



**From Paris to abroad**

**- Diversity in Europe- *In varietate Concordia* (EC, Brussels, 2000)**



**- issue 6**

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*« These strangers in a foreign World  
Protection asked of me-  
Befriend them, lest yourself in Heaven  
Be found a refugee »*

*« Ces Etrangères, en Monde inconnu  
Asile m'ont demandé  
Accueille-les, car Toi- même au Ciel  
Pourrait être une Réfugiée »*

**Emily Dickinson** (Quatrains II-2, 1864-65, Amherst, Massachusetts, Etats-Unis)  
**traduction en français de Claire Malroux** (NRF, Poésie/Gallimard, Paris, 2000)

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## From Paris to Thessaloniki

The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (Iriv) has published since September 2016 a newsletter dedicated to migration- *Regards Croisés sur la Migration*. Its main aim is to tackle the issue of diversity- the motto chosen for the European Union (EU) since 2000 and definitely in 2004 after the entrance of ten new EU country members (it enlarged from 15 members to 25).

The first four issues of our newsletter (September 2016 - March 2018) were dedicated to a comparison between Paris and Berlin on the basis of the testimonies of migrants selected in the French and German cities. Since November 2018 our newsletter has been open to other European Cities in that may be considered as examples to enhance and manage the diversity of their population in public space, services and policies. The first “new” issue opened with Rotterdam (Netherlands) whose inhabitants coming from abroad represent more than 70 % of the total population which is both a challenge and an opportunity to experience new approaches.

The 6<sup>th</sup> issue of our Newsletter is dedicated to religious and cultural diversity, with a focus on a religious minority. The European flag with its 12 stars symbolically refers to the twelve stars of Virgin Mary (her Assumption) but also to the twelve tribes of Israel. If the Judaeo-Christian roots of the European Union are quite obvious, the European Union is a secular project – its genuine cultural identity has always been open to all religions- “*United in diversity*”.

Thessaloniki has been an example in the field until the beginning of the 20th Century, where diverse but at the same time distinctive populations and cultures co-existed in peace for many years. Ottoman-Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, but also French, Italians, Bavarians and Russians created a multicultural mosaic of languages, traditions, religions and ways of life. One of the fundamental features of Thessaloniki – Greece’s second city, sometimes known as Salonica – since its very foundation in 315 Before Christ (BC) was its multicultural character. The Jewish heritage of Thessaloniki in particular, at least what survived the great fire of 1917, is around and above us- you just have to raise your head and have a look at the city’s many beautiful public buildings from the 19th and early 20th century. Their façades stand witness to the European influences that were amalgamated by the architects (many of them Jewish, as well as foreigners from various European cultures) with a strong taste of eclecticism, adopting various and diverse features and styles (Neo-classical, Neo-Gothic, Neo-Ottoman and Art Nouveau) into a harmonious urban complex.

The main characteristic of France is to be a secular country in which “*the state becomes modern, in this view, by suppressing or privatizing religion because it is taken to represent their rationality of tradition, an obstacle to open debate and discussion*” and whose “*effect can be intolerance and discrimination*”(Weil, 2009). Nonetheless former French Minister for Culture André Malraux underlined that the 21st Century would be religious (or mystic) or wouldn’t be”. This quotation was attested by the journalist André Frossard, during an interview given in 1955. At the beginning of the 20th Century metropolitan France was a predominantly Catholic territory with very small Protestant (1%) and Jewish (0.2%) minority populations. A century later, “*France has become the European country with the largest Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Atheist or Agnostic communities. We may speak of a ‘developed diversity’, with some tensions raised in the past 30 years between the free exercise of religion and local or French national institutions (mainly due to the presence of Islam as the second most practiced faith*”. (Weil, 2009). In Paris, an heritage of the Jewish community has been expressed by the French writer Patrick Modiano or with the Memorial to the Shoah, both referring to troubled times in France and Europe.

This new issue of our Newsletter dedicated to Diversity with a focus on religious and cultural diversity in Thessaloniki and Paris was possible thanks to the very kind collaboration of our Greek colleague from the University of Thessaloniki who is not only an expert in lifelong learning but also in the European Culture Heritage.

