobbying them to change the US government's mind, not about Israel or the Middle East but about a host of issues unrelated to AIPAC's lobbying work – things like trade policies or diplomatic choices vis-à-vis these [sometimes very problematic] countries.

But it's not just AIPAC that receives these requests. Colleagues at other Jewish organizations often told me their board members fielded similar requests. It took me a while to realize the disturbing truth: It was not AIPAC's effectiveness in the American political system that inspired the foreign leaders to ask for board members' assistance; it was the fact that they were Jews. That was enough to give these foreign dignitaries the impression that they were powerful enough, almost supernaturally so, to convince the American government to do their bidding, even to go against its own interests.

The connection between Jews and power is of course nothing new. Though our position in society has vacillated throughout history between disempowerment and influence, regardless of whether Jews were marginalized in society or leading figures, there were voices – sometimes loud, sometimes in whispers – that complained about Jewish power.

What made these insinuations so dangerous was precisely the fact that they were not based in reality. Jewish power was imbued with a mythical element, cast as unnatural, inhuman power that made the facts on the ground irrelevant, and the Jews even more dangerous to those who hated them. For when

someone is believed to have extraordinary power, perceived as beyond normal means of control, there is a terrible urge to contain them by all means necessary. In other words, since natural methods are ineffectual, they must be completely alienated, eliminated or eradicated. And that's exactly what they did to the Jews.

America has not been free of this framing, though it has historically been the fringe right that's spread conspiracy theories about Jews trying to take over the world. People like George Lincoln Rockwell and Fritz Julius Kuhn took the Nazis' language and created a homegrown form of anti-Semitism.

Sadly, the anti-Semitic trope of supernatural Jewish power that can only be contained through elimination is no longer the exclusive province of the right. I'm not speaking about anti-Zionism per se, but about the form anti-Zionism has taken over the past fifteen years. It is no longer deniable that the anti-Zionism which has become the bread and butter of the left flank of American political life has abandoned criticism of Israeli history, policies, and actions in favor of calls for elimination of the Jewish state based on a totalizing portrayal of its power that borders on the supernatural. In this new 21st century version of anti-Zionism, the practically supernatural power that Israel is seen as wielding can only be met with complete boycotts, exclusion and demands that the Jewish state cease to exist.

To students of Jewish history, this equation is all too familiar. We've been here before.

\*

The theme of the incommensurately supernatural powers of the Jews can be traced back to the first century AD, to the very beginnings of Christianity's murderous anti-Semitism. Early Christians blamed the Jews for the crucifixion of Christ, an impossibility from both a theological perspective and a political historic one. The accusation imbued Jews with enough supernatural power to overcome total political disempowerment as well as religious constraints in order to bring about the death of the Son of God.

This elevation of the power of the Jews to a mythical degree, whereby the Jews were not subject to the laws of religion or politics or even nature, allowed them to be held responsible for other, completely

unreasonable and illogical events, many of which lead to mass murder.

As Steven Beller notes in “Antisemitism: a very short introduction,” anti-Semitism “took ever more irrational, delusionary forms, so that by the mid-12th century Jews came to be accused of the ritual murder of Christian children.” Over the next hundred years, this mythology developed into blood libels, wherein Jews were accused of baking the blood of Christian children into matzos for Passover. Throughout the Middle Ages, there were over 150 blood libels. All lead to murderous mobs torturing and killing Jews.

The blood libel essentially argued that the Jews were inhuman, fantastical vampiric creatures or all-powerful devils who were willing consumers of their own species’ blood. Like these super-human mythical creatures, Jews murdered children and used their blood to empower themselves through witchcraft and pagan behaviors. The blood libel helped explain the supernatural power of the Jews by connecting them with other unnaturally powerful creatures. And because Jews were supernaturally powerful creatures, these canards justified – if not demanded – that these impossibly dangerous Jews be destroyed.

As murderers of Christians and drinkers of human blood, Jews could easily be seen as in league with mythological forces against the rest of humanity. And given that they were believed to have powers beyond human ability, it was not illogical that Jews were also accused of playing a role in what appeared to be an unexplainable plague – the Black Death that decimated Europe in the mid-14th century.

Needless to say, the power assigned to the Jews in the Middle Ages had no basis in reality, and not just because they weren’t actually drinking blood. Jews in the Middle Ages were completely disempowered; they were relegated to the fringes of economic and political society. But since their power was seen as coming from an unnatural place, simply marginalizing Jews by not allowing them to hold certain positions or jobs in society or impoverishing them would not work to contain the Jews’ inhuman and hostile power over the world. The Jews’ very existence within one’s community or country was seen as threatening to the anti-Semitic societies where they lived.