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## Thessaloniki- city of religious respect

Since the day of its foundation, Thessaloniki has always been multicultural. An important port and gateway between east and west, Thessaloniki (or Salonica) was a dynamic and prosperous commercial hub. There, Christians, Muslims and Jews coexisted for centuries. After multiple diasporas shuffled them in, out and around Greece, from the 15th century onwards, Jews played a particularly important part in the city's multicultural history. By the 20th century, however, they had become increasingly marginalized, and many Jews from Thessaloniki migrated elsewhere. Unfortunately, those who stayed suffered a terrible fate: by the end of WWII, 90% of the Jews living in Thessaloniki was murdered in the Holocaust. This contrast to being one of Europe's centuries-old central hubs for Jews is why Thessaloniki is often referred as the **City of Ghosts**.

After the upheavals of persecution and emigration from Europe, Thessaloniki proved a safe haven, a new centre providing a perfect location on the international trade routes between the Orient and the Occident. It is estimated that 20.000 Jewish immigrants lived in Thessaloniki by the mid-16th century. Coexisting peacefully with the other communities present (Christians and Muslims), they settled in different independent congregations near the harbour area, where they engaged especially in the crafts, particularly the production and export of textiles. Thus, the city became famous for its Jewish silk, weavers and wool dyers. As representatives of a new urban culture, Thessaloniki's Jews also transferred their skill and knowledge to new domains. The first printing press of the Orient operated at Thessaloniki since 1512, and Thessaloniki's Jews were at the forefront of its press until the dawn of the 20th century, exemplified by the famous family of Saadi Levi.

Meanwhile, in the 17th century, due to the decline of the Ottoman Empire and to the dubious figure of a pseudo-messiah, **Sabbatai Zevi**, who smartly allied with the Ottoman sultan, many Jewish families of Thessaloniki converted to Islam. Although they outwardly adopted Turkish names and Muslim observances, they continued to secretly perform their Jewish rites, due to which they are still famous as the *donmedes* (from Turkish *dönme*: rebel). By the turn of the 20th century, these wealthy *donmedes* communities (then numbering several thousand out of the ca. 80.000 Jews of Thessaloniki) constituted the most avant-garde part of town. Their activities (the famed Jewish guilds) and their contacts with European centres contributed to the spread of the western culture in Thessaloniki, its urban modernization and its fast industrial growth: Allatini's industrial flourmills complex, the pottery and textile factories, the demolition of the ancient sea walls and creation of the new port which helped to develop trade, were all achievements of that period. Additionally, the "*Alliance Israelite Universelle*" established a school providing education of western standards for their youth.

As the city expanded and modernised, becoming a powerhouse of commercial and industrial development in the Balkans, new public buildings and private mansions were built by its flourishing multicultural communities (Muslims, Christians, Jews, Donmedes and Franks). Even after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913), when Thessaloniki became part of Greece, trade continued to flourish, not least since the city became again an important centre for the soldiers of the Allied forces during World War I.

Famous Jewish and Italian architects erected banks and business establishments to host the rapidly growing commercial activities. The Great Fire was the beginning of the end for the "Jerusalem of the Balkans", the melting pot that had evolved during Ottoman occupation. At the turn of the 19th/20th centuries, a great part of the main centre of Thessaloniki was bought by two of the wealthiest Jewish/donmedes families of the city (Kapantzi and Modiano) and its subsequent regeneration had a strong taste of belle époque. In 1870 Liberty Square (Plateia Elefthereias) was created near the harbour, with outstanding buildings, cafés, clubs, department stores and luxury hotels, the majority belonging to Jews. Soon this new part of the town became the central meeting point and a place frequented by the growing cosmopolitan middle class. However, this prominent square was also where the final act in the life of Thessaloniki's Jewish communities began. It was here, on the 11th of July 1942 (Black Sabbath), that the German forces gathered ca 9000 Jewish males, subjecting them to humiliation and torturing many of them to death. One year later, 50.000 Jews were deported to the death camps in occupied Poland; by the end of 1943, no Jews were left in the city. All that was left of their rich and glamorous history was to be found in empty graves and houses. After the war, those who had survived the holocaust were organized in two small communities, while many moved abroad.