The power of the Jews was seen as so supernatural that only by literally ridding the community of Jews –

through conversion, expulsion or murder – could a Christian population be safe. So Jews were slaughtered by Crusaders and then expelled, from England in 1290, from France in 1394, from much of Germany by 1350, from Spain in 1492 (in addition to the forcible conversions and torture of the Spanish Inquisition), from Portugal in 1497, and from Vienna in 1670. Orthodox Russia, before its imperial expansion in the 18th century, also prided itself on being free of Jews.

This link between supernatural power and anti-Semitism explains why it was the onset of the Enlightenment, with its introduction and popularization of science, rationalism, and reason, that helped reduce the virulent and bloody anti-Semitism that reigned freely throughout the Middle Ages. And it explains why 19th century Romanticism, with its embrace of the irrational, also oversaw a renewed growth in anti-Semitism. And it explains why once the Nazis decided to exterminate the Jews, Nazi propaganda evolved to focus on the Jews’ almost supernatural power that threatened not only Germany but the entire Western world.

Calls for elimination are the calling card of anti-Semitism. What cannot be controlled through discrimination must be eliminated.

\*

Given this history, it’s been rather shocking to see this same obsession with what is perceived as the unfathomable danger presented by Jews develop in today’s anti-Zionist rhetoric. This rhetoric casts Israel as so powerful that reasonable methods of responding to its perceived misuse of power are impotent; nothing for this crowd will work but total elimination.

Leaders of the movement to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel, known as BDS, frequently make use of dangerously overwrought descriptions to describe Israel, as do its supporters. Recall Congresswoman Ilhan Omar’s now-deleted 2012 tweet: “Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them see the evil doings of Israel.” The tweet taps right into the trope that Jews are not only powerful, but all-powerful – capable of hypnotism that only Allah can reverse. This is a classic of the genre, though of course, this theme is not unique to Omar. The language is everywhere in the BDS community, as when Mahmoud Nawajaa, the General Coordinator of the BDS National Committee, accused Zionists of

This idea that Israel's very existence is a danger to world peace is repeated over and over again, both in academic spaces and outside them. A 2013 BBC poll found that Israel is considered one of the most dangerous countries to world peace – tied with Iran, Afghanistan, and North Korea – a view as ubiquitous on American university campuses as it is irrational. Israel, which has shown no hegemonic aspirations in its short history, and certainly no interest in any place that does not threaten its borders, is described and perceived as a danger to the entire world, a threatening power way beyond what is reasonable given its size and history.

That's how you can recognize the old anti-Semitic canard at work: Israel, the unnaturally powerful Jew of the international arena, has grown into the most oppressive, most dangerous genocidal country in the world and it must be stopped in its hegemonic, demonic tracks.

If it was Romanticism that helped Nazi anti-Semitism, and Middle Ages' ignorance that enabled the blood libels, the progressive left's embrace of eliminationist rhetoric comes from its own anti-scientific discourse: postmodernism. Like the Romantics, postmodernists reject the Enlightenment principles of reason and scientific explorations of reality, arguing that all truth is subjective, and subjective mythologizing is seen as a perfectly valid way of understanding the world. In addition, contemporary postmodernists are obsessed with issues of power, dividing the world into oppressors and oppressed. Anyone with power is evil and must be fought against.

This combination of an obsession with power with a repudiation of facts was the perfect storm to give rise to the reemergence on the left of supernatural myths about Israel and Jews.

Of course, it is certainly true that Israel and the pro-Israel movement in the US are very powerful, and can help influence political opinion. Members of the pro-Israel movement are highly effective participants in the marketplace that is the American political system. It's also true that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would make American diplomacy easier; America's Arab allies continue to stress that they cannot publicly support Israel or America's endorsement of Israel while this situation continues.

But this is not how Israel's critics talk about the Middle

East. Instead they suggest that the Jews and the Jewish state are superhumanly powerful – hypnotizing, controlling, brainwashing – so that reasonable channels of addressing a problem cannot work. Engagement, negotiations, debate, or a more successful political counterweight are cast as unviable in the face of this inhumanly powerful Jewish state and her supporters. Only the end of the existence of the state of Israel will suffice.

There is no room for dialogue or conversation with a country or her citizens and supporters when they pose a danger to world peace, and when they have the power to hypnotize. It must be boycotted – her supporters excluded, shut and shouted down – and ultimately cease to exist. One cannot, and does not, engage with supernaturally powerful monsters; one eliminates them.