During the German occupation of Thessaloniki, 96 percent of the city's Jewish population was exterminated at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps, while the community's cultural reserves were looted and the majority of buildings associated with Jewish life in Thessaloniki destroyed. These tragic events saw some 60,000 member of the city's Jewish community perish, and nearly destroyed the community's presence in the city completely. Despite coming close to being wiped out completely, the survivors of Thessaloniki's Jewish community not only chose to remain in the city, but they rallied to form a small but vibrant part of the city's fabric.

Nowadays, the Jewish community of Thessaloniki numbers around 1,200 and is an integral part of the local society. The community restored most of its functions and currently maintains the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki, three synagogues, an elementary school, a choir, a summer camp and a home for the elderly. It also supports all its members through scholarships for the younger members and welfare for the elderly and those in need. At the same time, the community organizes several cultural activities, conferences and other events, both independently and in collaboration with other local and regional organizations which ensure that the Jewish community remains a part of the city's rich cultural makeup. Most recently, following a long-standing request of the Jewish community, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki founded the Chair of Jewish Studies, an initiative promoting academic research into the city's expansive and well-established Jewish heritage.

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## Diversity in Paris- a tribute to a cultural and religious community

French writer Patrick Modiano, Nobel Prize for Literature in 2014, published his first novel in 1967 called “*La place de l’Etoile*” (awarded by the prizes Nimier and Fénelon). The title refers both to a geographical location in Paris ‘*Place de l’Etoile*’ (the beginning of the most famous avenue in the world- the “Champs Elysées”) but also to Modiano’s Jewish identity. The main character Raphaël Schlemilovitch (with a reference to the “schlemiel”- a popular character in Yiddish culture) tells his story and the persecution suffered by Jews during the Second World War in a parodic and exalted way combining reality and fictions. In most Modiano’s novels, Paris plays a major role, being the place for both his efforts to remember his family’s story (looking for memories of his past) and the remaining of troubled times during the Second World War with some critical locations such as the “rue Lauriston” where the French Gestapo for the Nazi regime that occupied Paris from 1940 to 1944, injured or killed numerous French people mostly those with a Jewish background.

In another novel, “Dora Bruder”, Modiano tells the story of a real young woman (a teenager of 15 years old), with Jewish origins, who disappeared in Paris in 1941 and died in deportation. Thirty years after the publication of his first novel (1967) this was another contribution to the “duty of memory”. It was very linked to a discussion he had together with Serge Klarsfeld, president of the association “*Fils et filles de déportés juifs de France* (FFDJF)” (Sons and daughters of deported Jews of France), he created together with his wife, Beate Klarsfeld, in 1979 . The Klarsfeld family has played a crucial role in the research, denunciation and imprisonment of many war criminals in the past 40 years.

Paris could have been the place for the first memorial dedicated to the Jewish victims of Nazism if David Ben Gourion, Prime Minister of Israël (1948-1963) had not realized it had to be first erected in Jerusalem (*Yad Vashem*). The first stone of the Mémorial de Paris was put in May 1953 in a field given by the City of Paris with contributions of several countries -France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and Yugoslavia. Before the Memorial, the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (CDJC) was an idea suggested in April 1943 by Isaac Schneersohn, a Russian industrial who could gather Jewish resisters during the war in “free” territory (Grenoble). The main idea was to document the persecutions of Jewish people during the Second World War in order to sue war criminals when the war was over. The achieved work and the precious documents gathered by Isaac Schneersohn and Léon Poliakov have been a major touchstone for the Nuremberg process (1945-1946) which allowed suing 24 war criminals (occupying the highest positions in the Nazi regime) after the Victory of the Allied. Since then, the CDJC has published the first historical review of the Shoah, “*Le Monde Juif*” and has created its own editing activities. It has played an active role “*in the areas of research, documentation, publishing (La Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah), teaching, adult training and, with the museum, cultural mediation through cultural activities and visits to places of remembrance*” (CDJC, 2019)

Since November 2018, Paris has been the place for weekly protest organised by the so-called “Yellow vest” movement—each Saturday (November 2018 to March 2019). On this occasion, several anti-Semitic speeches could be heard in Paris or inscriptions seen on the walls. In February, some swastika soiled the portrait of Simone Veil, former Minister in many French governments (since 1974) who defended with courage the right to abortion for French women (1974). She was also the first President of the European Parliament (1979-1984). A French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut, member of the French Academy, was insulted by a protester in his neighbourhood in Paris some days later. After these openly anti-Semitic behaviours, a protest was organised on another famous location in Paris “Place de la République” the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 2019 to denounce this hate propaganda.

The main reason for this anti-Semitic expression is mainly due to a lack of knowledge of the Jewish history or a biased way to refer to it- it is mentioned mainly on three occasions at school. The first one is when students are explained the French Revolution. France was the first country to recognise the equality of rights for Jewish citizens by the vote of its « Assemblée constituante » in 1791. Thanks to this citizenship, it was taken for granted that any right recognized to any French citizen was implicitly recognized whatever the religion. This was a main positive way to refer to the Jewish Community in French history. A second mention is more painful as it refers to the Dreyfus trial with two camps opposing his defendants (led by Emile Zola and his famous article “*J’accuse*”) to his opponents (mainly conservative and anti-Semitic movements). It has been a main example of “State mistake” and “Inequity in justice”. Captain Dreyfus was finally acquitted and reinstated in his rights after twelve years of legal process- a statue was erected to his memory in the 6<sup>th</sup> District of Paris. The third main reference to Jewish people in French history at school is the contribution of the Vichy regime (1940-1944) to the Nazi regime - French civil servants actively contributed to the deportation of thousands of men, women and children with Jewish origins to death camps (the *Shoah*) during the Second World War. These troubled times are still difficult to tackle in France with the dissemination of some revisionist theories denying the existence of the death camps and questioning the Shoah.

Many teachers, policy makers or any citizen concerned by the struggle against anti-Semitism insisted on the necessity to enhance education among youngsters who don’t know nor understand the issue (20% of them have never heard of the Shoah). The many exhibitions and workshops suggested by the CDJC in Paris is a way to better equip teachers to overcome a strong reluctance from their students, especially teenagers who are more convinced by information published on social networks where the “plot theories” are very popular together with “fake news” especially when the “usual suspects” are attacked and questioned in many insidious ways. This has become a main issue for any citizen not only in Paris or France but more generally in Europe with populist movements to denounce this hate propaganda, a main threat for democracy.

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Mémorial de la Shoah in Paris

<http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/>

- <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/le-memorial/qui-sommes-nous/histoire-du-memorial-de-la-shoah.html>
- <http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/education-training/the-ehri-project.html>

Jewish Museum in Thessaloniki

<https://inthessaloniki.com/item/jewish-museum-of-thessaloniki/>

<https://gr.ambafrance.org/Guide-de-la-Thessalonique-juive>

## Club de l’iriv at the Cité des Métiers

The iriv offers a monthly club at the Cité des Métiers in Paris is an illustration of a pedagogical approach to enhance diversity on the ground among a public with a migrant background

### “Valuing a migratory path—from experience to competence”

In a first step, participants are asked to introduce themselves (short biography) during a roundtable.

In a second step, diverse tools & pedagogical strategies are explained. On the basis of the Migrapass portfolio (circular approach from experience to competence), other strategies are suggested and discussed.

In a third step, the pedagogical supports are dispatched among participant after the session

The participation at 3 clubs together with the sending of one’s resume open the way to an official attendance certificate provided by iriv - it may also enrich the resume (as a training path)

Several European projects in the migration field have been tested at the Cité des Métiers since 2012- Migrapass (2012), Valbuk (2013), ALLinHE (2013-2014) Vintage (2015-2016), Key Tutors (2015-2017) and Revalue (2017-2019)



**Further information :** [www.club-iriv.net](http://www.club-iriv.net)

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