Israel's supporters are no doubt thankful that in the face of this kind of rhetoric, Israel is indeed in a position of power, necessarily so since it is a country surrounded by enemies, and exists in a part of the world where multiple countries and terrorist groups are openly committed to its destruction. Still, one can't help but shudder when one hears the eliminationist rhetoric of our past reemerge, given that elevating Jewish power to a supernatural level has always historically lead to murder.

But this discourse is not only dangerous to Jews; it is also sure to stymie real growth in Israel. If the Jewish state could be seen not as a terrifyingly supernatural hegemonic and genocidal monster that controls minds, but instead, for what it truly is – an imperfect country like all others, intent on remaining as powerful as humanly possible because it is surrounded by enemies, unlike most others – perhaps there could be a real conversation about how to address some of Israel's very human flaws.

---

*Dr. Sharon Goldman is Vice President of Global Resources and Strategy at Bar-Ilan University.*

**The views and opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Forward.**

## Culture

# Mazel tov: First edition of Yiddish 'Harry Potter' sells out in less than 48 hours

By Jordan Kutzik

Less than 48 hours after the Yiddish edition of “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone,” translated by Arun Viswanath, became available for pre-order, the book sold out its first print run of 1,000 copies. [Viswanath is Forverts editor Rukhl Schaechter’s nephew.]

For a Yiddish publisher in 2020, that’s a sales number that’s almost magical.

A second edition is in the works, publisher Niklas Olniansky announced on Facebook.

“It’s crazy, it’s hard to believe,” said Olniansky, who is based in Sweden. “We thought that we wouldn’t be able to sell more than 1,000 copies of a non-Hasidic book.” Olniansky noted that so far copies have been ordered in the United States, Israel, Poland, Sweden, Morocco, Australia and China.

Few – if any – new Yiddish books published outside of the Hasidic world sell 1,000 copies in a year, let alone in 48 hours. Most new Yiddish books for adults are either self-published by their authors or released by one of two Israeli Yiddish publishers in modest editions of several dozen to several hundred. Authors organize their own publicity and sell their books largely by word of mouth among a small community of readers. Although some contemporary Yiddish fiction receives stellar reviews and literary awards, the small audience means that the industry goal, financially speaking, is breaking even, not making a living.

Olniansky typically prints about 500 copies of his books, which range from simple board books that teach vocabulary to bilingual Swedish and Yiddish storybooks to novels for older children. His publishing house, Olniansky Tekst, receives support from the Swedish government; in Sweden, Yiddish is an official minority language.

Within the Hasidic world, sales figures are higher but still modest by publishing industry standards. [Many books published for the American Hasidic market in Yiddish are simultaneously published in English and Hebrew for other

Orthodox communities in New York and Israel, which helps to offset the cost.]

So how did the Yiddish edition of “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” manage to sell 1,000 copies in 48 hours? The popularity of “Harry Potter” is a key factor: Between the books, which have sold more than 500 million copies worldwide, the ongoing movie franchise and associated merchandise and theme parks, J.K. Rowling’s wizarding world is one of the most successful entertainment franchises in history. And translations of the books have become a popular learning tool for language students. Unsurprisingly, some of the people on social media who said they had purchased a copy are current or former Yiddish-language students. But native Yiddish speakers also appear, based on social media posts, to be a key group among those who purchased copies. And collectors who buy new translations of beloved books even if they can’t read them, a couple of whom have mentioned their purchase of the book on Twitter, are a third audience.

“I’m an optimist by nature but even I’ve been blown away by the enthusiasm. I’m thrilled,” said Arun Viswanath, the book’s translator, noting that he’s seen enthusiastic responses not only from Yiddish speakers and Jews more generally but among the wider community of language enthusiasts and people active in the Harry Potter fandom. “I hope people will be just as happy with the book as they were with the news of its release.”

While “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone” in Yiddish has been an unusually big hit, it is only the latest in a long line of children’s books to be translated into the language of Sholem Aleichem. Prior to World War II, many major works of American and European children’s literature appeared in Yiddish translation. Among those you can read for free in the Yiddish Book Center’s online library are Mark Twain’s “The Prince and the Pauper,” Jonathan Swift’s “Gulliver’s Travels,” Rudyard Kipling’s “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi,” Charles Dicken’s “Oliver Twist” and Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

In recent decades, new Yiddish translations of classic children’s literature have included Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s “The Little Prince,” several works by Dr. Suess including “The Cat in the Hat,” H. A. Rey’s “Curious George” and A. A. Milne’s “Winnie-the-Pooh.”

---

*Jordan Kutzik is a staff writer at the Forverts.*